

Philippe Theophanidis

A Decisive Mediation: Heidegger, Media Studies, and Ethics*

When it comes to the ways in which media studies intersects with Heidegger's philosophical work, two crucial problems cannot be overlooked: the definition of media and Heidegger himself. The former is a notoriously fuzzy concept, while the latter was infamously involved with Nazism and anti-Semitism. This chapter opens a path to addressing those problems. This path exposes not a solution, but instead highlights the issue of how we are for one another, and the care that is consequently required from and for us.

In the first part of this chapter, I expand on the two problems initially identified—media and Heidegger—and provide them with contextual background. I cast the problem of defining “media” and “media studies” as an epistemological one. In doing so, I show how one common way to borrow from Heidegger in media studies is to reference modern communication technologies. Since this is a relatively recent and rather specialized extension of the idea of medium, I argue Heidegger's influence in the nascent field of media studies is neither straightforward nor clearly established. Turning more specifically to Heidegger's own prejudices, I outline the well-documented and more complicated problem of his involvement with Nazism and anti-Semitism. I cast this problem as a political one. While some have argued that Heidegger's distorted political views contaminated all his work, I suggest that this is no reason for media studies to steer away from it. Going back to the emergence of the fields of communication and media studies, I show how the epistemological always was and still remains entangled with the political. While banning Heidegger is ultimately an ineffective way to deal with the nature of the problematic

views he presented (and getting rid of him does not spare us from the issues of prejudice anyway), merely sidestepping his involvement in the Nazi party is clearly not responsible either. I suggest instead that both the epistemological and political require ethical engagement. I outline how such an ethical engagement is of special concern for media studies, since ←233 | 234→it can be cast as a process of mediation. This approach offers alternative routes through the epistemological and political issues identified in Heidegger's works.

1 An epistemological problem: media

To rigorously assess the role played by the Heideggerian corpus in media studies, let alone to propose new developments in and beyond his work, it is important to clearly establish what exactly scholars study in this field. One possibility for a simple answer can be identified in the common object shared by all those participating in this plurality of studies: media. A quick examination, however, requires any inquiring mind to acknowledge that “media” is as common and popular a term as it is equivocal in what exactly it refers to: very familiar in the various ways it is used, yet elusive in its meaning. As a German media theorist observed, the fact that the “concept of media” is an issue is “raised by every wiseacre.”¹ How is that so?

It is still possible to find straightforward answers to the question, “what is a medium/media?” For example, in Hartley's *Communication, Cultural, and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*, the entry “Medium/media” opens with this rather confident assertion: “A medium (plural, media) is simply any material through which something else may be transmitted. [...] Media of communication are therefore any means by which messages may be transmitted.”² Alternatively, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists 29 different meanings for the word “medium,”³ excluding special meanings, some dating back to classical Latin. The recent conflation of the term “medium” with “media”⁴ in the narrow sense as a “main means of mass communication” still strongly informs the common usage. In this perspective, media are understood as material things—technological

artifacts ⁵—or a system of things ←234 | 235→fulfilling a function (transmission) for a given end (communication).⁶ Indeed, in a recent article examining new historical perspectives in communication studies, the authors observe that the “history of media is foremost the history of technical objects” (Thibault and Trudel, 2015, 12; my translation).

At first glance, this technological understanding of what media are helps to identify one of the common meeting points between specific aspects of Heidegger’s work and media studies.⁷ Heidegger’s discussions about the hammer as *das Zeug* (“equipment”) in section 15 of *Being and Time*,⁸ the typewriter in his lecture on Parmenides,⁹ or technology as “positionality” (or “enframing”) in the oft-quoted *The Question Concerning Technology*,¹⁰ all seem to offer logical applications in the field of media studies. This is not to suggest that such applications fell prey to technological reductionism nor a technologically determinist understanding of media. Many scholars working with a technical understanding of media do engage critically both with technological determinism and, when it applies, with Heidegger’s elaborate treatment of technology (a treatment that, since its formulation, has not itself remained exempt of critical and rigorous examination).¹¹

For example, Gunkel and Taylor introduced their recent book *Heidegger and the Media* by arguing that themes of “language, truth, telepresence and technological determinism constitute the four key related aspects of what makes Heidegger’s purportedly abstract and esoteric work so useful for revealing very practical and radical insights into the media’s role as a structuring element of our everyday lives” (2014, p. 8). Further examples of the diversity applications of Heidegger’s ideas ←235 | 236→regarding a technological understanding of media include, but are not limited to, postmodernism (Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 1992), television (Fry, ed., *RUA/TV? Heidegger and the Televisual*, 1993; Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live*, 2014) and radio (Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, 1996; Babich, “Constellating Technology: Heidegger’s *Die Gefahr/The Danger*,” 2014), media consumption (Wilson, *Media Consumption in Malaysia: A Hermeneutics of Human Behaviour*, 2015), media users theory (Wilson, *Understanding Media Users: From Theory to*

Practice, 2009), cybernetics in the media age (Poster, “High-Tech Frankenstein, or Heidegger Meets Sterlac” 2002), technology and biology (Kember and Zylińska, *Life After New Media*, 2012), the sense of place (Malpas, “New Media, Cultural Heritage and the Sense of Place: Mapping the Conceptual Ground,” 2008), the idea of communication (Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 2000),¹² environment and nature (Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 2015), emerging media and big data (Floyd and Katz, eds., 2015), entanglement and transhumanism (Babich, “O! Superman!” 2013; “Heidegger on Technology,” 2017), online learning (Cressman and Hamilton, “The Experiential Dimension of Online Learning,” 2010), and media as such (Bay and Rickert, “New Media,” 2008), especially in the tradition of German media studies (Kittler, *Optical Media*, 2010; *The Truth*, 2014; Weber and Cholodenko, *Mass Mediauras*, 1996; Siegert, “Cultural Techniques,” 2013; Winthrop-Young, “Krautrock, Heidegger, Bogeyman,” 2011a; *Kittler and the Media*, 2011b).

This is by no means an exhaustive survey of the relevant literature, nor necessarily a representative sample of Heidegger’s influence on media studies.¹³ Based strictly on this set of references, it is possible to assert that Heidegger’s work has been and still is influential, at least to some degree. The precise extent or the ←236 | 237→exact significance of this influence on the field of media studies has much to gain from a closer and more systematic investigation, which is currently lacking. This shortfall may have to do with the difficulty such a task entails. Two reasons can be briefly offered here to explain this difficulty.

First, it is worth noting that a large portion of communication and media studies—however those two fields relate, when they do—still simply manage without any direct reference to Heidegger. Numerous handbooks, readers, and encyclopaedias dealing specifically with communication and media make no mention of his work or include only passing allusions to it. In Littlejohn and Foss’s *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, which contains about 400 entries, Heidegger is mentioned in relation to the traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, dialogue theories, rhetoric and existentialism, but not to “medium theory” or technological issues. In

Donsbach's 12-volume *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Heidegger is associated with the same topics, but is also mentioned in entries about the history of communication and media studies, the history of the idea of communication and virtual reality (2008).¹⁴ Heidegger's name does not appear in the index of the second edition of *Reading Media Theory* (Mills, 2012), nor are any of his texts included in Larousse's *Sciences de l'information et de la communication* (published in the "Essential Texts" collection of the French publisher Larousse; Bougnoux, 1993). There are merely two mentions in the 500-plus page *The Handbook of Communication History*, while four are found in the massive revised edition of *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Simonson, ed., 2013; Durham and Kellner, 2006).¹⁵ The following works, which all take media studies as their main concern, do not make any reference to Heidegger, or scarcely mention him: *Oxford Handbook of Film and Media Studies* (Kolker, 2008), *Media Studies: An Introduction* (Kolker, 2009), *Media Studies: A Reader* (Thornham, Bassett, and Marris, 1996), *The Media Study Reader* (O'Sullivan and Jewkens, 1997), *Why Study The Media?* (Silverstone, 1999), *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (Morley, 2002), *A Companion to Media Studies* (Valdivia, 2006), *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (Couldry, 2003), *The Media and Globalization* (Rantanen, 2004), and *Key Concepts in Media and Communications* (Jones and Holmes, 2011). This is again a rather modest sample,¹⁶ but at the very least it suggests that Heidegger's work, although it exerts a certain influence with some authors, is far from being ←237 | 238→central or pervasive in the field of communication and media studies.¹⁷ As Gunkel and Taylor themselves twice asserted in their book, *Heidegger and the Media*, to this day Heidegger remains "largely ignored by Media and Communication Studies" (2014, p. 170).

