OBJECTS OF POWER

EMBODIMENTS OF AGENCY IN THE
WESTERN TECHNO-EMPIRE

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To the friends and family in Brazil
who fought against hatred and bigotry,
and are now fighting again.

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PRINCEPS. CROSSING THE WORLD

And here I am, at the dawn of the day, under the light of the new spring of the year two thousand and nineteen; and here are dogs, walking in front of their mistresses. There, those green English lawns whose pristine and unfailing mowing feels like a challenge to all imagination, constantly trampled by the plump paws and pads of dogs galloping in a jumble of hair, tails, ears, wet noses and short claws. Fearsome ladies call them aloud in a bright, clean, crystalline voice like emitting a perfect sine wave, seemingly higher in pitch than necessary; a special tone that manages to be both silly and bossy, and of which British women have the secret. Man's best friends, trained for this purpose for more than 30,000 years now, eventually comply.

The park, which is so vast that it feels almost desolate, inflates itself with all of that noise of legs, those long shouts, the constant throbbing of airplanes and helicopters, the wind that blows in the branches, the rumbling of the cars that can still be heard from afar. All this, a giant human nuisance in a giant human garden. And yet a form of silence, a sort of peace, arises from this antisilence: Albion breathes, sitting without a movement as in the eye of a storm, like a haven of civilisation and politeness at the heart of a world whose gloom and darkness never cease to descend into an increasingly bleak obscurity. Everywhere but not here, we like to think, lie the results of millennia of brutality and savagery of which, we too, have been the agents; it is only a matter of not looking, and already there is nothing to fear anymore... Later in the day, the lawns trampled by dogs will be trampled by shouting young sportsmen. Women whose bodies have been moulded by technical fabrics and hi-frequency exercises will be scolded by coaches full of a daunting energy. Later in the night, timorous foxes will evolve, almost invisible in the penumbra, slipping inside the abandoned gaps of human domination.[1]

[1] In response to increased noise, visual and physical interference due to the continuous presence of human beings in an increasingly degraded ecosystem, many mammalian species have changed their behavioural patterns from diurnal to significantly more nocturnal habits.

See Kaitlyn M. Gaynor and others, 'The Influence of Human Disturbance on Wildlife Nocturnality', Science, 360.6394 (2018), 1232 <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aar7121>.

Everything that is seen here, everything that is experienced here, is crossed by the possible and the impossible, by capacity and inability, by cooperation and competition. Inside the very heart of what we most love in the world, of what we cherish so dearly that tears seem to arise as love would emerge from the body itself; there may rest the enemy who will kill us, the underlying agent of our own end and despair; there may rest an object for our own desires and instrumentations. Despite our hearts being infused with a hope so delirious that it appears to set itself ablaze in a whirlwind of flames, and as affection and tenderness themselves take a share in our struggles, love—whatever such a word might mean—becomes hard to be envisioned as an essential form of liberation. Parallelly lies a reason that we affect to call cold for being our first instrument of calculation: the classic tool of power. Whether it remains dormant in desires that plunge into inintelligible realms, or whether it is managed according to our best technologies of reasoning, power underlies in everything. To act or not to act produces consequences; to desire as not to want, the shape of the environment, the other agents that live and breathe, all affect our actions. There is no escape.

Crossed by agents, the world is also inhabited and travelled by objects. Inert, natural, manufactured, untouched, connected, mystical, secret... all these interact in a way that may or may not be visible to us, following a hidden articulation that animates every irresolute mystery of world's ordinary existence.[2] These objects of the cosmos are also inhabited by power, by agency: actions, choices, possibilities and limitations flows through them like through ourselves. [3]

Because most of the links between those objects that are too large and too complex are invisible to my understanding and because this understanding is not only human but also inevitably mine, I do not aim to attempt an extensive description of all the powers that run through all things. I am human and our species is built on this connection to virtualities as well as the creation of objects designed to surround us: my focus will be on a rather arbitrarial collection of those.

This text is not intended to theorise power or agency, nor to elaborate a resistance manual; it is a navigation, a logbook that tries to understand our physical and

[2] The archaeologist Ian Hodder devoted his career to understand complex entaglements between things and humans and between things themselves. Further than being only that is perceived with 'perceptual boundaries', objects and things are interdependent in the vast network of the unievrse.

Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 6-7, passim.

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[3] In her book *Vibrant Matter*, the political theorist Jane Bennet investigates how things can have a role of their own in the public life, as what she calls a 'thing-power'.

