The Proust Effect: on Book-marks as an Aesthetic Medium

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The present essay aims to show how all kinds of marks-in-books (media inside medium) trigger a sense of identity but displace it into a feeling of repetition: the same becomes 'other.' Marginalia and ephemera are usually considered memory and spatial dispositifs, but in creating this swinging between identity and repetition, they can be regarded as aesthetic media. The archaeological approach, alongside theoretical framing, is done by revising the problem of how identity and repetition are present in annotating as a thinking process in reading. We enquire if there is any possibility of hierarchizing all correlates without falling into any extreme position, from materialism to idealism, from nominalism to radical ontology. This approach will fall on what we call the Proust effect: there will be no bookmarks without books, but the same book is entirely different when marked with different bookmark apparatus affecting in this way the thinking process itself while reading. Such a simple and forgotten medium can singularize and create complex worlds, transforming common grounds into different intentions, expectations, and assumptions. A bookmark not only draws the place one is reading. We show that they are more complex than that: they are forms of evoking the melancholy one can experience when they evoke memories of the self that trigger the flowing of identities and repetitions. Proust's Madeleine is a rhetorical metaphor we use to refer to bookmarks as aesthetic media effects. This approach is radical in two primary senses: a) no previous attempts were explicitly made till now to understand the function of this innocuous, or apparently innocuous media, and b) it shows that unthematized media, or techniques of communication, when deconstructed, can reveal significant importance in the determination of what is communicated while communicating with them.

It is no easy matter knowing your way around things!
Vilém Flusser

Eternity is in love with the productions of time.
William Blake

Inventions (*devices*) – never creations.
Roberto Bazlen

And today, the book is already, as the present mode of scholarly production demonstrates, an outdated mediation between two different filing systems. For everything that matters is to be found in the card box of the researcher who wrote it, and the scholar studying it assimilates it into his own card index.
Walter Benjamin

Introduction

The core argument of this essay is to show how all kinds of marks-in-books (media inside *medium*) trigger a sense of identity but displace it into a feeling of repetition: the same becomes 'other.' *Marginalia* and ephemera are usually considered memory and spatial *dispositifs*, but in creating this swinging between identity and repetition, they can be regarded as aesthetic media. The archaeological approach, alongside theoretical framing, is done by revising the problem of how identity and repetition are present in annotating as a thinking process in reading. Marginal media is here taken into inspection since they trigger important forms of accessing both the self and the alterity and allowing communication. Communication and mediation are simultaneous processes from which the self and the objects (the so-called otherness) emerge. In this essay, we enquire if there is any possibility of hierarchizing all these correlates without falling into any extreme position, from materialism to idealism, from nominalism to radical ontology. Such an approach to communication will fall on what we call the 'bookmark effect' or, in a more general formula, the *Proust effect*: there will be no bookmarks without books, but the same book is entirely different when marked with different bookmark apparatus affecting in this way the thinking process itself while reading. Such a simple and forgotten medium can singularize and create complex worlds, transforming common grounds into different intentions, expectations, and assumptions. A bookmark not only draws the place one is reading. We will show that they are more complex than that: they are forms of evoking the melancholy one can experience when, by pointing to a specific space, they already evoke the past; they evoke memories of the self that trigger the flowing of identities and repetitions. Proust's *Madeleine* is a rhetorical metaphor we create to refer to

bookmarks as aesthetic media effects. This approach is radical in two primary senses: a) no previous attempts were explicitly made till now to understand the function of this innocuous media or apparently innocuous media, and b) it shows that unthematized media, or techniques of communication, when deconstructed, can reveal significant importance in the determination of what is communicated while communicating with them.

The Proust effect (framing)

Marks in books that any reader makes in every possible format we can find in History of Media are a matter of uncanny astonishment. They reveal the presence of a subjective trace over a silent voice that emerges from the lines that are supposed to belong to another subject. Media institutionalizes alterity; they are its very inception and condition of possibility[1]. Bookmarks are an encounter that does justice to the act of writing itself: aligning signs to express a mindset of representations that unveil a personal idea of the world. Those who write address the reader, but the reader is always a mere and pale imaginary projection of the writer. However, as such, the reader accomplishes the task of addressing him in a pure, idealistic way. Readers are always inventions of the writer, projections, but they must be taken as dynamic projections, agentive projections. There is a deep belief in the writing process that the addressee will or even must accomplish his task, a duty that is dictated in the very essence of Writing. That is, for instance, what Vilém Flusser had in mind when he stated in *Does Writing Have a Future?* that:

> The well-known phrase *habent* [sua] *fata libelli* (books have destinies) gives only a rough idea of what is meant here. It is not that the writer transmits powers to his texts so that the text can put those powers into play according to its particular dynamics; it is that the text goes out to be completed. So the text does not have a destiny; it is a destiny.[2]

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[1] Dieter Mersch, *Théorie des Médias. Une Introduction*. Dijon: Les presses do reél, 2018, p.7. For a more detailed definition and deeper understanding of what is a medium and media, cfr., Wolfgang Hagen, "Metaxy: Eine historiosemantische Fußnote zum Medienbegriff." In S. Münker and A. Roesler (eds.), *Was ist ein Medium*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008, pp. 13-29, *passim*.

[2] Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing have a future?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, p. 37. The Latin dictum is attributed to Terentianus Maurus and is the 1286 verse of his *De litteris, De Syllabis, De Metris*. The complete verse goes like this: "Pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli". It is impossible here to account for all interpretations and uses of this dictum. However, an assessment worth quoting is Walter Benjamin's account of it because he turns the sentence into a more complex, intricate use of the *fate of a book*, mainly because he inserts it in the idea of collection and not only the book itself. In "Unpacking my Library", Benjamin, the collector who built a book entirely made of quotes from other books, *Marginalia* par excellence, says: *"Habent sua fata libelli*: these words may have been intended as a general statement about books. So, books like *The Divine Comedy*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, and *The Origin of Species* have their fates. A collector,

Furthermore, that was, in fact, the *fate* of William Shakespeare *Julius Caesar*. In the Robben Island Prison, South Africa, the inmates had a tradition to underline and sign their names on the margins of the pages of the books they read. Nelson Mandela, for instance, signed at least Shakespeare's book on the following pages: II, ii, 32-37[3]. The date was December 17, 1997, and the reader read what follows, opening a new layer for meaning to what Shakespeare had written and to what Shakespeare himself could found as a new historical approach; briefly, inmates at Robben Island Prison add another layer of historical significance, an echo of the timeless projection of a real-ideal reader:

> Cowards die many times before their deaths.
> The valiant never taste of death but once.
> Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
> It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
> Seeing that death, a necessary end,
> Will come when it will come.

