The crisis of modernity and the shaping of the Internet

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Agenda

• Conceptualizing crisis

• The critical, the crisical, and the dialectical stages of crisis

• A really short introduction to the „Aristotelian philosophy of the Internet”

• Crisis and the formation of the Internet

• Critical, crisical, and dialectical dimensions of the Internet

• Transition from two worlds to three worlds
Conceptualizing crisis

The crisis is a process of a kind of transformation

• in which an established system (of beings, of values, of institutions, etc.)
  – loses its integrity
  – gets disorganized and
  – a new system emerges

• disorganizing – reorganizing process

• e.g. in a society without crisis there is
  – a usual order of the events
  – a universal, dominant organising principle, expressed e.g. in a rule-based ideology, style, paradigm, etc.

• the crisis coming to be when the usual organising principles are losing their power and validity
Conceptualizing crisis

• Applying the Aristotelian view on processes, the crisis can be characterized with the notions of:
  • possibility and actuality

• Applying the Aristotelian view on processes, the crisis has three stages
  • characterized by the concepts dynamis, energeia, entelecheia
  • considering the processes from the position of possibility, actualizing and being actualized
  • which are the critical, the crisical and the dialectical stages

• Ambiguity of meaning: crisis designates the whole process or the deepest stage of it
  • how deep and pervasive the criticism - step by step or jumping into the abyss
Schematic illustration of a crisis advancement

established „old” system („old” unique reality)

emerging „new” system („new” unique reality)

many possibilities/realities

Critical
(dynamis)

Crisical
(energeia)

Dialectical
(entelekheia)
Stage 1: the critical

- In the *critical* stage of crisis development, the unique existing actuality has ruled possibilities

- However, this position, which was previously accepted without doubt, can be questionable, so the *possibility of changes* has already appeared here - dynamis

- The very typical ideologies of this stage of the process are the different forms of criticism: critical philosophies, utopias, avant-garde movements in art

- Criticism belongs to the universe of modernity
Stage 2: the crisical

- The unique existing reality as a basis for our searching activity is destroyed

- Actualization of the change - energeia

- Actuality loses its dominant position, because the difference between actuality and the possibilities cannot be identified, so reality is relativized and pluralized

- Here we have many actualities and we are not able to make a comparison between the alternative values and actualities

- The crisical attitude is a prod of deepest crisis

- Typical ideologies: versions of irrationalism and postmodernism
Stage 3: the dialectical

- From this position we can comprehend the change of world order/ a concrete being as a change which has been actualized - entelecheia

- Here it is evident that everything is commensurable, interconnected and interrelated

- Actuality is developing, and in this process lots of possibilities are actualized, so the world has a complex and open nature

- Typical ideologies: dialectical philosophies
Schematic illustration of the crisis of modernity

established modernity (unique reality)

emerging „new” system („new” unique reality)

many possibilities/realities

Crisical (postmodernism)

Critical (critical philosophies, utopias, avant-garde movements)

Dialectical (dialectical philosophies)
The four fundamental contexts (of and) for the understanding the Internet

- The Internet is a new complex being created by human activity
- Ubiquity of the Internet --- a philosophy of the Internet is needed
- Four contexts are necessary for understanding (Aristotle)
- Aristotle on the nature of the Beings
  - Four causes of the Beings
    » Material
    » Formal
    » Efficient
    » Final
The four fundamental contexts (of and) for the understanding the Internet

• Technological context
• Communication context
• Cultural context
• Organism context

• Existence and meaning in these contexts: ontological characterization of the Internet

• An „Aristotelian philosophy of the Internet” is needed
Technological context

- Technology: a specific form of human agency which yields – an imperfect – realization of the human control over a technological situation
  i.e., the situation is not governed to an end by natural constraints but by specific human aims.
  - Components: a given collection of (natural or other artificial) beings, humans, human’s aims, and (situation-bound) tools

- Internet as a network of computers

- Functions: satisfying human needs

- Traditional vs. information technology
Communication context

• Communication is a technology of community building
  • sharing mental states, views, experiences, etc.
  • communication situation analysis – 4 components
  • active media (McLuhan)
  • communication machines (book, telephone, TV, etc.)
  • computer as communication machine – Internet

• Internet as an active agent of communication situations

• Functions: building up specific human communities
  • online communities including mail, chat, social media, e-tc.

• Traditional vs. virtual communities
  • free, individually organized, virtual (open) communities
Cultural context

• Culture creates a world from beings by re-evaluation – a technology of world-building

• Internet is a medium of human culture

• Functions: building up a new (not natural and not social) realm for human beings
  • creation and use of (personal) homepages, e-tc.

