Chapter 7.18
Emotional Digitalization as Technology of the Postmodern:
A Reflexive Examination from the View of the Industry

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces emotional digitalization as a phenomenon of future information systems. It argues that emotional digitalization is a progress that will lessen the gap between technology and humanity, as well as between computer and man. The author develops and verifies his assumption besides theoretical references arising from his experiences with the information technology within the BrandLand Autostadt.

INTRODUCTION

"The inmost force/which binds the world, and guides its course" is no longer only a philosophical thought or religious voice, as in Goethe's "Faust," verse 382-383. But they are also not just bits and bytes, cable and monitors. The connection of these elemental substructures of modern civili-zation first shows where the path must go. The functional elements of our daily life must subordinate themselves to our principles of thought and aesthetics. And they must also appeal to the people in an aesthetic, as well as communicative and sense. The modern, as a synonym for freedom and democracy, could thereby obtain a new dimension — to become an ethical entity. The technology of the third millennium must also define the new standards.

As the postmodern breaks down the barriers between art and pleasure, it breaks through the wall between technology and emotion. The aesthetic sensation from looking at, for example, a corporate homepage, accessible to all, suggests a fundamental change in the meaning which will be attributed to the presentation of technology today, when in direct comparison with the functional-rationalistic views of modern, purely informational Web sites. The Autostadt, Volkswagen's new communication platform for marketing and

culture, is on several levels a culmination of different developments, which operate under the term "postmodern" and therefore contribute to theoretical discussion.

This radical change of the basic conditions of our life has put us on a path which will be indicated by a catchy, yet imprecise phrase: "postmodernity." The rationalization of the modern is being counteracted by the pluralization of our culture and humanization of technology, which was demanded, but not achieved, by the modern (Giddens, 1995). With Anthony Giddens, whose critique is applied here, we regard "posthistory" as "a succession of immanent changes," in order to face the prevalent conceptual dilemma (Giddens, 1995). One focuses the view to information technologies and sees that the humanization has an effect, particularly on aesthetics. And here alongside the desired effects lies a formidable danger: does IT go in the same ambivalent direction as the classic technologies, and will it give the manipulators of this world a leg up?

THE WORLD TODAY AND TOMORROW

The core problems of the industrial society (saturated markets, over-indebtedness, mass unemployment, etc.) demanded drastic mental reorientation and have at the same time uncovered innovation potentials. Spirituality and mental dimensions begin to replace the abstraction — the dream becomes a legend. The new technologies of the third millennium must also surrender to these new demands. With help from the most current technologies, we learn to tell stories. Contrary to the findings of Lyotard from the end of the great narrations of history[1], one could also speak about a fragmentation, which transfers this narration from people to technology, especially the digital technologies. With a new neologism, one speaks of the necessity of a "homuter society," which is in a

position to propitiate the people with (information) technologies (Haefner, 1984). Haefner uses this term freely in order to verbalize his skepticism of the possibilities of future developments, which was obtained during the Cold War. However, we could also read it with a conscious hope.

Thus, a great possibility of the future lies in the development of technologies, stimulating creativity and inspiring thoughts. For example, the aesthetic layout of an intranet and the constantly used user interfaces eases the employee's accessing of the media, prevents fatigue from using information and inspires emotions in the exposure to IT in everyday work. The effect is to state a higher degree of identification to the corporation, a more emotional, eventually better relationship to the employer and, ultimately and ideally considered, an increased labor efficiency accompanied by increased happiness. In this manner, IT of the postmodern can manage the reconciliation of the contradictions between technology and art, which are unimaginably present in the modern.

The IT of the present has the function of supporting the thoughts and actions of the individual and not to automate their work in order to eventually replace them. Comparably, the focus should be put on the installation of technologies that will save time. IT must be used to support work processes in order to optimize the concrete procedures and reduce the time requirements. Networked, Web-based systems with access points for all employees could be a first step. Important here are the user interfaces, which are adjusted to the work processes, aesthetically configured, self-explanatory, intuitive and can be understood spontaneously, thereby helping save time and increase room for further assignments.

The same exposed meaning, which electrification and mechanization had for the modern, could be digitization and computerization in the postmodern. The unreality, which challenges our terminology and understanding in increased

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