

# The Crisis of Technology and the Quest for Meaning: A Critical Conception of Media Philosophy

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**Abstract:** The crisis of modern technology has led to a series of issues such as the pervasive emptiness of meaning and the loss of subjectivity in human society. Under the influence of technological supremacy and instrumental rationality, philosophy, which abstractly refines the fundamental problems faced by humanity such as the meaning of existence, truth, and the dichotomy between rationality and irrationality, also finds itself in a crisis of legitimacy. In this context, the "media turn" in philosophy is an attempt to break free from its shackles. This paper proposes a media philosophy from the essential attributes of human communication and the inseparability of communication and media. By analyzing communication as a fundamental human essence, this paper outlines the basic concept of media philosophy, explores the path of media philosophy, and emphasizes the inherent significance of the collision of life's meanings and communicative exchanges. This paper asserts that in the era of "media as being" ontology, it is especially necessary to understand the essence of human existence and the face of the world constituted by communication from the perspective of media.

**Keywords:** Communicative Philosophy; Technological Alienation; Media Philosophy.

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## 1. Introduction

Recognizing the world and recognizing oneself are the core issues of subjective consciousness activities[1]. Communication is the real essence of humans; it is both the theoretical essence, the consciousness of real life, and the practical essence, the real-life activities of humans. Communication, as the essence of human existence, constructs self-consciousness in interactive experiences. Just as the Earth's air is its activity field, human communication is the activity field of humans, where individuals realize and express their life or capabilities[2]. It is within the diverse communication relationships of humanity that the possibility of "everything as media" is implied, or more accurately, "everything can be media"[3]. In this interconnected era, media have already become the infrastructure of our "being," the dwelling and the instrument of our actions and existence[4]. We must acknowledge that this is an era of "everything as media." All tools, technologies, and means of communication have become media, intermediating our interactions with individuals, nature, and the human environment[5]. Media connect the material existence space of humans with the psychological consciousness space, making human existence and media communication interpenetrative. As metaphysics, philosophy is the inquiry into the ultimate existential questions of humanity. In the era of new media technology transformations, philosophy will open new directions.

The 20th century marked the era of the linguistic turn in philosophical research, where philosophy traditionally dealt with the true meaning of language propositions. The founder of language philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, proposed the picture theory of language, asserting that the real world consists of all occurrences, and the meaning of propositions arises within this real-world context, with the sum of propositions forming language. The limits of language are the limits of thought, thus embedding the core content of philosophical research in language[6]. In the 21st century, with the development of the Internet, from smartphones and

computers to smart home devices, and the proclaimed advent of the metaverse era[7], the fusion of virtual and real reveals new media possibilities for the world. Media inherently grasp the overall attributes of human social communication and technological material properties, becoming the fundamental "vehicle" of the world. We thus speculate that philosophy is undergoing a media turn based on media technology, and media philosophy should become a significant new field of philosophical research. Media philosophy, therefore, starts from the essence of human communication, connecting the human world and the world of humanity through the thread of "media." At the abstract and speculative level, it proposes a scientific and rational "grand vision." From this perspective, media philosophy is also a new philosophical system of practical materialism. This paper will discuss the "media turn" in philosophy from the essential attributes of human communication and its inseparability from media, analyze potential crises in media philosophy from the perspective of technological alienation, and discuss the ultimate goal of media philosophy in relation to the significance of human existence through communication, thereby presenting a preliminary research agenda for future explorations in media philosophy.

## 2. The Revolution of Interaction and the Proposal of Media Philosophy

Interaction is the essence of human existence. Humans "cannot return to themselves, but must always seek a goal of liberation (or realization of some special ideal) outside of themselves to truly express their humanity[8]" . Throughout the development of German classical philosophy up to Marx's thoughts, "interaction" has always been a central theme. When Marx and Engels proposed the concept of "interaction," they used the German word "Verkehr," which broadly encompasses all social relations formed by human material production, including personal, social, and international material and spiritual exchanges [9].

An important characteristic of modernity is the

generalization of interaction. We cannot detach from the interconnected world, where interaction becomes the essence of human existence, reflecting the completeness of life expression. Jaspers believed that truth is born out of interaction, and the only reality in which people can genuinely relate to each other is through mutual understanding and trust [10]. Interaction makes the world "transparent," presenting itself authentically before the subject. As a practice activity based on human rationality and intellect, interaction ensures the continuous shaping of self-identity on a macro level. Individuals need to constantly gain a sense of existence through their connection and communication with the world, creating their exclusive "interaction community." Interaction, as a shaping and constructing reality, requires individuals to understand the world through interaction practices. Personal relationships are always reciprocal interactions, and only through interaction with others can one define their individuality. This is also reflected in the dual nature of human beings as social and natural entities. The development of social communities is based on interaction practices, and it is the existence of these practices that gives rise to the unique characteristics of human society.

The emergence and evolution of human society are undoubtedly driven by human interactions. In Heidegger's philosophy, "Dasein" (existence) is an open and indeterminate existence that continuously interacts and changes with the world, others, and itself. He further proposed the concept of "Being-with," which he considered an important dimension of "Dasein": "The world of Dasein is a co-world. 'Being-in' is Being-with others." Heidegger emphasized the social and interdependent nature of humans, asserting that one can only realize their existence based on being with others. The world of being-with is the shared world of subject and other, and human society exists in the "reality of being-with" generated by interactions[11]. Without interaction, individuals would struggle to achieve rich development, and even survival would be challenging. Yuval Harari in "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind" expressed a similar viewpoint, arguing that Homo sapiens triumphed over Neanderthals and secured opportunities for survival and reproduction because they are social animals capable of social cooperation[12]. As the prospects of the "Internet of Everything" and the evolution of the virtual world advance, "communication" has shifted towards "interaction," gradually evolving into a digital practice characterized by both exchange and action. The development of media technology is a process of continuous human extension and eventual return. The more technology integrates into our lives, the more we seek to balance and stabilize our humanity, making communication practices increasingly natural. Bruno Latour, who established the "Actor-Network Theory" (ANT), argued that the essence of society lies in "association," and future communication studies will inevitably shift towards the interpretation and integration of "association," with "interaction" being the best explanation of it [13].

