

Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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Morphological Media Psychology. An Attempt at an Overview in Four Versions

Morphological media psychology in comparison

Media psychology essentially deals with two questions: “What do people do with the media?” and “What do the media do with people?” (Wulf et al., 2023, p. 17). The aim is to understand the relationship between people and media, and as always in psychology, this is not only out of theoretical interest, but also for practical reasons, as it is hoped that this will enable desired media effects to be created or enhanced and undesirable media effects to be avoided or limited. However, how psychology understands such relationships depends crucially on its view of human nature, or more precisely, on its view of the psyche or, as morphological psychology calls it, its view of *the psyche* (*das Seelische*). People have always tried to form a picture of themselves and their psyche, resulting in very different images (cf. Salber, 1993, 2025). Scientific psychology has also developed various images of the psyche, some of which have made a career in psychology as so-called *paradigms* in the sense of Kuhn (1976). These paradigms are also found in media psychology, especially behaviourism, cognitive psychology (which sometimes includes Gestalt psychology, e.g. by Becker-Carus & Wendt, 2017), biological psychology and evolutionary psychology. Nowadays, there is often a desire to integrate these different paradigms. This fits well, as they are all oriented towards the natural sciences in terms of their understanding of their subject matter and their methods.

However, morphological psychology criticises these paradigms for turning the psyche into a subjective inner realm that is separate from the rest of reality and contrasted with an objective outer realm. At the same time, both the inner realm and the outer realm are further divided into elements (e.g. into cognitions, emotions and motives or into stimuli). The roots of this divisive thinking go far back in the history of philosophy, from Plato to Descartes to Kant. Once psychology has made these divisions between inside and outside and into different elements, it is then faced with the problem of how to reassemble the individual parts into a living whole. For Wilhelm Salber, the founder of morphological psychology, all these approaches lagged behind the insights of Gestalt psychology and holistic psychology as well as the findings of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis (cf. Salber 1959): From the point of view of morphology, the psyche does not consist of

ready-made parts, from whose composition one could then form a more or less adequate picture, but rather the psyche itself is the process of image formation, or in other words, *gestalt formation*. And this gestalt formation encompasses not only consciousness, but also unconscious dimensions of meaning. Approaching the psychic as a process of gestalt formation leads to a different understanding of the relationship between psyche and media. While the scientific paradigms of psychology assume a ready-made inner psyche consisting of very specific parts, which then encounters external things such as media, morphology conceives of the psychic as a process that unfolds, from the very beginning, within media in the broader sense. The psyche does not stand apart from these media, but rather they are themselves part of psychological reality. In the following, I will always refer to *media in the broader sense* when I mean the entire reality as a medium of the psyche (e.g. including other people and things), while I will refer to *media in the narrower sense* when I discuss those things that we usually refer to as media in everyday life and which media psychology usually focuses on. I will not begin with a definition of the difference between media in the narrower sense and other things that are not media in the narrower sense, but will attempt to elaborate on this distinction more clearly in the course of this text.

Media in the narrow sense as objects of morphological psychology

Wilhelm Salber emphasised the structural connection between the psyche and its media in the narrower sense at an early stage (Salber, 1957). In his publications, media examples from literature, film or the visual arts are never just specific areas of application of his psychology, but rather paradigmatic examples of the structure and functioning of the psyche in general: Salber describes the psyche, for example, as “literary from the outset” and “art-like” (Salber, 2015, p. 90) and speaks of lived and experienced literature (Salber, 1972). Concepts from the field of media, such as *images* and *stories*, became central concepts in his theory formation (W. Salber, 1972, 1983), and ultimately Salber even describes the psyche in general terms as a “mediapsyche” (Salber, 1994b, p. 137), which lives in the medium of reality or deals with it (Salber, 2015). Salber and his students have conducted psychological research on a wide range of media in the narrower sense: on literature and the handling of books (Salber, 1971, 1972), but also, for example, on the experience of font types (Domke, 1992). A particularly large number of studies deal with films, which Salber has always been very interested in (e.g. Ahren, 1998; Blothner, 2003; Dahl, 2004; Salber & Conrad, 2006). Dirk Blothner (2003) has also presented a concrete model for evaluating film projects with his *effect pyramid* model and, together with Marc Conrad, has psychologically examined the special features of successful US series (Blothner & Conrad, 2007). In connection with morphological market research, the psychology of

advertising and brands also came into focus early on (Salber, 1969) and was repeatedly taken up and further developed (e.g. Becker, 2010a, 2010b; Grünewald, 1991; Imdahl, 2015; Lönneker, 2007; Melchers, 1998). For Salber, art ultimately even became the *royal road* to understanding the psyche (Salber, 1999a, p. 10) and the experience of individual works of art became the subject of morphological studies (e.g. Hodde, 2022; Salber, 1994a). The commonality between art and the psyche, which morphology postulates, also forms the basis for morphological forms of treatment such as art coaching (Fitzek, 2015 Zwingmann, 2019) and morphological music therapy (Tüpker, 2013). As everyday and cultural psychology, morphology has also repeatedly dealt with the experience of media-mediated, current (news) topics, e.g. Chernobyl (Grünewald, 1987), the death of Lady Di (Imdahl, 1997; Melchers, 1997), the so-called German refugee crisis (Grünewald, 2019), or the Corona crisis (Becker, 2020). Occasionally, the news media themselves have also come into focus (Debus, 1985; Grünewald, 1989, 1991). Finally, digital media were also analysed morphologically: the smartphone (Grünewald, 2019), social media (D. Salber, 2012; Zwingmann, 2018) and artificial intelligence (Fitzek, 2022b; Zwingmann, 2022). The publications listed here are only examples and do not provide a complete overview.