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.1-2, passim.

fictional productions according to the power they bring with them. The focus of my interest is the way in which our tools, the objects of our knowledge, our technologies and our imaginations—because any technology is primarily fictional, starting with language—encapsulate the idea of power by their potentiality of being in action. Because these objects are ours, because we have this manufacturing bond with them, because despite the fact that they are increasingly dematerialised... their modes of production, the origins of their ideation as well as their finality, is ultimately determined by ourselves.

As agents with a certain set of choices, we use both our intelligence and the objects resulting of it as the means to our ends; collectively, this means a constant power struggle, gatherings and repeallings; it means the emergence of a city, of politics, of the State, of technical domination and of war as a permanent condition—our present techno-empire.[4] In such a realm, our body is the principle and the end of any action. This text will review the different embodiments of agency, from flesh to disembodiment; from a physical agent to a new ideation of God.

[4] Here I join Paul Virilio on the notion that the very structure of the City-State, and later our Nation-States, is the product of war or of its preparations; logistics and the power struggle are therefore and necessarily the our societies constant obsession.

See Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War* (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), Foreign Agents Series, first ed. 1983, revised in 1997), pp.10-11:

"I suddenly understood that war was a space in the geometrical sense, and even more than geometrical: crossing Europe from North to South (...), makes you realize the breadth of Total War. By the same token you touch on the mythic dimension of a war spreading not only throughout Europe, but all over the world. The objects, bunkers, block-houses, anti-aircraft shelters, submarine bases, etc. are kinds of reference points or landmarks tot the totalitarian nature of war in space and myth. (...) I find myself in the minority [of theoreticians], which claims that the city is the result of war, at least of preparation of war."

TO BE A BODY.
THE FLESH OF POWER

The limits of the self

Depending on whether one is born a beggar or an emperor... Organisms made of skin, muscles and organs, adapted or dysfunctional creatures, magnificent or disgusting... Behind the gaze that observes, in what iterations are born the thoughts that are behind those eyes? There is the body that is mine and the thoughts that run through it, this body that I lead, and there are these bodies that are other and over which I have no direct control; I do not command them, I do not experience them and I cannot understand them *from within*—my gestures, my thoughts, my consciousness are unable, at least for now, to extend beyond my flesh envelope.

But precisely, to move towards the otherness; to seek the pleasure of interaction, the comfort of a warm body that we discover, know and recognize in this sort of simplicity inscribed so deeply in our animal nature; the curious, yet always conditional, evidence of the pleasure of *being close to*. Also, the agony of being entrapped in one's own perceptions, one's own body; the desire for the other sometimes melts into the very desire *to be* this other, this otherness; a romantic fusion if there is one... And, why not, leaving everything to be eaten by flames, ultimately disappear.

Essentially, to be a body is to be at the helm of an organism that might be more or less competent or adapted, an individual more or less recognized and supported by the other agents that share its world, a cluster of cells that have more or less grap on its conditions, a creature that finds itself able or not able to open virtualities to transform them in possibilities. All those contingencies depend on

5 See Hito Steyerl, 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective – Journal #24 April 2011 – e-Flux' <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/> [accessed 24 March 2019].

Further than Steyerl's comparatively pleasant speculations, the military phantasmagoria dreams of a "4D" battlefield: an omniscient space where it would master both the geographical, purely tactical dimensions (3D) and the strategic dimension of information, which is the dimension of time (4D).

See Tim Blackmore, *War X: Human Extensions in Battlespace* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 5-6 :

"(...) if two superpowers weren't locked into a potential European war, what would contemporary and future armies look like? The discussions that ensued in the Soviet bloc and the U.S. military resulted in what is known as the [Revolution of Military Affairs]. It is important to keep in mind that RMA propositions are theories, many would say fantasies, about the way war is now, or in the future should be, pursued by the United States and its allies. (...) It is expected that war will be fought not in lines but in a four-dimensional battle arena. Battlespace, as it is called, is intended to be high, wide, and simultaneous: there is no longer a front or rear. Computer networks that will talk to each other over a military Internet called the Global Information Grid (GIG) that (...) promises 'unlimited bandwidth to its users (...). The more data flow, the more transparent battlespace is supposed to become, guaranteeing friendly forces informational and tactical dominance of the field. (...) RMA doctrine manuals and slide presentations sometimes show battlespace as a clear dome under friendly forces hold full information control."

pure chance, a sort of cosmic lottery of luck and misfortune. Our bodies are the result of a biological injustice caused by a nature for which the concept of injustice itself has no reason for being. They also are both the result and the subject of all of the dreams, desires, fears and hopes of those who preceded us.

