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Computer-Mediated Communication and Criticisms of the Internet Hubert Dreyfus' Criticism from the Perspective of Karl Jaspers' Philosophy of Communication

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Abstract: Going on the insight of existentialist and phenomenological philosophy, the American philosopher Hubert Dreyfus has launched a vigorous criticism of the "computer revolution," the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the past decades. However, it is often hard to spell out the practical and moral consequences of his arguments. The weakness of the arguments in this respect seems to be related to more general features of technology development and its ethical evaluation, such as the fact that technological devices open up new and complementary possibilities (for instance of communication) without, necessarily, taking away others. In this essay I discuss whether and if so, how, computer-mediated communication reflects, influences and changes fundamental structures of human communication. This analysis is carried out against the background of Karl Jaspers' existentialist philosophy of communication and technology. Karl Jaspers' philosophy will be explored and presented as a framework that provides fruitful insights for the discussion on CMC.

This essay is based on a set of rather tentative ideas and intuitions about the significance of human communication and more specifically computer-mediated communication (CMC).¹ Many people presume the patterns of communication to be changing by the increasing use of the Internet, which can be regarded as a medium that counts out the bodily and spatial presence of its users. In the last decennia of the twentieth century the Internet, developed for secluded academic and military information transfer, evolved

into a multipurpose worldwide network resulting in the network society. According to Manuel Castells, the internet is a communication medium that allows, for the first time, the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale. As the printing press in the West created what McLuhan named the "Gutenberg Galaxy," we have now entered a new world of communication: the "Internet Galaxy."² Castells goes on the point out that people and society at large transform technologies and vice versa. This particularly applies to Internet, a technology of

¹ Originally published in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Karl Jaspers Gesellschaft, Jahrgang 20* (2007). (Eds. E. Salamun-Hybasek, K. Salamun & H. Stelzer) Innsbruck: Studienverlag.

² Castells, M. (2003) *The Internet Galaxy. Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 2-3.

communication, because its underlying technology is logically malleable. As James Moor, who first coined this notion, understands it, technological devices such as computers are logically malleable in that they can be shaped to do any activity that can be characterized in terms of logical operations.³ The malleability of technologies allows them to be used in new and unforeseen ways, ways for which we frequently lack appropriate policies as to the control of applications and their effects. Computers, according to Moor, are generic technologies that have now intruded every sphere of life.⁴

Conscious communication (human language) is what makes the biological specificity of the human species. Since Internet transforms the way in which we communicate, our lives are deeply affected by this new communication technology. On the other hand, by doing many things with the Internet, we transform the Internet itself.⁵

As a consequence, Internet as an increasingly popular mode of communication is a powerful and influencing technology that deeply interacts with humans and the way they communicate. Therefore it stands in need of critical reflection.

It is a challenge for philosophy and ethics to try to articulate concerns relating to CMC and the Internet, such as "unnatural," "loss of meaning," "abstract and reductionistic view of life," and "fragmentation." These concerns are often looked upon with suspicion by philosophers and scientists, and not without reason, because they are hard to spell out in analytically clear ways, let alone in ways that can be translated to public reasons, to be endorsed by the political and social community as a whole. A general methodological assumption is that for this purpose we have to turn to philosophical approaches such as existentialism and phenomenology, which concentrate on the question of meaning and on the role of essential structures of human subjectivity such as spatiality, time, language, history, intersubjectivity, vulnerability, sociability, and

embodiment. Going on the insight of existentialist philosophy, Hubert Dreyfus has launched a vigorous criticism of the Internet and CMC in the past decades. I will discuss Karl Jaspers' philosophy of communication as a framework, which I will relate to CMC and I will argue that it sets a right frame for providing new insights in the discussion and appraisal of CMC.

Dreyfus' critique on Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication

The quintessence of the criticism that Hubert Dreyfus has launched against the Internet in his book on the Internet is that real life, face-to-face communication is essential to the full meaning of relating to others in processes such as learning.⁶ In that regard face-to-face communication is superior to CMC, because in the latter certain aspects of real life communication are corrupted.⁷ In describing the differences, Dreyfus employs a series of concepts, which include contextual, holistic, risk-involving, lively, vital, creative, autonomous, and emotional presence. However some central claims might be discerned.⁸

According to Dreyfus, CMC is a deficient or lesser mode of communication. Moreover, Internet replaces or expulses face-to-face communication. The danger of this trend is that existing and valuable patterns of communication are harmed. CMC is asymmetric in the sense that subjects control to a large extent different facets of communication such as the information they give and the identity they take. CMC can unilaterally be started out or ended, as exemplified in messenger services such as MSN. In CMC the commitment to others is less substantial and strong as in face-to-face conversations where the fact that I face others seems to create some sort of commitment that is not (or substantially less) free of obligations. Finally Dreyfus

³ Moor, J. H. (1985) "What is Computer Ethics?," *Metaphilosophy*, 16, 4, 266-75.

