THE PARADOXES OF THE INFORMATION CULTURE

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Abstract
Based on the meaning of information as a subjective concept, "information culture" defines the degree of individual perfection in the work with the information one needs - finding it, decoding it, saving it, processing it, systematizing it, the creation of new knowledge, communicating it in the form of information and its practical use. The elitist information culture includes also bibliographic, or information-search, culture, which forms the style of the "one who knows where knowledge is hidden" who experiments with methodological knowledge about the path to the needed information. In general, "information culture" overlaps with the concept "digital culture". With the present development of the two contradictory trends – information overload and information blackout – which lead to the paradox "increasing ignorance in the conditions of information overflow", we need to remember Plato's intellectualism in order to take today's user out of the lethargy of the controlled, unlimited and uncritical consuming of information and direct him towards an ecological communicative behavior.
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"Technology is the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it", said Max Frisch. These human extensions – the technologies – have replaced yet another self-amputated sense and have provoked fundamental metamorphoses in culture.

One of these cultural metamorphoses from the end of the 20th century has been legitimized with the term "culture of the computer page" as a type of meta-screen culture. "The culture of the computer page" is the peak of the pyramid which developed on the basis of the continuity between the visual, the written and the screen culture. The computer, as the most perfect human extension that has ever existed, liberated the human brain from the

duty to refine the sign systems and postulated itself as a "self-transforming sign system".

The transformation of societies through the three main processes in informatization – digitalization, interaction and globalization - readjusted our senses to master the newest culture – digital culture. According to the Canadian scientist Derrick de Kerckhove, digitalization turns everything into information in the name of universalization. In 1997 Nicholas Negroponte made the following prognosis: "In about ten years physical objects - books, newspapers, television, videotapes, CDs – will give way to digital forms, constructed by bits which have no colour, no size, no weight and are spread with the speed of light without problems." These two aspects of digitalization as a result of which the person using the information has no alternative other than using only information which has also lost its atomic structure, transforms the laws of human existence. The mind is no longer determined by the way of life, but by the bit.

The digital culture (which together with the launching of a new sensation compels us to also amputate our tactile senses) provoked a communication paradox: telecommunications without any alternative. Back in 1989 Jean Baudrillard warned that we were entering the "primitive society of the future", which in contrast to the primary primitive society, is entropic, autonomous and non-ergonomic. "In our contact with interactive web-television", he writes, "we interact without touching, we talk to each other without uttering a word, we have discussions without seeing each other."

It is true that digitalization solved the problems of freedom of movement of ideas and of access to ideas. But what do we forget again? The problem of the subject of culture. In our fervent ambition to ease our overloaded senses we created a net of technological extensions and we have built ourselves in this net. And in order to enter into a synchronous regime with the "self-transforming system", we had to accept the digital culture as a self-contained culture. Because only it can initiate us in the secrets of interaction with the world which we "needn't experience", but just register.

The modern "net-man" extraordinarily overlaps with the "street-man" of Alfred Schutz. They are united by the so-called information fetishism in their consumer-behavioral strategy. Both feel comfortable only in the world of the "socially approved knowledge", with the difference that the "net-man" hasn't experienced inertness. He strives to "privatize" the knowledge which circulates around the net. He believes in the adequacy of mechanically assembled information and because he considers it "socially approved", he doesn't feel the need for personal apprehension of the link of this information with reality. With the lazy mind, knowledge in digitized funds becomes a priority over reality much more easily.

This could be the result of the digital culture; undoubtedly, it promotes conformist attitudes. Because the user has logged himself entirely to the network "self-transforming system", he quickly turns into an atom in the

field of identical atoms. And as each system functions thanks to the automation and depersonalization of the individual cell, the cyber-user has no right to breach this law of nature. In order that the system functions without problems, the digital culture introduces the postulate for the "necessary conformism". Conformist attitudes, apart from being compulsory for cyber-space, are adequately comfortable, as opposed to the individualistic inventiveness which requires extra energy. Of course, the subject of digital culture doesn't stop fighting for its own identity, but this is done already as a subject of Brownian motion. The neo-individuality, states Baudrillard, is an interactive micro-particle which has landed on the new and which gives visibility to what it is standing on. This is the conformist state of "being directed to the others", of the folly of sameness, of saturation and repletion.