Description as a method and as a result

Paradigms in psychology based on natural science strive for explanations in the sense of linear causal relationships, which they seek to substantiate on the basis of measurements using statistical correlations. From a morphological perspective, however, there are no universally valid, linear causal relationships in the field of psychology. Rather, each object of investigation, as a gestalt formation, produces its own laws, which morphological investigation seeks to understand and make comprehensible. The methods used for this purpose are therefore not measurements, but qualitative descriptive methods such as *experience descriptions* or *in-depth interviews* in individual or group formats. *Descriptions* are both the method and the result of morphological research (cf. Fitzek, 2022a). The inherent logic of the symbolically reproduced object then makes it possible to understand, if not precisely calculate, the opportunities and limitations of further development and influence. Ultimately, morphology aims at a more precise understanding rather than a causal explanation. Specifically, it proceeds by attempting to summarise its objects of investigation in several condensed descriptions – four versions of the description form a complete *version sequence*. In the following, I would like to use these four versions as a guide for the subject of media: In a *first version*, starting from the general concept of the mediapsyche, media in the narrower sense are characterised as *mediating things*. Building on this, a *second version* will show the extent to which these mediating things mediate between fundamental conditions

of gestalt formation. In a *third version*, the general type of psychological transformation of media in the narrower sense will be demonstrated, which at the same time enables all other types of psychological transformations to be experienced through them. Finally, in a *fourth version*, three fundamental types of media in the narrower sense will be distinguished, which can be understood as self-treatments of reality through these media. Since the aim here is to morphologically grasp the very general subject of media in the narrower sense, this attempt will in many places have to remain more general and abstract than is usual in morphologies of specific media works. In order to make the general validity of the descriptions clear, I will also jump back and forth between examples of different types of media, which may be somewhat confusing. To compensate for this, examples from a concrete morphological media analysis, namely the experience of the film *Air* (by Ben Affleck, 2023), will be inserted between the general sections of text. I developed this film impact analysis with the help of students from the Master's programme in Media Psychology in 2023 and 2024 through descriptions and group interviews.

First version: The media soul and its mediating things

One way of describing a psychological object morphologically is to characterise it as a specific whole (*Ganzheit*) by naming and describing a *Gestalt quality* or *Gestalt logic*, a summary *image* or even a *narrative logic*. The aim here is to make the object so comprehensible that all phenomena associated with it can be understood as aspects of this Gestalt. In the following, this will be attempted for the object of the media, which, based on the concept of the media soul, is characterised as a *mediating thing*.

From a morphological perspective, the question of the relationship between humans and media is answered as follows: humans create and use media because humans themselves are a medium, a *mediapsyche* ("Medienseele"; Salber, 1994b, p. 137). This demonstrates the fundamentally different *object formation* of morphology (Salber, 1988). For morphology, the psyche is not a thing, but a *structuring process* (Salber, 1969) of human reality. This process itself is the substance of the psychic. The psyche is reality that deals with itself. In concrete terms, this means that every psychic formation involves the entire reality in order to represent and deal with itself within it. "The psyche lives only in the medium of jeans, jam, stories and fellow human beings, institutions, television dinosaurs" (Salber, 1994b, p. 137). Whether it's supra-individual processes such as religions, cultures, companies and brands, or individual processes such as the development of a character, and also the *hour-worlds* (Salber, 1965) of individual everyday actions – everything must be expressed in concrete media in the broader sense. Feelings must be sensually perceptible, and the content of thoughts only exists

together with their form (e.g. verbal). Salber's concept of the psyche turns everything we carry around with us in terms of clichés about *the psyche or the soul* upside down: while we traditionally locate the psyche within ourselves (head, heart or stomach), Salber consistently locates it in the (seemingly external) reality in which we live. The psyche is not thought of as opposed to matter, but as acting in and between material things, without, however, being reducible to an organ such as our brain (which should not be misunderstood to mean that the psyche exists independently of bodies and brains). The psyche is therefore not a pure, sublime idea, but exists only in the profane and everyday, imperfect and comical. The psyche or soul is not eternal, but change, development and transition. This also means that the psyche is consistently thought of as a construction, not as something *natural*. The psyche constantly recreates itself. Since the psyche has no fixed core, but only lives in the images it creates of itself, it is quasi-virtual, like a superficial appearance, but paradoxically also real in this appearance. And, similar to Freud, Salber locates the essence of the psychic not primarily in consciousness, but equally in the unconscious.

The psyche as a process therefore needs the material of the whole of reality in order to form its shape and thus treat itself. Conversely, the psyche can also be characterised as a reality that tries to come to itself (Salber, 2015). In this process, the psyche is always *in between*. This picks up on the basic insight of Gestalt psychology: Gestalt cannot exist without its parts, and yet it is something different than the sum of them. Freud also saw that the unconscious only exists by attaching itself to something, expressing itself in something and acting through something: in memory traces, in dream work, in slips of the tongue or in symptoms. The psyche is a nothing that wants to become a something, analogous to the light in Goethe's vivid morphology, which only acquires its colourful form through refraction in the opaque medium. A formation that can never remain static, that constantly wants to paint a new picture of itself. This inability to remain static points to the fundamental imperfection of the psyche, which is also a necessary condition for its existence. The psyche is always a process in transition to an image that is transforming. Salber therefore briefly described the psyche as a "search image" (Salber, 1994b, p. 139) and attributed to the media in the narrower sense the role of being co-searchers. The general mediality of the psyche (mediapsyche) is the prerequisite for the function of the media in the narrower sense: painting, sculpture, music, literature, photography, films, television, digital and social media, etc. These are objects in which the psyche expresses its own mediality and at the same time deals with itself. On the one hand, media in the narrower sense (above all language) help the psyche to understand itself; at the same time, in them (especially in art) the psyche confronts its own mediality as if it were an object (Salber, 2002). In the media in the narrower sense, what the psyche is, its being in-between, can

emerge clearly for the first time. Without images, the psyche would not know that it forms figures; without literature, it would not know that it lives in stories; without music, it would not know that it creates rhythms or moods. Media are therefore mediators that allow *forms* to emerge *as forms*, so that the psyche can become aware of its own formative process.

Media serve to mediate the psyche with itself. They enable the psyche to be reflected in its entirety within a limited object. In this sense, media are always *pars pro toto*.

Examples of representations of specific media as images or figurative logic include: the film *The Silence* (by Ingmar Bergman, 1963) as a “zone of silence” (Salber, 1965, p. 141), the series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* as a “modern witch hunt” (Blothner & Conrad, 2007, p. 62), the experience of soap operas as “foaming” (Fitzek, 2010, p. 697), smartphones as “sceptres of power” (Grünwald, 2019, p. 131).