⁴ Moor, J. H. (2004) "Reason, Relativity, and Responsibility in Computer Ethics," in: *Computer Ethics and Professional Responsibility* (eds. T.W. Bynum & S. Rogerson), Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

⁵ Castells (2003), op. cit., p. 3-4.

⁶ Dreyfus, H. L. (2002) *Internet* (Translated by R. van de Plassche), London, Routledge, p. 15. Dreyfus takes education as his favorite example, because "for two decades computers have been touted as a new technology that will revitalize education."

⁷ It is obviously not the case that all communication (e.g. ordering a beer in a pub) realizes these features to full extent, but the point, Dreyfus makes, is that Internet communication is structurally limited in this regard and that it is a lesser mode of the normal, let alone the best instances of real life communication and interaction.

⁸ These concepts I shall not address here.

argues that CMC deprives subjects of the possibilities and capacities of (self)interpretation due to the absence of embodiment and avoidance of risk and critical and unconditional commitment.⁹ In short, according to Dreyfus CMC is shallow and non-committal.

For Dreyfus these features are directly related to our concrete embodied interaction with situations and other subjects, with the taking in by means of perception, language, situational aspects and clues of the complete array of relevant features that fore- and backgrounds the meaning and moral aspects of human communication and interaction.¹⁰ Against this way of communicating and interacting, the possibilities Internet offers are not only second-hand. The attraction these new possibilities apparently have is precisely based on the absence of the valuable, although not easy-to-get, elements of real interaction, such as taking risks, failing, commitment, and accepting responsibilities. In the view of Dreyfus, the growing tendency¹¹ to communicate through the Internet is associated with a loss of essential human capacities. Disembodied engagement with the Internet will lead to a loss of capacities of subjects for experiencing and actively relating to the world, such as the capacity to discriminate what is relevant from what is irrelevant, the capacity to engage with our concrete, physical environment which creates a sense for the reality of things. Against these capacities, being on the Internet is tempting because "telepresence" enables the avoidance of authentic commitment, acceptance of risks that are essential to lead a meaningful life. Meaning is the result of a dialectical process of

interaction with concrete, not virtual forms of reality, such as nature, friends, the body, and society.

Before reflecting upon and dismissing many of the criticisms of Dreyfus on CMC, I present a framework of communication as developed by Karl Jaspers. For Jaspers, communication stands at the heart of his philosophy and is central to human beings, because by nature they have an absolute will to communication. Jaspers developed a fully fledged philosophy of communication that will be explored as a framework for contemporary debates on CMC.

Jaspers' Philosophy of Communication

In order to fully comprehend Jaspers' account of communication it is necessary to briefly introduce some of the main features of his philosophy, because these are intricately related. 1932 Jaspers published his 3 volume piece *Philosophie* in which he elaborately unfolds his philosophy. The arrangement in three volumes reflects his ideas on the constellation of reality in that the first volume explores the realm of science (the philosophical world-orientation) and the last two depict the realm of philosophy (Existenz and Transcendence). According to Jaspers there is a division between scientific and philosophical realities. The philosophical world-orientation is, contrary to what the title might indicate, concerned with sciences and its limits. Jaspers denies that there will be no terra incognita in the future, because the realms of Existenz and transcendence can never be subject of scientific research as they are the subject matter of philosophy. The origin of philosophy not only relates to wondering, doubt, and limit situations such as death, guilt or fate, but most profoundly to a will to existential communication.¹² The focus of this paper will be on Existenz and communication, because these are deeply interconnected as Jaspers states that "I am only in communication with another."¹³ This should be understood in an existential manner. For Jaspers, I cannot be(come) self without the other being around.

Philosophy is not as science in that it seeks a universal valid truth that can be captured in unequivocal

⁹ Dreyfus, H. L. (1999) "Anonymity versus Commitment: The Dangers of Education on the Internet," *Ethics and Information Technology*, 1, p. 19. See also Dreyfus (2002), p. 96-8.

¹⁰ Dreyfus (2002), op cit, p. 79.

¹¹ Several studies have pointed out that more and more youth relies on the Internet for communication. A recent survey on the Internet in Britain by Dutton et. al. (2005) reveals that over 80% of the Dutch youth in the age from 10 to 17 years actively communicates on the Internet. They argue that online communications, especially instant messaging, is not detrimental to the development of children. Youth who maintain social relationships through online communication experience and value their friendships as closer, because instant messengers as MSN provides them with tools to uphold multiple social relations online. See, Dutton, W. H., di Gennaro, C., Millwood Hargrave, A. (2005), *The Internet in Britain. The Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS)*, May 2005, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford, http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/oxis/oxis2005_report.pdf accessed 11.2.2004.

¹² Jaspers, K. (1954), *Way to Wisdom. An Introduction to Philosophy* (Translated by R. Manheim), Yale University Press, New Haven, p 26-7.

