

Discursive and/or dialogical? The Internet as a medium of the telematic society

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Abstract

For Vilém Flusser discourse and dialogue represent central components of his theory of communication that he developed since the 1970. In *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* (1984/1999) (English translation 2011: *Into the universe of technical images*), the chapter “Besprechen” (“Discuss”) sheds light on discourse and dialogue in the context of the emerging telematic society.

Flusser (1992: 99s) distinguishes between discourse and dialogue with regard to the production and distribution of information. On the one hand, the discourse spreads already disposable information from one central point to as many addressees as possible and thus continues their conservation. On the other hand, the dialogue generates new information in a circular way by combining already disposable information of several actors, burdened by contradictions and reservations, into a new and stable one. At the beginning of the chapter “Besprechen” (“Discuss”), Flusser (1999) explains that telematics will lead to a dialogization of the previously discursive techno-images. As up to now the medial spheres of the potential dialogic telecommunication (telegraph, telephone etc.) and of techno-images (photography, film etc.) were separated, computer technology enables their interaction by distributing the techno-images through telecommunication methods, thus producing them dialogically and converting them into instruments of information creation. In order to achieve this particular goal, people must abandon the use of techno-images for the sole purpose of distraction and diversion, but they must also not stop at a purely technical understanding of telematics. Flusser’s aim, however, is not to displace discourse once and for all, but to establish an ideal society in which discourse and dialogue are of equal value, for only discourses can generate dialogues and only dialogues can generate discourses.

Yeh (2013: 237) characterizes the Internet as a dialogic medium in Flusser’s sense. However, the Internet seems to be too broad a term here and should be differentiated. By analyzing the functioning of different social networks, our contribution aims to concretize the extent to which the Internet is a medium of dialogue and discourse and whether it can be identified as a means of establishing an ideal telematic society, in which projects are active, rather than subjects.

The aim of our contribution is to elaborate, based on Flusser’s theory on discourse and dialogue, to what extent dialogic structures are recognizable on today’s Internet. Does the Internet realize the ideal of dialogic communication through its structurally designed interactivity? Does this communication reach its limits through a potentially entropic overload of information and dispersion? Alternatively, does the Internet even increase the efficiency of authoritarian discourse due to its technical possibilities?

The first part of the paper will deal theoretically with Flusser’s concepts of dialogue and discourse as well as the ideal telematic society as already touched upon here. In the second part, the results of recent approaches in German media studies (Metten 2019, Osterroth 2019, Pappert & Roth 2019, Schweiger 2017) devoted to the history of social media are compared with Flusser’s theses. Based on this, the flow of information and thus the mode of communication within social media will be examined in more detail. The possibilities of intersubjective networking and community building will be described from divergent perspectives in order to be able to assess the extent to which the Internet is developing into a means of communication for a telematic society in which dialogue and discourse achieve an ideal balance in Flusser’s sense.

Keywords: Discourse - Dialogue - Telematics - Media - Internet

1 Introduction

Discourse or dialogue, two opposing forms of communication? Discourse vs. dialogue, perhaps even two competing forms of communication? Not at all, one would ask Vilém Flusser (1993: 232; 1999: 90s.)! It should be discourse AND dialogue, because only together, embedded in a reciprocal relationship can communication be generated. Discourse spreads already existing information from one sender to as many recipients as possible. Dialogue computes the old information into new information, which in turn is disseminated and then recomputed. The resulting network is not only based on reception but also on exchange and reorganization. Such a network, Flusser argues, makes it possible to escape the threat of totalitarianism posed by mass media programming. Flusser sees the potential to banish totalitarian forms of communication in telematics, in which technical images, such as photos, films and videos, are composed, disseminated via telematic channels and successively recomposed. This only becomes possible by a critical attitude, techno-imagination, seeking to understand the functioning of technical images and the risk being manipulated by them (Flusser 1996: 209-222).

