# LOG:: 17 BNC-MT

The black hit of space …

—The Human League (1980)

BNC-MT is short for **BARBARIAN NON-CINEMATIC MEDIA THEORY**.

Video Theory Reboot. It is time for a call to action. We need to think critically about the impact of technology on our lives and develop new ways of understanding the world around us and new methods for understanding this new culture. We need to find ways to make sense of the vast amount of information available to us and their infrastructures, and we need to find ways to connect with each other meaningfully through alternative structures and spheres. We need new practices and aesthetics.

This call is nothing new. Audiovisual, technological culture is constantly changing. In 2015, in his book *Elegy for Theory* D.N. Roderick stated:

*A new audiovisual culture, whose broad and indiscernible outlines we are only just beginning to distinguish, calls us to new modes of existence and forms of experience. Like any soul derailed by the vertiginous shock of modernity, we seek a conceptual compass to guide us home. One name for this navigational instrument is theory; another may be philosophy.[[1]](#footnote-2)*

There still needs to be a theory. Many theories are embedded in various studies, grounded on objects, patterns, similarities, phenomena, fields, themes, and genres, scientific communities with specific dialects, algorithmic beliefs, disciplines like languages of different nations, governing systems of knowledge and knowledge distribution. It appears that *surgeons, generals, mothers, writers, chefs, archaeologists, biologists, engineers, and seducers* have a preferred domain of objects, and all constantly argue with one another about the relative importance of these materials, but *we forget that they are the same size and that nothing is more complex, multiple, real, palpable, or interesting than anything else.*[[2]](#footnote-3)

## dispositiv media theory

During the opening of the Media Archaeology Lab at Bilkent University in Ankara in 2017, Wolfgang Ernst reminded me that we need to be precise, accurate, which I interpret to mean focused on the target.

Ernst himself formulates a dispositive media theory, reminding us that media are not neutral but rather *dispositifs* that shape how we perceive and understand the world. Media can be used to both empower and control people. Media theory can only be done with a deep understanding of the technologies that produce and circulate media. Such a theory must bridge the gap between the humanities and the sciences. Technical knowledge is essential for understanding materiality and impact.

Media theory needs a clear and precise definition of the media concept to carry out its work effectively. This definition should be broad enough to encompass all types of media. Yet it should also be specific enough to be useful for analysis. A well-defined media concept is essential for distinguishing between media and non-media and understanding media's unique properties. Media theory must be open to new approaches and perspectives and be willing to engage with other disciplines to produce a comprehensive understanding of media and audiovisual culture in the 21st century.

Any new theory needs to be a theory of lifeness. Lifeness is the possibility of the emergence of new forms and the potential to generate unprecedented connections and unexpected events.[[3]](#footnote-4)

## Doing Things

We need a new strategy of *doing things with words* and *doing things with things* or *doing things with visuals*. We need to stage interventions across conventional boundaries. The new aesthetics needs to operate simultaneously as a theory of production and reception. On the production side, it needs to provide a framework for understanding aesthetic work as the deliberate creation of relational atmospheres, rather than isolated objects. On the reception side, it needs to reframe our understanding of perception as a comprehensive experience of presence—specifically, how we encounter and sense the immediate reality of people, objects, and environments in their full dimensionality.

*In the twenty-first century, we’ve moved in a more challenging environment than that of the time when bodily perception was seen as extended by technological prosthesis, as Marshall McLuhan famously argued. Our post-pandemic sensory world is deeply pharmacological: toxic and curative, exciting and dangerous, a place where endless media saturation forces us to revisit ideas of life itself.[[4]](#footnote-5)*

We need to crash the party. We need to have fun. And we need to start to tell different stories. Dance all night long.

Schlage die Trommel und fürchte dich nicht,

und küsse die Marketenderin!

Das ist die ganze Wissenschaft,

das ist der Bücher tiefster Sinn.[[5]](#footnote-6)

It really doesn’t matter if we will tell this story over and over again, as long as we run against the capital’s walls. This is needed to survive. Remember Scheherazade.

