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## Virtual World – Real World

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### 2. Visions of humanity: the expulsion from paradise

Why do we accept these new levels of constant and unrestricted surveillance?

One reason for this development may be found in changes in the relationship of society to Nature and technology. We can see another in the growing standardisation and conformity of society today, and in the wish of individuals to fit in with these established norms. The last reason lies in the wish for self-fulfilment, in spite of increasing adjustment to set norms and values. Cyberspace offers ideal conditions for the creation of a further identity: anonymity, the absence of control mechanisms, one-sided communication cycles and self-defined membership of a group.

George Agricola and Paracelsus wrote: “The expulsion from Paradise is not a loss; man creates a new, more blissful paradise” through his “art”.

#### A. Changes in the relationship of society to Nature and technology

As a rule the term *Nature* is used in connection with everything “that exists, which human beings have not created, for example the earth, the plants and animals, the weather etc.” .... or “woods, meadows and the like, that have been changed minimally or not at all by human beings; by contrast with the town” (cf. the dictionary published by Langenscheidt KG of Berlin and Munich).

To extend our understanding further, *Nature* must be linked to the term “wilderness”. In current dictionaries the meaning of this word is explained as “a lonely, undeveloped region”, “land in its natural state”, “an undeveloped area that has been left in its natural state” and so on. In older works of reference “wilderness” is chiefly thought of as “an uncontrolled tangle of growth”; but then too it is seen as a “state of unlimited freedom” or even “an absence of culture”. The suggestion is of something untouched by humanity, something that exists in its own right, functions according to its own laws and goes on reproducing itself - a state independent of human beings. It is in opposition to that which human beings touch and modify, or cultivate.

Nature as such exists and reproduces itself. Mankind, however, only exists due to its constant action, reproduction, and reinvention. Nature is thus acting in a paradoxical way, being spontaneous and expedient at the same time.

Every single form of life is vitality. I live in the shadow of a birch tree. It grows between the Berlin firewalls of the backyards of the down-at-heel urban district of *Wedding*. Successor generations of little birches are constantly growing in the area around the house. The garden I look out on is being sown with little birches, between the slabs, the cracks and the rotten steps leading to the basement, in the unplastered approach to the front door, in the unflooded end of the gutter, in every niche and in every crevice in the wall. A frontier forest of birches will expand here, putting an end to the limited survival term of the concrete. First the paint peels off, then the mortar

crumbles, cracks develop in the walls and finally the day of the birches reclaims Nature in full force.

The history of life is vitality. The life process scatters, it plays, it opens itself in unpredictable ways into achievements that are ever new and for their part again represent correspondences in relation to the influences of the environment.<sup>1</sup>

The wild spaces of Nature can present a threat to the physical existence of human beings - according to their capacity. Death is the most powerful and most deep-seated cause for the banishment of Nature from modern life. Nature and death are woven together on many levels. Nature's "becoming and passing away" is a threat to us, pointing as it does to the comparatively short span of our lives and the finitude of all our efforts. We can accompany Nature's long-term developments only in an episodic manner. Cycles that are triggered by so-called *catastrophes* often take up more time than a human generation has at its disposal. Modern humanity thinks in the short term: its conceptions are temporally limited and egotistical. "What's in it for us, if a new wood grows up in 70 years time? We won't be getting any benefit from it" is a way of thinking that is widespread today among the older generation.

The wild spaces of Nature are a constantly lurking threat, which we try to combat through our peculiar capacity for acquiring knowledge. And so human beings have always followed the injunction of the Bible to "subdue the earth": from time immemorial it has been their concrete ambition and their real endeavour to tame, banish and control Nature and the natural wilderness. This indwelling vitality drives humanity to make the best possible use of its resources in today's achievement-based and communication-based society. Anyone who ignores talents and potential opportunities in and around himself can expect nothing from competition, and has passed up the chance of growth.

