

Revived classics

by Béla Pokol with help of ChatGPT5.2. pro

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Today, we have a great advantage that artificial intelligence knows all the letters of the classics, and with it we can hypothetically resurrect them to see what kind of vision they would outline with their mental capacity in today's circumstances. Here we revive a series of theoretical and political classics one after the other, and the first of them should be Georg Simmel.

Georg Simmel

Please describe in detail what kind of future you would have drawn for the probable development of society based on your theoretical premises if Georg Simmel were still alive today, based on his theoretical premises.

Simmel probably wouldn't have written a "forecast" in the sense of a linear prediction (A causes B causes C). His way of thinking was diagnostic and morphological: isolate the *forms of social interaction* (exchange, conflict, secrecy, sociability, domination, fashion, "the stranger," the dyad/triad, etc.), then show how modern conditions amplify some forms, deform others, and generate characteristic *mental life* (overstimulation, distance, the blasé attitude) and characteristic tensions (freedom vs. dependence, individuality vs. leveling, subjective culture vs. objective culture). So if Simmel were alive today and stayed faithful to his own premises, the "future" he would draw is less a timetable and more a set of intensifying tendencies, each with ambivalent consequences. Below is a detailed Simmelian prognosis—an extrapolation from his core ideas, not a claim about what he "really would have said."

Simmel's premises for diagnosing modern society

A Simmelian picture of the future starts from a few premises that run through his work:

1. "Society" is not a thing but an ongoing process of interaction. Society is the name we give to patterned reciprocal effects among people—*Vergesellschaftung* (association/socialization). That means the future is not primarily "where institutions go," but "what happens to interaction forms under new conditions."
2. Modernity increases mediation through abstract forms. Money is the paradigm: it mediates relations impersonally, increases mobility and freedom, but also makes life more calculative and can flatten qualitative differences into quantitative comparisons.
3. Modern life accelerates differentiation. People belong to more circles, occupy more roles, and depend on more specialized others. Individuality grows via "the intersection of social circles"—but also fragility grows (life becomes a balancing act across incompatible expectations).
4. Objective culture tends to outgrow subjective culture. The stock of externalized cultural products (technology, knowledge, institutions, art, systems) grows faster than any person's capacity to appropriate it inwardly. This is the "tragedy of culture": we create a world that later stands over us.
5. The metropolis is a model of modern mental life. Urban modernity trains the nervous system for incessant stimuli; it encourages "distance," punctuality, calculation, role-based interaction, and a protective shell (the blasé attitude). Crucially: "metropolis" is not just geography; it is a *form of life*.

If those premises are taken seriously, then "today" (digital networks, platform economies, algorithmic mediation, datafication, globalization, mass migration, AI systems, attention markets) looks like a continuation and intensification of the very dynamics Simmel analyzed in money and the metropolis.

The digital metropolis as the dominant form of life

Simmel's metropolis thesis is often summarized too narrowly as "cities make you blasé." More precisely: modern life multiplies stimuli, compresses time, and increases the number of fleeting contacts, so people cultivate psychic distance and selective attention as survival techniques.

If he were alive now, he would likely treat the internet—especially always-on social platforms and notification-driven life—as the metropolis generalized:

- Overstimulation becomes portable. The "street" is in the pocket. A future shaped by this condition is one in which the *default* mental posture is filtering, ignoring, muting, triaging.
- Distance becomes a primary virtue and a primary wound. People learn to maintain emotional distance as protection (blasé, ironic, detached). Yet they simultaneously hunger for intensity and immediacy. The future, on this view, oscillates between numbness and craving: periods of "I feel nothing" and bursts of "I need something real."

- Time becomes more granular and more anxious. Metropolis life already demanded punctuality and schedule discipline. Digital life adds micro-temporal fragmentation: feeds, streaks, rapid cycles of reaction. Simmel would read this as the sharpening of a modern form: life ruled by the tempo of external forms rather than internally grown rhythms.

Probable development: a widespread cultivation of “attention armor”—socially rewarded skills of detachment, curation, and interruption management—paired with counter-movements that promise re-embodiment (retreats, slow practices, local rituals, immersive experiences, “authenticity” industries).

From money to metrics: the universal equivalent multiplies

In *The Philosophy of Money*, money is not just an economic object; it’s a cultural form that:

- turns qualitative differences into quantitative comparisons,
- makes relations more impersonal,
- increases individual freedom by loosening traditional ties,
- but also spreads a calculating attitude and the sense that everything has a “price.”

A Simmel alive today would likely say: the money-form has spawned successors—new “universal equivalents” that function *like* money even when they aren’t currency:

- Ratings, likes, followers, reputation scores, rankings, dashboards, engagement metrics.
- Data profiles and predictive scores that decide access (credit, insurance, work opportunities, visibility).

These are Simmelian because they mediate social relations abstractly and create comparability.

Two future-facing consequences follow from his premises:

1. Generalized comparability becomes generalized anxiety. When more and more of life is measured, people internalize the logic of comparison. Simmel would likely see a future in which individuals experience themselves as portfolios: always improvable, always behind someone, always needing optimization.
2. Means become ends more easily. Money already tempts the reversal of means and ends. Metric-society intensifies it: the score becomes the purpose; visibility becomes value; engagement becomes “success,” regardless of content. He would likely regard this as a deepening of modern teleological confusion: the form conquers the life it was meant to serve.

Probable development: expanding “metric hierarchies” in work, education, culture, and even intimacy—alongside new statuses and new exclusions based on quantified visibility and algorithmic legibility.

The tragedy of culture in the age of AI and system complexity

Simmel's "tragedy of culture" isn't simply "technology bad." It's subtler: cultural products accumulate into an objective world of artifacts and systems that exceed any individual's ability to assimilate them. The result is a characteristic modern feeling: *my world is mine and not mine at the same time*.

If we apply that premise forward:

- Knowledge abundance becomes non-appropriation.
When information is infinite and instantly accessible, individuals may know *of* many things but appropriate few. Simmel would likely predict a future rich in "second-hand culture": summaries, derivatives, outsourced understanding—because subjective culture cannot keep pace.
- Black-box mediation becomes normal.
As systems (including AI systems) become more complex, many people relate to them as powers they use but don't comprehend. This fits Simmel's pattern: objective culture gains autonomy; individuals become dependent on it while remaining partially alienated from it.
- Creativity becomes both democratized and devalued.
Simmel's lens would likely notice a tension: easier production and distribution of cultural forms increases individual expression, yet the flood of forms can cheapen attention and make the individual work feel interchangeable.

He might also predict new cultural elites, not simply defined by wealth, but by *capacity for appropriation*: people who can turn objective culture into lived mastery (through education, time, mentorship, and interpretive skill) versus those who are perpetually "users" but rarely "owners" of meaning.

Probable development: a widening gap between (a) those who can integrate complex cultural systems into coherent life-projects and (b) those who experience culture as an overwhelming external environment.

Differentiation and the intersection of social circles becomes networked and brittle

Simmel's account of individuality is not just "people become more individual." It's: individuality arises because people stand at the intersection of multiple partially independent circles (work, friendship, politics, hobbies, family, etc.). This intersection produces uniqueness and freedom—because no single circle fully defines you.

Digital networks amplify this dramatically:

- You can belong to countless circles.
- You can switch circles quickly.
- You can curate different selves for different publics.

But Simmel would also see a structural risk:

- Circle-crossing can turn into circle-collapse.
When audiences merge (context collapse), what was once separated becomes

simultaneously visible, and the individual loses the protective benefit of differentiated circles. The self becomes a single object exposed to multiple norms at once, producing fear, conformity, or strategic performance.

- Differentiation can paradoxically create new uniformities. Fashion shows how differentiation and imitation work together. Online, micro-differences can mask deeper standardization as people follow the same templates for identity, speech, outrage, humor, aesthetics.

Probable development: more “designed selves”—carefully managed identity portfolios—paired with episodic breakdowns when circles collide and the self can’t satisfy contradictory demands.

The platform as the third party: a triadic future

Simmel’s analysis of the triad is powerful for the contemporary world: the moment a third enters a dyad, everything changes. A third can mediate, arbitrate, divide-and-rule, exploit conflict, or profit as *tertius gaudens* (the rejoicing third).

A Simmelian diagnosis of the near future would emphasize that:

- Platforms, algorithms, and institutions increasingly act as third parties between persons.
- Work becomes triangulated: worker–client–platform.
- Dating becomes triangulated: person–person–matching system.
- Public speech becomes triangulated: speaker–audience–ranking/moderation system.

He would likely predict that social life becomes more indirect, more dependent on gatekeeping systems whose logic is not identical with human intentions. This yields:

- increased connectivity,
- but also increased vulnerability to mediation (visibility throttling, incentive shaping),
- and a new kind of power: power through *structuring interactions*, not merely commanding people.

Probable development: social struggles increasingly target *the forms of mediation* (rules, algorithms, infrastructures) rather than only the content of disputes.

Secrecy, privacy, and the paradox of transparency

Simmel treated secrecy as a fundamental social form: societies are structured by what is revealed and concealed; secrecy creates boundaries, trust, suspicion, intimacy, and power.

A Simmel alive today would likely see a future defined by a sharpened paradox:

- An intensified demand for transparency (from states, companies, partners, publics).
- An intensified need for secrecy (privacy technologies, pseudonymity, selective disclosure, strategic self-presentation).

He would probably argue that “privacy” becomes less a stable right and more a *negotiated practice*: people continuously calibrate what to disclose for belonging and what to conceal for autonomy.

He might also emphasize a modern shift:

- In older settings, secrecy often protected small groups from outsiders.
- In a datafied setting, secrecy protects individuals from *systems* that record, infer, and circulate.

Probable development: privacy becomes a form of inequality—those with resources (legal, technical, social) can maintain boundaries; others become transparent by default.

The stranger becomes the normal social type

Simmel’s “stranger” is not simply a foreigner. It’s a social type defined by a combination of nearness and distance: someone who is inside the group in function, but outside in origin/belonging; someone who can be trusted with certain roles precisely because they are not entangled in local bonds.

If he looked at contemporary society, he would likely predict:

- More stranger-relations as everyday norms: remote workers, gig workers, online communities, migration, transient urban life.
- More functional inclusion without full belonging: people integrated economically or digitally but symbolically excluded.
- Ambivalence toward mobility: admiration for cosmopolitan flexibility and simultaneous resentment/fear of those perceived as “not from here.”

This is not just about immigration; it’s about a broader social pattern: relations optimized for exchange and function rather than thick belonging.

Probable development: intensified conflicts over borders and membership *and* intensified reliance on strangers to keep complex systems running.

Fashion becomes the tempo of culture and even morality

Simmel’s fashion is a model of modern culture: it reconciles two opposing drives—imitation (belonging) and differentiation (distinctiveness). It thrives where social mobility and uncertainty are high.

A Simmelian future sketch would treat much of digital culture as fashion accelerated:

- Aesthetics cycle rapidly (micro-trends, memes).
- Language and gestures cycle rapidly.
- Causes and moral signals can take on fashion-like dynamics: waves of attention, codified styles of indignation and solidarity, rapid obsolescence of understandings.

He would not reduce morality to fashion, but he might warn that moral life can be pulled into fashion-tempo under conditions of constant visibility and competition for attention.

Probable development: intensified volatility of public meaning, with periodic backlashes that promise stable commitments, tradition, or “depth.”

Conflict intensifies, but it also integrates in new ways

Simmel famously treated conflict not as mere social breakdown but as a form of socialization: conflict can create unity by clarifying boundaries and producing internal solidarity.

Applied forward, he might predict two simultaneous trends:

1. More conflict as a permanent social form
When identities are publicly performed and constantly compared, and when visibility is rewarded, conflict can become self-sustaining. Digital mediation can turn conflict into a resource (attention, profit, group cohesion).
2. New integrative structures built out of conflict
Groups form around shared antagonisms; solidarity is built by opposition. This is still “integration,” but it is integration of a more brittle kind—cohesion that depends on ongoing enemies.

A Simmelian warning would be: conflict integrates best when it remains connected to shared institutions and cross-cutting circles. If circles stop intersecting, conflict stops integrating and starts hardening into parallel worlds.

Probable development: alternating phases of fragmentation and forced re-coordination (through crises, infrastructure dependency, or shared risks), rather than smooth consensus.

Counter-movements that Simmel would expect

Because Simmel’s thinking is dialectical, he would not only describe intensification; he would expect reactive formations—forms that arise to compensate for the pressures of abstract modern life.

From his premises, likely counter-movements include:

- Re-embedding practices: localism, mutual aid, craft, embodied communities, slow rituals.
- Re-sacralization and re-enchantment: renewed spirituality or meaning systems that resist pure calculation.
- Protected sociability: spaces where interaction is valued as play and presence rather than as networking or content production.
- Boundary repair: renewed norms and tools for privacy, anonymity, and separation of circles.

Importantly, Simmel would also suspect that many counter-movements get *absorbed* by the money/metric form: authenticity becomes a commodity; retreat becomes a subscription; community becomes a brand. That absorption is itself part of the tragedy of culture.

The overall future Simmel would “draw”

Putting these strands together, a Simmelian future sketch of “probable development” would look like this:

- More mediation by abstract systems (money-like metrics, platforms, algorithmic sorting), expanding freedom of movement and choice while increasing dependence on impersonal structures.
- More individuality as self-design (multiple circles, curated identities), paired with new pressures toward standardization (templates, rankings, imitation dynamics).
- More psychological distance as default (blasé 2.0), paired with new markets and movements promising intensity, authenticity, and presence.
- More objective culture and system complexity that outpaces subjective appropriation, producing both empowerment (access, tools) and alienation (black-box reliance, overload).
- More stranger-relations as normal social infrastructure, producing cosmopolitan possibilities and boundary conflicts.
- More secrecy/transparency struggles, making privacy a central site of inequality and politics.
- More conflict that organizes belonging, with the key question being whether cross-cutting circles remain strong enough for conflict to still integrate rather than permanently fracture.

If Simmel were to end in his characteristic tone, it would likely not be triumphalist or apocalyptic. It would be an ambivalent diagnosis: modern forms continue to liberate and constrain at once, and the decisive issue becomes whether “life” can keep generating flexible forms that serve human purposes—rather than hardening into autonomous structures that dominate their creators.

The Digital Metropolis and the Tragedy of Culture: A Simmelian Essay on the Probable Development of Society Today

If Georg Simmel were still alive today and remained faithful to his own theoretical premises, he would likely resist the temptation to write a simple forecast of “what will happen next.” Simmel’s characteristic mode of inquiry was not predictive in the manner of linear social science. He was a diagnostician of modern life: a theorist of *forms*—recurring patterns of social interaction and experience—who asked how these forms intensify, mutate, and collide under changing historical conditions. His question would not be “What institutions will exist in 2050?” but rather: “What happens to sociation, individuality, and culture when mediation, differentiation, and abstraction reach unprecedented levels?”

In that spirit, a Simmelian essay about our probable social future must treat contemporary society not as a stable object moving forward in a straight line, but as a field of interacting

forms—exchange, conflict, secrecy, fashion, sociability, domination, the “stranger,” the dyad and triad—now reconfigured by digital infrastructures, metric regimes, global mobility, and increasingly autonomous technical systems. The likely future is therefore not one single direction, but a set of tendencies that deepen the very ambivalences Simmel located at the heart of modernity: freedom and dependence, individuality and standardization, connection and distance, cultural growth and cultural alienation.

1. Modernity as Mediation: From Money to Metrics

Simmel treated money as more than an economic instrument. It was a cultural principle that reorganized relations among people. As a “universal equivalent,” money translates heterogeneous values into a common scale, enabling unprecedented mobility and choice: one can switch occupations, relocate, purchase services once tied to personal bonds, and interact with strangers without thick moral familiarity. Yet the same abstraction also recasts the world in quantitative terms, encouraging a calculating attitude and flattening qualitative distinctions into comparable magnitudes.

If Simmel were to map the present, he would likely say that the money-form has proliferated beyond currency into a broader landscape of *universal equivalents*: ratings, rankings, likes, follower counts, reputation scores, performance dashboards, and engagement metrics. These do not merely measure social reality; they become media through which social reality is organized. They function as currencies of visibility and credibility, and they quietly recalibrate what counts as “success,” “importance,” and even “truth” in everyday life.

From a Simmelian viewpoint, the probable future under this regime is ambivalent. On one side, metricization offers a kind of democratized access: unknown creators can become visible; marginalized perspectives can gather audiences; informal labor and new skills can be recognized. On the other side, comparability becomes ubiquitous and intimate. When one’s social worth is continuously rendered into numbers, the modern “freedom” money once promised is haunted by a new dependence: the dependence on legibility, on constant performance, on staying measurable in the right way.

Simmel would anticipate a characteristic psychological consequence: the internalization of comparison. The self becomes a portfolio in competition with innumerable others, permanently improvable and permanently behind. And, as in his analysis of money, the means threaten to become ends. The score—visibility, engagement, rank—can eclipse the substance it was meant to represent. What is “good” risks being defined as what travels well through the metric system.

2. The Metropolis Generalized: Digital Overstimulation and the New Blasé

In “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” Simmel described the modern city as a training ground for a distinctive psychic posture. The metropolis floods the individual with stimuli, intensifies tempo, multiplies fleeting encounters, and forces constant selection: one must learn to ignore in order to survive. The blasé attitude, in this sense, is not mere indifference; it is a protective organ, a psychic distance cultivated in response to overstimulation.

In the contemporary world, Simmel would likely see the metropolis no longer confined to urban geography. The digital environment extends metropolitan conditions into everyday life regardless of location. The “street” is now carried in the pocket: a continuous stream of news,

invitations, evaluations, conflicts, spectacles, and demands. Under these conditions, the future of mental life tends toward what we might call *blasé 2.0*: advanced filtering, strategic detachment, and intermittent numbness as survival skills.

Yet Simmel would insist that detachment has a price. Distance protects, but it also thins the texture of experience. If the future intensifies the patterns of digital overstimulation, then it also intensifies a counter-desire: for intensity, for immediacy, for “the real.” The same individual who cultivates emotional armor may simultaneously crave moments that break through the armor. The probable result is oscillation: periods of numbness punctuated by bursts of pursuit—experiences, communities, causes, spectacles—that promise immediacy and meaning.

This oscillation is deeply Simmelian. Modernity is not simply alienating; it produces new longings and new forms. The “future” thus appears as a contest between distance and intensity, not as the victory of one over the other.

3. Objective Culture Outgrows Subjective Culture: The Tragedy Updated

One of Simmel’s most enduring ideas is the “tragedy of culture”: the tendency of objective culture—externalized knowledge, technologies, institutions, artifacts, systems—to expand beyond the individual’s capacity to appropriate it inwardly. Culture grows, but it becomes less *mine*. The individual lives surrounded by cultural riches that can be used but not fully integrated into a coherent personal world.

If Simmel confronted today’s accelerating complexity—global supply chains, institutional specialization, scientific expansion, algorithmic systems, and increasingly autonomous tools—he would likely see a dramatic intensification of this tragedy. The future would not be impoverished culturally; it would be superabundant. But the very abundance threatens appropriation.

In such a world, the individual’s relationship to culture becomes more second-hand. One consumes summaries, fragments, feeds, and interfaces rather than dwelling in durable forms. One uses systems that are opaque, relying on procedures one cannot explain. Even creativity can become paradoxical: production becomes easier, yet attention becomes scarcer, and the flood of cultural output can make any single work feel interchangeable.

From Simmel’s premises, the likely development is a widening divide between those who can convert objective culture into subjective mastery and those who remain perpetual users of external systems. This divide is not only economic; it is temporal and educational. It concerns who has the time to appropriate, to interpret, to develop a stable inner orientation amid complexity. In Simmel’s terms, it is a divide between those who can make culture “their own” and those for whom culture stands as a vast external environment.

4. Individuality Through Multiple Circles—and the Fragility of Circle Collapse

Simmel’s account of individuality is subtle. Modern individuality does not emerge by escaping society; it emerges through society, precisely because modern life multiplies social circles. The individual becomes unique by standing at the intersection of partially independent groups: profession, friendship networks, political affiliations, aesthetic tastes, family roles, and more. No single circle fully defines the person.

Digital life expands this intersection dramatically. One can belong to countless communities, adopt specialized identities, and find recognition beyond local boundaries. From a Simmelian view, this is a powerful engine of individuality.

But Simmel would also foresee a modern vulnerability: what grants individuality can also produce fragility when circles collide. The digital environment often merges audiences that were formerly distinct. Norms from one circle invade another. The individual becomes exposed simultaneously to incompatible expectations. Under such conditions, the intersection of circles can lose its liberating character and become an exhausting site of continuous self-management.

The probable future, then, includes more “designed selves”—identity as an ongoing project of curation—paired with increased pressure to avoid risk, to speak in templates, to conform to dominant styles that minimize collision. Here Simmel’s analysis of fashion becomes relevant: differentiation and imitation are not opposites but partners. The future may be full of micro-distinctions and niche aesthetics while remaining deeply standardized at the level of form—standardized ways of speaking, performing, and signaling belonging.