It is essential to note that media underpins the absolute practice of interaction for philosophers. As an indispensable intermediary in interaction practices, media can be said to produce social relations and social realities, with humanity entering a media-saturated world where everything is unified through media[14]. Interaction is a process of socialization and serves as a mirror to mediatization; the philosophy of interaction, in fact, foretells a comprehensive and universal media philosophy. In essence, interaction is a communicative

activity. Communication, as a social activity of humans, reveals the substance of social interaction[15]. Human communicative practices originate from their interaction practices[16]. Just as human information dissemination activities are inseparable from media, the mutual relationships formed through interaction are always mediated, with media technology continually evolving the forms of human interaction, thus deepening social interaction and offering endless possibilities for personal development. Only through intermediary media can the subjects of interaction engage in the bilateral activities of "giving and receiving" with others and themselves, thereby deepening self-criticism, self-awareness, and self-control, which then evolves into a reflective process of self-development. It is through media interaction that information is transmitted, meaning is constructed, and mutual relationships are established, allowing human society to form a culture of interaction within specific social contexts. Media interaction is an extended compound of human material and spiritual interaction[17], encompassing both the emotional thinking of the spiritual space and the practical actions of the physical space. The media acquired in the mediatized era is fundamentally an advanced communication tool used for "socialization." At this point, "media" has become a bridge that connects humans with all things in the world, constituting the "in-betweenness" of interaction activities.

The interweaving of technological logic and social logic has given rise to various forms of the relationship between humans and media[18]. Every generation of new media technology endows humanity with new experiential paths, stimulating different levels of interaction revolutions. Currently, we are experiencing the transition to deeply mediatized existence through four stages of media symbiosis: "embodied media," "disembodied media," "embodied-in-media," and "quasi-embodied media." [19] As media becomes more embedded in human social interaction practices, intermediary virtual and digital interactions will dominate the social mainstream. This embodies the historical categorical attributes of interaction, where the level of social productivity directly constrains the level of interaction. From language, writing, printing, telegraphy, and broadcasting to today's widespread use of communication satellites and the Internet, and then to the future development of the "metaverse" based on the maturity of AR, VR, 5G, cloud computing, and intelligent robotics, the efficiency of human social interaction has significantly increased, especially in the realm of spiritual interaction, which is developing rapidly in an information-explosive manner. In this context, media is not just an infrastructure but a place of dwelling, a means of existence[20], a life form that is changing our way of life and transforming the world around us. Media is no longer merely a carrier of information; it has become the technological vehicle of society, the macro-context of human social life, constructing the time and space of human social existence, and becoming the environment that guides human cognition and action.

Paying attention to media development is a reflection on humanity itself. It is precisely media that opens up new ways of experience and practice for us. Without media apparatus, the world becomes unreachable. Media concerns human existential conditions, and studying media from a philosophical perspective is a call for "humanism" in the current postmodern era. Against this backdrop, humanity needs a media philosophy to integrate and develop media

theories, reflecting on human life.

### 3. The Crisis of Technology and the Bias in Media Philosophy

To understand media philosophy, we must first clarify what media is and understand the evolution of human cognition regarding media. From the perspective of word formation, "media" consists of "媒" (medium) and "介" (intermediary), and it is the interaction and correspondence between these two elements that define media. Media is the continuous operation of connecting, triggering, and transforming these interactions, essentially serving as a "transaction" between relationships[21]. Media is the means through which people establish contact with their surrounding environment, and anything that exists can act as an intermediary medium. Therefore, in addressing the issue of media, the history of academic discourse has evolved from a tool-based theory to an ontological one, gradually shifting from formal, abstract, and speculative levels to material, practical, and historical ones. The cosmology of ancient Greek philosophy, characterized by naive materialism, posited that the primordial essence of all things was some kind of material, such as air, water, or fire. Around 555 BC, the soul and air were regarded as universal "media"[22]. Engels thus introduced the media-related aspects inherent in ancient Greek philosophy. From McLuhan's proposition that "the medium is the extension of man" to today's concept that "man is the extension of the medium," the expansion of media significance has become unstoppable. As an extension of the human body, mind, and abilities, the concept of media has continuously expanded in both connotation and denotation, tending towards infinity. From ancient silk and animal skins to contemporary new communication technologies like AI and the metaverse, media now encompasses nearly all forms of communication intermediaries. Particularly after some scholars proposed that "everything is media," an increasing number of technological, natural, and virtual entities have been incorporated into media studies. Currently, media technology is evolving along the path of breaking through the constraints of individual physical actions and the paradigm of strong relational connections in groups. In the new digital civilization era, media will elevate to become a DAO (Decentralized Autonomous Organization) medium with dual value in relational connection and algorithmic integration, reflecting a decentralized form of self-organization.