The first part of this paper deals with Flusser's analysis of discourse and dialogue, which he presented in the 1970s and 1980s. The danger of totalitarianism that arises when the dialogic character of technical images is ignored is the subject of section 1.1. The focus of sections 1.2 and 1.3 is to which extent, according to Flusser, the dialogical character of techno-images can be unfolded, the danger averted and the ideal telematic society realized. The second part of the paper (sections 2 and 3) transfers Flusser's theories and concepts of telematics and telematic society to today's Internet. The aim is to determine whether the danger persists or whether the Internet helps to realize the ideal of a telematic society, which is characterized by communication based on intersubjectivity.

1.1 Synchronization of amphitheatres and networks

According to Flusser's considerations in his work *Kommunikologie* (1996: 47-50, 223-231.),¹ the new media as well as the new codes, the techno-images, have generated an unprecedented

¹ In this paper, we work with Flusser's original German texts. We occasionally quote the original passages in the footnotes and paraphrase his thoughts in the continuous text in English. Unfortunately, the published English

danger for society, which consists in the synchronicity of the amphitheater-like distribution of information and its reaffirmation in network dialogues (public opinion). The novelty of this danger is based on the telematic communication structure of mass media, such as television, through which information of a scientific and technical nature is transmitted from an elite culture located in the center of the amphitheater to the rest of society in the ranks. However, not only is the broad society programmed in a stereotypical way, but also the elites involved in science and technology have themselves been programmed by the underlying communicational structure (Flusser 1996: 223). According to Flusser (ibid.), this resembles a vicious circle that must be broken in order to counteract the establishment of a totalitarian mass society.

A dialogical exchange of received information and the resulting creation of new information does not take place. The received information is merely discussed in an incoherent manner in the form of network dialogues, in the course of which a pre-programmed public opinion crystallizes. It should be emphasized that Flusser at this point adopts a dominantly discursive interpretation of telematic communication structures and the consequently discursively shaped (mass) society. For Flusser (1996: 33), network dialogues represent the potential to prevent entropy by reshaping information. In the synchronicity of the amphitheater and network, however, the original purpose of communication is denied. Therefore, loneliness and banality characterize people's lives (Flusser 1996: 230).

Only through communal and negentropic communication does the world, which is provided with codes and thus with meaning, advance to a world of intersubjectivity. This is Flusser's basic thesis in his work *Kommunikologie* (1996: 209). Furthermore, Flusser (1996: 226) emphasizes that techno-images are not to blame for this negative development, but rather the people themselves, who favor the continued synchronicity of mass media and public opinion by not realizing the potentially dialogical character of communication structures and technical codes. Instead, people distort them into telematic gadgets whose function is to seek distraction with them (Flusser 1999: 92). Underlying this is both a fear of having to give up comfortable old familiar habits and an intention to bypass any dialogical and creative responsibility.

translations of Flusser's works were not available to us. If possible, we will make use of them when revising the text.

1.2 Dialogic character

Although Flusser, as we have seen, emphasizes the danger of a network dialogue degenerating into discursive synchronicity, he also stresses (Flusser 1999: 87) – and this proves to be by far the more significant aspect – that techno-images harbor a dialogic potential. What's more, this is not just a potential. The character of techno-images is dialogic: their surfaces serve the computation of previous and thus the generation of new information. With their help, people can enter into a dialogue with each other. In comparison with linear codes, the advantage of techno-image surfaces is that they are able to absorb and transmit an inexhaustible amount of information. Furthermore, the dialogical character arises from the intersubjective points of view which can be obtained by means of the techno-images and which form, so to speak, the counterpart to the objective perspective of the linear codes.

To what extent is this possible? According to Flusser (1996: 210s.), the linear codes strive to represent images by means of concepts. For this purpose, an objective point of view is taken, from which the image can be grasped. However, for techno-imagination, the objective point of view is nonsense and an absurdity,² since there is always an unlimited number of points of view, all of which are valid and thus lead to the truth. In this respect, a purely metaphysical or purely theoretical and value-neutral standpoint is not or no longer feasible. According to Flusser (1996: 212s.), in the future the truth for science, politics, etc. lies in the standpoints held by the majority. Truth is produced consensually not exploratively.³ Hence, Flusser describes a movement away from objectivity toward intersubjectivity. This can be illustrated by the following two examples:

