

Dehumanisation

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When I was a child I first noticed the pattern. Every time a teacher took me out of class to chat, I felt anxious. But contrary to my expectations, usually it turned out to be quite pleasant. Afterwards, however, my parents often told me that they had a phone call that gave a "distorted" picture, but exactly in the direction of my initial "fear". It was only in adulthood that I began to discover the pattern behind these "biases" as well as the cure: if there is tension, communicate as directly as possible (no writing, no calling, or later no emails, WhatsApp's, etc). The more "technical" the communication is, the lower the threshold for colliding with each other. In other words, kindness and focus on each other decrease with the increase in technological distance in communication. How does this work?

A special form of technological distance is methodological distance, such as juridification. Consider for example ex-lovers, who no longer feel the spark that made it so easy to love each other. If they no longer want to live together, they can even try to impose their will on each other, for example with claims to property (or children), by having lawyers stand up for their supposed "rights". Of course they should continue to have a physical conversation with each other, without technology such as emails and letters, and 'instruments' such as lawyers. In any case, that would be much more in line with the human dimension.

The emancipation of the law - everyone can have themselves represented by a lawyer and thus assert themselves - is in line with the emancipation of violence: everyone has access to violence technology independently of muscle strength. The common thread is technology (or methodology), which makes it possible to sharpen the contours of the conflict and thus increase the tension. Meet up, keep talking, that's the only way we do justice to each other. But it takes courage, in work situations, relationships, friendships, and wherever social interaction matters. And, I must admit, I often lacked courage in my life ...

With the above in mind, it is not surprising that as technology-mediated communication becomes increasingly common, the boundaries of conflict are sharpening. The human willingness to understand each other, to be there for each other, simply becomes less likely. I would even say that communication has been somewhat dehumanized through technological mediation.

Digitising

Previously I described this as "digitizing"; our opinions, attitudes and feelings towards and for each other turn black and white: for or against. The annoying thing, and it certainly applies to me, is that the courage needed to meet physically in the event of a potential conflict is drowned out by the seemingly effortless possibilities and extremely accessible mass communication technologies, like SMS, WhatsApp, emails, and chats. It's annoying because it definitely dehumanizes us a little bit more each time. Of course, smileys and other emoticons are meant to "paste" impending conflict, but the nuance in black and white contrasts is easily lost.

The emancipation of the law began with the first legal systems. As beautiful as it was, it became necessary almost immediately. With the invention of gunpowder and later mechanization and industry, the emancipation of violence began. It brought power and strength independent of muscle strength. Stated black and white, if everyone had to kill an animal for a piece of meat, our (over) consumption would look very different.

Now there is the emancipation of information (and interpretation). You don't even have to be able to write a whole sentence to tweet an opinion (preferably not). Emancipation of law, violence and information dehumanizes us and therefore makes us a little more dangerous. A president of the United States tweeted his opinion, which reached a low point in dehumanization with the storming of the Capitol on the basis of black and white declared "contradictions." What is special is that it was not democracy or the law that silenced him, but BigTech. Democracy at the mercy of our technological madness?