This trend of "omnimediality" is inseparable from the driving force of technology, which gives birth to new phenomena while also enabling humanity to develop new perspectives and concepts for measuring the world. As a purposed system, technology is a means by which humans achieve their goals. In some sense, it is the product of humanity's dialogue with both physical and non-physical phenomena. However, this mediating role has always been like the "emperor's new clothes," existing transparently until the "counter-environment" created by technology was gradually revealed. Conversely, this also reveals the technological nature of media itself. As human material civilization develops and our worldview ascends, technology becomes the programmed rules by which we intentionally engage with natural phenomena. The new technological paradigms organized around information technology continuously reshape our "material culture." Overall, the revolution in information technology permeates all areas of

human activity, weaving the "fabric" of human life. As the materialization of science, technology becomes apparent within media. Media, relying on its technological "vehicle," highlights its intermediary nature in individual interaction practices, and this relational attribute has become the most critical logical form of media as technology evolves[23].

In the past, media studies focused on the relationship between humans, media, and technology, and has undergone a significant theoretical paradigm shift. Previously centered on technology, with an emphasis on its determining power, the perspective has gradually shifted to one centered on media ontology[24]. This represents the extension of "humanism" into the digital age[25].

The development of technology has triggered changes in the modern human life-world. While it is certainly legitimate to discuss the interpretation of social reality through technology, we must be cautious of the core dominance of technological relationships. As the dominant position of modern technology becomes increasingly entrenched, human society has had to contend with the universalization of technology. The advancement of high-tech has led to a "suffocation-passive" trend in the development of the humanities. On a deeper level, modern natural sciences have achieved an inside-out control over both the human living environment and human thought. From the industrial age to the intelligent age, technology, with accelerating speed, has offered humanity an endless prospect of material prosperity, while individuals are gradually estranged from their natural state of existence[26]. Driven by the values of technocracy and utilitarianism, modern humanity's excessive reliance on technology has resulted in the alienation of life, with both body and mind falling into crisis. The ongoing estrangement between humans and space, objects, actions, time, and self suggests that human society, along with its surrounding world, is spiraling into a state of technological alienation.

Technological Alienation is Manifested in Several Aspects. Firstly, technological alienation leads to the alienation of human subjectivity itself. Today, humanity faces the dual risks of physical and spiritual alienation. On one hand, in an era where "technological rationality" reigns supreme, humans are confronted with the fear of being "uprooted," with their spirit falling into the void. Economically, productivity, once the foundation of revolution, has been alienated by technology into the very legitimacy of modern society itself. Culturally, the rise of technology has "disenchanted" the world, stripping it of its religious filters. In a world that is fully colonized and alienated, the evolution of the human species is essentially the continuous technologization of human natural life, leading to increased repression. As technology increasingly integrates into human life, humanity's natural state is gradually eroded, and our sensory organs are being emasculated by intelligent media. We are entering a "post-symbolic era," where, with the help of extended reality technology, all communication information is becoming sensory. Once humans don a virtual reality headset, they can use various interactive gestures, motion-capture technologies, and facial capture devices and techniques in mixed reality displays to return to the gestures, movements, and expressions used by their ancestors for communication. This is a "regressive" phenomenon in the production and reception of information. At the same time, human interaction, constrained by instrumental rationality, is becoming more hollow in the confines of virtual reality, which accentuates this emptiness. Virtual reality technology

induces the illusion of avatars, causing a profound confusion between the virtual and the real. Unlike the real environment, the virtual environment can be modified quickly and easily to influence behavior within it. As digital existence becomes the daily landscape of social life[27], individuals can more conveniently establish virtual social relationships to reconstruct themselves, inevitably leading to increased fluidity of individual identity. As virtual communities are constantly transformed, individuals may fall into the dilemma of "self-nihilism" as they shift between different virtual identities. Immersive virtual reality systems use various input and output devices, transferring the user's "eyes, ears, nose," and even "tongue, body, and mind" to an "alternate space-time," thereby isolating the user from the real world. The stronger the pre-existing tendencies toward reality withdrawal and virtual immersion, the greater the dissociative effects of virtual reality technology on humans, gradually dissolving human integrity. In the era of social media, a common "schizophrenia" exists in public belief. People, in search of life balance, often choose to understand and comprehend the world through both a naturalistic prism and "supernatural" substitutes to comfort and compensate for spiritual needs. On one side, they believe in established natural laws and seek a naturalistic understanding of the world, while on the other, they engage in cyberspace festivities like "forwarding koi," seeking emotional and spiritual satisfaction in an anti-naturalistic way. The more severe mental issue of "depersonalization-reality disintegration syndrome" will only increase as virtual reality technology becomes more refined in the future. The deeper one sinks into the virtual world, the more comprehensively one is controlled by technology. As humanity moved from the wilderness to the city, modern technological achievements have created a spectacular artificial world[28], yet like "frogs in boiling water," we are drowning in the cage woven by technology. Technology builds a world of sensory disintegration and fragmented experience. In virtual space, to create an immersive sense of presence, we need to re-describe our appearance, voice tone, body sensations, and even our movements and personality in cyberspace, giving rise to a deconstructionist awareness of the body. Hyperreal scenarios provide real experiences on a conscious level, yet also guide humanity step by step into a nihilistic information mirage. Currently, most of our daily life behaviors can be digitized, and in the future, humans may even transcend their physical bodies, achieving "digital nirvana" in the virtual reality cyberspace. Beyond the virtual space, we have entered the era of technological crisis predicted by Heidegger—humanity is about to begin processing itself through technology[29]. Technology becomes a "prosthesis" for human organs, just as Stiegler regards technological evolution as a new stage of human organ evolution, calling technology "organology." With technology, humanity as a subject can reject its innate naturalness and consciously choose self-transformation. Current medical technologies such as cosmetic surgery, gene editing technology, and brain-computer interfaces are creating more possibilities for human free development. There is a heavy layer of artificial artifacts between us and the world, the thickness of which is intertwined with the iteration of the technological world. In fact, nanometer-scale artificial artifacts, invisible to the naked eye, are playing a role at the cellular level of the human body, altering body parameters, such as the activity of "active ingredients" in pills within the body, the radiation that humans voluntarily or reluctantly

accept, and the chemical and radioactive pollution of the natural environment. We are compelled to confront the final boundaries and limits of human technologization.

