

TWO APPROACHES TO THE CATEGORY OF MEDIUM: NOËL CAROLL'S ANTI-ESSENTIALIST AND HANS BELTING'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL VIEW IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON MEDIALITY

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to introduce two medium theories: Noël Carroll's one that the author called anti-essentialist, because it avoids thinking about media specify, and Hans Belting's one that is a part of his anthropological theory of the image (according to Belting, image, body and medium are always related). In the paper at first is introduced the Carroll's theory that is strongly connected with the question about film ontology, observations on media limitation, media purity, and media specify. This concept the author compares with the Belting's theory, that offers pretty much different medium concept than the one established among the media studies, analyzing medium in relation with human body (medium is the first and the most natural medium), and the image that is always embedded in the medium. Such comparison is in the paper introduced in the context of the Colin McGinn's cognitivist theory of the medium (broader presented) and other medium investigations, only mentioned (Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, Piotr Celiński, Andrew Fuller, etc.).

Key words: medium, mediality, image, essentialism, anthropology, film ontology

Introduction

The category of medium is a major part of the study of new technology art and cyber culture. It is an inseparable element of human activity connected with culture, which is emphasized by Marshall McLuhan in his famous statement that the "medium is the message" (1994, 7-22), which highlights the importance of this classification. An attempt at the definition of the category of medium and at its typology, taking into consideration its wide scope of functioning, has more importance in the age of digital culture, when it is more and more difficult to refer to the status of a work of art.

Image as medium is ceasing to be the representation of a fragment of reality (the question of reference becomes troublesome here), although it is not synonymous with simulacrum in J. Baudillard's understanding of this term (<https://filspol.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/j-baudillard-precesja-symulakrow.pdf>); nevertheless, just as in case of bio-art, transgenic or generative art, it utilizes tissues, cells, genetic material, neural connections or elements of software systems and mathematic calculations (Gessert, 1993, 205, 207). The image and medium "living" inside thus begin to function like a "living replica," and the creation of a work of art may be called, quoting W. J. T. Mitchell, "cloning terror" (2005, 11) – an act of creating as a result of the combination of biology and digital technology or esthetics and physics: "The clone signifies the potential for the creation of new images in our time – new images that fulfill the ancient dream of creating a 'living image,' a replica or copy that is not merely a mechanical duplicate, but an organic biologically viable simulacrum of a living organism" (Mitchell, 2005, 12-13). In the era of constantly strengthening development, called by Brockman "the third culture," that is culture arising from the combination of art, technology and science (1996, 17-22), the category of medium and mediality as a feature of art are becoming more and more blurred, as a result gaining the interest of theorists.

It appears that the ontology of the medium and its role in culture have been discussed with as much intensity as in the last two decades, along with the development of film theory and the emergence of holistic theoretical concepts by André Bazin, Rudolf Arnheim or Siegfried Kracauer. Theorists of that time were preoccupied with deciding, first, whether film is art, and if so, then what distinguishes it from among other types of artistic practice. Those questions are still recurring in a variety of forms in the theoretical thought, although the issue of the perception of film art (in the cognitivist, neurological and esthetic context, as long as it is valid to speak of esthetics in the age of the prevalence of critical art) and the question of the "power" of cinema affecting the process of human perception appear to be gaining much more significance.

In this short outline I would like to take a closer look at theses pertaining to the medium found in the 1996 book *Theorizing the Moving Image* by Noël Carroll, where the author tries to formulate his own theory of image and film media in relation to the existing concepts and juxtapose it with anthropological theory of image and medium by Hans Belting. The reflections of the latter seem especially important and methodologically useful to me, as the scope of the idea of media which Belting demarcates encompasses also the newest and most medially complicated artistic experiments.

The concept of medium to Noël Carroll

The aforementioned book by Carroll is quite a broad reflection on the film medium against the background of other contemporary media, especially photography and television. The theorist tries to relate his notions to popular movies or television programs. He also analyzes the emotionality of the viewer, describes the images of women in cinema and, finally, refers to the issue of film ideology. His reflections also touch upon the film avant-garde, which is a very broad and multi-faceted research area. Carroll does so because, as he himself states in the introduction, he does not want to follow the example of his predecessors creating a universal and absolute film theory, but wishes to practice the “theorizing” of the image and film media (including television): “I have replaced ‘theory’ with ‘theorizing’. By doing this, I intend to lay emphasis on theorizing as an activity – an ongoing process rather than a product” (Carroll, 1996, XIII). Many theses proposed by Carroll seem either doubtful or disputable, and their description definitely exceeds the frames of my brief outline. Therefore, I will focus here on the presentation of only those which pertain to the broadly understood ontology and specifics of the film medium.

