

**FOR PUBLIC
RELEASE**

CHAPTER 10
SEX AND TRIBALISM, VIRTUAL EDUCATION AND THE
INEQUALITY OF THE BRAIN

Trends have a distinct message for us. The fact that information and communication technology is breaking through a high threshold and entering a new historical phase means that everything is changing. We are being forced to see ourselves and our surroundings with new eyes. The paradigm shift will have wide-reaching and real consequences when our old 'truths' lose their validity. The institutions that supported the old society, and which seemed under the circumstances of the time to be eternal and 'natural', are now suffering extreme crises and being revealed as products of a society and an ideology that were intrinsically tied to the circumstances of their period. Their rapidly approaching demise under the crushing weight of change therefore appears inevitable. This trend is inescapable. The institutions most affected by this are the nation state, parliamentary democracy, the nuclear family and the education system.

The concept of a 'trend' ought not to be understood as synonymous with fashion or anything like that; it has nothing to do with the world of glossy magazines. We are using the words 'trend' and 'countertrend' in analogy with Friedrich Nietzsche's conceptual pairing of action and reaction. For Nietzsche, action was connected to the desire for power; it is, in a philosophical sense, an original impulse, independent of other impulses. Reaction, on the other hand, is a secondary impulse and only arises as a response to action. It is quite literally reactionary in the sense that its main aim is to support and preferably strengthen existing power structures against which the action is a threat. The reaction, therefore, is a mobilization of defence, an act of life support for a power whose position is disputed as a result of the emergence of a rival power; a prime

example of this is when the dominant class of a dying paradigm defends itself against a new elite that has the winds of history in its sails. If we transfer this conceptual pairing to sociology we get trend and countertrend. A trend in this sense is a movement in time that is connected to the struggles of a certain group to achieve and manifest a social identity. A trend is an original impulse that is not principally a response to another movement; it encounters resistance only when it collides with other interests, which it always does sooner or later.

A trend can be recognized by two distinguishing characteristics: partly that it has everything to gain from increased dissemination of information, and partly that it is intimately connected to and benefited by the territorial gains made by new technology. This means that the development of the internet itself and the social developments that presuppose or are benefited by the existence of the internet (such as globalization and the bourgeoisie's loss of power and status to the netocracy) can be identified as genuine trends. A countertrend, on the other hand, can be defined as a reaction against such a trend. It does not stand for anything other than the defence of the status quo, or a return to a past that has been highly sentimentalized. A countertrend is therefore principally concerned with combating and disarming a trend. Current examples of countertrends are the hypernationalism and isolationism that are being nurtured in various places in the western world and so-called Muslim fundamentalism in the Arab world. These are both reactions against the dominant trend that is moving towards globalization, secularization and increased plurarchization in society. A countertrend is always secondary in that it is always dependent upon a trend for its existence.

If we look at developments over a longer period, the pattern becomes considerably more complicated. Often one and the same social movement contains elements of both trend and countertrend. A good example is the environmental movement, which contains a 'trendy' faction, which regards technological advances and

open debate positively and which claims that the only way to create an environmentally aware society in the long term is to use information and discussion to stimulate new research directed towards a new, green form of advanced technology. But the environmental movement also contains a ‘countertrendy’ faction that is opposed to economic growth and wants to suppress information by forbidding research, and which more or less wants to enforce the relocation of city dwellers to the countryside, thereby returning to its romanticized image of the past.

Another example is the international movement against free trade, which has thrived as a result of a comprehensive network constructed with the help of the internet, and which must therefore be regarded, at least formally, as a trend. But in essence this movement is driven by the ambition to protect well-organized vested interests in wealthy countries against competition from cheaper imported goods, effectively shutting out poor countries from all profitable markets; this desire to limit information is clearly an example of a countertrend. For obvious reasons this sort of hybrid movement is extremely unstable. Their similarity to rapidly decaying chemical elements with large atomic cores has led us to define them as quantum-sociological phenomena.

Today’s countertrend is often yesterday’s radical and innovative trend – in tune with the times when times were different

Without making any qualitative comparison between trends and countertrends – Nietzsche for his part always favoured action – we can confirm that history tends to favour trends and that countertrends are generally doomed to fail in the end. This is in the nature of things: a countertrend implies a limitation of access to information, a strategy that in

the long run can never be anything but unsustainable wishful thinking. Countertrends play on people's fears and apprehensions about trends, but can ultimately only delay the historical process, never change it profoundly. Once information has begun to seep out into society the countertrend loses its potency and the trend breaks through on all levels. However, we must not forget that today's countertrend is often yesterday's radical and innovative trend – in tune with the times when times were different.

