

Designing for conviviality

(for a good society)



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The need for an ontological evaluation

A comprehensive understanding of the new technologies requires an ontological evaluation “helpful for reflecting on the fundamental assumptions about the social that underlie the study and evaluation of technology”

Aim -> make explicit the social ontological and methodological presuppositions in current strand of thinking about technology

I advance systemism but not before pinpointing the shortcomings of two most common ontological frameworks, i.e. individualism and holism

Individualism

Individualism (ontological/methodological) explains any kind of social phenomenon in terms of individual behaviors.

Basic assumption -> bigger scale processes can be logically derived from individual ones

A good society:

- a matter of cumulative individual choices and responsibility
- technologies are understood as consisting in the aggregation of their individual consequences

Problem: lacks the strength for addressing collective action and values



Holism

The background of the slide is a light gray circuit board pattern with various traces, pads, and components like integrated circuits and connectors.

Understands societies as totalities that transcend their members, irreducible to the properties of individuals

Social change brought about by the new technologies is conceived as supra-individual

Technology is a monolithic unit that acts upon another such unit, society.

Problem: plays down or even enslaves individual action

Systemism

Everything is either a system or a component of a system

Societies are neither simple aggregates of individuals nor supra-individual entities that transcend their members
-> systems of interconnected individuals.

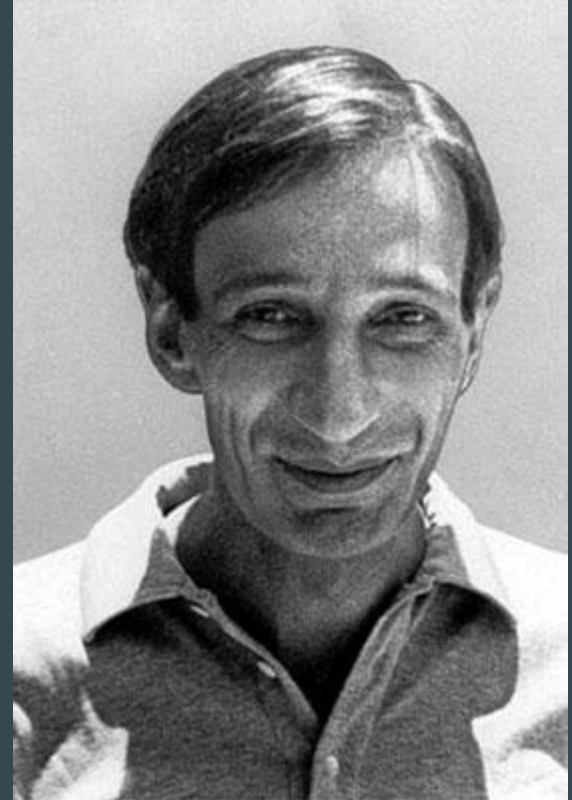
Technology is a subsystem of a society that is shaped by it but it also influences the macro level, society.

The relationship of technology to society as a whole is a complex, non-uniform and non-linear one;

Mapping the road to conviviality: Ivan Illich as a guide

Aim of **Tools for Conviviality** - setting a framework for analyzing man's relations to his tools (Illich 1973)

Modern technology becomes counterproductive, meaning it begins to be less unambiguously effective in meeting basic human needs (Mitcham 2009)



Counterproductivity

technologies are being created
as means to some specific ends
and end up subverting that
ends.



"First, they do an on-line search."

Tools = the category of all rationally devised devices, any explicitly articulated rational structure, be it material or cultural (Mitcham 1991)

Conviviality = “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence”

Individual freedom/autonomy



Community decision-making



Conviviality

Some criteria for designing for conviviality

Individual freedom/autonomy

Community

Flexibility

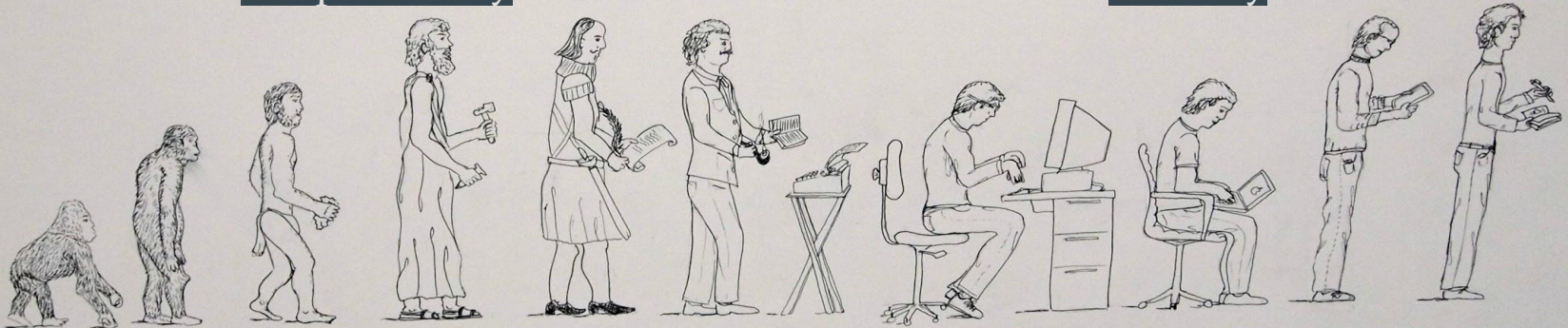
Sharedness

Transparency

Creativity

Simplifiability

Stability



A convivial society should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others ... To the degree that an individual masters his tools, he can invest the world with his meaning: to the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tools determines his self-image. Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision. (Illich 1973, 20)

Thanks for your attention!