It is an intensive preoccupation of human beings to delimit the living space in which they dwell, to make it safe against the incursions of the wilderness, of Nature and the demons of the wild(...): whether through apotropaic masks, fences, thorn stockades or painted charms. Human living space is designed as an anti-wilderness - as in English lawns, Baroque gardens or interior decoration.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Albert Schweitzer formulated the command to reverence all life. Human beings are only ethical when they regard life in all its variety - plant, animal and human - as holy, and dedicate themselves to the furtherance of life in a spirit of respect. The original prerequisite if we are to feel reverence for all life is Schweitzer's fundamental principle: "I am life, wanting to live, in the midst of life that wants to live."<sup>3</sup>

Life is defined by its will to live. And in this there shows the link that connects all creatures, their respect for life. At the same time, called forth by the mutual competition of creatures and their different definitions of life and their will to live, the pressure to survive makes itself felt. The respect for the will to live consolidates in the deeper realisation of the variety of Nature and

the limited capacity of a single species to comprehend everything. It becomes our aim to intuit the being of Nature in all its wilderness and variety, to contemplate and to study it. It forms a part of the ethics of reverence in the face of all life that we become capable of recognising and valuing the extant forms and conditions of life in their undistorted dynamic manifestations. In this way a more deep-rooted goodness and quality of life is revealed.

Rainer Brämer, Professor of Natural Sociology at the University of Marburg, wrote in 2002 in his publication *Varianten der Naturentfremdung - Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Naturreligion* [Varieties of Alienation from Nature - Towards a new Religion of Nature?] that the modern German citizen of our high-tech society spends 95% of his life in artificial biotopes, enclosed between glass panes. The German report on youth of the year 1997 reveals that 1% of today's young people think that cows are purple (referring to the wildly successful TV commercial, showing a purple cow standing on a green meadow, producing excellent milk for excellent chocolate), and 9% think that ducks are yellow. The younger the young people interviewed, the higher the proportion of those who were convinced by the yellow duck theory. Young people in Germany seem to derive their knowledge of Nature on the whole from television, on the basis of broadcasts like *Die Sendung mit der Maus* [The Broadcast with the Mouse], *Sesamstrasse* [Sesame Street or Tigerentenclub [Tigers and Ducks Club]]. Young Germans picture Nature as an animated world, but one from which humanity is absent. Their own body does not figure in their image of Nature. Through human contact Nature is rendered impure and denaturalized - farm animals and domestic pets and plants are no longer a part of Nature. Already in 1997, 50% of all young people in Germany when going for a walk would be listening to a walkman or diskman, 45% would be annoyed if mobile phones were forbidden and 35% would be annoyed if smoking and drinking were forbidden when hiking. Plainly for the media generation Nature on its own is just too boring.

And yet Nature is currently enjoying a boom. At the start of the eighties 40% of all those who were interviewed in an annual analysis of travel patterns mentioned *experiencing Nature* as one motive for travelling amongst others; today it is the major motive for booking a holiday for 80%. If we add the explanation *beautiful landscape*, 90% express their agreement with what is offered. The yearbook for research into travel and tourism, *Voyage 1997*, establishes the fact that travellers are longing to find something natural, original and unspoilt. In distant parts they look for authentic experiences, for a contact with Nature that has not been stage-managed - everything that it is not possible to find at home in the modern and civilised western world.

Nature is an extremely emotional, and for the most part a positively populated variable. As a rule she is beautiful, good, kind and in need of protection, and one who lays violent hands on her (...) does her damage. Young people think it is very important to plant trees, while felling them is seen as definitely harmful - (...). In their eyes Nature appears in the guise of a sweet fawn that must be preserved and cared for, but which is not to be touched if we can help it. Thus warning notices in a natural setting are seen in a positive light by almost 80%, while popular outdoor activities like camping or