In *Theorizing the Moving Image*, Carroll starts with criticism of the existing film theories, mainly the so-called classical film theory, which was replaced in the 1960s by film semiology. He also speaks suspiciously of attempts at creating contemporary, holistic theories of film as a medium. As David Bordwell rightly concludes the introduction: “Here, through painstakingly close reading and analysis, Carroll shows that much of contemporary film theory rides on equivocation, overgeneralization, misplaced analogies, and sheer appeal to authority” (1996, IX). It is difficult not to agree with this conclusion, as it is rather vague. The mere idea of Carroll’s developing his own theory in relation to the two, in his opinion dominant, modes of research on film theory (“classical film theory” and “contemporary film theory”) seems an ambitious task, worth attention. The theorist does not try to summarize ideas by particular scholars but attempts to find a common denominator in all of them; he does not negate specific theses but rather assumptions characterizing a given thought. In this way, he is able to create a general basis for his own notions, although one may feel that he also oversimplifies some theses. This conclusion is not an accusation because this is the theorist’s own decision, probably motivated by the assumption of his book.

Accusations against the two major theoretical notions which are discussed in the book are summarized by Carroll as follows:

“Classical film theory, of course, focused more on the analysis of the so-called film medium, whereas contemporary film theory has been preoccupied with questions of ideology. And yet both approach the subject as a unified field. Both try to isolate either an essence or a function of film. And having isolated that essence or function to their own satisfaction, these theorists go on to refer every question of cinema back to it. My own suspicion has been that film cannot be reduced to a single essence or function, and, correspondingly, I do not presume that our theories will result in a tidy package” (1996, XIV).

The issue of ideology, to which much space is devoted by Carroll in his book, is not the subject of analysis in the present outline; therefore, I will focus only on the theorist’s approach toward the category of medium. In the quoted fragment one may notice some overuse on Carroll’s part. Classical film theorists such as Bazin or Arnheim do not distinguish only one function of film, just as they do not believe that the “essence” of film is reflected by only one feature of this medium. What they did was attempt to distinguish those features (movement, montage, etc.) which could not be found elsewhere but in the film medium. At the same time, they did not reduce the essence of film only to this one feature or function, as film had been from the very beginning perceived as a holistic/total work of art, the actualization of the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The film medium differed from other media in how it combined the features and functions of other, “traditional” media, creating a new whole of them. Therefore, even if one disagrees with classical film theorists on the specificity of the film medium, it is still difficult to accept Carroll’s conclusions. His criticism of the theory of the specificity of the film medium arises here, I believe, from Carroll’s narrow understanding of the category of medium because he identifies the medium with only one form of film or even with the artefact itself, the recording film. In my discussion of Hans Belting’s theses I will try to show how such narrow understanding of mediality may limit contemporary art.

Nevertheless, it is still difficult to disagree with Carroll on a few issues. Especially convincing seems his criticism of Paul Strand, who stated that the power of a medium was determined by its homogeneity, its “media purity” (Carroll, 1996, 5). On the other hand, technological progress itself obliterated the legitimacy of Strand’s ideas as early as in the years when Carroll’s book was being written; thus the theorist’s notion appears quite obvious here. Progressing hybridization of mediality does not allow the theory of “media purity” to last.

A more important problem remains one of the aspects of classical film theory negated by the scholar, namely, the issue of “media limitations.” Carroll notes that theorists presented this idea in two ways:

“There is, however, a broader point to be made here – namely, unbeknownst to most proponents of medium specificity, they are often simultaneously espousing two different theories: one that a medium has special limitations, limitations on what it can represent perfectly – which are supposed to direct stylization, and secondly, that a medium has special potentials, potentials for best representing certain subject matter – which mark what endeavors should be pursued in the medium. Arnheim primarily holds a limitation theory of medium specificity while Lessing holds a special power theory” (1996, 9).