Let us first consider photography. The photographer strives to achieve that by means of his photograph, or more precisely by means of the standpoint from which the photograph was taken as a frozen view, future assessor will be able to see the world through his eyes. Consequently, the point of view is neither objective nor subjective, but intersubjective.⁴

Flusser (1996: 187) complains, however, that the photographer is not aware of the striving for intersubjectivity that characterizes the techno-image. It is misjudged as a purely aesthetic endeavor, which accentuates the danger of discursive instrumentalization. An

² "Für die Technoimagination ist der objektive Standpunkt ein Unsinn und ein Unding" (Flusser 1996: 211).

³ "Wahrheitssuche ist dann nicht mehr eine Entdeckungsfahrt, sondern der Versuch, sich mit den anderen hinsichtlich der Welt einig zu werden" (Flusser 1996: 213).

⁴ "Fotografien sind gefrorene Ansichten der Welt, die auf der Suche nach Intersubjektivität entstanden sind - Ansichten, die von anderen geteilt werden können" (Flusser 1996: 187).

awareness of the dialogical character of techno-images would enable the photographer to perceive and evaluate the world in a completely different way.

The video, which we would like to cite as a second example, is a new techno-image in comparison to photography and film, to which Flusser (1996: 199) attributes both the danger of synchronicity and a dialogical nature. The danger arises as soon as the video, by means of the mass media, promotes the transmission and dissemination of amphitheater discourses as well as the resulting degenerated network dialogue. On the one hand, the dialogical potential, the awareness of which is a basic prerequisite for the development of genuine communication, stands out because the people recorded in the video can see themselves on the monitor through the eyes of the individual filming them, but also through their own eyes the individual filming during the filming process. Furthermore, videos are editable, which means that elements can be removed or substituted by others. This creates new videos and thus new information.

According to Flusser (1996: 199s.; 1999: 92s.), it would be desirable for people to use telematics not only as a distraction, but to become aware of the dialogic character of techno-images. With their help, they could generate information themselves, act intersubjectively, and thus enter into genuine communication. In this way, the discursive character of telematic communication and its influence on society could be broken. It is extremely necessary, as Flusser (1999: 94) emphasizes in his work *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, for this change to take place as quickly as possible.

1.3 The ideal telematic society

Flusser (1996: 227) emphasizes that the telematic communication structure is not static in the technical sense, but offers unimagined possibilities for the construction of a new kind of codified world, new human relationships, and a new society.⁵

It is important to emphasize once again that “discourse” in Flusser’s work does not have exclusively negative connotations. The dialectical relationship between discourse and dialogue, which he set forth in his *Kommunikologie* in the 1970s, is taken up again in later works, such as *Nachgeschichte. Eine korrigierte Geschichtsschreibung* (1981/1993) and *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* (1984/1999) as will be specified in the following.

⁵ „[Die telematische Kommunikation] bietet ungeahnte Möglichkeiten zur Errichtung einer neuartigen kodifizierten Welt, neuer menschlicher Beziehungen, eines neuen Menschen und einer neuen Gesellschaft” (Flusser 1996: 227).

The ideal society is a society in which information is generated by computation, ergo by dialogue, and transmitted by means of discourse. Thus, dialogue and discourse are mutually related, in that dialogue maintains discourse and discourse stimulates dialogue (Flusser 1999: 90). Only in this way can communication be achieved. An exclusively dialogical society would be able to produce new information in certain circles, but this information could not be communicated to all members of society due to the lack of discursive channels. The consequence would be the formation of a knowledgeable elite and an ignorant mass. This would have to be rejected, as would an exclusively discursive society (Flusser 1999: 91). Flusser (1993: 233) argues that, for the first time, telematics gives people the freedom to generate new information and program devices so that they can use them to change the world according to their needs and desires. Flusser (1993: 233) defines this society, based on the processes described above, as an “Informationsgesellschaft” (‘information society’).

