**Brief Content**

Communication zones: division criteria

Medium Criterion

Television

The Internet

Credibility Criterion

Quality press

Popular press

Freedom Criterion

Authoritarian zone

Zone of freedom

Totalitarian zone

Criterion of Pathogenicity

Zone of paradise (advertising, erotica)

Zone of hell (violence in the media)

Automation Сriterion

Zone of humans

Zone of machines

Semiotic expansion

Biocenosis and noocenosis

Paradoxical thinking as part of philosophy of mass communication

Borys Potiatynyk. Media: Keys to Understanding

*The author analyses communication zones and the main trends of media criticism. As one of the most important tools of self-regulation of mass communication is media criticism, its study has proved to be a strong learning experience for those who intend to work in the mass media. The idea of semiotic expansion in this book is viewed within the context of media, providing readers with various approaches to communication. This encourages readers to reconsider their attitudes towards the media world. The work will be of interest to journalists and those who research media from the philosophical and critical perspectives.*

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**BOUNDS OF GROWTH (afterword)**

Information for the sake of information and progress for the sake of progress? I am  in little doubt that this is exactly how things are evolving. What is at issue, however, is this: is it at all possible to change this course of development? Media can be considered a child born by humankind but not belonging to it. Culture and civilization are presented in this book as a string of self-evolving projects that exploit both human and technical resources.

I understand the Apocalypse as freedom, absolute and unrestricted freedom. Conditions and the sense of the existence of the world consist of restrictions. And that is why absolute freedom would probably put an end to the world as we know it. We strive to tear down borders established by someone else. And we do so only to restore them again, proceeding from our own understanding.

The development of the global information network with its omniscience makes ideological or intellectual victory impossible, like the development of weapons of mass destruction has eliminated the possibility of a victory in a military confrontation.

Many people express their dissatisfaction with the contemporary media, which, nevertheless, exert an astonishing influence on them. Of course I cannot be expected to solve all media mysteries. This, after all,  is not my intention.

Generally speaking, the metaphor of keys in this book stands for the criteria on the basis of which I will attempt to divide mass communication into zones.

Communication zones discussed in this book are only arbitrary, but they can facilitate understanding of the media. They are like photographs of an object taken from different perspectives – those of popular and quality press, television and the Internet, freedom and authoritarianism. More items can be added to this list just like more photographs can be taken, particularly if the object is gigantic, complex and difficult to understand. I will try to demonstrate typical samples of media criticism rather than describe every zone in detail. For example, in the chapter "Television," I discuss Neil Postman's view of television as a medium that tends to turn everything into amusement.

Division of mass communication into a "paradise" zone and a "hell" zone is also rather arbitrary and even ironic. In reality the "paradise" zone has come in for as much criticism as the "hell" zone. As far back as the 1960s Marshall Herbert McLuhan argued that advertising is an attempt to bring the lost paradise back to the common people. Of course I cannot say that it goes for all advertising, but most of it indeed appeals to the feelings of satisfaction, comfort, pleasure, even bliss, imitating "the high life." The same holds true for the so-called positive propaganda -- erotic video production or most of music videos. Correspondingly, the zone of virtual "hell" includes the genres of documentaries and television shows that have to do primarily with aggression, suffering, tragedies, fear and pain. When describing this zone, I will pay more attention to screen violence and aggressive propaganda of totalitarian regimes. This propaganda is particularly terrifying because those who resist its ideological influence can be easily exterminated.

Today the situation is further aggravated by the discrepancies between the values formed by advertising and very low living standards of the majority of population. According to another assumption, propaganda and falsifications for people of the post-totalitarian countries are much more dangerous than screen violence and pornography.

This scheme is of course simplified; it does not reflect all the variety, complexity and unpredictability of mass communication. That is why there emerges the mixed zone (per hell ad heaven). The reason for this lies not only in the fact that propaganda or sadomasochistic erotica can make up part of both paradise and hell zones. The matter is that during the development of mass communication there have been continuous attempts to create an ideal order (communicational paradise) by different "hellish" means such as censorship, persecution of opposition journalists, etc.