Nationalism and democracy were originally fine examples of social and political trends, completely in tune with the technology of the age and supported by an increase in information. But the forces that are struggling to maintain old institutions today are the countertrends of our time. In spite of the occasional success, these forces are doomed to failure in a broader spectrum. The internet is a fact. Mass communications are rapidly becoming interactive. On a purely national level there is little that is of any real political interest. This means that globalization, secularization and plurarchalization are ultimately unstoppable.

At a generous estimation, bourgeois democracy is little more than 200 years old, but in that time an impressively tenacious myth has developed around it and has convincingly maintained that its structure and ideology are eternally valid. This myth has been supported by the fact that bourgeois democracy, seen as a trend, was spectacularly successful in its heyday and has contributed to an unparalleled increase in general welfare. In the mild delirium of the end of the capitalist era, bourgeois democracy has been seen, particularly after the pathetic collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, as not merely a precondition but almost a guarantee of economic growth, despite the fact that it is easy to refute this rather unsophisticated thesis. If we turn our critical gaze towards Asia, for example, we can see that it is hardly thanks to democratic virtue that Singapore, a shamelessly repressive one-party state, has been able to demonstrate an incomparably strong economy for several decades. Similarly, democracy has not paved the way for an economic miracle in Bangladesh. But in spite of this the myth lives on.

The American political scientist Francis Fukuyama has proposed the idea that bourgeois democracy represents 'the end of history' in a Hegelian sense – a completion of the political process. History should be seen as a process of development common to all people, a lengthy struggle between different social systems and philosophies, a conflict that will rage until all available possibilities have been tried and all unsatisfactory solutions discarded. Fukuyama is suggesting that all possible alternatives to bourgeois democracy have been swept aside. The decisive factors in favour of democracy are that it was best suited to cope with all the contradictory interests that arise in an advanced, global market economy, and also that democracy, with its theoretical equality, was of all imaginable alternatives best able to satisfy its citizens' need for recognition and respect. Fukuyama is both right and wrong about this. Bourgeois democracy is admittedly the most suitable social system in most respects, but only within the framework of the capitalist paradigm. When circumstances change, history is in motion once more.

So much ideological capital has been invested in the idea of bourgeois democracy that every attempt to examine its propaganda critically and every discussion of possible faults in the democratic theory have been rejected with distaste and labelled as heresy by the immense forces guarding this myth. A cult has been constructed around democracy and its rituals: a cult with strikingly irrational elements, a mass movement whose cohesive idea is the notion that the magical power of the correct political procedure can solve, or at least ameliorate, all serious social problems. The forms of democracy themselves are believed to conjure up sound political content. The correct method of making decisions always results in wise decisions, according to this most potent of democracy's dogmas. The self-appointed representatives of political goodness have persuaded themselves, and anyone who has cared to listen, that there is no difference between the correct method of making decisions and wise decisions,

and whenever someone has the bad manners to point out that the Nazis, to take one striking example, came to power as a result of democracy and parliamentary elections, the response is always a series of diffuse explanations about the German population's 'democratic immaturity', and the existence of that specific situation at that particular time. There is seldom or never a recognition that democracy itself is no guarantee for good and wise decision making.

Every exception is turned around so that it confirms the general rule: as soon as the democratic maturity of the population has reached a certain acceptable level, democracy will automatically produce wise decisions like a well-oiled political machine. This faith in the process of democratic maturity of the population is as unshakeable as it is unfounded. It is a matter of religious faith rather than empirical knowledge. According to the axiom, voters cannot vote wrongly, and if the people should nonetheless do so – like the Austrian people did when a populist right-wing party was elevated to government in the dying weeks of the twentieth century, a result which the rest of the European Union strongly opposed – then it is simply a matter of pronouncing loudly that a mistake has been made and bringing about a correction through suitable actions.

This is all about the bourgeoisie's parading democracy as if it in itself were something holy, yet being unable to accept democracy when it conflicts with the bourgeoisie's own interests. There is a considerable amount of hypocrisy in the ceremonial rhetoric of democracy. What is at best a problematic and fragile compromise between conflicting political forces, and at worst a method of legitimizing the decisions that the elite wants to force through, is elevated as something good, eternal and beyond all doubt – something in accordance with the laws of nature. Feudalism maintained that people could believe what they wanted to so long as they believed in God; capitalist tolerance stretches to the point that people can vote for whomsoever they want to so long as they vote for the bourgeois democratic state in one of its sanctioned variations.