In fact, "though the annotator herself can hardly have been aware of the fact, her annotation practice is consistent with centuries of tradition reaching far beyond the birth of print, through the ages of manuscript culture."[4] The described encounter finds proportionality in the idea of contagion or perception at distance and by which the idea, once written, is enlivened, again and again, through time, layering meaning into what was written and to the content of what was written. This encounter does not only play with alterity in the strict sense of *the Other* but also deferred face-to-face with who had written it to what was written. For instance, the pile of notes taken by Hans Blumenberg in his writing process can be numbered in more than thirty thousand note cards, handwritten and typed. Blumenberg's way of compiling information attests to a way of creating a *Marginalia sui* to his texts that goes far beyond a mere obsessive form of collecting or piling up information. His *Zettelkasten* is more than a mere act of adding but an actual form that reflects his attitude toward thinking and writing simultaneously:

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however, interprets this Latin saying differently. For him, not only books but also book copies of books have their fates. In this sense, the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with him, with his own collection. I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector, the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth. This is the childlike element which in a collector mingles with the element of old age", Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library." *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 56-67, p. 61.

[3] Cfr., *Voice of America*, July 17, 2013: https://www.voanews.com/a/nelson-mandela-and-robben-island-shakespeare/1703937.html# to find an image of the marginal note. For further reading about *Marginalia*, cfr., H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia. Readers Writing in Books*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2001, *passim*.

[4] H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia. Readers Writing in Books*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 5.

an endless process that leads to a historical approach to envisioning the world.[5] In his case, the dialogue was an inner dialogue and a projective discussion with past and future subjects, both to History and to the Future. A similar situation occurs with Guy Debord's way of taking sidenotes from his readings. Thousands of *affiches* were found when the Bibliothèque Nationale de France bought his archive in 2010 and 2011. The result was an edited four volumes of notebooks[6] organized thematically, revealing his drive to read while annotating; using the German classical term, they are the testimony of his *Lesewut*.[7]

Using Hegelian terms, *Marginalia* and ephemera are epiphenomena that trigger the process of negativity, creating the possibility of difference and verisimilitude.[8] To sketch it in a word, any media epiphenomenon implies a

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[5] Cfr., Daniela K. Helbig, "Life without Toothache: Hans Blumenberg's *Zettelkasten* and History of Scienceas Theoretical Attitude." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 80 (1), pp. 91-112, 2019, p. 94 and Hector Haarkötter, *Notizzettel. Denken und Schreiben in 21. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2021, p. 12ff.

[6] Guy Debord, *Histoire*. Paris: L'échappée, "La Librairie de Guy Debord", 2023; Guy Debord, *Marx. Hegel*. Paris. L'échappée, "La Librairie de Guy Debord", 2021; Guy Debord, *Poésie, etc.* Paris: L'échappée, "La Librairie de Guy Debord", 2019; Guy Debord, *Stratégie*. Paris: L'échappée, "La Librairie de Guy Debord", 2018. A fifth volume is being prepared with only notes concerning the reading of Philosophy books. The impressive obsessive act of noting down while reading is strange for the readers of Debord, where no references are made despite the mere enunciation of the author or book he is talking about. However, this is not so rare for those acquainted with the dérives and détournements as a writing strategy but also as a tactic for political action inside the act of writing. Cfr., Guy Debord, *Situations, dérives, détournements –Statuts et usages de la littérature et des arts chez Guy Debord* (eds., François Coadou & Philippe Sabo). Dijon: Les presses do reél, 2017. Every paragraph of his *The Society of Spectacle* (1967) contains a modified sentence from one of the books he read but in a concealed quote. He considered this practice more of a legitimate appropriation than an act of plagiarism. By mapping all the books he appropriated could reveal some of the structure of his thinking. This task is still to be done.

[7] About this *reading mania*, cf., Matt Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries: Books, Literature, and the Culture of Consumption in Germany, 1770-1815*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Library, 2017, Chapter 3, "The appetite for Reading around 1800", pp. 78-99. There, we can read: "Reading has always been considered dangerous by some, but rarely as dangerous as it was perceived to be in late eighteenth-century Germany. The meteoric growth of the market for books and periodicals in this period not only gave rise to a new literary public sphere; it also triggered wide-ranging and often hysterical fears among German intellectuals and other educated elites of a "reading epidemic." These fears have attracted a fair amount of interest over the years, with more recent studies generally addressing the topic from the perspective of the history of genre, class conflict, or gender politics. Commentators like Eric Schön have made it clear how significant the discussions of *Lesesucht* (reading addiction) and *Lesewut* (reading mania) are for our understanding of the history of reading and how our own notions of what it means to be a reader, especially a reader of novels, take shape in this period", p. 78. This reading of mania can be traced back as a symptom of immersing in other worlds, of *madness*, at least to Miguel de Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Vol. 1: 1605; Vol. 2: 1615).

[8] Brady Bowman, "The Hegelian Concept, absolute negativity, and the transformation of philosophical critique." In *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 26-61, passim.

temporal form, i.e., a repetition as a return of identity in different ways or forms.[9] It is a diagrammatic procedure but also a historical dispositive. Joseph Vogl summarizes this by stating that:

> Media denaturalize the senses and allow their historicization; that media can be understood as self-referential world-creating organs; that media are defined by the anesthetic space they produce, these might form the outline of a framework in which the history of media is constituted in nothing more and nothing less than the mere events of a discontinuous becoming-media.[10]

The effect we are calling here when taking bookmarks as a personal process of individuation, and thus, of thinking, is like what Marcel Proust described in the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, "Swann's Way" when suddenly a taste became a re-encounter with himself as other. The *mania*[11] it causes, the suspension of all the world at that moment –here, for us, the moment of reading– the inner sense of being transported to other worlds, other minds, and the feeling of intense joy are compared with the trace put in a page when reading. This how echoes the 'Proust Effect' when retrieved in a mark we left on a page or in a mark left by others on the page we are reading:

> Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me. When one day in winter, on my return home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent for one

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[9] Without wanting to go deep into this subject, we can read Pascal's *pensée* as acute reasoning about media, time, and the drive or the need to annotate. From this point of view, bookmarks are precise instruments for setting the ideal reading pace to acknowledge what is read in the reading process. Blaise Pascal's words are as follows: "*The infinite, the mean. –When we read too fast or too slowly, we understand nothing*", Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, (ed. Léon Brunschvicg). Paris: Flammarion, [1925]/1993, § 69. The French original is "*Deux infinis, milieu. –Quand on lit trop vite ou trop doucement, on n'entend rien.*" Here, we have used the translation by W. T. Trotter, "Thoughts." In Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters, Minor Works*. New York: Collier & Son Corporation, 1910. For references in Pascal and his drive to quote as individuation process, cfr., Pierre Lyraud, "La manière de citer: les citations latines montaniennes dans les *Pensées*". *Dix-septième siècle*, n° 287, 2020/2, pp. 255-276.

[10] Joseph Vogl, "Becoming-Media: Galileo's Telescope." In Briankle G. Chang & Garnet C. Butchart, *Philosophy of Communication*. Cambridge, Ma.: The MIT Press, 2012, pp. 627-634, p. 634.

[11] For a treatment of the role of *mania* in the Birth of Western Thought, cfr., Giorgio Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*. Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 1978, 1. "La follia è la fonte della sapienza", pp. 11-21, *passim*.

of those squat, plump little cakes called "petites madeleines," which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory –this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature. Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?[12]

This kind of encounter is made possible precisely by the traces on the page's surface, which bring us into the *essence of not being me* while being me from the beginning. Time, pure time, repetition, and difference are made possible by a scratch or a mark in a space where we intrinsically deposit our being.