The second reason that can explain the difficulty of assessing more clearly the influence of Heidegger on the specific field of media studies is related to the problem raised at the start of this section: the uncertain identity of this field. Despite the technological understanding I already discussed being largely accepted, what the labels "media studies," "media,"

and “medium” encompass are much more diverse. As one media and communication historian recently commented, regarding the absence of a dominating journal in his disciplinary field, “[i]f media and communication has no flagship, it is because there is no coherent discipline in the first place” (Pooley, 2015, p. 1247). This observation is not a new one. In 1974, Raymond Williams argued that the diversity of the field of communication research should be welcomed instead of lamented, observing, “[t]hat communication scientists cannot communicate with each other is by now one of those old jokes that with repetition become melancholy” (1974, p. 18). In his classic study on media and society, James W. Carey warned the reader, “[of] all the areas or subareas within communications, that of the mass media has proved to be the most fiercely resistant to adequate theoretical formulation—indeed, even to systematic discussion” (1989, p. 69). Robert T. Craig, who in 1999 penned an influential proposition for a “meta-model” of communication, observed fourteen years later in an interview that the nature of the field remained fragmented, adding, “[c]oherence is an elusive goal” (Boromisza-Habashi, 2013, pp. 421–422). John Durham Peters wrote more colorfully in the early 1990s of a “fascinating communication theory galore” (1993, p. 134). When allowed to stand ←238 | 239→outside of its common technological confines, the concept of “medium” shows just how rich a semantic field it belongs to. Media scholars who propose to take a step back from this instrumental understanding find themselves struggling to do so. We currently lack a rigorous examination of just how mass media research, communication studies, media studies, media archeology and, more recently, *Medienphilosophie* relate and differ from one another. An interesting attempt at a broader historical and epistemological survey can be found in Thibault and Trudel (2015). Under renewed scrutiny, the terms “medium” and “media” appear to be “ambiguous,” characterized by “a strange fuzziness” or “conceptual fuzziness” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 93; Tholen and Krapp, 2002, p. 661; Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 2003, p. 1). For some, the equivocal nature of media is worrying, as it carries the threat of “a boundless concept” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 12). The debate is described by

these scholars as “confusing, multivocal and heterogeneous,” and deeply characterized by the absence of consensus (Krämer, 2015, p. 27). Weighing in on this “heated debate,” others have provocatively asserted “there are no media,” hence broadening an earlier, similarly negating claim: “There are no mass media” (Horn, 2007, p. 7; Siegert, 1996; see also Siegert, 2015, p. 85).

From the fuzzy boundaries of the concept, we nonetheless see new understandings emerging about media phenomena, especially in relation to spatial meanings associated with the notion of “medium.” It is opportunities for further developments in this direction that I will outline in the final section of this chapter, specifically as it offers grounds for ethical possibilities. To understand the relevance—if not the urgency—of such a development, we must turn to the second problem at hand: namely, the political issues associated with Heidegger and his work.

2 A political problem: Heidegger

Even though the exact extent of Heidegger’s influence on media studies and the contours of the field are not easy to establish, all is not lost to fuzziness. American scholar Thomas Sheehan put it succinctly: “Two facts about Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) are as incontestable as they are complicated: first, that he remains one of the century’s most influential philosophers and, second, that he was a Nazi.” (1988). The statement was made some thirty years ago and, at the time, was hardly breaking news.¹⁸ Nonetheless, those two facts have been further ←239 | 240→complicated by the recent publication of Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks* (2016).¹⁹ This publication brought additional material, and publicity, to an already complex case.²⁰ In a recent essay situating the *Notebooks*, Jeff Malpas thus reiterates the problem: “That Heidegger was a Nazi and that he also held anti-Semitic views ←240 | 241→are simple facts,” he argued, before adding, “[a]s soon as one recognizes the need to clarify what is at issue in talk of Heidegger’s Nazism and anti-Semitism, then the fact that Heidegger was indeed a Nazi and an anti-Semite starts to appear rather more

complicated and much less straightforward” (quoted in Farin and Malpas, 2016, pp. 5–6). This case, which is not only about what Heidegger wrote and said but also about what he did not write and remained silent about, has been and still is being documented by important—if often controversial—efforts which cannot be examined in detail here.²¹

A general awareness of the issue at hand has made its way from the rather specialized corner of continental philosophy to the blinding spotlight of mainstream media.²² It has come in a burst of shards, fragments, and controversial tidbits of information. Those are sometimes treated with care and intelligence. Other times, they seem to be conjured up only to fuel oversimplified judgments. For example, some authors may have a general awareness of Heidegger’s involvement with the National Socialist German Workers’ Party and his membership card, while others may have heard of his alleged fascination with Hitler’s hand. A set of short excerpts from the *Black Notebooks* was translated and circulated online even before the publication of the three volumes in Germany, in 2014. Thus, we may have heard of Heidegger commenting about the “world Jewry” ←241 | 242→(*Weltjudentum*).²³ We’ve read short quotes supporting his reputation as a major philosophical figure of the twentieth century, but also statements from well-known public figures denouncing his dishonesty and political beliefs. Hence, the controversy manifests itself as a difficult tension between being unwilling to deny the importance of his contribution to philosophy, while vehemently refusing to overlook or forgive what he did. This tension found an exemplary expression in a comment shared by French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas: “Despite all the horror that eventually came to be associated with Heidegger’s name—and which will never be dissipated—nothing has been able to destroy in my mind the conviction that the *Sein und Zeit* of 1927 cannot be annulled, no more than can the few other eternal books in the history of philosophy—however much they may disagree” (1998, p. 208). Those facts cannot be glossed over or ignored.

This alone should be enough to indicate just how much of a rigorous and serious effort is needed to adequately assess the full scope of the problem.

To grasp what is at stake, one would need more than a minimal understanding of what historical Nazism, structural fascism, radical nationalism, cult-like Hitlerism, and anti-Semitism each entails, where they overlap and interlock, and how they nonetheless differ.²⁴ For example, the comments made since the publication of the *Black Notebooks* include remarks about “being-historical anti-Semitism,” “cultural anti-Semitism,” and “metaphysical anti-Semitism,” all of them distinguishable from the typology once proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in a different context (Trawny, 2016; Farin and Malpas, 2016, p. 6; Cesare, 2016; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1941). Understanding clearly how all of this intertwined with the “question of being” (*Seinsfrage*), Heidegger’s main philosophical concern during most of his career, at least according to traditional ←242 | 243→readings of his work,²⁵ may very well be just as important an issue. This last task requires knowledge not just of fragments and excerpts, or a selection of essays, but the bulk of the Heideggerian corpus.

Over the years, the constraints imposed by such a situation have informed various strategies to navigate both Heidegger’s philosophy and his political commitment to Nazism and anti-Semitism. One of those strategies is total excommunication of both the thinker and the thought, the persona and the whole of his work. To implement this ban, scholars must not use his name or even one line of his work, unless it is for the specific and explicit purpose of adding to the blame.²⁶ Another strategy consists of bracketing or amputating the political and ideological contaminant while saving part of the philosophy. This treatment may rely on the ignorance or explicit recognition of Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism and anti-Semitism, but in any case, it allows for some of his ideas—deemed unpolitical or at least uncompromised—to be put to use. While the first option is sacrificial in nature, the second is instrumental. Both operate on the assumption that a form of exclusion—total for the former, partial for the latter—represent an adequate solution to a complicated problem.

Like others, I do not think either of those solutions are adequate or satisfactory. On the one hand, I do not find myself in a position where I could competently and rigorously declare all of Heidegger’s philosophy to

be contaminated.²⁷ ←243 | 244→ On the other hand, I am unwilling to accept the idea that parts of it could be conveniently isolated and instrumentalized, while the contentious parts are circumvented. Short of sidestepping this issue, the remaining alternative seems to consist of a head-on confrontation. The difficulties that come with such a task are immense, more so from the perspective of a non-specialist. Considering what is at stake, is this complicated problem better left to the judgment of experts? Or, to phrase it differently, shouldn't media scholars simply avoid Heidegger's work altogether and find alternative ways through problems raised by research on media?

I argue to the contrary. There is both an epistemological and a political necessity to consider Heidegger, not despite his association with fascism and anti-Semitism, but because of it. To be clear, I am not arguing that from the point of view of communication and media studies Heidegger's only interest is found in the problematic aspects of his life, beliefs, and thinking. In another context, I could point out that since existence is foremost coexistence—or *Mitsein*, as Heidegger puts it in section 26 of *Being and Time*—then being together or “being-with” is the originary communicative condition of all things (although Heidegger restricts this condition to the human being alone, that is, to *Dasein*). As such, communication and media studies could and should be concerned with the work of Heidegger if only because they offer a privileged perspective on the question of being *qua* being-with. In all their equivocality, communication and media are indeed concerned with commonality, relationality, in-between-ness, and mediation. If such an argument is carefully developed, it underlines how media and communication studies relate to major aspects of Heidegger's philosophy, and most notably to the *Seinsfrage*. Such an argument would nonetheless need to address Heidegger's political leanings and anti-Semitism. In fact, this problem is, in more than one way, quite intimately related to the issue of “being-with” and community. Hence, it is this political problem that I address here, although briefly, if only to show how this controversy is not a reason to ignore Heidegger's work.