Example Air: The film Air (by Ben Affleck, 2023) tells the story of the negotiations between Nike and Michael Jordan’s representatives in 1984 that led to the launch of the Air Jordan shoes, which turned Nike into a global corporation. At the beginning of the film, it becomes clear to viewers that Nike’s basketball division was far from what it is today: it was rather unsuccessful and uninspired in terms of marketing. The main character, Sonny Vaccaro (Matt Damon), Nike’s brand manager, is dissatisfied with this. He believes that something better is possible. He finds a compelling image for this while watching a video of a basketball game featuring the young, promising player Michael Jordan. What he recognises in this video sets the entire plot of the film in motion – and at the same time reflects the overarching character quality of the film: in the video, Sonny recognises how much all the other players on the team trust Jordan’s ability to make the decisive shot. Everyone believes in Jordan, and he believes in himself. The video becomes a symbol for the entire film, because it gives Sonny the idea of changing Nike’s strategy and also focusing on this one player as an advertising partner, for whom he wants to have his own shoe developed. The entire rest of the film is carried by the development of this gestalt-logic: how does one part succeed in getting all the other parts of the unit to believe in him and align themselves with him, so that a new, better unit is created? Sonny now has to convince everyone of his idea. And even though the audience already knows that he will succeed in the end, following this development is a thrilling experience. “Belief” becomes the unifying theme of the film: it is expressed in Sonny’s belief in his idea, in Jordan’s mother’s belief in her son, in the question of whether Nike founder Phil (Ben Affleck) still believes in the principles of his company, but also in the leap of faith that Sonny’s initially sceptical colleague Rob (Jason Bateman) takes. It is also fitting that Martin Luther King’s famous speech and the phrase “I have a dream” contained therein play an important role in the film.

Second version: The medial impact space

As mediating agents, media enable the psyche to understand itself, to come to terms with itself. The second version of the morphological description aims to make the object of investigation comprehensible as a form that is co-determined in a so called *impact space* (*Wirkungsraum*) by various factors of formation that challenge each other in a tense manner but also complement each other. Morphology has developed various variants to dissect this sphere of influence. Early in his theory development, Salber identified six fundamental conditions (*gestalt factors*) between which mental processes develop in transitions and mediations. Even though these conditions receded somewhat into the background in his later theoretical development in favour of a more open model of main and secondary figuration traits (cf. Fitzek, 2010, 2022a), the basic model of these six conditions (also called *the hexagram*) is still a very clear and practical classification option that is often used in morphological market and media research. For morphological film impact analyses, Salber has also been using the concept of so-called *complex development* since 1960 (cf. Blothner, 2019), which he also explains in 1969 using the hexagram model in such a way that all six gestalt factors are effective in the film experience, but that it develops particularly from the contrast between two factors (illustrated using the vampire film, Salber 1969, p. 68). Blothner (2003), based on many individual studies, presented a list of eighteen *basic complexes*, each comprising two opposing poles, which, in my opinion, can be traced back to the polarities of the hexagram (cf. Table 1). The six *fairy tale-analogous principles* that Imdahl (2015) highlights for advertising are also clearly based on the hexagram model. Finally, the *scissor analysis* (Ahren & Melchers, 1998; Melchers, 1998) can also be understood as an individual structure of opposing factors (and their mediation) in advertising media, which can be assigned to the second version as a specific form of morphological description. In the following, I will present the gestalt factors of media in the narrower sense using the six gestalt factors of the hexagram. Following each polarity, this will then be illustrated using the example of basic complexes brought to life in the experience of the film *Air* (Affleck, 2023).

Table 1. Basic complexes according to Blothner (2003), sorted by the author according to design factors of Salber (1969).

Absorbing (Aneignung)	Becoming (Umbildung)	Shaping (Einwirkung)	Organising (Anordnung)	Expanding (Ausbreitung)	Equipping (Ausrüstung)
Preserve	Destroy	Acting	Being acted upon	Perfect	Imperfect
Support	Inversion	Attack	Escape	Beyond	Limited
Familiar	Strange	Triumph	Humiliation	United	Separated
Commitment	Transition	Direct	Mediated	One reality	Perspectives
Truth	Deception	Arbitrariness	Value positing	Temptation	Orientation (Renunciation)
Repetition	Change	Flexibility	Compulsion	Dissolution	Consequence

Absorbing: media repeat

From the idea of *the mediapsyche*, it has already become clear that the psyche is understood in morphology as a process of gestalt formation, and that this process needs and must take up other things in order to form itself. Salber has described this trait as *absorbing* (*Aneignung*, which could also be translated as *appropriation*; Salber, 1969). Psychological formations find their footing and realise themselves by incorporating sensory reality and connecting to existing formations. Since, from a morphological perspective, the psyche is always a process, never a thing or a substance, as explained above, this also involves a constantly recurring *process* of stabilisation through repetition. The psyche itself creates such points of support and repetitions. In remembering, for example, we revive existing memory traces in order to relive experiences, or we seek connections to what we have learned and practised in order to find an approach for our actions. Media in the narrower sense help us with such repetitions: The first writing system, for example, probably originated as a system for recording harvest and tax revenues. Plato already described writing as a support for memory, although spoken language already has such an appropriation function: “Language enables, as it were, an incorporation that can be continued indefinitely” (Salber, 1965, p. 161). Through language, we can bring the absent to life and define the constant in the flow of experience by naming it. All media in the narrower sense serve such appropriation tendencies of mental formation by making mental formation repeatable. Not only do we try to record something linguistically and make it repeatable in the form of records, but visual images – be they paintings, photographs or films – also serve as stabilising representations in which the psyche can repeatedly seek out and comprehend a form. Media as mediators are thus self-mediators across time; they point out that the process of structure formation, which we call the soul, seeks to grasp itself by producing identical and repeatable elements.