The bodies of the powerful

In the present state of affairs, the body whose image of power is maximal: the body of men, the body of the powerful. Neither too young, because a body that is too young was not given the opportunity to *harden*; nor too old, because its proximity with death is already a weakness. We need, as we say, their *prime age*, coupled with the agility of a healthy being. See their folds and their skin sliding on the muscles that slide on the bones, their controlled articulations, driven by a look with a tense brow bone arch, as if immersed in the thoughts of an eagle... watching the world from in its rational, vertical, cartographic perspective; these *thoughts of the above*, so clear and precise, so opposite to the *thoughts of the below*, which are always caught in ever changing prospects. To the sharpness of a panoptic vision that became more than vertical,[5] corresponds the sharpness of the traits: the neat appearance, clean nails, close-shaven, the collar accentuating the neck line, the gait full of confidence, the deep and clear voice that also follows a sine wave, this particular tonality that signs the natural authority; a voice of generals giving always *reasonable* orders through their transponders, echoing the quiet beep of the radars, the faint sounds of the calculating computers (the mythic voice is not the one that shouts in desperation: that one is to be defeated beforehand). Here, then, a man of the most convenient model of masculinity, a little outdated, mythological, rational and voluntary, courageous and ultimately driven by the common sense of a morality that is provided by the very nature of his impeccable body; the very embodiment, of a happy and triumphant imperialism, the legendary mirror of a natural Western superiority.

6 It is enlightening to note that the word virtue comes from the Latin root vir, "man"; during early Roman Empire, the world evolved from its previously rather strict martial acception to a broader masculine ethical ideal of good citizenship (slaves being referred to as puer, or "boy").

See *Myles McDonnell Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic.* 2006, Cambridge University Press.

Imperialism and morals of masculinity are thus entangled since millennia in language itself, and produced interesting outcomes. In French Middle Ages, the word came to mean something between "power" and "potentiality" before its religious and moral acceptions. It is also the early acception of the expression en vertu ("in virtue") that gave us "virtually" and later "virtuality".

See "Vertu" in the Dictionnaire du Moyen Français [online], <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/dmf/vertu> [Accessed 3 April 2019]

7 In *Bring Me Men,* Aaron Belkin develops the idea that American military masculinity is equated with the health of what he calls (and so do I) the empire. In order to preserve a positive image, not only abroad but inside of itself, the empire needs to project an unproblematic, innocuous, desirable and unquestionable masculinity: a masculinity made of helpful and good soldiers and not one that reveals the invariantly hideous face of their actions. The empire needs to be an ideal for both its citizens and the territories it dominates. Because those standards also mirror the contradictions of the empire itself, they are inherently unreachable. Indeed, soldiers have to prove their masculinity through authority, courage,

Because he is that reflection of the empire, its best agent, because he is in search of an ever more distant and virginal terrain, his masculinity must be projected as a *virtue.*[6,7] To explore the vast world and discover the wonders of the cosmos requires a strong physical condition and an ever-renewing amount of ingenuity. However this is not sufficient to produce the empire's perfect citizen. It is not sufficient indeed, to just imagine and visit: one must triumph. To defile the virginal ground, to fight against all that is unknown and against all that it is necessary to delete: anything that is not in the direct prospect of the eagle's eye simply does not exist, nor should it be even allowed to exist; those things shall remain in the unnamed and in death; if they were to ever become too large, too breadth, too strong, then they shall be repelled forever in obscurity. Once the good citizen of the empire, who is always a bit of a soldier, has been able to glimpse some of this forbidden side of the cosmos in a sort of initiation ritual through war and the discovery of the enemy, that side that hates him and vowed itself to his destruction, once he has seen that part of unintelligible that becomes his own, he, the ingenious being, once composed in the light of reason, discovers the greyness that arose inside of him; a greyness that will only be admitted from metropolitan citizens if he has won; otherwise he is doomed to dwell among the shadows, together with the very unknown he was fighting against.

The bodies of the otherness

Then the victorious soldier, if his youth has not vanished amid the bombs, will return from the greyness and find in compensation a young woman whose beauty is all the more valuable because it ignores itself—her candour, her joy and her simplicity will reanimate the one who has seen all the horrors that the world is made of, all the horrors that lie beyond the borders of the City, that unintelligible confusion, that barbarity. Occasionally, this woman will be strong, sophisticated; by sheer intellect, she will discern, but without clearly seeing, that the protected world in which she has been hidden is limited, so she will be able to understand barbarity indirectly. In truth, it is because