At least two complementary perspectives support the idea that Heidegger's work, political commitments are of legitimate concern for communication and media scholars. The first one is general, and does not depend on the specificities of an academic field or discipline. However, it is of special interest for communication and media studies, as it is concerned with the ways we live together, $\leftarrow 244 \mid 245 \rightarrow$ relate with one another, and organize and share our lives in common. For this argument, this perspective can be viewed as broadly concerned with the political. As such, it is of relevance for everyone, including media and communication scholars. The other perspective is epistemological. It pertains to some of the specific aspects that have shaped and still are shaping the disciplinary fields of mass media research, communication studies, and media studies. I will further outline those two perspectives in order to highlight how ethics can be the site where media and Heidegger, the epistemological and the political, all converge.

First, fascism—of which Nazism can be considered a “permutation” or not (Griffin, 1991, p. 110; Passmore, 2014, p. 21)—is not a private matter, nor an uncommon problem. To the contrary, it is a common problem in both senses of the word: it is at once public (shared) and prevalent (ordinary). Fascism is common in the sense of being public because it concerns us all. More precisely, it is concerned with “us” and it belongs to “us.” It concerns the very possibility of saying “we.”²⁸ As Foucault once argued, fascism is “not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively—but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the $\leftarrow 245 \mid 246 \rightarrow$ very thing that dominates and exploits us” (2002, p. 108).²⁹ Fascism can thus be regarded as a common problem in the specific sense that it is a shared problem, a problem “we” *have* and “we” *are* in common, as it brings us together and tears us apart. As soon as one recognizes that he or she lives a life in common—that is, not exclusively a private life—one recognizes the utmost necessity not to ignore this issue: the issue that “we” are for one another.³⁰ This last observation must be understood not quite simply in the

general sense that “we” represent an issue for one another, but in the specific sense that being together means sharing the conditions of this coexistence as a common issue. In an essay titled “The King is Dead: Martin Heidegger after the *Black Notebooks*,” Gregory Fried concluded with similar concerns: “[w]e may rightly despise Heidegger for his anti-Semitism and Nazism, and his entire body of thought must be reconsidered in light of increasingly decisive evidence of how deeply he adhered to these convictions. But who we are, and who we are going to be as human beings in a newly global world, is very much the question, and we seem allergic even to asking it seriously. As a genuine adversary, Heidegger brings what is at issue into focus; if we don’t raise the question at all and think it through, we will lurch blindly to our fate.” (quoted in Farin and Malpas, 2016, p. 55). Others have similarly argued that Heidegger, even with his fascism and anti-Semitism, is still very much “our” problem, and that casting him away is not an adequate solution (Agamben, 2006, pp. 273–281; Nancy, 2014).

Fascism is also common in the sense that it is not confined to a one-time, exceptional occurrence in our recent history: a monstrous error that happened only once and from which we have been able to stay clear of since. As Mark Neocleous put it, borrowing from Klaus Theweleit, “fascism is in fact a problem of ←246 | 247→the ‘normal’ organization of our lived relations” (1997, p. x). Far from being confined to historical research in some specialized corner of academia, it manifests itself in all corners of our daily lives, informing the experience we have living with one another.³¹ As such it does not concern the few, but the many: populations, crowds, masses, have all been and still are concerned with fascism (Jonsson, 2013).³² It has been and still is intimately linked with some forms of society and community.³³ Today, it is associated with the rise of right-wing extremism, radical nationalism, xenophobia, and violence on most continents.³⁴ Researchers have long been studying how the Internet is being used to spread neo-Nazi and far-right ideologies (Back, Keith, and Solomos, 1996; Thiesmeyer, 1999; Burris, Smith, and Strahm, 2000; Copsey, 2003; Atton, 2006; Caiani and Parenti, 2009;

←247 | 248→Eatwell,1996). During the 2016 election campaign in the United States, it was raised as an issue associated with white supremacy and social media under the euphemistic label “alt-right” (Rosenfeld, 2017; Malmgren, 2017; Lyons, 2017; Nagle, 2017). An incident in the early weeks of 2017 illustrates the way fascism, as an issue, pervades mainstream media outlets. At the time, a video of white supremacist Richard B. Spencer being punched became viral. In the days that followed, it spurred a (mostly) online debate about morality and Nazism, with *The New York Times* titling one of its pieces: “Attack on Alt-Right Leader Has Internet Asking: Is It O.K. to Punch a Nazi?” (Stack, 2017). Following the tragic incidents that took place in Charlottesville on August 11–12, 2017, the discussion about the ways the Internet enables right-wing extremists was once more reignited.

This brings us to the second perspective from where it appears relevant to examine the issue of Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism and fascism. This perspective is epistemological, and more specifically concerned with communication and media studies as academic fields. As I have already suggested, Heidegger’s views on technology represent an obvious point of access. However, there is an even more direct link between the growth of those fields and the history of fascism. This link is not only historical; instead it appears as a continuous issue that runs from the ways far-right ideologies spread on social media today to the role played by mass media in the context of the two world wars in the twentieth century.

Just how important the influence of war and fascism have been to the emergence of both the discipline of communication and the study of media is starting to be more clearly recognized by the development of new historical perspectives in the field (Buxton, 1996; Sproule, 1997; Gary, 1999; Glander, 1999; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004; Pooley, 2008; Pooley and Park, 2013; Turner, 2013; Babe, 2015; Thibault and Trudel, 2015). Specifically, this new research shows that the study of communication did not emerge “out of nowhere during the 1930s and 1940s,” but is intimately linked to collective “anxieties” regarding propaganda and the diffusion of new mass communication technologies between the two world wars

(Buxton, 1996; Gary, 1996, 1999). This new historiography explicitly moves beyond both the Manichean history, centred around the mythical “hypodermic model” (Sproule, 1989; Lubken, 2008; Thibault, 2016), and the “founding fathers” narrative promoted by Wilbur Schramm and others (1963, p. 116; Rogers, 1994; for a critical assessment see Pooley, 2008; Babe, 2015, pp. 99–104). Instead, it relies on archival investigation to provide a more nuanced history concerning the impact of various wars (including the Cold War) and propaganda on the ←248 | 249→birth, shaping, and further development of mass communication research, especially in the United States.

The study of this impact goes beyond explaining how Paul Lazarsfeld—and indeed many European scholars, including some the principal figures of the Frankfurt School—fled Europe to escape the rise of fascism, causing what some have dubbed a “transnational flow of ideas” (Löblich and Averbek-Lietz, 2015 pp. 25–45; see also Sills, 1979, pp. 411–427).³⁵ It also goes beyond the story of single historical figures, such as Guglielmo Marconi, who joined the Italian fascist party in 1923, before becoming a member of the Fascist Grand Council in 1930 (Raboy, 2016, pp. 549–576). Rather, this examination acknowledges how the birth of fascism, in between the two world wars, raised wide-ranging concerns about the use and effects of mass communication technologies in democratic societies, as “it caused people to take seriously the issues surrounding the growth of propaganda and mass communication” (Glander, 1999, p. 15). This anxiety stems from the intersection of the rise of mass society, developments of social sciences, and mutations in modes of government (Gary, 1992). As Fred Turner explains in *The Democratic Surround*, “[w]hen they gazed across the Atlantic to Hitler’s Germany, and, to a lesser extent, Stalin’s Soviet Union and Mussolini’s Italy, American journalists and social scientists saw their long-standing anxieties about the power of mass media harden into a specific fear that newspapers, radio, and film were engines of fascist socialization” (2013, p. 16).

Hence, in his own effort to revisit the traditional historiography of communication and media studies, Brett Gary has underlined the

ambivalent function for communication studies of this unique historical setting, at once perceived as an opportunity and a threat. “The contradictory imperatives of modern liberalism,” he writes, “simultaneous commitment to and fear of the expansion of the modern state, with its information and opinion control apparatus—pervaded the debates of the first generation of communication researchers” (1996, p. 124). Indeed, many were concerned not only with how to prevent the enemies of democracy from using this power against Americans, but also with how to develop beneficial applications without falling prey to its dark power. As it is well known now, those concerns were serious enough to fuel new initiatives in research, sponsored and supported by government agencies and private foundations. Among those private foundations, the new historiography shows just how crucial a role the Rockefeller Foundation came to play, especially to the initial launch of mass ←249 | 250→communication research. It did so by funding the Communication Seminar (also known as the Communication Group). As Gary states, “the evolution of the emerging discipline’s first research model was ineluctably tied to its historical moment. Its history cannot be separated—intellectually, institutionally, or epistemologically—from the impending crisis of World War II” (1999, p. 88).

