

# Zoaria Cultural Considerations

Social sophistication and adaptability requires communication tools that encourage people to connect with one another and share ideas. Technology, in part, provides us with the precursors from which we can build these rich interpersonal webs of expression. Moreover, the blending of technology with humanistic interests can lead to the evolution of cultural content and the emergence of new forms of interpersonal awareness.

There seems to be a tendency in Western culture today to exist in the external world. Materialism has reinforced this perspective and people increasingly seem to view entities outside themselves as objects. This perceptual reductionism of others can lead to a degradation of one's capacity to understand and communicate on a deeper existential level. And, with objectification comes an increase acceptance in the use of violence.

There seems to be a human need to articulate our experiences, to gain knowledge from others, and to understand our interdependence and connections with one another and the environment. I feel the exploration and development of this kind of knowledge can be stymied by the poverty of languages available. Some people, such as artists, are gifted at using other means to express and explore these abstract, subjective, and ambiguous concepts relating to life. I'd like to see a way that broadens our experiential comprehension, the ability to form new cultural symbols, and bottom-up concepts into the cultural consciousness.

I view our current paradigm as the logical outcome of the industrial revolution, and our movement into the information age as a struggle to find new tools that can leverage the potential of technology to allow people to connect and collaborate in ways that were never possible before. However, there is an socio-industrial residual that inhibits this pursuit: It's easy to over-generalize the efficiencies of the industrial model and to create assembly-line styles of human organization. As a result, our institutions encourage people to pursue hyper-specialization of knowledge and to perpetuate the functional categorization of roles to fit this model.

The industrial model is a powerful, well-honed, approach to organization and it has taken us remarkably far in a relatively short time. More and more, however, it seems that this approach continues to rely on brute-force techniques and is becoming a cultural detriment to our adaptive and innovative capabilities. Without a new direction of development, it seems as though we will suffer from the inflexible consequences of rigid, top-down hierarchies, and hyper specialization of talent. These methods parallel the beaurocratic structures and perpetuate the roles and labels that fit our existing model. One may argue that this is the best

we can do given the structures we have inherited and the tools we have available; however, this is not necessarily true.

This view of our current paradigm identifies a need for improved methods of internal, subjective, and personal expression. If language both enables and constrains our thoughts, and our culture is a macro scale co-participant in this process, then the development of a new tool, or medium, available to the individual is the scale at which we can start to develop change. I propose a model based in software, for distributed use on the internet, that will be an open and distributed means of expressing ideological and humanistic values with an emphasis on the individual's subjective perception and experience.

Culture, language, and technology co-evolve. Writing led to record keeping and the preservation of knowledge beyond mortal bounds. Mathematics was the linguistic precursor to the scientific revolution, and numbers have enabled the empirical engine to quantify and reshape our relativistic landscape. The arts strive to communicate our most subjective experiences of being human via one or more visceral sensory modalities. Technological advances created television and motion pictures that allow us to compress complex storylines into dense and compelling audio-visual experiences. Computer technology has enabled software to orchestrate our interaction with content and enable a more active exploration of an information state space. And now, the internet extends the software and multimedia interaction into a new communication substrate: A nearly real-time virtual space.

At each punctuated phrase of this evolution, our society and culture have also changed -- since they are reciprocally connected -- and periodically there builds a generalized pressure to use our newly developed technology to expand our socio-cultural interactive capacity. The past decade or so has been a precursor to this building pressure, we've been porting our existing languages to the Internet: Hypertext, digital images, streaming audio, streaming video, information databases. But we're coming to the realization that this is not the 'killer app' for the medium -- the internet continues to entice us to discover its potential -- one that connects our animate capacity for life experiences to its inherently new capabilities to represent them. The internet, viewed strictly as an interactive substrate, offers unique properties:

- It is interactive. Unlike TV and movies the Internet can enable real time participation in the co-development of information content -- much like a conversation does -- and the user is empowered to exert their Will to steer the stream of information exploration.
- It is multimedia capable. This means that the language is likely to be made up of multiple media elements, parsed in such a way as to create a dimensionally rich set of symbolic references. The language is also likely to be dominantly visual, as this is our human predisposition, and we already have established a comprehensive backdrop of cultural references

in TV, movies, and the visual arts. We have also developed several generations of audio/visual philes, trained to be highly capable of absorbing complex ideas across multiplexed storylines.

- It is distributed and chaotic. The outcome of any highly connected community of people, participating simultaneously without imposed order, will be inherently unpredictable. This enables a richness of information content that we are currently too linguistically impoverished to adequately express. And, the ability to represent this dynamic content with feedback will enable our culture to more deeply explore the implications of fundamental ideologies such as democracy, free enterprise, open markets, free expression, and multiculturalism.

A main benefit of this kind of technology is the advantage of enabling people to self-organize into functional groups, consortia, and to maximize their capacity to achieve cooperative goals. And then, to be freed from the repetitive maintenance of brittle structures, and to be able to automate the solution, dissolve, and form new groups as needed. This dynamic capacity to self-organize on a social level can make us more flexible and productive. Meritocracy becomes a viable method of group selection because the groups are empowered to self-select. And, we acquire the tools to maintain a more powerful social structure, tolerant of wide diversity, and able to resolve the contradiction between cohesion and fluid adaptability.

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