boldness or even recklessness while the
military condition is precisely to renounce
to all agency and obey, somehow like a
woman. This masculine version of double
binding is a tool for keeping an authority
on disorientated troops, just as feminine
double or triple binding goals (being a
mother while being a sexual object while
being a successful professional) are a tool
for maintaining oppression and control
on women. Coupled with the collective
nature of the military environment, the
stress induced by the hierarchies and the
missions, this actually very problematic
vision of masculinity generates a system
of moral and sexual abuse where presumed
homosexuals are the final scapegoats amongst
a climate of paradoxical homoeroticism and
total irresponsibility. While the author
concentrates his efforts on the United
States military in an embarrassingly long
and descriptive compilation of cases,
similar phenomenons are well-known across
the world and history. Therefore, I extend
the use of the expression empire not only
to define the United States of America as
the author does for supporting the idea
of an American paradigm as an essentially
imperialist project, but to define the
entire Western imperialist project.

See Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military
Masculinity and the Benign Facade of American
Empire, 1898–2001*, Critical War Studies
Series (London: Hurst, 2012).

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9 Needless to say that this metaphysical
mission is to be accomplished mostly with
the help of brooms, detergents, hot water
and sponges. However, the psychic absorption
of problematic emotional states of men by
women is also one of the requirements of
the gendered domination that occurs inside
of the empire. I use the word absorption
because in a typical set of masculinity

she is in the position of suffering the brutality addressed to the virgin and foreign lands at the heart of her own nation; she is the position of suffering the empire's violence within the very core of the empire. Despite her recently acquired citizenship,[8] her thought will remain a thought of the below, and the thought of the below is a thought that must ignore its thinking nature. And just as the ideal woman learns that she must pretend to be beautiful only by accident, the ideal man must necessarily be truly unconscious of himself, because it is this unconsciousness that preserves the fiction of the natural and of innate morality; of innocence: of authenticity. For the authenticity to remain true, it is necessary to maintain it in the unthought, as it is in the unconsciousness of its holders that lies the reality of power. Then her mythical role is to absorb the metaphysical pains of the true citizen by providing a relief meant to sink with her into the unnamed; a dark exorcism of imperial shadows.[9]

Authentic then, are the members of this fictional dyad where each one is supposed to complement the other, embodying a modern version of Platonician myths. Inauthentic are those whose femininity and masculinity are too confuse or too visibly fabricated, those who carry, by their choice and attitudes, the possibility of a meta discourse; all these queer beings are a threat to the fiction of authenticity through the revelation of their own fiction; all those lawless creatures who refuse to comply to the story that has been written for them, who refuse to burn their hearts on the altar of a myth; the creatures who once come from other lands, importing their inevitably barbarous dreams, their idioms that the empire cannot understand. The body is the first and last place of power, its origin and its end, and its mythographies are a reflection of our tensions; is it because the empire has weakened that the presence of those creatures became stronger, or is it the reverse? Such are the interior enemies, with their unclear bodies, these unsettling, changing, inner strangers among the dreams of a white, pure and reasonable nation.

In the techno-empire that leads the world in a state of total war, it is important to have a certain level of identity between the bodies of individuals and the body of the State. This identity is more or less continuous and is subject to fluctuations; nevertheless, beings who are too far from the proposed model or, worse, who

that teaches men to close up to any emotion that is not efficient enough to properly dominate or master a situation and refuse emotional communication, women have no other choice but to endlessly guess the idiosyncratic causes of eventual swinging moods, discontentment, anger or apparent sadness. They often feel personally responsible for the psychological wellbeing of men and try to improve it through actual labour and care in an almost a magical state of mind. This is how women's minds end up enclosed in a costful *peripheral thinking*.

[10] In *War X*, Blackmore spends two chapters exploring the meaning the body and of the armour in technological warfare, both with actual examples and in works of fiction such as Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers of 1959, where the protagonists fight in battle suits. Before introducing the need for armouring soldiers, he overviews different interviews of veterans who show a visible anxiety about their limits.

He writes: *"The skin is a bag for the body, also the soldier's first line of defence—but a weak one, easily breached. The new soldier doesn't know yet how easy it is for industrial warfare to penetrate*

are too indistinct, threaten the psychological borders of the empire itself from the inside; things that are neither friends nor enemies can only be suspect— agents of subversion, a weakness, a disease. In order to incorporate such aberrations, the empire must integrate them by opposing them to the enemy: thus making itself the designer of its constantly shifting borders.