¹³ Jaspers, K. (1970) *Philosophy, Volume 2* (Translated by E.B. Ashton), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 47 [my emphasis, henceforth referenced as P2].

propositions; there is no single truth for philosophy to arrive at. Since Existenz and true communication are not empirical at hand and, therefore, do not belong to the scientific enterprise, Jaspers argues, there is no science of existence. All that can be said about Existenz is elucidation and therefore the task of philosophy is *Existenzerhellung* (elucidation of Existenz) (P2, p. 48). By discussing communication, love, freedom, the unconditional, Jaspers tries to achieve recognition of what is present as a possibility in every human being and to focus on what asks to be realized in life. Existenz is thus not what objectively is, but what relates to the possibilities, the realization of which depends on me and me alone. Whereas rational perception is a necessary condition in arriving at scientific knowledge that is open to all, philosophical thoughts are achieved in historic and situated realities and in the possibility of the Existenz of the other. The philosophical truth is an unconditional truth, in which possible Existenz¹⁴ realizes itself in history through communication. As Jaspers states in *Von der Wahrheit*, the search for truth pushes toward communication with others.¹⁵ The community of all people is not grounded in by one truth, but only possible through the common medium of communication. It is the task of philosophy to bring to conscious this medium and make it available, by recognizing, on the one hand, the conditions of the realization of the unconditional will to communicate, and on the other, the different forms that damage communication.

The central idea of Jaspers' existential philosophy is that Existenz is communication. I distinguish two sorts of communication in Jaspers' philosophy; objective and existential.¹⁶ First, objective communication consists of

communication in *Dasein*, in consciousness-as-such, and in spirit.

Community through communication is found, to be sure, already among the merely living existences; it is in consciousness as such, and it is in spirit. However, on the level of mere vitality, it can remain instinctive sympathies or interests limited to certain purposes. In consciousness as such, it can remain an unconcerned agreement upon what is correct or valid; in spirit, a deceptive consciousness of totality which however suddenly breaks off fellowship.¹⁷

Communication in *Dasein* is communication in primitive community that has binding force due to distress caused by threats of nature and other communities. People only engage in communication for solipsistic reasons and not for the sake of truth, and therefore the communicative bond is broken down as soon as its goals have been achieved. Communication as consciousness-as-such is grounded in rationality and an impersonal and pragmatic goal-orientation. Human beings as consciousness-as-such discuss specific topics that are general of nature and belong to the realm of science. Contrary to communication in *Dasein* and consciousness-as-such, communication in spirit is substantial of nature. It is the community in the idea of totality, such as "this state," "this society," "this family" that first establishes substantial communication. People are full with something that is not an object in the world of which he as consciousness-of-such can have knowledge (*RaE*, pp. 79-85; P2, p. 49).

On the other hand, when surpassing objective communication the opportunity for possible communication opens up; namely, existential communication, which denotes more than a mere exchanging of words. People must also be able to remain silent; for Jaspers, communication and loneliness belong together. Existential communication, just as love, cannot be forced upon and demands two active actors. Communication is the life with others as it is takes place in manifold forms in *Dasein*. People always find themselves in situations. These situations, which I cannot escape from, determine what is required of me. In every situation it is possible to seek authentic existence and for this reason we should not be fatalists. However, not every form of community, which is indispensable for

¹⁴ According to Jaspers we are not only *Dasein*, consciousness-as-such, spirit, and possible Existenz which are the modi of being conscious of our being. In Jaspers philosophy possible Existenz denotes the fact that as humans we are not fully aware of our being, unless we also realize our Existenz.

¹⁵ For Jaspers this is not an objective statement, but rather the expression of a deep existential experience. Communication is introduced by Jaspers as a break-through of his individual solitude that he experienced from his youth onwards due to chronicle illnesses he suffered which forced him to remain largely outside the social sphere. Jaspers, K. (1947) *Von der Wahrheit*, p. 374.

¹⁶ For a more detailed description of objective and existential communication I refer to Saner, H. (1988), "Zur Dialektik von Einsamkeit und Kommunikation bei Karl Jaspers," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Karl-Jaspers-Gesellschaft. Jahrbuch 1* (eds. E. Hybašek & K. Salamun) VWGÖ, Wien, p. 31ff.

¹⁷ Jaspers, K. (1957) *Reason and Existenz*. (Translated by W. Earle) The Noonday Press, Inc., New York, p. 85. [Henceforth referenced as *RaE*.]

Dasein and possible Existenz, is what I want as possible Existenz. The naïve, uncritical Dasein of people in society has its consciousness coinciding with the general consciousness of surrounding people, while not searching for its own being (*P2*, p 48). In its naïve consciousness it does what others do, thinks what other think, beliefs what other belief, but its self-consciousness is concealed under a veil. Fritz Kaufmann correctly points out that

for Jaspers, the truest, most intimate communication has this paradoxical feature about it: that it respects, emphasises, and intensifies the differences between one existence and the other, instead of dwarfing, slurring and hiding them, as in the rule of anonymity of average life.¹⁸

As a consequence I am not able to communicate with others, because I am not yet conscious of myself. If I want true communication, then I do not want to return to ignorance. Rather, Karl Jaspers argues that it requires a jump of an self-conscious individual in order to position itself against others and the world, and, as a consequence, to acquire an original independence. Different modes of communication bring people closer to each other. These different forms of communication, Jaspers argues, display the boundaries of existential communication, which is not yet achieved in these different modes (*P2*, pp. 48-51). For example, via a "naïve substantial community," which is however deficient in that I encounter the other as a replaceable substance in communication. The community is impersonal and the other in communication might as well be any other person. Another form of communication is to use the other as means to one's ends.