Those problems, as shown by Carroll, pertain not only to film but to any media art. In accordance with the theses cited above, as Carroll states, artists should use media only within the scope which is in a way attributed to them. In other words, media have their limitations (formal and functional), the exceeding of which makes no sense because it would mean using a medium against its nature (1996, 5). The author of *Theorizing the Moving Image* disagrees with such limitations imposed on mediality; the best confirmation of his criticism are experiments by new media artists, who constantly veer between various media, transgressing their “natural” functions and deforming features ascribed to them. In this respect, the theorist’s accusations against essentialist media theory also gain clarity. Taking into consideration the fact that a number of features ascribed by the theorist to specific media are conventional, an attempt at finding specific applications for them on the basis of those features seems nearly always arbitrary. Therefore, it is difficult to disagree with Carroll (bearing in mind the charges held above against the theorist’s critique as a whole) that the theory of the limitation of a medium on the basis of the belief in its specificity is abortive and invalid.

As I have mentioned, not only does Carroll negate the existing film theories but he also proposes one of his own, which, as I believe, would replace theories of the film medium and create a basis for new understanding of the ontology of film:

“Of course, even if the doctrine of medium specificity and the sort of essentialism it espouses are false, it still may be the case that cinema has an essence. *Defining the Moving Image* explores that possibility and arrives at five necessary conditions for film, or, as I prefer to call the phenomenon, ‘the moving image’. This falls short of essentialism, though I think that it makes a positive contribution to the ontology of film” (1996, 2).

Carroll tries to somehow handle the fact that the ontology of cinema is specific (it sharply differs even from the creation of photographic images, the theorists of which he also frequently mentions), but at the same time to do so in a way allowing him to escape essentialism. His theoretical assumption, which is in a way supposed to answer the question of the power of film, is on the one hand obvious and on the other hand quite dubious as an attempt at explaining what cinema art is. As noted by Bordwell:

“He argues, for instance, that there is no ‘nature’ or ontological essence of an art medium, that indeed the very existence of art media is radically contingent. Instead of essentialism, Carroll advocates sensitivity to historical context. But his conception of history harbors no ‘grand narratives.’ There are only norms, styles, and practices, each with a fine-grained causal history. And this historical sensitivity is required for all theorizing: any film theory, classic or modern, which ignores the history of the medium, is likely to blind itself to counterexamples and plausible alternatives” (1996, X).

It is difficult to disagree with Carroll that one cannot speak of a theoretical category simultaneously ignoring its historical evolution. However, it appears that in his approach the theorist simply tries to replace the category of medium with the troublesome and ambiguous term *genre*. The confirmation of this notion can be also found in the chapter entitled *The Power of Movies*. Carroll, trying to depart from the popular thesis that the specificity of the film medium is confirmed by its unusual ability to recreate reality, states the following: “When people speak of the power of the medium, they are, I believe, talking about the power of this particular genre or style” (1996, 79). It is worth adding here that Carroll identifies the idea of the power of film with its popularity, which raises doubts because unpopular movies can strongly affect the audience as well. The theorist, in the most general terms, defends his notion as follows: since genres and styles are composed of specific, repetitive features, viewers recognize and absorb them to a greater degree (1996, 80-81).

The first, almost immediate reservation as regards this theory is that the “theory of genre and style” might as well be applied in literature, theater or painting. However, Carroll anticipates this accusation and explains his stance as follows: “Our hypothesis is that due to certain devices developed early in the evolution of movies, the typical movie is, all things being equal, easier to follow than the typical play, i.e., theatrical performances as have so far been commonly encountered” (1996, 83-84).

The theorist attempts to explain why he deems film easier in reception than other types of art, taking into consideration the role of the screen, camera movements and other filmic measures; still, proposing such a theory without any supporting empirical research always seems quite arbitrary. How are we supposed to classify, in accordance with Carroll’s assumptions, a theater play recorded on film, for instance? In consonance with medium specificity theory, it would rather be a movie, although in this case the question remains unanswered. It is also difficult to agree with the thesis that its genre actually preordains the power of film, especially as speaking of a “pure” genre appears just as absurd as speaking of a uniform medium. Of course, there are certain characteristics which allow us to differentiate between horror movies and comedies, but the borders of those differences are still fluid and, what is more, many genres have common features. The similar holds for styles.

The cognitivist approach by Colin McGinn

Although the present text takes into consideration two theorists, I would like to cite here other notions connected with the “power of the medium,” the author of which is also a cognitivist. The theses have been contained in the book *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact* by Colin McGinn and are based on an analysis of the perception of a medium by its viewer.

