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Inexistent. Algorithmic Media Cultures and the Structural Foreclosure of the Conditions of Media Education

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The proliferation of algorithmic recommendation systems raises a question prior to media competence: whether the structural conditions for a genuine encounter with what exceeds the subject — with the foreign, not merely the unfamiliar — remain available at all. This paper argues that algorithmic media, at the scale of platformization, have not merely altered media content but have closed the structural space in which such encounters could occur. Drawing on Plessner's philosophical anthropology — specifically the claim that eccentric positionality requires a world that does not yield — and Waldenfels' phenomenology of the Widerfahrnis (the event that befalls the subject before any category stands ready to receive it), the paper demonstrates

that what algorithmic recommendation systems produce is not a filtered version of the foreign but its structural absence: inexistence rather than suppression. This closure differs fundamentally from Stiegler's diagnosis of a loss of retentional capacity: it concerns not the subject's ability to engage the world but the world's availability for engagement. The paper concludes by drawing institutional consequences for media education as the practice of maintaining spaces in which the subject can still be confronted with what it is not yet.

Die Proliferation algorithmischer Empfehlungssysteme stellt eine Frage, die der Medienkompetenz vorausliegt: ob die strukturellen Bedingungen für eine genuine Begegnung mit dem, was das Subjekt übersteigt – mit dem Fremden, nicht nur dem Unbekannten – überhaupt noch gegeben sind. Der Beitrag argumentiert, dass algorithmische Medien unter den Bedingungen der Plattformisierung nicht nur Medieninhalte verändert, sondern auch den strukturellen Raum geschlossen haben, in dem solche Begegnungen stattfinden könnten. Ausgehend von Plessners philosophischer Anthropologie – der These, dass exzentrische Positionalität eine Welt voraussetzt, die nicht nachgibt – und Waldenfels' Phänomenologie des Widerfahrnisses (des Ereignisses, das das Subjekt trifft, bevor eine Kategorie bereitsteht, es zu empfangen) wird gezeigt: Was algorithmische Empfehlungssysteme erzeugen, ist nicht eine gefilterte Version des Fremden, sondern dessen strukturelle Abwesenheit – Inexistenz statt Unterdrückung. Diese Schließung unterscheidet sich grundlegend von Stieglers Diagnose eines Kapazitätsverlusts: Sie betrifft nicht die Fähigkeit des Subjekts, sich auf die Welt einzulassen, sondern die Verfügbarkeit der Welt für dieses Einlassen. Der Beitrag schließt mit institutionellen Konsequenzen für eine Medienbildung, die Räume offenhalten, in denen das Subjekt noch mit dem konfrontiert werden kann, was es noch nicht ist.

Im Grunde könnte man aber alles dieses
zur Anthropologie rechnen,
weil sich die drei ersten Fragen
auf die letzte beziehen.
Immanuel Kant (1800/1923, p. 25)

1. The Omitted Question

Yuk Hui has noted that the Kantian *Critique of Pure Reason* answers three questions. The fourth he leaves out.

In *Recursivity and Contingency*, Hui reconstructs the Critique as a machine — as an apparatus that synthesizes, articulates, and relates questions to one another (Hui, 2019). What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? These three questions form a system. The fourth question — What is the human being? — appears in Kant himself as the hinge that supports the first three. All questions of reason converge upon it (Kant, 1800/1923, p. 25). And it is the only one Hui does not answer.

In his most recent work, *Kant machine* (2026), Hui takes the Kant–AI connection further still. The book is organized around three questions: what could be called an intelligent machine, whether machines are capable of being moral, and whether an algorithm of perpetual peace exists — corresponding to the chapters “Intelligent Machine,” “Moral Machine,” and “Peace Machine.” In the Preface, Hui makes the transposition explicit: these three questions ‘are transposed from humans to machines, from the organic to the inorganic; therefore, the latent question would be “what is machine?” instead of “what is human?”’ (Hui, 2026, p. xii). The an-

thropological question is not omitted — it is substituted. The fourth axis is replaced by a machinic axis. That replacement is precisely what this paper takes as its starting point: not to supply the missing answer, but to ask what it means that the question of the human being has been structurally displaced — and whether this displacement is itself a symptom of what algorithmic media have done to its conditions of possibility.