Although I might experience a specific satisfaction in objective communication, this satisfaction is not an absolute one. The dissatisfaction of objective communication is the origin of a break-through to Existenz and to philosophy's task of illuminating it. As philosophy starts with wondering and knowledge starts with doubt, so the elucidation of Existenz starts with the dissatisfaction of communication.

The dissatisfaction with every particular mode of communication leads to a will to total communication, a

will which can only be one and which is the authentically driving and binding force in all the modes of communication (*RaE*, p. 95).

Jaspers identifies different ways that lead to a dissatisfaction of communication. As consciousness is not without an object, self-consciousness is not without another self-consciousness; it needs to recognize itself in the other in order to position itself as itself in the communication against the other. But Jaspers argues that this form of communication is dissatisfactory, because it is still freely exchangeable. The other is not a unique person, but just any other to communicate with. Other forms of dissatisfaction are related to either myself or the other (*P2*, pp. 51-4). When the focus of communication is on me, as self, I will increase the possible dissatisfaction in the light of existential communication, because I myself cannot find the truth, because the truth is that which is not just true for me. Focusing on myself prevents me from turning my dissatisfaction into the will of existential communication. Furthermore, I cannot be myself - and neither can the other - if the other is not willing to become himself. Existential communication is not the result of my own actions, but results from meeting the other in a mutual recognition for Existenz (*P2*, pp. 53-4). An additional dissatisfaction relates to the previous features. Existential communication is unique for the reason that the other I encounter is not just any other replaceable self, but a specific and unique other. Existential communication cannot be copied or imitated, because it is an exclusive experience between two selves who are unique and not freely exchangeable. I can only engage the other in freedom if the other is and wants to be himself. Existential communication, thus, cannot be forced upon and might fail to occur (*P2*, p. 54). The knowledge that I achieve in existential communication only through and with the other, might lead to the idea that persons without communication are damned or without luck, because they did not encounter others. But Jaspers contends that by formulating these thoughts communication is objectified. Finding friends is not a passive occurrence, but grounded in possible Existenz. It prepares for a docile waiting in loneliness. However, when I am content with myself by regarding my friends and communication as my own merits, then I will lose both friends and communication, because it was not the product of solely me; it cannot be attributed to me (*P2*, pp. 54-5). In seeking existential communication I cannot reach all. If I am eager to engage in communication

¹⁸ Kaufmann, F. (1957), "Karl Jaspers and a Philosophy of Communication," *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (ed. P. A. Schilpp), Open Court Publishing, La Salle, Ill., 212-3.

with everyone I encounter, then I fall back in superficiality.

Against the tendency of human beings to fall back in self-satisfaction, against the contentment of the knowledge of the consciousness-as-such, against the will of the individual, against the tradition, philosophy wants to illuminate (*erhellen*) the freedom by which communication seizes upon being. Philosophy seeks elucidation of existential communication against the threats of solipsism and the universalism of Dasein (*P2*, pp. 56-66). Philosophy calls upon me to open myself up for a communicative bond. If I come to myself, then, in this communication, we find both being-self and being-with-the-other. When I am not independent as an individual, then I will lose myself to the other and the communication ceases to be. And, when I isolate myself from the other, then communication becomes empty. Communication takes place between pairs that unite themselves, but at the same time they must remain two. They come to each other from their loneliness and know their loneliness only because they are in communication. I cannot be self without engaging in communication, but cannot engage in communication without being lonely. In the removal of loneliness by communication a new loneliness is created that cannot disappear without the fact that I self cease to be a condition for communication. If I stay in the loneliness of Dasein then I become an empty self. However, if there is unrest in the Dasein of the self, there is room for possible Existenz. Real community is that what is able to unite all. The philosophical truth considers all people as the possible other (*P2*, pp. 56-8).