As is the case with all the obvious contradictions in a governing paradigm, this one is a sign that the old paradigm has played out its role. Just one decade after the discussion of bourgeois democracy as the culmination of history there is now, ironically, a growing consciousness of a crisis of democracy. Apathy towards utopia is accelerating and democracy is being gradually stripped of both internal and external components. At the same time as technological development is promoting an entirely new ecology for humanity, the democratic 'recognition' upon which Fukuyama based large parts of his argument is being devalued. Fukuyama himself was the first to address the problems in his own cheerily optimistic theory with a dose of good old Nietzschean doubt. What is the point, he wondered, of universal recognition in the end? Who will be satisfied with something that is available to everyone? Invoking Nietzsche, Fukuyama pointed out the connection between the tolerance on offer and a dissolution of values that would be fatal for society. What genuine sense of self-respect can allow itself to be detached from every form of achievement? And is universal recognition actually possible? Can we ever hope to get away from a system of values and a hierarchy of various achievements?

An entirely 'equal' person is incapable of contemplating social and moral issues, because to do so presupposes a basic difference between good and bad, which is at odds with the extreme tolerance that is the hallmark of 'political correctness' (the last desperate attempt by an imploding democracy to flirt with everyone at the same time). Creative momentum is lost when society values everything as equal and has as its aim the equal distribution of resources. Stagnation accompanies stability, which leads to a gradual corrosion of democracy, in both its inert and its active states. But stability ought in this context to be the least of our problems; it is a chimera, a socio-scientific abstraction. Stability does not exist in complex systems; Fukuyama's great mistake was to confuse the model with the reality.

Democracy has become a great worry: it demands attention in the form of education and nurture, which is why all sorts of authorities and research institutes are insisting on major budget increases. The warning implied by this is that we can no longer take democracy for granted. Democracy must at all costs be strengthened, runs the message from those whose power is entirely dependent upon democracy, and who for obvious reasons have no interest in any form of plurarchy. Propaganda declares that the only alternative to bourgeois democracy is a nightmarish dictatorship which, as history has illustrated, is all too easily attainable through exemplary democratic means, while plurarchy is suppressed as best it can be. There is an impression that plurarchy does not exist, that it is not even conceivable. This is why it is highly ironic that the internet is being promoted as the tool that will facilitate the ultimate triumph of democracy. In actual fact the internet is responsible for the new media technological ecology in which plurarchy is thriving on natural selection and in which democracy is therefore doomed to failure. The crisis in democracy is here to stay. From now on democracy will be synonymous with the crisis affecting both itself and the whole of the declining paradigm. As a result of the paradigm shift the unthinkable has become thinkable.

In the virtual world, politics will become powerless

Informationalism will force the development of new political structures. One concrete political problem is that in areas where politicians want to

make decisions there is no longer anything to decide about. The market and the economy have moved. In this situation growing federalism will be the final straw for democracy, because developments are moving ever more rapidly towards a global state. The introduction of such a project is probable, not least because the survival of the political class is at stake. A world trade organization will be followed by a world tax organization, and so on. But all efforts in this direction will be in vain, not because any attempt to mobilize enthusiasm for the project

amongst all the world's voters would take immense effort, but because plurarchy will already be an accomplished fact before a detailed plan for a global state has even been sketched out. In the virtual world, politics will become powerless.

But even the virtual world will spontaneously establish certain global state structures. The electronic elite will establish a new lingua franca, a net-Latin based upon English, already the global language of communication for the netocracy. This highly modified form of English, in which subcultural dialects will come to the fore, where standard phrases will be drastically shortened, where innovative neologisms will be encouraged and sub-clauses abandoned, will be the universal language of the global networks.

The overwhelming Anglo-Saxon domination of the international music and entertainment industries indicates the central role played by a common language in the current medialization of the world. We can already see how the English-speaking countries of various continents have established a lead over their neighbours in the race towards informational society. This is obviously the case with the UK and Ireland, Canada, Australia and South Africa, all of whom are playing leading roles in spreading the Anglo-Saxon-dominated internet culture to every corner of the world; this without even mentioning the role of the USA. But even Hong Kong, Singapore and India are doing the same in Asia. Or the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries in Europe, where proficiency in English has become so advanced that it has practically become a second native language. The convergence of global communication is leading to an increasing demand for some form of uniform, common language, which will further benefit the Anglo-Saxon media industries, which were already well-developed before informationalism and which are now the main suppliers of content to the internet.

It is entirely logical that it has been easier for small countries with highly restricted domestic markets to think and act globally than for countries with large

domestic markets. The relative uselessness of their native languages has forced them to adapt and gradually switch to the English-based net-Latin. Those countries that have had ambitions of competing with English as the global lingua franca of the internet – primarily those countries in which French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Japanese and Chinese are spoken – are experiencing, on the other hand, comparatively large and intractable problems in connecting their national network structures to the global net. For this reason there will be initially a limited number of people from these linguistic areas taking part in the international networks. While we are still waiting for comprehensive translation software, language is still a barrier.