making campfires are judged by a majority to be harmful to Nature.<sup>4</sup>

Progressive alienation from Nature shows itself at the same time in a kind of glorification of Nature. Only without humanity can Nature subsist and maintain itself. Nature is felt to be a sacred divinity, humanity being seen as her devilish counterpart that is minded to destroy her. Nature is a place remote from human beings - a beneficial dispenser of life energy, a genuine and authentic place - but one where we do not appear in the picture. No German would take it into his head to leave the prescribed paths when hiking through the woods, or would be bold enough to plunge into Nature's trackless wilds. Reverentially we take photos of the sun streaming through the tree-tops, we stand in contemplative mood before anthills or observe with excitement a pond full of tadpoles. We are so carried away by our feelings that it does not occur to us that we are a part of the whole. We have become an over-powerful Antichrist figure, one who masters Nature to such an extent, on the basis of science and technology, that he can destroy or protect her to suit his whim. Electricity is the basic raw material of this world. The constant humming of high-capacity cables, extraction fans and ventilators replaces the cogwheels and cranks of the machines of the industrial revolution. Mechanical feedback has turned into a constant ghostly fluctuation, interference patterns and misunderstood data records.

For us dealing with nature means to change and improve it, making it fit our ideals. Most people not only assume that every natural product can be technically reproduced, but also that all natural processes will be simulated and replaced soon, including ourselves.

An invariable part of the cooperative coexistence of Nature and humanity is the endeavour to *transform the wilderness*, in the way in which human beings do through their culture. Culture - that is to say, that which human beings have to learn, that by which they are distinguished from their biological origins - must consist of the end product of learning: knowledge in a quite general, if not relativistic sense. Things and events, and even symbols, stand for cultural forms and models, of which they are the material representatives. It follows that culture is not a material phenomenon. Culture means models through which human beings perceive things, put them in relation to one another and interpret them (*cf. Goodenough 1964: 36*).

The heightening of culture has reached a point where Nature can no longer be recognised at all. The principle of civilised coexistence today bears the style of the human definition of the will to live. It presents itself as the *urban* principle, the principle of modernity and enhanced technological development, and excludes the respect for life in all its variety - as plant, animal or human being. In searching for boundless freedom we have banished and extinguished it. Our technologically developed culture and civilisation work in a self-referential way, setting themselves new goals.

Modern man, however, has entirely lost his connection with Nature. In principle, Nature can be manufactured and reproduced by man.

The following objectives of human progress may be derived from technological progress:

1. Increased striving for autonomy from nature.
2. Making more time available.
3. Increase in knowledge and abilities.

4. Decrease in work-load and improvements in the quality of life.

Man masters Nature through technology. He gains freedom and independence, but at the same time loses knowledge and a natural way of relating to life. Pushing back wild Nature, we find that there is a high price to pay: the loss of measure. Taken out of the area of tension between culture and Nature, between wilderness and civilisation, humanity forgets its roots: the society of growth tends to immoderation, the affluent human being is inclined to self-domestication (*Lorenz, 1973*).

#### B. Growing standardisation and conformity

Which leads us to the second reason: an increased standardisation and conformity of humankind within society, due to a pronounced wish for acceptance.

Harold Innis states:

The exploitation of a particular communication technology fixes particular sensory ratios in members of society. By fixing such a relation it determines a society's world view; that is, it stipulates a characteristic way of organizing experience. It thus determines the forms of knowledge, the structure of perception, and the sensory equipment attuned to absorb reality.<sup>5</sup>

In 1997 Clarissa Pinkola Estes' book *Women who Run with Wolves* became a cult book in the United States. The author addresses modern women "who find themselves forced by our civilisation and our society into fixed roles that have robbed them of their primal power." The adapted, over-anxious and uncreative woman of today cannot access the original link that connects her to the untamed *wolf-woman*.

She has lost the means of access to her intrinsic and primeval springs of power: what remains is a standardised human being in a society that has been taken over by technology. Nature has been lost to us all - not just to women, but to men as well. We lead a stressed-out, over-civilised and adapted life in a society of constant acceleration, without any psychic vitality. The western civilisation of today gives rise to a type of human being that is cut off from the world, closed, even shut in on itself - to human individuals who have come to be alienated in equal measure from their own inner nature and from Nature in the world around them.