In real communication I become open (*offenbar*) with the other (*P2*, p. 58). This openness is at the same time the realization of self. The will to become open totally risks itself in the communication, in which I only can realize myself. I give all up, because I know I will achieve my own Existenz. In short, in becoming open, in my openness, I will lose myself as Dasein to win myself as possible Existenz. The process of openness is not an isolated process that concerns just me, but needs the other. This process, Jaspers argues (*P2*, p. 59), is a struggle; "a unique struggle, combative and loving at once." As love this communication is not blind love, but a struggling love that illuminates, because it questions, demands and so on. Contrary to the struggle of Dasein, which is fought with arms of deceit and tricks, the struggle for Existenz is about openness, shaking off of power, and about the being-self of me and the other. This struggle should therefore not be understood as a

battle against each other, but as a mutual struggle for truth that takes place on a equal level and with complete confidence. In the existential, struggling communication I put everything to the other's disposal. Insofar as being-self is established through communication, neither I nor the other is a fixed substance of being that brings about communication. The becoming of being-self in communication appears as a creation *ex nihilo* resulting from a joint struggle. Love, as a substance of this process, is still not the communication, but its source through which it is illuminated (*P2*, p. 60). You and I, separated in Dasein, are one in transcendence, in its establishment through a struggling communication. Love, which is the substantial origin of being-self in communication, is able to bring about being-self as the movement of her own disclosure, but is not its fulfillment, which, as Jaspers states (*P2*, pp. 64-6), is a jump from the incomprehensible to the unthinkable. Factors that hinder communications cannot be love.

While communication in Dasein is a process and not the end, it is conscious of its deficiencies (*P2*, pp. 66-73). A first deficiency that might occur is the experience of default in communication. Although I experience closeness and nearness of others in Dasein, I still might be aware of the distance that stands between me and the other. In this status quo of communication I keep waiting not wanting to be disappointed. This is a possible communication, but not an illuminated or existential communication. In the grief of these situations there might be a longing for real communication, but the words, the deeds, and the truth are not present (*P2*, pp. 66-7). Another deficiency is silence¹⁹ when it takes the form of inaction as it stops the process of communication in Dasein. Being silent may also be an instance of a lack of expression. Silence then, does not express anything, because those in communication do not experience anything (*P2*, pp. 67-9). The determination of people as reasonable beings (*Vernunftwesen*) who take value as an objective basis for

¹⁹ Note that Jaspers also states that in existential communication being silent is a modus of communication. This being silent is however substantially different from being silent as a form of inaction and lack of expression. Being silent in existential communication is not an empty silence, but a recognition of the pain and guilt I experience when communicating with the other. Existential communication is not about words, real communication is something more than the exchange of words; people must also be able to remain silent (*P2*, p. 67-9).

knowledge and belief is a further deficiency, because there is no objective certainty for existence. Communication puts certainty into question and the will to become open dares to question that what is considered as certainty, without me being sure whether or not and how I will win myself. This attempt might fail, but is part of the process. Jaspers, lastly, mentions loneliness²⁰ which might become a deficiency if it takes the form of a lack of communicative binding to the other (*P2*, pp. 72-3).

As communication is becoming self with the other, so its rupture or damage (*Abbruch*) is the original threat of a failed Existenz.²¹ Communication is not existential if I am not aware of the danger of rupture. I should not hide but expose myself to grab hold of the possibility; otherwise I fall back into Dasein. I should not fear communication and release myself from the façade of myself that covers me from the danger of openness. In fear is the power of Dasein (*Eigendasein*), namely the interests in material goods, power, pleasure; factors that seek to isolate the self from others. Only when I stop the opposition of my own Dasein, e.g. the tendency towards money, I leave behind the world. Material goods are considered as a recognition of reality, ordering, and compromises, but at the highpoint the sacrifice takes place and the possibility of Existenz is looming. My own Dasein is the ground for the rupture of communication, but as a condition of Dasein also a condition of communication. A feature of my own Dasein is that I compare myself with myself and with what I am for others. In the struggle for existential communication this tendency of comparing my own Dasein, which faces the threats of different sorts of ruptures, is put aside, because as Existenz I can only be myself. It is existentially impossible to be or to want to be someone else than I am. If rupture takes place then there is guilt. If I withdraw or rupture the possibility of openness (*Offenbarkeit*) then I experience guilt of the loss of this existential possibility. A damage, once occurred, cannot be repaired, because the possibility was here and now in this specific situation. How

definite and existential the rupture might be, the possibility for the future still exists.

There is a variety of ruptures, but Jaspers discerns some forms of the break.²² One feature of rupture includes the resistance of communication. When I say that I cannot be changed or that people should take me as I am, I am not a free being and I am not seeking communication. Every onset for communication is perceived as the only possible communication by a rigid and fixed Dasein. Before communication even starts out, it is already damaged. Moreover, rupture might take the form of avoidance, when I fear Existenz and leave all choices to those who are held to be experts in particular spheres of life, such as doctors, teachers etc. Jaspers argues that true communication demands the engagement in all spheres of life, even if this includes failure and pain. The inevitable distress of Dasein also evokes damage to communication if it results in using the other as a means to my ends. In relation to the latter remarks, communication is being harmed if people are not willing to question themselves and their beliefs and if they are not prepared to be convinced in discussions with others. Hence, communication is impossible for people living in a fixed objectivity. They are inaccessible and do not want to communicate, engage in a true conversation, and relate to what others say. They are only capable of impersonal chatting and putting forward their rigid dogmas. People with a rational fixed morality, who are more eager to judge and demand, but less to act, do not live an original life, but compellingly ground their principles that they apply in every circumstance. These people are not able to engage in communication. Moreover, Jaspers mentions people's pride hindering communication in that it does not seek true communication in solidarity as it tries to conquer the world to make it its own. Kaufmann²³ summarizes Jaspers' account of defective modes of communication, which include insincerity, deceit and lying, "pseudo-communication" arising from shyness, fear, suspicion, prejudice, self-centeredness, and will and continually idle talk.