Local and regional languages and dialects are maintaining their strong position within large populations, but are gradually assuming a recognizably inferior position. Native languages will live on among the consumtariat, while the netocracy will regard them as a kind of amusing hobby with sentimental connections to the past, one of many sources of entertainment and amusement based upon identity. In much the same way as the middle-class tourists of former times spouted sentences culled from phrasebooks during their holidays abroad, the netocrats will amuse themselves during their summer holidays in their digitally wired country houses by practising the characteristic traits of the local language, all with a high degree of ironic distance. Within the porous framework of net-Latin there will of course be a number of different dialects, but these will not be geographically anchored but instead linked to different virtual subcultures, and will function mainly as identification markers to distinguish their speakers from the members of other electronic tribes.

One important reason why the USA has found it so easy to adapt to virtual culture is the pre-plurarchic attitude to geographical space that has always suffused the American mentality since the time of the first settlers. Majority decision making has never had the same strong roots in the collective

consciousness of North America as it did in Europe, thanks to the concept of the 'frontier' – the continual exploration of the boundary of the unknown. When Americans did not see eye to eye with their neighbours, there was always the possibility of upping sticks, moving further west and breaking new ground. There was a lot of spare land, and colonization took a long time. When the settlers had reached the Pacific, they continued to Hawaii and Alaska. Connections to permanent settlement have never been particularly strong in American culture. There has always been an emotive and irresistible desire for the unknown, a permanent preparedness to move on, a romanticization of the nomadic. We need to bear this in mind when we look at the great space projects of the 1960s and 1970s; once the Earth had been mapped and colonized there was only space left. Space became the 'final frontier'.

But only as long as our thinking was confined to physical space. The truly revolutionary adventure was waiting within the digital universe of satellite linkups and fibre-optic cables. During the 1980s the internet was made available to everyone – a completely new 'frontier' – and the first people who began to explore this virtual world were precisely the outsiders of American society: lone wolves or members of diverse subcultures who were ill at ease in the dominant cultural climate. They felt out of place, so they upped sticks, turned their back on mainstream culture and moved on, breaking new ground in a new world. This virtual mass migration, described by the American social theoretician Mark Pesce as 'the Gnostic Frontier', marked the beginning of colonization of a new world that was quite literally infinite. A continuous stream of new and unexplored virtual territories awaits the nomadic Americans. The journey need never end. The pre-plurarchic tradition has prepared the way for a smooth transition from democracy to plurarchy and the shift will be experienced as relatively mundane. What will be harder for Americans to accept will be the devaluation of money and the death of capitalism.

Another sacred social institution that is undergoing a fatal and intensely debated crisis at the onset of the informational paradigm is the nuclear family. There is a good deal of confusion in this discussion, in which conservative elements are arguing for a return to 'tradition'. What we need to be clear about is that what is usually called 'the traditional family', where the man goes out into the world to earn money while the woman stays at home and looks after the house, is anything but traditional. In actual fact, 'the traditional family' was a child of the 1950s: a result of increased welfare and the dream of fully-fledged suburban bliss free from social obligations. The middle classes moved out to the suburbs to get away from an urban community that felt altogether too stifling and oppressive. The suburbs, with their lush vegetation, were attractive because they appealed to our tribal instincts.

The real traditional family is something entirely different: an economic union and socialization project that links various generations together. The nuclear family – which is, interestingly enough, the same age as another late-twentieth-century phenomenon, nuclear weapons – ought therefore to be regarded as an integral part of late-capitalism's obsession with individualism: total freedom at the cost of total isolation, consumption instead of communication. There is a simple and obvious logic to this. It is in the interests of the state, as well as of capital (once again in the same boat), that people develop into 'independent individuals' rather than as members of wide-ranging networks of social communities. Quite simply, it makes it easier to exercise central control, and at the same time people develop a sense of individual responsibility for their own self-realization, which is expressed in intense and often therapeutic consumption.

The nuclear family arose because it was the smallest, most individualized social entity that was feasible once the necessary requirements of reproduction had been taken into consideration. But as far as the state, and capital, are concerned, it does not need to be stable at all. A single parent is more dependent

upon subsidies than a couple, and is therefore more submissive and more easily controlled. A marked increase in the number of single-occupancy homes also means, naturally, that consumption increases dramatically. The ideal would be for everyone to live alone in their own home, with their own car, so that optimal demand for houses, cars, sofas, cookers, etc., could be achieved. The path of the isolated, independent individual towards self-realization always passes through increased consumption.

