

# The crisis of modernity and the shaping of the Internet

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# Agenda

- Conceptualizing crisis
- The critical, the crirical, 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, crirical, 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

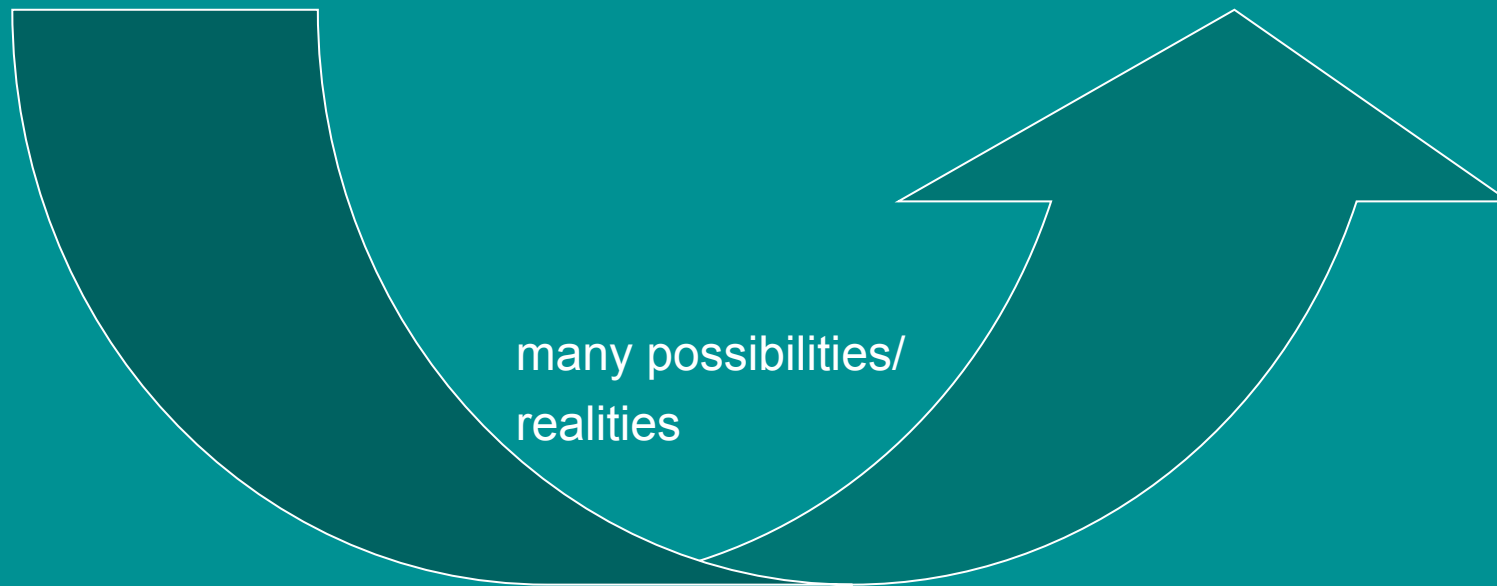
# Conceptualizing crisis

- 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 crisis 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 crisis

- 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 crisis attitude is a prod of deepest crisis
- Typical ideologies: versions of irrationalism and *postmodernism*

## Stage 3: the dialectical

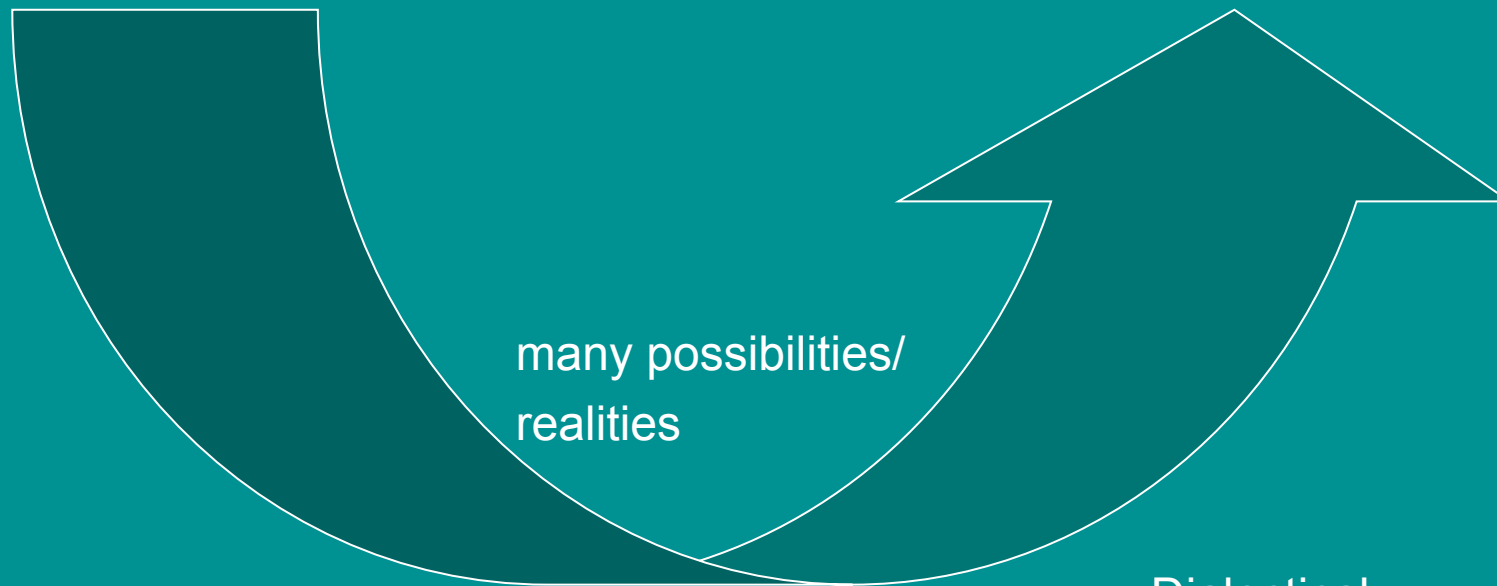
- From this position we can comprehend the change of world order/ a concrete being as a *change which has been actualized* - entelecheia
- Here it is evident that everything is commensurable, interconnected and interrelated
- Actuality is developing, and in this process lots of possibilities are actualized, 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)



Critical

(critical philosophies,  
utopias, avant-garde  
movements)

Crisical

(postmodernism)

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
  - banking, shopping, e-commerce, e-learning, e-tc.
- 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, crisisal 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-tc.
- 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)

# Critical 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