Chapter XVII

The Future of Digital Society and the New Values of Media

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Abstract

This chapter concerns the conceptualization of information society and its social impact. From this point of view it worked like a myth, emphasizing the role of technology and producing some effects on social behaviours. This idea is develop in three main ways. First of all the chapter explains how the myth was born and how it is producing effects. Second, it investigates how it is changing the anthropology of how we are thinking about technology and its development. Finally, it imagines how media education is affected by this process, pointing out some ideas for re-designing its epistemological profile.

Introduction: Ways of Considering the Future

The sudden appearance of an information or knowledge society has strongly focused the attention, in the last few years, on the future. In this way such a discourse has turned into a force to shape actions and social strategies. Nevertheless, there are different versions and modalities of interpreting future. Some are "prophetic" and assume the form of predictions and wishes used as moral stimulus and reflection; others are "catastrophic" and apocalyptic. According to this perspective the end is always tragic and pernicious and people should always be ready for the next cataclysm. The first versions are enthusiastic and optimistic and they promise a kind of informative and well-being paradise, which would develop itself as an inevitable consequence of the determinant processes of technology. The second versions calculate what might happen and depict future descriptions through market and statistical models (Breton, 1993).

Nevertheless, in my opinion, none of these forms of future perspectives is completely adequate to know what is about to come. They are not adequate to free and improve our capacity of imagination in the present to face the future. In fact you cannot say they are either completely wrong, or completely wise: each one contains a certain degree of valid knowledge, but none represents by itself the absolute truth.

This is why an undisputed original axiom is latent within these approaches. The majority of these perspectives consider the future as inescapable, written in the present and shaping inevitable destiny.

Nevertheless, these are fundamental discourses. Although they can only be considered as intuitions; without them they cannot understand either the human or the social action. Such discourses support human freedom of conscience and human capacity to drive its life. These elements are essential in the process of acquiring consciousness of humanity, but are also fundamental in educational process, and so in media education.

This principle, applied to the development of information society, is based on two main ideas:

- First, future is designed and depends on decisions and alternatives adopted in the present. This means that nothing is specific beforehand and that, therefore, nothing or nobody can present or imagine the future as an inevitable setting.
- Second, our intuition or knowledge of the alternatives that is coded in the future depends, above all, on deep understanding of past and present. The deeper our knowledge of past and present is, the more they will be able to imagine the possibilities that the future encloses.

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