The deeper causes of this schizoid state are to be looked for in the history of western philosophy: in René Descartes, whose philosophy of the separation of body and mind, Nature and intellect, subject and object was a decisive influence on the epoch of modernity. With this the reasoning human being had attained the upper hand, and the marginalisation of the physical and the sensuous, of all that was connected with the earth, was a foregone conclusion. The triumphal march of rationalism had begun.<sup>6</sup>

For man's social existence, rules are necessary. They determine the ways we relate to one another, create laws and thus also a society's morals and ethics. Without them, our highly complex western societies would collapse. Yet where new rules and laws are effective, new norms come about that are meant to show man the right way. Contrary to rules and laws, which tell people how not to act, norms illustrate what society regards as normal. Therefore they do not describe a way that contains what is right for every individual, but rather constitute the mean of the sum of all individual desires. A life of anonymity, of a systematised norm, makes people feel safe and protected. It allows each individual to strive towards the standardised ideal.

Norms represent the value systems of societies. These are defined by values, values which establish a norm for those individuals who apply them. As concepts of what is desirable that have developed historically and have been transmitted by sociocultural means, they in fact possess the character of supreme goals. They thus constitute a foundation and justification, in an interpretative way, for the more specifically defined social norms that are indispensable if members of a society are to have a mutually harmonious and rational mode of interaction in everyday life. The intermeshing of the world's national economies at a level that transcends the limits of continents, countries and nations results from the creation of global markets for capital, goods and services and the worldwide proliferation of transnational companies and corporate groups, and it is leading to the levelling of cultural differences. To live as a productive member of society, one possessing status and security, in the technologically transformed environment of the western civilised world, it is no longer possible to plan your life just on a local or regional basis.

So as to avoid the *clash of civilisations*, to use Samuel P. Huntington's term, sociologically and ethically based philosophical values and conventions are required to regulate this global world.

Western civilisations fail to face the widening gap between the glittering wealth of transnational corporations and the poverty suffered by a third of the world's population. Presently three billion people--nearly half the world's population--live on less than \$2 a day, while another 1.2 billion live on less than \$1. 15% of Chinese and 40% of South Asians are among the poorest of the poor.<sup>7</sup>

For this purpose norms, values, communal links and issues relating to both individual and collective identity need to be analysed and brought to light. A mutual respect for the existential links of all those who take part in the dialogue must be guaranteed, and they in their turn will come not just from religious walks of life, but from non-religious ones as well. Accompanying educational measures that engage with a believing partner to the dialogue in keeping with his value associations, his moral judgment and personal communicative skills are inevitable, seeing that human beings today stand at many very different phases in the development of their beliefs. Belief is not just to be connected with religion, but rather with an independent web of content and relations (*cf. Normen-Werte-Moralische Dialoge - Interdisziplinärer Dialog [Norms - Values - Moral Dialogues - Interdisciplinary Dialogue], Opusculum no. 6; Adloff, Bauschke*). For the globalised western civilised society this system of norms and values first and

foremost means health, fitness, beauty, youthfulness, flexibility, cosmopolitanism and linguistic citizens of the world unlimited by any dialect. Cultural, religious and ethnic differences and personal identity systems are given up in the interests of a worldwide exchange in all walks of life.

Men and women wear the same clothing, we read the same books and see the same films. We know the whole world, we visit the same places and locations, eat the same food, subject our bodies to operations in order to conform to a general ideal, and would be happy to clone ourselves or at least have ourselves improved with the help of technical devices. Religious symbols, indicators of tradition and culture, cannot be tolerated in multinational and multi-religious societies, seeing that they lead to exclusion, intolerance and hostility. Dialects are spoken no longer, folk costumes are no longer worn, traditions are no longer listened to or valued. The worldwide networking that at first glance looks like an instrument of liberty is actually far from it. Rather it is the stamping down of cultural variety in the name of worldwide *Americanization* or *McDonaldization*.<sup>8</sup>