5. The Triad Takes Over: Platforms as the Rejoicing Third

Simmel emphasized that the shift from a dyad (two-person relation) to a triad transforms social life. A third party can mediate, arbitrate, exploit, or reorganize the relation between the two. The “third” can become *tertius gaudens*—the one who benefits from the interaction of others.

Contemporary society is increasingly triadic. People rarely encounter one another directly; they meet through systems that sort, rank, recommend, monetize, and moderate. Work becomes worker–client–platform. Dating becomes person–person–matching system. Public speech becomes speaker–audience–algorithmic visibility. Even friendship is routinely mediated by feeds and interfaces that decide what is seen and when.

From Simmel’s premises, the future under intensifying mediation is one in which power is exercised less through direct command and more through the structuring of interaction itself. The most decisive struggles become struggles over the “forms” of mediation: rules, infrastructures, ranking criteria, and access conditions. This is classic Simmel: social life is shaped by forms, and when forms change, society changes—even if individuals believe they are merely choosing among options.

6. Secrecy and Transparency: The Future as Boundary Negotiation

Simmel treated secrecy as a fundamental social form. What is concealed and what is revealed are not secondary details; they constitute the architecture of trust, intimacy, authority, and belonging. Secrecy creates boundaries, and boundaries create social worlds.

In the modern future, Simmel would likely diagnose a deepening paradox: a heightened cultural demand for transparency and a heightened individual need for secrecy. Systems demand visibility because visibility enables control, prediction, and monetization. Individuals demand concealment because concealment enables autonomy, experimentation, and psychological safety.

The probable development is that privacy becomes less a stable possession and more a continuous practice: selective disclosure, strategic self-presentation, pseudonymity, “quiet spaces,” encrypted channels, and new social norms of boundary-respect. Yet Simmel would also emphasize that secrecy is not evenly distributed. Those with resources can buy privacy, legal protection, and technical competence; others become transparent by default. Thus secrecy becomes not only a personal need but a site of social inequality.

7. The Stranger as the Normal Type

Simmel’s “stranger” is a social type defined by nearness and distance at once: someone present within a group’s functional life but not fully woven into its thick bonds. The stranger can be indispensable precisely because they are not entangled; they can trade, mediate, and move.

In a world of global mobility, remote work, gig economies, and online communities, stranger-relations become ordinary rather than exceptional. Many people are integrated economically and digitally while remaining symbolically precarious—useful, present, but not fully “of” the group. Simmel would likely forecast intensified ambivalence: increased reliance on strangers to sustain complex systems, paired with intensified struggles over borders, membership, and belonging.

This tension is not limited to migration politics. It permeates everyday life: the expansion of functional ties without deep attachment. The future may become ever more cosmopolitan in its operations, while simultaneously generating renewed longing for local rootedness and stable identity.

8. Conflict as Integration—and the Risk of Permanent Polarization

Simmel’s theory of conflict is again ambivalent. Conflict can destroy, but it can also integrate by clarifying boundaries and producing internal solidarity. Modern societies do not eliminate conflict; they reorganize it.

The probable development in a hyper-mediated future is a more permanent state of conflict-as-form. Where visibility is rewarded and groups build cohesion through shared antagonism, conflict can become self-sustaining. Yet Simmel would also warn that conflict integrates only when cross-cutting ties remain strong. If social circles stop intersecting—if groups cease to share institutions, spaces, and experiences—then conflict hardens into parallel worlds and loses its integrative function.

Thus the Simmelian future is not simply “more conflict,” but a question: will differentiation continue to produce intersections, or will it produce separation without overlap? That distinction determines whether conflict remains a dynamic that still binds society, or becomes a force that fractures it.

Conclusion: A Future of Intensified Ambivalence

From Simmel’s theoretical premises, the probable development of society today is not a singular story of progress or decline. It is the intensification of modern ambivalence:

- Mediation expands freedom while deepening dependence on abstract systems.

- Individuality multiplies through circles while increasing the burden of self-management.
- Culture grows outward while risking inward alienation.
- Connectivity expands while psychic distance becomes a survival tool.
- Transparency is demanded while secrecy becomes a contested resource.
- Conflict integrates groups while threatening permanent fragmentation.

If Simmel were alive, he would likely end not with a prophecy but with a question of form and life: can modern society keep generating forms that remain proportionate to human purposes—forms that serve the growth of subjective life—rather than allowing objective structures to harden into autonomous powers over their creators? The future, in a Simmelian frame, is the ongoing struggle to keep mediation from becoming domination, and to keep cultural abundance from becoming cultural estrangement.

Max Scheler

Please describe in detail what kind of future you would have drawn for the probable development of society based on your theoretical premises if Max Scheler were still alive today, based on his theoretical premises.

What follows is a reconstruction: Max Scheler didn't live in the age of the internet, AI, platform capitalism, or contemporary geopolitics, so I can't truthfully report *his* prediction. But we *can* ask, in a disciplined way: if Scheler's core theoretical premises are kept fixed, what kind of *probable* societal development would a "Scheler alive today" most likely sketch?

A key point up front: Scheler's style of "forecast" is rarely a linear timeline ("in 2035 X happens"). It's more like a diagnosis of the reigning ethos (the lived order of values) and then a conditional prognosis: *if this ethos continues, these pathologies intensify; if a conversion of the ethos occurs, different futures open.*

1) The theoretical premises Scheler would treat as "the levers of history"

A. History turns on the effective order of values, not just institutions

Scheler thinks a person, a people, or an era is most deeply understood by the system of value-preferences that actually governs its perception and choices—its *ethos* or *factual ordo amoris* (its lived "order of love").

So “the future” is, in large part: Which values become dominant in directing life?

B. There is an objective ranking of value-spheres, and modernity risks a reversal

Scheler defends an objective ranking of value-types (from “lower” to “higher”), and he treats moral and cultural health as depending on whether the “higher” values actually guide the “lower.”

C. Modernity’s signature illness is reduction of the world to utility, producing “value blindness”

In the SEP account of Scheler, the crisis of modernity is driven by late capitalism, mechanization of nature, and liberal individualism, sharing a value-reversal that promotes utility over life, eventually producing a culture-wide value blindness where higher pursuits are seen mainly through usefulness.

And he links this to a long-run trend: internationalization/homogenization, a making of cultures “one and the same.”

D. Human beings are “spirit” and “life-drive” in tension; the future is either spiritualization or bestialization

Scheler frames the human as the meeting point of *Lebensdrang* (life-urge/drives) and *Geist* (spirit). The human task is the (never completed) unification of life and spirit—either a movement toward realizing deeper spiritual values or toward “bestialization.”

E. Knowledge itself has a moral precondition: loving openness

Scheler ties knowing to a “loving participation” and criticizes modernity’s ethos of control and domination, calling for virtues like humility and reverence to reawaken wonder.

F. Social renewal requires solidarity and co-responsibility, not merely “systems”

Scheler treats the self as always already formed within community (“experiencing with one another”), and he argues for solidarity as the basis of a more just future.

G. Ressentiment is a key mechanism of cultural/moral distortion

In *Ressentiment*, Scheler describes how resentment can “determine a whole morality,” perverting the rules of preference until what was “evil” appears “good,” and he explicitly treats it as a determinant in modern social movements and moral shifts.

These are the premises that would shape what he draws as the “probable” future.

2) A “Scheler alive today” diagnosis of our present ethos

Scheler would likely begin by saying: the 21st century is not a new ethos, but an intensification of the modern one he already analyzed.

The utility-ethos becomes infrastructural

In his terms, modernity transforms the world into an object of utility and cultivates value blindness.

A Schelerian update would point out that today utility is not only a cultural preference; it is built into systems:

- Platforms and metrics that reward what is measurable and monetizable (attention, engagement, conversion).
- Datafication of social life: friendship, reputation, identity, even moral standing increasingly treated as quantifiable signals.
- Automation/AI that extends the “ethos of control” into prediction and behavior-shaping (a new form of domination that can look “neutral” because it is statistical).

That last point is an inference—but it follows naturally from his claim that modernity’s ethos is domination/control and reduction to utility.

The “internationalization of cultures” accelerates—and triggers defensive reactions

Scheler’s worry that the modern worldview ends in an internationalization that makes cultures the same would feel, today, like a description of:

- global consumer culture,
- standardized professional-managerial norms,
- global entertainment patterns.

But a living Scheler would also notice the counter-movement: when higher values and cultural uniqueness are “blinded,” people often try to recover meaning through identity hardening—sometimes healthy, sometimes pathological.

3) The future Scheler would probably “draw” from these premises

I think he would sketch a future with one dominant trajectory (probable), plus two major branching possibilities (depending on whether a “conversion of the ethos” occurs).

Probable trajectory: a “highly managed world” of utility with widening value-blindness

Scheler’s own crisis-analysis says modernity is driven by reductive mindsets (capitalism, mechanization, individualism) that transform beings into utility and cultivate value-blindness. Projected forward, he would likely expect:

1) Economy: the reign of acquisition expands, and persons are treated as functions

Because he ties economics to an acquisition drive and sees capitalism as the economic expression of a value reversal, he’d expect the economy to keep pushing toward:

- commodification of more domains (care, intimacy, identity, education),

- a labor world where “value” increasingly means market usefulness,
- human beings experienced as “human capital,” i.e., *bearers of utility* rather than persons (Scheler’s “person as absolute value” is the implicit rebuke here).

2) Politics: power-drive without spiritualization → polarization, manipulation, and technocracy

Scheler’s sociology-of-knowledge frame says politics is rooted in the power drive, and history depends on which ideals successfully guide the real factors.

A “managed utility” future would include:

- politics as competition for control of the attention-space (rather than deliberation toward truth/justice),
- distrust and propaganda as normal (because domination replaces reverence/trust),
- the rise of managerial/technocratic forms of governance: “administration” replacing meaningful communal self-rule.

Scheler would not see this as merely “bad leadership,” but as the value-order showing itself.

3) Culture and education: spiritual goods survive mainly as “content” or “skills”

Scheler describes value blindness as a condition where arts, philosophy, religion are noticed mainly through usefulness.

Projected forward, he’d expect:

- the arts treated as *content streams*,
- philosophy reduced to “critical thinking tools,”
- education justified mostly as employability.

Not that these things disappear—but their mode of appearing becomes instrumental.

4) Community and intimacy: contractual relations deepen; loneliness becomes structural

Scheler criticizes liberal individualism as reducing community to society and relations to contracts for benefit.

So he would foresee:

- weaker thick bonds (neighborhood, intergenerational ties),
- rising loneliness and “social substitutes” (parasociality, digital tribes),
- moral life increasingly mediated by public signaling rather than lived solidarity.

Branching possibility 1: the age of resentment—moralization without love

Scheler’s *Ressentiment* analysis is a natural lens for contemporary mass politics and online life: resentment can invert value-preferences and shape a whole morality.

A Scheler-alive-today prognosis would likely include:

- chronic comparison and status anxiety as everyday conditions,

- politics turning into a struggle to punish, shame, and “level” rather than to cultivate excellence or holiness,
- an atmosphere where “justice” becomes psychologically entangled with revenge (Scheler’s worry is not “justice is bad,” but “justice can be perverted when it is energized by resentment rather than love”).

He would stress that resentment is dangerous precisely because it can look morally elevated while actually distorting the order of values.

Branching possibility 2: idolatry and “new religions” of finite goods

Scheler argues that humans inevitably intend the absolute; the danger is that finite goods (wealth, fame, power) are treated as infinite—idols.

So he would likely predict that if traditional religion continues to weaken *without* a genuine reorientation to higher values, societies will generate substitute absolutes:

- celebrity/fame (today: visibility metrics),
- wealth and “success” as salvific,
- political ideologies or nationalism as sacred objects,
- even “Technology” as an implicit providence.

This is not a claim that he would oppose all technology or politics; it’s that he would interpret the spiritual hunger behind them, and warn about idol-making.

The big fork: war or peace in a shrinking world

The SEP entry notes Scheler’s thought that living in an increasingly “shrinking world” creates the possibility of deeper mutual religious understanding, but also that conflicts may yield the bloodiest wars—and that *how we live with irreconcilable differences* determines whether the future is war or peace.

A Scheler-today drawing would probably say:

- global interdependence makes conflict more contagious (economically, informationally, militarily),
- but also makes solidarity more necessary and more imaginable.

So his “future picture” would not be a single line; it would be a decision space structured by the order of values.

4) What Scheler would present as the only real “exit”: a re-ordering of love and a politics of solidarity

Scheler is not only diagnostic; he is “therapeutic” in the moral sense. He thinks renewal requires transformation of the ethos.

A. Renewal is not produced by hatred, but by repentance and moral disclosure

In the SEP account, Scheler later emphasizes renewal through repentance and a collective recognition of guilt/responsibility, not renewal motivated by hatred. So he would likely warn that a resentment-driven politics can't heal modernity; it reproduces the pathology.

B. Solidarity as the realistic form of “love” in mass society

Scheler's mature socio-political emphasis on solidarity as the basis for a more just and peaceful future would lead him to a program something like:

- guarantee the basic vital goods (life-values) to all,
- but refuse the flattening of spirit into sameness (“democracy on earth,” “aristocracy in the heavens,” as the SEP entry summarizes his formula).

In contemporary terms, he would likely argue that a humane society must combine:

- material security (so life is not sacrificed to utility),
- cultural/spiritual seriousness (so higher values are not dissolved into entertainment or productivity),
- institutions that cultivate persons, not merely manage populations.

C. Rehabilitating humility and reverence against the control-ethos

Because Scheler connects knowledge to loving openness and criticizes modernity's domination mindset, calling for humility and reverence, he would probably treat the “spiritual” task of the next decades as:

- learning to see nature and persons again as more than manipulable resources,
- refusing to treat prediction and control as the highest form of rationality,
- restoring wonder as a public virtue (in science, education, and art).

5) Condensed “Schelerian future map”

If I compress the above into what Scheler would likely *draw*:

1. Most probable path (continuation): a globally integrated, high-efficiency, high-control civilization where utility becomes the default lens—producing value blindness, cultural homogenization, fragile community, and periodic waves of resentment politics.
2. Most dangerous amplification: idolatries of wealth/fame/power and moral inversions driven by resentment, intensifying conflict in a shrinking world.
3. Real alternative (possible but not automatic): a renewal “from above” in Scheler's sense—re-spiritualizing the real factors (family/politics/economy) by reordering the *ordo amoris* through solidarity, repentance, humility, and reverence.

A Schelerian Sketch of the Near Future: Utility, Value-Blindness, and the Fight for the “Order of Love”

To write an essay about “the future Max Scheler would draw if he were alive today” is to accept a disciplined fiction. Scheler died in 1928, long before digitization, social media, AI, and the contemporary global order. He left no forecast of our century. What we *can* do is something more Schelerian than futurology: reconstruct how a Scheler who kept his theoretical premises intact would *diagnose the governing ethos of the age*—and then project the likely consequences of that ethos if it continues, as well as the conditions under which a different future becomes possible.

Scheler is not primarily a “timeline thinker.” His approach turns on the idea that every person and every culture lives by an effective order of value-preferences: a ranking of what is felt as important, admirable, shameful, sacred, disposable. This ranking is not merely an opinion; it shapes what even *appears* as real or worthwhile. He calls this lived ordering an ethos—a structure of preference already active in experience. The future, on this view, is not first of all a new gadget or a new policy. It is the downstream unfolding of the values that quietly rule perception, work, politics, love, and knowledge.

From that starting point, a “Scheler alive today” would likely draw a future dominated by a single decisive struggle: whether modern societies remain trapped in a value-reversal that elevates utility above life and spirit—or whether they undergo a conversion of the heart that reorders love toward higher values.

1) Scheler’s levers of history: ethos, value-rank, and the person

Scheler’s philosophy begins in a deceptively simple phenomenological observation: experience is never value-neutral. Every encounter carries a sense of *better/worse*, *higher/lower*, *worthy/unworthy*, and this “preferencing” is inseparable from how things show up to us. In sacrifice—giving up something pleasant for health, for example—one can feel the reality of an internal ranking.

But Scheler does not treat this ranking as merely subjective. He argues that value-preference is grounded in an objective rank order of value-types, a structure of “lower” and “higher” values that is not simply invented by cultures. In the SEP summary, the ranking from lowest to highest is presented as: pleasure, utility, vitality, culture, holiness. Cultures vary enormously in what they treat as holy, noble, or beautiful; nevertheless, Scheler insists that *if* holiness is genuinely given, it is to be preferred to what is merely useful, and this “ought” is not just a social convention.

Crucially, values are not grasped by cold calculation alone. Scheler holds that love and hate are not just feelings added onto an already-known world; they are acts in which the world first becomes meaningful. The *person*—not the abstract rational subject—is the being who can feel this imperative and become responsible for it. For Scheler, to reduce a person to a lower value (mere pleasure, mere utility) is not a small mistake; it is a moral deformation.

If this is your framework, then “the future of society” is, at its core, the future of its effective order of love: which values lead, which values serve, and which values are treated as illusions.

2) Scheler's diagnosis of modernity: the value-reversal that makes everything "useful"

The Schelerian diagnosis of modernity is explicit and sharp. The SEP account presents his view that the crisis of modernity arises from three mutually reinforcing "mindsets": late capitalism, the mechanization of nature, and liberal individualism. What makes them "mindsets" is that they are not merely institutions or economic arrangements; they are ways of seeing and configuring reality.

What unifies these mindsets is a value reversal: the promotion of utility over the value of life. Under this reversal, a living being has value insofar as it is useful; goods and persons become valuable insofar as they generate more wealth or efficiency. Mechanization reduces living beings to manipulable systems for control and useful ends; liberal individualism reduces community to contractual relations formed for private interest.

Scheler's point is not merely that this is spiritually distasteful. It changes what the culture can *see*. When utility becomes dominant, it produces value blindness: higher values (art, philosophy, religion—anything "spiritual" in the broad sense) are not necessarily destroyed, but they are noticed primarily through their usefulness. A society can still have museums, universities, and festivals—and yet treat them internally as branding, productivity tools, therapy aids, or content pipelines. In that condition, a culture also loses sight of its uniqueness, because at the level of utility "people are more alike." Scheler even characterizes the endpoint of this modern worldview as an internationalization of all cultures, a making of peoples "one and the same."

This diagnosis is the first stroke in the "future picture" Scheler would draw today: he would likely say that what we call the "new" problems of the 21st century are, in many respects, the mature form of an older value-reversal.

3) Why Scheler would see our century as an intensification, not a rupture

If Scheler's crisis is "utility enthroned," then the present age would look to him like the enthronement has become infrastructural.

Modern societies do not merely *praise* utility; they have built environments where utility is continuously selected for. Platforms reward what is measurable and monetizable. Bureaucracies reward what is legible and manageable. Workplaces reward what can be quantified and audited. In Scheler's language, the modern ethos of control and domination transforms the world into an object of utility.

A Scheler alive today would probably be struck by one feature in particular: utility now presents itself as "neutral." When the guiding value becomes efficiency or optimization, it can masquerade as mere rationality. Yet, for Scheler, this is precisely how a value-reversal becomes most dangerous: it does not shout "I am a value choice." It quietly becomes the default lens through which everything else must justify itself.

In such an age, even knowledge is at risk. Scheler defines philosophy as a "loving participation" in the essence of things and insists that knowledge has a moral precondition: it requires humility, reverence, and an openness to what is other. If the dominant posture is

domination and use, then knowing is subtly transformed into control, and wonder becomes an inefficiency. That is not just an educational shift; it is a civilizational direction.

4) The probable future Scheler would draw: the managed world and the thinning of spirit

From these premises, Scheler would likely sketch the *probable* development of modern societies as a movement toward what we might call a highly managed utility-world—a civilization that becomes ever more sophisticated at producing, measuring, predicting, and steering, while growing less capable of recognizing higher values as higher.

This future has several interlocking traits.

a) The economy of usefulness: persons become functions

Where utility dominates, the “person” is constantly tempted to appear as a tool: a bearer of skills, outputs, data, or consumption patterns. Scheler’s ethics treats this as a fundamental moral wrong: any act that reduces the person to a lower value (mere pleasure or utility) is pernicious.

In a utility-world, the central social drama becomes a tug-of-war over whose usefulness counts: whose labor is valued, whose voice is amplified, whose life is protected, whose suffering is profitable to address, whose dignity is conditional.

A Scheler alive today would not predict the disappearance of moral language. He would predict something subtler: moral language increasingly forced to justify itself in utility terms—cost-benefit analyses of care, productivity arguments for education, reputational branding for virtue. That is value-blindness in motion.

b) The mechanized relation to nature: the world as standing reserve

Scheler’s account of mechanization is not simply anti-science. It is a warning about one worldview becoming total: mechanism as “the only way” to know the living. If that continues, the future is not only environmental risk; it is spiritual impoverishment. Nature ceases to appear as something with intrinsic meaning and becomes primarily a field of resources and levers.

