Hartmut Winkler

Docuverse
On the media theory of computers

With the emergence of the Internet, a vital debate has erupted about the 'computer as a medium'. In the press, on the Web itself, and at universities, the question is being discussed what the characteristics and properties of the new medium are; and it is becoming apparent that the established concept of media describes the new object very inadequately. The second question, closely related to this, concerns media history: namely, in what way does the new medium connect to the existing media? The book is based on the assumption that a profound upheaval in media history is currently taking place. A public that seemed to be captivated by technical images (photography, film, and television) now seems to be abandoning the entire paradigm and turning to a completely new media constellation. But why is this happening? What is it that is evidently forcing such a fundamental change? The text posits that it is not so much realities as certain 'desires' that sustain the new medium. These desires become accessible as soon as one analyzes the accompanying discourse that was triggered by the current wave of implementation.

Here, the widespread discussion of "possibilities" is peculiarly hasty and affirmative; but, read more critically, it allows a glimpse of certain desires; very general desires, in fact, which have already been directed at other media in a similar way: the encyclopedic ideal of gathering all the world's knowledge in one place, the desire to create a 'tableau', i.e. a unified sphere of the symbolic, the fright in the face of the arbitrariness of signs, and the desire to counter the rampant proliferation of 'natural languages' with the lucidity and transparency of a universal language. On this very general level, continuities can be shown that tie together very different historical media constellations. And at the same time, specific problems seem to have arisen in the trajectory of the previous media, which the data universe promises to solve; only the deficits of the established media, one could say, create the gap into which the new medium enters.