Surfaces, borders, armours

Also, the possibility of a body finally upgraded; in the anguish of ever more powerful weapons, a frightening ecological context and the pure and simple fear of dying, our surfaces are the last bulwark against the nonexistence. Cut an arm with a blade and blood will flow from it: our internal fluids blend with the outside world, compromising the integrity of our borders. In this world that we filled with artefacts to the point of nausea, the world that we invented for ourselves and that we populated with steel, concrete, depleted uranium, optical fibres and intangible information, there is no room for anything but what is perfectly hard and what is perfectly disembodied; things that are soft, flexible and unstable, things that are intended to fail and then rot, things that are organic, all those shall be thrown into the unthinkable, like the doomed souls shall be thrown into the lake of fire.

What is a soldier's body in front of the industrious technicality of war?[10] What is the human body, in front of ageing, in front of the gradual loss of its physical and cognitive capacities? What is a woman's body, especially vulnerable during pregnancy and childbirth, in front of all of this? In front of the uncontrollable, we call upon the inventiveness of our species: medicine, surgery, contraceptive technologies, cosmetics; biotechnologies. The body's ugly softness and imprecision, its releases of fluids, gases, odours, faeces, blood and noises; its uncontrollable heartbeats, its brain—and therefore its cold reason—that is vulnerable to hormonal influences: all these elements take our choices away, they take us further away from an already impossible omnipotence. To overcome this consubstantial and unbearable biology, it is imperative to close all its openings, protecting its

the body, the erase the separation between the person and its environment. (…) As the time goes on, the soldier becomes fixated on skins, envelopes, bags, barriers, because they keep the soldier together and the world external and apart." p.13
Also: "*Soft bodies, ripe and rotten bodies, plague Second World War German soldier Guy Sajer, who cannot contemplate flesh: 'Strange bodies made me uneasy, almost sick. As soon as I saw naked flesh, I braced myself for a torrent of entrails, remembering countless wartime scenes, with smoking, stinking corpses pouring out their vitals' (…) The skin is only a shiveringly fine barrier. It is no longer any guarantee of safety, no longer a way to preserve the body's cohesion, no longer a promise of security. It has almost ceased to be a surface—clothing has taken over that role. Skin might as well not exist.*" p.20

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11 As theorised by Simone de Beauvoir. See Debra Bergoffen, 'Simone de Beauvoir', in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018) ‹https://plato. stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/ beauvoir/› [accessed 18 June 2019]. 'The Second Sex: Woman as Other' section.

borders at any cost; the surface acts as the last, flimsy line of defence against the imprecision of the self that is immersed in the outside world. What is true for the military is also true for their civilian counterparts: gymnastics, well-being rituals, fashion, skincare and makeup are more than a mere strategy for seducing and feeling good; they are the essential, psychic armours of a metaphysical mission against disappearance.

This process of protection and *armourification* of the human body exists in the continuity of gendered divisions. Because the functions of each other's bodies (the *otherness* here embodied by the woman,[11] the non-citizen) differ in the social body, the invented armours more or less overlap, despite they also aim to establish the clearest possible demarcation between male and female. This can sometimes take a paradoxical form. In its most spectacular states, the aesthetics of what looks almost like a speciation process between the male and the female goes against the very efficiency of the male armour, which expected role was to maximise his ability to act on the external world. While it was expected that the female armour would in fact be designed to be almost exclusively a means of imprisonment, the male armour that is pushed to the extreme is strangely inefficient: the mass of muscles accumulated to achieve a status of ultra-virility is incredibly maladaptive, making these bodies heavy, wading and incompetent, well away from the image of the "man for the job", the ideal soldier whose both agile and powerful body is prepared to cope with any situation.

For the female body too, the achievement of an ultra-gendered armour prove to be maladaptive for its expected functions: prostheses of all kinds, eyelashes and nail extensions, the constant concern for the appearance of the hair and the make-up, high heels shoes and so on, are hardly compatible with the classic tasks of motherhood and domestic arts. Through identity and existential anguish, the original gendered function has been sacrificed to its own aesthetic degeneration in a painful and disorientating epitome of contradictions. This is obviously condemned by the heralds of authenticity myth: being so uncertain of our surfaces is necessarily a sign of weakness, while true power is always innate—that means inherited.

However, this adherence ad absurdum to physical norms and surfaces (at least when it is based on doubt) seems to be achieved only at the high cost of sacrificing one's individuality. The being dissolves inside the armour they have created, constantly doubting of their own authenticity and then pursuing it in an ever-increasing artificialisation. Any armour, whether physical or psychological, whether consubstantial to the body or external to it, carries its promise of protection at the cost of confinement: one can die psychically suffocated in their own surface like a soldier can cook entrapped in his own tank.

OBJECTIFYING THE WORLD

To act, to speak, to think

[12] There is a great amount of studies about animal language and cognition. Most of them study birds and dolphins, forming an interesting intersection between ethology, neurology, linguistics and acoustics. Cognition of animals is generally way superior to what we expect from them.