Scheler would likely say: a society can talk about “sustainability” and yet still remain trapped in the same ethos if nature is valued only because its collapse would harm human utility. The decisive question is whether life is loved as life—whether higher values can restrain the lower.

c) The contractual society: community thins into networks

Scheler’s critique of liberal individualism, as summarized in SEP, is that it reduces community to society and interpersonal relations to artificial contracts formed for individual benefit. If this is the background, then the probable future is a further thinning of bonds: weaker solidarity, more instrumental relationships, more loneliness disguised as connectivity.

Scheler's alternative is not nostalgia; it is solidarity. But solidarity, for him, is demanding: it includes not only responsibility for one's own acts but co-responsibility for the acts of others, asking how "I have participated in creating a world" where hate or violence is possible. A society that loses this co-responsibility does not merely become less friendly. It becomes morally fragmented: everyone sees evil as someone else's problem.

d) Culture as "content": higher values survive, but as means

The clearest mark of value-blindness is not that art, philosophy, and religion vanish. It is that they are treated primarily as useful. The SEP account states this directly: utility does not destroy higher values; it cultivates blindness to them, so spiritual pursuits are noticed through usefulness.

Scheler would probably recognize in our century a massive expansion of cultural production and cultural access—alongside a growing incapacity to experience "depth of fulfillment" as a criterion of the good. When "engagement" replaces contemplative attention, the higher values lose their power to command preference. They become optional lifestyle accessories.

5) The resentment pathway: moral life as self-poisoning and inversion

Scheler's most psychologically acute contribution to any future-sketch would likely come from his analysis of resentment.

In *Ressentiment*, he defines it memorably as a "self-poisoning of the mind," a lasting attitude produced by the repression of certain emotions, leading to "value delusions" and distorted value judgments. The importance of this is not clinical; it is cultural. Resentment, in Scheler's view, can reorganize an entire morality by inverting what is admired and despised.

A society governed by utility is fertile soil for resentment because it constantly produces comparison: status metrics, competition for attention, perceived injustices framed as rankings. Under those conditions, moral life can shift from love of the good to hatred of the admirable; from aspiration to leveling; from repentance to accusation.

Here Scheler's later reflection on renewal becomes crucial. The SEP entry notes that he came to see a central confusion in his earlier "war as renewal" stance: renewal takes place through repentance and cannot be motivated by hatred. A living Scheler, seeing the moral fever of contemporary politics and media, would likely repeat that lesson with urgency: a society cannot heal itself by perfecting outrage. Hatred may mobilize, but it cannot renew.

6) The global fork: a shrinking world, war or peace

Scheler also offers a strikingly contemporary thought: the world is "shrinking." He hoped this could become an opportunity for deeper understanding across religious and cultural differences, but he also warned that conflicts of faith and ultimate commitments could lead to the bloodiest wars.

And then he states the fork in a single conditional: how we live with genuine and irreconcilable differences will determine whether the future is war or peace.

Scheler would not treat this as merely geopolitics. For him, irreconcilable differences are ultimately differences of *ultimate value*: what is sacred, what is worth dying for, what counts as a human being, what “justice” means. In a value-blind age, those differences are often handled either cynically (as power games) or fanatically (as absolute conflicts). The Schelerian hope would be: can we recover a hierarchy of values that allows conflict without dehumanization—difference without hatred—plurality without relativism?

7) The deeper anthropology behind the forecast: spiritualization or bestialization

Underneath his social diagnosis sits Scheler’s philosophical anthropology. The SEP entry describes the human being as the meeting point of two movements: life-urge (*Lebensdrang*) and spirit (*Geist*). The human task is not to erase either, but to let life be spiritualized and spirit be embodied—an ongoing process never completed. Every act participates either in realizing deeper spiritual values or in a movement toward “bestialization,” a slide into the shallow and superficial.

This is Scheler’s most dramatic lens on the future. He would see technological power, economic growth, and institutional sophistication as morally ambiguous “real factors.” They can serve spirit, or they can enthrone the drives with better instruments. The decisive question is whether spirit truly governs—whether holiness, truth, justice, and beauty can command preference over mere advantage.

8) The alternative future: the reordering of love through humility, solidarity, and repentance

Scheler’s prognosis is severe, but not fatalistic. He does not think modernity’s crisis is overcome primarily by better technique—because technique itself is one expression of the reigning ethos. What is required is a transformation at the level where values are disclosed.

First, he calls for a reawakening of wonder and reverence. In the SEP account, he argues that modernity’s control-and-domination ethos turns the world into an object of utility, and that to reawaken wonder we must rehabilitate virtues such as humility and reverence. This is not pious decoration; it is epistemic therapy. If knowledge requires loving openness, then humility is not optional—it is part of seeing.

Second, the political-social form of that reordering is solidarity. Scheler’s notion is not a vague friendliness; it is co-responsibility: the willingness to ask how “we” have made a world where evil becomes possible and to take collective responsibility for transforming it.

Third, renewal requires repentance rather than hatred. Scheler’s later stance, as summarized in SEP, is explicit: genuine renewal occurs through repentance and cannot be motivated by hatred. This becomes, in our century, a direct critique of moral cultures built on permanent denunciation. A Scheler alive today would likely argue that without repentance—personal and collective—the public sphere becomes a resentment machine: endlessly moralizing, rarely renewing.

Conclusion: what the “Scheler alive today” drawing would look like

If we compress all this into a single picture, Scheler would probably draw the near future not as a timetable but as a decision-space:

- If the modern value-reversal continues—utility preferred over life, mechanization preferred over reverence, contract preferred over community—society becomes ever more globally integrated and efficiently managed, while becoming more value-blind: richer in means, poorer in ends.
- In that condition, resentment grows as a cultural force: moral life shifts from love of higher values to poisoned inversion and leveling.
- Because the world is shrinking, the stakes intensify: irreconcilable differences can become either a school for mutual understanding or fuel for catastrophic conflict—war or peace.
- The alternative future is real but not automatic: a renewal through reordered love—humility and reverence restoring wonder, solidarity restoring co-responsibility, repentance disarming hatred—so that spirit can guide the real factors instead of being absorbed by them.

In other words: Scheler would not predict “what will happen” so much as expose what is already happening in the heart of modern civilization—and insist that the future depends on whether we can once again perceive, and prefer, the higher values as higher.

Edmund Husserl

Please describe in detail what kind of future scenario he would have drawn for the probable development of society based on his theoretical premises if Edmund Husserl were still alive today, based on today's technological development and today's conditions.

What follows can't be a report of *what Husserl actually would have said*—he died in 1938, long before digital networks, platform economies, and AI. So I'll do something more careful and (I hope) more useful: a Husserlian reconstruction. I'll take a handful of core Husserlian premises (lifeworld, critique of scientism/objectivism, intentionality, time-consciousness/sedimentation, intersubjectivity, personhood/ethics) and ask: If Husserl encountered today's technological and social conditions, what “probable” societal trajectory would he diagnose and project? The result is a plausible “future scenario” he *could* draw from within his own framework—not a claim about his personal opinions.

1) The Husserlian starting point: what “drives” his diagnosis of modernity

A. The lifeworld is the ground of meaning—even for science and technology

In Husserl's late work, the lifeworld is the taken-for-granted world of everyday experience (the world we live in as practical agents, with “affordances,” purposes, norms). It is *not* a “mere subjective appearance” that science replaces; it is the meaning-foundation that makes scientific objectivity possible at all.

Crucially: science/tech emerge from the lifeworld but then also flow back into it, reshaping what counts as obvious, real, normal.

That feedback loop is the engine of his “crisis” diagnosis.

B. The recurring danger: being “dazzled” by exact method → forgetting meaning and value

Husserl warns against treating the ideals/methods of the exact sciences as if they were the absolute norm for what counts as real. What is “precise enough” depends on context; obsession with maximal exactness can become a category mistake.

When a culture generalizes this attitude (quantification as the sole gatekeeper of reality), Husserl thinks it risks:

- depreciating the lifeworld,
- producing alienation of science from human significance, and
- becoming unable to address value and meaning questions that people still must live by.

C. Objectivity is intersubjective achievement, not a view from nowhere

Husserl emphasizes that science isn't just “facts out there”; it is a communal, historical practice. He explicitly frames scientifically valid knowledge as presupposing a kind of “first-person plural” condition: shared methods, shared sense, shared validation practices.

This matters enormously for the digital age, because it makes trust, shared reality, and communicative norms central philosophical and political variables.

D. Time-consciousness + sedimentation: the future is “pre-shaped” by habitual meaning

Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness says experience is not just a knife-edge “now.” Consciousness has a built-in structure of retention (just-past) and protention (anticipation), which makes continuity and expectation possible. And over time, experience sediments into habits, dispositions, and “schemas” that silently steer what we notice, expect, and accept as plausible. This is a perfect bridge to understanding algorithmic feeds, recommender systems, persuasive design, and AI assistants: they don't just deliver content; they can restructure *what becomes habitual and anticipatable*.

E. Personhood and ethics: a person is not a “profile,” but a self-responsible life

Husserl draws a sharp line between the “pure ego” and the real person (with character traits, dispositions, interests, convictions), warning not to confuse them.

He links personhood to:

- stable convictions/valuations/volitions,
- the difference between passively “going along” and actively endorsing norms,
- and an ideal of rational self-responsibility (he even formulates a maxim: “*Be a true person; lead a life that you can consistently justify with insight...* ”).

He also pushes ethics outward: responsibility is social; “Everybody is co-responsible for everybody else,” aiming ultimately at an ideal of a mutual-help “love community.”

2) Husserl meets 2025: what he would likely think is “new” about today’s crisis

From a Husserlian standpoint, today’s distinctive leap is not “technology exists”—it’s that:

A. The mathematization of nature has become the mathematization of the social lifeworld

Husserl’s “crisis” story originally targets a culture where scientific objectivism colonizes what people treat as real. In 2025 conditions, he would likely say:

- We are no longer only mathematizing *nature* (Galilean move).
- We are mathematizing *meaningful social life itself*: attention, preference, credibility, employability, risk, friendship, desirability, political persuasion—recast as measurable and optimizable signals.

This would look, to Husserl, like a second-order objectivism: not only “nature as numbers,” but *persons-in-community as numbers*—and then those numbers feed back into the lifeworld as “what is really going on.”

B. AI and workplace adoption accelerates the feedback loop

Even in relatively conservative domains like SMEs, generative AI use is already significant; an OECD report (surveying 5,000+ SMEs across several countries) says generative AI was used in 31% of SMEs in its sample, with many reporting performance benefits and changing skill demands. OECD survey work on AI in the workplace also reports majorities of workers saying AI improved their performance, while flagging risks around data collection, inequality, and intensity. Husserl would interpret this as: AI is quickly becoming part of the normal “equipment” of everyday practical reason, meaning its categories and outputs are poised to sediment into what feels “obvious.”

C. Trust becomes a structural problem (deepfakes, synthetic media, information manipulation)

Husserl’s intersubjective account of objectivity makes the “shared world” fragile when:

- seeing/hearing no longer reliably indicates “how things are,” and
- public reality becomes saturated with synthetic content.

Contemporary sources describe exactly this kind of erosion:

- UNESCO explicitly frames deepfakes as contributing to a “crisis of knowing,” with examples of deepfake-enabled fraud and broader societal targeting.
- A 2025 European Parliament research brief discusses generative AI’s role in information manipulation and the emergence of “deep doubt” and eroded trust, citing warnings that deceptive media threats will grow.

Husserl would likely treat this not as a side problem but as a central crisis of intersubjectivity: the lifeworld depends on shared perceptual and communicative trust.

D. Institutions respond with regulation—but regulation itself becomes part of the lifeworld

For example, the EU AI Act timeline indicates phased obligations (including AI literacy obligations and transparency-related elements), with general-purpose AI obligations applicable from 2 August 2025 and full applicability on 2 August 2026, among other dates. From a Husserlian view, this is not merely legal detail: it’s part of how societies try to re-stabilize objectivity under technological pressure.

3) The “future scenario” Husserl might project (probable development), given his premises

I think a Husserl-consistent projection would look like a two-track scenario with a strong claim about what is “probable” *unless* reflective renewal occurs:

- Probable drift: deepening objectivist-technocratic mediation of the lifeworld + episodic trust crises.
- Possible renewal: a counter-movement toward reflective, responsibility-centered rationality (a “phenomenological enlightenment” for the digital age).

Below is what that scenario might look like in detail.

Scenario: “The Digital Crisis of the Lifeworld”

Phase 1 (now → early 2030s): The rise of a “digital natural attitude”

Husserl’s “natural attitude” is our default mode: we simply live in the world as “there,” relying on habitual meanings. In the 2020s, that default attitude quietly becomes digital. Not because people think philosophically about it, but because:

- work, learning, news, romance, and friendship are mediated by platforms,
- AI assistants become routine tools,

- and algorithmic outputs are treated as “just how it is.”

What changes in lived experience (Husserlian translation)

1. Horizon-shaping at scale
For Husserl, every experience has a *horizon*—implicit expectations of what is relevant, likely, normal.
Algorithmic curation becomes a horizon-engine: what you see repeatedly becomes what you implicitly expect; what you never see becomes what feels unreal.
2. Sedimentation becomes engineered
Husserl describes sedimentation: earlier experience deposits traces that guide later experience.
In the digital lifeworld, sedimentation is no longer only “organic”; it is partially designed (feeds, notifications, gamified incentives). The future is pre-shaped not only by your past, but by others optimizing your past.
3. Temporality is reorganized
Husserl’s retention–protention structure is the inner form of continuity and anticipation.
A likely Husserlian observation: attention economies and AI summarization compress and repackage temporal experience—less patient unfolding, more instantaneous “ready-made” sense.

Social effects Husserl would expect as *probable* in Phase 1

- Competence inflation: Many tasks get easier (writing, coding, design drafts), so the baseline expectation rises. (OECD findings about performance improvements and changing skill needs fit this pattern.)
- Responsibility outsourcing: People increasingly treat “the model says...” as a reason, not merely as input.
- A new naïveté: not naïveté about nature, but naïveté about algorithmic mediation—people accept the system’s categories as reality.

Phase 2 (2030s): The institutionalization of “algorithmic objectivity”

Husserl insists science is an intersubjective practice with presuppositions and historical genesis, and it feeds back into the lifeworld.

In the 2030s, he would likely predict that AI stops being “tools we use” and becomes “procedures that define the normal.”

The key shift

From “AI helps decide” → “AI defines what counts as a good decision.”

Examples in Husserlian terms:

- Public administration: Policies increasingly justified by predictive models.
- Employment and education: People are sorted by “potential” measures; the measures become taken-for-granted.

- Health and insurance: Risk scores feel like “reality,” not interpretation.

Husserl would name this as a culture-wide strengthening of objectivism: treating abstract models as if they were *the* real world, rather than one historically situated “attitude” toward the lifeworld.

Trust and deepfakes become structural, not episodic

As synthetic media becomes more prevalent and more persuasive, Husserl would project:

- periodic “epistemic shocks” (scams, false videos, manufactured controversies),
- followed by institutional patches (verification regimes, labeling, regulation).

The EU context already shows movement toward transparency and literacy obligations (as part of an attempt to stabilize conditions of trust).

But Husserl would likely think: patches can’t fully solve it, because the deeper problem is that the lifeworld’s evidences (what we spontaneously take as given) are destabilized.

Phase 3 (2040s and beyond): A bifurcation—“technocratic drift” vs “reflective renewal”

Track A: The probable drift (if “dazzlement by method” continues)

Husserl’s late diagnosis of crisis is: quantification/technical success expands, but meaning and value orientation don’t automatically come with it; the lifeworld gets depreciated, and existential questions go unanswered.

In the AI-saturated lifeworld, the drift outcome would be:

1. The person becomes a “case”
Husserl insists a person is constituted through convictions, valuations, and self-responsible commitments—not merely through persistent perceptions or external descriptors.
The drift world treats the person as:
 - a bundle of predicted behaviors,
 - a profile of preferences,
 - a risk score.

This would look, to Husserl, like a catastrophic category error: confusing the conditions of administrative convenience with the reality of personhood.

2. Norms without insight
Husserl distinguishes going along with norms vs acting *in the light of norms* with rational insight.
Drift society increasingly enforces norms through opaque systems: you comply because the interface demands it, not because you can justify it.

This produces a new kind of heteronomy:

- people are “free” in name,
 - but live inside an environment that pre-selects options and interprets them.
3. Collapse of the first-person plural
 Since objectivity requires shared intersubjective practices, Husserl would regard large-scale distrust (“deep doubt”) as corrosive to the very possibility of a shared world.
 The drift future contains:
- parallel “realities” (fragmented publics),
 - verification fatigue,
 - a retreat into “homeworld bubbles” (Husserl’s homeworld/alienworld distinction becomes psychologically and politically acute).
4. A crisis of reason, not just of politics
 Husserl would likely say: the deepest damage is that people lose confidence that *reasoned insight* can guide life—because everything appears as power, manipulation, optimization, or spectacle.

Track B: The possible renewal (if reflection becomes culturally central)

Husserl is not only a diagnostician of crisis; he also proposes renewal through a radical reflective shift (phenomenology as a disciplined return “to the things themselves,” bracketing naïve assumptions).

A Husserlian “renewal” future would likely involve:

1. A “digital epoché” becoming a civic skill
 Translated: cultivating the ability to *suspend* immediate assent fosters resistance to manipulation and category mistakes.

In modern terms it would look like:

- institutionalized AI/media literacy (not as trivia, but as a discipline of judgment),
- norms of slow verification for high-stakes claims,
- explicit awareness that models are *interpretive attitudes*, not oracles.

(Interestingly, some legal-regulatory trajectories already include AI literacy and transparency impulses.)

2. Re-personalization of social institutions
 Because Husserl links personhood to self-responsible justification, he would likely favor institutions that require:
 - contestability (you can challenge a decision),
 - reasons you can understand,
 - space for agency and moral growth.

This aligns with his ethic of autonomy and responsibility.

3. Reconstruction of the “first-person plural”

A renewal path would treat public truth not as a pile of content, but as a practice:

- shared standards of evidence,
- shared verification infrastructures,
- shared accountability for deception.

Given contemporary “crisis of knowing” anxieties around deepfakes, this becomes a central project rather than a technical nuisance.

4. Global intercultural rationality rather than tribal homeworlds

Husserl explicitly links intercultural encounter to the discovery of the relativity of one’s “homeworld” and to the aspiration for truths valid for all.

He might see the internet and global networks as a far more intense version of the cultural contact he thought helped inaugurate theoretical inquiry—but only if societies develop the ethical and epistemic virtues needed to survive that exposure.

5. Ethics as co-responsibility

Husserl’s later ethics stresses co-responsibility (“Everybody is co-responsible for everybody else”) and an ideal of reciprocal support.

In a modern scenario, he would likely insist that the digital lifeworld requires:

- collective responsibility for information environments,
- protection of the vulnerable from exploitative systems,
- and design/governance that supports human flourishing rather than mere engagement/efficiency.

4) If Husserl had to pick what’s “most probable” from today

If you force a Husserlian forecast to choose what is *probable* (not merely possible), it would likely be:

A turbulent middle:

- continued acceleration of AI integration into everyday life and institutions (work, education, governance),
- recurrent trust crises from synthetic media and manipulation,
- increasing regulatory/verification infrastructures attempting to stabilize objectivity,
- and an intensifying cultural struggle over whether society treats persons as *self-responsible agents* or as *manageable profiles*.

Husserl would probably say: without a renewal of reflective rationality, the drift track dominates—because the “dazzlement” of success (efficiency, prediction, optimization) is culturally seductive. But he would also insist that crisis can motivate renewal—because crisis reveals what was being presupposed and forgotten.

5) What he would likely prescribe (because for Husserl, prognosis implies responsibility)

Husserl would almost certainly end not with “and so doom,” but with a call for a new kind of seriousness:

- recover the lifeworld as the meaning-ground (don’t confuse models with reality),
- rebuild intersubjective trust practices (objectivity as first-person plural achievement),
- educate for judgment (a “digital epoché” as disciplined suspension of naïve assent),
- protect personhood as self-responsibility rather than profile-management,
- and treat ethics as co-responsibility in shared environments.

In other words, he would likely frame the central question of the AI age as:

Will humanity allow technical rationality to become the measure of all reality, or will it re-found technical power within a reflective, responsible, communal reason?

Husserl in the Age of AI: A Phenomenological Scenario for Society’s Probable Development

To imagine Edmund Husserl alive today is to stage a meeting between a philosopher who diagnosed a “crisis” in modern rationality and a civilization now living inside the infrastructure of digital networks, ubiquitous computation, and increasingly capable AI systems. Any claim about what Husserl *would* say is necessarily speculative. But a disciplined speculation is possible: one can take Husserl’s central theoretical premises—his analyses of the lifeworld, intentionality, time-consciousness, intersubjectivity, and personhood—and ask what kind of future scenario follows *if those premises are applied to contemporary conditions*. What emerges is not merely a critique of gadgets or a moral complaint about “screens.” It is a structural forecast about how meaning, trust, agency, and the shared world may develop when the tools that once served human understanding begin to reorganize the very conditions under which understanding occurs. A Husserlian prognosis would likely describe a near future of intensified objectification of social life, repeated crises of shared reality, and a bifurcation between technocratic drift and reflective renewal.