Effects and Media

In July 2017, the famous weekly journal for literature and ideas, *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), created a section that was named "Footnotes to Plato." It was launched for the 130th anniversary of his author, but no footnote has been made up until now to explain the origin of the expression, and no article has been dedicated to him till the present day. This is a section that the TLS dedicates to classical thought –and sometimes not so classical– and where reviews on important thinkers are made. But a superficial inspection will acknowledge that this expression comes from Alfred North Whitehead's famous book, *Process and Reality*, where he states that: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."[13] TLS overtly plays with meaning, reference, and the layers of historical connections.

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[12] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*. Vol. 1: 'Swann's Way/Within a Budding Grove'. New York: Random House, [1913] / 1981, p. 48 [Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Du côté de chez Swann,* vol. 1, ed. Jean Milly). Paris: Flammarion, [1913] / 1987, pp. 144/5.

[13] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. New York: Free Press, [1929] 1978, p. 39.

This exercise we here bring forth raises two main problems which should be pointed out here as the central core of this text: that all *Marginalia* in texts[14], or any other media, results from an intricate web of *invisible phenomena* that transform the usual role given to *media* as silent or invisible mediators apparatus; and taking that in account, to the thesis that they do not appear to be in the realm of appearances, but in the realm of the invisible[15]. Footnotes, but also a great part of all *Marginalia*, were made possible around 1700[16] and represent a considerable sign of the now-becoming *visible of Marginalia*. They create a cloth of interwoven relations of meanings that could not pass as hidden intentions or that could be taken into an aesthetic account. Media *Marginalia* is an aesthetic machine!

In this sense, Whitehead, without even a reference to him, foretells even more that he is an *author* and one of the authentic sources of what Michel Foucault would come to bring forth to the *World Republic of Letters* in his famous article, "What is an author?", from 1969, and in stating that they, the authors, could be defined as the "*initiators of discursive practices*" (*fondateurs de discursivité*)."[17] Quoting is, in this sense, layering meaning in a historical perspective and rendering possible

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[14] For a full and new review of *Marginalia* as aesthetic media, cfr., the magnific book dedicated to what is the out-of-text, a collection of essays of critical contemporary scholars in the subject: Carlota Fernández-Jáuregui (ed.), *Fuera-de-texto*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca (col. Materiales de Arte y Estética), 2023.

[15] This perspective can be traced back to Marshal McLuhan's *Understating Media* and the assertion that *the media is the message*. The first reaction comes from Jean Baudrillard (1972), where we can read: "There is no theory of the media. The "media revolution" has remained empirical and mystical, as much in the work of McLuhan as with his opponents. McLuhan has said, with his usual Canadian-Texan brutalness, that Marx, the spiritual contemporary of the steam engine and railroads, was already obsolete in his lifetime with the appearance of the telegraph. In his candid fashion, he is saying that Marx, in his materialist analysis of production, had virtually circumscribed productive forces as a privileged domain from which language, signs, and communication in general found themselves excluded. In fact, Marx does not even provide for a genuine theory of railroads as "media," as modes of communication: they hardly enter into consideration. And he certainly established no theory of technical evolution in general, except from the point of view of production primary, material, infrastructural production as the almost exclusive determinant of social relations", Jean Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media." In Noah Wardrip-Fruin & Nick Montfort, *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge, Ma.: The MIT Press, 2003, pp. 277-288, p. 278. We can observe the same in Vogl's "Becoming-Media: Galileo's Telescope." To discuss this problem, cfr., Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission. An Approach to Media Philosophy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015, pp. 27-38, *passim*.

[16] H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia. Readers Writing in Books*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 55. For a deeper survey, cfr., Anthony Grafton, The Footnote. A Curious History. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1997, where the first chapter shows the importance of footnotes for historical perception (sec. Footnotes: The Origin of a Species, pp. 1-33).

[17] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*. Paris: Gallimard, 2001, pp. 817-849, p. 837.

other authors. As media epiphenomena, *Marginalia*[18] are perceptive instruments and not only *invisible* mediators. As Friedrich Kittler points out:

> There is a perfectly good reason for this situation. Though the lines of a book have looked linear since Gutenberg, the page of a book has been two-dimensional since the Scholasticism of the twelfth century at the latest. Each paragraph and section, footnote, and title plays across a surface whose two-dimensionality is no different from that of an image.[19]

By that, Foucault states that authors are the very condition of possibility for the formation and the criteria or rule of *other* texts. It must be asserted that they are, in fact, not only the source or ground for *other* references and authors but for a set, a determined set, of other texts, creating a *precise* frame: History and *mediunic* relations. Despite all these facts, Foucault did not refer to Whitehead, which is a notable lack of memory or deliberate oblivion. If we want to put it in another way, footnotes are the condition of possibility for any future *auctoritas* on the *discourse practices* an author seems to inaugurate[20], and in this sense, they are forms of marking books, marking texts, and layering meaning.

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[18] Cfr., Edgar Allen Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. XVI: "Marginalia – Eureka" (James A. Harrison, ed.). New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1902: "Marginalia.", pp. 1-78. There we can read the following annotation, which is very symptomatic of what we are treating here: "In getting my books, I have been always solicitous of an ample margin; this not so much through any love of the thing in itself, however agreeable, as for the facility it affords me of pencilling suggested thoughts, agreements, and differences of opinion, or brief critical comments in general. Where what I have to note is too much to be included within the narrow limits of a margin, I commit it to a slip of paper, and deposit It between the leaves; taking care to secure it by an imperceptible portion of gum tragacanth paste. [...] This making of notes, however, is by no means the making of mere memoranda -a custom which has its disadvantages, beyond doubt. "Ce que je mets sur papier," says Bernardin de St. Pierre, "je remets de ma memoire et par consequence je l'oublie"– and, in fact, if you wish to forget anything upon the spot, make a note that this thing is to be remembered. [...] In the marginalia too, we talk only to ourselves we therefore talk; freshly –boldly –originally –with abandonnement –without conceit", pp. 1-2. This annotation appeared in *Democratic Review*, November 1844.

[19] Friedrich Kittler, "Perspective and the Book". *Grey Room*, 05, 2001, pp. 38-53, p. 39.

[20] Remember what Marshall McLuhan stated about Harold A. Innis, another of the most significant sources of quotes and another of the most excellent sources of forgetting that history has known. McLuhan states: "I am pleased to think of my own book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* as a footnote to the observations of Innis on the subject of the psychic and social consequences, first of writing then of printing." Cfr., McLuhan's *Preface* to Harold A. Innis's book, *The Bias of Communication* (University of Toronto Press), first published in 1951. On the subject, see Andrew Brian Chrystall "A Second Way to Read McLuhan's Footnotes to Innis." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 45, 2, 2020, pp. 327-345. See also Graeme Patterson, *History and Communications. Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan. The Interpretation of History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1990.