*And the same significance can be seen in the reverse operation, in the expanding of time by the internal proliferations from one story to another, which is a feature of the oriental storytelling. Scheherazade tells a story in which someone tells a story in which someone tells a story, and so forth. The art that enables Scheherazade to save her life every night consists of knowing how to join one story to another, breaking off at just the right moment – two ways of manipulating the continuity and discontinuity of time. It is a secret of rhythm, a way of capturing time.[[6]](#footnote-7)*

It is also a way of understanding. Without understanding, we will struggle to formulate any theory. But, we might not understand *it* at all now. The Trojan horse is in place, if we only accept that we are inside and not surrounded but a part of *it*. Understanding is interconnected with practice. It will be the practice of the Barbarian, the simple ignorance.

## Positive Barbarism

Walter Benjamin's concept of *positive barbarism* is one of his most provocative and generative ideas for me, emerging from his observations of cultural exhaustion and the possibilities for renewal in modernity. The concept appears in his 1933 essay *Experience and Poverty*, where he develops it as a response to what he saw as the crisis of tradition and experience in modern life.

World War I in Europe had interrupted severely traditional forms of experience and cultural transmission. The traumatic impact of industrialized warfare, combined with rapid technological change, had rendered many traditional forms of wisdom and experience seemingly irrelevant or impossible to communicate. Positive barbarism, for Benjamin, represents a radical strategic response to cultural over-saturation. It involves embracing a kind of cultural poverty—not out of necessity, but as a deliberate choice. This *barbarism* is *positive* because it clears the ground for new forms of experience and expression, unencumbered by the weight of tradition.

The positive barbarian is one who starts from scratch, makes do with little, builds with limited means, values directness over complexity, and embraces new technological possibilities. For Benjamin, positive barbarism carries revolutionary potential. By clearing away the detritus of traditional culture, it creates space for new forms of collective experience, different modes of perception, novel social relations, and alternative political possibilities

This *starting from zero* approach isn't about destroying culture per se, but about creating conditions for genuine cultural renewal. The positive barbarian, in Benjamin's vision, is not someone who destroys culture out of ignorance or hatred, but someone who strategically reduces cultural baggage to create space for new forms of experience and expression. This figure remains provocative and potentially instructive for contemporary attempts to imagine and create alternative futures.

Today, when we face multiple crises and when the weight of accumulated cultural detritus often seems overwhelming, Benjamin's concept of positive barbarism suggests that starting from less might allow us to build something more sustainable, authentic, and collectively meaningful.

## Practice, Practice

Human beings are fundamentally practicing creatures. Practice transcends mere repetition or learning; it represents the essential mechanism through which humans transform themselves. This concept forms the cornerstone of what Peter Sloterdijk terms *anthropotechnics*,[[7]](#footnote-8) the various technologies humans employ to shape, cultivate, and ultimately reinvent themselves.

Practice, as Sloterdijk defines it, is any operation that enhances the practitioner's ability to perform that same operation again. This seemingly simple definition carries deep implications for understanding human nature and development. Whether in the realm of physical fitness, spiritual devotion, or intellectual pursuit, practice serves as the bridge between what we are and what we might become.

The scope of practice in Sloterdijk's framework is remarkably comprehensive. It encompasses everything from the most concrete physical exercises to the most ethereal spiritual disciplines. Modern gym culture, with its regulated routines and measured progressions, stands alongside ancient ascetic traditions. Professional training programs share conceptual space with meditation practices. What unites these diverse activities is their transformative intent: their aim to overcome perceived human limitations and reach toward something higher.

This vertical tension—the constant striving upward—characterizes all meaningful practice. When religious frameworks provided clear paths to transcendence, this manifested as spiritual exercise. In our secular age, it emerges in different forms: the athlete pushing toward peak performance, the entrepreneur pursuing excellence, or the artist refining their craft. Yet the essential pattern remains: deliberate, self-directed effort aimed at transformation.