Becoming: media change

On the one hand, media can be described as fixed points for the formation of the psyche. At the same time, however, we immediately notice an opposite tendency: “The psyche cannot remain static” (Salber, 1965, p. 92). As much as we like to form a fixed image, we are also constantly creating new images. Tendencies towards transformation or *becoming* (*Umbildung*), are strongly evident in our dreams and daydreams, in which our memory traces can be transformed into anything possible. From a morphological perspective, it is important that gestalt factors such as *absorbing* and *becoming* are not understood as isolated motives or drives. Furthermore, they cannot be sharply distinguished from one another but must be seen in transition and mediation with one another: it is precisely when

we want to hold on to something that the movement of the psyche becomes apparent. When looking at old photos or reading old diary entries, and even more so when receiving old news, we become aware of the changes that have taken place. Even and especially the ever-same rhythm of music urges variation and movement. Blothner (2003) describes the *repetition* of a constellation in film as a *technique of captivity*, which in turn makes it particularly clear what developments have taken place in the meantime. We sense that formations of the psyche are not fixed and identical with themselves, but that they are always in transition to something else, in a state of transformation. The fictional, fantastic or surreal that entertainment media and art can present to us allows us to feel this changeability of reality particularly strongly. In literature, theatre, film and the visual arts, we experience the possibilities of transforming reality and at the same time experience change ourselves by immersing ourselves in strange and different worlds – usually while sitting motionless in a chair – or even experiencing how we ourselves change in the process.

Example Air. The film *Air* brings to life a complex that Blothner (2003) characterises as *repetition-change*: while Nike's initial situation is seen as stuck in a rut, the protagonist Sonny embodies a willingness to take risks and a desire for something new (right at the beginning of the film, Sonny is shown gambling). He wants to try something new and risk everything on one move, or rather, on one player: Michael Jordan. This is countered by the equally understandable concerns and desire for security of his boss and colleagues (his colleague Rob in particular understandably sums up the fears of losing a secure job). Nevertheless, the story develops from a dominance of the old to a desire for the new, which ultimately also grips Sonny's colleagues and his boss. In a central scene of the film, however, this is turned around once again: the protagonist Sonny convinces with an improvised speech precisely by promising young Michael Jordan the unwavering loyalty of the Nike brand. This gains particular force because he predicts the vicissitudes of Michael's future, in which things will not only go uphill, as illustrated by a montage of images of actual misfortunes from Jordan's future life. This echoes the basic complex of commitment-transition according to Blothner (2003).

Shaping: Media direct

By shaping, we mean that formations of the psyche are specific and decisive settings that, in their decisiveness, also position and distinguish themselves from other formations. What forms as a gestalt develops a specific shape, a direction or orientation that it seeks to maintain or enforce against other things. People can shape or direct their reality by using their bodies as a medium in the broader sense, e.g. by pulling, pushing, shoving or kicking. However, if we were to do this to other people, it would be a form of violence, which we generally condemn, and it would also be far too rough to achieve what we want. Our language, on the

other hand, is much more differentiated as a medium in the narrower sense: we can use it to command, ask, request, threaten, promise, assert, justify and much more. In linguistics, this is also referred to as *speech acts* (Austin, 2014), meaning that our speech is always also an action with which we want and can achieve something. We also experience tendencies to influence through images that suggest a certain view of reality, through music that carries our mood or our movement, or in stories of decisive actions that classically revolve around heroic figures and questions of victory or defeat.

On the one hand, the media are more sophisticated as a means of shaping, but on the other hand, they are less compelling than direct physical shaping. The influence of the media can counteract our already developed lines of action. In entertainment media, we can experience such counteractions as exciting, which Blothner (2003) describes as a technique for captivating the audience through *obstacles and delays*. Media appeals such as advertisements are effective precisely because they bring temptations and resistances into a mediating order (cf. Melchers, 1998). This already points to the next step in gestalt formation: *organising*.

Organising: Media order

Although the mind always actively and constructively processes reality, it also follows the orders, patterns and rules that have already been established in that reality. Orders make our lives easier, relieve us of the burden of constantly having to make new decisions, and support and regulate our everyday lives. Order enables different things to work together, such as when working in an organisation. And if it doesn't work there, we experience particularly clearly what orders normally achieve. The simplest form of order is differentiation, such as the differentiation between figure and ground on which all perception is based, but also the differentiation between good and evil, which regulates our social actions. Every medium also has its own rules of distinction and helps us to organise and sort. This is easy to demonstrate using the example of language, which structuralism according to de Saussure understands as a system of distinctions: each signifier means what all the others do not mean (de Saussure, 2016). As speakers, we must obey the rules of a language if we want to use it and have an effect through it. This shows that order and effect need each other. Visual images also follow rules of representation, which vary depending on style. Music is a form of moving order that develops its own rules. Stories form typical, dramatic patterns, such as a conflictual opposition between protagonist and antagonist. For Salber, archetypes or *complexes* (including the six conditions presented here) are ultimately forms of expression of "organising basic structures" (Salber, 1965, p. 179). Genres or styles in media formats are also examples of such types. They create commonalities, regulate what fits together and what does not. Particularly concise ordering media

are lists and tables, but also house rules and agendas, as well as law books and, last but not least, scientific models such as the one presented here, which attempt to reveal an order that organises the phenomena in the background. Even if we experience orders as something that already exists, to which we submit or conform, human orders are always manufactured orders and therefore always possible in other ways. It is always possible to rearrange things – here, the organising again refers to the *shaping*.

Example: Air: The plot of Air is mainly driven by Sonny Vaccaro's decisive actions: he pursues his goal of securing an advertising deal with Michael Jordan, consistently overcoming various obstacles both from his own company and from Jordan's manager and family. In order to influence his opponents, Sonny has to adapt to their different types of order: he has to remind his boss of his own pioneering spirit, the rules with which he made Nike great (and which are also repeatedly shown in the film). He plays off Jordan's aggressively pompous manager with humour. He has to show Michael Jordan's mother, his actual negotiating partner, that he, like her, recognises Michael's unique talent and, like her, is also willing to make sacrifices. The audience repeatedly experiences a shift between setbacks and progress, which ultimately leads to Sonny's triumph (with Blothner, 2003: humiliation-triumph). However, when Sonny has almost achieved his goal at the end of the film, the film offers another subtle twist: Sonny himself now falls under the influence of Jordan's mother, who turns out to be a skilled negotiator. In a calm dialogue, she persuades Sonny to change the usual terms of the contract, thereby ensuring that her son receives a share of every Air shoe sold in the future. She uses a type of self-blackmail typical in advertising, reminding Sonny of what he has professed to believe (namely, Michael Jordan's exceptional talent) – which makes the financial "sacrifice" seem justified and small. Sonny really has no choice but to agree if he doesn't want to betray himself. What Mother Jordan describes in the conversation as "just a small thing" is in fact, as the audience immediately realises, a radical reorganisation and a huge victory for the Jordan family.

