

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN SIEGFRIED ZIELINSKI AND PETER WEIBEL



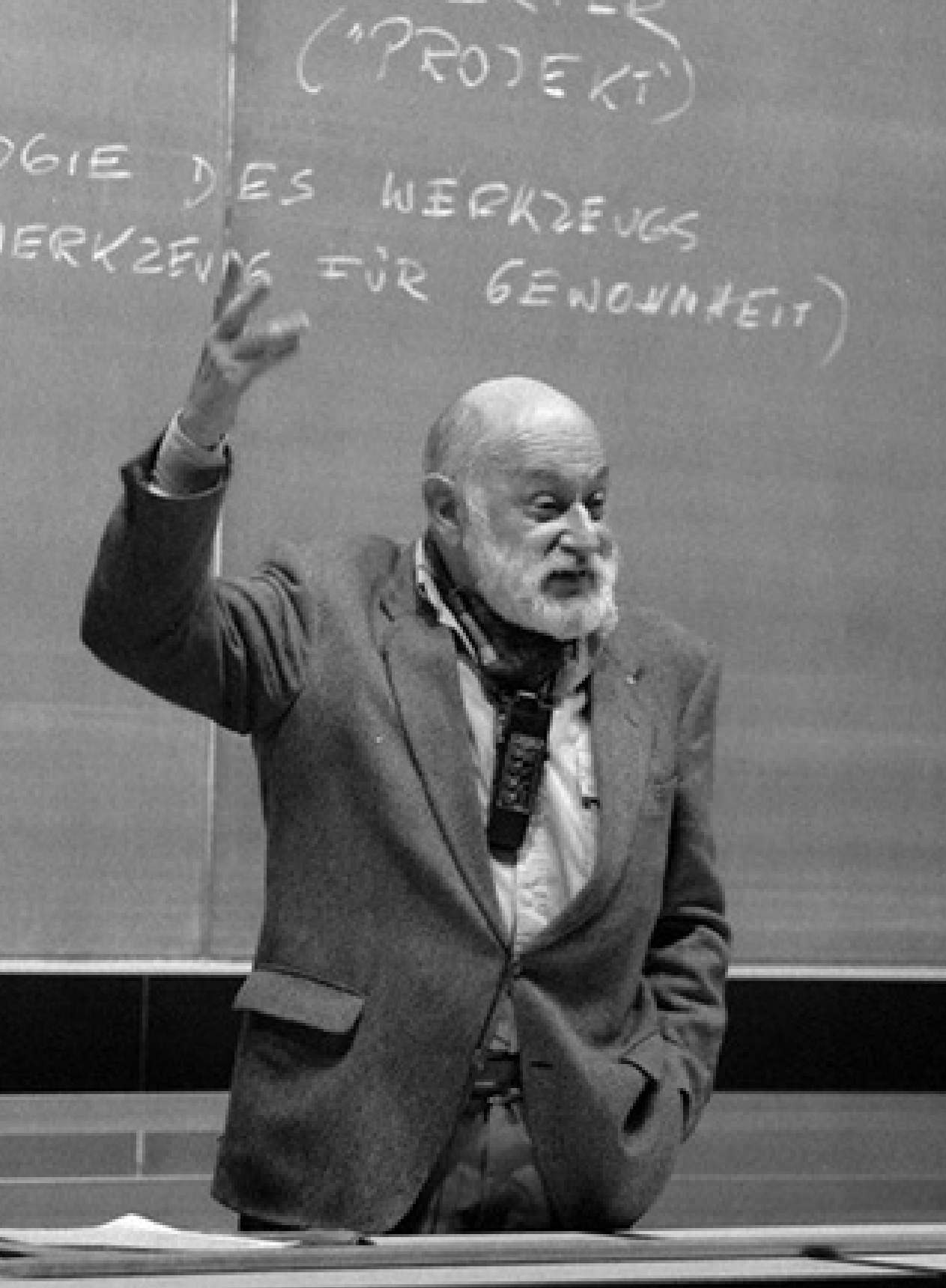
Semay Buket Şahin

Founder of Archaeo Media Platform,
Co-Founder Pr Carnet World,
Lecturer and Author

Recently, I had the opportunity to read the text “The Institutions Need Us but We Don’t Need the Institutions: An (Im)possible Interview with Peter Weibel,” which Professor Siegfried Zielinski personally sent me in 2023. That same year, I attended his Variantology and Travelling in a Time Machine: The Work of Art in the Age of its Infinite conference held at Sabancı University. My intention had been to ask him questions concerning topics I had addressed in my forthcoming book chapter—questions that also touched upon his personal reflections. However, due to time constraints during the event, this was not possible. Subsequently, I was able to obtain his email address through a close friend of mine who works at Minnesota Press, and it was through this contact that Professor Zielinski kindly shared the aforementioned text with me.