To emphasize the good faith behind the effort to find useful applications to mass communication, Gary coins the expression “prophylaxis propaganda” (1999, pp. 89, 102, 125). However, as he also clearly shows, this concerted effort cannot obfuscate the fact that despite good faith, or because of it, moving this research effort “in the direction of national security” also represented a risk. As one of the Rockefeller Foundation officers wrote at the time, “[t]here is always a danger that if emergency mechanisms are not recognized as such, that they become permanent” (1999, p. 102). Other officers of the foundation were more explicit, arguing that those research efforts resembled “the methods by which democracy has been destroyed” (Gary, 1996, pp. 139–140). Commenting on a report produced by the foundation titled “Research in Mass Communications,” some officers explicitly called on what they perceived as the “fascistic tendencies” embedded in it (1999, p. 104). Historian of communication and

media studies Jefferson Pooley argues those risks were not entirely avoided as “emergency effort became routinized, through inertia and the subsequent cold war context, into the national security state” (2008, p. 63, n. 46).

Thus the legacy of fascism—as a threat to democracy and a shaping force—informs the fields of communication and media studies up to this day. As “big data” and surveillance studies are gaining more momentum, what Gary wrote more than twenty years ago has not lost any of its relevance: the difficult birth of the field “linked the emergence of mass communication research as a scholarly field with the growth of the surveillance apparatus of the modern national security state” (1996, p. 123). In other words, today’s familiar debates about the impact of the Internet and social media on democracies inherit—without simply duplicating it—from a tortured past. In more than one way, Heidegger’s work and political commitments belong to this long-standing issue because they are concerned with the emergence of new communication technologies (among other technological developments) and as they are, at least partially, entangled in the ideology of fascism. Although the argument cannot be fully developed here, they also belong to it as his philosophy can be viewed as centrally concerned—in a problematic way, as should be clear by now—with contemporary modes or ways of co-belonging or coexistence.

With this background, we can now turn to the final part of the argument. Here, I want to show how the epistemological and political issues we have examined ←250 | 251→ so far expose the crucial importance for an ethical decision. This decision is not about Heidegger, and whether to read his work or not, or whether to engage with his ideas or not. To understand this, ethics must be distinguished from the sphere of morality. This distinction will serve two purposes. First, it will underline how this decision is not about settling on a position: it is not an end-point, but a process. This certainly is not to say that we should be hesitant about fascism and Nazism; quite the contrary. The risk is such that it should be constantly reassessed. We must be careful not to think we can come to a decision once and for all, and forget about it, or get used to it. We must continuously and relentlessly come to a decision, without falling prey to the temptation of believing that

the case is closed. Such a decision allows us to maintain our engagement with the political issues identified above, and hence ourselves. This decision, as a process, opens ourselves to one another. What is thus being held is not so much a given set of values, but the opening itself, as the possibility for “us” to exist. Since the issues identified above concern “us,” the very conditions of our co-belonging, such a decision should indeed be concerned with our ways of coexisting. Second, I will show how such an understanding of ethics relates to space: the opening where we “take place.” In such a spatial configuration, the ethical decision names the conditions of a milieu of existence: it becomes a process of mediation. This idiosyncratic understanding of ethics brings it in line with the study of medium and media.

3 Ethics as mediation

When it comes to “ethics,” the general meaning of the term has come in recent times to be conflated or confused with morals. This conflation has its reasons. Ethics refers to the Greek *ἦθος* (hereafter transliterated as *ēthos*), meaning character.³⁶ To some degree, it is thus equivalent to the Latin *mores* which gives us ←251 | 252→“morals” (also *mœurs* in French).³⁷ Nonetheless, some twentieth-century authors have made a strong argument to distinguish between the two terms. In her striking introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt already distinguishes between rules of conduct and conduct, “the Latin word [*mores*] being associated with rules of behavior, whereas the Greek word [*ēthos*] is derived from *habitat*, like our ‘habits’” (1978 p. 5). Michel Foucault develops a similar line of reasoning in the third part of his Introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of his inquiry, *The History of Sexuality*. He unfolds the many differences between moral codes and the “ethical subject,” arguing that “a rule of conduct is one thing; the conduct that may be measured by this rule is another” (1990, p. 26).³⁸ Paul Ricœur similarly underlines the authoritative nature of “moral” while examining the relationship between “ethics and morality.” He proposes his own differentiation, where he

reserves “the term ‘ethics’ for the aim of an accomplished life and the term ‘morality’ for the articulation of this aim in norms characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint” (1992, p. 170). Jacques Rancière also makes a distinction between ethics and morality, using another point of differentiation: “[b]efore recalling law, morality or value, *ethos* indicates the abode [*séjour*]. Further, it indicates the way of being which corresponds to this abode, the way of feeling and thinking which belongs to whoever occupies any given place” (2006, p. 5). For the issues at hand, it is specifically this spatial aspect of ethics, also hinted at by Arendt, that we shall employ. A few brief observations will suffice, while keeping in mind they do not in any way exhaust the discussion about this richly complex topic.

What is most important to the present argument is the spatial qualities associated with earlier uses of *ēthos* (especially in its plural form, ἦθηα, or *ēthea*). Indeed, before it came to mean “character,” *ēthos* first meant “an accustomed ←252 | 253→seat: hence, in pl., haunts or abodes of animals” (Liddell and Scott, 1901, p. 644).³⁹ Heidegger points to this relation in his 1946 Letter on “Humanism”: “ἦθος means abode, dwelling place” (1998a, p. 269).⁴⁰ In 1984, Charles Chamberlain offered one of the first detailed, although concise, overviews of the spatial meaning of *ēthos* in its plural forms. He observes that if *ēthos* can be understood to mean “character” for most writers after the fifth century (including Aristotle), such a translation hardly makes sense for earlier writers (1984, p. 97). In his argument, he insists on the spatial dimension of the plural *ēthea* in early sixth and fifth century BC writers, such as Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, Herodotus, Hippocrates, and Thucydides. He suggests the word *ēthea* named, for those earlier writers, “an arena or range in which the animal naturally belongs” and, as such, how it was then associated with “the places where animals are usually found” and “animal haunts” (1984, p. 97). Extending its use to humans, the term *ēthos* “refers to the range or arena where someone is most truly at home” as well as to “the arena in which people and animals move” (1984, p. 99; see also Woerther, 2007, p. 34). In a more recent and much more thorough examination of the meaning of ἦθος in Aristotle, Frédérique

Woerther offers additional precision. Although she argues that the spatial meaning does not belong to the “semic core” of ἡθεα, she acknowledges it is an important “contextual seme” (2007, pp. 22–42, 300; my translation).

By themselves, these few observations do not stand as a demonstration, nor do they follow Aristotle’s understanding of ethics.⁴¹ They nonetheless reveal ←253 | 254→ a perspective where ethics is cast as a constitutive horizon for media studies. Indeed, they allow us to sketch the outlines of a perception of ethical decisions as a process of mediation. Ethics can be understood as mediation if the spatial meaning of the word medium is reinstated. When it is, mediation names a process of conditioning and transformation: not only of character, but also of a milieu. In this first part of reconceptualization, mediation becomes the process through which a specific place is made familiar by habituation, and where characters are eventually shaped.

The spatial context associated with such an understanding of ethics does not refer to space in any abstract way. It points to places as they are constantly transformed, conditioned, and accustomed by habits. Conversely, those modes of existence are not random behavior, accidental action, or a matter of fixed repetition. Habits are at once plastic and resilient. If habits change, the accustomed place will not be the same; if the place changes, the habits will likewise transform. Such a perspective runs contrary to the idea that a given milieu has the power to determine unilaterally the character of individuals, societies, or populations dwelling there. This has important consequences for media studies, as it shows that mediation is incompatible both with the idea of media as mere containers or conduits, and with the idea that a container unilaterally conditions its content.⁴² ←254 | 255→

Furthermore, it should be clear now that such ethics, conceived as a continuous process of mediation, of space conditioning, is not reducible to a given set of moral rules, values, or norms that would be external to contextualized and ever-changing ways of life. Moral codes can claim an abstracted nature indifferent to the contingencies of daily existence and the passing of time. Ethics, in the sense discussed here, cannot. Rather, such an understanding of ethics points to the fact that what is ultimately at stake are

precisely those modes or ways of existence or, more aptly, coexistence. When both the ways of life and the milieu where they take place are related to the point of inextricability, ethics is not and cannot be the concern of a single individual. Ethics always names shared characters or dispositions, for there are no such things in isolation. At the very least, a character always marks a relation, a “between,” a “with.” It is never an endpoint, but always an ongoing process of exchange: hence, mediation. In this light, abstract ethics make no sense: they are always actualized or enacted in coexistence as a shared praxis (although by no means necessarily harmonious). They always manifest as a specific context, a given situation: indeed, a site in the making. Hence, mediation as ethics is also about the shaping and conditioning of the milieu we are in⁴³: not just the space between us, but the milieu opens by the fact that “we” happen, “we” take place.

