

# Internet: some collateral effects

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The individual finds his place in the symbolic network in which he is immersed. This symbolic space is formed by the superimposition and integration of all aspects and elements that make up human existence in a determined socio-cultural context.

One aspect of this socio-cultural context is composed of instruments developed by technology with the intention of facilitating tasks and assignments, improving our use of time and space. However, the constant technological innovations assimilated into our lives generate impacts on our existence and the meaning we assign to it.

The relationship between life style and technological organizations, mediator of means of production, indicates historically that as new technologies are introduced, changes occur in social structure and function that, together, penetrate the private life of individuals and are capable of causing important changes at the most subjective level.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, the world has been in a process of radical change. The most recent stage of technological evolution, generated by revolutionary innovations, follows the expansion of computer sciences and the convergence of microelectronic technology, software and hardware, that have determined the form technologies of production, of information and of telecommunications is transforming society and it is impossible to foresee with certainty what the results will be since this transformation is still occurring.

We are living in a period of profound change. In the decade of 1990's, technology, which was already in existence for some time outside Brazil, definitively entered the homes of middle class Brazilians in the form of the personal computer. And, from 1995 on the use of the Internet, the international network of computers, became common practice in Brazil. It is easy to see how the use of the computer became an integral part of daily life. This causes us to think about how the computer is fast becoming an indispensable part of daily life.

Among the technological advances in computer sciences, the Internet has, without doubt, had the greatest impact. The Internet is a paradigm of what analysts describe as space in today's terms, "space of flows" (Castells 2000). An alternative, non-conventional space is created by networks of computers, fiber optics, cables, satellites and cellular phones in which society moves and interacts in real time sharing that which is not material.

There is no doubt regarding the revolutionary impact of the Internet. The fact that it has penetrated many areas (economical, political, educational, etc.) of contemporary societies to such an extent that the resulting exclusion and illiteracy in the digital world that includes a huge percentage of the world's population raises great concern (Bauman, 1999).

On the other hand, from the point of view of individual subjectivity, the studies of various researchers indicate that, directly (or better, from the direct use) or indirectly the Internet is giving birth to a new form of life (Leitão & Nicolaci-da-Costa, 2000; Bauman, 1999; Jameson, 1991; Sennett, 1998; Turkle, 1995). Notably, young people are the principal users of the Internet, which presents the main

screen on which we can analyse the projection of a new era.

There seems to be no doubt that our behavior and habits will suffer alterations due to the development of new technology. However, even though it is easy to detect the changes in habits and behavior that new technology brings about, it is considerably more difficult to document how it can radically alter our very being (how we think, perceive and organize our external and internal worlds, how we relate to others and to ourselves, how we feel, etc.).

In general, all who have studied the impact of the Internet have reported new behavior patterns. Young's book (1998 *Caught in the Net*, related the emergence of a new pathological behavior: the intensive use of the Internet, which she believes has the characteristics of an addiction.

From a broader point of view, in the same year, Nicolaci-da-Costa (1998) analyzed new manners of thinking, of writing, of learning, of beginning and maintaining relationships of all types, of loving, of acquiring knowledge about oneself, etc. in internet users.

In addition to new behaviors, the analysts of the new digital order deal with new problems and psychological conflicts as well. Technological stress is the theme of the book, *TechnoStress* by Weil and Rosen (1997). The excess of information is examined by Schenk in *Data smog: surviving the information glut* (1997). Virilio (1999) points to virtual sex as a consequence of present social disorder. Isolation and depression are subjections of investigation in research done by Kraut and collaborators (2001).

Finally, new subjective organizations can be identified with the results of empirical inquiries with users of the Internet, done by researchers. In *Life on the Screen: identity in the age of the Internet* (1995), a North American psychoanalyst, Sherry Turkle, argues that a new model of psychic organization is emerging as a result of the use of the Web. The model is one of "multiple selves" or individuals who, as occurs on the computers, live as if they were in several "windows" open simultaneously.

The first evidence seen when we examine what has been produced by the Internet Revolution is to notice that in the same way as previously occurred with other technological innovations, the new forms of social organization (virtual and in network) and new space (imaginary, lived as if real) generate and continue to generate alterations not only in behavior, but also in the constitution of the psychic of men, women and children in our days.

These alterations present some facets: the creation of new living space, significant changes in life styles and the way we act as men and women, the proliferation of terms we use to express new interests, new necessities, new relationships, new conflicts, etc. Ultimately, new ways of life.