For these reasons the great wave of divorces that has swept the western world since the mid-1960s does not actually constitute a violation of capitalist values. On the contrary, it is a logical continuation of increasing individualization on all levels, and of the escalating development of social structures under the capitalist paradigm: from village communities and the tribal family, which consisted of several generations, to the single urban citizen, who constitutes the ultimate capitalist family unit. This will not prevent a number of noticeable elements of the introductory phase of informationalism from strengthening some of these tendencies. The clearest example is when industrial production decreases to the benefit of information management and an expanding service sector. This means that a large number of poorly educated men will be rendered superfluous in the labour market. At the same time, an increasing number of career opportunities for women are opening up, suggesting a further increase in divorce rates and the number of single people.

Sexuality is another matter: the Pill meant that sex could be differentiated from familial responsibility. Francis Fukuyama has suggested that the Pill not only granted women the freedom to live out their desires without consequences, but that, primarily, it released men from any sense of responsibility for the children that were born anyway. Maternal care for infants is highly biologically programmed, whereas paternal care is more of a cultural product and therefore more sensitive to disruption. Added to this is the fact that reproduction is gradually

becoming separated from sexuality generally, with both fertilization and pregnancy being increasingly taken over by biotechnical laboratories. This is hardly going to strengthen family bonds.

Conventional forms of personal relations are dissolving and disappearing: circumstances will determine the form of a relationship

The freedom from censorship offered by the internet also means that sexuality is becoming less dramatic and is just one pastime amongst others: the link between sex and cohabitation is being weakened, which means partly that sexuality is being distanced from relationships generally, and partly that a wealth of cohabitation forms is appearing in which sex plays no part. You no longer need to live with your sexual partner, just as little as you need to live with your

tennis partner. You do not need to have sex with the person with whom you are living, as little as you need to have sex with your boss or your therapist. Conventional forms of personal relations are dissolving and disappearing: circumstances will determine the form of a relationship, and not vice versa.

The lack of a normative majority on the internet means that every conceivable sexual preference is becoming socially acceptable; every taste has its own more or less global network. Homosexuality, sadomasochism, different forms of asexuality: everything is going on alongside more generally inclusive activities, which is providing inspiration for the most disparate lifestyles and forms of relationship. The internet has already stimulated unparalleled experimentation in areas of sexuality and relationships – a development which is now exploding. The keyword in this context is ‘queer’. Queer culture implies the liberation of heterosexual society from the compulsion to be normal and normative, and is growing rapidly through imitation of the successful networking of gay society. Sexuality is no

longer a subject for control and regulation; it is not made to perform a socially cohesive role within the state or the market, but is now the basis for the creation of new, more or less temporary, tribal identities on the net. Queer culture is thus a genuine trend. Sex and cohabitation are being replaced by sex and tribal identity.

It is the search for tribal identity within the practically limitless framework of virtual nomadic society that is forming new, fluid family structures. This tribalization of culture, this virtual return to nomadic existence made possible by electronic networks, means that permanent homes are no longer regarded as the fixed point in life, which itself stimulates further unconditional experimentation with lifestyles. The rapid increase in mobility and speed in society is leading, for better or worse, to a growing sense of rootlessness. The new sense of homelessness is simultaneously imposed and desired, a burden and a possibility. The new nomadic life implies a permanent migration between different cities, different workplaces, different identities.

The mobility of the netocracy – first virtual, but increasingly physical – is leaving deep traces on society and culture. The idea of a home and a place of residence is changing beyond recognition. The higher your status, the greater your degree of mobility. The consumtariat, securely settled in fixed dwellings, is easily accessible to the homogenizing effects of the mass media and the remaining political powers and their ever more desperate tax authorities. The netocracy is abandoning the traditional suburban fortress established by and for nuclear families. Now hotels, monasteries and meditation centres are the major influences on the new elite's way of life. The function of the permanent residence to act as an identifying factor is disappearing and being transferred to the net, to the virtual equivalent of the home: the homepage. A homepage is what genuine netocrats can accept as their fixed point in existence. As long as it will be regularly updated!

Another institution in deep crisis is public education, one of the fruits of large-scale population growth in Europe and North America during the 1800s, which in turn, like the explosive population growth of the Third World during the 1900s, was a consequence of the habitual delay between technological changes and cultural behaviour patterns. As we have earlier asserted in our analysis of mobilistic diagrams, history moves far faster than people can possibly react. Changes that affect material circumstances often achieve their cultural impact only after a delay of several generations. Populations grew in Europe and North America because infant mortality dropped and the general preconditions of life improved radically, at the same time as the birth rate remained at its earlier high level. A noticeable decline in the birth rate did not occur for several decades, which meant that for a long time there were colossal numbers of children. The working-class families of the countryside and the city slums were turned into veritable production lines for the making of children.