The meeting of Siegfried Zielinski and Peter Weibel is more than the convergence of two media theorists—it is the mutual recognition of kindred spirits who, each in their own right, have stretched the boundaries of what thinking, art, and institutions can be. In this conversation, Zielinski, the founder of “anarchaeology,” and Weibel, the self-declared “anarchist director” of the ZKM, traverse themes central to contemporary media philosophy: temporality, acceleration, aesthetics, memory, institutional critique, and the epistemological status of machines.





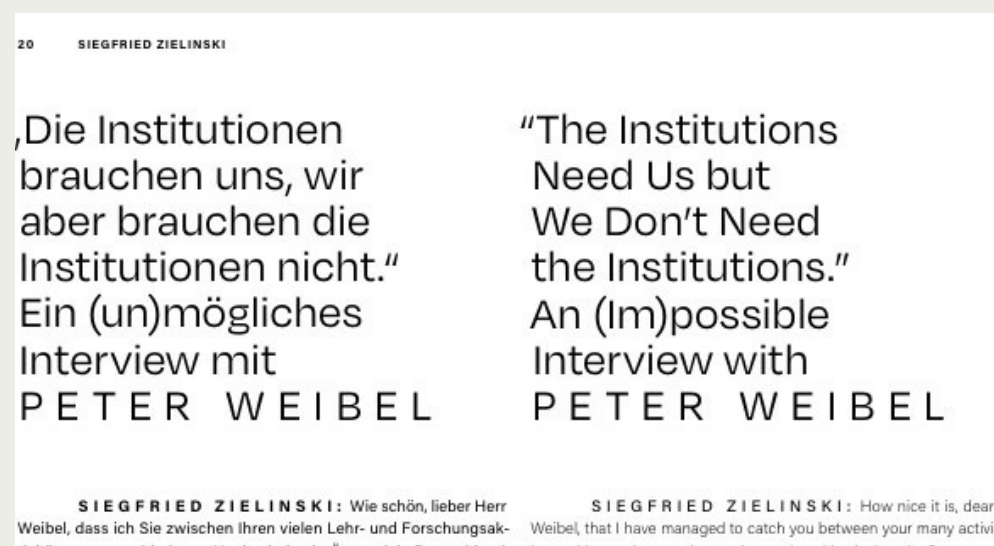
At one point in the conversation, Weibel refers to Vilém Flusser's reflections on memory and the act of writing. The statement "We shall survive in the memory of others" reveals Flusser's belief that one's existence may endure beyond physical life through written thought, living on in the memories of others. Weibel exemplifies Flusser's deep commitment to writing with the phrase "Scribere necesse est, vivere non est"—writing is necessary, living is not—a reworking of a quotation attributed to Henry the Navigator. These words struck me with an almost visceral force, creating a moment of existential rupture.

The act of writing could, of course, be described in numerous ways, such as through the well-known proverb "verba volant, scripta manent." Yet this raises the question: is writing truly enduring? When pushed further into a more anarchic register, this discourse appears to collapse into an existential reflection, as captured by the biblical passage: "Vidi cuncta, quæ fiunt sub sole, et ecce universa vanitas, et afflictio spiritus." The translations of spiritus here are particularly revealing. The term carries multiple meanings—spirit, breath, and even wind—yet in some versions it is rendered as "chasing after the wind." This, I believe, resonates meaningfully with the tone and implications of Weibel's later remarks.



Weibel finds the opposition between writing and living overly dramatic and even pathetic. In his own experience, writing is not in conflict with life but rather intimately interwoven with it—an activity that profoundly enriches his existence. He describes the deep pleasure of writing alone at night, under the roof of the ZKM, when all his colleagues have gone to sleep: a time when he can bring his thoughts to life and focus on his texts. These are, in my view, the words of a sage who is fully aware that, in the end, everything is but a chasing after the wind.

Apart from this, the extended dialogue between Siegfried Zielinski and Peter Weibel as presented in their interview published in EIKON #122 is giving us a performative articulation of a living media philosophy. Engaging with thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Deleuze, Pessoa, Flusser, Brecht, Heidegger, Bruno, and others, Weibel and Zielinski trace the contours of a thought in motion. The discussion offers a unique insight into the philosophical underpinnings of media archaeology and reflects on temporality, subjectivity, institutions, aesthetic form, and technological mediation.