In fact, we if we pay more carefull attention, as Bienveniste points out, the word *auctoritas* came from the Latin verb to 'enlarge', to 'extend', to 'augment', but also to enrich; an *author* is somebody who is quotable, viz., that should be taken as a reference to *any* actual or future discursivity to be made on the object or a frame they had established[21]. Footnotes, as *Marginalia*, are the original cradle of any textual *intercourse*. This makes us immediately remember the sentence of the German Historian Leopold von Ranke in his definition of the task History should have as something that "simply shows how it really was."[22] Leopold von Ranke's aim –one should remember him as the father of Modern *footnote* systems and Modern historical methodology– is very clear about this media epiphenomenon: textual *intercourse* is History made upon media. In this sense, a reference should be what it meant to be: to indicate what is outside the discourse in order to make it *material, accurate*, or, at least, trustful. Authors are, in this sense, a *matter of fact*, subjects of quoting; they are the building blocks of any loose footnote or any footnote system. New technical printing devices allows that at the beginning of the XIX century. If we take into consideration Friedrich Kittler's assertion, in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* that "media determine our situation, which –in spite or because of it– deserves a description" [23], we should hermeneutically mean and conclude that the *footnote system* is an *Aufschriebensysteme* (*Discourse Networks),* so to say, *a system of inscription*, pure media, in a sense taken by Kittler from Marshall McLuhan's 1964 book, *Understanding Media* but now understood as a mechanism that produces aesthetic experience. We can further state that this system is being completely neglected as a medium and as an element of Media Theory. Some quick appointments will make this sentence a transparent and pertinent way to think about footnotes and media *Marginalia* in present times.

The second aporia comes much earlier but brings a similar problem to footnote systems as *Marginalia* and sidenotes on books or texts; this problem is incarnated in the concept of what is or can be a Classical Author. This will bring us into a historical realm, more than methodological discussion, as it happened to be in the first moment. Saint-Beuve, in 1850, stated that a "classic, according to the usual definition, is an old author canonized by admiration, and an authority

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[21] Émile Benveniste*, Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*. Chicago: Hau Books [1969], 2016, p. 423. There is the precise quote: "This authority –*auctoritas*– with which a man must be invested for his utterances to have the force of law is not, as is often stated, the power of promoting growth (*augere*), but the force (Skt. *ojaḥ*), divine in principle (cf. *augur*), of "causing to exist".

[22] Original says: "bloss zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen". Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Volker von 1494 bis 1514*. Leipzig: Verlag von Duder und Humboldt (1824), 1885, p. VII. About the same subject, cfr., the *Preface* of Roberto Calasso to Roberto Bazlen's, *Scritti*. Milano: Adelphi, 1984.

[23] Friedrich Kittler, original states: "Medien bestimmt unserer Lage, trotzdem oder deshalb, ein Beschreibung verdienst." Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon Film Typewriter*. Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986 p. xxxix.

in his particular style."[24] Of course, it should be underlined that Saint-Beuve emphasizes the *author* and not the book alone. Thinking with Saint-Beuve we may reframe this definition through the concepts of the *absolute performative* and that of *Natural History*, which by definition are connected to the first idea of our argument.

On the one hand, *the absolute performative* means the assumption that someone speaks *what* he had spoken in a well-marked historical timeframe. On the other hand, by the name of *Natural History,* we essay to fit History, Biology, and Politics together. *Natural History* is an important concept, and it has its own history, and represented as a key concept for Marxist thought, mainly for György Lukács, Walter Benjamin, and T. W. Adorno, as well as for, later, the polemic media theoretician Friedrich Kittler. But it was Walter Benjamin who more deeply discussed and presented the meaning of the concept, which was sketched as,

> As the historical lies encased in the essence or "nature" of the Ideas, [and] that natural History simultaneously signifies the historical "dynamization" of the intransient Ideas or essences.[25]

By these means, footnotes, *Marginalia,* and History are interwoven and presented as a unique idea of human events as human-created *facts* that, though contingent, can become a picture of our world, a *Weltanschauung.* As for authors, footnotes are a matter of historical redemption. Benjamin's ever-future book, *Das Passagen-Werk* ("Arcades Project")*,* is an extreme example: History can be disruptive since any human intervention can bring out new events that can be taken and interpreted in various ways. Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, is interpreted in this way: the wind blows on his front, allowing space for recognizing and bearing witness to the *ruins*; in this sense, ruins can be taken as footnotes: something new is about to come, but certainly, by reference to something that was already *being* in the past.

Let us now recall a very contemporary concept, forged in the late sixties, which in modern History had trespassed its realm: from the Natural frame to a so-called hybrid Natural-Historical case. Let us recall the concept of Anthropocene as an example of this. The Anthropocene and the decadence of footnote systems and media are linked: the Anthropocene represents the historicizing of Nature, the going into History of Nature. Since Nature has always been the reference (*Bedeutung)* of any discourse, the Anthropocene has become both a historical and material concept to be used in and for Social Sciences and Humanities, which

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[24] Charles-Augustin Saint-Beuve, *¿Qué es un clásico?* Madrid: Casimiro, Madrid, 2011, p. 8.

[25] Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, V, I, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 1982.

makes the History of the interception between Nature and Technology problematic[26] or narrativized.

Apparently, this goes out of its way to historicize the possibilities of Humans and Nature themselves. However, since Karl Marx approaches –the real heir and the *author* who brings out the tradition of linking Human Affairs with Nature through footnotes– we can affirm that he re-linked Nature and Thinking. The problem, as far as Marx and Engels have noticed, is that they are not concerned with Nature but with humans acting into Nature and its *matérialités*. In *German Ideology,* they affirm that they discovered a new materialist way of making History with no concern for relations to footnotes, as a method of pinpointing that relations that are a common ground, as demonstrated by *Das Kapital* itself and by the very hand of Marx marking the relations, according to the strict rules of Leopold von Ranke. *Das Kapital* can be taken as the hypostatization of *Marginalia.* Marx and Engels's aim was to make human History a science. Without any of these claims, History would become a fantasy to be planned. We should recall, as an ironic act of linking, the voice of Glaucon in Plato's *Republic,* where they are talking about what Politics should be, how it can be fed, and with what it should be fed. We can read it in the voice of Glaucon: "Yes, Socrates, he said, and if you were providing for a city of pigs, how else would you feed the beasts?"[27] Footnotes are alike; in modern scientific practices, someone finds the place, someone puts references, more freely or not, because no deepness in History is at stake, no *facts* are involved, only arguments that should be supported by the ancient methodology that is now a superficial system of referentiation. Footnote systems

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[26] "The term was first coined by atmospheric scientists as a name for the geological epoch that the Earth entered with the industrial revolution, around 1800. It is characterized by the unprecedented fact that humanity has come to play a decisive, if still largely incalculable, role in the planet's ecology and geology, that 'Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of nature and are pushing the Earth as a whole into planetary terra incognita", Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge. The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept.* London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 1. This definition transforms the whole complex of the concept of Nature into an interwoven relation of human actions over it. From a historical viewpoint, not only geological, but the category of the Anthropocene also falls in the effort of making clear the layering of meanings between humans and Nature. An acute approach to this perspective can go like this: "Storytelling in and about the Anthropocene is thus, in very literal ways, affected by the imaginary and conceptual challenges that Chakrabarty has laid out in his writings. And yet the very idea of the Anthropocene –regardless of whether it will become an official geological epoch or not– continues to be immensely productive for storytelling, inspiring artists to look for innovative and more adequate modes and media for conveying what it means –and what it can mean– when humans wield a geological force. Over time, the creative energy involved in the production and mental performance of such stories might bring us at least a little closer to scaling up our imagination of the human." Alexa Weik von Mossner, "Imagining Geological Agency: Storytelling in the Anthropocene." *RCC Perspectives*, 2, *WHOSE ANTHROPOCENE? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Four Theses,"* 2016, pp. 83-88, p. 88.