Expanding: Media complete

Mental formations have a tendency to become part of the whole, striving for completion and continuation. They want to spread, increase, connect everything with themselves and make it complementary. In everyday life, we experience this in the form of desires for perfection, ideas of paradise and impossible ideals that we seek to achieve. Media cater to these tendencies in a special way: they enable enhanced formations, intensified experiences, the viewing of seemingly perfect images, the grasping of seemingly pure ideas, and the hearing of seemingly supernatural music. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan understood media as extensions of man (Kloock & Spahr, 2012; McLuhan, 1992). In much the same way, morphology regards media as extensions of the psyche. Mediated by the media,

the psyche can unite to form large, supra-individual entities, as demonstrated by all cultures that are connected by their belief in (media-mediated) myths, religions or ideals. Media forms appear to us as self-contained entities, comparable to worlds of their own (*hour worlds* according to Salber, 1965), which are one and the same for many people, sometimes even for masses of people, and can therefore create unity. The phenomenological media philosopher Lambert Wiesing (2018) puts it this way: Media create intersubjective sameness. This means that a film, book or piece of music is always the same, regardless of the place and time of its realisation. In their dissemination through media, spiritual forms break away from being just one thing. They can survive as ideas and detach themselves somewhat from their material foundations (without ever completely losing their dependence on them). Through media, spiritual formations can thus seemingly emerge *on their own* (albeit only in appearance), as if there were a separate, ideal world in addition to our own. Media thus reveal a *surplus* that can take the form of a surplus of knowledge and information (news) or a surplus of life and reality (art). Communication media such as our smartphones embody this *surplus* and advertise themselves as precisely these means of dissemination that overcome boundaries and make universal connectedness and constant accessibility possible for everyone by everyone. At the same time, smartphones make it clear that our tendencies to expand will never really become independent – for example, when the battery runs out. We remain dependent on our *equipment* – which in Salber's hexagram is also the name for the opposite pole of expanding.

Equipping: media constrain

Every gestalt formation must develop a limited form in order to maintain itself. Gestalt psychology has investigated such tendencies towards rounding off and closure in visual figures and actions. In everyday life, we can see that boundaries are necessary: clear framework conditions and necessary (often material) prerequisites are what enable our everyday activities to function. A general example of the equipment of our gestalt formations is our health: when it is present, it usually recedes into the background and forms the foundation for our desires for expansion, but when it is disturbed, it comes to the fore and we are reminded of our limitations and vulnerability. Being healthy or sick are different *states* of our everyday life. Our inner life is determined by such equipping states, which define our possibilities and limitations as restrictive frameworks. Waking and sleeping or working and celebrating are further examples of such states, each of which makes completely different things possible or impossible. In this sense, states act like filters that allow some things through and not others. Media support and require such states: a story needs a beginning and an end, an image is defined by its boundaries (frame), a film has a particular effect in the supportive state of

the cinema-experience. Media force us into certain states (e.g. sitting still) and favour other states or disrupt them. Ultimately, McLuhan's famous statement "*the medium is the message*" means precisely this: that every medium commits us to a certain state. McLuhan's thesis on television, for example, was that it is not so important *what* people watch on television, but rather *that* they watch television (e.g. instead of reading, cf. McLuhan, 1992). This is what changes their lives and also their culture. Today, we are seeing a changed attitude to life and certainly a changed culture as a result of digital media (cf. Grünewald, 2019). Media states of mind are also related to the fact that it matters which medium we use to do something. Creative people know that a change of medium can break a block (e.g. writing by hand instead of on a computer). We experience equipment trains in media where we are reminded of the concrete materiality of media, e.g. when technology does not work. Academic media psychology, like media theory, has often dealt with the limiting aspects of media equipment. For McLuhan, the flip side of expansion through media is amputation, a loss of abilities that are replaced by media. Plato also recognised this when he described writing as an crutch for memory, which – if used too much – weakens memory. There is currently a debate about how artificial intelligence will change our lives and what dangers lie in it taking over our thinking. The expansion that we usually want is associated with necessary sacrifices. Only in the limited, self-contained world of forms of a medium can a figure achieve increased shaping and thus gain the *added value* mentioned in the last section.

Example Air: From the outset, a sense of expansion is evident in the film Air: Sonny wants to achieve great things with Michael Jordan as his advertising partner. With Blothner (2003), one could speak here of the basic complex of limited-beyond. His belief in this idea inspires Nike employees, despite all their concerns, to also focus on this big goal, even though it involves sacrifices (night and weekend shifts) and risks (loss of job). The sleepy Nike department becomes a team that even works through the weekend and night. However, when it finally comes to the decisive presentation to the Jordan family, it quickly becomes clear that something is going wrong: from the outset, the carefully prepared presentation seems imperfect and fails to spark enthusiasm. When Sonny realises this, he improvises an impromptu speech in which he reveals that Nike (as an equipment supplier) wants a small share in the "immortality" that he predicts for Michael Jordan through his fame. In return, he promises to stand by him even when things are not going perfectly. The speech impresses and surprises everyone. At this emotional climax of the film, viewers experience a shift from imperfect to perfect (also a basic complex in Blothner, 2003), but also back again, so that the scene remains central in their memory.

The tension between expansion and equipment forms the central axis of the film's complex development. It manifests itself between the huge, seemingly perfect success of the Nike and Jordan advertising deal and the rocky, imperfect path to get there; between the shining light of Michael Jordan (who, wisely, is never shown directly in the film) and the very human, unathletic protagonist Sonny; between the down-to-earth piece of equipment that is a shoe and the seemingly supernatural talent of an exceptional athlete.

