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Media Competences Shaped by New Media: The “Virtue of Ignorance”

The complexity of the human environment, the number of scientific domains, and common access to culture, which are typical of the contemporary stage of civilization, could make ignorance a strategy for surviving and gaining peace of mind in an unknowable world. Media, and the meaning system created by their messages, are considered here as a special example. In the interactive world of new media the recipient is also the creator; technically it is not very complex. However, media usage requires adequate skills, regardless of the purpose of the media use.

In such a context, the “virtue of ignorance” involves the media skills needed for use of a new style of popular culture material. Media skills are not so much connected to knowledge of media and culture as such but rather to a familiarity with appropriate navigation methods. “Virtue” is understood here as the conscious cultivating of an attitude of constant selection in regard to media content. The strong term “ignorance” is used to stress the extent and effects of that phenomenon. The first part of this essay is devoted to discussion of technological changes and their social setting. In the next part, the inevitable technological and scientific ignorance—and the promotion of ignorance as a virtue in popular culture—is described. Due to space constraints, some extreme examples are used to highlight the essence of the problem.

Key words: convergence culture, new media, “explosion of ignorance,” new technology, media competences