1) The Husserlian starting point: society lives on meaning before it lives on data

Husserl’s late thought insists that beneath science, beneath measurement, and beneath every technique, there lies a more original layer of human existence: the *lifeworld*—the everyday world as lived, taken for granted, and already meaningful. This lifeworld is not a private mental bubble. It is public and practical: the world in which bread is edible, doors can be opened, words have sense, promises bind, and other persons appear as responsible agents. In the lifeworld, we do not primarily encounter “data.” We encounter *things as meaningful*: a face as expressive, a street as safe or unsafe, a conversation as sincere or manipulative, an institution as legitimate or corrupt.

From this standpoint, the great danger of modernity is not technology itself. It is the temptation to forget the lifeworld as the ground of meaning and to treat the products of

scientific abstraction—numbers, models, formal systems—as if they were the ultimate reality rather than a highly effective *method* derived from and dependent on lived experience.

Husserl’s famous diagnosis of a “crisis” can be understood as a cultural self-misunderstanding: the more successful mathematical science becomes, the more a civilization begins to assume that only what can be formalized and computed truly counts as real. But human life cannot be lived inside equations. The questions that decide the fate of individuals and communities—questions of value, purpose, justice, dignity, responsibility—do not disappear when they are ignored. They return as disorientation, cynicism, and conflict.

If Husserl stood in our moment, he would likely say: the crisis has changed its surface form, but not its inner logic. The “forgetting” he warned about has migrated from physics and geometry into the heart of social existence.

2) Today’s technological condition: the mathematization of nature becomes the mathematization of the lifeworld

In Husserl’s historical narrative, modern science begins with a decisive transformation: nature is approached as if it were written in mathematical language. This yields enormous power—prediction, control, engineering. But the danger is that the method’s success seduces society into a metaphysical conclusion: that the mathematical representation is what is *most real*. In the twenty-first century, the same movement expands beyond nature into the social lifeworld itself. Everyday life is increasingly translated into machine-legible traces: clicks, locations, purchase histories, social graphs, biometric signals, writing style, voice patterns, facial movements. The modern “object” of mathematization is no longer primarily the falling stone or the orbiting planet. It is the human being in context—attention, desire, trust, employability, risk, political persuasion, mental health, friendship, credibility. This is the key Husserlian shift: we are not only building technologies *in* the lifeworld; we are building technologies that reorganize how the lifeworld appears, how it is trusted, and how it is inhabited.

AI intensifies this because it does not merely store and transmit data. It produces *seemings*: plausible answers, coherent narratives, synthetic images, simulated voices, predictive classifications. It furnishes the lifeworld with “ready-made sense.” And because it does so fluently, it can be taken as a new kind of authority—not necessarily as a person, but as a quasi-objective layer of reality, hovering above the messiness of human testimony. A Husserlian would immediately ask: what happens to human rationality when the world is increasingly encountered through systems that *pre-interpret* it?

3) The first phase of the scenario: a “digital natural attitude” becomes normal

Husserl distinguished the natural attitude from philosophical reflection. In the natural attitude, we simply live: we trust the world’s basic givenness, rely on habits, and move through familiar meanings. Reflection is not our default; it is an achievement. If Husserl were analyzing today’s conditions, he might say we are entering a new, historically unprecedented natural attitude: a *digital natural attitude*, in which mediation by platforms, feeds, rankings, and AI outputs is not experienced as mediation at all, but as “the way the world is.”

This phase would be marked by three intertwined developments.

First, horizons are engineered.

For Husserl, every experience carries a horizon—an implicit background of expectations about what is likely, what is relevant, what belongs. You do not see a cup as a random shape; you see it as something you can grasp, fill, drink from. Likewise, you do not hear a sentence as noise; you hear it as meaningful speech. Horizons are the invisible scaffolding of sense.

Algorithmic environments, especially recommendation systems and personalized streams, become horizon-machines. They do not merely show content; they shape what feels salient, normal, plausible, and socially validated. Over time, the individual no longer experiences this shaping as external. It sediments as internal expectation: *this is what people are like; this is what matters; this is what is happening.*

Second, sedimentation becomes industrialized.

Husserl's analyses of passive synthesis and sedimentation highlight how past experiences deposit patterns that guide future experience without explicit deliberation. Habits are not only personal; they are the temporal infrastructure of meaning.

Digital systems accelerate and standardize sedimentation. Notifications train attention. Metrics train self-evaluation. Autocomplete trains expression. Search results train what questions seem worth asking. AI assistants train what counts as a “good” answer. What was once a slow organic layering of habits becomes partially engineered—optimized for engagement, efficiency, or institutional goals.

Third, time-consciousness is reorganized.

Husserl's work on time-consciousness emphasizes that lived time is not an external clock but the inner structure of experience—retention of what just was and protention of what is about to come. When the rhythms of life are reorganized—when attention is continuously interrupted, when experience is cut into fragments, when “now” is constantly replaced by a new “now”—the very manner in which meaning unfolds is altered.

In this first phase, society grows used to “instant sense”: summaries, bullet points, instant answers, instant judgments. The subtlety of gradual understanding becomes a luxury. The temptation is not simply impatience; it is the cultural normalization of a shallower temporal style of consciousness.

From a Husserlian standpoint, this is not a mere lifestyle change. It is an alteration in the conditions under which rational insight is formed.

4) The second phase: “algorithmic objectivity” becomes an institution

The first phase normalizes digital mediation. The second institutionalizes it. Here, Husserl's warnings about objectivism take on a new form.

The decisive transition is this: AI and quantitative systems move from being *tools that assist decisions* to becoming *procedures that define what a good decision is.*

When hiring depends on predictive screening, “talent” becomes what the model can detect. When education is reorganized around measurable outcomes, “learning” becomes what can be assessed. When healthcare and insurance revolve around risk scoring, “health” becomes what can be predicted and priced. When policing uses predictive mapping, “danger” becomes what

appears in the data. The categories do not merely describe the world; they become performative. They shape behavior, opportunity, and identity.

A Husserlian would argue that this produces a deep category mistake: confusing a method of managing complexity with the reality of personhood. It is not that models are useless; it is that their success encourages a civilization to treat their abstractions as if they were the essence of the human. At this stage, society begins to replace the question “What is right?” with “What works?” and then to replace “What works?” with “What optimizes the metric?” The chain is subtle but consequential. It is the replacement of reasons with outputs.

5) The trust crisis: intersubjectivity under synthetic conditions

Husserl’s account of objectivity is inseparable from intersubjectivity. A shared world is not merely a pile of private perceptions; it is a communal achievement in which people can, in principle, correct one another, confirm evidence, and arrive at stable meanings. Objectivity, in this sense, is bound to trust: trust that testimony is usually sincere, trust that perception is broadly reliable, trust that institutions of verification are not entirely corrupt. Synthetic media and automated persuasion threaten this at its roots. When seeing is no longer believing—when a voice can be cloned, a video fabricated, a document simulated—the lifeworld’s ordinary evidences weaken. This does not only produce deception. It produces *deep doubt*: a cultural posture in which people cease to know what kinds of evidence are worth trusting at all. A Husserlian future scenario would therefore predict repeated “epistemic shocks”: moments when the public is forced to confront that what appeared as reality was constructed. The likely consequence is not a neat transition to better verification. It is a turbulent oscillation: panic, then new technical fixes; scandal, then new institutional rules; then another scandal.

In Husserl’s terms, this is a crisis not of information, but of the shared world as such. If the background trust that sustains intersubjective life decays, society does not simply become “misinformed.” It becomes existentially disoriented. People retreat into smaller circles of credibility. Public discourse becomes less about truth and more about loyalty. The “first-person plural” (“we know,” “we can agree,” “we can verify”) begins to fracture.

6) The person at risk: from self-responsible agent to manageable profile

Husserl’s concept of the person is not reducible to psychological traits or behavioral patterns. A person is a being who can take a stance, commit, justify, and become responsible for a life. Personhood is bound up with the possibility of rational self-critique and ethical orientation. A technocratic future, seen through Husserlian lenses, risks reversing this: it treats the person as a predictable system, a set of preferences, a risk score, a consumer segment, a compliance category. The person becomes a “case.”

Two consequences follow.

First, responsibility is outsourced.

When decisions are increasingly mediated by systems that present outputs as authoritative, individuals and institutions find it easier to say, “The system decided.” This is not only a bureaucratic excuse; it is a cultural shift in the meaning of accountability. Husserl would likely view it as a betrayal of rational agency: the weakening of the habit of giving reasons that can be understood, challenged, and endorsed.

Second, autonomy becomes thin.

One can have many choices and still lack autonomy if the environment pre-shapes desires, attention, and interpretation. A Husserlian would emphasize that freedom is not merely selecting among options. It is the ability to stand in reflective relation to one's motives, to understand why something appears as good, and to take responsibility for one's commitments.

A society that increasingly governs through nudges, rankings, and predictive personalization may preserve the appearance of freedom while hollowing out its substance.

7) The bifurcation: technocratic drift versus reflective renewal

Husserl would not write this as a simple dystopia. His diagnosis of crisis was also a wager on renewal: the idea that the failure of naïve objectivism can provoke a deeper understanding of reason.

From his premises, a future scenario likely bifurcates.

Track A: Technocratic drift (the probable default).

If society continues to be “dazzled” by technical success, it will treat computational rationality as the measure of all things. Institutions will expand surveillance and scoring because it works administratively. Culture will treat synthetic sense-making as convenience. Trust will continue to erode and be patched with verification regimes that rarely address the deeper issue: the forgetting of the lifeworld and of personhood as the ground of meaning.

In this drift scenario, the long-term outcome is not only political polarization or economic inequality (though those may follow). The deeper outcome is spiritual and rational fatigue: people lose confidence that insight and responsibility can guide life. Cynicism becomes the default “wisdom.” Public life becomes a contest of manipulation rather than a shared search for truth.

Track B: Reflective renewal (the difficult possibility).

A Husserlian renewal would begin with a cultural shift analogous to the phenomenological *epoché*: a disciplined suspension of naïve acceptance. Translated into contemporary terms, this would mean cultivating a civic and personal capacity to recognize mediation, to question the authority of outputs, and to return—again and again—to what is actually given in experience, in dialogue, and in moral life.

Such renewal would not be anti-technology. It would be a re-foundation of technology within a richer concept of reason. It would demand institutions built around contestability and intelligible justification: decisions that can be explained, challenged, and revised. It would demand education that trains judgment, not just skill. And it would demand a renewed ethic of co-responsibility: recognition that information environments, design choices, and institutional policies are not neutral—they shape persons and shared reality.

In this renewal track, the goal is not a perfect epistemic world free of deception. It is something more basic: a re-stabilization of intersubjective life, a recovery of the “we” capable of truth-seeking, and a protection of personhood as something irreducible to profiles.

8) Conclusion: the core Husserlian lesson for the AI age

If Husserl were alive today, the future scenario he might draw would center on a single philosophical claim: the greatest danger is not that machines become intelligent, but that human beings forget what intelligence is for. In the lifeworld, meaning comes before measurement. Persons come before profiles. Reasons come before outputs. Trust is not a soft social add-on; it is part of the transcendental infrastructure of objectivity. When society allows technical rationality to become the ultimate standard of reality, it gains power but risks losing orientation. And when it loses orientation, it becomes vulnerable to manipulation, fragmentation, and despair. Yet the same technologies that threaten the lifeworld can also expose how fragile and precious it is. They can force a civilization to ask again what it means to know, to judge, to promise, to be responsible, to share a world with others. A Husserlian future is therefore not predetermined. It is a task. The probable drift is toward deeper algorithmic mediation and periodic trust crises. But the philosophical hope—Husserl’s enduring wager—is that crisis can awaken reflection, and reflection can renew reason. In the age of AI, that wager becomes newly urgent: not as an academic program, but as a condition of a livable common world.

Antonio Gramsci

Please describe in detail what kind of future scenario he would have drawn for the probable development of society based on his theoretical premises if Antonio Gramsci were still alive today, based on today's technological development and today's conditions.

Any answer to this has to be an interpretive reconstruction, not a claim about what Gramsci *actually* would have said. But it *is* possible to sketch—fairly rigorously—what kind of future he would likely project if he updated his analysis using his own core premises (hegemony, civil society, “integral state,” organic intellectuals, war of position, passive revolution, and the shaping of “common sense”). Below is a detailed “Gramsci-today” scenario that tries to stay faithful to that framework.

1) The starting point: how Gramsci would read “modernity” in 2025

Society develops through hegemony, not just force

Gramsci’s key “diagnostic lens” is that advanced capitalist rule is typically stabilized not mainly by overt repression, but by organized consent across civil society—schools, churches, media, associations, intellectual life—backed by coercion when consent fails. He treats the

state as an “integral” formation: political society (government, police, law) + civil society (the institutions and practices that manufacture consent).

So if he looked at the present, his first move would be:

Where is consent being produced today, by whom, and through which institutions?

“Common sense” is the battlefield

He doesn’t treat ideology as just “propaganda.” He treats it as lived, practical consciousness—“common sense”—which can be fragmented and contradictory, yet contains a “healthy nucleus” (“good sense”) that can be developed into a coherent worldview.

So he would ask:

What is today’s “common sense,” how is it organized, and what material routines reproduce it?

In advanced societies, transformation is a war of position

He argues that in complex modern states, political change is less like a single frontal assault (“war of manoeuvre”) and more like a long struggle to occupy the “trenches” of civil society—building durable institutions, alliances, and cultural leadership before taking formal power.

So he would expect the decisive struggles of the next decades to be fought not only in elections or streets, but in:

- education and credential systems
- media ecosystems
- workplace organization and managerial “science”
- the everyday moral language of “responsibility,” “innovation,” “security,” “merit,” etc.

2) What changes in the 21st century: the “trenches” become digital and algorithmic

Gramsci’s “civil society” list (schools, newspapers, associations, intellectuals) maps surprisingly well onto platform society—except now the terrain is *digitally mediated*.

The new gatekeepers of consent are recommendation systems

A Gramscian update would put enormous weight on this fact: on major platforms, who is heard is shaped by algorithms (recommender systems), not just editors or party newspapers. As one overview puts it, when we post online, “who will hear us” is determined “in large part by algorithms,” and recommender systems are “the engine” of major platforms.

That is practically a textbook “hegemony in civil society” mechanism—except automated, continuous, personalized.

“Algorithmic common sense” becomes a structural phenomenon

He would likely argue that the technological form changes how common sense is produced:

- Personalization fragments the shared public world: different groups inhabit different information streams, moral vocabularies, and “obvious truths.”
- Engagement optimization rewards affect (outrage, fear, identity performance), which can polarize and destabilize consent.
- Feedback loops form between users and ranking systems—people adapt to the algorithm; the algorithm adapts to people.

Even policy-oriented summaries now routinely describe how platforms feed users customized content to keep them engaged and warn of “feedback loops” that can create echo chambers / filter bubbles and polarize opinion. In Gramscian language: the *infrastructure of consent* is now partly mathematized, privatized, and run in real time.

3) The “integral state” in 2025: from welfare/party systems to a platform–security–managerial bloc

Gramsci would almost certainly say that the “integral state” has evolved.

A likely “historic bloc” today: platform capital + finance + security state + professional–managerial strata

Gramsci uses “historical bloc” to describe a coalition of forces that becomes culturally and politically unified under a particular hegemony.

A plausible Gramscian diagnosis of the present is that the leading bloc in many countries is built from:

- platform and data-centric firms (attention, advertising, cloud, AI services)
- financialized capital (venture capital, asset managers, credit systems)
- state security and administrative apparatuses (policing, border regimes, cybersecurity, surveillance procurement)
- managerial/professional layers who administer metrics, compliance, HR, ESG reporting, education credentialing, and “innovation” agendas

This bloc doesn’t rule only through laws; it rules through *standards, protocols, rankings, and interfaces*—the everyday “default settings” of life.

“Hegemony protected by the armour of coercion,” upgraded

Gramsci’s famous formula (in paraphrase) is: hegemony is consent, but it’s protected by coercion. In an AI/platform era, he would likely say coercion becomes:

- less visibly “political” and more “administrative” (account bans, deplatforming, credit scoring, automated eligibility decisions),
- more preventative (risk scoring, predictive policing logics),
- more infrastructural (identity systems, payment rails, app stores, cloud chokepoints).

Not because conspirators sit in a room, but because a modern “integral state” tends to absorb threats by reorganizing civil society and administration so consent is reproduced with less friction.

4) “Americanism and Fordism” becomes “AI-ism and Platformism”

Gramsci’s notes on “Americanism and Fordism” were about how rationalized, mechanized production reorganizes not only work but culture, morality, family life, discipline, and consent.

Updating that logic, he might sketch something like this:

The factory returns—dispersed, digital, and inside services

He would likely argue the “factory principle” spreads through:

- algorithmic management (tasks broken down, measured, optimized)
- gig and contractor ecosystems (labor treated as modular and on-demand)
- remote/hybrid work (workplace discipline moves into software)
- continuous surveillance of performance (KPIs, dashboards, monitoring)

This is Fordism without a single assembly line: a *distributed assembly line of attention, data, and micro-labor*.

A new kind of labor discipline: producing “predictable humans”

Gramsci was interested in how modern production requires new habits, new “ways of life,” and new moralities. In 2025 he might say the dominant project is to produce:

- workers who self-optimize, self-brand, and accept permanent reskilling,
- citizens who accept trade-offs of privacy for convenience/security,
- consumers whose desires are shaped by recommender systems and ad markets.

In other words: hegemony is increasingly behavioral and psychological, built into tools people “freely” use.

5) The future scenario he would most likely draw: a long “interregnum” managed by passive revolution

Gramsci uses “passive revolution” for top-down transformations that modernize and absorb demands *without* a deep popular-democratic rupture. If he were forecasting, I think his “probable” scenario would be:

Phase 1: crisis of authority continues, but is administratively contained

He would likely diagnose many societies as living through a crisis of hegemony: old legitimations weaken, but no new worldview fully replaces them.

In that condition, he would expect:

- volatility, polarization, and “anti-system” moods,
- fragmentation of mass parties and unions,
- a search for “strong solutions” (technocratic or authoritarian),
- periodic moral panics and scapegoating.

But he would also expect modern states to be resilient because the trenches of civil society are deep—now including digital infrastructures.

Phase 2: the ruling bloc stabilizes itself through “reforms that change everything so nothing changes”

A Gramscian “passive revolution” of the 2020s–2040s might look like:

- Regulating platforms just enough to restore legitimacy, without democratizing ownership/control.
- Green transition as modernization, where climate policy becomes a new frontier of investment and industrial planning—often led by existing elites.
- AI governance frameworks that reduce the most visible harms while preserving the core structure: private control of infrastructures + managerial oversight.
- Welfare adjustments (targeted benefits, retraining programs) that reduce explosive discontent but keep labor precarious and disciplined.

Gramsci would likely call this a renovation of hegemony: concessions, moral language (“responsibility,” “trust & safety,” “innovation”), and selective coercion—rebuilding consent.

Phase 3: “algorithmic hegemony” becomes the normal form of politics

Over time, he might expect politics to become less about competing comprehensive programs and more about:

- managing attention,
- micro-targeting messages,
- platform-mediated mobilizations,
- short-cycle outrage/identity waves,
- administration by metrics.

This makes “war of position” harder: it’s difficult to build stable organizations and shared “good sense” when civil society is constantly reorganized by engagement-driven systems.

6) Who are the “intellectuals” now? Engineers, influencers, and institutional designers

Gramsci’s theory of intellectuals is central: intellectuals are not only professors; they include managers, technicians, bureaucrats—anyone whose function is to organize, educate, and lead.

A “Gramsci alive today” scenario would likely highlight a reconfigured intellectual layer:

The dominant bloc's "organic intellectuals" include:

- software and ML engineers who shape ranking, moderation, and automation tools,
- product designers who shape habit and attention,
- policy/compliance professionals who translate political pressure into internal rules,
- consultants/think-tank ecosystems that moralize the system ("innovation," "competitiveness," "safety"),
- media creators and "influencers" who translate elite language into popular common sense.

This is hegemony as *design + narrative + administration*.

Counter-hegemonic intellectuals have new openings—but also new traps

He would likely see opportunities for "organic intellectuals" from subaltern groups to emerge through:

- independent media,
- workplace organizing in logistics/tech/gig sectors,
- local/community institutions,
- open-source and digital commons projects,
- alternative education networks.

But he would warn that platforms also incentivize individualized visibility (personal brands) over durable collective organization—turning potential organic intellectuals into isolated entrepreneurs of attention.

7) The "Modern Prince" in an era of networks: party, movement, or platform?

Gramsci still thinks a revolution requires an organizing vehicle—he calls the party the "Modern Prince"—able to unify forces and articulate a coherent worldview in advance of power. If alive today, he might revise the *form* (because mass parties have changed), but not the *function*:

- He would likely argue that "horizontal networks" can spark mobilization, but cannot substitute for durable organization capable of strategy, education, and alliance-building.
- He might imagine a hybrid "Modern Prince": part party, part union ecosystem, part cooperative media/education infrastructure—capable of operating inside the digital trenches rather than being dissolved by them.