The human mind is not ready to handle the information explosion, as is it not prepared for manipulation and spin, which are employed to exert commercial or political pressure. Quite defenseless in the face of such threats, it is extremely vulnerable and exposed. In view of this, the following tasks seem particularly pressing:

a)         to restrict by means of legislation flows of screen violence, pornography, advertising and propaganda;

b)         to help develop in individuals adequate psychological 'defense mechanisms.'

The latter point is exactly what such psychological and pedagogical disciplines, both academic and applied, as media education, media literacy, media ecology and cultural environmentalism primarily address.

Media education is like a manual for users of technical devices, which necessarily contains safety precautions. That is, it describes under what circumstances these useful appliances become dangerous. Media education is a manual for media users, especially children.

On the other hand, violence and pornography constitute a traditional set of accusations brought by the older generation against the younger one, which is always thought to be more ill-mannered and immoral than the previous one. However, such accusations are stereotypical enough to cast doubt on them. We may even assume that excessive concentration on violence and pornography distracts our attention from really powerful and much more dangerous pathogenic flows.

One can try to visualize a time in a distant future when the inhabitants of Earth will have moved to the virtual world and only sophisticated cerebral and highbrow programs will be profitable on television. So, in a 'dim and distant' future (why not let our imagination play upon this for a while?) action movies will only appeal to cultural deviants. And at some point one of them might write something like this: "Commercial television has led to a domination of a  culture of intellectuals that  shows a complete disregard for physical culture. It is a rarity, therefore, to see a film depicting action, brute force, if you will, which might bring back to our thoroughly intellectualized and virtualized world a largely forgotten atmosphere of ancient myths and folk tales, of Hercules' and Odysseus' heroic exploits, evoke a spirit of combat and adventure in place of incessant computer games and a strong passion instead of Internet sex".

Sounds almost impossible, doesn't it? In the meantime, however, as far back as the 70s Marshall McLuhan wrote that a man of the electronic era loses his body and with it he loses his sense of identity. What he has instead is an image, but not a body. Such a person is desperately trying to find  his origins. And violence is one expression of such a search.

I have confined  myself here to the description of pornography and violence, advertising and propaganda as projects that once started, begin to automatically expand by involving more and more participants (readers, viewers, film producers, directors, actors, etc). What we deal here with is a phenomenon of self-promotion. A business that has gathered  momentum starts promoting itself, cultivating tastes which it consequently invokes in justifying itself.

In this respect, terrorism, both real and virtual, comes into sharp focus. Reflecting  on modern-day terrorism, one cannot help thinking that the tragic theater seems to have moved into our life, while real theatre and cinema merely perform the function of a preliminary examination of this or that scenario. If we were to draw an analogy between physical violence in the act of terror and a gun cartridge, the former might  be compared to a primary inner flash which detonates the explosive charge. In our example, the major "outer" explosion is exclusively psychological.

But still, how to answer the question posed earlier: are there reasons to believe that virtuality sucks the energy out of the real violence and real eroticism? Or, just the reverse, that screen violence and pornography work the recipients up to an extent that they pose a risk of social and psychological aberrations in their behavior? The complexity of the above-described phenomena (and what we have examined hardly covers them all) does not allow us to give a definitive answer. I am inclined to believe that what happens in effect is the two tendencies at work at the same time exerting opposing pressure on society. But, after all, there is nothing unusual about it, especially if we consider how contradictory human nature is. Indeed,  as we all know, our interest in violence and eroticism is rooted in certain instincts, which means that this interest is a natural one. At the same time, however, man has another, genetically conditioned drive, a drive to practice self-restraint, improve nature (and him/herself as part of it). Civilization, in fact, owes its very existence to this drive.  That is why I believe restrictions on erotic and violent behaviors and their different expressions will always be imposed. The only difference will be in the degree of these restrictions, and, consequently, in special characteristics of redistribution of psychic energy.