[27] Plato, *Republic,* Volume I: Books 1-5. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2013, 372b4.

that are in use today remind us of the importance of the idea of William of Ockham and his razor principle (*novacula Occami*): *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, so to say, entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity.

A singular effect of this is presented in Wittgenstein's notes and appears to be an acute example: "I really do think with my pen because my head often knows nothing about what my hand is writing."[28] Nowadays, the rules of quotations are influenced by understanding the texts as mere instruments and their (re)constructions. This system itself falls apart due to its pure, superficial essence. Developing this theme would take us too far and extend our argument beyond a simple historical argument as here are aimed and not as a political manifesto. Ultimately, the instrument or medium, footnotes, functions like the pen in Ludwig Wittgenstein's annotation. The text will appear in one way or another, depending on how we use citations and footnotes. Let us remember the well-known Greek expression, so beloved to Edmund Husserl, which states: μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος[29], that is, a transfer of meaning, a pouring them in a pure referentiality. Some quick quotes would make such a phrase more straightforward and relevant to think about footnotes and the media today: these are always side-by-side with a precise citation, typically made in APA Style + Nº of edition format. So, we are allowed to glimpse the reference itself in the text in a unitary way. This article's purpose, more than a problem of form and its instrumentalization, it is an actual attack on *Marginalia*. These forms are a complete mode of erasing seeable cross-reference, and sciences and textuality become an empty field for understanding historical depth. The more recent the quote date, the more effective it is. Superficiality arises when the life spectrum of a text is more or less the same as a Queen honeybee. As von Ranke *Marginalia* established it as such, the art of linking is already under the threat of death. It only remains as a mirror reflection of what Peter Sloterdijk, not without irony, calls *Kulissen-Ontologie*, which we can translate as a "scenery ontology": the scenefication of an actual historical and factual linking of references.

Kafka's aphorism, dating from 1917, is a prominent symptom of the disappearance of *Marginalia* as an aesthetic medium that cross-references between texts; this is all this aphorism is about: if we have no historical context, everything is possible. If we only attend to the *apparatus*, notes, and subjects, we are effaced

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[28] The original is as follow: "Ich denke tatsächlich mit der Feder, denn mein Kopf weiß oft nichts von dem, was meine Hand schreibt" Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen / Culture and Value*. London: Blackwell 1980 (1931), frag. 87, p. 17. We would also benefit from Nietzsche's annotation: "Our writing instruments work with our thoughts" (*Unser Schreibzeug arbeitet mit an unseren Gedanken*), *apud* Friedrich Kittler, "The Mechanized Philosopher", in Laurence A. Rickels, *Looking after Nietzsche*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 195. In fact, Nietzsche received in 1881 a Hansen Writing Ball machine, a typewriter patented in 1870 and which he used to compensate for his visual deficiencies.

[29] Cfr., Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen, I. Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1975, p. 22.

from the *scene* in writing and reading. Kafka was reading about his historical time and the scarcity of historical deepness in his epoch while taking a position on it! In this sense, among others, Kafka's literature is pure footnotes to his historical situation and his bureaucratic *milieux*:

> They were given the choice of becoming kings or the kings' messengers. As is the way with children, they all wanted to be messengers. That is why there are only messengers, racing through the world and, since there are no kings, calling out to each other the messages that have now become meaningless. They would gladly put an end to their miserable life, but they do not dare to do so because of their oath of loyalty, (December 2, 1917). [30]

Taking account of this *scenery ontology*, any reader of any book that is acquainted with these problems will immediately -or at least probably be- find in the subject of this article as an explicit reference to Vilém Flusser's concept of *The Shape of Things*, which has as subtle subtitle, *Philosophy of Design* (1999). In this book, which does not explicitly deal with *Marginalia*, there are many references to what can be considered as design but also, and by reference to it, to the concept of the inventions or media epiphenomenon, viz. *Marginalia*. Considering this book, it still happens that the English version is a translation from German, which would be something like *From the State of Things: A Small History of Design* ("Vom Stand der Dinge: Eine kleine Philosophie des Design"). That was the title that the German editor, Fabian Wurm, gave to a collection of texts where Flusser uses the word *design*, thus, in *the position of things*, and which was published in 1993, two years after his death. The word *small* here matters.

These are what the first words of the first essay that constitutes the outline of what it might mean to *design* say:

> In English, the word design is both a noun and a verb (which says a lot about the nature of the English language). As a noun, it means -among other things- "intention", "plan", "intent", "aim", "scheme", "plot", motive: "basic structure: all these (and other meanings) are connected with "cunning" and "trickery". As a verb ("design"), meanings include "to invent something": "to simulate", "to sketch", "to draw", "to model", "to make designs on something." The word is derived from the Latin *signum*, meaning "sign," and shares the same ancient root. Thus, etymologically, design means

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[30] Franz Kafka, *Die Zürauer Aphorismen* (Hrsg. von Roberto Calasso). Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 2006.

'de-sign'. This begs the question: how did the word design come to attain its current meaning around the world?[31]

The answer to the problem we are positing is not only historical, says Flusser, but rather is rooted in a more formal philosophical problem, to use the ways of Flusser's argument: the answer *is* also in History. It is contextualized in it, but it is not exhausted in it. To answer this question, History would be too narrow for its determination. It would become something of tiny dimensions, narrowing it, but also something that causes anguish as a pathology of decision-making, i.e., to a short formula of determination. The answer can be found instead in the notion of *invention*, which for his work would be the correct translation of this term into other languages: an intention is shown, and the will of the intention is affirmed simultaneously. Invention, in fact, refers to *invenio*, which we could translate as material becoming something else than mere material and must be considered as the coming of what is made in the face of what is evolving into being.