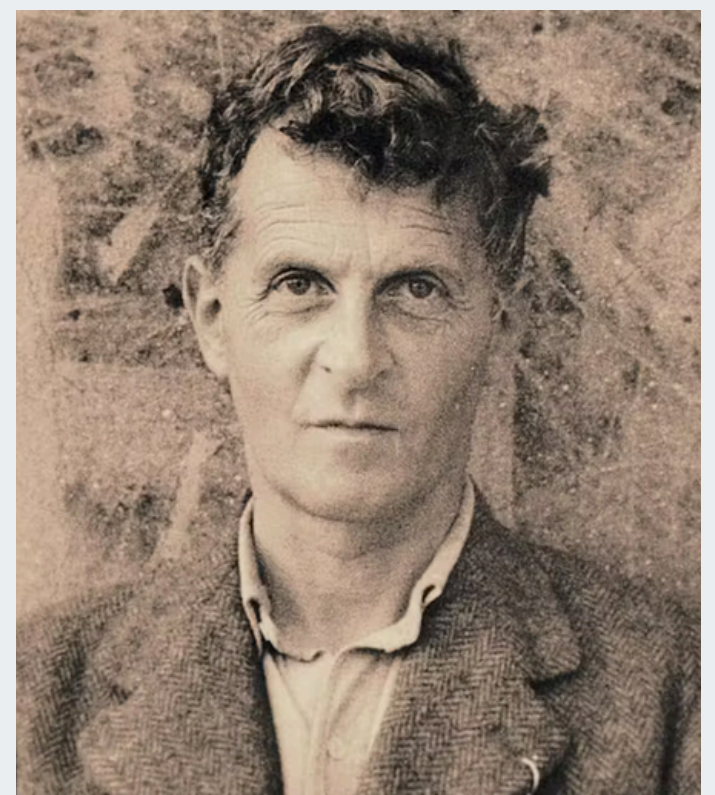


Zielinski invokes the “Berlin philosopher Michael Theunissen” and his *Negative Theologie der Zeit* (1991) to introduce a typology of time-consciousness: those who are “too much in time” (melancholically circling like on the rings of Saturn) and those “too little in time” (constantly fleeing from it). This sets up a question about how Weibel inhabits time. Weibel rejects such “dualisms” as a form of “lazy thinking,” thereby pivoting from Theunissen’s binary to a non-binary, fluid inhabitation of time—he is “both ... too much and too little in time.” This becomes an autobiographical-philosophical statement about lived tempo and artistic productivity. Deleuze is also referenced directly when Weibel critiques Theunissen’s binary of time-bound melancholia and time-denial as “lazy thinking.” Deleuze’s philosophy of multiplicities, difference, and becoming underpins Weibel’s resistance to simplistic dialectics. Instead, he claims to be simultaneously “too much and too little in time,” embodying contradiction as method.