Next, based on the observation and analysis of behavior and reports of users, we will relate some aspects that characterize an overflow of a new computer aesthetic that stamps new qualities of lifestyle on young people,

ICQ – Observing the use of the Internet, we see that the basis for research for innumerable themes was broad-

ened. Children and adolescents alike see this as a great help with their studies. It seems that everything is right at ones fingertips. Never has so much been “written”, never has so much been typed. The use of the keyboard seems to be a diversion, we never hear complaints about the amount of typing that is done. However, if students were asked to write the same amounts manually, there would certainly be complaints.

One aspect does not escape the notice of professors; many texts are only reproduced, (copy and paste), placed here or there, without having been elaborated in the least. Another aspect that cannot be overlooked is that the grammar and spelling of children and adolescents leaves a lot to be desired. This may be one of the negative aspects of the use of the Web. Everything happens so fast that there is not time for accents or full words, abbreviations are necessary and the impression is that the language they use is not the same one as in grammar books.

*The open Windows* – the Windows system brought great mobility to the operational use of the computer. While this was a big step in the development and of the extension of the use of home computers, it also brought some reflexes as collateral effects.

When we observe the practical use of Windows, we notice that it is common for various “windows” to be open for different tasks. The user can be in a “chat room”, and have other programs like texts editors, games and navigators. This way, it is possible to move from one to another rapidly and in such a natural way that one has the sensation that the user is performing several activities at the same time. The observer would be incapable of following the velocity with which the user moves from one space to another, the interaction is restricted to the points connected by video.

The open window, as Turkle (1995) sees it, characterize a present-day subjectivity. The individual, as one who has multiple selves that act simultaneously is without a central state of being. It is so quick and easy to go from one self to another as if these selves were always available like the open screens of Windows. We think that the absence of a central state of being is an error. No matter how much the individual fragments himself into others, there exist a need for a system of organization that connects all of the parts. And, it is this system of organization that suffers the excesses since its “software” and “hardware” is not adequate to handle the insane speed of developing and upgrading technologies. The multi-tasking individual, forces himself (body and mind) to do several things at the same time, trying to keep up with the “upgrade” of his machine. In what concerns his “hardware”, we are aware of the growing wave of physical problems such as posture problems that results from long hours of activities in front of the monitor, injuries caused by repetitive effort due to excess and ever increasing rapidity in typing. In the area of “software”, there are growing numbers in statistics reporting anxiety (panic syndrome), sleep disorders, inability to function satisfactorily in school or at work, impulsivity, lack of concentration, etc.

*Caught in the Net* – observations before and after the appearance of *Word Wide Web* show that “virtual reality” captures the individual isolating him from “real reality”. The anonymity of *nicks* makes it easier for the individual to express himself on-line than when in the presence of other people. Many times, the individual feel more “intimate” and committed to people they have never seen than with the people in their family. However, even followed by a feeling of depth, we believe these interactions are marked by superficiality in the relationship; after all, how can one be intimate while hiding behind a mask? How can one be committed protected by a wall that prevents real contact? If as Lacan (1999) says it is the symbolic which is determinant of individual subjectivity, what is to expect? If caught in the Net, the individual increases his virtual relationships at the price of a deficit in his inter-social relationships in the real world.

*Without Limits* – In virtual space the references which introduce limits to our desires are suspended. The simplest aspects of life are relegated to second place as pleasure determines what the individual does *on-line* triumph over all consideration for the time needed for the activities of life *off-line*. When obliged to abandon *on-line* activities, the individual often express dissatisfaction and often reaches the point of acting aggressively. This life of liberty experienced *on-line* may be related to a decline in respect for authority that is seen more and more in relationships *off-line*.

If, on the one side, life *on-line* transmits great pleasure, on the other hand, the individual remains eternally dissatisfied because he never finds the balance between his resources (technical and personal) and the final version. In this sense, logged on to the Internet, the individual has few limits for his desires. On the other hand, he has difficulties in finding formulas that protect him from the excesses generated by its abundance, mobility and diversity, if for no other reason, because he is not aware of this excess.

As each day passes, many begin to live in this space and this reality in the absence of that which is material, where he experiences new forms of life on the screen of computers which serve as platforms and access routes. What attracts the attention of those who are interested in understanding the human consequences of the Internet Revolution is the surprising power that this new space and this new reality has in capturing and holding its audience in such a way that the experiences lived on-line are so attractive and so real and intense that they can occupy a major amount of time in the individuals life.

A new space has been created by the emergence of the Internet. The dominant characteristic is that it is a virtual space in which a virtual reality is shared. This new space is accompanied by new necessities, new demands, new rules of production, sociability, survival skills, etc. As a result of all this, new behavior and habits emerge that show up in the processes of transformation in the way of life.

In a general form, all technology, in its essence, is developed with the intent of improving the quality of life. In this brief exposition, we have tried to show evidence based on observation that in spite of its positive potential the interaction with new technology can bring also collateral effects.

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