Well, this sounds like Heideggerian jargon. We are aware of it! But it is not, and it is not our intention to dwell on it, even if it is at the same time, given Flusser's reading affiliations to the famous thinker of the *Hütte*. But, in fact, it goes beyond it. In other words, an abandonment, a distance, where he joins a whole tradition that does not end with him and that references the first text on the philosophy of technology of the modern era: Ernst Kapp, a Hegelian geographer who emigrated to Texas, but also a pre-Heideggerian (Heidegger uses too much his terminology without even quoting him), whose decisive book dates from 1877. Ernst Kapp's filiation, and his attempt or design, was to frame the origin of human techniques, or technology, in Biology and as an extension of human perceptual organs but also as a negative moment of exteriorization and self-mirroring of humans in their externalizations, using Hegelian concepts. But let us ignore Ernst Kapp's biological argument for now and stay close to his historical approach. That's what we can read in Kapp's argument:

> On the one hand, every tool –understood in the broadest sense of the word as a means of enhancing sensory activity– presents the unique possibility of moving beyond the immediate, superficial perception of things. On the other hand, as the combined product of intellectual and manual activity, the tool is so fundamentally and intimately affiliated with the human being that he finds himself beholding something of his own being in the creation of

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[31] Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things. A Philosophy of Design.* London: Reaktion Books, 1999, p. 17.

his hand, his world of representation embodied in matter, a mirror –or after– image [*Nachbild*] of his interior, a part of himself.[32]

What are we really reaching with the subject of this paper? What is the ultimate goal of this essay? The inquiry into the technique of the media and its invisible effects or *Marginalia*. The reasons for this being as such are often much more accidental than historical re-readings. We want to think about simple devices and simple apparatuses, all the paraphernalia of instruments that accompany thinking and reading, because in the West, as more than one uses to state, thinking and having read (or seeming to have read) coincides. Let us stay with what we wanted to have said instead of having made a circumlocution of what we wanted to have said. In this case, we deal with approaching the bookmarks, the whole ephemeral apparatus, the *ephemera* that the theory of textuality works with, to designate instruments that make identity and repetition possible while allowing the mapping of what is thought in the space where it is framed, that is, a means of communication, in this case, the book. Books are a kind of world, but that could be expanded to other media since there are more and more analytic instruments.

Bookmarks and marks in books are instruments of apparently easy use, that no one stops to think about, that no one wants to think about because they are so anodyne; and yes, bookmarks, whatever they are and in whatever form they incarnate –or have been and still are– are a possible object of thinking. Massimo Gatta helped us lead this enterprise, and in his book, *Breve storia del segnalibro*, stateing that:

> The fact is that the bookmark measures space, not time. It belongs
> to geography, not History. As it progresses through the pages the
> bookmark functions like a flag planted in the book's map: 'So far,'
> it signals in the manner of the lucky commander who, after each
> battle marks on a map the progress of his troops.[33]

This essay was written and translated into several languages during the period in which we were all locked down at home and open to reading and its margins. This points out the danger humans pose to each other and the contagion books can do too.[34] Only in the melancholy of that suspended time could such a book have all the sense and the impact it had. But the question for the sense of the

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[32] Ernst Kapp, Elements of a Philosophy of Technology: On the Evolutionary History of Culture. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018, p. 24.

[33] Massimo Gatta, *Breve storia del segnalibro*. Perugia: Graphe.it edizioni, 2020, p. 51.

[34] As Gatta remarks, "One should avoid putting flowers or leaves in books because, as they wither, flowers and leaves transmit time to books: which are themselves immune from this contagion". Cfr., Massimo Gatta, *Breve storia del segnalibro, op. cit.,* p. 52.

things –envisioned in phenomenological tone– and their rhythm and standards, as the sage Gatta presents, are previous and go back at least to the Enlightenment. In other words, small things that want to be big or small things that gain time to be big need moments of paralysis and melancholy.

Massimo Gatta, a scholar of these systems and a Librarian, states that with the bookmarks, it is a matter of spatializing time and temporalizing space. It is true that they are geolocation instruments. That seems to say nothing unless they are embodied in an object that shapes or defines them. That medium is the phonetic-vocalic writing itself, as Kittler remarks, but mainly the one that is embodied in the *codex* and the printed book around 1450, and the cheapening of paper production since the end of the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX, being central throughout the whole XX century and making possible the reading notes, inserted or not inserted in the same object of reading.

This eagerness for repetition remains and is always an eagerness for the geolocation of memory.[35] At the same time, it is an aesthetic phenomenon by the very nature of the media we use: the one that overflows the reader, the spectator, the listener of something that is addressed to him by another human being and that, without knowing why, like in Proust, lends itself to our gaze, or the gaze only, if we put it in a position of mere skeptical beings. But the matter of fact is that every human being is now a possible skeptic, especially since the notion of exchange value and cult value was formulated on the exact historical dates, or instead since the idea of exchange value was created because the *cult value* is a later reference and belongs to its single and greatest rhetorician: Walter Benjamin. We approach the bookmark not out of dandyism or dilettantism but because there is a will and a desire to think about their impact. As H. J. Jackson points out: "Given the recent shift of attention from the writer to the reader and to the production, dissemination, and reception of texts, *Marginalia* of all periods would appear to be potentially a goldmine for scholars."[36] This is still to be done!

We do not always need to stick to History to solidify our ideas. Pulling directly from the History of ideas as a resource when dealing with a problem is not always the best solution. When dealing with these problems, sometimes History can only be an obstacle to the ability to approach them in new ways. This is not to say, however, that History is not valuable. That is something the books are always aware of. In fact, there are clear points of confluence between the ideas presented here and in Flusser's work, but they are not only drawn and projected

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[35] Gatta is again clear: "The bookmark is beautiful because you always win with it. If we like the book, we get to the end quickly, routing the enemy. If, on the other hand, we don't like it at best we stop operations and immediately get a reprieve. But, for sure, with the bookmark, you never back down; with books, you don't lose, and at worst, you break even. I have come this far, I say, and the territory I have occupied I keep it: you, the author, keep the rest, I don't care anyway", Massimo Gatta, *op. cit.,* ibidem.

[36] H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia. Readers Writing in Books*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 6.

in terms of what his projections wanted to address. Nonetheless, these can be found in references and arguments materialized in this article and throughout the set of addressed problems, but the endless process Flusser sees in any technical device is projected as a seed to another, and so on. The aim here is to pay attention to *Marginalia* as a media epiphenomenon.

Despite this, whoever wants to combine *design, past,* and *future* in the same subject, which is the risk we run in naming identity and repetition as qualia of every *Marginalia*, runs the risk too of seeing the attempt stamped in what could be defined as a predetermined judgment. Any tacit predisposition of the reader or listener, whatever the approach intended by an author, whether it is a meticulous or distant look, can change how what lies in the margins is perceived. This is even more acute if the plural appears: *designs, pasts, and futures*, that is, identities and repetitions. The geolocation of space as a geolocation of memory is not unique to *Marginalia; it is not a* univocal process or the determination of a linear time. Any modern novel, if not philosophy itself as a literary form,[37] could prove it. What Leibniz called the *confusion of the given things* in perceptions seems to occur here, for, as he states in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, "it is impossible for us to think always and expressly in all our thoughts."[38] This framework belongs to the man who invented the binary digits; the author also wanted to extinguish the natural language to create an artificial and universal one. Tacitly recalling Leibniz, Flusser says that the world must be invented, and the best way to do it is to calculate it. We heard this to exhaustion in *Media Culture* (*Medienkultur*).[39] His words are the following: "What these modern mathematicians understood is that to have the world within our reach, to understand the world, it is not necessary to look at the world or describe it, it is necessary to calculate it"[40], and for Flusser calculating it is the same as inventing it. Therefore, the mind of man and the Western reader cannot disassociate itself from these unexplicit disturbances. In other words, he is at the mercy of the power to design for pleasure, as an exercise of the imagination, of the capacity to make sketches that produce enjoyment, that is, for pleasure in designing for only the sake of designing.