8) The fork in the road: Caesarism/authoritarianism vs a democratic counter-hegemony

Gramsci is attentive to moments when, if consent collapses, states lean more heavily on coercion (or "exceptional" leadership). His framework strongly suggests two big forks:

A) Managed technocracy sliding into “soft Caesarism”

If crises intensify (economic shocks, climate disasters, geopolitical conflict), the likely ruling response is:

- more executive power,
- more surveillance and risk management,
- more “emergency” justification,
- more control over information infrastructures.

Not necessarily classic dictatorship—often a technocratic-authoritarian drift packaged as competence and safety.

B) A counter-hegemonic project that turns “good sense” into a new common sense

Gramsci’s more hopeful pathway is that subaltern groups build a new historical bloc—an alliance that can lead morally and intellectually, not just protest.

Translated into today’s conditions, he might say the “winning” counter-hegemonic strategy would have to include:

- institution-building (unions, cooperatives, mutual aid, schools/media) that aren’t dependent on platform incentives,
- a new “national-popular” program (in his sense: rooted in popular life, not elite discourse),
- control over key infrastructures (communication channels, data governance, public digital services),
- a cultural project that answers the moral language of the ruling bloc (freedom/security/merit) with an alternative moral-intellectual leadership (dignity, solidarity, democratic control, ecological repair).

This is classic war of position—updated for algorithmic civil society.

9) A compact “Gramsci-2025” future vignette (probable trajectory)

If you asked him for a “probable development” narrative, he might sketch something like:

1. The next decades are an extended struggle over the re-legitimation of capitalism after repeated shocks.
2. The ruling bloc will attempt a passive revolution: regulate the worst excesses, rebrand modernization as inclusion/green transition/AI safety, and rebuild consent through schools, media, and platforms—while tightening administrative control.
3. The core novelty is that civil society is increasingly organized by recommender systems and platform infrastructures, making consent more personalized, more fragmented, and more difficult to challenge with stable mass organization.
4. Unless counter-hegemonic forces build durable institutions and a coherent worldview, politics will oscillate between managed technocracy and periodic populist explosions,

with a persistent temptation toward authoritarian solutions when “spontaneous consent” fails.

That is: a long interregnum, not a clean break.

Gramsci Alive Today: A Speculative Essay on Society’s Probable Development Under Digital Capitalism

To imagine what Antonio Gramsci would “predict” if he were alive today is necessarily an act of reconstruction. We cannot know what he would have written in the face of artificial intelligence, platform economies, climate stress, financialization, and a fragmented media environment. What we *can* do is take his central premises—hegemony, the integral state, civil society as a system of trenches, organic intellectuals, the war of position, passive revolution, and the struggle over “common sense”—and ask what kind of future scenario those premises would likely generate when applied to contemporary conditions.

This essay sketches such a scenario: not a fantasy “Gramsci the futurist,” but a Gramsci who updates his method while remaining faithful to his framework. The result is a picture of a long, uneven struggle—an “interregnum”—in which advanced societies oscillate between managed consent and coercive stabilization, while counter-hegemonic forces face new opportunities and new structural obstacles inside a digitally reorganized civil society.

1) Theoretical premises: what Gramsci uses to read the future

Gramsci’s point of departure is that stable rule in complex modern societies is rarely maintained by force alone. It is maintained through hegemony: the capacity of a leading social bloc to secure *active consent* by shaping culture, morality, everyday “common sense,” and institutional life—while retaining coercion as a backstop when consent breaks down. This is why his “state” is not only government and police. It is an integral state: political society (formal state power) fused with civil society (the dense web of institutions and practices that form consent).

From this premise flows a second: political transformation in advanced societies cannot be understood as a single decisive rupture. It is more often a war of position—a prolonged struggle to occupy the “trenches” of civil society: education, media, professional life, religion, law, philanthropy, associations, workplace organization, and intellectual production. Even the most dramatic moments—elections, uprisings, collapses—are typically preceded and followed by long contests over legitimacy, organization, and worldview.

A third premise is his concept of organic intellectuals. “Intellectuals” are not merely academics. They are organizers, managers, technicians, journalists, clergy, administrators—any group whose social function is to articulate, teach, and stabilize a worldview, turning a

class project into a cultural “common sense.” In modern societies, leadership is inseparable from the production of intellectual and moral order.

Finally, Gramsci insists on the plasticity of ideology. “Common sense” is not a monolith; it is a contradictory mixture of inherited beliefs, practical habits, and partial insights. It can be reorganized. It can be contested. And because it is lived rather than merely “believed,” it is fought over through institutions, routines, and everyday language—not only through speeches.

If a living Gramsci tried to draw the “probable development” of society today, he would start here: Who is producing consent? Through which institutions? With what moral language? Under what material conditions?

2) The contemporary terrain: civil society becomes digital infrastructure

The most consequential novelty of the early 21st century, from a Gramscian perspective, is not simply that we have “more media.” It is that civil society—once dominated by parties, unions, newspapers, churches, and schools—has been reorganized by platform infrastructures whose core logic is algorithmic selection, behavioral prediction, and attention capture.

In older industrial democracies, the “trenches” of civil society were already deep: mass schooling, national broadcasting, stable parties, large unions, professional associations, and relatively coherent public spheres. Today those trenches still exist, but they are cross-cut by systems that rank, filter, recommend, and monetize communication at scale. This matters because Gramsci’s hegemony is not just a set of ideas; it is the *organization of social experience*. When experience itself is increasingly mediated by recommender systems, metrics, and platform governance, the production of consent becomes both more continuous and more automated.

From this, a living Gramsci would likely infer a new central fact: the struggle for hegemony has become inseparable from the architecture of information and interaction. In earlier eras, the ruling bloc relied heavily on editors, clergy, party intellectuals, school curricula, and broadcast media. Today, it relies increasingly on systems that do not merely persuade but structure what becomes visible, what becomes thinkable, and what becomes socially rewarded.

This is not to say “technology determines everything.” A Gramscian approach would reject that. The point is that technology becomes part of the material apparatus through which a social bloc organizes consent and disciplines dissent.

3) The emerging hegemonic apparatus: algorithmic consent, managerial morality, and security rationality

What kind of hegemonic order would Gramsci see consolidating in the present?

He would likely identify a dominant configuration that combines:

1. Platform-capital accumulation (advertising, data extraction, cloud services, AI infrastructure, digital marketplaces)

2. Financialization (short-term valuation pressures, asset management power, debt discipline, speculative investment)
3. Managerial-professional governance (metrics, compliance regimes, HR/credential systems, consultancy cultures)
4. Security state rationality (surveillance infrastructures, risk scoring logics, border regimes, cybersecurity, “emergency” governance)

In Gramscian terms, this resembles a contemporary historic bloc: not a conspiracy, but a functional alignment of forces whose interests and worldviews become mutually reinforcing. Its cultural leadership is not only delivered through newspapers and parliaments, but through interfaces, policies, standards, and the moral vocabulary of “innovation,” “safety,” “efficiency,” “resilience,” “responsibility,” and “competitiveness.”

A living Gramsci would probably underline how modern consent is often produced through what feels like neutrality: “best practices,” “data-driven decisions,” “community guidelines,” “risk management,” “performance metrics,” “evidence-based policy.” These are not *fake*, but they are political in the deeper sense: they shape what counts as rational, who counts as competent, and which demands appear legitimate or irrational.

He would also notice how coercion increasingly takes a managerial form. It may not appear first as police batons; it appears as eligibility rules, automated decisions, account bans, credit scoring, predictive suspicion, deplatforming, employment precarity, bureaucratic filtering. Coercion is still present, but it is braided into administration, infrastructure, and “terms of service.”

This yields a distinctive Gramscian diagnosis: hegemony today is partly “algorithmic” and partly “administrative.” It operates by shaping behavior through environment design, incentives, and visibility, while retaining the traditional coercive apparatus for moments of open conflict.

4) “Americanism and Fordism” updated: AI, platforms, and the new discipline of labor and life

Gramsci’s reflections on “Americanism and Fordism” were not mere commentary on factories; they were an analysis of how a production regime remakes society. Fordism demanded new habits, new family organization, new disciplines, new moralities. It created a specific type of worker and citizen.

If he updated this lens, he might describe the present as a shift toward AI-augmented platform capitalism. The “assembly line” is no longer only in a factory; it is dispersed across services, logistics, content creation, customer support, and gig labor. Work is decomposed into measurable tasks; performance becomes a stream of data; supervision becomes continuous and sometimes automated. The worker is pressured not only to obey but to self-optimize—always learning, always available, always branding, always adapting.

He would likely argue that the new regime seeks a predictable human being: someone whose attention can be captured, whose preferences can be predicted, whose labor can be flexibly allocated, whose discontent can be channeled into safe outlets. This is not total control—Gramsci never assumes social life can be fully engineered—but it is a structural aspiration embedded in the design of many contemporary systems.

From this angle, “common sense” changes shape. It becomes infused with:

- the ethic of personal entrepreneurship (“hustle,” “side income,” “self-brand”),
- the moralization of productivity (“optimize yourself,” “never stop learning”),
- the normalization of surveillance-as-convenience,
- the sense that institutions are opaque systems one must navigate strategically rather than collective structures one can democratically govern.

A Gramsci alive today would likely see this as a major victory of contemporary hegemony: not only that people believe certain ideas, but that they increasingly experience social life as an individualized optimization problem.

5) The probable trajectory: a prolonged interregnum managed through passive revolution

Gramsci’s famous notion of an “interregnum” refers to a period in which the old order is dying but the new cannot yet be born—creating a fertile space for morbid symptoms: cynicism, resentment, extremism, and unstable politics. If we apply his method to current conditions—economic volatility, climate disruption, migration pressures, geopolitical rivalry, distrust in institutions, and media fragmentation—he would likely describe many societies as living inside such an interregnum.

What is the probable development of society under these conditions?

A Gramscian forecast would not be a simple linear story (“collapse” or “utopia”). It would be a scenario of uneven stabilization. He would expect the dominant bloc to attempt a renewed hegemony through what he called passive revolution: top-down transformations that modernize and absorb popular demands without a deep democratic reconstitution of power.

In contemporary terms, this might include:

- Selective platform regulation that restrains the most visible harms while leaving ownership and core incentives largely intact.
- Green modernization that creates new industrial investments and managerial regimes—sometimes genuinely reducing emissions, sometimes functioning as a new field for accumulation and technocratic control.
- AI governance and “safety” frameworks that promise stability and legitimacy while preserving the centralization of infrastructure and expertise.
- Targeted welfare adjustments (training programs, conditional benefits, crisis relief) designed to prevent explosions without reorganizing the underlying structure of labor insecurity.

This is exactly the kind of stabilization Gramsci would expect from an advanced integral state: not only policing dissent, but reorganizing civil society so that dissent is managed, domesticated, or redirected—while some concessions are granted to maintain legitimacy.

In this scenario, crises do not disappear; they become the fuel of continual reform-from-above. The system learns to metabolize shock.

6) The central contradiction: fragmentation of consent and the danger of “Caesarism”

However, the digital reorganization of civil society introduces a contradiction that would fascinate Gramsci: the same mechanisms that produce consent can also destabilize it.

When communication is filtered through attention markets and algorithmic ranking, public life can become:

- more polarized,
- more prone to moral panics,
- more vulnerable to misinformation and cynicism,
- more fragmented into mutually unintelligible subcultures.

This fragmentation can weaken the coherence of hegemony. The ruling bloc may still dominate economically and institutionally, yet struggle to generate a stable “national-popular” common sense that binds diverse groups.

Gramsci had a name for what can happen when social forces reach deadlock and ordinary legitimacy collapses: a drift toward Caesarism—an “exceptional” stabilizing force (sometimes a leader, sometimes an apparatus) that resolves the crisis through coercive-administrative means.

Translated into today’s conditions, the probable danger is not always a dramatic coup. It can be a subtler form: the normalization of emergency governance; the expansion of surveillance; the tightening of borders; the criminalization of certain forms of protest; the delegation of public decisions to opaque technical systems; the reduction of politics to security management.

A Gramscian living today would likely say: the more consent becomes brittle and fragmented, the more the integral state leans on coercion—often disguised as administration. The “armour of coercion” becomes heavier when hegemony fails to feel natural.

7) Counter-hegemony under platform conditions: new opportunities, new traps

Gramsci is not only a theorist of dominance; he is a theorist of strategy for the subaltern. His question is always: how can dominated groups become capable of leadership—moral, intellectual, and political—rather than merely erupting in protest?

He would probably see genuine openings today:

- The low barrier to publishing and organizing can create new “organic intellectuals” from working-class, racialized, and marginalized groups.
- Labor struggles can emerge in new sectors (logistics, gig work, platform content labor, service work) where value chains are tight and disruptions can be powerful.
- Digital commons, cooperatives, and open-source projects can prefigure alternative models of ownership and coordination.
- Local institutions—schools, mutual aid networks, community organizations—can rebuild social solidarity beyond the volatility of online life.

But he would also warn of traps specific to the platform era:

- Individualization of visibility: the platform rewards the “influencer” more than the organizer; it turns potential leaders into personal brands competing for attention.
- Short-cycle mobilization: outrage waves and viral moments substitute for durable institutions, training, and strategy.
- Dependence on hostile infrastructure: movements organize on platforms whose incentives and governance they do not control.
- Fragmented common sense: without shared narratives and institutions, it is harder to form the broad alliances required for hegemony.

From a Gramscian viewpoint, the decisive question becomes: can counter-hegemonic forces build institutional durability and a coherent worldview within an environment that structurally pushes toward fragmentation and spectacle?

8) The “Modern Prince” today: what replaces the mass party?

Gramsci argued that political transformation requires an organizing form capable of unifying social forces and educating them into a collective will—what he called, in effect, the “Modern Prince” (often associated with the party). In the contemporary era, where mass parties have weakened and trust in institutions is low, he would likely revise the form while insisting on the function.

He might argue that a purely networked movement—horizontal, episodic, leaderless—can be powerful for ignition but weak for consolidation. A counter-hegemonic project would need something like:

- a union ecology that reaches precarious and service workers,
- media and education institutions that develop “good sense” into a stable worldview,
- cooperative economic structures that materialize solidarity,
- local governance capacity (municipal power, community services),
- and a political vehicle capable of alliance-building and long-term strategy.

In short: a war of position requires organizations that outlast cycles of attention.

9) The forked future: algorithmic stabilization vs democratic reconstruction

If Gramsci drew the probable development of society from today forward, he would likely present not one destiny but a structured fork—both shaped by the same premises.

Path A: Algorithmic–technocratic stabilization (a renovated hegemony).

The dominant bloc learns to manage crises through passive revolution: partial reforms, safety regimes, green modernization, and AI governance. Consent is rebuilt not as a shared civic culture but as a patchwork of personalized experiences, nudges, and administrative controls. Politics becomes increasingly managerial: optimizing systems, managing risk, suppressing “extremes,” and keeping conflict within permitted channels. Coercion expands quietly where needed.

Path B: Counter-hegemonic democratic reconstruction.

Subaltern groups form a new historic bloc capable of leadership—linking labor, climate

justice, anti-racism, feminist struggles, and democratic demands into a coherent program. They do not rely only on viral mobilization but build institutions: public digital infrastructure, democratically accountable media and education, workplace power, and forms of ownership that reduce dependence on platform monopolies. They transform “common sense” by anchoring it in lived improvements: security through solidarity rather than surveillance, freedom through democratic control rather than consumer choice.

Gramsci would not assume Path B is inevitable. But he would insist it is possible—because hegemony is made, not given. The “probable” outcome, absent such a project, would drift toward Path A with periodic shocks: cycles of backlash, resentment, and authoritarian temptation, punctuated by reforms that re-legitimate the system without changing its foundations.

Conclusion: The future as a struggle over the trenches

If Antonio Gramsci were alive today, his future scenario would likely revolve around one central insight: the decisive conflicts of the coming decades will be fought in the trenches of a digitally reorganized civil society. The battle is not only over laws and elections, but over the production of common sense through platforms, schools, workplaces, and administrative systems. The integral state has not shrunk; it has mutated—interweaving public power with private infrastructures of communication, data, and algorithmic coordination. Under these conditions, the most probable development is neither a clean collapse nor a smooth progress, but an extended interregnum managed through passive revolution: reforms from above that renovate consent while deepening administrative control. Whether society drifts into a more coercive stabilization or moves toward democratic reconstruction depends, in Gramsci’s terms, on whether counter-hegemonic forces can do what he believed was necessary in any advanced society: wage a successful war of position—building institutions, alliances, and a new moral-intellectual leadership capable of turning scattered “good sense” into a durable common sense.

Pierre Bourdieu

Please describe in detail what kind of future scenario you would have drawn for the probable development of society based on your theoretical premises if Pierre Bourdieu were still alive today, based on today's technological development and today's conditions.

If we treat this as a Bourdieusian thought experiment—not “what Bourdieu would *certainly* say,” but what kind of probable future one might sketch by extrapolating from his core premises (field, habitus, capital, symbolic power, reproduction, the state’s meta-capital)—then a fairly coherent scenario emerges under today’s platform/AI conditions. Below is one

detailed scenario (with branching points) that stays close to Bourdieu’s way of reasoning: start from durable structures, then ask how new technologies reconfigure the rules of the game while leaving the basic logic of domination and reproduction intact—often intensified.

1) The theoretical “engine” Bourdieu would likely keep running

A Bourdieu-informed projection tends to assume:

- Society is not mainly held together by explicit contracts or individual choices, but by structured fields (education, media, politics, art, tech, finance, science, etc.) with positions, stakes, and rules of competition.
- People act through habitus: durable dispositions shaped by upbringing and trajectory. Habitus “fits” some fields better than others.
- Inequality persists via capitals that are unequally distributed and convertible:
 - Economic capital (money/assets),
 - Cultural capital (knowledge, credentials, taste, styles of speech),
 - Social capital (networks, who picks up your call),
 - Symbolic capital (recognized legitimacy, prestige).
- Domination is stabilized when it becomes misrecognized as natural: symbolic violence, doxa, and “common sense.”
- The state is not just an actor among others; it holds meta-capital: it sets categories, credentials, law, and legitimacy—often shaping all fields at once.

With that engine, “technology” is never just gadgets. It’s new infrastructure for:

- classification (who counts, who ranks, who is visible),
- accumulation (new ways to build and convert capital),
- consecration (new authorities that legitimize some as worthy and others as not),
- discipline (new ways to monitor and steer behavior).

2) What “today’s” tech changes in Bourdieusian terms: new capitals and a new meta-field

A. A platform/algorithmic meta-field rises

Bourdieu would likely treat large digital platforms and AI systems less as one sector and more as something like a meta-field that increasingly conditions other fields—because they control:

- visibility (ranking, recommendation, virality),
- attention (time-on-platform, feeds, notifications),
- metrics (what counts as success: followers, engagement, ratings),
- access (who can reach whom, at what cost),
- data (predictive power, targeting, surveillance).

Where older fields had gatekeepers (editors, professors, critics, party apparatus), this meta-field introduces algorithmic gatekeeping that looks neutral (“the system recommends...”) while being strategically designed.

B. New kinds of capital become decisive (without replacing the old ones)

Not “new society,” but new currencies that convert into old capitals:

- Attention capital: measurable visibility (followers, watch time, reach).
- Algorithmic capital: practical mastery of ranking systems (SEO, content optimization, growth hacking, ad targeting, A/B testing, prompt skill, model/tool literacy).
- Data capital: ownership/control of datasets, behavioral traces, and the capability to act on them.
- Credential-as-a-service capital: micro-credentials, badges, portfolio signaling, reputation scores—often tied to platforms.
- Infrastructure capital: control over cloud, chips, model access, app stores, identity systems.

These forms are *highly* convertible:

- attention → money (ads, sponsorships),
- attention → symbolic legitimacy (status, “expert” aura),
- data → political influence (microtargeting, agenda setting),
- algorithmic capital → cultural capital (appearing competent/modern),
- infrastructure capital → economic rents (tolls on access).

C. Doxa gets automated: “the metric is the truth”

A key Bourdieusian twist: domination becomes stronger when it is experienced as objective measurement rather than power.

In an AI/platform society:

- rankings, scores, feeds, “reputation,” “quality,” “relevance,” “trust & safety,” “risk,” “employability,” “creditworthiness,” “engagement” start to feel like *reality itself*.
- People adjust habitus to what the metrics reward.
- This is symbolic power with a machine face: it doesn’t argue; it sorts.

3) The probable trajectory: a society of “algorithmic reproduction”

Here’s a plausible future scenario a Bourdieusian analyst might draw if current tendencies continue.

Phase 1: Intensification (now → ~5 years)

Inequality becomes more “personalized” and less visible as structure.

1. Education splits into augmentation vs. supervision
 - Privileged families buy forms of “cognitive augmentation” (best tutors, best AI tools, enriched environments, cultural experiences, protected time).