The Other is no longer an object of passion but an object of production. Maybe it is because the Other, in his radical otherness (*altérité*), or in his irreducible singularity, has become dangerous or unbearable. And so, we have to conjure up his seduction. Or perhaps, more simply, otherness and dual relationships gradually disappear with the rise of individual values and with the destruction of the symbolic ones. In any case, otherness (*altérité*) is lacking and, since we cannot experience otherness as destiny, one must produce the other as difference.<sup>9</sup>

Thus in the area of genetic engineering during the past few years the use of computers has led to developments that make it possible significantly to manipulate a person's genes. They enhance, for example, the control of the ageing process, of muscle growth or growth in general; the control of the individual's appearance through plastic surgery; the increase of mental capacities through chip implants and the ability to combat diseases and epidemics.

These examples perfectly express the struggle towards an ideal norm and the desire for man's ultimate rule over human finitude. We have an identity in the physical and natural world but need an additional identity for the world determined by technology.

### C. Creation of a virtual identity

Which leads us to the third reason: creation of a second self by means of virtual reality. In his book *Connected Intelligence: The Arrival of the Web Society* the media philosopher Derrick de Kerckhove says:

One of the main effects of digitization is to make 'liquid' everything that is solid. Anything that can be digitized can be translated into anything else that can be digitized.<sup>10</sup>

In 1993 I qualified as a Master of Arts at the *Universität der Künste University of the Arts* in Berlin with an Internet game. Depending on mood and constitution, the persons addressed received my messages, and I playfully switched between the most varied identities. Industrial society is formed through the industrial mass production of physical objects that serve to meet the requirements and secure the survival of human beings. This is a dated world. Society in the information age is characterised by virtuality, which means in the most comprehensive sense *in correspondence with what is possible*. The essence of the virtual world is immateriality and digitalization.

Robert Musil already, in his book *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften [The Man without Qualities]*, where he depicts the Austro-Hungarian monarchy just before the outbreak of war as an analogue of the crisis of modern society, has his hero Ulrich discovering various different models of living and thinking. Ulrich reduces them all to two fundamentally contrasting approaches: that of *the sense of possibility*, where visions and possibilities determine our actions and our thoughts, and opposed to it the *sense of reality*, where probable and tactile experiential values make up the here and now. Relating this to the present age, we can see that we are living with the *sense of possibility*. Virtual or immaterial goods are becoming the most important raw material of the coming epoch. In an earlier period a lamp manufacturer would sell lamps; today he sells light and atmosphere. A tour agent used to organise transport and overnight accommodation; today he traffics in adventure and emotion. These are examples of the basic shift in our understanding of products, moving from material to information. Every product is at the same time an experience. In a world that is on the one hand defined by possibility as such and on the other by norms and values, humanity longs for freedom, for a mode of existence, which promises the ultimate in individualisation, liberation and authenticity. Virtuality makes this dream come true.

We can distinguish three levels of virtuality:

- (1) virtuality as an instrument for copying and simulation
- (2) virtuality as a prosthesis
- (3) virtuality as a surrogate world.

#### D. (1) Virtuality as an instrument for copying and simulation

The first level of virtuality serves as an instrument for the copying and simulation of genuine realities. This type of virtuality works in the widest possible sense with reproduced forms, for example with texts, images, music and so on. Goods that are closely attached to physical products appear in a virtual scenario in the guise of symbol. They copy genuine realities; e.g., computer games or medical applications, virtual interior furnishings, virtual buildings and constructions and so on. Entire branches of industry put up these worlds for sale: the film and games industries, planning a kitchen with *IKEA*, the new Venice in Las Vegas or modern theme parks like *Disneyworld*.

We are preparing a dematerialisation of the body. We hold a cellular receiver to our ear, in order to communicate with voices from any continent and any culture. Fully automated robots at production plants replace our abilities and our hands. Our eyes no longer witness the pain of injured Afghan, Iraqi, Israeli or Palestinian soldiers worldwide in all the international theatres

of war, or the unemployed and homeless in Rio, London, Berlin, New York and Moscow, but that of the much more dramatic, more visible, more detailed and more fascinating images of *Hollywood's* mega-machinery. Our eyes see *CAT scans* of cancerous metastases, we see ultrasound children, we see the settings for cruise control in our vehicles, and still have our hands free to type numbers into our mobiles, to open Coca Cola cans or even to load a gun. Hearts, livers and kidneys of freshly executed prisoners from China are flown at top speed to clinics in London, Berlin, Los Angeles or Las Vegas, so that a CEO or an ageing actor can have a new lease of life.