In postmodern society, humanity's social practices and identity relations face new issues of authenticity. New media technologies have created new social networks and social forms, such as live streaming and virtual communities, which are becoming increasingly diverse. Although, on the surface, the entire society can experience a sensory perception of a symbolic world within a relatively short time, this modern technological mediation has actually triggered various social problems and crises in communication. The fast-food style of interaction has made humans restless and lonely, while the virtual network provides diversified choices. The fluidity of virtual world identities causes humans to fall into the dilemma of "meaninglessness" in social interactions. At the same time, people gradually neglect real interpersonal relationships and social activities around them, turning instead to online communities for psychological comfort, tending to fill the gaps of reality in the "simulated world," leading to long-term isolation from society. This results in many psychological, physiological, and interpersonal issues. Audiences can, in the truest sense, "distance" themselves from the suffering of others, with sensory communication and contact showing a state of absence. The "other" becomes a "phantom" on the screen, avoiding an existential sense of being touched. The "numbness" of electronic space spreads to reality through wires. With the aid of VR and other virtual reality technologies, humans can also experience an "out-of-body" sensation, where consciousness separates from the body, also known as a dissociative experience. Human intelligence technology frameworks will further rewrite the relationships between humans and the world, society, information, and the self. Minimally invasive brain-machine interface technologies and non-invasive brainwave control technologies in laboratories are dragging our existence into "virtual communication." Moreover, the entire society is in pursuit of the technical efficiency of instrumental rationality, accelerating social interactions accordingly. People are forced to interact with various intelligent systems that are more convenient and efficient[30]. These intelligent terminals, using big data algorithms, can provide humans with "intimate" and "thoughtful" intelligent services. It seems that in this "efficiency-first" environment, people are becoming more willing to accept this form of alienated communication. This phenomenon is reflected in the widespread invasion of virtual robots in human society, such as virtual customer service in e-commerce, virtual idols adored by fans, social media bots, and even virtual intimate relationship avatars. Humans interact directly or indirectly with robots, while also being conditioned by the habitual language patterns of these robots, even to the point of subverting their own social interaction behaviors. Media constructs humanity through "sensory deprivation," akin to a Faustian bargain, leading to a lack of understanding and emotional depth in real social interactions. Although digital technology has altered the limitations imposed on human communication by the physical space-time, in this process, humanity has lost the warmth and effort of breaking through these spatial and temporal barriers. The body is compressed into data and symbols for transmission, and the physical contact that should convey emotions is replaced by mechanical operations and electronic symbols. In short, in postmodern society, the technological media of communication has turned around to

control and dominate humanity, causing people to lose autonomy in their interactions. The media technology, originally created to satisfy specific human needs, has ultimately become a tool of domination over humans.

Thirdly, technological alienation is manifested in the cognitive alienation of the reality of the world. In the post-truth era, we have stepped into a "hide-and-seek world," a world where it is difficult to grasp reality. The world is succumbing to an unreasonable communication system, where what we see through the media is merely a universe composed of disconnected pixel images, discourse comments, and fragmented narratives. The media network influences our cognition by creating a "simulated environment," blurring the boundaries between public and private spaces. People are increasingly accustomed to shuttling between virtual images and real environments, interpreting and thinking about the real world based on the standards presented by the media. The way social life is controlled gradually shifts from the principle of reality to the principle of simulation. Issues like information overflow, overload, and asymmetry make the world difficult to grasp. Fictitious "reality" can be transmitted to the public through symbolic encoding as information that can easily deceive, such as the use of deepfake technology by many tech companies to develop commercial and entertainment deepfake software. For example, the app "ZAO," which possesses "AI face-swapping" technology, easily integrates users' facial expressions, technical actions, and voices into one. This technology tends to be used in a popularized, everyday, and entertaining manner, making large-scale, low-cost insulting parodies, economic fraud, pornographic revenge, and even criminal defamation possible[31]. This reflects how the reversal of truth and falsehood in technical operations further exacerbates the formation of a "risk society." In the era of big data, humans have access to a vast amount of information, and the public requires a unique media landscape to fill the spiritual void. Without a continuous "falsification" of the world, humanity cannot survive. This provides an opportunity for mass media such as advertising, television, and film, aided by various high-tech powers, to showcase the so-called "real." The "simulacrum" becomes the basis for people to understand objects and even the world. For purposes such as profit or political agendas, information publishers hide behind the scenes, meticulously crafting a "phantasmagoric (self) similarity" of reality to manipulate the consciousness of the audience in front of the screen. The real-life version of "The Truman Show" is played out everywhere, all the time. This reflects how the reversal of truth and falsehood in technical operations further exacerbates the formation of a "risk society." In the era of big data, humans have access to a vast amount of information, and the public requires a unique media landscape to fill the spiritual void. Without a continuous "falsification" of the world, humanity cannot survive. This provides an opportunity for mass media such as advertising, television, and film, aided by various high-tech powers, to showcase the so-called "real." The "simulacrum" becomes the basis for people to understand objects and even the world. For purposes such as profit or political agendas, information publishers hide behind the scenes, meticulously crafting a "phantasmagoric (self) similarity" of reality to manipulate the consciousness of the audience in front of the screen. The real-life version of "The Truman Show" is played out everywhere, all the time. When truth and lies go hand in hand, what lies behind reality is the need for the will to power