It is worth noting the development of digital technologies and the rise of environmental and ecological concerns—both linked to the intensification of globalization processes—have encouraged the exploration of a wider understanding of the notion of media, including ways that are concerned with the design of space. This exploration further extends, and sometimes questions, the traditional metaphors of media as technological instruments, means, or containers. Hence, for example, David Morley’s recent plea for a “non-media-centric” understanding of media (2009). Morley urges researchers “to transcend ←255 | 256→their narrowly media-centric focus on the technologies for the transmission of information” and to embrace a broader frame of concern (2009, p. 116). This is hardly the first nor only effort by media scholars to claim back the rich conceptual pedigree associated with the notion of “medium.” Others, unaffiliated or marginally affiliated with media studies have expressed an interest in the notion for more than a century.⁴⁴

I have established how the ethical perspective I outlined above does not define “media” in the narrowly instrumental and technical sense it has acquired during the first half of the twentieth century. Instead, it relies on the spatial meaning of the word medium, perceiving it as a dynamic milieu. As such, it is concerned with the milieu we are becoming: the various, ever-

changing spaces we share, and those which keep us apart. It is not an abstracted space, but each time provides the places of our common disposition and mutual customs. It is not the world we live in, as subjects in an objectified container, but the world we are. We are not this world once and for all, but instead continually decide to open ourselves toward one another. It is through this opening that “we” take place at once as parts and whole, singular and plural (Nancy, 2000).⁴⁵ What does it mean regarding the decision to engage Heidegger’s work? In my conclusion, I suggest that such a decision is not only a matter of understanding the philosophical argument of Heidegger, but also an ethical commitment. The decision can be seen as ethical, since it concerns the conditioning, styling, and modification of the milieu we are to ourselves.

4 A Decisive mediation

We have seen how mass media of communication—along with mass media research itself—shares a history with the two world wars of the twentieth century, and with fascism. As we have also seen, some argue that this history is ←256 | 257→ambiguous, at least to one extent. On the one hand, new technologies of mass communication were thought at the time to represent a threat to democracy. On the other hand, efforts were made to find ways to use them as a safeguard of democracy.

The argument for this ambiguity—at once both threat and opportunity—is qualitatively different from the oppositional perspective that works actively to resolve the ambiguity: threat or opportunity, one or the other. This oppositional perspective is an old and enduring trope, opposing worried concerns against enthusiastic discourses, pitting pessimist views against optimistic ones, with a regularity closely matching the endless cycle of technological innovations.⁴⁶ Today it is found in debates about what virtual reality might eventually do to social relations, or what the Internet is currently doing to our brain; just as not so long ago, it was fueled by what television was said to be doing to democracy. This argument, it is possible

to demonstrate, goes back to Plato's criticism of writing in *Phaedrus*, as every student of communication and media studies is likely told.

The alternative to this never-ending feud takes the form of an argument that opens the false dichotomy to ambiguity as the defining trait of technology (see, for example, Esposito, 1995). In turn, this alternative suggests a concept of media that is neither one definition nor another, neither good nor bad, but fundamentally and decisively mediocre, vague, and inauthentic (Oosterling, 2007; Mersch, 2013; Siegert, 2015).⁴⁷ Mediation as a process of creating spaces, or openings, is inherently indefinite. The fuzziness I discussed in the first section can be treated not as a problem, but as a feature. It does not get in the way when we try to understand media for what they really are: instead it is constitutive of them, defining how they are. This mediation adequately answers for the political ambiguity historically tied to technological media. At this point, in this opening, epistemology meets politics. ←257 | 258→

This way of presenting the problems with media and Heidegger blurs the traditional distinction between the object of knowledge and the knowing subject. We are, for ourselves, the issue we must address.⁴⁸ Media, Heidegger, fascism: those topics concern us to the extent that they concern the actual conditions of our various political associations and political dissociation. Given the current global situation, this issue is not merely of theoretical or historical interest. Instead it is of the utmost ethical importance for us, here and now. It certainly does not follow that communication and media scholars are somehow required to concern themselves with Heidegger's work. However, it does follow that Heidegger's work and his political commitments are constitutively concerned with and by an ethical decision.

Before being ethical, such a decision certainly is a matter of understanding the ideas themselves. It demands that we pay attention to the words he coined and the many concepts he developed. It likely requires a knowledge of the different ways in which his texts were edited and published. The transformations his arguments underwent during the span of his life should also be examined and weighed to identify consistencies and

contradictions. This interpretative rigour is a necessary hermeneutical commitment; it is by itself an important and serious task. Attentiveness is just as crucial for non-specialists—among whom I must place myself—who do not carry Heidegger’s work at the heart of their main research effort. Often, as a result, only a few essays are studied, if thoroughly, but as such they remain abstracted from a much larger body of work, and sometimes also from the larger historical context in which they were produced. ←258 | 259→ Additionally, when knowledge of German is missing, those texts are accessed through translations.⁴⁹ This, I infer, is likely the situation many media scholars find themselves in when they are working with, against, and beyond Heidegger’s ideas. However, given the political problems I discussed above, the decision that is at stake here cannot be reduced or limited to hermeneutics alone. Instead, this decision is also, to a large extent, an ethical matter.

Another way to make the argument is to suggest that hermeneutics itself—the issue of understanding Heidegger’s ideas—does not float above political concerns, nor does it take place outside of history, from some privileged position. Instead, the hermeneutical concern is at once an ethical one. Although they do not subscribe to the spatial understanding of ethics developed here, some authors have highlighted how it relates to hermeneutics. Pinning an ethics of interpretation against a Habermasian ethics of communication, Vattimo observed in *The Transparent Society* “that hermeneutics is distinctly inclined toward ethics” (1992, p. 105). More recently, Dennis J. Schmidt’s understanding of “hermeneutics as original ethics” takes on ethical concerns in the work of Heidegger and finds crucial development in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s work (2008, pp. 35–47). He argues that Gadamer’s hermeneutics is fundamentally concerned with thinking through what Heidegger called “originary ethics.” Indeed, while it remains a subject of debate, a significant number of commentators have called attention to Heidegger’s discussion about ethics in his work, prior to and beyond the treatment given in his 1946 Letter on Humanism.⁵⁰

This comes as a surprise when “ethics” is conflated with “moral,” or when Heidegger’s concern with the “question of being” is associated with

an ethereal abstraction. Indeed, it would be hard to try to reconcile Heidegger's political commitments and personal outlook with moral guidance. Additionally, if $\leftarrow 259 \mid 260 \rightarrow$ ontology is understood as being strictly concerned with what is essential, then understandably it has nothing to do with contingencies of history or politics, let alone ethics. This is not, however, how Heidegger understood ontology. If the question of being (*Seinsfrage*) is considered from a practical perspective, then the considerations of ethics in Heidegger appear less surprising. In other words, the ethical dimension of Heidegger's work makes sense if "being" or, more to the point for the discussion at hand, "being-with" (*Mitsein*) is understood as the concrete issue that it is. Hence my proposition to understand ethics from a spatial perspective, as a process of mediation. An interpretation of Heidegger's work must not only put it in context, but also must acknowledge its situation: the specific ways in which the process of interpretation itself takes place, being opened by a shared concern and, in turn, opening the possibility for collective care. This decisive mediation concerns our modes of existence, how we are together in our daily existence, the way we live, our customs, and indeed our ethics. It is worth noting how this ethical perspective regarding coexistence—while not necessarily cast in a spatial perspective— is not restricted to Heidegger alone. It belongs to a twentieth-century tradition—often influenced by and critical of Heidegger's work, it is true—that has attempted to explore the relationship between ethics and "first philosophy" or ontology (Lévinas, 1989; Nancy, 1999; Desmond, 2001; Taylor, 2003; Esposito, 2010, pp. 86–111, Przyłębski, 2017, pp. 43–62).