Steve Mann, a *senior student* at the *MIT Media Lab*, is attempting to live on the web. He wears a “wearable wireless webcam” all day, which sends still video images of what he sees all day long to his website, where they are published. Sometimes he phases out his direct visual contact with reality by means of a pair of spectacles, which enables him to see not reality, but the images captured by the video camera instead (*Wired, October 1995*).

Every kind of reality can be subjected to further processing and technical improvement. Our perception has become a product, a consumer object. It is sold and marketed: the individual can pick out from the varied range of possibilities whatever he requires, whatever he wants at this particular moment to consume.

#### E. (2) Virtuality as a prosthesis

The second level: virtuality as a prosthesis. Virtuality is used as the extension of an arm, computers function as prostheses to compute, think, observe, control, stimulate, and so forth, as means to boost and enrich reality with imagination. Flight simulators, computer simulation of human behaviour in psychology and brain research, medical applications, such as minimally invasive diagnostics and surgery, androids, clones, cybersex, digital money, transactions on the financial market etc. ... In this way virtual worlds are created that replicate structures and processes which are not represented in the real world. Handicapped by the human-machine interfaces, it will still be some months or years before this level of virtuality equips our daily life in the commercial world, but as long ago as 1995 Nikolas Adair, in an article in the magazine *Wired*, announced that the technology of display could be entirely dispensed with:

The folks at the University of Washington's Human Interface Technology Laboratory have developed a laser diode that eliminates the need for a screen, drawing images directly onto the retina of the eye. The head-mounted Virtual Retinal Display uses a combination of lasers and mirrors to produce full-color images bright enough to be seen in daylight. Researchers, funded by Micro Vision Inc. of Seattle, have produced working prototypes capable of displaying 1,280-by-1,024-pixel images at 72 hertz - as fast as many conventional monitors. Within the decade, the team hopes to produce an eyeglass-sized device that displays images at resolutions approaching human vision.<sup>11</sup>

In this way - as with the television that traces signs on a coating of phosphorus - it becomes possible to write data to human beings directly, that is to the optic nerves of the retina. The human being's perception is altered in a fundamental way, with additional virtual information being superimposed on real images.

#### F. (3) Virtuality as a surrogate world

The third level: virtuality as a surrogate reality. The prosthesis takes on a life of its own, the computer turns into a creation machine. *Virtual Reality (VR)*, *Artificial Reality*, *Virtual Environments* or *Cyberspace* are the terms used here. On the basis of data that can be digitally processed, immaterial worlds can be created. They are worlds, because they do not merely represent replicas or projections - they also have their own rules, which breathe a simulated life into these conceptual worlds.

This form of virtuality brings forth completely new wares: dream worlds, adventure environments and experiential spaces. Already today we are in a position to experience rudimentary prototypes of these virtual environments on our own. The object is to deceive the senses, or actually to produce sensory delectation by artificial means, in order to generate perceptions that persuade the user that he is located in a spatial environment. The point of crystallisation of different forms of integration is the decisive factor. The integration of various interface technologies with different media calls for the complete linkage of the human individual to a new quality of experience, where he stands at the centre of events.