Crucially, Sloterdijk distinguishes between two forms of repetition in human life. The first is the mindless repetition of daily routine—the mechanical cycling of habits without purpose or progress. The second is deliberate practice—conscious, focused repetition aimed at growth and transformation. This distinction helps us understand why some repetitive activities lead to profound change while others merely maintain the status quo.

Perhaps most provocatively, Sloterdijk argues that what remains vital in religion today is not its belief systems but its practices—the technologies it developed for reshaping human thought and feeling. Modern society, rather than being post-religious, might better be understood as having inherited and secularized these ancient practices of self-transformation. Today's proliferation of training regimens, both physical and metaphysical, suggests that the human need for transformative practice persists, even as its expressions evolve.

The fundamental message is clear: humans are beings who must actively work on themselves through practice to achieve their potential. This work isn't optional or superficial—it's the very essence of human development. Whether through physical discipline, mental training, or spiritual exercise, practice remains the primary tool through which humans shape themselves and, by extension, their world.

This understanding of practice does not see humans as fixed entities. It rather presents us humans as works in progress, constantly engaged in the project of self-transformation through deliberate practice.

## Things Strange

We have learned about networks, social connectivity, people and relationships, communication processes, mobility, information and capital flows, and network societies as the dominant social organizational structure in the age of globalization. People and objects are equal. Objects can determine reactions and act like people. Moments of actions. The short life and constantly newborn relations in repetition building.

The situation resembles an ecological system, an environment with climatic conditions. The social is the result of a technological formation. Modern technical media create an environment where data flows like living organisms, governed by digital rules - codes, protocols, and formats - that shape how information interfaces with human users. This digital ecosystem doesn't exist in isolation from society; rather, social interactions are transformed into inputs and outputs within these information flows.

Both human activity and data exchanges exist within a framework defined by technological capabilities, economic forces, and political structures. These systemic constraints shape our communication ecology much as climate shapes natural environments. However, this analogy has its limits. While natural ecosystems can occasionally influence their climate, the relationship between technical systems and their constraining conditions tends to be more one-directional.

To understand modern communication, we must examine both the technical infrastructure that enables data flow and the broader conditions that shape how we use these systems. It is a complex interplay between human society, digital information, and the structures that govern their interaction.

## And so …

What makes it worth talking about video, online video or the *Visual*? Its primary origin is a signal from a point of light moving, a dot creating a line, and then building a shape in time and repeating. The signal creates an environment spread in time and flow, and builds information through information of a location, a point, a plane, a status in time, bright or loud, a point somewhere and its data, a scan, a mode, or something.

In Nam June Paik's view, the camera is just a tool for processing information flows. It captures something (input) and sends it out (output) in real-time. What makes video unique is this constant exchange. We take a flow, manipulate it, and release it into the stream for further transformation.

Paik argues that video is more about interaction than observation. It's like being a sculptor or painter, working directly with the image rather than passively watching it. Unlike film, which emphasizes storytelling, or television, which focuses on consumption, video invites participation. Video even foreshadows the rise of virtual images. We criticize television's impact, but video offers something distinct: liveness. This *real-time* quality gives video a unique ontological presence, a way of being that sets it apart from other media.

*Live TV is like life, you never manage to get everything done, there are always a few bittersweet regrets. . . . But what is the interest in being live? Interactive events must happen live. We’d like to use interactive TV because the best use you can get from a TV is to answer it like a telephone.[[8]](#footnote-9)*

Video goes beyond simply communicating messages and fostering social connections. It creates a new way of experiencing time. Unlike traditional media that capture a moment in time, video puts us right in the middle of the action. With video, we don't just witness an event, we participate in its construction. This happens through a collective process, where different elements (like technology and people) come together to create a flow of experience. Live video technology even changes how we think about ourselves as viewers. Joseph Beuys captured this well when he said, *I am a transmitter and I radiate.* He wasn't just saying he's involved; he meant he becomes part of the ongoing flow himself, connected to countless others. This opens up entirely new social and artistic possibilities, all centered around this idea of continuous, ever-changing experience.