- Disadvantaged groups get more “supervision” (monitoring, standardized remediation, compliance tech).
 - The rhetoric is “personalized learning,” but the structure is a two-track formation of habitus: one trained for mastery and entitlement, the other for discipline and adaptation.
2. The labor market becomes a competition in demonstrable signals
 - Hiring and advancement lean harder on portfolios, online reputation, and machine-readable performance proxies.
 - Those with inherited cultural capital learn to *stage* competence in the right codes (tone, presentation, strategic networking, “professional narrative”).
 - Others are filtered out earlier—often without an identifiable human decision-maker.
 3. The media field yields further to attention logic
 - Journalistic autonomy weakens as platforms determine distribution.
 - Symbolic capital shifts from institutional titles to “platform legitimacy.”
 - Public discourse becomes more reactive, more scandal-driven, more polarizing—not only from ideology, but because attention metrics reward conflict, novelty, and identity signaling.

Bourdieuian prediction: domination deepens precisely because it feels like “user choice” and “neutral recommendation,” not like coercion.

Phase 2: Consolidation ($\approx 5 \rightarrow 15$ years)

A new “digital state nobility” forms—often across state and corporate boundaries.

Bourdieu wrote about elite reproduction through schools and the state. Translated forward:

1. A hybrid elite stabilizes
 - Top positions in tech, finance, security, elite education, and bureaucracy become increasingly interchangeable.
 - Credential pipelines narrow: a small number of institutions, networks, and platform careers reproduce the top.
 - Cultural capital for elites includes not only classic distinction (taste, language, manners) but also “command of systems” (governance, AI fluency, data strategy).
2. The state’s meta-capital is partly delegated
The state still matters, but it increasingly governs through:
 - standards set in partnership with industry,
 - outsourced infrastructure,
 - data-sharing and automated compliance,
 - platform enforcement of speech norms, commerce, identity, and access.

From a Bourdieusian view, this is not “state disappears,” but “state power is re-mediated.” The key question becomes: who controls the classificatory instruments (IDs, scores, access rules, moderation, eligibility)?

3. Everyday habitus adapts to constant evaluation

- People internalize being rated: likes, reviews, response times, productivity dashboards, social credit-like proxies (not necessarily state-run).
- A “habitus of anticipatory conformity” spreads: you pre-edit yourself to please systems you can’t see.
- Anxiety, cynicism, and performative identity management become normal social skills.

Bourdieusian prediction: symbolic violence becomes *gentler* in appearance but more total in reach—because it is ambient and continuous.

Phase 3: A branching point ($\approx 15+$ years)

Bourdieu would likely insist the future is structured but not predetermined: crises can create hysteresis (habitus lagging behind a rapidly changing field), and that mismatch can produce both reaction and transformation.

So the scenario branches.

Branch A: “Platform neo-feudalism” (high concentration, low contestability)

- Infrastructure capital concentrates further (compute, models, distribution, identity).
- Access to visibility and economic opportunity becomes rent-based (pay-to-be-seen, pay-to-compete, subscription to tools).
- Social mobility is increasingly “gated” by invisible filters and paywalls.
- Politics becomes a struggle over spectacle and influence operations, while real decisions drift toward technocratic governance and corporate-state alliances.

In Bourdieusian terms:

the dominant class secures reproduction by controlling the instruments of classification (credentials, rankings, legitimacy) and presenting them as neutral optimization.

Branch B: “Regulated digital social democracy” (re-politicized classification)

This branch becomes plausible if counter-forces gain power:

- strong regulation of platform dominance,
- enforceable data rights,
- transparency and contestability for high-stakes algorithms,
- robust public options (public digital infrastructure, education tooling, health and employment services),
- revitalized unions / sectoral bargaining adapted to platform labor,
- credential reforms that reduce pure signal inflation.

In Bourdieusian terms:

the struggle shifts to the political field and bureaucratic field reclaiming meta-capital, making the rules of classification publicly contestable rather than privately optimized.

4) What would Bourdieu likely highlight as the *key mechanisms* of future domination?

1) The quiet power to classify

Who gets to define:

- what counts as “skill,” “risk,” “quality,” “hate,” “misinformation,” “merit,” “productivity,” “professionalism,” “good taste,” “trust”?

Bourdieu would see AI and platforms as multiplying classification everywhere—then hiding it inside technical systems.

2) The conversion machine

The future hinges on convertibility:

- Those who can convert economic capital into algorithmic/attention capital early (tools, teams, access) will convert it back into symbolic legitimacy (“thought leader,” “innovator,” “expert”), and then into more economic power.

This is classic Bourdieu: the game changes, but conversion advantages remain class-skewed.

3) The new forms of distinction

Distinction doesn’t vanish; it mutates:

- taste becomes “curation skill,”
- status becomes “signal control,”
- cultural capital becomes “fluent self-presentation across contexts,”
- social capital becomes “network reach plus platform credibility.”

Even anti-elitism can become a style—another form of distinction.

4) Symbolic violence via personalization

When the system is personalized, failure looks personal.

- “The algorithm didn’t show your work” becomes “your work isn’t good.”
- “You didn’t pass the filter” becomes “you didn’t deserve it.”
- “You were de-ranked” becomes “you’re problematic.”

Bourdieu would likely argue that this is a powerful modernization of symbolic violence.

5) Where would he look for resistance and change?

Bourdieu was not only a theorist of reproduction; he also cared about reflexivity and the conditions for collective action.

A Bourdieusian “hope channel” would focus on:

- making classification visible (audits, transparency, rights to explanation/appeal in high-stakes uses),
- building counter-institutions that generate alternative symbolic capital (trusted public media, independent credentialing, professional associations, unions adapted to digital labor),
- strengthening autonomy of fields (journalism not governed by engagement metrics; science not governed by vanity metrics; education not governed by compliance tech),
- politicizing the meta-field (treating platform governance and AI infrastructure as public questions, not private engineering choices),
- collective forms of capital (solidarity, organized bargaining power) that can counter the individualized competition the system encourages.

6) If you want the scenario in one sentence

A Bourdieu-inspired projection under today’s technological conditions would likely be:

Society trends toward a deeper, more automated form of social reproduction, where platforms and AI systems become dominant instruments of classification and consecration—intensifying inequality while making it feel natural—unless political and collective forces succeed in re-politicizing and democratizing the tools that define merit, visibility, and legitimacy.



An Algorithmic Future in Bourdieusian Key: A Probable Scenario for Society Under Platform and AI Conditions

To write an essay about what Pierre Bourdieu might sketch as a “probable” future today is not to pretend we can channel his voice. It is, rather, to run contemporary realities—platform economies, ubiquitous data capture, artificial intelligence, and the reorganization of work and culture—through the conceptual machine he built: field, habitus, capital, symbolic power, and social reproduction. If we take those premises seriously, the future does not look like a clean break into a new technological era; it looks like an intensification of an old story. Novel instruments appear, but the deeper logic persists: domination reproduces itself by reorganizing the rules of competition and by making those rules feel natural.

Bourdieu’s sociology begins with a refusal of naïve individualism. People do not simply choose their paths from a menu of options; they navigate worlds already structured into

fields—relatively autonomous arenas such as education, journalism, art, politics, science, and the economy—each with its own stakes and its own form of “what counts.” Within each field, actors struggle for advantageous positions using resources Bourdieu calls capital. Some capital is obvious, like money and property. Other forms are subtler: cultural capital (knowledge, credentials, taste, linguistic ease), social capital (networks, connections, obligations), and symbolic capital (recognized legitimacy—prestige, authority, the aura of deservingness). Underneath these struggles sits habitus, the durable dispositions people acquire through upbringing and trajectory: what feels possible, comfortable, admirable, shameful, “for people like us,” and what does not. The reproduction of inequality is not merely maintained by police or laws; it is stabilized through doxa—the unspoken common sense of a world—and through symbolic violence, the gentle coercion that makes social hierarchies appear deserved, normal, or inevitable.

From this standpoint, “technology” matters chiefly insofar as it alters (1) the distribution of capitals, (2) the convertibility of capitals, and (3) the instruments through which the world classifies and legitimizes persons. Today’s technological development—especially large platforms and AI systems—does all three at once. A Bourdieusian scenario would likely begin with a claim that seems modest but has large consequences: digital infrastructures increasingly function as a meta-layer across fields, shaping how journalism reaches audiences, how political speech circulates, how cultural products are discovered, how reputations form, how work is assigned and evaluated, and how education sorts and certifies. Where older societies relied on visible gatekeepers—editors, professors, party leaders, critics—today’s society increasingly relies on algorithmic gatekeeping: ranking, recommendation, scores, dashboards, filters, and automated decision pipelines. These instruments do not argue; they sort. And because they appear technical, neutral, or data-driven, they lend domination an aura of objectivity.

In such a world, new forms of capital become decisive—not replacing older capital, but becoming new currencies that can be converted into it. Attention capital (visibility, reach, follower networks), algorithmic capital (practical mastery of ranking systems and platform norms), data capital (access to and control over behavioral traces), and infrastructure capital (control over compute, models, distribution channels, identity systems) turn into money, status, and institutional authority with remarkable efficiency. The crucial Bourdieusian point is not merely that “influencers get rich,” but that the ability to accumulate these new capitals is itself stratified. Those with economic capital can buy tools, time, teams, and access; those with cultural capital can speak the dominant codes of expertise and professionalism; those with social capital can plug into the networks where opportunities circulate before they become public; those with symbolic capital can be believed, amplified, and forgiven. The new digital capitals are therefore not egalitarian “opportunities for all.” They are accelerants for the convertibility advantages that already favor the privileged.

A probable near-future, then, is one in which social reproduction becomes more continuous, more personalized, and less visible as structure. Consider education. Under a rhetoric of “personalized learning,” the system may split into two tracks: for the advantaged, technology becomes augmentation—tutors, enriched curricula, strategic guidance, and toolchains that amplify curiosity and mastery. For the disadvantaged, technology becomes supervision—monitoring, standardized remediation, compliance systems, behavioral tracking. Both groups use “AI,” but in different ways: one learns to command systems; the other learns to be commanded by them. This is habitus formation by design: an upbringing in entitlement to navigate institutions versus an upbringing in adaptation to constraints. The result is a familiar

outcome in new packaging: credentials and competence appear individually earned, while the conditions that made them likely remain socially distributed.

Work follows a similar pattern. Platform-mediated labor and AI-augmented evaluation push the labor market toward machine-readable signals: portfolios, reputation scores, response-time metrics, productivity dashboards, “culture fit” proxies, and automated screening. In a Bourdieusian frame, the decisive struggle is not only over wages but over the *criteria of worth*: what counts as skill, professionalism, and potential. The privileged are more likely to possess the cultural fluency needed to perform competence in the preferred idioms—polished self-presentation, strategic storytelling, the right tone, and the right networks. Others are filtered out earlier, often without encountering a human decision-maker, and are then encouraged to interpret exclusion as personal failure rather than structural sorting. Here symbolic violence becomes almost frictionless: the system’s verdict arrives as a notification, not as a confrontation.

Public culture likewise reorganizes around attention. Journalism, politics, and entertainment face the gravitational pull of engagement metrics, and engagement tends to reward novelty, conflict, moral drama, and identity signaling. Bourdieu would not reduce this to cynicism about audiences; he would locate it in the field logic imposed by distribution infrastructures. If visibility is scarce and controlled by algorithmic ranking, then producers adapt their strategies to that ecology. The result is not simply “worse discourse,” but an altered structure of symbolic power: legitimacy shifts from institutional gatekeepers to platform-mediated forms of consecration. “What matters” becomes what travels. Truth and nuance do not disappear, but they compete under rules that increasingly privilege the spectacular over the slow.

If this is the near-term intensification, the medium-term consolidation suggests a further step: the formation of a hybrid elite that spans corporate platforms, state bureaucracies, finance, security apparatuses, and elite educational institutions. Bourdieu wrote about a “state nobility” reproduced through schools and credentials. Updated to today’s conditions, one might expect a “digital state nobility” reproduced through selective pipelines: elite universities, prestigious labs, high-status firms, and state agencies, all sharing personnel, norms, and networks. Their shared capital is not only money and credentials; it is the practical authority to define categories—risk, safety, credibility, employability, permissible speech, acceptable identity, legitimate expertise. Bourdieu called the state’s unique power meta-capital: the power to set the exchange rates among capitals and to impose official classifications. In a platform/AI society, a key question is whether this meta-capital remains firmly public, or whether it becomes partly delegated to private infrastructures that govern access and legitimacy on the state’s behalf.

This is where the future’s most telling mechanism appears: the automation of doxa. As ranking systems and evaluative metrics permeate everyday life, people come to experience these classifications not as contestable political judgments but as descriptions of reality itself. If your content does not travel, your work feels unworthy. If your profile is filtered out, you feel unemployable. If your speech is downranked, you feel “problematic.” In classic symbolic violence, the dominated often adopt the categories that dominate them. Under algorithmic conditions, that adoption can become ambient: people adjust their behavior in anticipation of invisible evaluation. The habitus of the future may be a habitus of pre-emptive conformity, mixed with anxiety and performative self-curation. Importantly, this does not require an overt authoritarian regime. The sorting can be distributed across countless interfaces and

institutions, each claiming merely to optimize user experience, reduce risk, or improve efficiency.

Yet a Bourdieusian scenario is not pure determinism. Bourdieu insisted that when fields change rapidly, habitus can lag behind—a condition he called hysteresis—and that mismatch can generate crises, resentments, moral panics, and political volatility. The same technologies that intensify reproduction can also make contradictions sharper: precariousness amid abundance, surveillance amid freedom rhetoric, personalization amid standardization, “merit” amid inherited advantage. Out of such contradictions emerge branching futures.

One branch could be described as platform neo-feudalism: extreme concentration of infrastructure capital, rent-like tolls on visibility and participation, and a society where mobility depends on access to proprietary systems. Under this branch, classification remains opaque, and contesting it becomes difficult because it is framed as technical. Politics becomes increasingly theatrical, while consequential governance migrates toward technocratic or corporate-state arrangements.

Another branch, however, is conceivable: regulated digital social democracy. In this path, classification becomes publicly contestable. Transparency and appeal rights limit automated sorting in high-stakes domains; data rights and interoperability reduce lock-in; public options provide non-extractive infrastructures for communication and education; collective bargaining adapts to platform labor; and the autonomy of key fields—science, journalism, education—is defended against being wholly governed by engagement metrics. In Bourdieusian terms, this is a struggle over who holds meta-capital: whether the categories that shape life are imposed privately under the guise of optimization, or publicly through accountable institutions.

A Bourdieusian essay ends not with prophecy but with a diagnostic claim about what is at stake. If Bourdieu were alive today and reasoning from his premises, he would likely argue that the central conflict of the coming decades is not “humans versus machines” but the political struggle over the instruments of classification and consecration. AI and platforms do not merely automate tasks; they automate judgments about worth. They transform symbolic power into software. The probable future, if present tendencies continue unchecked, is an intensified reproduction of hierarchy—more personalized, more continuous, more deniable. The counter-future depends on whether societies can make the new classificatory powers visible, contestable, and collectively governed.

In short: the Bourdieusian future scenario is not a science-fiction leap. It is an old social logic wearing new technical clothes—unless we insist on changing the rules of the game rather than merely learning to play it better.

Talcott Parsons

Please describe in detail what kind of future scenario you would have drawn for the probable development of society based on your theoretical premises if Talcott Parsons were still alive today, based on today's technological development and today's conditions.

Below is a Parsonsian-style “most probable” future scenario—*not* a claim about what Talcott Parsons “would definitely say,” but what a forecast consistent with his theoretical premises would likely look like if he were analyzing society under today’s technological conditions (AI, platforms, global interdependence, climate risk, demographic change, etc.).

I’ll do it in three layers:

1. the premises (what in Parsons’ theory forces the forecast to take a certain shape),
2. a diagnosis of today in Parsons’ key categories, and
3. a probable development path (with branching outcomes), using his system logic (AGIL, differentiation, integration, value-generalization).

1) The theoretical premises that shape a Parsonsian future scenario

A. Society is a system that must solve four “functional problems” (AGIL)

Parsons’ best-known heuristic is that any complex social system must continuously meet four requirements:

- A – Adaptation: secure resources and adjust to the environment (economy/technology)
- G – Goal attainment: set collective priorities and mobilize for them (politics/state)
- I – Integration: coordinate parts, manage conflict, sustain trust and law (legal order, civil sphere, community)
- L – Latency / pattern maintenance: reproduce motivation, identities, values (family, education, culture, religion, media as socialization)

A Parsonsian forecast is less “here’s the next gadget” and more:

“Where will strains accumulate among A, G, I, L—and what new institutions will emerge to restore a workable balance?”

B. Modernization tends to mean differentiation and “adaptive upgrading”

Parsons’ evolutionary story isn’t “everything gets better,” but it *is* directional:

- Societies tend to become more functionally differentiated (economy, polity, law, science, education become more specialized).
- Over time they tend toward more generalized, universalistic norms (rights, citizenship, merit criteria)—because large complex systems can't run purely on kinship/particularism.
- Technological change is treated as adaptive upgrading: it increases system capacity, but produces *lag* in integration and culture.

So a Parsons-consistent future scenario will predict:

- more differentiation (new subsystems and professions),
- institutional “catch-up” after shocks,
- recurring integration crises when change outruns norms.

C. Order is stabilized by generalized “media” (money, power, influence, value-commitments)

Parsons argued large systems coordinate through symbolic media:

- Money (economic exchange)
- Power (political capacity)
- Influence (social persuasion/legitimation)
- Value-commitments (deep normative loyalty)

A Parsonsian “today” diagnosis sees digital tech and AI as massively amplifying money flows, power capacity, and influence, while value-commitments lag or fragment—creating instability.

D. Strain and conflict are real, but interpreted as “integration problems” and “institutional lag”

Parsons is often criticized for underplaying conflict. But in his own terms, conflict and polarization are typically read as:

- institutional mismatch (new conditions; old norms),
- role strain (people can't meet expectations),
- legitimation deficits (the system can't justify decisions convincingly),
- weakening of integrative mechanisms (law, education, shared public sphere).

His “probable future” is therefore a story of strain → institutional experimentation → partial reintegration (or, if reintegration fails, de-differentiation/authoritarian closure).

2) A Parsonsian diagnosis of “today’s conditions” (through AGIL)

A – Adaptation (economy/technology): acceleration without stable social settlement

Key features today, in Parsons' terms:

- AI and automation raise productive capacity and decision speed (“adaptive upgrading”), but also destabilize occupational roles and the reward structure.
- Platform infrastructures concentrate coordination capacity in a few organizations (new “strategic centers” of adaptation).
- Data becomes a quasi-resource like capital—except it is also *relational* (about people), so it immediately triggers integration and legitimacy problems.

Parsons would likely frame this as: adaptation is outrunning integration.

G – Goal attainment (politics): legitimacy strain + capacity race

He would likely focus on:

- Governments facing simultaneous pressures: economic competition, security, climate adaptation, demographic aging, public health preparedness.
- A growing capacity race (states and large firms) to harness AI for administration, surveillance, military, and economic advantage.
- But also a legitimacy deficit: citizens can't easily see *why* decisions are made when algorithmic systems and complex supply chains mediate outcomes.

So: goal attainment expands in capability, but risks losing legitimacy—especially if decisions look opaque or unfair.

I – Integration (law/community): fragmentation of the public sphere

Parsons would likely see today's integrative challenge as:

- communication abundance but normative fragmentation (many publics, weak shared standards of truth/authority),
- rising disputes over membership boundaries (migration, identity, “who belongs”),
- declining trust in institutions that previously stabilized integration (media, parties, courts, universities).

Digitally amplified “influence” without a shared normative frame creates chronic integration strain.

L – Latency/pattern maintenance (culture/socialization): value pluralism under stress

Parsons would likely highlight:

- Education and family systems struggling to socialize stable role expectations in a rapidly changing labor market.
- Increased mental health strain as individuals face continual reskilling and identity negotiation.
- Culture splitting between universalistic ideals (rights, inclusion) and renewed particularisms (nationalism, subcultural closure).

In Parsons' terms: pattern maintenance becomes a bottleneck—society can't reproduce the motivational and normative “software” fast enough.

3) The probable future scenario if Parsons were analyzing the next decades

A Parsonsian forecast usually isn't a single storyline—it's a most probable path with branching depending on whether integration can be rebuilt.

Phase 1 (near-term): “Adaptive upgrading” produces structural strain (A outpaces I and L)

Probable developments:

1. Rapid role reconfiguration
 - Many routine cognitive and administrative roles are reorganized around AI tooling.
 - Not simply “job loss,” but job decomposition: tasks split between humans, automated agents, and new supervisory/audit roles.
 - Parsons would predict widespread role strain: expectations shift faster than training, status norms, and professional ethics.
2. A new stratification pattern forms
Instead of only “capital vs labor,” Parsons would expect status and class to reorganize around:
 - credentialed capacity to work with/through AI systems,
 - access to high-trust institutions and networks,
 - positions that control “media” (money, power, influence, data).

A likely outcome is a sharper divide between:

- system-integrated elites (high mobility, high control over information and organizations),
 - precarious service and care sectors (still human-intensive),
 - and a squeezed middle whose roles are continually redesigned.
3. Legitimation crises around algorithmic decisions
Parsons cared a lot about legitimacy. He would expect:
 - conflict over fairness in hiring, credit, policing, welfare administration,
 - disputes over who is accountable when decisions are “system-produced,”
 - political mobilization demanding explainability, due process, and rights in digital systems.