Flusser (1999: 93) emphasizes that his utopian society would be simultaneously a “society of artists” and a “society of players”. He thereby not only underlines the creative activity of information production and the use of technical devices by humans, but also and in particular the new interpersonal relationships that arise from the former. Ideally, telematics would evoke not only a creatively active individual (an artist), but a creatively active society (of players) that would correspond to its proper intersubjective and dialogical meaning through the production of information. Flusser (1999: 102) renounces any ego-related concept and characterizes precisely the social relationships as identity-forming. We are only concretely an »I« when we are with and for others. »I« is someone who is addressed with »you«⁶ The misrecognition of telematics that Flusser states (1999: 101), however, casts society in a light of meaninglessness and inadequacy.

In view of the points made, it could be summarized that for Flusser, the ideal telematic society is an information society or one of artists and players, in which there is a collaboration between dialogue and discourse and a focus on interpersonality, on interpersonal communication. Is this a picture of society that our current society comes close to, thanks to the Internet and social media in particular? Or is it the case that the Internet as a mass medium maintains or even reinforces the synchronicity of amphitheater and network (public opinion)?

⁶ “Wir sind überhaupt erst konkret ein »Ich«, wenn wir mit anderen und für andere da sind. »Ich« ist, zu dem jemand »du« sagt” (Flusser 1999: 102).

In today's telematic society, are techno-images used in unfolding their dialogic character or continue to be used as tools of distraction?

2.1. New types of techno-images – Language-Image-Texts

We have already used the examples of photography and video to focus on technical images and emphasized their intersubjective and thus dialogical character, which, however, according to Flusser, has not yet unfolded. In the present age, technical images seem to have evolved and taken on new forms.

Take for example memes, which Osterroth (2019: 270), following Stöckl (2011), defines as “language-image-texts”. According to Osterroth, the meme makes use of several media formats simultaneously, i.e. it combines several media formats into a new kind of technical image. Being an “act of communication”, the meme corresponds to the concepts of discourse and dialogue. This is also evident in Dynel's description of the meme, which Osterroth cites: The meme is characterized by “various formats, for example videos, GIF files, photographs, and drawings”. It produces “countless derivatives by being imitated, remixed, and rapidly diffused by countless participants in technologically mediated communication” (Dynel 2016: 662).

In Flusser's words: the memes are constantly recomputed, ergo dialogized, by the Internet users and discursively forwarded to other users. As Osterroth (2019: 276s.) points out, it is the constant computation that makes the meme a meme in the first place. Furthermore, Osterroth (2019: 272) emphasizes its “insider character”: the individual memes are only used to communicate with certain social groups and are only understood within these. The size of the social group can vary significantly. Memes allow for intersubjectively oriented points of view and thus dialogical characteristics can emerge. However, the pursuit of intersubjectivity and dialogue proves to have certain limitations, at least initially. After all, if a meme and its ongoing derivations gain a certain level of recognition and popularity, they can be transferred to the broader alternative public sphere of the Internet. Internet users may reshape the meme or just take on a recipient role and evaluate the meme by pressing the “like” or the “dislike” button. Consider the following example⁷:

⁷ Posted on 10/30/2019 by Instagram account “revintelectual”, https://www.instagram.com/p/B4OM9ygA_BO/ [27.08.2021].



Figure 1: Meme *Elogio da superficialidade* ('In praise of superficiality').⁸

It is striking that the structure of this meme cannot be characterized as fully prototypical in the sense of Osterroth namely consisting of two linguistic and separated components, an introductory context, a punch line and an image. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the image was taken from other users and thus newly formed. Nevertheless, the example can be classified as a novel technical image that combines several media formats (speech-image-texts). Specifically, it appears to be a photograph of Vilém Flusser, which has been modified by text areas and an emblem, presumably intended to indicate the designer and publisher. Furthermore, the image refers to a specific social group,⁹ who, according to the Instagram account and its contents, is firstly Portuguese-speaking and secondly interested in an intellectual lifestyle, literature and philosophy, as well as experienced in these areas.¹⁰ One can therefore conclude that the image is designed to be intersubjective. In addition, the members of the social group can rate the image both indirectly via the "Like" button and directly using the comment function, and in this way communicate with both the publisher and the other users, which

⁸ English translation of the text: "Images should serve as models for actions because, although they show only surfaces of objects, they nevertheless allow us to see relationships between them that were previously unthinkable."