This substitution is not a coincidence. It is a symptom. The symptom character lies not in what Hui omits, but in what makes the omission coherent: a media environment in which the enactment conditions for posing the fourth question have already been structurally altered cannot generate the intellectual pressure to pose it. The fourth question differs from the first three not only in content but in its type of questioning. The first three ask after conditions: after what makes cognition, action, and hope possible. The fourth asks after the one who asks. It is the only question of reason that thematizes its own subject.

This paper does not answer it. It asks whether it can still be posed. Hui leaves the fourth question out. What this paper shows: it is neither answered nor dissolved. It is — through the fulfillment of its conditions under different auspices — rendered superfluous. That is the actual catastrophe. What algorithmic media do to this structure — that is the question Hui does not pose. It is ours.

This is not a critique of Hui's project, which has a different object. Hui diagnoses a cultural and philosophical transformation: the

transposition of Kantian questions onto machines. What this paper adds is a prior register of analysis — not what has been substituted, but what structural conditions made that substitution available as a coherent intellectual and technological move. Hui's observation is here taken as evidence. The diagnosis of its conditions is a different undertaking, not a competing one.

Media-pedagogical research has asked after the anthropological dimensions of media; this paper asks a prior question: whether the structural condition under which any media encounter can be an encounter with the foreign — rather than a confirmation of the familiar — is still given.

These traditions are selected because they share a common pre-supposition — the structural openness of the subject toward what exceeds it — which algorithmic media put at stake. The paper proceeds by conceptual clarification and theoretical confrontation, not by empirical investigation.

That the encounter with the other is eroding is not, in itself, a new diagnosis. Byung-Chul Han has described the present as the expulsion of the other — the proliferation of the same that drives out the foreign and the resistant (Han, 2016); Hartmut Rosa has named the corresponding loss as the waning of resonance, the muting of the responsive relation between self and world (Rosa, 2016). What both leave unspecified is the mechanism — how, concretely, the foreign is withdrawn. The argument developed here supplies that mechanism, and in doing so converts a cultural diagnosis into a structural claim. Its steps form one movement

rather than a sequence of authorities. Plessner establishes why an outside is constitutive at all: eccentric positionality is enacted only against a world that does not yield. Waldenfels specifies what that outside must be — the *Widerfahrnis* that befalls and resists, not the merely unfamiliar. The mechanism of similarity preference then shows how algorithmic media foreclose precisely this — a foreclosure to be distinguished sharply from Stiegler's diagnosis: not a loss of the subject's retentional capacity but a withdrawal of the world's availability for encounter. Anders, finally, gives the foreclosure its figure: the human no longer stands opposite what surpasses it but is surrounded by it. The thesis running through these steps is singular — algorithmic media at platform scale render the foreign not suppressed but inexistent, and with it the enactment condition on which media education tacitly depends.

2. Eccentric Positionality — Structure and Enactment

Eccentric positionality is not an achievement. It is a mode of being.

Plessner's point is precise: the human being is eccentric — structurally, not performatively. It has a center and stands outside it. This is not a decision. It is the form of its existence. The animal is centric. It lives out of its center, coincides with it, is it. The human being does not coincide. It is always already divided: bodily centered and simultaneously positioned outside that centering. It experiences itself as having a body, not merely as being one. This

doubling is not self-consciousness in the Cartesian sense — not a reflective act laid over a being that would exist without it — but the structure of eccentric positionality itself: the living being is given to itself only as standing outside its own center (Plessner, 1928/1975, pp. 288–293).

From this base structure Plessner derives anthropological laws. The first is decisive for the argument developed here: as an eccentrically organized being, the human being must make itself into what it already is (Plessner, 1928/1975, p. 309). It has a nature — and must enact it. This is not a paradox but a description: the human being is never finished with what it is. It is always in enactment. And this enactment is not self-sufficient — it requires resistances, demands, a world that does not yield.

The second anthropological law deepens this: Plessner calls it *natural artificiality*. The human being is by nature dependent on culture. Unlike the animal, which is equipped with instinctual closure, the human being is constitutively open — underdetermined, incomplete, in need of supplementation. It compensates its world-openness through institutions, tools, symbols, and cultural forms. Mediality is therefore not an external addition to an otherwise complete being — it is the substance through which the human being enacts its nature at all. What this means for the present argument is consequential: the question is not whether algorithmic media mediate, but how. All media mediate; all media constitute the conditions under which eccentric positionality is enacted. The question is what kind of mediation algorithmic me-

dia introduce — and specifically whether their mode of mediation preserves or forecloses the openness that Plessner's second law makes structurally necessary.

