Digital Trauma: the Repression of Wholeness

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I analyze the contemporary discourse of the ‘digital’ as a fetish that is symptomatic of profound psychological and social problems. I employ the terminologies and theories of Fredian psychoanalysis on the one hand, and of cybernetics on the other. This is in accordance with Gregory Bateson’s famous metaphor of binocular vision: seeing the same object or process from a point of view that is at a slight distance from another one is what gives a sense of depth. I interpret Bateson’s theory of ‘hubris’ as describing an over-estimation of the capacity of digital communication to map psychic and social patterns. Reading today’s digital fetish as a sign of ‘hubris,’ I then connect it to Freud’s concept of the death drive. I finally proceed to connect Herbert Marcuse’s interpretation of Freud in *Eros and Civilization* – in particular, his distinction of basic and surplus repression – with Bateson’s notions about learning and how they relate to the transcendence of hubris. To do this I employ a mathematical-linguistic device developed by Alfred Korzybski, which he called the index, to specify how in Freudian psychoanalysis Eros works at at least three distinct logical levels: Eros1,2,3. In this way I counterpose a cybernetic-monistic theory of the logical structure of the psyche as an entity that learns on multiple levels to the Freudian theory of the drama of Eros and Thanatos.

KEYWORDS:

digital, analog, Eros, Thanatos, cybernetics, psychoanalysis, Wholeness, learning