and the deep sea of desire. Urban legends and conspiracy theories, such as the "Apollo moon landing hoax" and the "Flat Earth theory," have persisted for a long time. Non-true concepts and illusions endure, and the construction of symbolic systems has always been an "imitation" technique. The world has been compressed into a symbolic, media-based "scene" accepted by people. When real experience is replaced by symbolic experience, Baudrillard's metaphor that "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" can still serve as a "spot-on summary" of the current situation of local wars in the world. Media technology provides the foundation for the manipulability of the virtual world, becoming a "dispositif" of total control, a metaphor for the manipulation of the times. Simulated "simulacra" dislocations are present everywhere, and the fluidity of the "re-presented spacetime" means that the "virtual reality" presented by the media is even more complex. In people's access to information, data mining, machine learning, and recommendation algorithms based on users' past behavior and preferences have become important means of information filtering. New media technologies open up new opportunities for re-understanding reality: when humans can experience and "possess" multiple mediated realities in the virtual world, big data, through "deep learning," simulates the neural system of the human brain to process complex information, creating "profiles" based on personal preferences and desires, sometimes even understanding human needs better than humans themselves. Humanity oscillates between being "meticulously cared for" and "recklessly surveilled," raising new questions about how humans recognize themselves and affirm their existence in this context.

Fourth, the advancement of technology has led to the alienation of the Earth and the world, freeing humanity from the concerns of humanism. Building on the reinterpretation of "alienation" as "separation," Hannah Arendt introduced two important concepts: "world alienation" and "earth alienation." Earth alienation and world alienation refer to the dual processes of humans escaping from the Earth into the universe and retreating from the world back to the self. This is concretely manifested in stronger productivity, greater possession, and a deeper sense of deprivation. On the one hand, modern technological development has led to earth alienation. The invention of space telescopes challenges the Earth's space as humanity's "absolute confinement," and the newly developed astrophysics has accelerated the process of earth alienation. Humans began to identify with the scientifically rational explanation of their "cosmic origins" and attempted to develop advanced technologies that break free from the Earth, no longer viewing themselves as beings constrained by Earth's natural limitations. Inventions such as airplanes and spacecraft, which completely depart from the Earth's surface, have caused the Earth's shrinkage effect[32]. Once in space, humans become a different entity: from the subject of the Earth to its object, the Earth is degraded into a temporary "zoo," which has sparked an indifferent attitude towards the Earth's natural ecology. In this process, nature is gradually regarded by humans as a resource field with infinite substitutability, developing from the "utilization for well-being" of objects to the domination, control, and destruction of nature. On the other hand, the development of modern technology has also led to world alienation. People, due to excessive immersion in technology and the virtual world, are gradually distancing themselves from the real world. At the level of reality, technology, either unintentionally or

deliberately, has built a cage for humanity in the Anthropocene, presenting humans with a future landscape of boredom and spiritual death. Technology has created a new type of human being who only feels satisfied by labor and consumption. Technology removes us from social participation, reduces scenes of mutual dependence, fosters individualism, and humans gradually lose their subject status, becoming technologized parameters. Thus, under the dominance of modern technology, two different forces have emerged to influence modern life. One force promotes the replacement of natural evolution with artificial evolution through the development of high-tech technologies such as gene editing, genetic algorithms, and machine learning, which reversely train human neural networks. This development facilitates the dominance of artificial "participatory" evolution over natural evolution, creating seemingly limitless possibilities that transcend natural limitations. The other force continuously accelerates the production process of goods through technological intervention[33]. In this "abundant" consumer society lies humanity's challenge to natural limitations: on the one hand, the excessive development of technology has led to conflicts with human nature, with production leaps generating excessive demands on nature, indirectly threatening humanity's most basic survival needs. Faced with the limitations of the living environment, many "space adventurers" have emerged among the population, and humanity is simultaneously developing cyborg technology and powerful genetic technologies to explore another path for survival beyond Earth, thereby avoiding the scrutiny of the Earth's cautious ethical overseers. On the other hand, the material prosperity of society has accelerated the abandonment of objects by humans, such as antibiotics, microplastics, and nuclear wastewater, which exacerbates environmental pollution and harms human organs, nerves, and other aspects. Humanity is paradoxically creating an inhumane atmosphere for itself, which constitutes the modern crisis in human-nature interactions. Reality suggests that the Earth has been fully exposed to forces external to nature, subverting the sustainable concept of the "Earth game." Humanity is faced with the challenge of either actively exploring the development of "space colonization" or being forced to flee from pollution, "leaving one's homeland" to seek new living space. Alternatively, following Freeman Dyson's suggestion, "establishing the mathematical limits of cosmic destiny[34], whereby everything is ideally transferred into supercomputers or superintelligence, humanity could complete the "cyber metamorphosis" and fully become "digital life." This represents a challenge of foresight and determination for human society.