Information fetishism in the information society appeared as naturally and as logically as product fetishism in the consumer industrial society. As a result of the saturation of information flow and of the transformation of information into a commodity, knowledge became secondary. The current, the new, the extra replaced the lasting and the valuable. Today we assemble only data, we understand only information, which overshadows and makes the search for meaning useless. The reason for this process of "anti-cognition" hides probably in the new "technocratic discipline". It is based on the desire for total accumulation on the wavelength principle, radically different from the principle of selectivity. The overcharging with information destroys the balance of the cognitive functions. It leaves the feeling of over-satiation and stagnancy, the new is regarded as the old, innovations become something banal. The technocratic discipline provokes the inertia of overall indifference towards the world and its content, it cultivates "collective narcissism" and progressive "indifferent openness" to egocentricity. As a result of "anti-cognition", contact prevails over the message, the audience over the content, the sign over the meaning. Communications exist without aim, without understanding; verbal rivalry swallows the act of thinking.

Obviously, again, we have to pose the question about the difference between information and knowledge. First of all, we must note that only philosophy gives a definition for "information" adequate for the needs of the humanities. One of the quite accurate definitions states, "Information is the reflection apprehended by someone or by something", or information is a medium for the individualization of knowledge. Any message or knowledge is not automatically information, but only that which is subjectively judged and apprehended. Information is the knowledge that circulates in space; knowledge is accumulated information. Or, information and knowledge are the two driving forces in a closed cycle. Knowledge is a result of processing and organizing of apprehended information and it does not contain meaningless elements. The knowledge has the distinctive need for a long period of time for contemplating and systematizing; the mechanical perception of data, facts and someone else's opinions cannot find a principle of organization between them, in order to transform them into knowledge. This is where the main reason for the appearance of the information fetishism hides - the lack of time and the shortened distance between

finding, perceiving and communicating information. The value of knowledge is being replaced by the value of information.

Cognition is the only means to fight the entropy in the system, the ignorance. Provided that the digital culture ignores the need for familiarization and comprehension, there is a real risk that information turns into a catalyst of entropy. How is this transformation possible? The basis of the process of cognition is the existence of a difference between the organization of the object (the information environment) and the cognizing subject (the recipient). The organism keeps its inner organization through constant, dynamic balancing with the outside environment. In order to comply with the requirements of the changing information environment, the individual resorts to a dynamic information exchange, which improves his organization, i.e. his state of being informed. When this basis of cognition is shaken, when the "difference" transforms into an "abyss", we are forced to constantly fill in, "pour into" the foundations, without having the time to build upon them.

This again proves the difference between the concepts "information society" and "society of knowledge". Each civilization has an information aspect, in the sense of the definition of civilization - a lasting state of matter, able to accumulate, analyze abstractly and use information for acquiring the maximum amount of data about the environment and about its own self, for devising preserving reactions. Information cannot be a social substance, or a resource; it is a property of matter, it is the spiritual aspect of the relation between the message and the recipient. Knowledge is the social substance and their priority place in a given historical stage legitimizes the "society of knowledge". In other words the new knowledge, as human resources that cannot be taken away or destroyed, are the "shares" of the new post-industrial civilization. As Benjamin Franklin said, "If a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take his money away. Shares in knowledge pay the highest dividends". Therefore, the creation of new knowledge is the preserving reaction of the future civilization. But who will create this new knowledge? It is claimed that in the developed information society 90% of citizens will be occupied in the information sphere: scientists, medics, engineers, lawyers, artists will have to master the digital culture, i.e. to able to programme. Then where is the place of the creator of the knowledge to be digitized? Let's look at the term "information culture". Based on the meaning of information as a subjective concept, "information culture" defines the degree of individual perfection in the work with the information one needs - finding it, decoding it, saving it, processing it, systematizing it, the creation of new knowledge, communicating it in the form of information and its practical use. In general, "information culture" overlaps with the concept "digital culture" and it is composed of three basic levels. First, the entire aggregate of necessary and accessible means for optimization of the information processes. Secondly, the skill to use effectively and connectedly these means, and potentially refine them. And thirdly, the awareness of the objective systematism of the information sphere in public life.