Third version: The fairy-tale transformations through media

In morphological psychology, the psyche is conceived as a reality that is perpetually transforming and reworking itself. In his book *Seelenrevolution* (Salber, 1993), Salber recounts the entire history of culture as a sequence of figures, each of which can be understood in terms of a particular problem of construction or transformation (abbreviated as transformation patterns). In fairy tales (usually by the Brothers Grimm, but not exclusively), he saw highly condensed representations of these fundamental psychological transformation patterns, which are therefore particularly suitable for characterising the complex constructions of psychological formations. In the third version of the description of a specific work, morphological analysis therefore attempts to penetrate the specific pattern of transformation of its object of investigation and, at best, to bring it into dialogue with a fairy tale. Morphological media psychology has already demonstrated this in many cases: for Blothner (2003), *transformation* is the third level of his *pyramid of effects*, on which he analyses films in terms of their *morphological dramaturgy*, even if he does not explicitly trace them back to fairy tales. However, there are many film analyses with reference to fairy tales, e.g. by Gloria Becker (2010a, 2010b), formerly Dahl (Dahl, 2004) or by Wilhelm Salber and Marc Conrad (2006). Advertising material could also be traced back to specific fairy tales (Becker, 2010a, 2010b), whereby it could also be shown that the lack of or undesirable effect of a commercial can be explained by the fact that the fairy tale it alludes to does not fit the intended advertising message (Zwingmann, 2021). Using a few, but very revealing examples, morphological research has also shown that non-fictional news topics can also be better understood in terms of their effect if the construction problem at work in them is illustrated by a fairy tale: e.g. the death of Lady Di by the fairy tale *The True Bride* (Imdahl, 1997; commentary by Herbert Fitzek) or the so called “refugee crisis” from 2015 in Germany through *Hansel and Gretel* (Grünewald, 2019). The effect of social media has also been studied in terms of the fairy tale structures at work in them – for example, Facebook and *The Fisherman and His Wife* (D. Salber, 2012) or Instagram and *Snow White* (Zwingmann, 2018) – as have works of art, among other things, in order to make them usable for morphological art coaching (e.g. Zwingmann, 2019).

Example Air: The film *Air* can also be traced back to the transformation pattern of a specific fairy tale, namely “Puss in Boots” (Brothers Grimm). This fairy tale tells of a miller’s son whose father leaves him only a cat, while one brother gets the mill and the other at least gets the donkey. When the dissatisfied miller’s son is already considering skinning the cat, it begins to speak and asks for a pair of boots so that it can go out. With a mixture of skill and tall tales, the cat then makes itself popular with the king and procures gold, a castle and ultimately the king’s daughter for the miller’s son. The cat even persuades a magician who can transform himself into anything to turn himself into a mouse – and eats him. According to Salber, the fairy tale depicts a dissatisfied unity seeking more receptivity or cooperation from the world. (Salber, 1999b, p. 64). This lack of receptivity is addressed by one part – the cat – and transformed into a successful responsiveness. And that is exactly what the film *Air* allows us to experience: it begins with a dissatisfied unity (Nike’s unsuccessful basketball brand), in which the protagonist Sonny embodies the part that wants to create a new, more satisfied unity. The audience experiences this transformation with them: step by step, we see how Sonny achieves a cooperation between the parts of the Nike company and the parts of the Jordan family. Sonny’s methods are also very similar to those of the tomcat. He has to prove his usefulness by making correct predictions about his competitors Adidas and Converse. Like the confident cat in the fairy tale, he oscillates between the parts, accommodates them and moves them towards each other. At the same time, however, Sonny, like the cat, has to resort to lies and tricks: he makes promises that he cannot actually keep yet, does not always tell the whole truth and sometimes breaks the rules. In Sonny’s impromptu speech to the Jordan family, he presents himself and the other Nike employees as servants working for the greatness of the coming unity. However, the fairy tale characters should not be identified exclusively with individual film characters, because the cunning trick of reversing the proportions (the wizard becomes a mouse) is ultimately not achieved by Sonny, but by Mother Jordan, who negotiates a share of the shoe sales for her son that will make him fabulously rich. The shoe is a common concrete symbol in both film and fairy tales: the boots made especially for him enable the cat to face the world. In the film, the eponymous *Air* shoe is made especially for Michael Jordan by Nike, thus forming a very successful new unity with him. In the film, Sonny says, “A shoe is just a shoe, until someone steps into it.”

The construction problem of media

Media in the narrower sense can therefore be characterised as mediating entities in which the general conditions for the formation of mental constructs are realised and conveyed in a particular way. Media are also capable of enabling us to experience a wide variety of transformations. How is this possible? To understand this more precisely, I would like to attempt to highlight what I see as the construction principle of all media in the narrower sense. Media are apparently

difficult to grasp conceptually; at least, there is as little agreement on a definition of media in media theory as there is in psychology on the psyche (cf. Grampp, 2016). This indeterminacy of media is both a problem and a solution: it already points to the problem of transformation, to which all media can be related and which, from a morphological point of view, is also the most original construction principle (or the most original construction error) of the psyche. In my view, all media are based on the relationship between *the undefined and the defined*, and in morphological psychology, this relationship is also the origin of the psyche itself. I am therefore of the opinion (and this idea is not new) that media and the psyche should be regarded as having the same origin. For Salber, the ability of the definite to become indefinite and, conversely, the redefinition of the indefinite is the starting point of all psychological development: He places this fundamental relationship at the beginning of his psychological cultural history, as he sees the origin of the history of psychological transformation in the point at which humans (in contrast to animals) no longer perceive their own reality as self-evident and clearly defined. For example, a stone can become something indeterminate for humans, something that can be treated, i.e. redefined, perhaps as a tool, jewellery or sacred stone. For Salber, this starting point also gives rise to the necessity of language as a redefinition (naming) of a reality that is no longer self-evident and predetermined. The image of humans and the psyche that is drawn here is thus based on the imperfection and indeterminacy of humans, who do not move in fixed paths like other animals, but display an openness from which new forms can always emerge. The human psyche seeks its image precisely because it has no specific image.