In the social and psychological reality, situations will appear that open up possibilities for an encounter in existential communication (*P2*, p. 82). In the encounter I approach the other in the different roles that I may occupy, such as master or slave, parent or child, boss or

²⁰ In Jaspers' philosophy of communication the concept of loneliness not only denotes a deficiency, but also paradoxically forms an integral part of the process of seeking existential communication. The experience of loneliness drives me towards a real communication bond, in which I and the other recognize our being lonely (*P2*, 56-8, 71-3).

²¹ Jaspers (1932/1973) op. cit., p. 73-82.

²² Jaspers (1932/1973) op. cit., p. 78-81.

²³ Kaufman (1957) op. cit., p. 214-6.

employee, or as beloved one. Contrary to the ordering in the empirical Dasein according to merit, wit, and education, the ordering in Existenz is not to be known. Despite the different orderings of people, existential communication demands an encounter of people at an equal level (P2, pp. 82-4). In society, people form social groups, and interactions within these groups are a condition for Dasein. Its many forms are also necessary for existential communication in that uncountable contacts, free of obligations, carry opportunities for real communication that surpass communication in Dasein. Not every encounter will lead to existential communication and therefore, Jaspers argues (P2, pp. 84-6), social groups and social encounters form a safety net for those unable to engage in existential communication. All communication, even existential communication, is part of these groups, which are historically determined and, although they might change over time, are handed over from generation to generation. In short, social encounters remain within Dasein, but existential communication goes beyond what social groups can produce (P2, pp. 86-8).

Jaspers and Technology

The question to address is whether and to what extent Jaspers' philosophy of communication presents fruitful insights for the debate on CMC and especially Dreyfus' criticism. By discussing the relevance of Jaspers for this debate his philosophy of technology is not to be ignored, because his later philosophy of technology makes available a connection between his account of communication and CMC. Jaspers' philosophy of technology is characterized by two periods; the early period focusing on the demonism of technology and the later on the neutrality of technology. His early philosophy of technology, as voiced in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*²⁴ might be summarized, according to Peter-Paul Verbeek, as the suffocation of human existence by technology.²⁵ Technological developments as of the Industrial Revolution have significantly

changed the human condition. The fact that the number of people dramatically increased, made human life dependent on technology. Society, accordingly, had to be structured as to facilitate this development, resulting in social organizations and bureaucracy (MMA, pp. 33-7, 51-2). Jaspers argues that this dependency on technology keeps society in its power and turns it into an apparatus in which everything is appraised for its value as a function in the apparatus. This even includes human beings, who might, as a consequence of their functionality for society, dissolve as an individual and see their possibility of becoming self threatened (MMA, pp. 41, 52-4). Jaspers considered technology as a demon, as an independent artifact, developed by humans, but eventually turning against them. Technology is like a demon, because once you call for it, it does not go away. The demonism of technology has resulted in what Jaspers called the "rule of the mass," the massification of existence, in which people are alienated from their possible Existenz and deprived of the possibility to exist as a unique person by standardization of thoughts and action.

In *The Origin and Goal of History*²⁶ and *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man*²⁷ Jaspers displays a less negative and more ambivalent view on technology according to which he tries to explain the threatening character of technology and how this can be mastered. The later Jaspers nuances his early views on technology in that he still admits that technology is a demon, but this demon should not be considered as an intrinsic feature of technology. Rather, technology has become a demon because of the way it is used by people and the subsequent transformation of people into a part of the machine.²⁸ Technology has extended its scope over all spheres of life, from science to healthcare to organizations. People themselves become resources and a means for technology, without being aware of it (OGH, p. 123). But at the same time Jaspers acknowledges that technology both brings dangers and chances. The demonism of technology can only be countered by penetrating technology (*durchschauen*).

²⁴ Jaspers, K. (1957) *Man in the Modern Age* (Translated by E. and C. Paul), Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York. [Henceforth cited as MMA.]

²⁵ Verbeek, P.-P. (2000), *De daadkracht der dingen. Over techniek, filosofie en vormgeving*, Boom, Amsterdam. (Translated by R.P. Crease, *What Things Do. Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design*, Penn State University Press, University Park, PA, 2005), p. 27.

²⁶ Jaspers, K. (1957) *The Origin and Goal of History* (Translated by M. Bullock), Yale University Press, New Haven. [Henceforth cited as OGH.]

²⁷ Jaspers, K. (1963) *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man* (Translated by E. Ashton), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. [Henceforth cited as AFM.]

