

## Not a Wikipedia CV

Siegfried Zielinski

In **1969/70** and **1972/73** I studied theatre studies, new German philology, linguistics, sociology, philosophy and political science at the Philipps-Universität Marburg. My most important teachers there were Gert Mattenklott, Hans-Heinz Holz, Wolfgang Abendroth, Jörg Jochen Berns and Joachim Hintze. Learning, however, took place very much outside the seminar rooms and lecture halls, on and behind the theatre stage of the university, in Marburg's jazz club, in Marxist reading circles and self-organised media theory reading groups, as well as on the streets. Often there were several demonstrations a week - especially against the Vietnam War, against occupational bans for left-wing intellectuals, for the improvement of the social situation of many students. As an editor of the "marburger blätter" I published my first agit-prop texts with a media-critical orientation and worked with others to establish media studies teaching and research at the humanities faculty. At night we played improvised music on instruments we didn't necessarily know how to play, and I painted obsessively, e.g. fictional portraits or large-format decors for the studio stage, where I worked with Bernd Eilert on a production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, among other things, and helped with the legendary stage play about Arnold Hau. - I had to interrupt my studies because the German state - after my successful refusal of military service - forced me to work for one and a half years in a nursing home for the mentally and physically seriously ill. There I learned how to wash corpses, how morphine makes the worst pain a little more bearable, and that *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx in Braille fills a small truck.

The narrowness of the medieval German university town in Hesse and the prospect of being able to deal with questions to the media on a professional level and critically at the Technical University of Berlin drove me to West Berlin in **1972/73**. Since I had no income or scholarship, I first worked as an assistant to the gallery owners Lietzow & Hartmann in Charlottenburg. Here I framed, packaged, and sold paintings by the Syrian-born painter Marwan, the young Berlin savages of the time (Wolfgang Petrick, Klaus Vogel-sang), or by Post-Romanticists such as Richter, Fußmann, Kienholz, or Dittberner. Selling the paintings was easy for me, so the friendly owners offered me the management of one of the galleries - for an at the time incredible 6,000 DM a month. I decided to accept Friedrich Knilli's offer to work for him and his team at the Technical University as a tutor. The monthly income for this was 300 DM. Because parallel to the work in the gallery I had taken up my studies at the chair of the Austrian mechanical engineer and radio theorist and his assistant Erwin Reiss. The latter's first media studies department at a German university consistently continued the "Institute for

Language in the Technical Age" that Walter Höllerer had founded in 1961. I focused my studies on the appropriation of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (especially Adorno & Horkheimer), the intensive examination of sociological and philosophical approaches (Jürgen Habermas, Horst Holzer, Franz Dröge, Gerhard Maletzke, Will Teichert), US-Americans such as Harold Laswell, Claude Shannon, Sven Windahl or Eliuh Katz, the study of the developing Cultural Studies in Birmingham (Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Stephen Heath et al. et al.) as well as the protagonists of advanced cultural and media thought from the period between the world wars of the 20th century (Siegfried Kracauer, Bela Balazs, Bertolt Brecht, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Dziga Vertov, Eisenstein, Kuleshov & Pudovkin, Walter Benjamin, Rudolf Arnheim. As Knilli's collaborator, however, I also quickly became familiar with thematic fields and research that later became fundamental to my media archaeological ideas and concepts. These included the histories of proletarian theater and print media, above all the workers' radio movement, as well as an intensive acquaintance with the fascinating cinema archaeologies of Ceram (Kurt Marek) or Zglinicki, as well as Sigfried Gideon's *Mechanization Takes Command* or René Gustav Hocke's studies of Mannerism. I was able to expand my media theoretical considerations in Roland Posner's semiotics seminars or the lectures on the history of technology at the Technical University. I also studied humanities at the Free University of Berlin with Wolfgang Fritz Haug (*Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*), Klaus Holzkamp (*Sensual Cognition*) and the critical political scientist Wolf-Dieter Narr. I experienced Dietmar Kamper later, as he had only moved from Marburg to Berlin in 1979.

During my student days in Berlin I learned with Knilli, Reiss, Volker Spiess, Bodo Rolka and the friends of Elefanten Press Galerie how to make books, magazines and even a video channel. Our channel was called *BAF-Besser als Fernsehen*. It was short-lived. I supervised and further developed an experimental video studio that had existed since 1964. In dialogue with Peter Glotz, who was the science senator in Berlin at the time, I designed an audiovisual laboratory that would serve as a production facility for all the universities in the western part of the city. Since the academic institutions were already in fierce competition, the realization was delayed until Glotz left the city. I was allowed to meet Heiner Müller, Andrzej Wirth, Umberto Eco, Atze Brauner or Harry Kramer, who each made a strong impression on me in their own way.