Closely tied to the destiny of technological alienation is the alienation of media philosophy as it aligns with "scientific thinking." The notions of "scientific omnipotence" and "efficiency above all" expose media philosophy to the risk of alienation, turning it into a discipline that parasitizes on the "scientific" model, where the focus of media philosophy research becomes centered on the technical aspects of media itself, serving as an expression of instrumental rationality. When the technological system becomes the sole value system, technological logic replaces all social norms, and humans, in turn, become "objects," losing their true essence. Technology, as a means for humanity to manipulate nature, is also a purposive medium, enabling beings to reflect on and continually renew their relationship with society and nature through this medium. In the past, we have always

emphasized the role of technology in the evolution of human society. The tools created by humanity over hundreds of thousands of years have continuously reshaped human beings, and the evolution of human thought and morality ultimately needs to return to social interaction practices. The enigmas of "What can humanity become?", "What should humanity become?", and "What is the purpose of human existence?" can only be answered through interaction. The key to handling the relationship between the real world, virtual avatars, and the spiritual self lies in our inquiry into the ideal self, ideal world, and ideal life. This is not a technical issue but a philosophical one, fundamentally involving the overall interaction between humanity and the humanistic and material worlds. Philosophy, as the conceptual framework for human self-understanding, develops interpretative dimensions within the "chaos" of human nature[35]. However, as Graham Harman has pointed out, "Philosophy ultimately is merely media theory[36]" If philosophy wishes to re-establish its position as a "unifying" force, it must inevitably evolve into a media philosophy that encompasses both technology and spirit. Against the backdrop of the current transformation in media studies, forward-looking discussions on the risks of media philosophy alienation caused by technological crises are both important and meaningful.

#### **4. The Pursuit of Meaning and the Ultimate Goal of Media Philosophy**

The reason why media is emphasized and communication is valued lies in the deep-rooted human pursuit and desire for meaning. The meaning and value of human life have always been the focus of contemplation and exploration by thinkers throughout history. As early as 800 BCE to 200 BCE, the emergence of Confucian and Taoist thought in China, Hinduism and Buddhism in India, and the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato in Greece began deep explorations into human existence, the meaning of life, ethics, and social order. Concepts such as "Nirvana" in Buddhism, "Ren" in Confucianism, and Plato's "World of Ideas" reflect this great awakening of human nature. Jaspers referred to this period as the Axial Age, when human history achieved a spiritual breakthrough. During this era, what later generations would call Reason (Vernunft) and Personality (Persönlichkeit) became manifest[37]. However, these core ideas of the Axial Age seem powerless in the face of technology, having been marginalized and gradually losing their dominant role in the transition from traditional to modern society[38].

With the accelerated evolution of the new round of technological revolution, humanity, after experiencing spiritual awakening and intellectual leaps, faces an urgent philosophical question: how to live in the world, define the world, and dominate the world. Emerging technologies such as ChatGPT constantly bring topics like "technological singularity" and "useless class" into the public eye, highlighting an ever-increasing spiritual crisis compared to the past. From a naturalistic scientific perspective, the universe inherently lacks purpose, and human life does not possess any transcendent meaning. Advanced technology today appears to have developed into a "Pandora's Box," where a slight misstep could turn humanity into its own "gravedigger." The many real-world predicaments conceal profound spiritual crises. The contemporary world is increasingly characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and imbalance. Humanity has reached a new survival threshold;

the more technological advances are made, the more humans become aware of their vulnerable situation in the face of the "objective limitations" and "potential side effects" of these technologies.

From the Code of Hammurabi inscribed on clay tablets to artificial intelligence powered by supercomputers, human reason has always guided humanity in transcending the constraints of nature[39]. However, in this process, human life has become increasingly dependent on the existence of technological artifacts, leading to their comprehensive invasion into daily life. As the future world of machine operations becomes more suited for machines themselves, we need to question whether there will still be a place for humanity in this future. In "The Wandering Earth 2," the artificial intelligence MOSS can manipulate a person's fate. If it can set traps for humans through algorithms, the consequences would be unimaginable. Although this scenario is a plot from a science fiction movie and far from reality, the notion that humanity has unknowingly fallen into the "trap" of AI is not entirely unfounded. Everything has a beginning and an end. Although violent warfare is increasingly losing its legitimacy due to the evolution of civilization, the new executioner-technology-slowly bleeds humanity through simple pleasures, eroding autonomy, vigilance, and even humanity, emotions, and love. The uniform, mechanized survival ethos weakens individual subjectivity, turning personalities into machines and algorithms, with human nature becoming "mechanical programs" under technological discipline. Modern society is becoming the "Megamachine" described by Mumford[40], and humans are degenerating into "human animals" fully adapted to a purely technological environment. New technologies have already touched the very foundation and limits of humanity. To maintain natural human dignity, we face many challenges that require more nonlinear thinking and interdisciplinary research to meet. Whether it's gene-encoded 3D printers in biotechnology, vaccine "codes," or the current stage of intelligent technology, all fundamentally pose dual challenges to the human body and mind. The questions posed by the technological era are shifting from "What is a human?" to "How to become human?" The development of technology is also a process of self-awareness and self-expression for humanity. This is a dual problem of both technical and humanistic nature, and today, the logic of technology and humanism need to be more closely integrated.

Under the dual influence of modernity crisis and artificial intelligence technology, humanity deeply feels its existence becoming increasingly insignificant. The fragility of civilization and the loss of self are laid bare before us. In this context, humanity urgently needs to reassess the position of technology, engage in "meditative thinking" about it, and simultaneously seek meaning to reposition itself. When humanity realizes that existence has no inherent purpose, it is struck by a sense of nihilism, leading to doubts about reality and a reevaluation of the essence of technology. We must acknowledge that the instrumental nature of technology has, at certain historical stages, optimized human survival, and that the development of technology possesses an almost fateful inevitability.