⁹ The size of the social group with which the account and, in particular, the memes are intended to communicate can be relatively concretely quantified at 27.9k subscribers, a not small but, nevertheless, limited group.

¹⁰ <https://www.instagram.com/revintelectual/>.

further emphasizes the intersubjective character.¹¹ In theory as in practice (with the appropriate tools and programs), the image could be taken and re-formed by adding another linguistic component to it, replacing the previous one, or exchanging the photo. To fulfill the communicative act completely, the modified image would have to be discursively disseminated via a channel such as Instagram. Hence, the example unmistakably illustrates the dialogic character and intersubjective orientation of modern technical images.

2.2. New types of techno-images – (Scientific) Web videos

To further demonstrate the unfolding intersubjective and dialogic potential of social networks, so-called knowledge-communicating web videos (Metten 2019) will now be briefly addressed. Metten (2019: 193) emphasizes that the web videos published on YouTube do not correspond to the films and videos of traditional mass media channels, such as television. According to Metten (2019: 193), these mass media channels address a heterogeneous audience and ensure the exchange of information within society as a whole.

Presumably, Flusser would doubt that mass media enable the exchange of information as described by Metten (2019), since the purely discursive broadcast does not constitute an information-generating dialogue. Accordingly, Flusser would surely also reinterpret the heterogeneous audience as an “amorphous, homogenized mass” (cf. Flusser 1996: 49). Nonetheless, compared to the continuous and discursive dissemination of television, the videos published via YouTube that Metten (2019) examines are aimed at specific social groups with a corresponding subject matter or interest. Furthermore, YouTube enables anyone to take on the role of sender as well as receiver, which both enlarges and differentiates the spectrum of content creators, content consumers, and the content itself. In this respect, there is no centralization comparable to that of television.

In view of scientific web videos, the simultaneous appearance of an objective and an intersubjective point of view seems particularly worth mentioning. Metten (2019: 198s.) first explains that essentially all videos, and thus also scientific videos, address their viewers in a communicative way. This corresponds to Flusser’s view that videos are designed to be intersubjective and thus have a dialogic character. However, since the videos discussed here focus on the presentation of science, the camera angles and camera movements tend to be static,

¹¹ At the time of the image call (08/10/2021), the image had been rated 215x with a “Like”. Unfortunately, there were no comments.

thus conveying the neutrality and closeness to reality that is characteristic of science. As Metten (2019: 199) points out, following Daston & Galison (1998), the research film conforms to the ideal of mechanical objectivity, which is considered free of the observer's subjective influence.

Nevertheless, the objective design is embedded in a communicative framework. In this regard, Metten (2019: 199) highlights the dual function of scientific videos, knowledge presentation and knowledge communication. The knowledge transfer takes place in the form of a video commentator or video narrator, who directly addresses the viewers in order to give them an understanding of the scientific facts. In Flusser's sense, one could argue that the commentator or narrator assumes the viewers' perspective in order to explain the scientific facts in a way that they can understand. Furthermore, the viewers assume the perspective of the commentator or narrator in order to comprehend the scientific facts. Despite the objective presentation of knowledge, the videos are therefore designed to convey knowledge intersubjectively and thus communicatively. Moreover, in terms of optimal knowledge representation and transmission, Metten (2019: 200) emphasizes that audiovisual formats are not reduced to moving images. Spoken language, sound and music, moving and still images, written inserts and graphics work together. Consequently, not only the image formats discussed in the previous section, but also video formats are characterized by a multimedia interplay which, as Flusser (1996: 200) already pointed out, makes them processable and thus dialogic.

In conclusion, we would like to note that modern language-image-texts as well as modern scientific web videos are intersubjective and no longer used merely as gadgets of diversion. Their intersubjectivity and reshapability allow their dialogic character to unfold and enable communication in connection with their discursive dissemination. At the same time, the strict division of roles into sender and receiver is dissolved and channels such as Instagram and YouTube act in a decentralized manner, unlike the previous forms of mass media such as television.