Here lies a tension that Plessner himself does not resolve — and which it was not his task to resolve. It becomes so here. For what Plessner describes as necessary resistance — the world that does not yield, the other who is not I — is not an anthropological constant but a historically variable structure. The eccentricity of the human being is universal. The conditions under which it can be enacted are not. When the mediating instances are altered — institutions, media, cultural forms — it is not the structure of eccentricity that changes, but the conditions under which it can be enacted.

I am not eccentric through thought. I am thrown out of my center — through friction, resistance, unavailability. A world optimized for resonance yields. It shapes itself around me — anticipates my preferences, confirms my categories, mirrors my interaction history. In such a world I can stand beside myself — but there is nothing that throws me out. I stand before myself. That is not eccentricity. That is narcissism as world-structure — not as a psychic disposition but as the structure of the relation to the world itself.

The algorithm is not the first medium to constitute enactment conditions of eccentricity. Plessner's third anthropological law — *mediated immediacy* — describes that the human being is accessible to itself only through detours: through language, symbol, institution, tool (Plessner, 1928/1975). Writing constitutes different en-

actment conditions than orality. The printing press constitutes different ones than the manuscript. What distinguishes algorithmic media from all preceding media configurations is not that they constitute enactment conditions — all of them did. It is that they optimize the enactment conditions for resonance: for the minimization of friction, the maximization of connection, the anticipation of the subject before it shows itself. That is a qualitative shift, not a gradual continuation.

What algorithmic media alter is not the structure. It is the enactment. Eccentric positionality persists — but it is suspended: it comes to a standstill without ceasing to exist. The human being is still eccentric. It finds no world anymore that throws it out. And because enactment is suspended, so too is the first step toward Plessner's first law: whoever cannot make themselves into what they already are — because the world does not force them to relate to themselves at all — remains what they already were. Confirmed. Anticipated. Profiled.

Plessner names the structure. What names the enactment condition of this structure — that is Waldenfels.

3. The *Widerfahrnis* — Enactment Condition of Eccentricity

Not every encounter is a *Widerfahrnis*. For Bernhard Waldenfels, the *Widerfahrnis* — what befalls one — is pathos in its basic sense: something that comes upon us without our own doing and strikes *before* it is grasped as something, before any category stands ready to receive it (Waldenfels, 2002, pp. 14–15, 32–33; Walden-

fels, 2004, pp. 238–239). This priority of the befalling over its intentional uptake is not a terminological nicety but a phenomenological turning point. Affectedness: I am moved. Something strikes me, I react. The category of reception stood ready. *Widerfahrnis*: something befalls me — the ‘befalling’ is decisive. It befalls *me*, not an arbitrary recipient. And it comes as a claim: it demands a response before I know what has been asked. The response precedes the question. The body is already in motion before the subject has decided.

This priority of the claim is not occasional — it is structural. The *Widerfahrnis* has a temporal structure that differs categorically from that of the offer: in the *Widerfahrnis*, something approaches me before I am ready to receive it. Not temporally close — but structurally: before the category stands ready that would classify it. That is the specific passivity of which Waldenfels speaks — not passivity as inactivity, but as the being-struck that precedes understanding (Waldenfels, 2006/2018, pp. 38–44). Käte Meyer-Drawe has shown that this structure is constitutive for learning as such: genuine learning — as distinct from the mere acquisition of information — begins precisely where the subject is interrupted, where its existing categories prove insufficient, where it is compelled to respond before it can orient itself (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, pp. 15–16). Learning, on this account, is not a process the subject initiates but one that befalls it — a *Widerfahrnis* in the strong sense.

This distinction is decisive for the technical mechanism. Recommendation systems operate on similarity. They can produce the other: the unknown, the surprising, the unexpected — everything that still has a coordinate in the similarity space, however distant. What they cannot produce is the foreign: that which lies outside the space because foreignness is not a relation of similarity but its suspension.

What comes to me algorithmically does not come as a claim. It comes as an offer. The offer expects resonance, not a response. It anticipates rather than demands. The specific passivity of the *Widerfahrnis* — being struck before understanding — is structurally excluded from the offer. The offer presupposes my receptivity and serves it. The *Widerfahrnis* puts it at stake.