• Traditional vs. cyberculture
  • traditional culture creates a social world from natural beings - cybercultural praxis of the Internet creates a world of ‘network-being’ from the social system by reevaluation
  • the three worlds: Natural --- Societal --- Network
  • formation of a new organism

• The nature of the ‘network-being’: virtual, open, individually created, playful, free, etc.
Organism context

- An organism is a complex being with specific identity, integrity and reproducibility

- Internet as a specific organism: network of networks
  - it is an artificial being created mainly by (direct and indirect) interpretations

- Functions: holding specific (postmodern) organization principles
  - specificity of the identity and the evolution of networks: plurality, fragmentality, individuality, e-tc.

- Modern vs. postmodern organism
  - the postmodern Internet: plurality, fragmentation, virtuality, inclusive of modernity, against power, individuality
The Aristotelian philosophy of the Internet about the nature of the Internet

The Internet is
- the medium of a new form of human existence
- created by the late modern man and
- it is built on the earlier (natural and social) spheres of existence
- but it is markedly differentiated from them

We call this newly formed existence web-life and we are trying to understand its characteristics
Internet and the crisis of modernity

• The Internet is an artificial sphere of life for late modern people, which is a prod of the crisis of modernity

• The formation of the Internet can be associated with a crisis development process – with the advancement of the crisis of modernity

• The critical, crisical and dialectical phases of this crisis create and/or prefer different sorts of beings and practices which are included into the Internet use, so it has a complex nature which is imbued with the values of these various phases

• Reflections to the whole crisis development can be found at the critical theorists and the postmodern thinkers, so many relevant descriptions of the Internet come from these areas
Internet and society

- The Internet - society relations in the context of the late modern crisis

- In the critical stage of this crisis critical theories of the late modern society, and social utopias are created and the Internet can be considered as a virtual realm of these ambitions

- In the next phase of the crisis these possibilities transform into realization and in this process the Internet will be the most significant holder of the fundamental postmodern values:
  - plurality, virtuality, individuality, fragmentation, included modernity, against abstract power

- From the perspective of the dialectical stage the Internet can be considered as a medium of a new realm for the mankind built on the natural and social spheres of human existence.
Critical dimensions of the Internet

- **Technological context** – artificial beings possible
  - Virtuality and openness
  - The reality has a measure - full/perfect reality
  - E-beings: e-mail, e-science, e-personality, e-etc.

- **Communication context** – artificial community possible
  - Break away / independency from the given communities
  - Chat, fake identities, e-democracy

- **Cultural context** – artificial worlds possible
  - Individual freedom to build up independent worlds
  - Play cultures, extension of the worlds, individual web pages

- **Organismic context** - modern organism possible
  - Systems, utopias, most modern values: speed, effectivity, dimensions (number mysticism)
Crisical dimensions of the Internet

- All of these four contexts together: synergy

- Technological context – artificial beings are actualizing
  - Pure information technology – production by interpretation
  - Virtual beings and open realities

- Communication context – artificial communities are actualizing
  - Virtual (open) communities - independency from the real communities
  - Online games, postmodern personality, multiple identities, online communities

- Cultural context – artificial worlds are actualizing
  - Cyberculture: reinterpretation of the classical values, individual worlds
  - Second Life, plurality of the worlds, Web 2.0

- Organismic context - postmodern organism are actualizing
  - Networks, irrationality, postmodern values: plurality, fragmentation, virtuality, included modernity, against power, individuality
Dialectical dimensions of the Internet

- All of these four contexts together in a different way: emergency

- Technological context – artificial beings has been created
  - Information technology – production by interpretation
  - Virtual beings and open realities

- Communication context – a new community has been emerged
  - Build up from virtual (open) communities
  - Online communities

- Cultural context – a new world has been emerged
  - Cyberculture, infinite versions of individual worlds
  - Web-life or network-being

- Organismic context – a new organism has been emerged
  - Being of the network of networks – interaction between the networks
The modern crisis: transition from two worlds to three worlds

- Two worlds: natural and social, nature and culture, cosmic and human values, etc.

- Emergence of society:
  - tool making (technology),
  - speech (communication)
  - conceptual thinking (culture),
  - communities (online communities)

- Post-industrial, information, network society?

- A new organism is emerging – it is not a social system
  - Society = communities + culture
  - Web-life = online, virtual communities + cyberculture

- Three worlds: natural, social, and web-life
Conclusion

• A more complex world is emerging in which the natural, the social and the web-life spheres are simultaneously present

• The ‘human essence’ has moving from the social to the web-life

• A new period of human history has started