For Flusser, human communication is viewed "from an existential point of view." It answers the question, "Why do we communicate?" We do not communicate so much to exchange information between a sender and a receiver united by a channel as to create with others a reason to live or to continue living, echoes Flusser's positions, *textual intercourse*, so to say. Communication is an act of freedom, but a freedom that is not natural, but artificial, intentional, dialogical,

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[37] Agnes Heller, "Philosophy as a literary genre". *Thesis Eleven*, 110 (1), pp. 17-26, 2012, *passim.*

[38] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain.* In G.W. Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften.* Hildsheim: Georg Olms Verlag, [1765] / 1978, Bd. V, pp. 39-509, p. 40.

[39] Vilém Flusser, *Medienkultur.* Berlin: Fischer, 1996.

[40] Vilém Flusser, *Medienkultur.* Berlin: Fischer, 1996, p. 67.

and collective, aiming to create codes that help us forget our inevitable death and the fundamental meaninglessness of our absurd existence.[41]

Vilém Flusser, in dealing with design and the designer, the invention and the inventor, connects both with the project concept and with what is projected in the act of *programming*. According to him, everything that is a project refers to the time *to* come and, viz., to the future. It occurs in this caesura, in this fracture, between what is projected in the project and what is itself the project. Flusser also distinguishes between those who project in the past and those who project in the present, between the designer of the past and today's designer. According to Flusser, the designer of the past finds or discovers, while the designer of today invents. In this notion of *invention,* problems arise, and the *difference* between these two approaches is significant. The Latin *invenio* implies that the human action of drawing (sketching or projecting) is an action that is only guaranteed to be effective by making the projected present in the project itself. It is always a play between accident and prodigality, contingency and teleology. What is at stake here is to present a reflection on how this interval is thought and how the categories of the present emerge; this should be achieved by skillfully cutting through Flusser's preoccupation with phenomenology but without ceasing to engage the task with the need to understand how functions certain media have; in this case, the bookmarks or any mark in any other medium, so to say, *Marginalia.*

When an event, i.e., a projected object, does not occur naturally, nor is it based on the structure of direct action, and according to previous sketches –such was the traditional way of organizing thought and designing as such–, appears, in line with a theory of the spectacle, which claims that it is a solidification of a conception of objects as a distant function in the world, viz., that the spectacle is a framed world. That is to say that one can think of these objects from a perspective established with respect to their purpose and not so much about the purpose itself, viz., to the relation to the what and not to the how. Events do not occur spontaneously; they are artificial by nature. They are produced to give the impression that they are real and effective, but they only pretend to be authentic. The concept of *artificial* has a precise meaning: illusion, skill, cunning, technique. But, in actuality, such a strategy of thinking has neither strength nor meaning, as Flusser intends to point out. Ezio Manzini is right when he observes that such an environment is necessary to create the environment itself, which requires a new definition: "The artificial needs to get rid of its negative connotations and be tinged with different values."[42]

A media theory, which is always part of a philosophy of technology at present, always consists of elaborating on a project; that is to say, it is a tangible

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[41] Cfr., Anke Finker, *Vilém Flusser. An Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, p. 83.

[42] Ezio Manzini, *Artefactos. Hacia una nueva ecología del ambiente artificial.* Madrid: Celeste Ediciones, 1992, p. 42.

way of designing. The problem is not only knowing the essence of the programmed object and what original elements it contains but also the fact that communication is what happens all the time, everywhere; that communication depends on the means that determine it. The media are evidence, constant experience, and constant projection. From this angle, the problem shifts from the book as something natural to an anachronistic questioning in the process of going backward into History. The analysis of the communicative process in its own doing, in its becoming, in its own time is only possible by deferring time. The reformulation of the problem must, therefore, have this structure: even if we could know the intrinsic and extrinsic principles of communication and the objects it always entails, it still cannot be said that it would be possible to get to know what communication is since these principles must have been previously expressed, or sent, transmitted, stored, and projected through a given medium. In a word, they should have been already designed.

Coda (or Arcades...)

We can reformulate the problem and argue that we must move from the problems of principles to the issue of causality: from the problems of its origins to the problem of who, what, or when initiates it and for what purpose. Now, precisely by resorting to one of the four definitions Aristotle gives of cause, as "the immanent matter from which something is generated"[43], it may become clear that the cause of the whole process of transmission can only be thought of as identical with its materiality and that *Marginalia* is material as well as an aesthetic apparatus.

That is the same as saying that there are means that make communication possible: the technique and what is designed with and on it. The answer must be of a material order and, consequently, the mode and structure that it can assume from the means that produce it, that design it is to project it, but also pointing to the differences between these means: orality, writing, photography, gramophone, radio, television, Internet, or, as here, bookmarks, *Lesezeichen*, *Marque-page* or *Signet*, *Segnalibro*, *Marcapáginas*, all words it has in languages that we don't know; that is, notes, marginal remarks that are placed in a book have the power to *re*design it differently as it was projected. To understand the communicative process, always as a media and technical project or, as Flusser says, of a phenomenology of design, that is, an attempt to understand under all the categories what it means to invent something from a previous apparatus.

One of the most quoted remarks and one of the more explicit formulations of this problem is found in Friedrich Kittler –the already mentioned *author*– when he states, "media determine our situation, which –in spite or because of it–

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[43] Cfr., Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1012b34-1014a & *Physics*, 194b16-195b30 (*Metaphysics*, Volume I: Books 1-9. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1933 & *Physics*, Volume I: Books 1-4. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1957).

deserves a description." In Kittler's conception, a *situation* (*Lage*) –a term that could also be interpreted as *location* or *zone*, in which a space-place is made or as an occupying space that is materialized– translates the spatial and temporal coordinates that one can access: that is, a completed mediated experience of the world and its conceptual formalization. Therefore, it materially coincides with the speculative problems raised above concerning the determination of the projected objects without the need to go through existential, complex, and subjective relationality. The imaginary discipline that Flusser proposes –a phenomenology of design– is an approximation, both historical and conceptual, of the notion of the project to that of the invention. The materiality of the media is always tacit or has not been explicitly discussed, thus marking the disposition of the human being to experience the world, giving rise to formulations that we can read in any book that wants to explain something to us.