In the evening, a child watches "Good night, kids!", a TV program. For some reason, he dislikes a cartoon. However, he fails to erase it from his memory, no matter how hard he tries. Moreover, his efforts to forget the cartoon have produced the opposite effect. The child bursts into tears. To FORGET something bad appears to be a problem. "I want to forget!", "How can I forget it?"

Having entered our psyche, IT seems not only to BE but also to ACT inside us, remaining there forever.

I hold the opinion that the human mind is fatally vulnerable and practically defenseless in the face of propagandist manipulations. The only thing that can partially help us is developing the critical mode of thinking, introduction of media education and media literacy, which can inoculate us against the manipulative technologies of advertising and propaganda.

Another important question is whether we can really consider the progress of media to be boundless? I believe that this progress has a limit or, to be more exact, its ultimate aim, at least in theory. I should describe it so as to be able to make some predictions. Since only after having determined the final point can we know how long it will take to reach it and what difficulties we may face on the way.

The biblical story of the Fall serves as a wonderful metaphor that can help us shed light on the development of our civilization and of media in particular. It is the history of disengaging from something once integral, unique and extremely important, so important that today the entire sense of individual existence can be reduced to imitation of the past where there was no individual spirit or individual consciousness, and where the past and the future merged. Contemporary mass communication can be seen as another symptom of this nostalgia, another attempt to regain, through technology, the lost abilities of *OMNIPRESENCE, OMNISCIENCE and OMNIPOTENCE.*

Humanity has continuously sought to broaden its knowledge about the world, society and itself (this statement seems to be self-evident), that is, to open, using Aldous Huxley's metaphor, "the doors of perception" wider. Huxley himself, however, had a slightly different and unusual view of "the broadening" that is presented in the essay under the same title. The author considers, which it is mescaline, a comparatively harmless cactus drug, that can help us open the "door" wider. Proceeding from some ideas of Bergson, Huxley develops his concept of the eliminative function of the brain. In his interpretation the brain is a valve that separates and protects the consciousness of a person from the gigantic ocean of information. It is presented as being fenced off from the surrounding information ocean by the "valve-brain", which lets in only a very "narrow flow" of the most essential information. It is alcohol and drugs that help widen this access.

We do not intend to make a case against psychedelic substances as ways of connection to the information ocean, questionable as they are. Our ambition is to outline the ultimate aim. We consider mass communication to be another attempt to approach the eternal ideal of omniscience and omnipresence by means of modern engineering and technology. Omniscience can be visualized as an information ocean or information sphere where all possible information is stored. In order to learn something one must get connected to this sphere. Now I should explain what kind of sphere I have in mind. Quantum physics and information science have hypothesized about the existence of an integral information (semantic) field, where power can transform into information and vice versa. This transformation does not depend on any technical devices; on the contrary, engineering and logical thinking cause degradation and atrophy of the properties that have been considered inherent in human beings and activated by an innate intuitive ability. However, this hypothesis, attractive as it may seem, does not have substantial scientific grounds; it is rather a marginal theory. That is why the only thing we can discuss within the framework of this scholarly essay is the idea of synergetic information sphere, which is in line with the basic principles of contemporary science.

My assumption is that in five years or so the word "Internet" will not be used as often and widely as it is today and not because the phenomenon is going to disappear. On the contrary, in fact, it will broaden so much and will become so commonplace that speaking about the Internet will be nothing short of speaking about, say, the atmosphere. It will become new "air"– omnipresent and therefore almost inconspicuous. We notice the air mainly in three cases: when it is of exceptionally good quality (on a mountain top, for example), of extremely bad quality (in a smoggy city) or when we lack it. Similarly, the Internet will become a new atmosphere, or more precisely, noosphere. Today the notion of the noosphere as a planetary information sphere stands every chance of overcoming skepticism of the dominating scientific paradigm, which has pushed it into the margins of scholarly thought together with the noospheric ideas of Volodymyr Vernadsky, Teilhard de Chardin and Leroy.