3.1. The ideal telematic society – One side of the coin

In the previous sections, our aim was to show that, in Flusser's sense, modern technical images are able to bring their dialogic character to bear. Now the question arises whether today's Internet or, more precisely, some of its communication channels are capable of banishing the danger of synchronicity. Do they promote communication in order to create an ideal telematic society according to Flusser's ideas?

In her discussion of Flusser's concepts "discourse" and "dialogue", Yeh (2013: 237) refers to the Internet as a dialogical medium. However, based on Münklers (2009: 21), Pappert & Roth (2019: 25) state that the Internet initially operated as "one-to-many communication", as an "offer area" without socially active and certainly not interactive reference. However, a change took place that generated the so-called Web 2.0.¹² In addition to the information broadcast, Web 2.0 now also offers its users application software with which they can create their own information (Münklers 2009: 20s.). Web 2.0 associates a new dimension of communication and interaction on the net, for which the expressions social networking, collaboration and participation became common (Fraas et al. 2012: 14s.). From Flusser's point of view, the "new dimension of communication" would thus imply a balance between dialogue and discourse, and the terms "interaction", "social networking", "collaboration", and "participation" would imply the realization of intersubjectivity. According to Fraas et al. (2012:15), Web 2.0 can therefore be labeled the Social Web, which emphasizes its fundamental social character. In this way, it fulfills Flusser's concept of the intersubjectivity of ideal telematic communication.

Due to their active participation as well as the communication between users, Münker (2009: 20) highlights that Web 2.0 does not represent a mass medium, as already shown earlier in relation to the concrete social channels Instagram and YouTube. Mass media still exist, as Pappert & Roth (2019: 29) point out. However, most mass media have shifted a large part of their presence to the web and in particular to Instagram, YouTube, Twitter & Co. For example, the Brazilian daily newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* has its own Instagram account,¹³ which not only serves to publish information (news) in the form of language-image-texts, but also to interact with readers via the comments section. The same applies to the television station *CNN Brasil* and its own YouTube channel.¹⁴ Pappert & Roth (2019: 29) conclude that the relationship between mass media and social media is increasingly based on reciprocal

¹² Pappert and Roth, as well as Münklers, point out that the assumption that there has been a version jump from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 is wrong, "weil das Worl Wide Web ja keineswegs aus einer einzelnen Software besteht, die man isoliert weiterentwickeln könnte" (Münklers 2009: 21) ('because the World Wide Web does not consist of a single piece of software that can be developed in isolation').

¹³ <https://www.instagram.com/folhadespaulo/> [24.08.2021]. Furthermore, on its Instagram account, with around 2.8 million subscribers, the daily newspaper states that it is also active on the social channels Twitter and Telegram.

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvdwhh_fDyWccR42-rReZLw [24.08.2021].

observation, borrowing and harnessing. In a first conclusion, the dialogical potential of the Web 2.0 cannot be denied.

3.2 The ideal telematic society – The other side of the coin

Schweiger (2017: 55) also sees in social media in particular an opportunity for users to no longer act merely as recipients of information, but also as producers and publishers of information. The author summarizes this possibility as having democratic potential, as it enables ordinary citizens to communicate directly with politicians or journalists.¹⁵ According to Schweiger (2017: 56), the democratic potential of online discourse is due to the access to the discussion (input), its process (throughput) and its result (outcome). In a sense, this corresponds to the balance between discourse and dialogue described by Flusser. Moreover, Flusser's notion of communication, especially the intersubjectivity inherent in dialogue, also suggests the democratic orientation addressed by Schweiger (2017). However, Schweiger raises the question of whether the potential of the social web is actually being exploited by citizens. Is communication really taking place?