In this sense, given the nature of each medium to control space and time, as Harold A. Innis had pointed out, we can see in this medium (the bookmarks) as the beginning of what could be called a *geography of design*, but also a geography of technique. As often happened in the History of Thought, these assumptions were first imagined by literature and art. An example can be found in Stefan Grabiński's[44] –the 'Polish Poe'– collection of short stories, deconstructing the *Train*, published in 1920 under the title *The Demon in Motion*, where Grabiński tried to glimpse all the powers that this object of design had on societies and that would have only begun to be grasped after its *Marginalia* emerged. The same can be said of the binoculars that *The Man Without Attributes*, Robert Musil tried to imagine. There we read:

> In this way, binoculars contribute both to the understanding
> of the individual human being and to the deepening of the
> misunderstanding of what it means to be human.[45]

But perhaps the finest and most delicate example is the one offered by Jorge Luis Borges, precisely because Borges does not think of an object as a product of modern technology but casts us to think of one of the oldest and closest objects known to man, the dagger. In his words:

> That is not what the dagger wants. It is more than a metal
> structure; men conceived and shaped it with a single purpose
> in mind. It is, in some eternal way, the dagger ^{that} stabbed a

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[44] Stefan Grabiński, *The Devil in Motion*. New Yor: Ash Tree Publishing, 2005. *Demon Ruchu*, in the Polish original.

[45] Robert Musil, "Triëdere". In Robert Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 7. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981, pp. 518-522, p. 519. We didn't have access to an English translation: Robert Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*. New York: Archipelago Books, 2006, pp. 85-94.

man in Tacuarembó last night and the daggers that rained down on Cesar. It wants to kill; it wants to shed sudden blood.[46]

The case of bookmarks, not only as *Marginalia* but also as paratext, is an example that deserves a history and a reflection that puts them into action when designing communication processes, they *want to shed sudden blood.* As the classical Italian philologist Maurizio Bettini points out in *Con in libri,* the "bookmark measures space and not time; it belongs to geography, not to history."[47] Page markers, for instance, are *Marginalia* but also ways of geolocating oneself in the representative world that constitutes thinking and the resource of that thinking to its original raw material, viz., to the thinking of *others* and the thinking of the embodied meaning in the books one read, recalling Pascal quote, *the infinite, the mean* when we read in a certain pace of time. Hans Blumenberg, who always saw in the book one of the most potent metaphors of the Western Culture, who uses bookmarks like no one else, never thought to see in this medium a powerful form and a mediunic structure that refers us to an invention that tries, seeks to design, a historical clock-marker for thinking, for the structures of thinking. Blumenberg's approach is exquisite but fails concerning the details he is using in the process of his own thinking. Media are so comfortable that they relapse us on considering its pathways as mere instruments. The first obstacle is not time as such or the natural access to the world via perception but the design instruments we create for this purpose. As Federico Garcia Lorca states in his address to his hometown Library on-set, "Tell me what you read, and I will tell you who you are."[48]

To finish this seemingly endless route *in res*, the oldest surviving bookmark is dated to the XI century AD. But it probably existed before that time. A bookmark does not only pinpoint the place where one is reading. It is more complex than that: it evokes the melancholy one can experience when seeking to mark a space and evoke the past, and it also evokes memories of the self that trigger identity and repetition. Proust's *Madeleine*[49] can be read as a rhetorical metaphor for bookmarks; for an obsessive-compulsive reader like Proust, he knows that a drop of ink on a page, a flower, a strip of paper, a silk ribbon, can trigger one's whole life backward and change one's perspective on the world and oneself. Bookmarks are maps for reading and of reading, a tremendously powerful *medium* that places oneself in what Hannah Arendt wants to answer when she asks

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[46] Jorge Luis Borges, "El puñal". In *Evaristo Carriego.* Madrid: Alianza Editorial, [1930] / 1988, p. 61.

[47] Maurizio Bettini, *Con il libri.* Turin: Einaudi, 1996, p. 50.

[48] Federico Garcia Lorca, *Dime qué lees y té diré quién eres.* Medellín: Confiar, 2007.

[49] There is no intention to go deep into Proust literature, of course. We use here only as a trope that refers to the triggering of memory posit by any marker, the bookmarks, and the swinging movements of the sense of *self* and *other* it brings about.

the question, "Where are we when we think?"[50] The answer is not only *nowhere*; it can also be *here,* on this page. These are evocative monuments that only a bookmark can activate. At the *Here* of the page, there is an encounter with the other and oneself, a spatial geography that opens to the space-time relation, maybe the only and proper encounter. The erasure or virtualization of markers in the digital age may be a sign, a *signum* (itself already a bookmark) that Hannah Arendt was trying to show: an exercise of thought or the absence of thought.

To finish with an anecdote that may freshen our argument, Frederico Seneca, an Italian advertising designer, drew a bookmark for a cooking company. The bookmark was a classic Victorian bookmark, rectangular, detachable, and with a figure of a human being in a joyful movement. Above the figure, could it be read, "Nunc et semper, Peruggia Chocolates!"

This is the actual function of a bookmark or *Marginalia* as media epiphenomena and as an aesthetic phenomenon: to mark the *here* and *ever*, the time and the space that is everyone's life and thinking. The *Proust Effect* we sketch here is the possible encounters or re-encounters that media and its epiphenomena can create[51] between the textual *intercourse* of our lives, or to say it in another way: we shall try not to look inward yourself but seek for the medium that makes it possible. The *Proust Effect*, in a word, makes us aware that we are always a media project and projections, only an *Arcade Projects*.

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[50] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, 1 & 2.* San Diego: A Harvest Book/Hardout, Inc., [1977/8] / 1981, I, IV, *passim*.

[51] Massimo Gatta uses painting to illustrate how bookmarks were introduced, although perhaps not consciously, into Western civilization culture. An example of this can be found in the Italian Renascence painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo with the painting *Il Bibliotecario* (1566). Many other examples could be evoked here, but this would constitute a reason for another essay, which should be concerned with showing the coming into existence of this mnemonic instrument of localization into Western culture and, therefore, giving an account of it as a medium with aesthetic functions. As Massimo Gatta points out: "It will be the celebrated Giuseppe Arcimboldi who will endow the bookmark with a relevant iconographic dignity and presence. In fact, in the 'Librarian' (*Bibliotecario*), painted in 1566 and now preserved in the Skokloster Castle in Håbo, Sweden, the Italian artist will enhance its iconographic presence like few others. The bookmarks, in the overall architecture of the painting, truly occupy an emblematic place: the sparse *bookmark-hairs* (*segnalibri-capelli*) remain solitary in their clownish and tenuous presence, slipping down from the open pages of the *volume-cranium* (*volume-cranio*), and the quivering bookmark-fingers try, in their whiteness, to hold in the body-library an improbably large bound volume", Gatta, *op. cit.,* p. 24. A perfect example of this 'unconscious' aesthetic media effect is present in Giorgio de Chirico's painting 'The Child's Brain' (*Il cervello del bambino*, 1914, Moderna Museet, Stockholm), which depicts a man in a nude torso, eyes closed, in front of a desk with a yellow book over it. Inside the book, nothing is written on the covering pages. A silk red ribbon and the set of thoughts are seemingly coming to his eyes closed gaze. Needless to say, this enterprise will necessarily lead to literature and the layering of references in it and certainly with special attention to Roberto Bolaño posthumous novel 2666 (2004), but only...

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