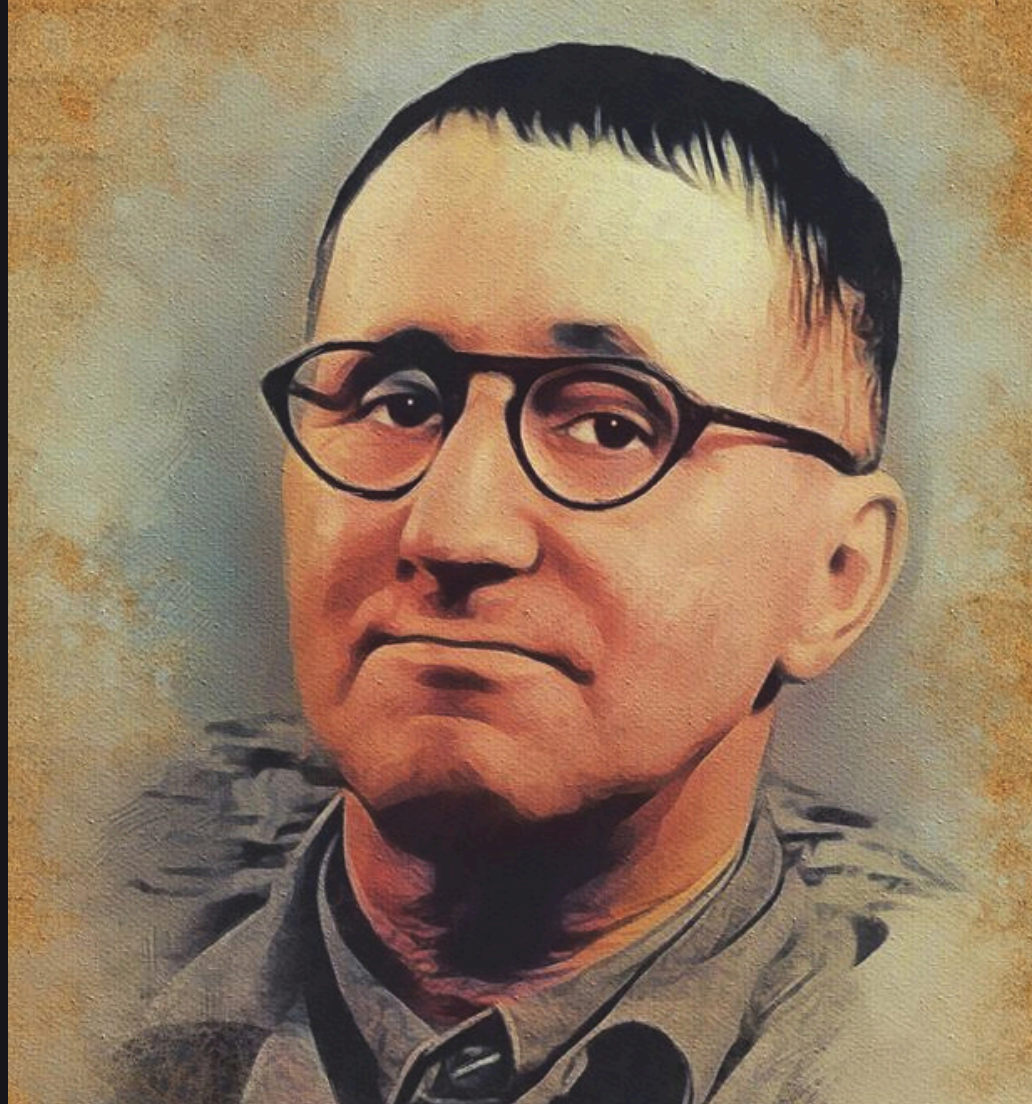




In the dialogue, Weibel also draws on Wittgenstein at multiple points, most notably when he dismisses dualisms as “lazy thinking” and invokes the metaphor of Wittgenstein’s ladder (from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*): a tool that should be discarded once it has served its purpose. This is an anti-dogmatic gesture, indicating that conceptual frameworks are provisional and contingent. Wittgenstein is also mentioned at the end of the dialogue, where his architectural and sculptural experiments are discussed as forms of “expanded philosophy.” The cool-headed sculpture of a girl and the house he built in Vienna are interpreted as attempts to monumentalise philosophical practice—a gesture Weibel resists, favouring time-based, ephemeral media. Wittgenstein thus appears both as a caution against reification and as a model for the kind of boundary work between philosophy and art that Weibel sees as central to his practice.



In an earlier part of the dialogue, Zielinski notes that Heidegger kept a small radio receiver in his Black Forest hut. Weibel remarks that, for Heidegger, the device served as a kind of vademecum—an aid that prevented him from becoming entirely engulfed in his “pathos-laden ontologies,” acting instead as an existential lifeline to the outside world. Even Heidegger, a philosopher immersed in the contemplation of Being, is thus portrayed as someone who required media to sustain his existential orientation. In contrast, Weibel aligns himself not with Heidegger but with Bertolt Brecht, quoting from Brecht’s poem “An den kleinen Radioapparat” (“To My Radio”), written in exile while fleeing Nazi persecution. In the poem, the radio becomes a device that transmits the voice and news of the enemy across distances and displacement.



The symbolic role attributed to the radio in Brecht’s poem—as a medium that carries the voice across time and space—reminded me of the so-called “cognitive sponges” believed, in pre-technological contexts, to convey voice-like messages independently of both temporal and spatial constraints. In my presentation at the Festival de la Imagen, titled “The Media Archaeology of Artificial Mind Creation,” I examined such early forms of cognitive transmission. These pre-modern artefacts, with their mnemonic and communicative functions, may be considered precursors to contemporary practices of archiving within artificial intelligence, particularly in relation to the medial conditions that govern how consciousness is preserved and transmitted.

The dialogue between Zielinski and Weibel functions as a media-philosophical palimpsest—layered with references, ironies, and provocations. Through their engagement with a wide spectrum of philosophers, they resist closure, monumentalisation, and academic fixity. Instead, they articulate a philosophy that is mobile, performative, and post-institutional—rooted in practice, informed by memory, and oriented toward the future. The result is not a linear narrative of thought, but a constellation: a rhizomatic network of voices, influences, and tactics. In this way, the conversation itself becomes an act of media archaeology—not just documenting the past, but excavating the conceptual tools with which we might think otherwise.