The last years of my studies at Knilli's department were marked by an intense engagement with the infamous anti-Semitic film from Nazi Germany, Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß*, as well as the US television series on the *Holocaust*. In the tradition of the workers' radio movement, we organized listening and viewing evenings in which we discussed both the film and the television series with a wide variety of groups - from young trade unionists to conservative and right-wing groups to young intellectuals from Palestine

who lived in England. **In 1979** with a few others I made the documentary 16mm film "Responses to HOLOCAUST in Western Germany" as writer and director, and was invited by numerous universities and Jewish institutions in the USA. Above all, the discussions with Holocaust survivors in New York, San Francisco or Milwaukee, who often spoke to Germans again for the first time after the War, are deeply engraved in my memory. The unassuming documentary, which ends with a morning roll call of Bundeswehr soldiers with then German President and ex-Nazi Carstens, was added to the collection of the Museum of Broadcasting in New York. That same year I graduated with a thesis on "the devil's director," Veit Harlan, which was published as my first monograph in **1981**. I took the oral exams with Knilli in the fall of **1979** in a taxi to Tegel Airport, from where we took off for New York.

In the early **1980s**, I initially worked as a freelance writer before setting up the first project-oriented degree course in Media Studies & Media Consulting at the TU Berlin together with Friedrich Knilli. During this time, I produced video films with highly motivated and extremely creative students, among others about everyday life and resistance under fascism or the British TV station "Channel Four" (**1985**), which initially had a strong cultural and artistic orientation. For this we interviewed Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, Stuart Hood and many others in London. In the practical media projects numerous printed works critical of the then new media were produced, such as the book brochure "Tele-Visions - Media Times" (**1981+1982**).

In **1985** I completed my doctorate with a philosophical dissertation on the history of the video recorder with Friedrich Knilli and the engineering scientist Manfred Krause. In it, I meticulously reconstructed the emergence and development of electromagnetic image and sound recording through a single technical factual system in the close interrelationship of technology and culture. This was media archaeology before the field became *en vogue* under this term. In the final chapter, I discussed the new *cultural technique* for intervening in techno-time structures. **In 1989** I was habilitated at the Technical University of Berlin with a thesis on the integrated history of cinema and television and acquired the *venia legendi* for media studies. My public habilitation lecture was on *High Definition Television*. That same year I received my first appointment as Professor of *Audiovision at the University of Salzburg* in Austria, a city I had never been to before and where, according to Thomas Bernhard, you can either work hard or kill yourself. There I set up a teaching, research and production department for "audiovisions". Exhibitions, numerous media events, the development of the program "Artists in Residence" as well as our own publication series were components of this work. In **1992** we anticipated the celebrations of the first century of cinema history with a series of 20 short films on the *Archaeology of Audiovisions*.

Together with the film director Peter Lilienthal, the philosopher Dietmar Kamper, and Eckhart Stein from ZDF's "Kleines Fernsehspiel," among

others, I organized the European Summer Academy for Film and Media Art at the Berlin Academy of the Arts from **1990 to 1993**, parallel to my engagement in Salzburg. Here, young and aspiring artists as well as curious people from the street interested in art were given the opportunity to work with masters such as Fernando Birri, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Abbas Kiarostami, the Quay Brothers, Dore O., Alexander Nikolajewitsch Sokourow, Harun Farocki, Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, Wim Wenders, producers like Keith Griffiths, architects like Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman, cinematographers like Raoul Coutard or Henri Alekan, authors like William Gibson or Samuel B. Delaney to learn and work together.

**In 1993**, an exciting project lured me back to what Vilém Flusser called "a disgustingly reunited Germany". I was appointed professor of communication and media studies at the newly established Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, and after just a few months I was appointed its founding rector, and in **1999 was** elected its first rector. Some of my most important tasks in the seven years of building up the new art academy was to give it an artistic profile, to create a balance between the various arts, design, the sciences and film/television, to anchor the new academy in the local, regional and international art and media scene, to create a high level of acceptance for the students' artistic works, which were imbued with technology, to assemble an internationally renowned faculty, to integrate the heterogeneous subjects into a single course of study, to give the university an internal order appropriate to its tasks, and to develop a complete range of academic studies at a high level (undergraduate, post-graduate, and doctoral studies). This included, among other things, the establishment of a generously endowed professorship for *Sound/Noise/Music*, for *Gender and Media* as well as the first academic position for an *Archaeology of Media in an Art Context*, which was filled first by Wolfgang Ernst.