Claim and offer: this is not a matter of tone or intensity. It is a difference in relations to the world. In the claim, the subject constitutes itself as responsive — it responds to something it did not produce. In the offer, the subject confirms itself as preferring — it selects from what has already been prepared for it. Eccentric positionality — standing-beside-oneself, being-thrown-out-of-one's-center — presupposes the claim. It does not arise from choice but from exposition. Whoever receives only offers does not become eccentric. They become confirmed.

What Waldenfels describes phenomenologically can be described in precise media-theoretical terms. Rainer Mühlhoff analyzes how digital platforms operate not on content but on affect — on the dynamics of affective resonance (Mühlhoff, 2015). This is not ma-

nipulation in the sense of targeted belief change. It is an intervention at the level below decision-making: at the level at which the body reacts before the subject chooses. This affectedness is thus not accidental — it is industrially produced, the product of platforms that function as affect economies (Mühlhoff, Breljak, & Slaby, 2019). What appears as encounter is the result of an optimization for maximal resonance at minimal interruption. The subject experiences intensity — but intensity whose parameters were already set before it arose. That is not a *Widerfahrnis*. That is affectedness under the exclusion of contingency: calculated resonance instead of open encounter.

The subject of algorithmic media reacts to everything — and responds to nothing. It is maximally reactive and structurally non-responsive.

4. The Mechanism — Similarity Preference as Closure of the Space of Foreignness

A recommendation algorithm encodes user interactions as vectors in a high-dimensional latent space. Similarity is proximity. What is recommended is what is already near in the space. The space itself is the congealed aggregate of all users' interactions — it is the opposite of Waldenfels' foreign: the total assimilation of the other into the familiar before encounter takes place.

This is not a claim about the contents of training data, which may be culturally heterogeneous, nor about the range of outputs a system can technically produce. It is a phenomenological claim

about the structure of encounter: what arrives as a recommendation arrives already configured as relevance — as *Angebot* calibrated to the user's interaction profile, not as *Anspruch* arriving from outside it. The statistically improbable recommendation and the foreign in Waldenfels' sense are structurally distinct: the former is an outlier within the similarity space; the latter lies outside its dimensionality altogether. The exclusion is structural rather than statistical: the dimensions of the space are themselves constituted out of recorded interactions, so what has never been interacted with at scale has no axis along which it could be located. It is not a remote point within the space but a form for which the space provides no coordinate.

What is described technically here as a latent space has been put in terms of cultural theory by Felix Stalder. Stalder identifies algorithmicity as one of the three basic forms of the culture of digitality — alongside referentiality and communality (Stalder, 2016, pp. 165–193): algorithmic systems process not content but patterns of patterns — they operate on aggregated correlations and thereby constitute the space of what counts as relevant, visible, and connectable. The latent space is the technical realization of Stalder's algorithmicity — and its tendency toward closure is not a malfunction but the consequence of the cultural logic Stalder describes: algorithmicity operates on patterns of patterns — and the foreign forms no patterns.

The foreign in Waldenfels' sense has no coordinate in the latent space — not because it lies at the margin but because it lies out-

side the dimensionality of the space. It is not suppressed. It is inexistent — a structural condition Waldenfels already names at the level of order: the foreign is not excluded but *außer-ordentlich*, without place within the order at all (Waldenfels, 2006/2018, pp. 31, 125). Simanowski's image is precise: whereas Goethe's *Weltliteratur* presupposed the encounter with the Other of another culture as its normative condition — a salad bowl in which each ingredient retains its contour — the language model produces *Welt-text* as a statistical melting pot, dissolving distinctness before any encounter can take place — a parallel dynamic, though transposed from language generation to recommendation infrastructure (Simanowski, 2025, pp. 61–65). Foreignness is not a relation of similarity but its suspension. Such a foreign cannot be represented in the similarity space — not through better data, not through larger models. It is a structural condition of the procedure itself.