The remarkable work of Dr Pepperberg on African grey parrots has shown this species is able to understand categorical thinking, answering to comparative questions and even creating simple sentences for asking for treats. See Irene Maxine Pepperberg, *The Alex Studies: Cognitive and Communicative Abilities of Grey Parrots* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 2002)., passim

The works of Ryabov suggest that dolphins may carry something similar to a conversation between individuals. See Vyacheslav Ryabov, 'Some Aspects of Analysis of Dolphins' Acoustical Signals', *Open Journal of Acoustics*, 1 (2011), 41-54 <https://doi.org/10.4236/oja.2011.12006>.

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[13] Chimpanzees have been notably seen making spears for hunting. See Pruetz J. D. and others, 'New Evidence on the Tool-Assisted Hunting Exhibited by Chimpanzees (Pan Troglodytes Verus) in a Savannah Habitat at Fongoli, Sénégal', *Royal Society Open Science*, 2.4, 140507 <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.140507>.

And then one day sounds came out of our bodies. Sounds that showed themselves similar in similar situations, calls that found their articulation and strength in what the others sensed what was to come after the sound was heard. An emergence of language, which is not specific to our species; all kinds of birds, cetaceans and other mammals possess a variety of more or less complex languages.[12] The human species sometimes likes to distinguish itself by its engineering character, granted by its opposable thumbs; yet we are not the only ones to create tools, nor to produce weapons, however rudimentary.[13]

What seems to differ, however, is the complexity of the systems of cognitive representation, particularly the entanglement of conditions in an elaborate grammar. As of today, we do not know of any other animal species with similar grammatical abilities to ours, even from afar.[14] Complex constructions of all kinds, phrase elements, alignment of conditionals, exclusions, additions, probabilistic thinking... have given rise to a sense of storytelling, narratives, and fictions. It was in ancient Greece that the systems of formal logic that we know today emerged, forming the foundation of a thought that can order the world into abstract categories, and make it correspond to these abstract categories.

The instinctive movement of an empire that is empiricist has been to disdain the "magical thoughts" of so-called primitive populations as a collection of superstitions with no legitimate basis. Moreover, the most radical fringe of the Enlightenment wished to do likewise with Christian religion: this entire century of thought, on which are still based the most ardent technophile hopes, has presented itself as the

14 Several studies tried to identify complex grammar patterns amongst wild birds but failed to do it so. See Stobbe Nina and others, 'Visual Artificial Grammar Learning: Comparative Research on Humans, Kea (Nestor Notabilis) and Pigeons (Columba Livia)', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 367.1598 (2012), 1995-2006 <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2012.0096>. And Carel ten Cate, 'Assessing the Uniqueness of Language: Animal Grammatical Abilities Take Center Stage', *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review,* 24.1 (2017), 91-96 <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-016-1091-9>.

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15 See Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Routledge, 1982) <http://dss-edit.com/prof-anon/sound/library/Ong_orality_and_literacy.pdf>.

In his book, the linguist Walter J. Ong defends the idea that writing is the first form of technology to have been invented.. (pp.80-82, passim.) He also notes that the complex grammar of ancient Greek has been produced by the fact it has been written down. Therefore it became the basis for the rising of formal logic, that is still at the basis of the Western pattern of thinking. (p.51, passim)

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16 A bit in the same fashion as of the functionalist anthropology (see note 17), Yuval Noah Harari, a historian of the Middle Ages, regularly comes with the idea that any society bases itself in a shared fiction. While his ideas may not be revolutionary, he is one of the rare figures that is not tied to the Silicon Valley to appear in lectures and debates about artificial intelligence and new technologies:

first herald of Reason facing the obscurity of archaic superstitions and indemonstrable tales. Nevertheless, it is to overlook the practical power of fictional narratives; it is to overlook the fictional nature of rationality itself. Abstract entities and formal logic,[15] which are so dear and necessary to any rationalist methodology, might be nothing more than *fictions that work*.[16]

Reason as a form of magic

When a group of hunter-gatherers say that whites have a very powerful magic, it is literally that they hear it; and it is literally that they are right. In a magical system of thinking, rituals, prayers and other elaborate constructions with diverse aims, classified by Westerners as "supernatural," are supposed to have a materialisation in the real world, and this is not necessarily very different from the methodology we use to build a rocket or assemble a team of executives during a retreat in a company. In this respect, magic, belief or religion do not have a symbolic role, but rather a *functional* one.[17] As such, we can also question the purity of the rational or reasonable nature of space exploration or other highly symbolic undertakings, whether it is Apollo or its contemporary example SpaceX, which aggregates all kinds of beliefs. A hope in the future of humanity, with a kind of entrepreneurial and individualistic fascination for Elon Musk's character.[18]