One more thing to determine is how long it will take us to reach the ideal of omniscience as the ultimate aim of the development of media. My assumption is that media will never, in fact, accomplish this task. But the closer they get to this ideal the SLOWER their pace will be. It is difficult to determine the precise distance. What units should we use – Years? Centuries? However, it is clear that during the 20th century we were getting closer to this ultimate aim of development at frantic speed. However, the closer we are to it, the harder it is to move further. Those who climb mountains will readily confirm that.

Let us consider another scenario, where there is no slow-down to the development of mass communication; on the contrary, it is accelerating in geometrical progression irrespectively of real human needs and even of the hypothetical ideal of omniscience. Under these circumstances the principle of "information for the sake of information" is being realized. A similar principle works for dissemination of the so-called "letters of happiness" or "chain letters". Probably each of us has at least once received a message either through the regular mail or through the electronic one with recommendation to send two dozen copies of it to our acquaintances. This is said to be a precondition for our happiness and good luck. These messages provide a very good example of a semiotic formation which seizes our consciousness by pressing the "buttons" of happiness/unhappiness (other semiotic formations may influence many more "buttons", for example, those of significance, fame, fear, curiosity, sexual interest, seeking comfort, security, etc.).

One of the stages of approaching semiotic revolution, in my view, is the notion denoted by such polysemantic terms as "information era" or "informational society". Revolution can be defined as redistribution of semiotic flows, a change of the present semiotic hierarchy with the youngest institutions becoming dominant. Though I do not intend to deny anthropocentrism, in this book I would like to step aside from this traditional and, in my view, slightly superficial approach and concentrate on semiocentrism. The human person in this book is merely a function of semiotic flows realized in particular through the psychological desire to seem more important in the eyes of other people.

The consequences of "the death of the author", in Michelle Foucault's interpretation, have not yet been properly contemplated. We can even go further and state that the death of the author has not yet happened. And it has not happened for a very simple reason: the author has not been born, that is, in a certain sense, he has never existed.

When reflecting upon the problem of the author, I always imagine a bonfire. The heat is discourse in its broadest sense. New generations, like pieces of wood, are continuously thrown into the fire. These pieces of wood take a while before they catch fire. Not all of them do, however. The dry ones are the first to be ablaze and the best to keep discourse-fire burning. Are you "struck"? This is exactly the word that reflects the essence of things. It is important to understand the word literally. The textual flow either strikes us or catches us, like a river catches wooden chips and takes them away with the stream.

Self-expansion and irreversible growth of this metadiscourse, in fact, determine the development of human civilization and culture. The statement that the hypothetical law of semiotic expansion has created all the variety of forms of human civilization and culture may seem rather strange. It can be visualized as a waterfall, where cascades of water fall down the rocks, obeying only gravitation and creating an infinite variety of wonderful patterns.

Civilization is a great river that has sprung from the stream of information. We are like stones or sand of the great river. We are constantly being washed by the stream. We need to think about information as a stream that is  dependent on humankind, but at the same time, independent of each of us.

Accumulation of significant amounts of information and speeding-up of their rotation stimulate people as text-creators, giving feverish tempo to the process of duplication of semiotic matrixes. But the aim built in this mechanism – to increase amount and to speed up rotation of information – does not necessarily have to limit itself to humankind. I believe that the process of semiotic expansion started before humans appeared and will not end if they disappear.

