



AWAREness

INTELLIGENT MACHINES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR LIVES. DIGITAL REALITY HAS LONG PLAYED A DEFINING ROLE IN OUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS. THIS HAS BECOME EVEN MORE APPARENT SINCE COVID-19 REACHED PANDEMIC PROPORTIONS. WE ARE ALSO USING ALGORITHMS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO FIGHT THIS VIRUS. CORONA IS INCREASING THE PRESSURE TO REORIENT OURSELVES IN THE WORLD. ESPECIALLY RIGHT NOW WE NEED A NEW TYPE OF AWARENESS – AND ALL OUR SENSES.

BAR



MISTER FUTURE

After carving out a successful career as a journalist and publicist, Matthias Horx is quickly becoming one of the most influential trend forecasters and future researchers in the German-speaking world. He has published 20 books – including a number of bestsellers. Horx also founded Germany's most important future-oriented think tank – the Zukunfts-institut – which is based in Frankfurt, Germany, and Vienna, Austria.

Back from the future

HOW WILL OUR LIVES LOOK AFTER THE CORONAVIRUS HAS PASSED? THE FUTURE RESEARCHER MATTHIAS HORX TRIES TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION BY MEANS OF A "RE-GNOSIS" AND EXPLAINS WHAT ATTITUDES WILL BEST HELP US TO OVERCOME THE CRISIS.

Mr. Horx – you are a future researcher, or “futurist.” Are you able to predict when the coronavirus crisis will end?

Yes – in that it will never end. The change that is happening right now will one day give rise to a new normality. And this is simply something we will have to get used to. This is when the crisis – in terms of us experiencing it as a crisis – will be over, but our world and society will have transformed.

The coronavirus crisis has turned all of our lives upside down. When will we be able to return to our old lives?

Is that something we really want? Many people I have been speaking to have told me that they wouldn't give back the experiences they've been having during this period of lockdown. Even if our fear has gotten out of hand at times, we have suddenly been feeling much closer to other people. Some have even said that they have really enjoyed how life has slowed down considerably, and that it isn't as hectic or chaotic as it was before. I think that this shift in mindset could truly change us. We are now confronted with ourselves and the question "How do I actually want to live my life?"

Do we simply have to wait and see how things will turn out, or are we able to independently determine our futures?

Weren't we able to do that before? I suppose that the crisis has shown us that we've been missing out on a lot of opportunities to change that we might have had in the past. We always complained about the world

around us and "those at the top". But at the end of the day we all know that you have to start small – with yourself – to make big changes. And that's something we can all do.

Existential fears, money worries, loneliness – the onset of the crisis has triggered much anxiety and uncertainty in many people. How can we conquer our fear of the crisis?

You can't exactly "conquer" fear per se – it's an important emotion for human survival. If our ancestors hadn't had fear, then humans wouldn't exist today. But it is possible for us to gain new impulses by pushing through our fear. Perhaps the point of crises is to uncover our creativity and vitality, and to make it clear to us that we are not alone. Our friends, family, and even the state can help us out in emergencies. Not everyone experiences things this way, but countless people do. That makes us stronger.

You mentioned that we will experience a “new normality” after the coronavirus. Do you really believe that we won't be able to return to how things were “before”?

The world as we know it is in the process of disappearing. But a new world will piece itself together and take its place. We can only guess what shape it will take. There is an exercise that we use for vision processes at companies which has produced positive results. We call it a "RE-gnosis". A prognosis is usually always about fearfully looking ahead to the future with all of its problems and risks. But if you mentally put yourself in

the future, in a time when the crisis has subsided, then you will possibly see that not everything was bad – and that you even managed to overcome some difficulties. That imbues us with confidence and helps us to better handle the challenges of today. This is how we connect ourselves with a somewhat more advanced version of our future selves and pull ourselves out of our hopelessness. We reinvent ourselves in the process, so to speak.

Are you perhaps downplaying the extent of the crisis? Some people would like to maintain the current level of deceleration, but for others it's about surviving or keeping their jobs.

I don't think I am. We're all learning, whether we're rich or poor, aren't we?

Who are the winners and losers of this crisis?

It depends on what we make of it. But those who previously worked behind the scenes – the nurses, drivers, grocery store clerks – are now held in reverence and appreciated, and I think that is something that will stick. Those who have been grumbling are the ones who will lose.

The climate crisis was a major issue before the coronavirus crisis. Do you think the earth and climate have been recovering due to the shut-down that has been imposed across the world?

At the very least, we have managed to figure out that the world can slow down without it being the end of the world. We used to believe that the climate crisis couldn't be solved because any change would damage

the economy. But if we resolve the coronavirus crisis, then perhaps we can also reduce our CO2 emissions. That would at the very least be something worth considering.

What can we learn from this crisis when taking on other issues, like the fight against climate change, for example?

We are learning that we can handle crises and that a slowdown of our industrialized society doesn't necessarily have to lead to its demise. Moreover, we now know that we can achieve a whole lot with innovation and a community behind us.

Do you think that we will learn how to be more careful with resources in the future because we have to do without at present, or will we fall back into old patterns?

Some people will revert to how they did things before. But maybe the Corona will lead to a slowdown of sorts. Perhaps we won't race around the world as much as we used to, and maybe we won't congregate in massive soccer stadiums to cheer on our favorite teams as often. That in itself could be something that becomes contagious in the future. We may have to look for new ways of relaxing and blowing off steam that aren't cool après-ski parties in Ischgl. And perhaps having to do this will benefit us in the long run.



What does history tell us? What have major crises left behind in their wake?

They often result in learning processes. Hygiene rules had been invented by the end of the Middle Ages to make diseases more controllable. The AIDS crisis didn't result in the exclusion of homosexuals, but to greater tolerance. The Cuban Missile Crisis didn't lead to the Third World War, but to disarmament negotiations. Chernobyl ushered in the beginning of renewable energies. It is sometimes quite surprising to see what crises make of us – in the end, crises mean that we have to learn so we can better handle the future.

Technology, AI, and self-learning algorithms have played an increasingly important role over the last few decades – but all of a sudden solidarity and human fellowship are what's most essential. What opportunities do humans have in this crisis?

The opportunity to become a "doer", to experience a feeling of community, and to face external threats with humanity and confidence, is something wonderful that

will stick with us. It isn't much different to how we handle crises in our personal lives. In a crisis, things become difficult when you get wrapped up in denial, just like in your love life. Then you become bitter and really unhappy. But once you overcome this hurdle, you can rediscover love again.

We have one last question for you, our expert – how do you think the world will look after the coronavirus crisis has passed?

We will only be able to shape this new world together. I don't want to give people any ideas about how it will look. We should all feel responsible for contributing to the future to come. ☐

„CHERNOBYL INITIATED THE END OF THE SOVIET UNION AND THE BEGINNING OF RENEWABLE ENERGIES. WE TOO WILL LEARN WHAT WE CAN DO BETTER IN THE FUTURE FROM THE CURRENT CRISIS.“

Matthias Horx at his second home, Bad Gastein, Austria