At which level do the peculiarities in the behavior of the creator of new knowledge, of the innovator, start? In the first place, the subject of the "society of knowledge" should realize the difference between "information" and "knowledge". Being informed, having a rich "thesaurus", are not by any means signs of a high information culture. The threat of total information fetishism can be neutralized by the wisdom of the knowledgeable, not by the strength of the informed.

The elitist information culture includes also bibliographic, or information-search, culture, which forms the style of the "one who knows where knowledge is hidden" who experiments with methodological knowledge about the path to the needed information. It is wrong to think that we must look for a balance between data and their meaning, between information and knowledge. "We should", says Daniel Bernstein, "realize that we do not need 24-hour stimulation of our senses. We should return to the forms of communication which leave us time to determine a fact, to comprehend it and only then, accept it." In any case the development of written culture as a basis of every "sustainable development", which is the foundation of the present "culture of screen reading" as well, has decisive significance. Let's think of Plato's intellectualism and its paradox: with scarce information he reached knowledge, valid till today, truths, which even the present, informed and empirically assisted mind cannot reject, add to or dispute. "Plato's paradox" is undoubtedly connected to the space and freedom of thought developed on the basis of constant trials and errors, of rich material, collected for generations, following the principle "Do ut des" ("I give, so that you can give"). With the present development of the two contradictory trends -information overflow and information blackout - which lead to the paradox "increasing ignorance in the conditions of information overflow", we need to remember Plato's intellectualism in order to take today's user out of the lethargy of the controlled, unlimited and uncritical consuming of information and direct him towards an ecological communicative behavior. The memory of Plato's intellectualism is also needed today as a spur to combining the efforts of sociologists, philosophers and futurologists for a "return to the man" who "observes himself" and develops the "culture of his own self". The ancient rule to always have all interiorized knowledge "at hand", so you can contemplate on it in loneliness, is in the basis of this "culture of the self"

From it we can derive another requirement towards contemporary information culture: the ability to unload yourself of information. A characteristic feature of the evolving intellect is not the insatiable hunger for information, but the ambition for reducing the memorized information. This ambition is also realized in the process of getting informed, but through finding organizing, associative information. In other words, information about rules, correlation and symmetry is sought, to link the unconnected, chaotic and isolated subjects of thought, images and concepts. This so-called negative information assists in the huge information discharge. Otherwise, the constant and intensive attack on the human memory with ad hoc images and variable meanings would surpass the individual limit of saturation and would provoke an indifferent communicative behavior. The desire to dispose

of information is a natural protective reaction of the human brain against energy overcharge. This is one of the main rules for information hygiene in a polluted information environment. The search for "negative" information is a reliable method for information balancing of the human as a creative individuality.

Obviously, the agent of the "society of knowledge" is the balanced intellect, able to balance the system too, by striving to discover and solve occurring problems, and to reduce its entropy. In other words, the intellect is the ecologist of the information space.

However, only the wise one has right to take decisions. Only he can observe reality from aside and from above: far from the "socially approved knowledge", he is always out of the atomic structure of the digital routine. Even if they appear, cognitive technologies will continue to process data only. Wisdom is not inherent to them. The wise creator will work with intuition and metaphors, with improvisations and creative drives. The wise creator is the "man above the net" who respects the laws of nature. He is the conservative consciousness of the future.

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