To answer this question, Schweiger (2017: 59) refers to the results of several German-language studies on different social channels. Schweiger (2017: 59) concludes that not the entire society, but only a relatively small part of it, namely predominantly male and sociable individuals, actively participates in acts of communication. In this context, communication is mostly between users with the same views and opinions, which prevents the flow of differently switched information and thus the emergence of new information, ergo a dialogue. Schweiger (2017: 145) uses the term “echo chamber” to describe this phenomenon. All individuals shout the same utterance, the echo becomes louder and louder, and the group's opinion is confirmed. The term “echo chamber” is accompanied by the term “filter bubble” (Schweiger 2017: 145), which refers to the dissemination and use of information within smaller splinter groups in which the echo can only unfold its effect. The authors of the paper would like to emphasise once again that the dehomogenisation of the masses generated by social media should not be seen as negative in principle, as already mentioned in the previous sections. However, when the influx

¹⁵ Furthermore, he refers to Berthold Brecht's (1967) theory of a dialogical and intersubjective radio, which now seems to come true with the Internet.

of new or contradictory information fails to materialize, preventing dialogue, we speak of a filter bubble, which is the negative flip side of dehomogenization.

Not infrequently, this one-sided confirmation of already existing information culminates in insulting and defamatory tirades that have nothing to do with communication in Flusser's ideal telematic society, which represents a with and for each other. Generally speaking, the level of argumentation as well as social customs play a subordinate role in most cases, as Schweiger (2017: 60) points out on the basis of empirical studies. However, this does not mean that constructive discourses and dialogues are completely absent in Web 2.0. Often, these are conducted on specific issue-related areas. However, Schweiger (2019: 60), referring to a study from 2014 led by himself, points out that even issue-related communication only extremely rarely ends in agreement.

Pappert & Roth (2019: 32) also underline a difference between the ideal function of Web 2.0, especially its communication channels, and the tendencies in practice. In this regard, they emphasize the lack of constructiveness of most acts of communication, which often end in vilification and thus represent dangers for the democratic-pluralistic public sphere.

4. Conclusion

In principle, Web 2.0 is associated with social participation, interaction and communication, which is why the term social web is also used. It also differs from mass media in its decentralized structure. In view of these characteristics, it is fundamentally suitable for establishing an ideal telematic society according to Flusser's ideas, which is based on a balance between discourse and dialogue as well as on togetherness and cooperation within society. Modern technical images also seem to unfold their dialogic character within Web 2.0, as was shown on the basis of language-image texts and (scientific) web videos. Their intersubjective interpretation and reshapeability play a decisive role in this process and ensure that techno-images no longer serve merely as a diversion.

However, the predicted potentials, as promising as they may seem, do not correspond to the actual practice, or they only partially do so. Even in Web 2.0, no ideal telematic society according to Flusser has been able to establish itself, at least until today. Instead, Flusser's warnings of a misguided communication that suppresses dialogue and thus evokes a unilateral and egocentric society appear to be becoming reality. As Flusser (1996: 226) stated in relation to techno-images such as photography or video, their structure is not to blame for the

synchronization of amphitheater discourses and degenerated net dialogue (public opinion). Nor is Web 2.0 and its communication channels to blame for the current negative tendencies. It is the people who become comfortable in their filter bubble and echo chamber. In this way, they undermine intersubjective points of view and thus any genuine dialogue. Although these undemocratic tendencies can be observed in many cases, they are not structurally inherent to Web 2.0. There is undoubtedly a communication potential that reconciles discourse and dialogue, even if this is perhaps found less in political-ideological areas and more in professional ones. Looking at the points that we have discussed, one can conclude that, on the one hand, Web 2.0 has been able to develop its dialogical character to some extent and also bring the prospect of an ideal telematic society closer. On the other hand, Web 2.0 is not free of anti-communication and thus undemocratic counter-currents. Against this background, the medium of the Internet, including the communication channels provided by Web 2.0, seem to exert an ambivalent influence on today's society. This raises the final questions: will society continue to remain in limbo between the ideal and the worst case or will it finally turn completely to one of the two sides? And which one of the possible sides is this likely to be? Will an ideal telematic society, as Flusser described it, ever be able to prevail or will it always remain just an ideal, a utopia? At least, the approaches to intersubjectivity and dialogue resulting from the possibilities of Web 2.0 still leave room for hope.

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