This view is in line with the idea of semiosis and its particular stages, such as physiosemiosis, biosemiosis, zoosemiosis and anthroposemiosis [John Deely, Basics of Semiotics]. Though the last item on this list is  a tribute to  anthropocentrism, it may well be that the information process will continue without people, who might be kept as a kind of reserve at best. The semiotic expansion does not take place through "human-human" type of communication. On the contrary, this sector is diminishing and the edge goes to other types, such as:

- "human-machine" (TV-set, radio, computer, communication robots, which monitor human reactions and send new materials, etc);

- "machine-machine".

This tendency can be easily detected in journalism, where there is a continuous decrease in importance of the personality and journalists become more and more like biorobots that work for an invisible assembly line. We may say that the importance of the personality in journalism is diminishing because there is a general decrease in the importance of the human being. That is why the problem of automatic behavior does not cease to worry me.

Media are characterized by an inherently dual nature. On the one hand, they were brought to life by people and operate for their sake. On the other, however, they are an expression of the worldwide information processes, or to be more exact, an episode in these processes. The term in semiotics for this is semiosis, which denotes behavior of signs and their interaction.

Semiosis, as some believe, started long before humankind appeared. We can think of it in terms of a train that is moving fast. At some point a passenger gets on (man or humankind) only to get off at another stop, which may well be long before the train's final destination. It may even be that the train is not bound for the 'station' where humankind is heading.  I would even go so far as to say that, deep down, this direction is hostile to man's interests as a biospecies. My view of mass communication is directly linked to the hypothesis about a communication project that is self-sufficient and self-regulatory. In my view, scientific and technological progress is largely an autonomous process that is not confined to the human environment. In view of this, the most persistent thought in this book is about a need to reconsider the prevailing anthropocentric  framework (whereby man is seen as the center of information universe) and move on to other, semiocentric points of reference. Accounting for the world from the semiocentric perspective provides a framework that has an aggressive semiotic structure at its core and as its driving force. If we are to accept this viewpoint, media can be seen as a child that mankind carried in its womb but that it cannot claim as truly its own. It is rather the other way around, in fact, that humanity provides  prime 'fodder' or a means to help this structure unfold and expand. In a sense, humankind is nothing short of a surrogate mother for the media.

The global metadiscourse is identified with the noosphere – a new sphere of the Earth, which does not depend upon subjective desires of individual people, and which, at a certain stage of its formation, exerts a destabilizing influence on the other spheres of the Earth, such as the bio-, atmo- and hydrosphere.  I consider that the essence of the noosphere is not "the great consciousness", but texts – self-evolving semiotic structures capable of expansion. The history of human civilization can be interpreted in terms of expansion or self-development of certain semiotic and symbolic structures, with the human being as part of them.

People do not satisfy the pace of development of the noosphere. That is why not only the physical copying and production of texts, but also development of the text (in the sense of processing textual flows, comparison, analysis, and, finally, creation of new texts) is increasingly more often done by machines.

The topics of explosion-like semiotic expansion and of noosphere threats constitute the second part of this book. Our main idea is that there are mechanisms of expansion built in the text. The flows of financial symbols, reflecting rules of development of informational systems in general, have only one internal logic – escalation in rotation and increase in amount. Media are the central link of the threatening by its scale semiotic explosion we are witnessing now. In this sense we can speak of the THREAT OF THE NOOSPHERE, odd as it may sound, that is to say, the quickly expanding noosphere poses a danger to the biosphere and to people as a biospecies.

There exists a stereotype that the noosphere is something exclusively positive. We are accustomed to identifying ourselves with it. That is why we may be surprised to hear about the threat of the noosphere. The noosphere is ruled by its own laws, and it does not care about the fate of an  individual person or that of the entire humankind, for that matter. The emergence of any new sphere of Earth brings the risk of destabilizing effects. And the noosphere is no exception in this regard.

If we were to draw an analogy between the noosphere and the biosphere or atmosphere, we would come to the conclusion that we are hardly able to initiate any radical changes. Humanity has no control over the noosphere and its dynamics. It is gradually expanding, or 'showing' through us, through our consciousness.