Parsonsian interpretation: This is normal “lag” during modernization: adaptive systems upgrade faster than integrative and cultural systems can stabilize.

Phase 2 (medium-term): institutional “catch-up” through new integrative mechanisms

If Parsons is optimistic in his characteristic way, he expects societies to institutionalize new norms and organizations to restore equilibrium.

A. New legal-constitutional frameworks for the digital order

A Parsons-consistent prediction is not “tech will self-regulate,” but:

- development of a rights regime for data, algorithmic decision-making, and digital identity,
- procedural protections: auditability, appeal mechanisms, non-discrimination standards,
- clearer lines of responsibility across state and corporate actors.

This is classic Parsons: integration is rebuilt by institutionalizing norms into law.

B. Expansion and professionalization of “fiduciary” institutions

Parsons gave special weight to institutions that maintain values and motivation (education, medicine, welfare).

He would likely predict growth of:

- lifelong education systems,
- certification and licensure around AI-critical domains,
- new “trust professions” (auditors, model risk officers, data stewards, safety engineers, civic transparency roles).

This is differentiation: new specialized roles emerge to handle new problems.

C. Reconfiguration of the welfare state toward “capability maintenance”

Parsons would not necessarily predict a utopia, but he might see a practical shift:

- from welfare as last-resort income support
- toward welfare as continuous employability + social participation infrastructure (training, childcare, healthcare, mobility, digital access).

This stabilizes L (motivation) and I (integration) under rapid A (adaptation).

Phase 3 (longer-term): a new equilibrium—or a bifurcation into competing “societal models”

Parsons would likely think the most probable outcome is not one global endpoint, but multiple modernities that solve AGIL differently.

Track 1: “Liberal-integrative modernization” (high differentiation + rule-bound integration)

Characteristics:

- strong legal oversight of AI and platforms,
- relatively open inclusion (citizenship expansion, anti-discrimination norms),

- continued high differentiation (autonomous science, independent courts, plural civil society),
- heavy investment in education and legitimacy-building institutions.

Parsons would see this as the “evolutionarily stable” track because it sustains complexity without collapsing integration.

Risk: chronic legitimacy fights remain, but institutions absorb them.

Track 2: “Technocratic-administrative closure” (capacity prioritized over pluralism)

Characteristics:

- high state or corporate coordination power,
- reduced transparency justified by security/efficiency,
- thicker surveillance and behavioral steering,
- civic integration achieved more by control than consent.

Parsons would interpret this as a solution to G and I by sacrificing some of L’s pluralism and some of I’s procedural openness.

Risk: it can stabilize in the short run, but produces long-run legitimacy fragility and resistance.

Track 3: “Fragmented pluralism” (weak integration, islands of high tech)

Characteristics:

- advanced tech in some sectors, but low institutional coherence,
- persistent polarization and distrust,
- private governance (platform rules) substitutes for public law,
- uneven education and health capacity.

This is the scenario where A advances, but I and L fail to keep up, producing chronic instability.

Parsons would likely call this a prolonged state of “strain” with episodic crisis management rather than stable equilibrium.

4) What Parsons would see as the central “hinge variables” determining which path dominates

If you want the Parsonsian logic condensed into “what decides the future,” it’s basically this:

1) Can integration be rebuilt in the digital public sphere?

- If societies create trustworthy procedures for truth claims, accountability, and dispute resolution, integration stabilizes.

- If not, influence becomes weaponized and legitimacy collapses into permanent culture war.

2) Can the education/socialization system keep pace with role change?

- If education becomes continuous and widely accessible, role strain is reduced.
- If not, a permanent underclass of “role-displaced” citizens grows, fueling anti-system politics.

3) Can political systems maintain legitimacy while using powerful algorithmic tools?

- Capacity without legitimacy pushes toward authoritarian or technocratic closure.
- Legitimacy without capacity leads to drift and paralysis.

4) Can societies generalize values to include new boundaries of membership?

Parsons would stress inclusion as a modernization trend (not always linear).

In today’s context that means:

- inclusion across identity lines,
- inclusion of migrants,
- inclusion of people displaced by technological change,
- possibly even inclusion norms regarding “human autonomy” against manipulative systems.

5) A concrete “Parsons-style” future snapshot (what society might look like when it stabilizes)

If the integrative track wins out, a Parsons-consistent stabilized society (say, a couple of decades out) would likely display:

- Economy (A): AI-augmented production with tighter standards; many services reorganized into human–AI teams; productivity gains partly redirected into education/care sectors.
- Polity (G): stronger regulatory state capacity focused on infrastructure, safety, and strategic competition; more procedural constraints to preserve legitimacy.
- Law/civil sphere (I): “algorithmic due process” becomes normal—audits, appeals, liability standards; civic organizations specialize in oversight.
- Culture/education/family (L): lifelong learning becomes routine; socialization emphasizes adaptability plus civic norms for digital life (media literacy, privacy norms, responsibility for automated decisions).

The “new normal” would be: higher complexity, more specialized institutions, and a thicker layer of procedural governance to keep the system integrated.

6) One important caveat (still within Parsons' framework)

Parsons tends to assume that institutionalization and value-generalization can keep up. A modern Parsonsian update would probably have to concede something like:

- the speed and scale of digital influence operations,
- the concentration of platform power,
- climate-driven shocks and migration pressures,

may produce more frequent, sharper integration crises than his mid-20th-century model anticipated—so the future might be less “smooth evolution” and more “punctuated equilibrium”: long periods of strain interrupted by rapid legal and organizational restructuring.

A Parsonsian Essay on the Probable Future Development of Society Under Contemporary Technological Conditions

If Talcott Parsons were alive today and asked to sketch a probable future scenario for modern society under contemporary technological conditions, he would likely begin by resisting the temptation to write a narrative of gadgets, markets, and headlines. His approach would be more structural and more austere: to ask what kinds of pressures an increasingly complex social system must absorb, and what kinds of institutional arrangements it must invent in order to remain stable enough to reproduce itself over time. In Parsons' framework, the decisive question is not whether technology is “good” or “bad,” but whether the institutional order can keep pace with the new demands placed upon it—whether it can coordinate action, sustain legitimacy, and maintain motivational commitments while adapting to rapid change.

In this sense, the future would not be predicted as a single linear trajectory but as a pattern of strains and adjustments: technological acceleration pushing one side of the system forward, and the slower-moving integrative and cultural mechanisms scrambling to catch up. The probable future, then, is a story of imbalance and re-equilibration—of institutional lag followed by selective reconstruction.

Functional Preconditions and the Problem of System Balance

Parsons' most influential general claim is that any society must continuously meet certain functional requirements if it is to persist. Though his famous “AGIL” scheme can be criticized for abstraction, it remains an effective compass for thinking about systemic stability. A society must adapt to its environment and secure resources (adaptation), it must set and pursue collective priorities (goal attainment), it must coordinate its parts and manage conflicts (integration), and it must reproduce the motivations and values that make social roles

workable (latency or pattern maintenance). When these functions are balanced, societies can be both complex and relatively stable; when one function races ahead, strains accumulate elsewhere.

Technological development in the early twenty-first century—especially digital platforms, algorithmic coordination, and now rapidly advancing artificial intelligence—looks, in Parsonsian terms, like a dramatic “adaptive upgrading.” It expands the system’s capacity to process information, allocate resources, and coordinate actions at scale. But Parsons would almost certainly add a crucial caveat: upgrades in adaptive capacity tend to expose vulnerabilities in integration and pattern maintenance. The system becomes more powerful, but also more brittle, because the normative, educational, and legal frameworks that sustain trust and legitimacy typically move more slowly than technological capability.

Thus, the probable future begins with an asymmetry: the adaptive subsystem outpaces the integrative and cultural subsystems. The outcome depends on whether institutions can be reconfigured to restore balance.

The Technological Acceleration of Adaptation: New Capacities, New Dependencies

From Parsons’ perspective, the contemporary economy is not merely a market but a core subsystem responsible for adaptation. It supplies energy, resources, and organizational flexibility. Digital infrastructures and AI intensify this subsystem’s effectiveness: they compress decision cycles, extend organizational reach, and enable a novel kind of coordination—real-time, predictive, and increasingly automated.

However, these same capacities generate new dependencies. In earlier industrial society, production and administration were “heavy” and visible: factories, bureaucracies, and professional chains of command. In digital society, the crucial infrastructures are often intangible and concentrated: cloud services, platform ecosystems, data pipelines, model architectures, and invisible scoring systems. Parsons would likely interpret this not simply as economic change, but as a transformation in the “media” through which modern systems coordinate—money, power, influence, and value-commitments. Technology multiplies money’s speed, amplifies power’s reach, and intensifies influence across the public sphere. Yet the stabilizing medium of shared value-commitment—what makes people accept outcomes as legitimate even when unfavorable—does not automatically scale with connectivity. Indeed, it can fracture.

The likely near-term effect is role disruption. Occupations are not merely bundles of tasks; they are stabilized expectations tied to training, status, and moral norms. When AI reorganizes work by decomposing tasks and redistributing responsibilities, it destabilizes the “role structure” that connects individuals to institutions. Parsons would predict a widespread experience of role strain: people asked to be perpetually adaptable while remaining accountable, cooperative, and motivated. The social order becomes less a ladder of stable careers and more a shifting network of projects, certifications, and algorithmically mediated evaluations.

In the short run, then, modernization produces a paradox: more capacity and less security, more coordination and more uncertainty.

Integration Under Pressure: Legitimacy, Trust, and the Fragmented Public Sphere

If adaptation has accelerated, integration becomes the bottleneck. Integration refers to the mechanisms that hold society together: law, shared norms, civic trust, dispute resolution, and the general sense that institutions are entitled to make binding decisions.

From a Parsonsian standpoint, much contemporary conflict can be described as an integration crisis in slow motion. The public sphere has become saturated with messages, yet deprived of stable mechanisms for evaluating authority and truth. Digital platforms are powerful vehicles of influence, but influence without shared normative anchors becomes volatile. In earlier periods, integrative institutions—parties, unions, professional associations, major media organizations, universities, courts—provided comparatively consolidated channels through which disagreements could be translated into negotiable claims. Today the channels have proliferated, and the criteria of credibility have become contested. This does not eliminate integration, but it shifts it toward a more fragile form: integration by temporary coalitions, by brand-like identities, and by algorithmic amplification rather than by durable civic frameworks.

Parsons would also focus on legitimacy problems generated by algorithmic decision-making. Modern societies require procedural legitimacy: people comply with decisions not only because outcomes favor them, but because the process seems fair, knowable, and accountable. When decisions are produced by opaque systems—credit scoring, hiring filters, predictive policing, welfare eligibility algorithms, content ranking—the process becomes harder to justify. The question “Who is responsible?” grows murky. And when responsibility becomes murky, legitimacy erodes.

This is a critical hinge. Parsons would likely see the coming decades as a struggle to institutionalize new forms of procedural legitimacy suited to automated systems: rights of explanation, standards of accountability, audit regimes, and enforceable limits on manipulation. Whether society stabilizes depends heavily on the success of this institutionalization.

Pattern Maintenance and Socialization: The Cultural Lag of Modernity

If integration is the system’s “glue,” pattern maintenance is its “reproductive organ.” A society does not persist merely by allocating resources or passing laws; it persists because it continuously socializes new members and renews the motivations of existing ones. Families, schools, cultural traditions, and moral narratives make the role structure livable. They teach not only skills, but expectations: what counts as achievement, what counts as responsibility, what counts as dignity.

Technological acceleration places unprecedented strain on these processes. When the labor market demands constant reskilling, education can no longer function as a one-time rite of passage into adulthood; it must become a lifelong institution. When public discourse is hyper-mediated, civic socialization must include media literacy and norms of epistemic responsibility. When identities are both pluralized and politicized, societies must renegotiate the terms of inclusion—who counts as a full member and on what basis.

Parsons historically emphasized the modernization trend toward universalism: societies move from kinship and particularism toward generalized norms—citizenship, rights, merit. But today he would likely note a counterpressure: particularistic reattachments to subcultures, nations, and identities that promise belonging amid uncertainty. The future depends on which

tendency dominates. If societies succeed in “value generalization”—creating widely accepted norms for fairness, autonomy, and civic equality within digital conditions—then differentiation can proceed without collapse. If not, the outcome may be a persistent culture war that corrodes trust and makes collective problem-solving impossible.

Goal Attainment in an Era of Capacity Races: The State, the Market, and Strategic Competition

Parsons would not ignore geopolitics and state power; he would treat them as the goal-attainment function of the system. Today, state capacity is being redefined under conditions of strategic technological competition, climate risk, and demographic stress. Governments will be pressured to deploy AI for administration, security, and economic planning. At the same time, they must preserve legitimacy in societies that are pluralistic and suspicious of opaque control.

This produces a likely bifurcation of societal models. Some societies may drift toward technocratic closure—high capacity, high surveillance, lower pluralism—securing integration by control rather than consent. Others will attempt liberal-integrative modernization—high capacity paired with robust rights, oversight, and institutional checks. Still others may experience fragmented pluralism—advanced pockets of technology within an incoherent civic and political order, producing chronic instability.

In Parsonsian terms, these are different solutions to AGIL tensions. Technocratic closure tries to fix goal attainment and integration by weakening pluralism; liberal-integrative modernization tries to preserve differentiation by thickening legal and civic procedures; fragmented pluralism fails to generate coherent integration, leaving adaptive forces to reshape society without stable normative mediation.

The Most Probable Path: Institutional Catch-Up Through Differentiation

Parsons’ overall orientation would likely remain cautiously evolutionary. He did not imagine modernization as frictionless progress, but he did imagine that complex societies tend to invent specialized institutions to manage newly emergent problems. Therefore the most probable future, in his terms, is not societal collapse but institutional catch-up. We should expect, after a period of disorder and experimentation, the emergence of new stabilizing structures: legal frameworks for algorithmic accountability, professional roles devoted to auditing and safety, educational institutions devoted to lifelong reskilling, and welfare arrangements oriented toward maintaining participation rather than merely alleviating poverty.

Such a scenario is not utopian. It implies new hierarchies, new forms of exclusion, and new conflicts over who controls the key media of coordination—data, models, infrastructures. But it suggests that the system’s overall trajectory will be toward a new equilibrium in which digital and AI-driven adaptation is domesticated by legal norms and cultural expectations. In other words, the social system will attempt to turn technology from a disruptive force into an institutionalized capacity.

A Parsonsian Conclusion: The Future as a Test of Integration

If Parsons were alive today, he would likely conclude that the central problem of our technological era is not primarily technological. It is integrative and moral: can modern societies generate sufficiently generalized, enforceable norms to keep the expanded powers of money, influence, and state capacity compatible with trust, dignity, and membership? Can they convert opaque automated power into accountable procedures? Can they socialize citizens into roles that are continually changing without producing widespread demoralization and resentment?

The probable development of society under today’s conditions is therefore best imagined as a contest between acceleration and institutionalization. Technology will continue to upgrade adaptive capacity. Whether society becomes more stable, more authoritarian, or more fragmented will depend on how successfully it rebuilds integration and pattern maintenance under digital conditions. In Parsonsian terms, the decisive question of the future is whether modernization can continue without tearing the normative fabric that makes complex cooperation possible.

If it can, the result will be a new kind of modern equilibrium: more differentiated, more procedurally regulated, and more dependent than ever on institutions that translate technical power into legitimate order. If it cannot, the future will not be postmodern freedom but systemic strain—periodic crises of legitimacy, intensified polarization, and the recurrent temptation to solve integration problems through coercive closure. Either way, a Parsonsian lens implies that the fate of technological society will be determined less by the sophistication of its machines than by the sophistication of its institutions.

Niklas Luhmann

Please describe in detail what kind of future scenario you would have drawn for the probable development of society based on your theoretical premises if Niklas Luhmann were still alive today, based on today's technological development and today's conditions.

I can’t know what Niklas Luhmann *himself* would have written if he were alive in 2025. But you *can* build a fairly “Luhmann-compatible” future scenario by taking his core premises seriously and then asking: what kinds of structural pressures do today’s technologies and conditions add to the ongoing self-reproduction of society as communication? Below is a detailed scenario sketch in that spirit: not a prophecy, not a plan, and not a moral diagnosis—more like a theory-guided description of likely tendencies and the kinds of stability problems and new forms that would plausibly emerge.

1) The theoretical premises that constrain any “Luhmannian future scenario”

A Luhmann-based scenario starts from a few hard commitments:

Society is communication, not people

- Society consists of communications, not of individuals.
- Individuals (as conscious systems) are the environment of society. They matter, but they do not *compose* society.
- What develops historically are patterns of communication (and the forms that stabilize them).

Modern society is functionally differentiated

Modernity is not “one hierarchy” but a set of relatively autonomous function systems, each with its own binary code and its own way of producing meaning:

- Economy: payment / non-payment
- Politics: power / no power (government/opposition; collectively binding decisions vs. not)
- Law: legal / illegal
- Science: true / untrue
- Mass media / public communication: information / non-information (what counts as “news,” salience)
- Education: success / failure (or qualified/not qualified)
- Health/medicine: healthy / ill (or treatable/not treatable)
...and so on.

No system can replace the others without losing what it uniquely does. That’s why “politics should control the economy,” or “science should rule,” etc., repeatedly disappoints: each system can only operate in its own code.

Systems are operationally closed but structurally coupled

Each function system:

- Produces its own operations (communications) from its own operations (autopoiesis).
- Reacts to “outside events” only as internally constructed information.
- Still becomes tightly interdependent through structural couplings (e.g., politics ↔ law via constitutions; science ↔ economy via R&D funding; media ↔ politics via attention).

Modernity increases complexity, and society survives by selection

A very Luhmannian expectation is:

- Complexity keeps rising.

- The central challenge becomes: How can systems keep selecting (deciding, judging, pricing, legislating, publishing, etc.) fast enough to reproduce themselves?

That makes time, attention, trust, and risk the crucial media-like problems.

2) “Today’s conditions” translated into Luhmann’s vocabulary

From a Luhmann perspective, today’s most consequential shifts are not “technology” as gadgets, but changes in the conditions of communication:

A) Digital networks massively expand communicative connectivity

- Communication becomes cheaper, faster, more persistent, more searchable.
- Boundaries between interaction, organization, and public communication blur (a private message can become a public event instantly).

B) Algorithmic selection becomes a dominant form of second-order observation

Platforms, recommender systems, metrics dashboards, and automated moderation do something very Luhmannian:

- They observe communications and then select communications based on those observations.
- This produces *feedback loops* where communication increasingly orients to being selected (ranking, trending, virality, KPI).

C) AI (especially generative systems) alters authorship, attribution, and expectation

A Luhmannian translation is:

- AI is not “a new participant with consciousness,” but it becomes a high-powered mechanism for producing communicative proposals (texts, images, code, arguments, plans).
- That changes the ecology of communication by flooding society with plausible utterances and reducing the cost of variation.

D) Society faces more “global” problem references

Climate, pandemics, supply chains, cyber risks, migration, financial contagion—these are not just issues, they are problem forms that exceed territorial politics while still requiring it for collectively binding decisions.

This is the classic Luhmann tension: world society in function systems vs. nation-state segmentation in politics.

3) The core future scenario: a society that becomes “more itself” under digital conditions

A Luhmannian scenario will *not* predict “utopia vs. collapse.” It will predict something more counterintuitive:

The most probable development is:

functional differentiation persists, but the media of communication change, producing tighter couplings, faster cycles, and more visible contingency—without creating a new center.

That means:

- More connectivity does *not* integrate society into one coordinated whole.
- More information does *not* produce more consensus.
- More computational capacity does *not* produce controllability.
- Instead: the systems accelerate their own logics, become more sensitive to irritation, and create new stabilizers (organizations, standards, regulation, reputational systems).

4) What happens to “public reality” when selection is platformized?

4.1 From mass media to a hybrid: platformized public communication

Luhmann treated mass media as a system with its own code (information/non-information) that constructs “reality” for society.

With platforms:

- The selection of “what counts as information” becomes distributed and commercially optimized (attention, engagement).
- Many communications are addressed simultaneously to multiple systems (politics, economy, law, intimacy), creating chronic context collapse.

Probable consequence:

Public reality becomes more fragmented, but also more synchronized in bursts (viral events), producing alternating phases of:

- high volatility (storms of attention)
- and rapid forgetting (replacement by new topics)

This is very compatible with Luhmann’s emphasis on time-binding through media: platforms shorten the “present” and make the past searchable but socially irrelevant.

4.2 Second-order observation becomes ordinary

People and organizations increasingly observe:

- how others observe them,
- how algorithms observe them,
- how metrics observe everyone.

In Luhmann's terms: society shifts further into second-order observation as routine practice.

Probable consequence:

More reflexivity does not guarantee wisdom; it often produces:

- strategic communication,
- moralization as a shortcut,
- cynicism and distrust,
- and a premium on scandal forms (because scandal is an efficient format for attention selection).