This is not a property of individual algorithms — it is a threshold phenomenon of scaling. Individual systems occasionally explore; cold-start problems force randomness. With platformization, the quality of the process changes, not merely its extent. Van Dijck et al. (2018) have described platformization as the penetration of platform infrastructures into all sectors of society, reorganizing existing institutions and practices through the mechanisms of datification, commodification, and selection (pp. 2–9). The ideological dimensions of this reorganization — how platform logic naturalizes its own power arrangements as neutral infrastructure —

have been elaborated as a media-pedagogical problem in its own right (Filk, 2025b; cf. Mühlhoff, 2025). Applied here: the latent space becomes culturally dominant not because any single algorithm decides so, but because the platform infrastructure makes it the operative environment of social, cultural, and educational encounter. It no longer represents an individual user but the ensemble of all interactions. What has been interacted with by no one has no coordinate in the aggregate. The closure is historically datable — with the establishment of algorithmic feeds as dominant circulation infrastructure from around 2012 — and thus reversible: a structural condition, not a law of nature.

The objection that media have always selected does not strike the thesis. The printing press selects what is printed — the unprinted remains existent elsewhere. Television selects broadcast slots — the unbroadcast remains producible. The scaled latent space does not select from a pre-existing world. It constitutes the circulation space of the culturally available — what Couldry and Mejias describe as the structural appropriation of the social through data practices (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Not contents are filtered — the condition of the possibility of encountering the foreign as such lapses.

The argument claims no totality: experiences of foreignness have not disappeared. But the algorithmically curated sphere — the platforms, feeds, and recommender systems that now constitute the default media environment of students and educators alike —

has structurally ceased to enable them. The latent space does not stay outside the classroom. It arrives with the subject.

5. Stiegler and the Limits of Pharmacology

Stiegler treats what we have lost. The argument here treats what is no longer there to be lost.

Stiegler's diagnosis is precise and far-reaching: digital media grammatize experience. They take over retentions and protentions — retention and expectation. The subject loses the capacity for temporal synthesis, its individuation achievement in Simondon's sense (Stiegler, 2011, pp. 4–5; Simondon, 1958/2020, pp. 3–8). The key term here is *tertiary retention*: externalized memory — writing, recording, the archive — that supports and extends the subject's temporal synthesis without replacing it. When digital systems take over tertiary retention at scale, the subject loses the psychic exercise of remembering, anticipating, attending. It is a form of cognitive outsourcing that leaves the horizon of what is possible in principle intact: the world is still out there, still available in principle, still capable of surprising. The subject has merely lost the musculature to engage it fully. Even Stiegler's institutional pharmacology — the long circuits of transindividuation that he anchors in school, collective memory, and cultural transmission — thinks structural counter-forces, not merely individual exercises of attention (Stiegler, 2010, pp. 65–93). That is not the narrow, purely psychological reading.

And yet a limit remains that his framework cannot cross. Simondon's individuation operates within a field that is always already given — a metastable reservoir of the pre-individual that is in principle inexhaustible (Simondon, 1958/2020, p. 8). In Simondon there is no closure of the space of possibility. There is blockage of enactment. Even Stiegler's institutional pharmacology presupposes that what is to be preserved through institutions is in principle still available: a reservoir, a horizon, a pre-individual. The question is whether this horizon still exists — or whether it has already been overwritten by the infrastructure of the latent space.

This distinction requires further precision. Simondon's pre-individual field is not a reservoir of content. It is a structural surplus that precedes any form — constitutively inexhaustible because individuation never exhausts the potential it draws on; each individuation leaves a remainder available for further individuation (Simondon, 1958/2020, pp. 3–8). The latent space, by contrast, is constitutively finite in a specific sense: it contains only what has already been interacted with. It is not a field of potential but an aggregate of actualized interactions. Where Simondon's pre-individual field precedes form, the latent space follows it. Where the pre-individual reservoir exceeds any individuation, the latent space contracts around what has already been individuated. The structural inversion is complete: Stiegler's pharmacology operates within Simondon's inexhaustible field and attempts to keep access to it open. The argument here concerns a different operation

— not the blocking of access to an existing field, but the substitution of the field itself by its own actualized residue.

In Stiegler, the tool weakens the muscle. Here, the tool alters the space in which the muscle might move. The subject could respond — but finds nothing to respond to. That is not a gradual radicalization of Stiegler. It is a different level of description.

The first loss is reversible — through different technology, different practice, different pharmacology. The second is not — as long as the infrastructure of circulation is constituted by the latent space. Stiegler's pharmacology presupposes that technology can be turned around — poison becomes remedy. That presupposes that what was lost is still latently present in the technology. But if the space of foreignness itself has been overwritten, there is no pharmacology. There is only structural transformation.