This development forced wide-reaching political activity: the growing mass of children needed to be cared for and protected in a satisfactory way: to be civilized and brought up as useful members of society, as diligent workers and insatiable consumers. These ambitions were co-ordinated in the middle of the 1800s in a new institution: the state school. Apart from their practical function, schools also had an ideological role. During the early years of industrialization the hordes of children had been put to hard work in factories at an early age. But the middle and upper classes eventually forced through legislation regulating child labour, and in time also introduced compulsory education. Partly inspired by the romantic cult of the child and its imagined closeness to some original state of innocence and purity, they wanted to protect and nurture the young, sheltering them from the more brutal sides of life and carefully introducing them to the secrets of adult life.

It is important to remember that childhood is a cultural product, created during the Renaissance. During the age of feudalism children were not regarded as

belonging to a special category and were not assumed to have any special needs; their entry into adulthood was not a question of nurture and education. Children were purely and simply small people, far too weak to be of any real use. The word 'child' did not describe an age, but a relationship; you were the child of so-and-so, and always would be, which underlines the obsession of feudal society with family names.

The advent of childhood during the Renaissance is, as Neil Postman has pointed out, closely connected to the printing press. This new information technology brought with it a new perception of what it meant to be an adult: the ability to read. Consequently the definition of a child was the opposite: a person who had not learnt to read. One did not automatically become an adult with time, but through education. Education is in some respects a revolt against nature: a small child is made to sit still and fret over the alphabet and other studies when play and other physical activities are much more appealing. In this way education coincides with the need for the child to control its impulses. Childhood thus became one of the basic discoveries of capitalism, and as such became the subject of endless ideological conflicts.

Universal education meant that the process of becoming an adult and a member of society became industrialized and encompassed even the children of the working class. What was grandly described as a human right was at the same time a social duty. Someone who did not go to school could not become an adult, nor, therefore, a fully fledged citizen. Society's values were instilled, and the necessary capabilities to ensure that society's needs were fulfilled were taught. Education itself was a visible example of progress, and the idea of progress suffused the whole enterprise. Everyone had reason to greet universal education warmly: for the working class it was necessary if its children were to have even a theoretical chance of climbing socially, and for the bourgeoisie it offered the chance to recruit new talent to the administration of the state apparatus and to form the remainder of the working class into an effective workforce for the factories.

Nothing was left to chance. The whole enterprise was rigorously planned according to the most advanced pedagogical programmes of the time, with the model for the organization taken from related institutions such as the military, and mental hospitals. Schools became the instruments of selection for the capitalist meritocracy and functioned satisfactorily so long as the labour market demanded clearly defined competencies for a more or less stable list of standardized careers: in other words, as long as there was a direct link between education and working life. But with the breakthrough of informationalism the entire capitalist notion of 'the career' is crumbling. A crisis within our schools is inevitable.

The informational labour market has an entirely new structure. Employment is no longer a lifelong contract and length of service is no longer of prime importance. Business organizations are becoming less rigid and are concentrating on temporary projects, for which people with specific competencies are employed. Temporary constellations are created only to be dissolved when a project is completed. Education is never a completed chapter but must be constantly updated. Every new task involves a new situation, which generally requires new knowledge. The unavoidable consequence of this is that all diplomas, titles and certificates are practically worthless the day after the exam. This, in turn, means that schools are really losing every other role except for those of a holding-pen and a place for social training; children can learn more sitting in front of their computers at home than at their desks at school. In an increasingly fragmented and changing society, the whole idea of centralized, homogenized schooling linked to the nation state seems outdated.

Already, increasing demand for further education and the development of skills both inside and outside business has led to many old academic institutions sensing that change is in the air. Politicians fight to be able to inaugurate new subsidized business parks aimed at growth industries like information technology and biotechnology, connected to universities and colleges. Increasingly costly

educational packages are being tailor-made for companies in a seemingly limitless spirit of generosity. But it would be a mistake to take this as a sign that traditional educational institutions will play a leading role in informational society. Business parks are not a trend but a countertrend – an increasingly desperate attempt to protect old hierarchical structures under new circumstances – and are therefore doomed to fail. These actors from the old paradigm are far too closely tied to their old historical positions to be able to move easily and quickly enough to survive in the virtual ecosystem.

The feudal roots of academic culture are evident in its hidebound fascination for titles and old qualifications. Its closed frame of reference, its rigid hierarchy, its incapacity to assimilate criticism as something constructive: all of this is creating a problem of credibility. The academic world appears, in the eyes of the netocracy (whose scepticism towards self-proclaimed experts in every field is practically constitutional), to be obsolete and corrupt. This opposition between the netocracy and the academic world is to a certain extent superficial. But beneath the surface there is a more fundamental difference in attitude that is becoming more apparent as the universities desperately seek to protect their increasingly exposed position in informational society.