The ethical issue at hand in the interpretation of Heidegger's work is consequently not entirely foreign to an ethical issue that is also of concern for Heidegger. This relationship certainly is not one of identity, as "our" attitude toward fascism and anti-Semitism precisely does not, and must not, coincide with Heidegger's attitude. The relation might be described as a rupture, dissonance, or dislocation. It is nonetheless a fracture we share, one that is still constitutive to some extent of how we are toward one another. Hence the ethical decision to think with and beyond him,⁵¹ using the

knowledge of the texts we can access, and in ignorance of the material that remains to be published.⁵² This decision must be constantly ←260 | 261→reassessed and reopened. As such, it asks for a sustained and insistent attentiveness. The decision is endlessly transitive and must be maintained as a possibility, an opening against all definitive closure or bans.⁵³ The decision is a situation we create and shape for and through the ways we relate.

This, at least, is one way to conceive of engaging with the issues presented by Heidegger and his work. This engagement, while being concerned with technological artifacts and systems, is at once epistemological and political. In such a light, it casts ethics as a decisive mediation and is, for this reason, of the utmost relevance for the study of media.

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- 1 Bernhard Siegert, “Cacography or Communication? Cultural Techniques in German Media Studies,” *Grey Room*, Vol. 29 (2007), p. 28.
- 2 John Hartley, ed., *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 142–143. This entry explicitly restricts the definition to processes involving “human semiosis” and implicitly restricts “communication” to a process of transmission. For a divergent take on the meaning of the word “communication,” see Derrida (Limited Inc., pp. 1–12).

- 3 “medium, n. and adj.,” OED Online, June 2017, Oxford University Press, Oct. 27, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115772>
- 4 “media, n.2,” OED Online, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115635>
- 5 Artifacts or instruments, equipment, apparatus: here, the important distinctions that can be made between all these terms are left aside.
- 6 Media as material means or a system of material means for communication in a transmission process: see Marcel Danesi, *Dictionary of Media and Communications* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), p. 192. The way “system” is understood here is distinct from the system theory developed by Luhmann regarding media (see Jesper Tække and Michael Paulsen, “Luhmann and the Media,” *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research* Vol. 26, No. 49 (2010): 1–10).
- 7 Don Ihde briefly comments Heidegger’s familiarity with “the beginnings of late modern communication technologies” in his book, *Heidegger’s Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives* (Fordham University Press, 2010, pp. 4, 128–139).
- 8 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 95–102.
- 9 Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 85–87.
- 10 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 1977.
- 11 See, for example, Stiegler (*Technics and Time*, 1998), Babich (“The Essence of Questioning,” 1999), and Ihde (*Heidegger’s Technologies*, 2010), to name a few.
- 12 Peters explains in the introduction of his book *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) that he uses “communication theory” in a “loose, ahistorical sense.” This is what allows him to argue that “communication” was a central concept for philosophy in the 1920s. Among the “[m]ajor works probing the possibility and limits of communication,” he lists *Being and Time* alongside Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontent*, Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*, and others (2000, p. 10).
- 13 Furthermore, it is worth noting this survey is concerned specifically with technological from the perspective of media. The secondary literature pertaining to the broader issue of technology as such in Heidegger’s philosophy is significant and keeps expanding. Although two decades old, Borgmann and Mitcham’s “critical review of the literature” on the topic represents a good starting point (“Critical Review,” 1987). At the time of writing yet another collection is forthcoming under the title *Heidegger on Technology*, which promises to offer “the first comprehensive and definitive account of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of technology” (Wendland, Merwin and Hadjioannou, 2018).
- 14 Those latter three entries having been authored, in order, by Peter Simonson and John Durham Peters, John Durham Peters, and Sean Cubitt.
- 15 All four are found in an entry on “postmodernism” penned by Frederick Jameson.
- 16 A more rigorous study should comb a defined set of communication journals for Heidegger’s name, based, for example, on the SCIMAGO Journal & Country Rankings. In the *Journal of Communication*, the highest rank in the category for “communication,” a search for Heidegger returned 35 results between the years 1973 and 2012. There were 46 results in *Communication Theory* (fourth in rank) spread between 1991 and 2016, 29 results in *New Media and Society* (fifth) between 2003 and 2016, and none in *Communication Research* (seventh) for the same

time period. Those numbers would certainly require further exploration to increase their relevance for the issue at hand.

- 17 The question of just how much an influence can be rigorously established presents its own set of problems, the first having to do with search parameters: is explicitly mentioning the name of Martin Heidegger the only acceptable marker? Stanley Cavell, for example, is an important figure in cinema and media studies who was strongly influenced by Heidegger's work. The title of one of his most renowned books, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, was inspired by Heidegger, yet in it Heidegger's name appears on only six pages (Cavell, 1971).
- 18 Heidegger's involvement with Nazism was common knowledge during his lifetime and subject to scholarly criticism even then. Marcuse publicly attacked the political involvement of Heidegger's existentialism as early as 1934 (2009, pp. 1–30). In 1940, Vivian Jerauld McGill, founding editor of the Marxist journal *Science & Society*, examined Heidegger's "blindness" in a wider essay on the state of philosophy in Nazi Germany (1940). In 1946, a former student of Heidegger, Karl Löwith, published an essay titled "Les implications politiques de la philosophie de l'existence chez Heidegger" ("The Political Implications of Heidegger's Existentialism") in an issue of *Les temps modernes* (Wolin, 1991, pp. 167–185). In 1948, Günther Anders, former husband of Hannah Arendt, published a vehement charge against what he perceived as the "pseudo-concreteness of Heidegger's philosophy." Anders does not criticize Heidegger's involvement with Nazism explicitly. He takes a different angle, arguing that "moral or political participation or action [...] has become extinct in Heidegger's philosophy" (1948, p. 350). He further points to "the emptiness of [Heidegger's] moral rigorism" (1948, p. 361). A review published by Jürgen Habermas in 1953 bears an unequivocal title: "Thinking with Heidegger and Against Heidegger: On the Publication of Lectures Dating from 1935" (Wolin, 1991, pp. 186–197). Theodor W. Adorno's own well-known *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie* was published in 1964 (1973).
- 19 At the time of writing, three volumes of the *Black Notebooks* have been published by Vittorio Klostermann. Those three volumes have been translated by Richard Rojcewicz and published in English by Indiana University Press under the titles *Ponderings II–VI: Black Notebooks 1931–1938* (2016), *Ponderings VII–XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939* (2017a), and *Ponderings XII–XV: Black Notebooks 1939–1941* (2017b). The *Black Notebooks* are published as part of Heidegger's *Complete Works* (*Gesamtausgabe*) and correspond to volumes 94 to 96. For more information, see Escudero (2015).
- 20 For reviews of and discussion about *The Black Notebooks*, see Krell (2015, pp. 127–160), Trawny (2015), Farin and Malpas (2016), Nancy (2017), Mitchell and Trawny, eds. (2017). A series of unconnected conferences also brought together scholars around the issues raised by the newly published notebooks: on April 8, 2014, at the Goethe Institute in New York City, Peter Trawny (who edited the three volumes of the *Black Notebooks*) discussed the issue with Roger Berkowitz, Academic Director of the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College; September 5–6, 2014, at Emory University, in Atlanta (Peter Trawny was keynote, while panelists included Bettina Bergo, Robert Bernasconi, Eduardo Mendieta, Richard Polt and Tom Rockmore); September 11–12, 2014, at CUNY, in New York (panelists included Richard Wolin, Emmanuel Faye, and Thomas Sheehan); January 22–25, 2014, at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in Paris (panelists included Alain Finkielkraut, Jean-Claude Milner, Peter Sloterdijk, François Fédiér, Peter Trawny, Barbara Cassin, Donatella di Cesare, Babette Babich, and many others). Recordings of those public panel discussions are available online. Proceedings of the conference held in Paris were published in 2015.