From the perspective of the media, the concept of the media soul already made it clear that media should not be thought of as some kind of *extra* added to an already complete psyche. Rather, mediality is a fundamental feature of the psyche: the psyche depends on the medium of reality in order to exist, and the psyche also fulfils the function of a medium in relation to reality. In order to come into its own, the psyche ultimately also needs the media in the narrower sense, because in the medium in the narrower sense, the relationship between form and material is reversed. We usually see form as secondary to a thing and the material of which something is made as primary. A person who grows from an infant to an adult changes form but remains *objectively* the same. In media in the narrower sense, however, form becomes primary. It is only in the medium in the narrower sense that we recognise forms *in themselves*. The prerequisite for this reversal, in which form becomes more important than material, is the transformation of the definite into the indefinite. In order to be a medium, a thing must lose some of its own determination (Niklas Luhmann already formulated this with reference to the Gestalt psychologist Fritz Heider; cf. Luhmann & Weber, 2008). A medium

produces phenomena, i.e. it allows forms to appear, while its own form becomes unthematic, disappears, as it were. It is precisely this relative indeterminacy that makes a material a usable (= ever-changeable) medium. In language, for example, sounds are sufficiently indeterminate in themselves, and letters have sufficiently little meaning on their own. They can recede into the background when they are used – usually in combination – in a specific sense, namely to designate or determine a form. Other media also thrive on their relative formlessness: dyes and canvases, clay or stones, sounds and tones recede as media behind the images, sculptures, stories or melodies through which they take on a specific form.

Media continually revitalise the transformation from the undefined to the defined. The dark cinema auditorium, the empty screen, the white sheet of paper, the silence before the music begins or before someone starts to speak – all these are examples of a new process of making things undefined. Media in the narrower sense are therefore objects through which the transformation from indeterminate to determinate is repeatedly carried out, so that the medium as a thing becomes indeterminate and is able to convey the formation of form. This mediating formation of form *is* the spiritual. As long as it works in the background in everyday reality, it remains unthematic. Only in the media in the narrower sense is it itself thematised as form or form formation.

The fairy tale of the media: Fundevogel

For Salber, the fairy tale Fundevogel from the Grimm brothers' collection of fairy tales is a condensed representation of the primordial relationship between the indeterminate and the determined. The fairy tale can be summarised as follows:

A forester finds a foundling in a tree, which had been snatched from its mother by a bird of prey and left there. The forester decides to take the foundling, whom he names Fundevogel, home with him and raise it together with his daughter Lenchen. The two children become inseparable. One day, Lenchen hears that her father's cook wants to cook Fundevogel in her cooking pot. She warns him and runs away with him. However, the cook sends two servants after the children, but they manage to escape twice by transforming themselves: once into a rose bush with a rose on it and once into a church with a crown inside. When the cook finally sets out to find the children herself, they transform themselves into a lake with a duck on it. The cook tries to drink the lake dry, but the duck pulls the cook into the water, causing her to drown.

The fairy tale thus depicts the psyche as a lost foundling that is dependent on cultivation and must form a dual unity (media soul). However, this dual unity is repeatedly threatened with being torn apart and ending up in the entropy cauldron of reality. The duality of the undefined and cultivation can save itself through self-determined transformations, which ultimately cause the entropy-witch (the

cook) to fail. Salber speaks of the psyche in general as a *dual-unity* (*Zweieinheit*) and, in relation to art, as a “twin of our lifeworlds” (Salber, 2002, p. 38), or in another formulation: “The everyday psyche is a first art, the art twin a second psyche” (Salber, 2002, p. 39). The psyche and its media are twins, a dual-unity. The media are the necessary means of expression in which the psyche comes into its own. By becoming indeterminate, the media become a symbol of the psyche itself and can at the same time absorb the entire diversity of transformations in the history of psychological cultivation. Just as the psyche can transform itself into anything, so too can the media in the narrower sense.

Fourth version: Three types of medium

Based on Fundevogel’s fairy tale, which illustrates the construction principle of media in the narrower sense, different types of media can also be distinguished in terms of how they deal with the problem of the relationship between the indefinite and the definite. Here, I would like to draw on Karl Bühler’s classic classification of the three sign functions (Bühler, 1999). For him, every sign has a *representational function* through its reference to an object, an *expressive function* through its use by the sender, and an *appellative function* through its effect on the recipient. Even though these three functions can never be separated from one another in principle, typical media forms have nevertheless developed over the course of history in which one of these functions is brought more to the fore, while the other two remain effective in the background. Without much effort, one can identify *news*, for example, as a format that primarily emphasises the representational function by presenting what is supposedly *objective*. In contrast, works of art and entertainment formats can be assigned to the expressive function: they clearly appear to be something created and constructed by humans, which is why they are often described as *subjective*. Finally, it is easy to see that the appellative function takes precedence in media advertising, as its aim is to prompt the audience toward a particular action.

In the following, I would like to show that, against the backdrop of Fundevogel’s media fairy tale, each of these media formats can be understood as a specific, paradoxical approach to the problem of indeterminate-determinate, which can be assigned to one of the – at first glance rather puzzling – transformations in the fairy tale and understood symbolically from there.

Rosenstock and Rose: The representation

The first of Fundevogel and Lenchen’s transformations in the fairy tale is into a rosebush and a rose. This can be understood as a symbol of the connection between continuity and change: the rosebush appears as an immovable whole, on which the rose blossoms bloom and wither again as changeable parts. This recalls the relationship between *absorbing* and *becoming* that I described above and can

also be easily linked to Bühler's *representational function*: when a medium represents an object, this generally means a repetition, an image through which an object is fixed and represented in a medium (in Bühler's terms: through the sign). The logic of representation is that the medium enables a view of reality as it is objectively. The representation is true if it corresponds correctly with reality. What is overlooked here is that every representation is always also a creation, a construction that determines access to reality at least insofar as it makes a selection and takes a certain perspective (which is dealt with in media and communication theories, for example, under the keywords *agenda setting* or *framing*). Even if this is taken into account, the representation still assumes that reality itself is a completely defined whole, as constant as a rose bush that merely produces different flowers. Paradoxically, however, this can also be understood in exactly the opposite way: It is only through representation that an otherwise indeterminate reality becomes a determinate one. While phenomenal reality is in a state of constant change and transformation, it is media representations that attempt to work on its fixation. From this perspective, the mass media format of *news*, as realised in newspapers or television news, strives to continuously represent the many changes in the world and thus seems to want to prove "(...) that the new is always the same" (Grünwald, 1989, p. 55). As if the world were a rose bush on which new flowers grow every day (and quickly wilt – because nothing is as old as yesterday's news). Representational media such as news create the image of an objective reality by repeatedly integrating the new into the continuity of a consistently defined reality with which we can identify. In line with the metaphor of the rose bush and the rose, this image seems quite *natural* to us. The representation thus occupies the extreme position of the determined in the complementary series from indeterminate to determined, by repeatedly linking the flow of fluid, indeterminate reality to the certainty of a fixed image. The representation says: This is how it is!