At a certain stage interests of humans as a biological species coincided with the interests of the noosphere, which was created by man. But this coincidence is only temporary. I believe that in the future hostility of the noosphere towards the biosphere will become even more evident. The time when the word "noosphere" was pronounced with romantic admiration has passed. Contemporary ecological problems attest to the destabilizing character of the noosphere, the effect which I believe is hardly the result of an aberration or anything out of the ordinary in the nature of the noosphere, for every sphere tends to go through a critical phase early on in its development.

The idea of restricted development, in my view, reflects the intuitive need to repress the development of the noosphere by keeping back semiotic or semio-technological expansion (technologies are formulas slipped out into the reality or realized formulas). This idea, though, sounds almost absurd when voiced by someone who works in the media sphere. First of all, it contradicts the deeply rooted archetype of "omniscience". Every journalist and ordinary reader will tell you that, despite the abundance of information, its quality leaves much to be desired and reports on events are insufficiently balanced and reliable.

I hold an opinion that the drastic enlargement of the scope of the so-called negative information (screen violence, pornography, falsifications, etc.)reflects general enlargement of the information flow, since every stick has two ends. Besides, even so-called positive information is associated with information fatigue, intellectual disorientation and other negative phenomena. A growing number of people develop upside down paradoxical perceptions of information, considering everything devoid of exhaustive intellectualism (say, action movies, erotic films or sports programs) to be positive and relaxing.

This means that escalation of pathogenic flows is unavoidable if we are to admit that there is a tendency to general enlargement in the amount of information. The struggle against the screen violence and pornography is doomed to failure unless we find efficient means of suppressing the semiotic explosion, or more precisely, unless we manage to gain control over the unruly chain reaction of the semiosis.

In no way do I aim to provide a strategy of turning the explosion into a controllable semiotic reaction. My humble task is to make people realize the existence of the problem and the necessity to deal with it.

This work can be interpreted in terms of four conflicts.

The first one is the conflict between media as impersonal mechanisms and the human being.

A project is a semiotic system that develops by using us as operators and carriers. If we stop to reflect upon any project, we will conclude that even leaders are "slaves of the text," just like ordinary workers are. Joseph Stalin was as dependent upon the huge project called the USSR as any rank-and-file collective farmer was.

The human being as a biological carrier of the semiotic sphere, as a recording, reproducing, and creative device, belongs to this sphere and is subject to laws of its expansion. The size of the population is primarily a consequence of the expansion of semiotic structures. We are merely particles of this steadily expanding system. The automatic behavior within the growing expansion of semiotic structures can be viewed as a major problem that is impossible to solve.

We like our big and small appliances and devices, and not only because they economize our time and efforts. We like the very idea of a machine. This may be because it compensates for our inherent disorder and chaos.

The 'clockworklike' organization of our life and everything in it  is the ideal we seem to strive for. Automation and mechanization  tend to penetrate everywhere. Our own  thinking may be no exception here (intellectual machine). There is a fable that I borrowed from an ancient Chinese philosopher. A traveler walking in a desert meets a recluse, who is climbing down  a well to get a bucket of water. On seeing this the traveler suggests  the man  make the task easier for himself by using some simple mechanism like a crane or a spindle to spare himself the trouble of going down the well each time he needs water. 'But  I don't want it', – came an answer, – 'because man using a machine turns into a machine  himself'.

We cherish an illusion that the relations between man and machine are at least reciprocal: we own machines, and machines own us. However, Megamachines (Lewis Mumford) very often tend to function regardless of us, like a virus. It is not that they are opposed to us, they are just intrinsically programmed to multiply and expand. The expansions of pornography, media violence and commercials are good examples here.

As I consider this, I feel we need a new Don Quixote. The old one combated imaginary giants, who turned out to be windmills. The new Don Quixote will combat the "windmills" of mega machines, which in reality are gigantic monsters.