The netocracy is interested in change, whereas academics are concerned with static models

To put it simply, it is a question of opposition between two completely different temperaments. For the netocracy, speed and an overview are the primary requirements, whereas traditional research prioritizes thoroughness and depth, which explains the persistent studies of a stability that is purely fictional: purely

theoretical constructions with little or no connection to reality, which dominated social science during the 1900s. The netocracy is interested in change,

whereas academics are concerned with static models. Or, to put it another way, the netocracy is interested in bodies in motion, while academics prefer to perform autopsies on old corpses. There will be not so much an encounter as a brutal cultural clash between these two participants, a clash that can only end badly for academics, whose obsessively neurotic attachment to scientific scrupulousness, references, footnotes etc. makes them incapable of attaining the speed and overview that appeal to the netocracy.

What the netocracy is seeking and needs is something quite different to what the universities are offering: the ability to absorb and assimilate large amounts of information, combined with an intuitive understanding of what is relevant in each specific situation; quick associations and irrational playfulness rather than conscientious analysis of sources. The netocracy's attitude to knowledge is at the same time instrumental and aesthetic. When the netocrats do not find what they want in either universities or business parks, they will turn their backs on the academic world and construct their own primarily virtual institutes and think-tanks, free from outsized administration, intellectual snobbery and a tyranny of detail.

Education will in the future be characterized by an interactive and constantly adapting pragmatism. It will be offered and developed on the net in the form of small, precisely adapted modules, specially designed for the task at hand. It will be the student who decides the rules, not the institution. There will be stiff competition between these sophisticated and flexible systems, and in this market there will not be room for capitalism's inflexible and resource-hungry monster universities. There will no longer be any need to sit isolated in some regional college, divorced from the labour market, adapting to obsolete conventions in the hope of getting a diploma that, like the Soviet Order of Lenin today, only has kitsch and curiosity value. The future of collective education is behind it.

This development is being hastened by the academic institutions' inability to create functional networks. The mailing lists and web archives that have been launched so far by the leading universities in Europe and North America are based upon the entirely mistaken belief that creativity and problem solving can be stimulated with the help of eternally rumbling debates, open to everyone. This attitude seems unforgivably naïve to a netocratic observer. Within the netocracy there is an acute awareness that qualified networks can only function if they are created as time-saving arenas for contact between selected participants, and as contact points for the exchange of exclusive information. This requires strict and sensitive curators; it requires the ruthless manipulation of information, presentation and accessibility. This means, in effect, that practically all teenagers are capable of managing their own private network more effectively and, above all, more purposefully, than naïve and clumsy universities with their feeble presence on the net, in spite of all their enormous subsidies.

It is ironic in this respect that the internet was originally created for and partially by academic institutions that did not understand how to use the new medium with whose management they were entrusted. Recent developments have left them behind. We can see once again how creativity rather than financial resources or politically directed regulations is decisive in the allocation of power in informational society. It follows from this that there is no reason for the netocracy to boast of academic titles; on the contrary, it will be more prestigious to highlight a lack of formal qualifications. In the eyes of the netocracy, completed educational programmes and doctoral titles are not signs of merit, but an indication of an inexcusable lack of judgement. Universities will come to be regarded as protected workshops for intellectual therapy, and anyone who has spent time there will be treated with an increasing amount of suspicion. At the same time, academic institutions represent a powerful interest that cannot be disregarded; they will be perceived as a potential source of countertrends that might harm the netocracy. For this reason it is unlikely that the netocracy will be content merely

to ignore the academic world, but will actively oppose it, if only by excluding its representatives from attractive networks.

Trends are encountering countertrends on every social and cultural level in the transition between capitalism and informationalism. One far-reaching trend, related to welfare and education, which is showing signs of getting stronger, is the diminishing birth rate of western countries. Giving birth is simply not fashionable any more. In a majority of western nations women are giving birth to less than two children on average, and the consequences of this are not hard to work out: the population is declining at an increasing rate. The politicians of the twenty-first century have no hordes of children to take care of; one of the truly large problems will be the exact opposite – how to manage the decrease in population numbers. A shrinking number of young people is expected to provide for an increasing number of old, and steadily older, people. In a democratic society the elderly would be able to force through a gerontocracy by using their majority position to outvote the smaller number of young people. But, as we have already seen, in a plurarchic society there is no connection between positions of power and purely numerical superiority, as little as there is any direct connection between power and money. On the contrary, it is probable that a minority of young people will have power, thanks to their relevant abilities and their greater manoeuvrability on the net.

