SITUATIVITY – TEXTUALITY – VIRTUALITY

by

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Electronic virtuality is a component of a new level in the evolution of mankind. Who knows the past will form a different future. Therefore it is useful to look at the patterns of development, applying different evaluation criteria. This text focuses on situativity, textuality and virtuality.

Situativity certainly is the oldest phase of development. Beings always were in something like a "situation", characterised by input-output structures, by challenges, and by answers. Situations applied to the individual being as well as to a species.

Its existence in the time-space-continuum is characteristic for a being. This time-space-continuum not only affects the actual situation of a being but also the information available to it on real and abstract matters. One of the consequences is the use of spatial metaphors as an aid for abstract thinking.

One of the framing conditions of mankind (conditio humana) is migration, the change of location. Migration is programmed into human consciousness and may be specifically addressed and updated there. Migration seen as a social or mental program is characterised by goals. It is the world of seeking and finding as well as of chase and of war.

Opposite to this dynamic concept of migration is the static concept of settledness and security. It comes with terms like house, door, wall, town, castle - with an area to be defended. Defence is focus, not migration.

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However, experience tells us that almost every town once has been conquered. Therefore, defence includes the likelihood of its termination. It does not last forever.

We have to remember that situativity of beings is much older than any textuality of civilisations. Maybe it precedes human speech by hundreds of millions of years.

Pre-linguistic situativity is characterised by a wide variety of signs as mimics, gestures, and acoustic signals. Common patterns of behaviour finally resulted in customary law.

Animism is a phase of human evolution. Animism was dominant for a long time. Even today its role should not be underestimated. Ambience is assumed to be animated, and human beings to be able to communicate with these animated entities. As an example, the world of children is animated when they play with pets, even toys. Toys represent the relaxed space of gaming, an animistic frame.

However, animism is not just a matter of the collective or individual past. Today it experiences a kind of renaissance in the culture of machines. Most probably man-machine communication uses similar mechanisms like the interaction within an animalistic world. Therefore it can be assumed that it is possible to learn lessons from the old but still present world of animism. Even virtuality may build upon the functional chains of animistic experience.

An other approach to cope with situativity is to recognize abstract structures within the elements of a situation.

An example is to implicate the firmament with real situations, thereby relating constellations to events.

Doing so seemed to make it possible to bridge present time and future. Astrology was a historic attempt to identify a methodology for contextualisation, using a taxonomy of universal types for interpreting incidents out of a generic point of view.

This approach to cope with situativity expresses the desire for universal cognitive tools. The medieval times developed one of those by the antagonistic formulas of "universalia ante rem, in re und post rem", referring to the philosophical views of Platon, Aristoteles, and the Nominalism.

These early cognitive approaches are interesting for the creation of electronic virtualities, in particular, because they explicitly express the relation

between abstract ontologies (e.g. taxonomies, semantic networks) and applied ontologies (e.g. entities of a virtual stage).

Myths of pre-antiquity and antiquity reflect the desire of mankind for universal explanations. As an example, Gilgamesch, Orpheus, Herkules, Theseus, and Odysseus went to he end of their world to gain the ultimate knowledge. Other examples are the journey of Parmenides to the celestial house of time and the visions of Platon and Plotin.

Myths of today follow very much the same principles as those of yesterday: both are based upon abstract meta structures. Knowing these structures allows for understanding and interpreting their meaning. Fairy tales follow this principle, as well as the content of electronic situative virtuality. Finally the issue is narrativity and the question which social and mental patterns are relevant for the acceptance by the addressees.

One of the generally accepted assumptions is that the collective consciousness is stable - it does not change rapidly. A crucial point is whether the massive application of mass media is able to even produce collective consciousness as well as sub-consciousness at the large. Even more, the question is whether electronic virtuality is a step beyond the possibilities of mass media.

Mass media in conjunction with electronic virtuality enables to change sub-conscious structures, not only to interpret them. The famous thesis of Marx, referring to Feuerbach, not only includes the economic and social worlds but also - to some extent at least - the worlds of collective sub-consciousness. The impact of this expansion of the competences of mankind is new challenges and new temptations.

The new electronic virtuality combines the external social world with the internal mental world, to create new interwoven dimensions of e-reality.

Textuality is characteristic for developed societies. Texts are information stores independent from the author. Life cycle of texts usually is longer than the lifespan of persons, thereby creating continuity. The durability of texts enables modern institutions (institutional knowledge).

Texts determine the professional juridical thinking.

Most probably textuality started with the religious context. Initially it was a privilege of the priests. Later on legislators and judges adopted textual methods (producing, interpreting, etc.) for their use, creating a professional culture of its own.

By interpreting juridical texts jurists arrived at the level of abstraction. It started with the precise wording of Roman Law, then developed the systematic approach of Natural Law Doctrine ("more geometrico"), followed by the so-called "Begriffsjurisprudenz". Modern concepts of abstract legal language are legal logic, legal thesaurus, semantic networks, legal taxonomies and legal ontologies.

The new concept of visualisation does not make traditional textuality obsolete but goes far beyond its capabilities. Text has a linear syntax, visualisation has two dimensions. e-virtuality goes beyond: from 3 dimensions to many interwoven dimensions of e-reality.

Traditional narrativity already knew of virtuality, creating subjective mental pictures. It was the computer which enabled a new kind of virtuality which is very realistic. It is a new kind of societal and mental reality, a new space called "Cyberspace".

Cyberspace creates a new kind of situativity. Dialectically, the traditional situativity was the thesis. Textuality was the anti-thesis. E-virtuality is the synthesis. Therefore, modern virtuality reflects former situativity as well, representing some kind of Atavism.

Cyberspace creates new spaces in analogy to real rooms. However, the paradigms of virtuality possibly go far beyond previous limits set by real life (e.g. "second life").

As a result, the powers of empathy (sympathy as well as antipathy) experience new fields of application. New myths and fairy tales are created, building upon old traditions and expanding towards new adventures.

The cave parable of Platon represents a cognitive pattern still valid in the world of Cyberspace. The original version used monochrome shadows on the walls of the cave, Cyberspace uses coloured projections on the screens.

However, just watching the (monochrome or coloured) shadows neither gives truth nor liberty. It is necessary to leave the cave to enter reality, recognising "universalia ante rem".