Forget fixed images and pre-defined moments. Video lets us build time together as a collective flow.

Perhaps it is in this sense that we should interpret another statement from Paik: ‘The ultimate goal of the video revolution is the establishment of space-to-space communication, from situation to situation and not from subject to subject . . . we no longer work on an object, but a situation.’[[9]](#footnote-10)

Video technology, with its ability to handle any situation, allows the world to truly become a realm of moving images, of *Visuals*, as envisioned by Bergson.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Let’s make things strange again. Ostranenie. Videoness!

BNC-MT shall be a theory of environments, of habitats where signals flow and social practices take place. Media is faces and places, or figures and spaces. Media theory is about environments and infrastructures as much as about messages and content. We need to think of media as environmental, as part of the habitat.

Nothing is pure, but everything is new.

## Sight Seeing / MOVING

Travel isn't just about going somewhere; it requires intention. We move for a reason: work, necessity, or personal growth. Our journeys are guided, following established routes or plans. Any non-work travel that follows a defined path can be considered tourism.

Unlike consuming media, tourism is a physical experience. Tourists are constantly on the move, physically traveling along routes, visiting designated landmarks, and following pre-determined schedules. This creates a routine. Deviations from these defined paths might be random exploration (sightseeing) or something more unsettling: terrorism.

Tourists and terrorists both reach destinations different from their starting points, but their motivations differ significantly.

Sightseeing expands the visitor's environment, allowing them to explore a temporary location and its surroundings. Hiroki Azuma argues that tourism shares similarities with a creative practice called *secondary derivation*. In this process, fans (often *otaku*) take original works and create new ones based on them. Similarly, tourists interact with existing realities (destinations) and create their own experiences, effectively making *secondary derivative works* out of reality.

There's a distinction between physical movement (like walking) and the rapid exchange of information, which is another kind of movement.

In Peter Weibel's work, movement encompasses both. It includes the physical movement of objects and bodies, the movement of thought, and the constant flow of information. Weibel's perspective suggests there's no such thing as something genuinely static. Everything is in a state of flux, even our thinking.

‘There is nothing dead.’[[11]](#footnote-12)

At the turn of the 20th century, travel was primarily a function of power. Armies and resources moved in service of war and military exercises. Ordinary travel remained a luxury for the privileged few. The concept of the tourist emerged as a transformation of the industrial worker. Increased leisure time, a byproduct of this era, became a consolation prize for an otherwise grueling existence. The Nazi slogan *Kraft durch Freude* exemplifies this idea. In a society like the one depicted in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, factory workers might be offered moments of controlled leisure—a brief escape from routine without any real challenge to the system. Tourism is another structured element of life, offering an illusion of freedom and choice without ever allowing true liberation. The terrorist, in contrast to the tourist, operates undercover. They enter the travel system similarly, but their actions are disruptive and destructive.

Tourists and terrorists are the last moving human bodies at the moment of writing this text. Anything else is things. And the soldier is replaced by remote-controlled drones.

Hiroki Azuma, after wondering about the tourist, starts to reflect about the concept of family. He writes: ‘The philosophy of the tourist must be supplemented by the philosophy of the family. The strategy of the postal multitude that travels to and fro between nation state and Empire, spreading misdelivery and compassion, must be supported by a new familial solidarity.’[[12]](#footnote-13)

Family resemblance is also a philosophical idea by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Categories or concepts might not have one defining feature but a collection of overlapping characteristics. Think of a family: some members might have similar hair color, others share a height, but no single feature defines everyone in the family.

Video is social. The Barbarian is never alone.

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3. Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska. Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process. The MIT Press 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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6. Italo Calvino, Six memos for the next millennium. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Peter Sloterdijk, You must change your life; on anthropotechnics, Wiley, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Lazzarato 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Nam June Paik, Binghamton Letter, 8 January 1972 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Lazzarato, 2019: 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Peter Weibel, Territorium and Technik, Merve 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Azuma 2022: 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)