The means of Western reasoning, fiction and abstraction are extremely powerful, but the use of logic and reasoning in the construction of those structures, whether physical or conceptual, is in no way a guarantee of a flawless reason or an uncompromising objectivity. From where did we get this need, this urge to understand everything, to establish such a cognitive supremacy through the arrangement of things into categories? If it seems certain that there are neurological bases for this classification capacity, which is shared with other animals, once again we are the only species to have developed it on such a scale.

From language as our first and rudimentary technology, we shifted to the construction of imperial

"[The United States of America] is a story that we share in order to serve certain needs and desires that we have. It is a created story, but not an objective reality. I don't mean to imply that it's bad or not important. Some of the best things in the world, nations and corporations and banks and so forth, are the most powerful forces today in the world, far more powerful than any human being or any animal. The key is to remember that we created those things to serve us. The trouble really begins when people lose sight that we are reality and they are not."

(Yuval Noah Harari: '21 Lessons for the 21st Century' | Talks at Google – YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw9P_ZXWDJU> [accessed 14 June 2019]., 32:50'.)

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[17] This is the heart of the intellectual challenge of describing the functional nature of magic beliefs through a notion of symbolic efficiency (efficacité symbolique) and, moreover, to analyse those beliefs as a rational practice. In a thesis that is as fascinating that it is densely documented, La Rationalité des croyances magiques (Rationality of Magic Beliefs) not yet translated in English, Pascal Sanchez compare different anthropological models in order to create the backbone of a theory able to describe and explain magic beliefs and practices extensively.

See Pascal Sanchez and Raymond Boudon, *La rationalité des croyances magiques*, Agora, 405, Édition revue par l'auteur (Paris: Pocket, 2017)., pp. 451–532., passim.

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[18] Elon Musk who, quite unexpectedly, regularly brings the question of feelings in the debates about AI and space exploration. He refers to them as a product of the *limbic system*, a part of the brain that regulates feelings, social

and functional fictions; perhaps cognition itself is nothing more than a vast imperial enterprise, a descriptive and exploratory imperialism, embedded in the electric mysteries that run through the mind. In a world where words are used to describe everything, half-thoughts, vague feelings and all forms of the unknown become objects of an appalling fascination; in that sense, faith could be understood as a form of necessary trust in everything that is not only unknown, but unknowable.

Experience made tangible

Such cognitive mastery over the environment has been further extended into instrumental mastery. The fortunate combination of a lively mind and special paws called hands has made humans capable of radically changing the surrounding resources for their own use. All of a sudden, a profusion of objects, coats, arrows, beds, pots and all kinds of utensils. Small scale manufacturing, time-consuming, resource-intensive. The populations are relatively small, everything one needs to know is told from one generation to the next... Knowledge is lost in the mists of time, while the world is vast and inhabited by all kinds of things.

In some places, however, where there were fewer resources, there has been a tendency to group into larger masses. For a long time, it was thought that the appearance of religions was a result of sedentarization, but some sites such as Gobekli Tepe or Çatalhöyük appear to indicate the opposite.[19] The organization into states, if it became the almost unique model of contemporary social organization, has not been simple or linear.[20] In such places, the work is hard and continuous expansion is vital.

Writing, the second technology of mnemonic improvement, then occurs: it is no longer necessary to constantly repeat things to be able to remember them. Clay tablets, papyrus and libraries will remember everything that needs to be remembered just as well, if not better. As a consequence, human cognition is altered. Categories of mental description of objects are changed;[21] the brain finds itself impacted in its very neurology by an external technology. Just as

processing and autobiographical memory. He gives his most extended view on the subject in his interview with Joe Rogan.

See Joe Rogan, 'Joe Rogan Experience #1169 - Elon Musk', *Joe Rogan Experience* (YouTube, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycPr5-27vSI> [accessed 16 June 2019], 25:50'.

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[19] Hodder suggests that it is the anthropocentric view promoted by religions that drove people to settle down and not sedentarisation that promoted religion as an authoritarian enforcement, as usually advanced.

See Ian Hodder, 'The Role of Religion in the Neolithic of the Middle East and Anatolia with Particular Reference to Çatalhöyük', *Paléorient*, 37.1 (2011), 111-22 <https://doi.org/10.3406/paleo.2011.5442>.