In the euphoric Internet years of the early **1990s**, I was one of the editors of the first electronic net journal *CTheory* around the Canadian theory star Arthur Kroker and his partner Marie-Luise, and was co-initiator of the journal *Balkan Media*, which was founded in Sofia in **1992** as a peaceful attempt to respond to the destructive crisis situation in this region. From **1996** onwards, I helped to set up and raise the international profile of the Budapest Centre for Communication and Culture (<sup>C3</sup>), funded by George Soros. I also advised art colleges and academies in various countries in their attempts to modernize.

After a short sabbatical, during which I wrote, among other things, my *Deep Time/Archaeology of the Media*, from **2002** onwards I was again primarily involved in teaching and research, with a focus on the archaeology and genealogy of the interrelationship between the arts, sciences and technologies. Since **2004**, I have been working on the long-term goal of writing a *variantology of media* and their relationship to the arts. To this end, I established an open research network with colleagues from

universities/academies in Beijing, Barcelona, Bologna, New York (Columbia), Boston (Harvard), Hangzhou and Hefei (PR China), San Diego, Perth/Australia, Vienna, and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, among others. This project generated five volumes in English between **2005 and 2011**, as well as a "best-of" volume in German (**2013**). They were developed in international conferences in Cologne, Berlin and Naples and designed with selected artists (vol. 1 Werner Nekes, vol. 2 Peter Blegvad, vol. 3 Ingo Günther, vol. 4 Irit Batsry, vol. 5 The Quay Brothers). - **In 2006** I accepted a professorship for media theory at the Berlin University of the Arts in the Institute for Time-Based Media and returned professionally to the capital with my research projects.

As part of my research and teaching, I managed - with strong support from Nils Rölller, Silvia Wagnermaier, Marcel Marburger and Daniel Irrgang - the **VILÉM\_FLUSSER\_ARCHIVE** from **1998 to 2016**. Within this framework, we developed our own publication series (*International Flusser Lectures*) and I led the research project "Intermediales Publizieren" (Intermedial Publishing), which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) from **2000 - 2007**. In **2009**, Vilém Flusser's "Bochum Lectures" were published in this context by Fischer-Taschenbuchverlag, which I edited with Silvia Wagnermaier. In **2015**, I curated the exhibition "Bodenlos - Vilém Flusser und die Künste" (Bottomless - Vilém Flusser and the Arts) with Baruch Gottlieb and Peter Weibel, a collaborative project of the Akademie der Künste Berlin and the ZKM Karlsruhe. With Weibel and Daniel Irrgang, I edited the trilingual handbook *FLUSSERIANA - An Intellectual Toolbox* (Minnesota University Press **2015**), a real book-making challenge. About 120 authors from many countries were involved in the operational encyclopedia.

The years **2011 to 2015** were also marked by reflection on the state of affairs that had become established in Germany as media studies/"Medienwissenschaften". **In 2012**, I published the monograph (*... nach den Medien*) *Nachrichten vom ausgehenden 20. Jahrhundert* (Merve **2012**), which was also published in English by Univocal in **2013**. In **2013/14** I developed the idea and concept for *An-Archive(s)*, a bi-lingual encyclopedia on the archaeology and variantology of the arts and media. In **2013-2015**, the series of conversations "On the Genealogy of Media Thinking" with Hans Belting, Thomas Elsaesser, Valie Export, Boris Groys, Sybille Krämer, Geert Lovink, Claus Pias, Hans Ulrich Reck, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, Otto E. Rössler, Elisabeth von Samsonow, Peter Weibel, among others, was created. In addition, two research volumes (**2014** and **2015**) and an atlas on "Media Thinking and Media Acting in Berlin" were published. All the talks and the revised atlas were summarized by Daniel Irrgang and Florian Hadler in the comprehensive book *Zur Genealogie des MedienDenkens*, published by Kadmos in **2017**.



After my retirement in Berlin in February **2016**, I received an offer from Hong Kong to head the media department of the City University as Dean. At the same time, the state of Baden-Württemberg, the ZKM and representatives of the university literally urged me to succeed Heinrich Klotz and Peter Sloterdijk as rector of the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) Karlsruhe for three years. The university was in a deep crisis, which I underestimated in its severity. After just over two years, I ended the impossible and nerve-racking collaboration.

