

NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIETY

Mankind has already survived a lot of fundamental changes, revolutions. We can think about geological, climatic changes. But this is not the worst or the most dangerous. For humans prove to be able, to survive and even live comfortable in about the most extreme climates and climate changes from deserts up to the ice environments (Eskimos). Much more dangerous for the environment, the other creatures and the human beings themselves are the transformations and revolutions caused by human culture itself. Here traditionally one introduces the agricultural revolutions, which really has transformed the whole physiology of our environment. In the 16th – 19th century we have the pre-industrial and the industrial revolution which again has made a revolution in the environment, and in the human culture, human lifestyle and thinking. Nature again has been «cultivated» to a second degree (generalized urbanization).

Today we see a third and new revolution, the revolution of the virtual learning society. This revolution can still take very different directions. It can build a world in which nature, the environment is revitalized, gains back its pivot role in the survival of humanity. Or on the contrary, we maximize the human impact on the material world, destructing with the new technology means what rests of our natural environment, and inevitably we are preparing the destruction of life on earth. As the science fiction authors have beautifully described, virtual reality revolution is then the start of the exit by humanity from the earth towards a new planet. However, the risk is enormous that we will not survive this revolution. The risk is enormous that we will not find a new planet as friendly as the earth for us to start to destruct it on its turn, to go to a third world, etc.

Let's hope that in time, we all get conscious of what is at stake, that we all get aware of the challenges and that we really in time make the choice to lead the virtual society in harmony with the natural environment. But let us be aware that this struggle is not won a priori. We dare even say that the chances to direct the virtual society towards survival of humanity and the natural environment is rather small, as it requires

coordinated, mondial actions of all people responsible in industry, in religion, in politics, in culture. If this coordination and cooperation is not realized we are just lost. Therefore let us try to use also the new technology to «forge» unity for global and mondial cooperation and coordination for creating a new harmony between the virtual society and the natural world. A possibility which we really have before us today, perhaps also tomorrow. However, if we don't take the necessary steps in a short time, the option of harmony between both can be definitively lost.

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THE TWENTIETH/TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: THE VIRTUAL LEARNING SOCIETY

At the end of the twentieth century we see the start of a new revolutionizing internationalization gulf, a world globalization combined with enormous progress of new technologic. Where in the pre-industrial and industrial revolution, the substitution of manpower by machines was realized, we see that not only this is accelerated but becoming even more penetrating by the substitution of human intelligence by machine intelligence. This last substitution has as a consequence that the need for traditional workpower is drastically reduced. We can even expect that the traditional manpower in 2020 will be reduced with 93%. The service sector and education will now see the dramatic reduction of manpower, which has and is still going on in industry. Moreover through the internationalization and globalization (Internet), countries with low and informal social institutionalization will take what rests of traditional manpower over by these countries and cultures with a very cheap, but highly preformatted labor, in other words. We can expect that this will lead, like it happened in the 16th century to a very dualistic society, with a large poor community and a small rich top. We can also expect new ideologies to arise, to find new answers for social organization. This can very easily lead to social instability and insecurity. But it is also true that this scenario isn't necessary. **The new technologies can on the contrary lead a very stable society. Indeed for the first time the possibility is created that work is generated for everybody.** «The right of work for everybody' has always been a beautiful but unrealistic wish. But the new technologies have changed all this too. It is true it has destructed and is still going to destruct traditional work. But it can generate enormous