Looking around  in search of something else opposing  the world of the machines (you will not find many things that are not machines themselves, come to think of it), I see  intuition and paradox as definitely at odds with them. A machine of any kind, with its underlying structure of a formal logic, refutes the very idea of the paradox. Even some computer viruses are designed as a logical paradox to get the machine into a state of infinite oscillation, or causing the computer to go down.  There also exist ways to stimulate intuition by encouraging paradoxical thinking.  This is one of the reasons why I tend to view paradox not only as a symptom of conflict between man, on the one hand, and the rational machine, on the other. Paradoxical thinking is an essential element in the philosophy of mass communication, a bridge between the machine-like rational and irrational cognition.

Media criticism can be considered as another symptom of this conflict as well as a means of improving media, albeit not the most effective one. A way out can be offered by a new medium that will develop on the basis of the Internet. It is the Internet that will occupy the throne of media king in the future. The fight for this throne, though, is far from easy. It brings us to the second conflict between technologically diverse types of media – manuscripts, print media, radio and television. My vision of the problem is based upon the idea that transfers of "the media throne" (from the oral tradition to writing, from writing to printing and from printing to television – the dominant medium at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st centuries) have always been caused by  conflicts. Each of these stages reflected interests of conservative media elites and of the people who implemented a new medium. Today we may observe signs of a growing conflict between television as the acting media king and its heir, mostly focusing on redistribution of advertising flows.

The third conflict is manifested in the tension between the reality and the virtual world. By revising and expanding the notion of virtuality, the author basically regards it as synonymous with psychological. Virtuality can be assumed to be a "great consciousness," which incorporates the so-called reality. REALITY IS A PART OF VIRTUALITY. It generates certain images on the "screens" of our minds. Electronic communication, as I have hypothesized, is heading towards the direct projecting of images on our "mind screens" and it takes enormous effort on our part to create the necessary technologies for this. Language/text, though, seems to have reached this aim long ago. It took possession of our minds the moment it emerged and particularly strengthened after the written communication was invented. That is to say that language, despite its archaism, is a very effective means of generating images in human minds.

The correlation between the language and electronics is similar to that between the analogue relaying and semio-analytical relaying. By means of the first method a ready-made image is imposed on us, while the second method involves analysis and encoding of a message into words, which in turn generate images in receivers' minds (these images, though, can differ from the ones that the author of the message had in mind). The second method gives the receiver some freedom of action in decoding the image.

The computer has helped many of us discover that  virtuality is internal rather than external. It is expressed in our dreams and hallucinations, fantasies and "world visions". We have become aware that the computer does not create virtuality; it just transforms it, enlarging the amount of material accessible for our perception, and producing various materials essentially different from those provided by reality and other media. The computer can be said to reform virtuality.

After all, for people the world has always been virtual, that is to say imaginative. It has been a projection and interpretation of reality, which will probably never be fully grasped by the human being.

Finally, the fourth conflict has to do with the ideological principles that provide the basis for media activity. It is primarily connected with the opposition of authoritarian or instrumentalist approaches to media, on the one hand, and the classical theory of the self-regulating free press on the other. In this book I rely on the assumption that it is impossible to bypass the authoritarian stage in the development of mass communication. Ukrainian media of the early 21st century provide a sad illustration of this assumption.

Thus, in the first part of the book I review, analyze and classify some trends and types of media criticism in terms of communication zones. The second part  is concerned with the things hidden behind the histrionic "paradise" and "hell" that are usually overlooked by critics. This part is of a philosophical nature.

Every topic, when approached carefully enough, will inevitably lead us to general reflections on human nature and truth. It is not unlike the electric spark between two oppositely charged electrodes-statements, neither of which can be considered true when taken separately. In any case, that is the way I would like the thoughts expressed in this book to be perceived.

Translated from Ukrainian by Halyna Bezukh