"For humanity, survival without technology is merely an abstract possibility"[41]. Among these, information data serves as the fuel driving the engine of technological dominance in culture. Whether on the micro level of human mental structures or the macro level of nature, the core issue

lies in whether the technological mediums that carry information are governed by human ethics, as only then can they fulfill their proper value. Technology is both the form and symbol of the evolution of the human world, while the medium represents the underlying logic of the world. On the one hand, technology enhances human capabilities in computation, decision-making, and judgment; on the other hand, it becomes an alienating force of domination. We should choose to treat technology as a medium for communication, rather than pessimistically viewing it as the master of human life. As Pico describes in his Oration on the Dignity of Man, "We have placed you at the center of the world, where it is easier for you to observe all that is in the world. You are the sculptor of your own dignity and freedom, able to shape yourself into any form you prefer. You can degenerate into the lower forms of life, or through the judgment of your soul, be reborn into a higher, divine level"[42]. Technology is nothing more than a means for humanity to reach another state of being, but humans can imbue cold electronic components and codes with warmth and humanistic care, making the medium of technology bear a human soul. However, where the boundary lies in technology's modification and upgrading of humanity, and whether this process is something humanity is forced into or willingly participates in, remains a matter of debate. Once technology holds the central position in the relationship between humans and technology, humans risk becoming mere "objects," losing their true essence. Only by viewing technology as a medium for communication can humanity further strengthen its characteristics and avoid constraining the development of human nature. For technology, humans are the starting point of meaning, and technology, as an infrastructure and tool, provides methods and means for humans to achieve goals and solve problems. The introduction of the concept of communication as a medium will allow technology to re-establish connections with life.

Despite living in a universe governed by cold laws, where existence is essentially a collection of moving atoms, what makes humans truly human is their hope and faith. Humanity needs to believe in its own value and destiny, from which human philosophical thought is born, and great civilizations are often established on this foundation. In today's highly developed technological era, the problems humanity faces continue to grow. Over-reliance on technology has drained the vitality of human life. In this scenario, humans need challenges, purpose, and meaning. The meaning of human life lies in self-creation, fundamentally built upon the communicative actions between humanity and the world. The purpose of philosophy is not to present the world in a static manner, like science does, but to recognize knowledge and truth in the dynamic practice of human life. Most importantly, philosophy aims to find a reasonable meaning and value for human life, satisfying the deep spiritual longing of humanity. Life, as a communicative practice, is an interactive manifestation of infinite will in development and creation. Communication arises from humanity's original drive to pursue meaning, and meaning exists within these communicative actions. Human nature is sublimated in intersubjective communication, and the meaning of human existence also emerges from this. As technology iterates, it further expands the scope of human "communication," from human-to-human interaction to the organic integration of "Heaven and humanity," and eventually evolves into a socially interconnected life system. The concept of the

medium thereby reveals its far-reaching nature. From this perspective, media philosophy offers us a framework for contemplating the meaning of communication and existence.

The current technological crisis arises from the speculative ambiguity surrounding the goals and directions of technological development, and the scope of technology use still requires philosophical reflection at its source. Science and technology reduce reality to its natural components, while philosophy ensures that these components, once contemplated, truly become human. As a reflective discipline, philosophy remains necessary for in-depth scrutiny of rapidly advancing science and technology, though traditional philosophy will evolve into a future-oriented form, encompassing possibilities and uncertainties with a new paradigm. Philosophy and the era it inhabits share a "dynamic" relationship, where thought must resonate with the times. Although constructing a philosophical system that genuinely encompasses a comprehensive worldview is challenging, it is only through the continuous cycle of bold assumptions and repeated verification that we can extract unrecognized knowledge or ideas, allowing for a cognitive reconstruction and a deeper understanding of the world, achieving a clear "portrait" of the world. Humanity should shape the future of the world as one would craft a piece of art, with philosophy endowing this "work" with its soul. From the birth of "metaphysical" philosophy to the mid-19th century, including shifts toward metaphysical, irrational, linguistic, practical, and anti-anthropocentric perspectives [43], philosophical thought systems have resembled an unfinished artwork, with each shift representing a refined "polish" of ideas. Whether artificial intelligence and digitalization can "be good" on the surface is an issue of human-machine interaction or integration, but at its core, it remains a question of human nature [44]. Ultimately, these issues are fundamentally human issues, and more precisely, issues of media philosophy. Science reveals the truth of objects, representing the objective "being," while philosophy seeks truth and the "good" as the source of rationality, grounded in mature values that transcend subjective viewpoints-philosophy is the "should," the meaning and value of life. Intelligence and ethics "share the same roots"; the development of intelligent technology refines the "good" in humanity, and through this process, humanity "sets its heart for the universe," recognizing the intrinsic value of human goodness. In a world devoid of "good" and ethical standards, humanity would find itself in a "cosmic dark forest," gripped by anxiety from the loss of security. Therefore, we cannot be confined to the utopian pursuit of metaphysical truth; instead, we should begin with theoretical research on technological systems such as communication technology, cybernetics, and artificial intelligence, and engage in humanistic and ethical reflection on intelligent communication and human-machine interaction. The beliefs, values, and ultimate words humans use to describe themselves and the world are products of the historical convergence of material technology and spiritual thought. Media influence human consciousness, thinking, cognition, behavior, values, and ethical concepts, even affecting social and political structures. In the era of intelligent technology, people live in a world of digitalization, the internet, and intelligence. Information and communication technologies have profoundly altered our way of life and thinking, and as a medium, technology as a cultural inscription extends the possibilities of human survival in time and space. The limitation of knowledge lies

precisely in its mediated nature, emerging as a point of mutual interpretation between philosophical epistemology and media studies.

In this context, media philosophy becomes the philosophical study of media and its impacts, representing a form of philosophical renewal. Media philosophy offers humanity new perspectives and methodologies, reflecting both the rationality of technological tools and the essential nature of human life and communicative ethics. For philosophy to re-establish its "unity" within the discipline, it must inevitably embrace media philosophy, which addresses the "dual state of mind and matter." Here, "mind" is composed of informational elements, while "matter" represents physical energy. The "dual state of mind and matter" refers to the superimposition of mental (mind attributes) and physical (material attributes) properties. Media, as both an information carrier and a technological object, possesses both mental and material characteristics, with these two aspects overlapping and transforming into one another.