In the briefest manner possible, Colin McGinn, in relation to the models of perception, has divided image media into ones which are looked into and ones which are looked at. The first model of perception assumes that the viewer looks in a way “through” the medium, perceiving only the images that the medium conveys. To the philosopher, such media include mirrors, windows, water, eyes, telescopes, microscopes, lenses and, finally, screens. In accordance with McGinn, each of them fulfills the role of the absent medium, as they are by definition transparent and, if the process of watching is not disrupted (e.g. when the screen starts flicking or water – waving), we watch images “through” them, not “in” them. The looked-at media, on the other hand, comprise ones which, in the most general terms, “embody” artistic images: paintings, sculptures, photographs:

“Of course, as with paintings, we also see this looked-at object as *representing* something, a person, say; but we do not thereby look *into* the photograph. We look at the photograph and see it as representing something, but we don’t look at the movie image and thereby see it as representing something. The movie image is seen, but not looked at; the photograph is seen *and* looked at (...). Photographs are objects of visual attention; movies exist to direct attention elsewhere (...)” (McGinn, 2005, 37).

“Artistic media” (or ones in which artistic images are viewed) are characterized by the fact that they capture the viewer’s attention; when we look at them we notice not only the conveyed image itself but also its medium (shape, structure, etc.), which is not transparent.

McGinn’s differentiation between film and theater media looks similar:

“We could say that visually speaking, theatre is a *present* medium, while cinema is an *absent* medium. Cinema is self-effacing, while theatre is self-affirming. The cinema screen is there to be transcended; the stage is the primary object of attention. The screen confronts you with something it wants you to ignore; the stage wants to hold your attention on itself” (2005, 34).

In a theater play as important a role as the presentation of a story by means of images is played by the medium itself: the stage, decorations, costumes, specific lighting, the curtain. In a movie, if the medium is not its basic subject, then it is imperceptible while watching.

The main aim of McGinn’s reflections is to show why film (moving pictures appearing on a cinema screen) has such great power of affecting the viewer. The researcher does so by analyzing the way of perceiving images conveyed by media. As one may guess, the abovementioned division is only one of the stages of McGinn’s reflections on the influence of film on the shape of human perception. Still, even this differentiation convincingly makes us realize that the process of perception depends also on the medium which a given image has adopted; as a result, we do not experience all image messages in the same way. As emphasized by McGinn in the conclusion of his analysis, he believes the existence of such media of whose presence we are unaware to be an illusion.

We always know that a given image appears on a window pane or a cinema screen and does not take place in our vicinity. Media “into which we look” allow us to forget – for a moment, not completely, but still – that images are conveyed by them. In this way, we feel that they are closer to actual events, they affect our emotions and engage our imagination more easily.

In this respect, they are analogical to dreams (McGinn, 2005, 100-131), which can even make them dangerous (McGinn, 2005, 83-99). When we look at “artistic media,” we cannot be deluded to the same degree that what we see is actually happening. In other words, using Edgar Morin’s category, the effect of “projection-identification” with the protagonist and the diegesis (2005, XXV-XXXV) cannot take place automatically (as it does, for instance, while watching a movie) unless we consciously “design” it. Therefore, in case of both types of media, the physical process of perception itself as well as the way of “experiencing” a work of art look different.

McGinn’s book is a very interesting theoretical publication, but it can also be accused of describing only the perception of “pure” media, as the author does not analyze such presentations in which media overlap, creating hybrid structures. However, it appears that in spite of its model approach, it is still a more interesting notion than the one proposed by Carroll.

Hans Belting’s anthropological theory of medium

Finally, I would like to proceed to Hans Belting’s reflections, in which, as I have already mentioned, the problem of medium has been approached from a different perspective than the cognitivist one.

“The idea of image can only be enriched when we speak of the image and the medium as two sides of the same coin. (...) A medium is characterized precisely by the fact that as the form (embodiment) of an image it encompasses the form and the matter, usually separated when we speak of works of art and esthetic objects. (...) An image cannot be reduced to its form encompassed by the medium when it conveys the image. (...) In this relationship the dynamics is contained which cannot be expressed by means of traditional argumentation related to the issue of image” (2007, 15; own translation – E. T.).