The structural reason for this limit is precise. The *pharmakon* operates on a shared substrate: the technology contains in distorted or attenuated form what it has also damaged. Counter-practice recovers what the technology suppressed but did not destroy. The latent space, however, contains no distorted trace of the foreign — because the foreign, in Waldenfels' sense, is that which arrives before any interaction pattern is established. Encoding requires interaction; the foreign is definitionally prior to it. What was never interacted with at scale was never encoded. There is nothing in the substrate to recover pharmacologically. The foreign is not present in the technology in distorted form. It was absent

from the beginning of the encoding operation — not despite the technology's reach but because of its logic.

6. Anders — Witness at the Threshold

Günther Anders describes no final state. He describes an experience — the experience of being surpassed.

T. schämt sich, geworden, statt gemacht zu sein, der Tatsache also, im Unterschied zu den tadellosen und bis ins Letzte durchkalkulierten Produkten, sein Dasein dem blinden und unkalkulierten, dem höchst altertümlichen Prozeß der Zeugung und der Geburt zu verdanken. [T. is ashamed of having become rather than been made — that is, of the fact that, unlike the flawless and exhaustively calculated products, he owes his existence to the blind and uncalculated, utterly archaic process of begetting and birth.] (Anders, 1956/2010, p. 24)

Promethean shame is an affect — and that presupposes that the human being still stands and feels. That is the structure of the witness: he sees the threshold because he still stands on this side of it. The shame comes uninvited. It befalls the human being in the face of its own products — not as a reflected conclusion but as a blow. The sight of the working machine, not its analysis, produced not pride but shame (Anders, 1956/2010, p. 28). This is the exact structure of what Waldenfels calls the claim before the response: the machine makes a demand on the human being's self-relation before it knows how to relate to it. The body has already responded — with shame — before the subject has understood

what has struck it. *Promethean shame* is a *Widerfahrnis* in Walden-fels' precise sense: not mere affectedness, but the experience of a claim that arrives before the category stands ready to receive it. Anders' subject is still exposable. The machine can still strike it.

Why is this no longer possible with algorithmic media? Because the algorithm does not stand opposite. It surrounds. The machine stood before Anders — as object, as boundary, as other. Distance presupposes a counterpart — the consciousness of a boundary between what I am and what I stand before. The latent space has no counterpart. It configures the space in which one stands. One cannot feel ashamed before it because one does not see it. It is the medium, not the object.

Anders still operates within the askability of the question. His entire work is negative anthropology — but anthropology (Filk, 2006; cf. Anders, 1956/2010, p. vii). He still poses the fourth question, radically and desperately. That is tragic — in the precise sense: he fights with means that have already lost the condition of their own efficacy.

Anders' diagnosis can be read — beyond its explicit wording — as testimony to a threshold: as the moment in which the enactment condition was still visible because it was just then slipping away. He does not describe what comes after. He describes the trembling just before. What comes after — the dissolution not of the answer but of the very askability — is no longer his subject. It is ours.

Promethean shame is still possible where the medium is an object. It is structurally excluded where the medium is an environment.

Anders knew that the human being can no longer catch up with its products. What he did not know: that it would stop noticing.

7. Media Education Without a Before

If that is true — if the enactment condition of the *Widerfahrnis* has not simply gone missing but been structurally closed — then the question for media education is not: How do we awaken attention? But rather: Where is there still a space that does not anticipate who is coming?

One can be attentive in a closed space. That is the experience many know as concentration — as deepening, focus, intensity. It is real. But it is not the same as exposition. Attention in a closed space deepens the familiar. Exposition in an open space risks the self-evident.

That is the objection to every media-pedagogical response that stops at Stiegler: cultivating attention, slowing down, resistance to grammatization — all of that presupposes that the space in which one is attentive is open. But if the enactment condition of the *Widerfahrnis* has been structurally closed, then attention alone is no answer. It is sharpness in the wrong space.

Media education has always operated with an implicit anthropology — one that it has seldom made fully explicit. The dominant paradigm of media competence (*Medienkompetenz*), developed by

Dieter Baacke and foundational for the field, presupposes — as a representative instance of a broader paradigm — a subject capable of acquiring, applying, and critically evaluating competences across four dimensions: critique, use, design, and communication (Baacke, 1997/2007, pp. 96–102). In the English-language tradition, David Buckingham develops a parallel paradigm of critical media literacy — equally premised on a reflexive subject capable of analyzing and producing media (Buckingham, 2003). This subject is implicitly autonomous, reflexive, and educable — in short, it is Plessner's eccentrically positioned human being, though rarely named as such. The competence model does not ask about the anthropological preconditions of competence acquisition: it assumes them.