While the netocrats are experimenting with identities and lifestyles in their heavily guarded networks, the consumtariat is held in place, thanks to the Disneyfication of the whole of the popular cultural landscape. Entertainment, consumption and leisure time are melting together into a single, enormous industrial sector. Large holiday resorts with adjacent entertainment factories are being built near airports, where the consumtariat are carried to be entertained to sleep. The very latest and most expensive entertainment technology is offered by so-called ‘multimedia theme parks’: collective experiences for alienated keyboard slaves.

On the innumerable recreation sites on the net there are interactive soap operas and every conceivable variety of bingo, lotto and betting, and every possible sort of game. Each form of game will have its own television channel and a host of homepages. This theatre performs all day, every day, always.

It will become considerably more difficult than before to use mass media for propaganda purposes, as we have already discussed in an earlier chapter. It will not be possible to use the same clumsy strategies as during the days of centralized one-way communication. Simultaneously, increasingly medialized, virtual reality will become sensitive to media manipulation. Any attempt to use the media will increasingly be an invasion of reality itself. The boundary between one and the other will become steadily less distinct and will eventually prove more or less impossible to maintain. As a result, propaganda will become invisible, no longer discernible even to an expert. It will become its own reality, in its own right: the ever more subtle manifestation of the power of the elite in the form of pleasant and soothing mental massage for the masses.

We are becoming increasingly dependent upon our ability to create functional models in order to orientate ourselves

Both art and philosophy are trying to find new tasks and new means of expression. The ambition to create an all-encompassing synthesis – total art, a universal explanatory model – has gone now. Virtual daily life will make that sort of thing seem as thoughtless as it is pointless. The twentieth century philosophy of language has left us with an awareness

of the limitations of our conceptual apparatus. The big problem is that the amount of information on offer is increasing exponentially, while our perception and our capacity to deal with incoming impulses is developing with the studied slowness of biological evolution – in other words, scarcely noticeably at all. The

virtual world is rushing away from us: that is the tragic realization of mobilism, which presents us with the task of making what in reality is an unmanageable world somehow manageable. This necessarily artificial level of comprehension contains an increasing amount of incomprehension; we are becoming increasingly dependent upon our ability to create functional models in order to orientate ourselves.

The new rationalism is therefore becoming transrationalistic and contains a fundamental understanding of the unavoidable limitations of rational thought; it denies every form of transcendentalism and metaphysics at the same time as humbly acknowledging the shortcomings of rationalism. A mobilistic credo would be able to take as its starting point Nietzsche's exhortation to capitulate willingly to infinity, to be filled with the 'joy of tragedy'. Or Spinoza's exhortation to love this unfathomable world despite the fact that we can only expect frosty indifference in return. We must, according to the mobilists, abandon our infantile need for response and affirmation. Quite simply, we have no choice: life cannot be anything other than what it is.

The vacuum that remains when rationalism has given up, the 'trans-' in transrationalism, can only be filled with painting, literature, music and all the new hybrid forms of art that are being opened up by new technology. Creative possibilities are practically limitless. The other side of the coin is that art, more than ever before, will become the exclusive province of specific electronic tribes. Art will probably not reach other groups to any noticeable extent, partly because of the extremely targeted output of media on the net, and partly because of other groups' lack of a frame of reference. The whole apparatus that makes slightly more demanding culture comprehensible exists only under highly fragile circumstances on the net. This is why culture will become yet another dividing barrier separating different groups from one another in the electronic class society, and a cohesive and identity-supporting factor only within narrowly defined groups.

Informational society is anything but equal. And the inequality it offers seems more 'natural' than was the case in earlier times because its meritocratic element is so large, because power is so difficult to localize, and because its representative mechanisms are so discrete. The netocracy is fairly untouchable; it has not taken anything from anyone and its position of strength and status is built upon its undeniable suitability to thrive in the new ecosystem created by information technology. Nor does the new underclass share the same exciting, sexy attributes and the pathos of justice that the underclass of the capitalist paradigm could demonstrate, and which aroused a certain level of sympathy. The consumtariat is the underclass because of its own lack of social intelligence, according to the norms of intelligence established by informational society.

No doors have been closed to anyone; the problem is that it requires a special talent to understand how to grasp the handle and get in – a talent lacking in the masses. Is this inequality necessarily unfair? And if it is, according to whose criteria? And, if so, what can be done about it? Ought we to hold back those who have the ability to make the most of the opportunities on offer? Ought we to carry on giving new chances to people who have failed so many times before? How can we solve the problem of increasing inequality in a society in which inequality cannot be rectified by redistribution? We have not yet worked out how to swap brains with one another.