5) AI as a new “variation engine” for communication

This is one of the most interesting places to extend Luhmann without forcing him into sci-fi.

5.1 AI increases variation; selection becomes the bottleneck

If AI makes it cheap to generate:

- arguments, reports, legal drafts, marketing, research summaries, propaganda, romance messages, etc.,

then society gets an explosion of possible communications (variation).

But systems still survive through selection and stabilization.

Probable consequence:

The scarce resource shifts further toward:

- attention,
- credibility,
- authentication,
- and *institutionalized selection procedures*.

So we should expect a growth of:

- verification services,
- provenance standards,
- “proof of personhood” ideas,
- organizational gatekeeping,
- legal duties for traceability,
- and reputational infrastructures.

5.2 Authorship and responsibility become structurally ambiguous

Modern society relies heavily on attributing communications to persons and organizations (for trust, liability, legitimacy).

AI muddies this:

- Who “said” it?
- Who “decided” it?
- Who is accountable?

Probable consequence:

A wave of re-attribution work:

- new legal doctrines,
- new organizational procedures (“human in the loop” as ritual *and* as risk management),
- new professional roles whose function is to certify responsibility.

In Luhmannian language: organizations will create programs to keep decisions *decidable* under attribution uncertainty.

5.3 “Communication without understanding” becomes normal

Luhmann already separated:

- consciousness (understanding as a psychic event),
- from communication (a social event).

AI will amplify a scenario where:

- communications can be produced and responded to fluently,
- without any human understanding at the point of production.

Probable consequence:

Society adapts by shifting what counts as “understanding” toward:

- operational success criteria (“did it work?”),
- or institutional criteria (“was it certified?”),
rather than internal mental states.

6) Politics: more demand for steering, less capacity to steer

This is a classic Luhmann move: modern society constantly demands political control over problems politics cannot control.

6.1 Politics faces a legitimacy problem under accelerated attention cycles

Platforms shorten political time:

- permanent campaigning,
- instantaneous scandal,
- polarization as a stable attention format.

Probable consequence:

Politics increasingly communicates *about* politics (meta-politics), because:

- it must constantly reproduce legitimacy under observation,
- while real steering is blocked by other systems' autonomy.

6.2 Crisis governance becomes the “normal exception”

Climate disasters, cyber incidents, pandemics, financial shocks—these create repeated states of urgency.

Probable consequence:

Politics shifts toward:

- emergency semantics,
- executive concentration,
- rapid regulation,
- symbolic gestures that satisfy public communication, while often outsourcing implementation to:
 - administration,
 - law,
 - markets,
 - or private platform governance.

So the system stabilizes itself less by long-term planning and more by continuous crisis processing.

6.3 World society vs. territorial politics intensifies

Function systems (economy, science, media) are structurally global. Politics remains territorially segmented.

Probable consequence:

More mismatch phenomena:

- global problems with local mandates,
- international coordination failures,
- and the growth of transnational “quasi-political” arenas (standards bodies, corporate governance regimes, treaty networks).

7) Law: expansion, fragmentation, and privatized norm production

7.1 Law proliferates because complexity proliferates

Digital life produces endless new conflict types:

- data rights,
- AI liability,
- platform governance,
- cross-border jurisdiction problems.

Probable consequence:

Law grows in volume and procedural sophistication, but not necessarily in unity.

7.2 Legal pluralism becomes normal

Alongside state law, you increasingly get:

- platform terms of service,
- content moderation rules,
- financial compliance regimes,
- industry standards.

From a Luhmann lens, these are competing norm-generating structures that stabilize expectations without fully integrating.

Probable consequence:

Individuals experience normativity less as “one legal order” and more as:

- layered regimes,
- conditional access,
- contractual governance,
- “account status” as a quasi-legal condition.

8) Economy: payment remains the code, but the forms mutate

Luhmann would not say “capitalism ends because AI.” He would expect:

- the payment/non-payment code persists,
- but markets reorganize around new infrastructures.

8.1 Platformization and data infrastructures deepen

Economic competition shifts to controlling:

- marketplaces,
- identity and reputation,
- logistics,
- compute and data resources.

Probable consequence:

Stronger winner-take-most dynamics, followed by political/legal counter-movements—without any final resolution.

8.2 Automation changes labor inclusion patterns

A Luhmannian angle here is inclusion/exclusion:

- People are included in society through multiple systems (education, labor market, politics, law).

- If labor demand polarizes, inclusion becomes more conditional.

Probable consequence:

New stratifications form *across* function systems:

- credential inflation in education,
- precariousness in economy,
- differential exposure to surveillance and scoring,
- uneven access to legal recourse.

9) Science: stronger influence, stronger contestation

9.1 AI-assisted science speeds up truth production and error production

If science accelerates publication and synthesis, it also accelerates:

- noise,
- irreproducibility,
- strategic misuse.

Probable consequence:

Science responds by strengthening:

- peer review automation,
- methodological policing,
- provenance standards,
- and boundary work (what counts as “science”).

9.2 The coupling between science and politics becomes more conflictual

Politics wants decisions; science produces uncertainty ranges.

Probable consequence:

More “science communication about science communication,” and more public disputes that are less about facts than about trust and authority.

10) Ecology and climate: “resonance” increases, coordination remains structurally limited

Luhmann’s *Ecological Communication* argument (in simplified form) is:

- the environment does not “communicate” with society;
- society communicates about the environment, within its own codes.

So climate change becomes socially real as:

- economic costs,
- political conflicts,

- legal obligations,
- scientific models,
- media events,
- health crises.

Probable consequence:

More resonance (more communications referencing ecological constraints), but not automatic integration.

Instead, each system processes climate through its own code:

- economy: pricing/insurance/investment
- law: liability/standards/rights
- politics: legitimacy/conflict/redistribution
- science: models/uncertainty/attribution
- media: events/scandals/attention cycles

This produces high activity without a single “solution center,” and makes oscillation between:

- ambitious programs,
 - and implementation fatigue
- a very stable pattern.

11) Three branching “future paths” that remain compatible with Luhmann’s premises

Because Luhmann treats the future as contingent, a good Luhmannian scenario gives branch points rather than one storyline.

Path A: Managed acceleration

- Society normalizes AI as infrastructure.
- Verification, law, and organizational procedures catch up.
- Inequality rises but is politically buffered by selective redistribution and new inclusion programs.

Result: modern society continues, more bureaucratically and more algorithmically, with frequent crises but no systemic breakdown.

Path B: Re-stratification via access regimes

- Identity, reputation, and platform access become the key social “passports.”
- A small set of organizations controls critical infrastructures (compute, payments, information channels).
- Exclusion becomes less visible but more absolute (deplatforming, credit denial, automated risk scoring).

Result: function systems persist, but lived reality feels more like “digital estates” (tiers of access).

Path C: Fragmented world society

- Geopolitical blocs harden.
- Standards, legal regimes, and digital infrastructures diverge.
- Economy and science remain globally interdependent but politically constrained.

Result: a more conflictual world society with duplicated infrastructures and higher costs of coordination—yet still no return to isolated “national societies.”

12) The most “Luhmannian” punchline

If you ask, “So what does the future look like?” a Luhmann-compatible answer is almost disappointing on purpose:

- Society will not become unified.
- It will not become fully steerable.
- It will not become fully transparent.
- It will become more complex, more self-observing, and more dependent on organizations and infrastructures that stabilize selection under overload.

In other words: under digital and AI conditions, modern society most likely becomes more intensely modern—more differentiated, more contingent, more fast-cycling, and more reliant on procedural trust.

A Luhmannian Future: Society as Communication in the Age of Platforms and AI

To ask what kind of future scenario Niklas Luhmann would draw if he were alive today is, in a strict sense, to ask for something he would probably resist delivering: a prophecy, a program, a normative blueprint. Luhmann’s sociology was never designed to tell society where it *should* go, and it rarely attempted to say where it *will* go in any linear sense. Its ambition was different and, in a way, more unsettling: to describe how modern society reproduces itself as communication under conditions of increasing complexity, and how its major subsystems—politics, law, economy, science, education, mass media, and others—continue to operate as autonomous meaning-machines that cannot be “unified” without ceasing to function.

If Luhmann were writing in 2025, the novelty would not be “technology” as such. Modernity has always been technological. The novelty would be the way digital networks, platform infrastructures, and artificial intelligence reconfigure the conditions under which

communication is produced, selected, stabilized, attributed, and forgotten. In a Luhmannian frame, this is a question about *forms of selection*: who or what selects which communications become relevant, credible, actionable, and binding—and how these selections feed back into further communication.

This essay sketches a plausible Luhmann-compatible scenario: not “what Luhmann would have said,” but what follows when one takes his theoretical premises seriously and translates today’s technological and political-economic conditions into his vocabulary. The result is not a single future, but a set of tendencies and branching paths—each consistent with the idea that modern society is functionally differentiated, operationally closed in its subsystems, and yet densely structurally coupled through institutions, infrastructures, and crises.

1. Society Is Not People: It Is Communication

Luhmann begins where common sense ends: society is not made of individuals. Individuals—psychic systems of consciousness—belong to the environment of society. Society itself consists of communications that refer to other communications: utterances that are understood (in the social sense of being taken up) and thereby become part of a self-reproducing chain. This is the point of the concept of *autopoiesis*: systems produce their own operations by means of their own operations.

This premise immediately reframes the “impact” of technology. Technologies do not “change society” by changing individuals’ minds, as if society were a sum of private experiences. They change the conditions under which communications can be produced and connected: their speed, reach, durability, observability, and selectability. When communication becomes cheap, ubiquitous, and automatically processed, society does not become more unified; it becomes more communicatively prolific—and therefore more complex.

In modernity, complexity is not a temporary problem that could be solved by better leadership or better morals. It is the normal condition. The question is always how society keeps selecting—how it reduces complexity by deciding what counts as relevant, true, legal, payable, legitimate, newsworthy, educated, healthy, and so on. Modern society survives not by eliminating complexity but by continually producing selections that make further communication possible.

2. Functional Differentiation: A Future Without a Center

The defining structure of modern society, for Luhmann, is *functional differentiation*. Modern society is not organized as a single hierarchy with a center. It is composed of multiple function systems—politics, economy, law, science, mass media, education, health, religion, art—each operating with its own binary code and its own criteria for what counts as a successful communication.

The economy cannot replace science, because payment is not truth. Politics cannot replace law, because power is not legality. Science cannot replace politics, because truth does not produce collectively binding decisions. And mass media cannot replace any of them, because information is not legitimacy, legality, payment, or truth.

This is not merely a descriptive claim; it is a constraint on futures. It implies that even under revolutionary technologies, society will not converge into a single rational order. On the

contrary, new technologies tend to intensify differentiation by offering each subsystem new ways to reproduce itself at higher speed and on a larger scale—while simultaneously increasing the frictions between subsystems, because each observes and irritates the others with incompatible expectations.

If Luhmann were diagnosing the present, he would likely emphasize that the desire for “integration”—for one unified public reason, one coordinated plan, one coherent worldview—is itself a recurring symptom of modernity’s structure. Modern society repeatedly generates fantasies of central control precisely because no center exists.

3. Digital Networks as a Transformation of Selection

From a Luhmannian point of view, the internet is not “a new public sphere” in a normative sense; it is a vast expansion of communicative connectivity. It enables more communications to occur, to circulate, and to be stored. But connectivity alone does not stabilize meaning. If anything, it undermines old stabilizers by multiplying contexts and audiences. Communication that once belonged to a bounded interaction can now be dragged into public visibility; a private utterance can become a viral event; a local controversy can become a global symbol within hours.

In earlier phases of modernity, mass media offered a relatively centralized system of selection: editors, broadcasters, and institutions determined what counted as public information. Platforms displace and hybridize this arrangement. Selection becomes distributed, automated, and economically optimized. Algorithms observe communications and then select communications based on predicted engagement—likes, shares, watch time, outrage, retention. This is a historically new form of second-order observation: machines and metrics observing communications as communications, and then reshaping the communicative environment by ranking, recommending, suppressing, or amplifying.

The consequence is not simply “misinformation.” A deeper consequence is the transformation of what counts as relevance. Communication increasingly orients itself toward being selected—toward visibility, virality, trendability. Selection becomes opaque (because algorithmic criteria are not fully public), and yet intensely consequential (because it determines attention and, increasingly, reputational survival). Public reality becomes bursty and volatile: synchronized in sudden storms of attention and then rapidly forgotten, not because society becomes amnesiac, but because new selections continuously replace old ones.

In a Luhmannian scenario, the future public sphere is not a single conversation but a constantly shifting topology of attention: fragmented, yet periodically synchronized by viral forms that are efficient at producing further communication—scandal, outrage, moral denunciation, identity conflict, and simplified storylines. These forms are not “pathologies” that could be eliminated by fact-checking alone; they are stable communication formats under conditions of selection overload.

4. Artificial Intelligence as a Variation Engine

Generative AI changes the economy of communication in a particularly Luhmannian way: it increases *variation*. It becomes cheap to produce plausible texts, images, code, arguments, summaries, legal drafts, policy memos, marketing campaigns, and intimate messages. In a society that reproduces itself by communication, the ability to generate endless

communicative proposals is not trivial—it is an amplification of the system’s capacity to create possibilities.

But Luhmann would insist: variation is never the bottleneck for modern society. Selection is. Stabilization is. The more possibilities you can generate, the harder it becomes to decide which possibilities matter. AI therefore shifts scarcity away from “content production” and toward the infrastructures and institutions of trust: authentication, provenance, responsibility, credibility, and procedural legitimacy.

A likely development is thus a wave of “re-selection technologies”: verification services, provenance standards, institutional gatekeeping, stronger organizational procedures, and legal doctrines that re-anchor attribution. Modern society relies on attributing communications to persons and organizations: authorship, liability, accountability. If AI blurs the line between human-authored and machine-generated utterances, societies will respond not by abandoning responsibility, but by inventing new rituals and procedures that restore decidability: “human in the loop” requirements, audit trails, certification regimes, and organizational role structures whose function is to say, in effect, *this decision belongs to us*.

The paradox is that AI may normalize “communication without understanding.” Luhmann already separated communication (a social event) from consciousness (a psychic event). AI intensifies a world in which communications can be produced and responded to fluently without any human understanding at the point of production. Modern society will adapt by shifting what counts as understanding toward operational criteria (“did it work?”), institutional criteria (“was it certified?”), and procedural criteria (“was due process followed?”). The result is neither dystopia nor utopia; it is a further proceduralization of meaning.

5. Politics: More Demand for Steering, Less Capacity to Steer

In modernity, politics is burdened with expectations it cannot fulfill. This is not a failure of politicians; it is a structural consequence of functional differentiation. Politics produces collectively binding decisions, but it cannot command the economy to be “fair” in an economic sense, science to be “certain,” or law to be “flexible” without undermining those systems’ operational logics.

Digital attention dynamics intensify political volatility. Politics is observed permanently, commented on instantly, scandalized continuously. Legitimacy becomes harder to reproduce because the time horizons of attention shrink. Public communication demands immediate responses to complex problems; politics must communicate urgency even when it lacks effective instruments.

A plausible future is the normalization of crisis governance: emergency semantics, rapid policy cycles, executive concentration, and symbolic gestures that satisfy public attention even as implementation is displaced to administrations, courts, markets, or private infrastructure providers. In a Luhmannian perspective, this is not simply “authoritarian drift” or “incompetence.” It is a mechanism of self-stabilization: politics reproduces its legitimacy by demonstrating responsiveness under conditions where long-term steering is structurally blocked.

At the same time, the tension between world society and territorial politics grows sharper. The economy, science, and digital communication operate globally; politics remains largely segmented by states. Climate change, pandemics, supply chains, and cyber risks exceed the nation-state's capacity for unilateral control, yet still demand political decisions. The future therefore likely includes the growth of quasi-political transnational arenas—standards bodies, treaty networks, corporate governance regimes—that do not fully replace state politics but complicate it further.

6. Law: Proliferation, Fragmentation, and Privatized Normativity

As complexity grows, law proliferates. New technologies generate new conflict types: data rights, AI liability, cross-border jurisdiction, platform governance, automated discrimination, cybersecurity negligence, and more. Law responds by generating more distinctions, procedures, and doctrines to stabilize expectations.

But in digital society, norm production is not monopolized by state law. Platform terms of service, content moderation policies, financial compliance regimes, and industry standards increasingly regulate behavior in ways that feel quasi-legal. They stabilize expectations not through democratic legislation but through conditional access: account status, reputational scoring, contractual governance. This produces a layered normativity experienced by individuals not as one coherent legal order but as overlapping regimes: the law of the state, the law of the platform, the law of the employer, the law of the payment system.

A Luhmannian future would thus likely feature legal pluralism as normal. Conflicts over “free speech,” “privacy,” and “safety” will not be resolved once and for all. They will be processed continually through shifting couplings between law, politics, economy, and public communication—each translating the conflict into its own code.

7. Economy and Inclusion: Access Regimes and New Stratifications

The economy's code remains payment/non-payment. AI does not abolish that code; it reorganizes competition around new infrastructures: compute resources, data access, platform marketplaces, identity and reputation systems, logistics, and payment rails. We can expect intensifying struggles over market power and the periodic appearance of political and legal counter-movements—antitrust, regulation, national industrial policy—without any final settlement. Modern society does not reach equilibrium; it cycles through new forms of imbalance and correction.

A more subtle Luhmannian issue is inclusion and exclusion. Individuals are “included” in modern society through multiple systems: education, labor markets, law, politics, health. If automation and platformization polarize labor demand, inclusion becomes more conditional and stratified. Access to quality education, stable employment, legal recourse, and reputational protection becomes uneven. The future may therefore not look like a return to old class hierarchies, but like a new stratification based on access regimes: verified identity, credentialed expertise, platform reputation, and institutional affiliation.

This form of stratification is compatible with functional differentiation; it does not replace it. It overlays it.

8. Science: Accelerated Truth Production and Accelerated Contestation

Science operates with the code true/untrue, but it does so through institutions, journals, labs, funding systems, and now AI-assisted research. AI can accelerate literature review, hypothesis generation, and data analysis. It can also accelerate noise, low-quality publication, and strategic manipulation. The likely response is not the collapse of science, but intensified boundary work: stronger standards, more verification mechanisms, new forms of peer review and auditability.

At the same time, the coupling between science and politics becomes more conflictual. Politics demands decisions; science produces uncertainty ranges. Public communication moralizes and polarizes. The future will likely include more “science communication about science communication”: debates not only about findings, but about who counts as an expert, what institutions deserve trust, and what procedures legitimize claims.

9. Ecology and Climate: Resonance Without Integration

Luhmann’s ecological insight is counterintuitive: the environment does not communicate with society; society communicates about the environment. Climate change becomes socially real as economic costs, political conflicts, legal obligations, scientific models, media events, and health crises—each subsystem translating ecological constraints into its own code. This produces resonance across society, but not integration.

The future therefore likely contains both: heightened ecological communication and persistent coordination failures. Ambitious programs appear, implementation lags, fatigue sets in, crises renew attention, and the cycle repeats. There is no single “solution center” capable of coordinating all subsystems at once. The problem becomes a stable reference point for communication—perhaps one of the defining problem forms of the century—precisely because it cannot be solved by one system without the others.

10. Three Plausible Branches: Futures as Variations of Modernity

Because Luhmann’s theory emphasizes contingency, a Luhmannian scenario should not end with one storyline. It should identify branch points—patterns of stabilization that could become dominant under slightly different selection pressures.

One plausible path is managed acceleration: AI becomes infrastructure; verification and regulation mature; organizations absorb uncertainty; inequality rises but is buffered by selective redistribution and new inclusion programs. Society continues with frequent crises but no systemic rupture.

Another path is re-stratification through access regimes: identity, reputation, and platform access become the key passports; a small number of organizations control critical infrastructures; exclusion becomes less visible but more absolute—denial of access, deplatforming, automated risk scoring, credit gatekeeping. Functional differentiation remains, but lived experience feels like tiers of membership.

A third path is fragmented world society: geopolitical blocs harden; standards and infrastructures diverge; economy and science remain globally interdependent yet politically constrained. Coordination becomes more expensive; duplication increases; conflict becomes a stable background condition.

None of these paths returns to a simpler society. All assume that modernity continues—because the basic structure of functional differentiation is unlikely to be replaced by a new center.

Conclusion: The Future as “More Modern Modernity”

The most Luhmannian conclusion is also the least comforting to those who hope for final solutions: modern society will not become unified, fully steerable, or fully transparent. Under the conditions of platforms and AI, it will become more complex, more self-observing, faster-cycling, and more dependent on organizations and procedures that stabilize selection amid overload.

If one had to compress the scenario into a single sentence, it might be this: AI and digital infrastructures will not create a new social center; they will intensify the autonomy of function systems while tightening their couplings through new selection mechanisms—and thereby make contingency more visible, crises more normal, and trust more procedural. In that sense, the future is not the abolition of modern society, but its deepening: a society that survives by communicating about its own inability to control itself, and that stabilizes itself not by consensus, but by continually inventing new forms of selection, attribution, and legitimacy that make further communication possible.