Church and Crown: The Appeal

Secondly, in the fairy tale, the twin-psyche transforms into a church and a crown inside it. The crown should be understood here as a clear symbol of worldly power and dominion. The crown is contained within the outer form of a church building, symbolising the (in this case religious) order that legitimises worldly power (divine right). So here we are dealing with the relationship between *shaping* and *organising* described above: every *appeal* is an attempt to influence, which must refer to an order such as typical patterns, rules or laws. While the crown stands as a symbol of influence for our concrete actions, the church symbolises the order in the background, the laws that justify those actions. In the human psyche, it is not clear from the outset which law should apply, because human beings are underdetermined. Human laws do not work as automatically as, for example, the law of gravity in physics. Humans must agree on their rules and laws and submit

to them. Unlike the alpha animal in the animal kingdom, human leaders are not simply the strongest, but must legitimise their claim to leadership, for example by referring to religious, ideological, political or economic orders. Even money is only an effective power as long as everyone agrees on the economic order that gives money its purchasing power. And all advertising must be able to refer to cultural norms, whether these are specific role models (e.g. how to be a man or a woman) or more general values such as individuality, self-realisation, freedom or enjoyment. Advertising must implicitly or explicitly refer to such norms in order to justify a certain action (buying a product, voting for a party or changing one's behaviour in some other way). Wilhelm Salber has therefore described advertising as a substitute for "Knigge", a synonym in Germany for a guide to etiquette (Salber, 1959, p. 119), and Grünwald called it a supplier of "pragmatic ideology" (Grünwald, 1991, p. 31). It is clear that such human norms and rules are always constructed norms that can change historically (which is particularly easy to understand when looking at old advertising or propaganda). Advertising can act as an appeal by presenting a certain order as the truth – and deducing from this how one should behave. Advertising exploits the fact that, as underdetermined beings, we are always in search of orientation. In doing so, it obscures the fact that other orders are always possible. Seen in this light, advertising stands between the indeterminacy of the psyche (which does not automatically know what to do –if it did, advertising would be unnecessary) and the determination to which it aspires. In our search for guidance, the appeal tells us: This is how it should be!

Duck and lake: The formation of expression

As the last pair of figures, the twin-psyche Fundevogel-Lenchen take refuge in the form of a duck on a lake. The duck as a living creature represents a limited, mortal being. The lake on which it swims is the world that spreads out around it and carries it. What we have here is an image of the relationship between *equipping* and *expanding*. Here we are dealing with Bühler's – easily misunderstood – *function of expression* and, at the same time, with what can be understood as art in the narrower sense. As Salber has repeatedly pointed out, it would be misleading to imagine expression as something internal being pushed outwards. As if works of art were protrusions of emotions, fantasies or other subjective contents of the artists into the objective world. From a morphological point of view, however, art is rather a self-treatment of the psyche in the sense that it creates itself at the same time as it expresses itself. From a morphological point of view, the psyche does not exist in a finished form beyond the expression it finds, but rather constitutes and creates itself in its forms of expression (autopoiesis). This has always happened in culture and "everyday art" (Salber, 2002, p. 12), but is also explicitly marked in works of art as *constructions as such*. In literature, music, visual arts, theatre and film, the psyche can come into its own. Unlike representational

forms, these works do not claim to be depictions of objects, but reveal themselves from the outset as creations. They can still have representational and appealing functions, but this is not the main point. Rather, they tie in with the indeterminacy of the psyche and its ability (and desire) to transform itself into many things. “Because it is a media-psyche, the psyche experiences the most intense stimulus of its life in the fact that it can transform itself – transform itself into the diversity of the whole of reality” (Salber, 1994b, p. 137). That is why genuine works of art are open without being arbitrary – they connect the psyche with its own infinite reality of transformation. The mortal little duck on the inexhaustible lake is an image of what works of art are: attempts to capture the infinite, immense reality of the psyche in finite works, without ever being able to complete the task. The expressions of art say again and again: This is how it could (also) be!

Summary

Morphological psychology understands the psyche from the outset as a mediapsyche. Media in the narrower sense are mediating this of this mediapsyche: they enable and expand the self-treatment of psychological reality. Through their relative indeterminacy, they can make a variety of formations and transformations experiential. As representations, they work on a specific image of reality; as appeals, they attempt to orient the indeterminate through defining orders; and as forms of expression, they represent the psyche itself as an indeterminate reality that is constantly redefining itself.

Zusammenfassung

Morphologische Psychologie versteht das Seelische von vorneherein als Medienseele. Medien im engeren Sinne sind Vermittlungsdinge dieser Medienseele: Sie ermöglichen und erweitern die Selbstbehandlung seelischer Wirklichkeit. Durch ihre relative Unbestimmtheit können sie eine Vielfalt von Formenbildungen und Verwandlungen erfahrbar machen. Als Darstellungen arbeiten sie an einem bestimmten Bild von Wirklichkeit, als Appelle versuchen sie, Unbestimmtes durch bestimmende Ordnungen zu orientieren und als Ausdrucksformen stellen sie das Seelische selbst als unbestimmte, sich immer wieder neu bestimmende Wirklichkeit dar.

Keywords: Morphological psychology, media, media psychology, literary psychology, film psychology, advertising psychology, cultural psychology, everyday psychology, art psychology

Keywords in German: Morphologische Psychologie, Medien, Medienpsychologie, Literaturpsychologie, Filmpsychologie, Werbepsychologie, Kulturpsychologie, Alltagspsychologie, Kunstpsychologie

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