Structural approaches to media education (*Strukturelle Medienbildung*) have made this connection more explicit: Jörissen and Marotzki develop media education as a transformation of basic structures through which subjects relate to world and self — a transformation requiring genuine encounter with what exceeds the subject's existing frameworks (Jörissen & Marotzki, 2009). These positions have since been developed further within the discipline itself: the field's own journal has examined how algorithmicity reshapes the conditions of resonance and perception (Röll, 2023), the current debate on artificial intelligence has prompted calls to widen the pedagogical perspective beyond the competence model (Knaus, 2024), and structural media education has increasingly been recast in relational terms — a move in which

Jörissen is himself centrally involved (Klepacki & Jörissen, 2023). The present argument is continuous with this trajectory rather than opposed to it. The argument here does not contest either framework. It asks whether the media environments that now constitute the primary field of media education still enable the encounters that both require — or whether the latent space has foreclosed precisely the openness on which the entire project depends.

What structurally distinguishes a media-educational space from a recommendation system? Not intensity, not the quality of content — but fundamental orientation. A recommendation system orients itself toward the subject as it is. It anticipates the recipient before they arrive. The media-educational space — structurally, not empirically — is the opposite: it is built on incompleteness. The space does not know who is coming. It is not tailored to them. It is oriented toward the subject as it is not yet.

Hans-Christoph Koller develops — in direct engagement with Waldenfels' phenomenology of the foreign (Koller, 2023, pp. 79–87) — education as transformation of the relation to world and self: as the process that takes place when people are confronted with problem situations whose resolution exceeds their existing means and possibilities (Koller, 2023, p. 15). This is not additive expansion — no additional learning, no gain in competence. It is a transformation of the basic figures through which the subject understands world and itself.

Jörissen and Marotzki's structural media education develops precisely this insight for the media-pedagogical field: media encounters become educative not through the transfer of content but through the confrontation with what exceeds, disrupts, and restructures the subject's existing frameworks — through genuine otherness, not curated variation (Jörissen & Marotzki, 2009). Meyer-Drawe's account converges: learning that is genuinely transformative begins where the learner is interrupted — where what befalls them cannot be absorbed into what they already know (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, pp. 15–16). The foreign that triggers educational processes is the same foreign that strikes in the *Widerfahrnis* as a claim before understanding. If algorithmic media structurally exclude this foreign from the circulation space of the available — if they replace the inexistent with the similar — then they eliminate not only a phenomenological experience structure. They eliminate the trigger condition of media education itself.

This elimination, however, is not structurally neutral: the closure of the space of foreignness does not affect all epistemic traditions equally.

8. Institutional Consequences

The closure of the space of foreignness is not, however, a culturally neutral event. The latent space is not constituted by an abstract ensemble of all possible human interactions. It is constituted by the aggregated interactions of populations with access to digi-

tal platforms — populations that are, historically and structurally, predominantly Western, Anglophone, and urban (Filk, 2025a). The foreignness that is structurally excluded from the latent space is not an abstract category but a concrete one: it is the epistemic forms, linguistic structures, aesthetic traditions, narrative conventions, and ways of knowing that have not been encoded in the dominant interaction patterns, because their bearers have been systematically excluded from the infrastructures that generate the space. The question — whose anthropology underlies media education? — receives here a precise technical answer: the anthropology embedded in algorithmically curated media cultures is the anthropology whose interaction patterns have shaped the latent space. Those whose ways of knowing were never interacted with at scale have no coordinate in the aggregate (Birhane, 2021). Their foreignness is not merely unrepresented — it has no coordinate in the space. Mignolo's concept of the colonial difference — the epistemic boundary that marks what counts as knowledge and what does not — finds here a technical instantiation: the latent space enacts colonial difference algorithmically, rendering structurally absent precisely those forms of knowledge that the colonial matrix had already marginalized (Mignolo, 2011; Couldry & Mejias, 2019). The pedagogical elaboration of this diagnosis — including critical data literacy as emancipatory response to epistemic violence in algorithmic systems — has been developed as a media-pedagogical program (Filk, 2025a, for the full elaboration). The closure the latent space enacts is not universal but asymmetric — and its asymmetry is not accidental. This asymmetry is not

a separate problem grafted onto the structural argument: it is the historical form the structural closure takes. The latent space would foreclose the foreign structurally even under conditions of perfect equity; that it does so under conditions of historical exclusion means that the structural and the political arguments share a single institutional target.