Instead, I refocused on my international activities, especially in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Shortly before the outbreak of the pandemic, I had the privilege of organizing and chairing a major international conference on the interrelationship of the arts and sciences in Shanghai's new Art District at the West Bund. Because of the pandemic, my visiting professorships at Tongji University in Shanghai and the National Art Academy of China in Hangzhou are pending in **2021**.

The orientation towards other countries and cultures is essential for my research and teaching activities. At the European Graduate School in Saas Fee I have been teaching students from all over the world since **1999**. Together with Peter Greenaway, Avital Ronell, Samuel Weber, Sandy Stone, Giorgio Agamben, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, Slavoj Žižek. As Michel-Foucault-Professor for Techno-Aesthetics and Archaeology of Media I was part of the founding faculty of this unusual project initiated and directed by the philosopher Wolfgang Schirmacher. In the first two decades of the new millennium, Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Jaques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Bruce Sterling, Barbara Hammer, Elia Suleiman and many others also taught there. **Since 1979**, I have given seminars and lectures in most European countries, in the Southern Americas (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay), the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong, Israel, South Korea, Abu Dhabi, Japan and numerous states in the USA. Among the museums where I have lectured are the Guggenheim New York, the Reina Sofía Madrid, the Centre Pompidou Paris, the Tate Modern London, the Muczarnok Budapest, the ITT in Tokyo, the Millenium Museum in Beijing, the K11 in Shanghai, the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de *Barcelona* (CCCB), the Modern Art Museum in Ljubljana. Numerous of my texts have been translated into other languages, including Chinese, English, Finnish, French, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Czech, Hungarian, Russian.

As part of my work at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, I developed and directed the annual festival "Digitale" in close collaboration with Nils Röller from **1995 to 1999**, which attempted to open up the public cinema and art space for digital and analogue experiments. It took place regularly in the Cinemathèque of the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, with numerous guests from many parts of the world. Yoichiro Kawaguchi or Richard Leacock participated as well as Steina Vasulka, Christoph Schlingensief, The Quay

Brothers or the lettrist Maurice Le Maitre. From **1996 to 2005**, together with Hans-Ulrich Reck, Nils Röller, Wolfgang Ernst and Thomas Hensel, I edited the *Jahrbuch für Künste und Apparate* (LAB), which will be condensed into a best-of volume in **2021**. At the KHM I co-initiated and -established several prizes and awards for young art (e.g. the Spiridon-Neven-DuMont-Prize, the Hermann-Claasen-Prize for Photography and Media Art and the sponsorship prize of the International Nam June Paik Award in NRW. **In 2008** I organized a micro edition of the world cinema festival "New Crowned Hope" at the Akademie der Künste Berlin, with the participation of the opera director Peter Sellars.

**Since 2015** I expanded my research and presentation activities of Thinking Media by curating large-scale exhibitions, usually in cooperation with Peter Weibel, the artistic director of the ZKM Karlsruhe, but also with the Berlin Academy of Arts or with Sarah Kenderdine in Lausanne. The most important projects so far have been "No Firm Ground - Flusser and the Arts" and "Allah's Automata" (**2015**), "Dia\_Logos - Ramon Llull and the Ars Combinatoria" (**2018/19**) and "Art in Motion - 100 Masterpieces - Art with and through Media" (**2018ff.**).

During the **2020/2021** pandemic, a deep friendship came to fruition that has long connected me with the musician, composer and sound researcher FM Einheit. In the years before, we had already collaborated on various radio and performance pieces, including the reconstruction of Russian composer Arsenji Avraamov's famous "Symphony of Sirens" from 1922/23. As part of the Currentzis brothers' MusicAeterna platform in St. Petersburg, we now developed a new acoustic format together - wild montages and collages of philosophy, natural science, music, poetry and media theory. I wrote lyrics, poems and experimental prose for the now 25 episodes of just under an hour each. Extracts from this collaboration have been performed on festivals in Istanbul and Beijing.

In addition to my active memberships in art and film academies, I filled numerous honorary positions, including as a member of the program advisory boards for film and media of the Goethe Institutes, the board of trustees of the House of World Cultures (HKW) in Berlin, the board of trustees of the Kunststiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen and the board of trustees of the ZKM Karlsruhe, where I am still active today. **In 2010** I was elected as a full member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of North Rhine-Westphalia. I am also an honorary senator of the Austrian Institute for Media Archaeology and have been a member of the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain for many years.

At the moment – in **2021** – I am writing a book on *Ladders to Heaven & Stairs to Hell*. In dialogue with FM Einheit I prepare a volume on his Sound Research.





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