- 21 Those contributions started during Heidegger's lifetime and continue to this day. While an exhaustive list is beyond the scope of this chapter, the following references can serve as indicators: Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), Farías (1989), Wolin (1990), Sluga (1993), Faye (2011), Janicaud (2015), and Nancy (2017). As stated, some of this work has been and still is subject to heated debate.
- 22 English and French venues which dealt with the publication of the Notebooks in the spring of 2014 include (but are not limited to) *The Guardian*, *The National Post*, *Slate*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Telegraph*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Le Monde*, and *Libération*. This relatively recent media coverage triggered by the publication of parts of the *Black Notebooks* could alone support research also titled "Heidegger and Media," although with a likely different outcome. In an earlier, online version of his examination of the Black Notebooks, Gregory Fried observed, "[p]eople delight in the tabloid spectacle of a once-famous figure made infamous by their own failings" ("The King Is Dead," 2014). Babette Babich commented more specifically on the "digitalization" of the controversy, noting, "today's Heidegger scandal transpires on Facebook, via video, via shared online articles and posts: instant announcement with instant commentary on no less than three dedicated Facebook Group pages" ("Heidegger's Black Night," 2016a, pp. 66–67). She remains one of the few observers who has refused to ignore the intimate relation between those modes of mediation and the core of the controversy: "What is the effect of the medium of dissemination and expression on reflection?" ("Heidegger's Black Night," 2016b, pp. 66–67).
- 23 *Weltjudentum* is sometimes translated as "world Judaism." There are important discussions about the translation problems of this expression into French (Trawny, 2015, translator's foreword) and into English (Babich, "Heidegger's Black Night," 2016a, pp. 63–64).
- 24 Ernesto Laclau opens a chapter of *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* dedicated to "Fascism and Ideology" by quoting from Ortega y Gasset: "'Fascism has an enigmatic countenance because in it appears the most counterposed contents [...] Whichever way we approach fascism, we find that it is simultaneously one thing and the contrary, it is A and not-A [...]" (quoted in Laclau, 1977, pp. 81–82). The first line of Ian Kershaw's preface to the third edition of his study, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* underlines another aspect of this problem: "[s]cholarly research on Nazism has produced a literature so immense that even experts cannot hope to master all of it" (1993, p. vii).
- 25 What constitutes the core of Heidegger's inquiry—*die Sache selbst*, according to an expression used in *Being and Time* (34)—has been and is still being challenged, at least by the American reception of his work. This challenge takes the form of a call for a "paradigm shift" in Heideggerian studies (Sheehan, 2014).
- 26 This is the position held by Christian Fuchs, who concluded a recent journal article with those words: "It is now also the moment where scholars should consider stopping to eulogise and reference Heidegger when theorising and analysing the media, communication, culture, technology, digital media, and the Internet" (2015, p. 75). Fuchs references Heidegger's work, critically, in subsequent publications (2016, 2017).
- 27 "Contamination" is the issue raised—and the vocabulary used—by Peter Trawny in his book *Heidegger and The Myth of Jewish World Conspiracy* (2014). The metaphor of contamination carries its own set of problems, as it involves at its premise the idea of an uncontaminated thought or, for that matter, an uncontaminated life. The consequence of such a view should be carefully weighed: it operates based on the opposition between clean and dirty, pure and impure, which has been used by Nazi rhetoric and political discourse in general (Perry, 1983; Mutsaers, 2016). Trawny briefly acknowledged the issue without developing its consequences

(“Heidegger and the Myth,” 2014, pp. 12–13). This issue is more than tangentially related to the study of communication (when understood as the process opposite to immunization) and media studies (as they were once associated with medical metaphors, such as the “hypodermic” metaphor, which I will address later).

- 28 The condition that allows for the production of a “we”—thus of political synthesis—has received renewed attention in recent years, both by English and French scholars (Geffroy, 1985; Vogel, 1994; Pagano, 2013; Garcia, 2016; Macé, 2017). In 2013, the issue was the central topic for the conference *Discovering the “We”: The Phenomenology of Sociality* held in Dublin. Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont first pointed out the relationship between fascism and the utterance of a “we” (1936, pp. 236–241). Jean-Luc Nancy’s main effort since the late 1970s has focused on this very problem through a re-examination of the notion of “community.” In *Being Singular Plural*, a central contribution to this effort, he observes, “this is us, we who are supposed to say we as if we know what we are saying and who we are talking about” (2000, pp. xii–xiii). Recent events surrounding the election of President Donald Trump have shown just how accurate his diagnostic still is. While Richard B. Spencer—a known spokesperson for the far right in the United States—was addressing a conference in Washington in November 2016, a large screen featured the slogan for his presentation: “Become Who We Are” (Rappeport and Weiland, 2016). In his book *On Tyranny* written in December 2016 and published just weeks after the United States presidential inauguration, American historian Timothy Snyder, who wrote extensively on the issue of fascism, observed, “[w]e see ourselves as a city on the hill, a stronghold of democracy, looking out for threats that come from abroad. But [...] human nature is such that American democracy must be defended from Americans who would exploit its freedoms to bring about its end.” (2017, p. 27).
- 29 Foucault’s statement regarding “the fascism in us all” may sound provocative. It is reminiscent of another similar observation, shared this time by Roland Barthes at the occasion of the Inaugural Lecture he delivered at the Collège de France on January 7, 1977: “But language—the performance of a language system—is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech” (1979, p. 5). Barthes’s observation offers yet another angle from which fascism should appear especially interesting for communication and media scholars.
- 30 This is Werner Jaeger’s well-known conception of the dual life in archaic Greece: “Now, every citizen belongs to two orders of existence; and there is a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own (ἴδιον) and what is communal (κοινόν). Man is not only ‘idiotic,’ he is also ‘politic.’ As well as his ability in his own profession or trade, he has his share of the universal ability of the citizen, πολιτικὴ ἀρετή, by which he is fitted to co-operate and sympathize with the rest of the citizens in the life of the polis.” (1945, p. 111).
- 31 Sadly, I wrote this chapter during the events and aftermath of the Charlottesville, NC, Unite the Right rally, when various far-right groups clashed with counter-protesters, leaving one dead and many injured. While the U.S. President was calling for unity (“Let’s come together as one!” [sic]), the far-right protestors were chanting “one people, one nation” (Wang, 2017; Scherer, 2017). At the time of writing, the normalization of fascism was not a matter of theoretical discussion: for many in the United States, it felt like an impending if not immediate threat.
- 32 The growth of cities that accompanied the industrial revolution raised concerns about the psychology of the crowd that led to well-known studies. Some of those studies became entangled in the development of fascism itself (Le Bon, 1896; Tarde, 1962), while others explicitly targeted it (Bataille, 1979; Reich, 1946).

- 33 It is worth remembering the bond that brings together community and fascism, especially as ideologies (Kitchen, 2008; Pine, 2017). Thomas Kühne has examined the relationship between the desire for a communal belonging (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and crime committed in the name of an ethno-national unity under Hitler (2013). Already in 1939, Svend Ranulf made the argument that founders of sociology—including Ferdinand Tönnies and Émile Durkheim—were the true precursors of fascism: “indulgence in glorifications of the *Gemeinschaft* and in deprecation of the *Gesellschaft* is equivalent to a piece of fascist propaganda unsupported by genuine science” (1939, p. 34). In France, the very efforts of the members of the Collège de Sociologie to save their community from fascism raised serious issues (Falasca-Zamponi, 2006). This may help explain why Walter Benjamin was openly critical of their activities and also why, despite Georges Bataille’s explicit and active resistance to fascism, Benjamin once told him “At bottom, you’re working for fascism!” (Agamben, 1998, p. 113; Lacoue-Labarthe, 2007, p. 66).
- 34 The relationship between fascism and nationalism cannot be that of a straightforward identification: there are clearly elements of fascism and nationalism that do not overlap. Nonetheless, there are active ultranationalist parties that have been widely and explicitly associated with fascism, such as Golden Dawn, a political party in Greece (registered in 1993, the party holds 17 seats in the Hellenic Parliament at the time of writing).
- 35 Everett Rogers put it the most bluntly: “Two of Hitler’s direct contributions to American communication science were Kurt Lewin and Paul F. Lazarsfeld” (1986, p. 101).
- 36 In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains how ἦθος “comes into being as a consequence of ἔθος, on account of which it even gets its name by a small inflection from ἔθος” (*Nic. Eth.* 1103a.14). For Aristotle, ἔθος—different from ἦθος only by the first accented letter—means “habit.” Hence, ἔθος and ethics derive from or constitute a modification of habit (Woerther, 2007, p. 144, n. 33). In his translation, H. Rackham similarly observed in a note, “It is probable that ἔθος, ‘habit’ and ἦθος, ‘character’ (whence ‘ethical,’ moral) are kindred words” (in Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 1934, p. 70). In a newer translation, Joe Sachs further remarked, “[h]ow the condition meant by character derives from habit is more complex” (in Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 2002, p. 22). The details of the relationship between the two words—ἔθος and ἦθος—is being partly discussed by Aristotle in the subsequent section of his *Ethics*. In contemporary times, this discussion has been reopened mainly by scholars interested in Aristotle’s treatment of rhetoric. Further discussions about how the two orthographies could be related are found in Petit (1999), Frobish (2003), and Woerther (2005, 2007). For thorough discussions of the relationship between habituation, habit, and character, see Vergnières (1995) and Lockwood (2013). For a good overview of previous effort and examination of the relationship between the two Greek words and its implication for rhetoric, see Miller (1974).
- 37 See, for example, Sidgwick (1988, p. 11) and Dewey (1932, p. 3).
- 38 See also his 1984 interview, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” where he further develops the concept of ἔθος as it was understood in ancient Greece (1997, pp. 281–301).
- 39 Similar definitions are found in French etymological dictionaries as well (Bailly, 1935, p. 894; Chantraine, 1968, pp. 407–408). In Boisacq, the article for ἦθος references back to the article for ἔθος, where the spatial meaning is nonetheless listed among the meanings of the term (1916, p. 218). In a more recent account of the etymology of the words, the articulation of the slight difference between ἔθος and ἦθος is also addressed (Beekes, 2010, p. 511). At the time of writing, Woerther’s remains the most thorough philological examination (2005, 2007).
- 40 He does so in a discussion about fragment DK B119 from Heraclitus: “ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων” (“human’s ἔθος is his daimon”). Although it cannot be discussed here, the passage is