VR techniques are distinguished from conventional interface techniques in that they provide access to the third dimension. It is just this third dimension that makes it possible for the user to enter this world, and so blurs the boundary between man and the machine still further. The classic human-machine interface has become the space in which humans and data interface. Virtual worlds replace the real world. This happens through the perfecting of simulation: avatars, mock identities on the Internet, caves or holo-decks, etc. De Kerckhove anticipates the future development of the network in the following terms:

Today we have search engines, tomorrow morning digital engines, tomorrow midday group mind wear, tomorrow evening independent agents.<sup>12</sup>

Virtual worlds are generated by computers; as digital models, they are only apparently present, but there is nothing in the material world that corresponds to them. Like every kind of digital information, virtual worlds can be reversibly manipulated at will, and copied without any loss of data. Every property and every pattern of behaviour can in principle be freely designed, with the proviso that only ideas, concepts and applications that can be symbolically described can also be integrated with virtual worlds. Virtuality describes the possibility of what may be represented, that is to say, the basic concept in terms of content of virtual worlds. Virtuality, on the other hand, does not represent a unique feature of the virtual world. The peculiar individuality of virtual worlds rests on the combination of virtuality with the powerful absorption of the user, that is to say, with the degree to which the

user is psychically involved with the medium. Absorption can be reached by degrees, with any medium: in reading a book, in watching a film in the cinema, the reader or viewer is always psychically involved. Indications of this involvement are the psychic states - such as happiness, sadness, fear, joy, tension or terror - which are called forth by the medium.

This third level of virtuality gives rise to a society, which gives priority to an individualised world of experience, in preference to holistic interests. The individual ceases to participate actively in the community, and internalises his world instead. As a result of the powerful urge towards change and our need to differentiate ourselves from others, the human individual becomes a presentation, becomes a public site, as is already happening today in the form of weblogs; indirectly, however, the addition and recombination of all individual representations is driving a development of social structures, as a result of which the spiral of development is turning more rapidly all the time. New things come into being and pass away in the twinkling of an eye. Each of us has the possibility to develop his or her personal strategy for living, and to live in keeping with it. The linkage between these individually designed worlds of experience is based on a transfer of information, which makes possible global transparency, even though it calls for no social communication whatever.

#### G. Normal schizophrenia

Virtual worlds will in future be taken for granted as a part of daily life. The boundaries between the real world, so called, and the virtual world will no longer be clearly distinguishable, seeing that the virtual world will support, and independently implement, actions and events that make it effectively a part of the reality that shapes our experience. Our experience of Virtual Reality will rather tend to put in question our naive concept of reality, and bring us to the awareness that that our reality is only a reality of appearance, filtered through the medium of our perception. There will be a transposition of our concept of reality in favour of virtual worlds and identities, resulting in a perfectly normal form of schizophrenia. I exist in the here and now in just the same way as I exist in cyberspace. Overlaps can happen, and may be taken on board as *déjà vu* experiences, as feedback or flashback or as a vision of the future.

The classic conception of the product will be fundamentally altered. The basic criticism of the aesthetic values of a product will no longer be so important, as virtual products are evanescent. This follows from the realisation that the product can be continually improved; it can also be simply deleted again at any moment. Integration with virtual worlds in daily life will change not so much the product as the view that is taken of the product itself, seeing that the foreground limitlessness of the possibilities of design proves - on closer inspection - to be not the most important factor. So in the real world we are compelled by the laws of Nature to exercise physical and practical functions in order to satisfy our natural, physical and physiological requirements. In the virtual world these necessities of Nature can be dispensed with; but this is not a liability, as in the virtual world none of these requirements can be satisfied in any case. As a kind of replica of the user - one that keeps a documentary record of his actions, can externalise his thoughts (it being possible to represent information instantly) and can put his unconscious

activities on display - the virtual world becomes an integral part of the human subject. New aspects - such as the application of unconscious bodily reactions for self-reflective purposes - transfer the focus of attention from the world of products to the individual, so that the product becomes an integral part of the user.

To attain to this new freedom in virtual space, we will have to give up many constants of our life as it is today.

1. Loss of historical knowledge and abilities: dried milk instead of the mother's breast, crafts and repair works, no larder in modern buildings, home trainers instead of outdoor activities and manual work, etc.
2. Loss of history.
3. Loss of identity and authenticity as human beings.
4. Collective loss of reality.
5. Vulnerability of the information society.
6. Receiving masses of junk information and spam.
7. Loss of the experience of direct contact with nature and other human beings. Denaturalization of everyday life.
8. Having more trust in machines than in human beings.