²⁸ OGH, p. 122; Verbeek (2000) op. cit., p. 52.

The fate of mankind depends on the way it masters the consequences of technology (*OGH*, p. 124; *AFM*, p. 290). Therefore, Jaspers advocates that technology is a task, because

technology is only a means, in itself neither good nor evil. Everything depends upon what man makes of it, for what it serves him, under what conditions he places it (*AFM*, p. 192).

In the end, the neutrality makes people responsible for how they employ technology.

Technology should be viewed as neutral²⁹ in that it is no more than a means to human ends; technology itself can not set any ends. Technology is in itself neither good nor evil, but can be used for good and bad by human beings (*OGH*, p. 115). Central to his new analysis of technology is a focus on the limits of technology. How one evaluates technology depends on what one expects of it. A clear appraisal of technology presupposes clarity with regard to the limits of technology. These limits consist in the incontrollable presuppositions of all technological realizations (*OGH*, p. 118), which are not apt for technological control, because it is dependent on them. The most important limit is that technology is constrained by the fact that it is a means and in need of mastery.³⁰ Technology serves different needs in human existence, notably the relieve of human existence. The limit of technology is that it remains a means; technology itself has no goals and neither is a goal itself (*OGH*, p. 119). Technology does not contain any internal direction, neither towards the fulfillment of human existence nor towards the despise

of technology (*OGH*, pp. 114-5). As a result of its neutrality it is in need of mastery (*Führung*). The mastery cannot be found in technology itself, but needs to be sought in a conscious ethos, while asking ourselves "what do we want with technology?" (*OGH*, p. 119).

Jaspers' new perspective not only opens up possibilities to criticize technology but also to stress the favorable aspects of technology, e.g. new human possibilities of Dasein in the world. Among the chances that are opened up, the chances of a wider perspective and a new consciousness of world are important for our analysis. Jaspers mentions the development of transportation as a positive product of technology, because it enables people in a kind of omnipresence to enjoy other places that were not at hand in the past. Moreover, the developments in the field of music and film allow people to reminisce past times as an enrichment of life. Another influence is that a new consciousness of the world has been established, as "we visualize the globe and it is filled with the daily news that comes to us from all parts of it" (*OGH*, p. 117; *AFM*, pp. 67, 194).

To sum up, in his later philosophy of technology Jaspers opens up the possibility of assigning technology the credits for offering human beings chances, such as radio and transportation. This is not an unrestricted appraisal of technology, but he surely has abandoned his techno-pessimistic views of his earlier work. He warns us to be suspicious of modern technology not because its progress brings evil inherently, but because the people who develop and use it can turn it into evil. Technology is no longer a fate, but a task of human beings.

Jaspers' Significance For Computer-Mediated Communication – Mitigating Dreyfus

For obvious reasons Jaspers did not address the question of CMC, as he died in 1969; Internet and CMC did not exist. Still, what might be the import of Jaspers' philosophy of technology and communication for discussions on CMC? I am convinced that Jaspers' philosophy of technology and communication might provide a framework for reflection upon CMC. In the following I will articulate some preliminary ideas with regard to CMC.

I believe Jaspers to offer a fully fledged framework that is less pessimistic than Dreyfus' account of Internet and CMC, although Jaspers also expresses serious

²⁹ The claim of technology being neutral is not as common in the philosophy of technology, e.g. because technology accomplishes more than the fulfillment of some goal it is related to. It also shapes the context in which it is applied, because it plays a role in human actions and (re)shapes the relation between human beings and their environment. However, for Jaspers neutrality is not applied to specific technologies, but to technique; the question is not whether specific technologies are means to an end, but whereto people have something like technique. Technique is neutral in the sense that technology developments cannot direct itself in a certain direction. The sovereignty of human beings is not limited to technological artifacts, but to *the* technique (Verbeek, 2000, op. cit., p. 56).

³⁰ Other limits, which are for the analysis less important include e.g. that technology is limited with regard to the mechanical, the lifeless, the universal, the materials, and humans. For a more detailed descriptions of these limits see *OGH*, pp. 118-22.

warnings pertaining to technology. Jaspers does not advocate an entirely optimistic perspective on technology; he admits that technology involves both dangers and chances. Jaspers wonders whether or not technology-based-communication would lead to a global community of the human spirit, or whether it would provide a basis for mutual rejection, hatred and totalitarian manipulation.³¹ Philosophers, such as Hanyu³² and Górnjak-Kocikowska³³ stress Jaspers' views to articulate warnings with regard to the information society and CMC. But I wish to imply that their views are too negative a portrayal of Jaspers. I coincide with Walters' remark on Jaspers' appraisal of information technology when he states that the later Jaspers, alongside his remarks on the consequences of technology, was concerned with the wrongful demonization of technology;

the demonism of technology [...] is only to be vanquished by following the road that leads to our penetration of it.³⁴

Subsequently, it is up to human beings to control technology development by penetrating, mastering and directing it. Human beings are responsible for what they bring forth and it is therefore, Jaspers argues, a task for human beings to address the question what to do and achieve with technology as the fate of man depends upon the way he masters the consequences of technology. Walters correctly argues that for Jaspers

essential to such mastery is a daily communication that involves both being-oneself and being-with-the-other.³⁵

I recognize in Jaspers the chances that technology might provide; for example. CMC makes available a powerful means of manifesting oneself to the other. Jaspers' suggestion that technology is a means for some other good and not a means itself is helpful for my argument. CMC is not an end in itself and, as a consequence, CMC need not exclusively be regarded as a life in the virtual, as a life on the screen, but as a way of manifesting oneself through the computer and Internet "by what I am myself."