important for the issues at hand, as it is prompted by a remark shared by Jean Beaufret regarding the relationship between ontology and ethics. Heidegger's comments take the form of an answer to a question he remembers being asked: "When are you going to write an ethics?" (1998, p. 268).

- 41 Other paths allow us to relate the space-shaping process—mediation—to ethics. For example, keeping with Plato and Aristotle, it would be worth exploring the relationship between μέθεξις (participation) and μεταξύ (between, amongst, amid), especially given the proximity of ēthos and hexis (Gadamer, 2000; Nancy, 2007; Alloa, 2009). This is not exclusive to Western philosophy either, as shown in the work of Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji regarding ethics (1996; see especially his discussion of the etymology of ningen, the Japanese word for "human being").
- 42 In another context, this would require a discussion about Aristotle's hylomorphic scheme. Instead, it will suffice to point to the long-lasting idea that a milieu of existence determines a character. Such a conception can be found in a wide variety of authors from ancient Greece through the medieval period, all the way to early modernity: Herodotus, Hippocrates, Ibn Khaldun, Herder, and Taine all supported this view. For a general "outline of the history of the idea of milieu," see Koller (1918). Two further observations are worth noting. Mediation as ethics, as it is being discussed here, is thus incompatible with the idea that a specific character could be grounded in a specific place once and for all. Ideas that seek to assign an essential identity (often ethnical) to a geographical location are always at risk of devolving into dangerous ideologies. This was the case with Nazi ideology as it championed the slogan "Blut und Boden." The exact implication of this slogan for Heidegger's philosophy is outside the scope of this chapter and has already received a significant amount of attention (see, for example, Harries, 1976; Malpas, 2006, pp. 17–27; Bernasconi, 2010). Finally, it should be clear that such a processual mediation does not coincide with Kittler's often-quoted idea that "media determine our situation" (1999, p. xxxix). This is not to say, however, that such an idea is incompatible with a treatment of technology; quite the contrary. It takes the issue of technics seriously as a condition—not an instrument—of existence, as Nancy once argued, "existing is technological through and through" (2003, p. 24).
- 43 The difference between milieu as a centre and milieu as an intermediary field has been examined by Georges Canguilhem in his book *The Knowledge of Life*. In a chapter titled, "The Living and his Milieu," Canguilhem links the discovery of our medial condition to the process through which we were forced to abandon the idea that human beings occupy an exceptional position in the universe. The decentering, as he explains, comes with the realization that "[man] is no longer in the middle [milieu] of the world, but he is a milieu" (2008, p. 117; emphasis in the original). This discussion on milieu was picked up by Michel Serres in his major doctoral thesis on Leibniz (1968, pp. 673–683), and more recently by Pierre Macherey (2017). For more discussion on the history and evolution of the concept of "milieu," see Chien (2007), Gandolfo (2008), and Feuerhahn (2009).
- 44 Theoretical interest in the notion of medium encompasses a wide variety of approaches, including Fritz Heider's epistemology of "thing and medium" (1925), Robert E. Park's concept of the city (1925), the idea of "medium specificity" discussed by art theorists (Greenberg, 1993), the emergence of various media ecologies (Fuller, 2005), the city as medium in German theory (Kittler and Griffin, 1996), man as medium (Oosterling, 2000), intermediality, médiologie (Debray, 2000), médiance (Berque, 1990), the recent emergence of Medienphilosophie (Mersch, 2016; Krämer, 2015), medium as a concept of sociology (Tosini,

- 2006), media as living circumstances (Canguilhem, 2008; Sloterdijk, 2009), and medium as ambiance (Spitzer, 1942; Somaini, 2016).
- 45 Jean-Luc Nancy's essay "Being Singular Plural" is an explicit attempt to move beyond Heidegger's existential analytic, toward a co-existential analytic (2000).
 - 46 For an analysis of how this opposition played out within the Frankfurt School's assessment of mass media, see Negt and Adelson's rigorous overview (1978).
 - 47 There is a lot more to say about this, from Charles S. Peirce's remarks about the vagueness of communication, to Heidegger's observation about the averageness (*Durchschnittlichkeit*) of language. Here, it will suffice, if only suggestively, to recall Wittgenstein's discussion about a question he asked himself in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "But is a blurred concept a concept at all?" (1963, p. 34). Given the opportunity, it would be possible to show how this structural and functional ambiguity is also at work in the concept of communication at least since the Pythagoreans' understanding of what "common" ("κοινόν") meant.
 - 48 "We are": this is an ontological proposition, but from an ontology quite distinct from the "first philosophy" laid out by Aristotle, and more akin to Heidegger's treatment of the question of being. It is the case because its logic is one where the essential is found in the existentiell or, to put it in other words, where the essence of being is entirely in the modes of existence. It is akin to Heidegger, but also different. If it were developed, it would put an emphasis on mediality, whereas Heidegger's crucial observations on *Mitsein* in *Being and Time* were and remain in the shadow of his sustained examination of *Dasein*. This emphasis on mediality would further mean a distancing from anthropocentric views, and a renewed attention to space (as place, milieu, site, topos, etc.). For all those reasons, it must be noted that existing propositions to the effect "that media are our situation," that "we are media and of media," or that "[m]edia are our infrastructures of being" have yet to fully engage what this means in the long history pertaining to the question of being (Mitchell and Hansen, 2010, p. xxii; Parikka, 2010, p. xxvii; Peters, 2015, p. 15). Developments in that direction can be found in Peter Sloterdijk's treatment of media as it appears in various works, but most centrally in his "Spheres" trilogy (2011, 2014, 2016).
 - 49 Elsewhere, it would be possible to argue that the knowledge of German is not sufficient by itself to guarantee a rigorous—certainly not a more authentic—access to the text. In other words, one can be fluent in German and yet still stumble amid Heidegger's unfamiliar ideas. This observation pertaining to the opacity of language is a point where some of Heidegger's ideas meet with issues of concern in communication and media studies.
 - 50 For indicative purposes only, as a more exhaustive literature review would require its own analysis, see Caputo (1971), Bernstein (1992, pp. 79–141), Vogel (1994), Hodge (1995), Olafson (1998), Nancy (1999), Paley (2000), Lewis (2005), Brook (2009), Esposito (2010, pp. 86–111), Webb (2011), Gak (2015), Artemenko (2016), and Babich (2016a). For a more thorough bibliography of texts published between 1979 and 1999 that deal with the questions of ethics and co-existence in Heidegger, see Annalisa Caputo's exhaustive bibliography (2001, pp. 142–147).
 - 51 Others have argued for the necessity to pit Heidegger against himself. This was Jürgen Habermas's proposition in the 1953 review I mentioned in note 18. This position is sustained in the foreword Habermas wrote for the German edition of Victor Farías's book, *Heidegger and Nazism* (1989). Jeff Malpas makes a similar proposition when he suggests his project be read "as setting Heidegger against Heidegger" (2016, p. 20, emphasis in the original).
 - 52 As of 2017, of the 102 volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, eleven volumes have not yet been published by Vittorio Klostermann (Frankfurt am Main). Some of the published volumes

have yet to be translated into English.

- 53 A similar argument is made by Tracy B. Strong in the Introduction to his *Politics without Vision* (2012, pp. 1–5). It is also raised by Peter E. Gordon in his review of Emmanuel Faye’s *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–1935* (2010). For an in-depth discussion about the conception of decision as “opening,” specifically in the context of reading Heidegger, see Jean-Luc Nancy’s essay “The Decision of Existence” (1993).^{←277 | 278→}^{←278 | 279→}