Donald Theall on the significance of convergence in cyberspace:

Ultimately, the full development of cyberspace, or virtual reality, will provide people with the capability to interact within all-encompassing environments across space and time, while simultaneously utilizing databases of varying media mixes from many distant and disparate locations.<sup>13</sup>

Human self-perception and self-definition means referring to one's own personal sphere of action, not relating to the public at large. Out of this a lack of interest in societal and political problems, issues, and developments is generated. This lack of interest is being nurtured by an uncontrollable amount of information. As a result of modern media and its 24/7 flood of information, man feels well informed, enlightened, individualised, authentic - and very happy. What will be the impact of this media hybrid on human communication, and, more importantly, on human identity? The possibility of escaping from reality with the help of virtual identities is already an attractive way of signing off from a given area of life - at least for a matter of hours, through visiting chatrooms or indulging in cybersex activities. We will not recognise the threat that the linked databases constitute until one of our identities is affected in its freedom and possibility of self-expression - whether in cyberspace or in the here and now. Privacy will be a thing of the past.

There are numerous, increasingly interconnected databases, set up by the authorities and by private companies alike. The divergent interests of these different actors are leading to different outcomes for the data's source - us. We will not be able to control who has which access to which amount of our personal data. It is said that "those who control the past, will control the future", but for us it is "those who control the present, will control the future".

Or will aimlessness itself become a new value? Will the human individual in cyberspace scatter his microscopically fragmented interests on all

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sides, will he experience everything simultaneously and define and configure himself simultaneously as often as he wants to, will he no longer recognise his own identities? Will the capacity for schizophrenic thinking become a condition of survival in the confusion of the society of unlimited options? Imagine being able to partake of anything, to be anywhere, backed up by a computer network, which enhances the nervous system through the addition of multiple sensors and sub-systems and externalised cerebral regions... Is the cyber-human then just a processing node in the world-spanning mega-intellect? Is human culture developing into something like the superconsciousness of a new organism, one that we can no longer register at all on the basis of information-carrying neurons? Reversibility and the possibility of saving data increase the half-life of information. Will we some day have so much information available for new combinations that everything has been set down that is describable? Will this enable us to travel into our own self-generated time? And will we find ourselves then only quoting ourselves, while the mega-organism we have generated is producing realisations on that basis that lie far beyond our intellectual grasp?

### 3. Conclusion

A community is a group of people who are different yet interdependent and are bound together by a common set of responsibilities. By contrast, a lifestyle enclave on the Internet is a group of people who choose to be together because they share some common dimension of importance, such as professional status or preferred leisure activity. Whereas public, informal gathering places bring together a wide variety of individuals to share a common space, lifestyle enclaves are segmented and tend to encourage the narcissism of similarity. Human beings have given up access to their natural origins in favour of new realities. They have taken themselves out of the field of tension between Nature and culture, and now define their reality in a globalised growth society which as a result of its virtual worlds tends to immoderation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the philosophy of rationalism is being reinforced. Affluent man is domesticating himself.

In virtual reality he finds fictive freedom and authenticity. He lives in keeping with the principle of the *sense of possibility*, where virtual or immaterial goods have become the significant raw material. The fact that in all digital happenings we are placing ourselves in networked environment that is capable of being stored in machine language goes unnoticed. The new reality brings with it no abiding depth. In the mirror of reflection and eternal reproduction, everything becomes information and communication. Contrary opinions and politics find no place in this stage-managed media-based world of spectacles and consumer articles. The image of super-individuality, communicated by clever marketing, is already a fake. Individuality and authenticity were yesterday - tomorrow will be the age of the adjustable mass, in the same way that Nature has become adjustable to us. We do not think any longer, we believe. A future time may come when artificial intelligence becomes a kind of over-powerful dynamic, one that will master humanity to such an extent in scientific and technological terms that we will be directed, formed and mastered by it.

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## Notes

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