Jaspers provides a framework for communication which is not about communicating as we commonly understand it, but about both being-oneself and being-with-the-other. This idea of communication provides a basis for people relating to each other through the Internet via CMC. Jaspers differentiates between different forms of communication; the first being objective, the second being existential. Objective communication takes place according to objective schemes in the world between people who meet each other as Dasein, consciousness-as-such or spirit; each modus with its own specific forms and goals of communication. These forms of communication are part and parcel of human beings and constitute the building blocks of daily human interaction. But at the same time, they are deficient and therefore stand outside the realm of existential communication. However, one cannot force upon the other existential communication; it is a possibility that might be realized in concrete historical circumstances. Subsequently, most communication that will take place between people is objective. And Jaspers argues that objective communication is necessary for human beings to at least arrive at the possibility of communication in an existential manner. Hence, we should not only value objective communication as ends in themselves in every day life, but also as necessary conditions for existential communication.

I argue that we might consider CMC as a technology that sets the conditions and makes available the possibilities and situations for existential communication. CMC is a powerful way to manifest oneself to the other. It is, compared to existential communication, a deficient mode, but the existence of lesser modes is necessary and constitutive for real communication. Without experiencing the deficiencies of objective communication, human beings are not motivated for the search for existential communication and self-realization.

³¹ See, for instance, also Walters, G. J. (2003) "Communication and the Third Industrial Revolution: Technology and the End of Work," *Karl Jaspers' Philosophie. Gegenwart und Zukunft* (eds. R. Wisser & L. H. Ehrlich) Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, p. 252.

³² Hanyu, S. (2003), "Jaspers' Existenz-Philosophy in the Information Age," *Karl Jaspers' Philosophie. Gegenwart und Zukunft* (eds. R. Wisser & L.H. Ehrlich) Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg.

³³ Górnjak-Kocikowska K. (2003), "The Relevance of Jaspers' Idea of Communication in the Age of Global Society," *Karl Jaspers' Philosophie. Gegenwart und Zukunft* (eds. R. Wisser & L. H. Ehrlich) Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg.

³⁴ Walters (2003) op. cit., p. 262.

³⁵ Walters (2003) op. cit., p. 263.

Due to the fact that technology opens up chances for analyzing CMC there is a possibility for relating to Dreyfus' criticisms of the Internet. Dreyfus' main argument against CMC is that real life or face-to-face communication is essential to real human interaction, the other being shallow and non-committal, because the bodily features of humanness are neglected. As argued above, Dreyfus' view is based on rather rigorous and extreme arguments, namely that CMC is a deficient mode of communication, is asymmetric, and a deprivation of self-interpretation due to the absence of embodiment and the avoidance of risk and commitment. Some general critique against Dreyfus might be offered. CMC is complementary to face-to-face communication, it is an additional possibility which stands besides other practices and possibilities. It should not be rigorously considered as a replacement, but as a supplement to existing patterns and means of communication. Moreover, attention should go to the specific features of Internet practices that are to the detriment of human existence. People are responsible for creating technology and should therefore control and master it. What's more, in so far as there is an influence on other practices, in time there will be a balance between various modes of communication: people will adapt to new situations. Finally, not all communication needs to be existential. Jaspers explicitly denies this himself. What Jaspers has coined objective communication has its deficiencies, but on the other hand it is necessary for people to engage in it in order to feel dissatisfied and consequently feel the urge for existential communication.

Against Dreyfus who deprecates lesser forms of communication, Jaspers, thus, offers a framework in which deficient forms of communication, the objective modes, perform an essential task, namely making people aware of the dissatisfactory of objective communication and pushing people towards existential or real communication. So, by acknowledging the lesser status of objective communication Jaspers need not denounce CMC as does Dreyfus. It is the task of philosophy to make aware this discontent and to bring to conscious and make available this medium of communication by recognizing, on the one hand, the conditions of the realization of the unconditional will to communicate, and on the other, the different forms that breach communication.

To conclude, there is no need to be as pessimistic as Dreyfus that our future lives will be one that is lived on the screen; Jaspers' account sets the frame for

developing an account of CMC that establishes not a life on the screen, but interactions through the screen which opens up positive chances for human communication on the Internet and created the possibilities for possible Existenz to engage in existential communication when one masters the consequences of the underlying technologies of CMC.