Media philosophy holds significant potential for transcending traditional philosophy and achieving a philosophical shift. In an era where media technology is as pervasive as nature, and nature itself has become highly technologized, media philosophy carries the mission of integrating media and technology, nature, and existence, forming a new "philosophical synthesis" focused on "participation" after the previous approaches of "inclusive" and "transcendent" models. Media philosophy integrates technological rationality and value judgment, providing a new intellectual foundation for the holistic approach to science during its cyclical process of "synthesis-differentiation-synthesis." The apparent contradiction between technocratic culture and humanistic culture, the so-called "two cultures," can be reconciled through media, which serves as the breakthrough point for this research. Media, on one hand, connects human subjective consciousness, and on the other, exists as a technological object, making this exploration a cross-disciplinary venture.

Today, natural science has shifted from a trend of differentiation to one of integration, with the development of many new disciplines based on interdisciplinary intersections and syntheses[44]. It is precisely the advancement of modern science and technology, along with the development of social practices, that calls for the development of philosophy and demands that philosophy play its integrative role. Media philosophy aims to embrace the medium of human existence through interdisciplinary collaboration, revealing the essence of media and moving towards norms and guidance through careful analysis of technology.

Firstly, from the broad scope of communicative practice, media philosophy should embark on the path of decoding technology through interdisciplinary collaboration. The expansion of communicative territories brought about by technological development allows humanity to achieve multidimensional, multilayered interactions across regions and even interstellar spaces. The invention of the World Wide Web has created a virtual communication network, making global interconnectedness possible-this is communication across regions. From Galileo's invention of the first optical telescope to the current advancements in radio telescope technology, enabling the observation and study of celestial radio waves, humanity is gradually decoding electromagnetic waves from extraterrestrial sources, thus engaging in interstellar communication. Archaeological technologies

such as 3D scanning and 3D printing enable new discoveries from ancient artifacts, allowing historians to uncover aspects of history that were previously undocumented—this is communication across dimensions[46]. The development of virtual idols and virtual broadcasters within digital screens offers even more space and possibilities for exploration, where humans and "humans" coexist—this is communication across dimensions.

Secondly, from the depth of communication, media philosophy considers the ethical guidance of communicative ethics, engaging in philosophical reflection on the fundamental factors that determine media ethics principles and the variables that influence them[47]. Media philosophy provides normative judgments on how humans "should act in communicative actions." Under the norm of ethical coordinates, communication becomes smoother and more natural, allowing for deeper exchanges. In this world of diverse and flowing ideas, people yearn for "ethics" and "values," seeking direction and a place for their souls. From this perspective, media philosophy becomes a pursuit of the root-level subjectivity and meaning construction, necessitating an ethical reflection on the information age through the lens of media philosophy to establish a human-centered technological governance mechanism.

The future direction remains in "suspense," where excessive criticism of technology and the lack of value-rational constraints will stifle the development of human civilization. We need both optimistic and critical rational scales, using critical philosophical thinking to guide humanity's attention to changes in the era. Additionally, we need humans and the world to mutually promote, constrain, and harmonize through media interactions, recognizing the destiny of both the world and human development. The shift towards media philosophy will be an effective means to address the technological crises and communication dilemmas faced by humanity, elevating the level of human communicative practice.

Media philosophy will encompass a universal horizon, including the entire "lifeworld," where all possibilities are sedimented, with any specific horizon or mode of thought, including natural science, being only one partial possibility among many. This understanding of the origins and limits of science and technology embodies an attitude towards the world that is beyond utilitarianism—a "humanistic attitude" liberated from the fragmented specialization and instrumentalized perspectives. Only in a state of free openness can the completeness of humanity be preserved, the brilliance of human civilization be safeguarded and manifested, and the technological crises be overcome. From this perspective, media philosophy allows us to glimpse the dawn of limiting the risks and blind development of science and technology.

## 5. Conclusion: Moving Towards Media Philosophy

Media is not merely symbolic; media is existence. Media permeates our realms of imagination and reality from all directions, becoming a key factor in determining our life situations. At this stage, we have already stepped onto the threshold of an intelligent media era characterized by human-machine integration and collaborative evolution, with numerous new technologies continuously emerging. Faced with emerging media technologies, we need to avoid blindly

worshipping technological rationality while fostering value rationality to cope with the rapidly changing media society. This means maintaining an ideal rationality towards the suspended future state of existence and continually pursuing an ideal living situation. Simultaneously, we must use ideal rationality as a scale to transcend existing realities, critically evaluate unreasonable life situations, and reconstruct them. Media philosophy will move towards the collaboration of scientific rationality and technological rationality, along with a new understanding and interpretation of traditional philosophy, adapting it to the new era of the Anthropocene. Media philosophy will be a discipline that studies media and its impact on human thought, culture, and society. As a vehicle for human interaction, media philosophy will play a comprehensive role in considering the existential meaning of communication. Our world is deeply interconnected, and media philosophy, as a "holistic" philosophy, will establish a "worldview," exploring the ultimate essence of media and the ethical coordinates of future media technology, while also comprehensively constructing the logic of human civilization development and future trends through media as a vehicle.

In summary, media is like "strange clouds" without precise contours, infinitely blending and difficult to accurately describe. The "cloud map" silently reveals the mysteries of life, freely floating in the sky of human thought. The time will come when the clouds part and the sun shines through, and all changes will be rooted in the media.

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