This is not a Romantic invocation of pedagogical *eros*. It is a structural requirement — and it has institutional consequences for media education:

First: temporal structures that protect the before. Slowness is not a sentimental gesture — it is the institutional form of keeping open. What is not immediately connectable needs time to disturb.

Second: spaces of non-profiling. Where no interaction history is stored, no profile can form. No profile — no anticipated recipient. The subject arrives in the space as unknown. No one has decided who it is before it arrives. That is the institutional minimal form of the *Widerfahrnis* — not its guarantee but its condition.

Third: spaces of encounter not pre-filtered by similarity preference. Decisions about canon, seminar structures, curricula — everywhere that it is decided what someone encounters before they can choose, the question arises: Does this decision close the space of foreignness — or does it hold it open?

Curation is active pre-selection for a profile. Keeping open is the omission of closure. And actively counteracting the asymmetry of the latent space is the positive institutional obligation that follows

from taking the question — whose anthropology? — seriously. These are not three separate operations but one: the commitment to an encounter that the dominant infrastructure has made structurally improbable.

The seminar offers the clearest institutional instantiation of this structure. Its defining characteristic is not its content but its architecture: a shared text or object is placed at the center that neither the educator nor the participants selected on the basis of an interaction profile. No prior history determines what will be encountered. The seminar does not know who is arriving before they arrive — which is precisely what the recommendation infrastructure cannot tolerate. The seminar is not a space of open discovery in a romantic sense. It is a space of structured non-anticipation: the encounter is prepared, but its recipient is not pre-configured. What can befall someone in such a space is not guaranteed — but it is not structurally foreclosed. That minimal structural openness is what the three institutional commitments above converge on: the seminar as the institutional form in which the condition of the *Widerfahrnis* remains, however precariously, available.

Media education is the institutional practice of exposition toward what holds no profile of the subject — as the structural contrast in Table 1 makes explicit. Media education does not guarantee the *Widerfahrnis*. It protects the condition under which it remains possible — by leaving open the decision of what fits:

	<i>Recommendation System</i>	<i>Media-Educational Space</i>
<i>Orientation</i>	Subject as it is	Subject as it is not yet
<i>Mode of encounter</i>	Offer (anticipates receptivity)	Claim (precedes understanding)
<i>Structural principle</i>	Similarity preference	Openness to the foreign
<i>Anthropology</i>	Profiled subject	Eccentric subject
<i>Space of foreignness</i>	Closed (inexistent)	Held open (institutional task)

Table 1: Recommendation System and Media-Educational Space — A Structural Contrast (CC-BY-SA)

9. Conclusion

This paper began with a substitution. Yuk Hui replaces Kant's fourth question — What is the human being? — with a machinic question: What is machine? The substitution is not accidental. It follows from the structure of the enterprise: critical philosophy can be extended to artificial intelligence along three axes. The fourth axis — the one that asks after the subject of the asking — resists extension. Hui leaves it out not by oversight but by design.

The argument developed here has shown why that resistance matters for media education. The fourth question cannot be substituted without loss — not because the anthropological answer is sacrosanct, but because the enactment conditions under which it can be posed at all have been structurally altered. Plessner's eccentric positionality requires a world that does not yield. Waldenfels' *Widerfahrnis* requires a claim that arrives before the category stands ready. Meyer-Drawe's learning requires an interruption

that cannot be absorbed. All three require the foreign — not the other, not the surprising, not the unfamiliar, but the structurally unassimilable. Algorithmic media, at the scale of platformization, have constituted a circulation space from which precisely this foreign is absent: not suppressed, but inexistent.

Media education cannot restore what the infrastructure has foreclosed. But it can refuse to reproduce the foreclosure — institutionally, curricularly, and in the daily decision about what someone encounters before they can choose. That refusal is not nostalgia. It is the minimal condition under which Kant's fourth question remains askable at all. And it is the condition under which media education remains education — rather than the well-curated confirmation of a subject that has ceased to ask what it is.

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