In this short quoted “introduction” to the understanding of the idea of medium by Belting one may notice that the German theorist departs from its traditional meaning (rooted in the esthetic discourse), problematizing and closely connecting it with the category of imagery and – as will be revealed soon – corporeality. Belting rightly notes that a medium cannot be reduced only to the form of an image, e.g. to canvas or a cinema screen. The exemplary canvas and screen have a number of various connotations and immanent features which influence the ontology of image, sometimes transforming, supplementing or negating it. Between an image and its medium there is an unbreakable relationship; therefore, Belting so sharply juxtaposes his understanding of the category of medium with the reductionist approach of media studies. This approach (it is difficult to resist the temptation to accuse the theorist of unjust generalization; however, it appears that Belting words his conclusion in this way in order to present the difference existing between the two discourses more vividly) has a strong tendency to identify the medium with technological products; it separates both categories, overlooking the game which is played between them (2007, 50-51).

“The idea of medium gains its true meaning only when it appears in the context of body and image” (2007, 15; own translation – E. T.), claims Belting, at the same time accentuating the necessary participation of corporeality in connection with the relationship of image and medium. The body is, to the theorist, a “missing link” which gives us the awareness of the image and medium relation. The medium fulfills a role similar to that of the human body. It shows what can only be expressed in the material aspect: gives shape and sound to it, serves as a medium of emotions; remains inseparably connected with consciousness, memory, intelligence. However, media influence also the shape of our perception, by means of which both external images (perceived in a way imposed by the medium which determines how we look at the world) as well as internal images are formed. Mental images are, on the one hand, conditioned by the constant perception of the world, which helps project already prepared images in human mind; on the other hand, they are individual characteristics of every person, which overlap with the remembered image and transform it – in this way our body manifests itself. The body is thus an additional medium for images formed as a result of the observation of external reality and “internal perception.”

Belting accentuates the inseparability of image and medium but also strongly emphasizes that the categories are not identical. The essence of this difference existing between them is situated by the theorist in man, more specifically, in man’s ability to perceive both external and internal images. Image and medium are connected in human sensual experience, but still image is “more mental” and medium – “more material” in character, thus their presence is manifested in different ways. What is more, an image does not actually exist before it is “brought to life” by its viewer.

Then, in accordance with Belting, takes place the only moment at which an image is freed from its medium, as in our imagination we somehow separate the two, as a given image is projected in ourselves and the role of an external medium is taken over by our body: “Mediality of images is the expression of the body’s experience” (Belting, 2007, 38; own translation – E. T.). I think one of the most important conclusions by Belting is that the medium participates in the greatest “mystery of image,” which:

“consists in the fact that presence and absence converge in it in an inseparable way. In its medium an image is present (otherwise we could not see it), in spite of the fact that it still refers to absence, the image of which it is. The ‘here and now’ of the image is received by means of the medium in which we witness the image” (2007, 39; own translation – E. T.).

Therefore, the image is constituted by means of an ongoing dialog between the medium and the viewer (therefore, also – or maybe above all – his or her body): “The question of image leads to symbolic frames, within which we perceive images and accept them as ones” (Belting, 2007, 41; own translation – E. T.). It appears that it is the medium that allows us to give shape to images, preventing the complete blurring of the category of imagery. Graphic presentation, as has been stated before, constantly balances between presence and absence and thus needs a medium which it could adopt.

It is connected mainly with the large number of practices accompanied by graphic representations, gaining a specific meaning (ritualistic, sacral). As Belting notes: “Let us not forget that images needed embodiments simply because in the social sphere they participated in rituals which a given community performed on them” (2007, 38; own translation – E. T.). It pertained (and does pertain) mainly to various initiation rituals (in the initiations of many cultures the image of a given person fulfills an important role) as well as the cult of the dead. Both of the enumerated types of rituals, in various forms, appear in Majewski’s movies, therefore, separate reflections will be devoted to the function of imagery in a ritualistic aspect.

A constantly recurring idea in connection with the category of medium is its incessant evolution. To primitive people the only available medium which provided form to the images of their times were the walls of caves; today it is difficult to find accurate names for various experiments with mediality. Belting, absolutely aware of the speed of media changes, still emphasizes the fact that reflections on the more and more complicated mediality cannot end with reflections on technological solutions only (2007, 69). The form of media to a large degree influences the shape and meaning of images. Different consequences arise from the embodiment of an image in a mirror, a window, a mask or on canvas being a natural anticipation of the cinema screen; different consequences arise from its representation by “new media” as well. Rarely do we encounter media in their “pure” form today; more and more often hybrid and multiplied mediality can be found. Furthermore, as Belting believes:

“New media are frequently nothing but a newly cleaned mirror of memories, in which old images survive in a different way than in museums, churches or books. Therefore, in the border area of contemporary and old media new dynamics arises, recalling also those images which are no longer created today” (2007, 60; own translation – E. T.).

The coexistence of new and traditional media or different media in general results in, as we have read in the quoted statement, the emergence of an interesting border area, in which imagery needs to find its place as well. It is very difficult because often combined media derive from different mimetic and esthetic patterns, and imagery, whose “governors” they are, must be interpreted from various points of view. Media of this kind are called by many critics media hybrids (Gwóźdź, 1998, 178) and intermedia (Chmielecki, 2008, 119-120), frequently causing disagreements. In the present text, however, there is no place for an attempt to settle them.

Conclusions

The category of medium understood from the anthropological point of view appears to me one which will find justification in case of attempts at specifying the status of media in contemporary art: bio-art or cyborg/robotic art, where the medium becomes synonymous with a living body (Eduardo Kac’s famous “GFP Bunny”) or an artificially created one. The art of new technologies, on the one hand, aims at stronger and stronger immaterialization of the medium (digital recording, especially in generative art), on the other hand, it reaches back to the most primitive, traditional and physical media forms, connected with the body (that of humans, animals, or technological) or light (approached more like a sub-medium than a medium of its own). Since artistic projects are becoming more and more ambiguous, theorists are often forced to expand the meaning and functionality of the category of medium.

In the face of constant and surprising changes in mediality, Carroll’s notion does not fulfill its purpose at all, even when applied only to film, not to mention new technology art. More and more sophisticated intermedial borrowings, generic pastiches and play with styles and conventions, which are witnessed even by average cinema viewers, make

the theory proposed in *Theorizing the Moving Image* seem anachronistic and methodologically useless. On the other hand, Hans Belting's theses, although definitely not answering even the majority of contemporary theoretical doubts connected with the category of medium, provide certain beginning for further analysis of contemporary artistic projects. It is caused by the fact that Belting clearly "opens" the medium to corporeality and imagery and in a number of contemporary projects this connection plays the crucial role.

The German theorist tries to approach the category of medium in possibly broad terms, taking into consideration various discourses and theoretical perspectives, without making the idea lose its shape. With a view to the above, the anthropological idea of medium seems especially worth attention and promising in research terms.

In contemporary media studies a number of other theoretical solutions have been proposed, which I will only briefly mention as I am finishing my reflections. Piotr Celiński, a Polish author, undoubtedly deserves attention; he proposes the category of post-medium by stating that: "[d]igital convergence proves to be a state which exceeds and annuls the border of recognition of the phenomena of medium and media as they are" (2013, 16; own translation – E. T.). In other words, he believes that in post-media reality we face a lack of unambiguous forms of particular media as well as the disappearance of their autonomy as media (Celiński, 2013, 17). A philosophical approach toward the category of media, on the other hand, is developed by Mark Hansen, who situates the medium in the context of affectively understood corporeality (2004). Other interesting observations include ones contained in the concept of "evil media" by Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey. The notion of evil is posed to address the unintended and secondary effects of media, where the technology does not serve its function, but creates its own para-semiotic effects. Fuller and Goffey analyze malicious, viral and terroristic usage of new media, but also point out to the technological glitches, malfunctions, and limits. The evil aspect of media is where its agency is visible at best, where user experience is exposed to errors, disconnections – materiality of the medium itself (2012). Finally, in the book *Life after new media*, Joanna Zylińska and Sarah Kember support the replacement of the category of medium by the broader idea of mediation. Both authors claim that due to the relational formula of contemporary media and their hybrid, complex and ambiguous structure, we should probably opt out of talking about particular media and conceive them as 'mediation' – the process of media sphere creating and functioning (2012, XV).

The multitude of contemporary concepts of medium clearly shows that the category is particularly interesting not only to media researchers but also philosophers, anthropologists and art theorists. One should closely follow the concepts as they are an attempt at wording the most complicated and heteronomic communication and artistic processes.

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Biography

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