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[20] In his book Against the Grain, the anarchist, agrarian studies specialist and political sciences scholar James C. Scott contradicts the idea that the social organisation defaults to a society based on state hierarchy.

See James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, Yale Agrarian Studies Series (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 183-218., passim.

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[21] In the 1930s, the neuropsychiatrist Alexander Luria conducted a research on illiterate and semi-literate peasants in USSR countryside. Interviewees found themselves unable to answer simple syllogic.

the use of tools is refined with repetition, digging its mental furrows in the brain, the use of writing sets up new reflexes of hands, new habits of thought.

More than a resource to be possessed, the ability to write, transmit and acquire knowledge is a new human power; its supports, as tablets, sheets and books, are its first objects. The technique of knowledge, its articulation, are strategic skills in undertakings of dominance over nature and peers. However, being able to write down knowledge also means that one can physically find it. Without language, any thinking was necessarily secret, evanescent, unformulated, uncommunicable. Without writing, thought is distributed from person to person, requiring repetition to fix the reasoning and to prevent change; only torture can extract the precious information. The immobilization of knowledge in objects external to the body opens up a new vulnerability. Knowledge can be stolen, power can be stolen. Thus, what must remain truly secret is better not to be written: the technology of information is averse to secrets.

Categories of thinking did not mean anything
to them; words and representations being
processed almost exclusively according
to personal experience. Walter J. Ong
gives a long account on this study in
Orality and Literacy (Ong., pp. 49-56.)
See also John T. Guthrie, 'Research
Views: Literacy and Thinking', *The
Reading Teacher*, 31.3 (1977), 340-
42., <http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Mail/
xmcamail.2014-12.dir/pdfYCNJw48XtW.pdf>

OBJECTS FOR THE MIND

Ever-improving souls

Among the objects of power, there are not only those that directly imply a physical extension of human action: there are also the objects that are properly symbolic. If the former always have a symbolic side through the virtuality of their functions, for the latter it is the symbolic function that is primary. Whether or not specifically using the technology of language, it is the ability of those objects to evoke, to remain in and to shape the mind that is determining. Sacred books and incantations, ceremonial items of all kinds, works of art... the objects that first appeal to the spirit are as heterogeneous as the strictly functional ones.

However, because the technological world is a world where the discourse on technology is its essential characteristic, its tendency is to become ever more efficient through specialisation. From Fordian assembly lines to doctoral theses targeting restrained points of informational science, reason, empiricism and capitalist utilitarianism have swallowed up every single detail of existence. People are asked to be their own projects, to run themselves as they would run a company with its specific assets; the body itself is thus its main asset and its mind an object of exploitation.[22] This forms a paradigm of a sort of totalitarian prostitution, which should penetrate as far as the soul itself, if it were any. The teleology of a self-maximisation has replaced the one of religious salvation. By the efficiency of a discourse that only expresses itself in terms of investments and profits, that transforms the practice of meditation in a great jihad of self-improvement which measured against those opaque stock markets that are the algorithms inhabiting our portable computing units, there is no place left to agency, free will or personal power. Because a rationality that is understood only

[22] Byung-Chul Han and Erik Butler, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, 2017., passim.

by an optimising aspect is that of a world where there is only one correct solution for performing any task, that rationality is totalitarian in its essence.

Free will propaganda

Also, what could the function of the objects of the mind, apart from indoctrination books or magic formulas? What has happened to art, for it to separate itself, at least in appearance, from its external functions and become an object that is supposed to be experienced by and for itself? Curiously, the works that should be felt as the most cryptic are nowadays almost naturally understood. I am thinking in particular of the wave of the 50s and 60s and lyrical abstraction, American flavour. At that time, what turned out to be decisive was the notion of a distinctive style reflecting authenticity; the work of art as the intermediary between the figure of the artist and the viewer, as in a medium performance. To simply feel, through a painting, the penetrated agitation of a Pollock, the focus of a De Kooning, the sense of nothingness of a Mark Rothko. The work embodies thus an extension of the artist's own person, of their personality, their very temperament. Nothing less than a magical process.

The main uninformed criticism of the movement was, and still is, that anyone would be able to realise such a painting. Despite being ignorant, the idea is in fact seductive. If everyone is able paint like Jackson Pollock or rather, like themselves, it means that success is within everyone's reach. From being the communist and alcoholic worker pariah from a small town in the middle of the empire, Pollock became a bright star of the capital. Everyone adapted to his raw and aggressive temperament and managed to find his lack of subtlety indicative of America's genuineness. The incorporation of some Amerindian ritual notions into his discourse and history also made him an interesting piece for a syncretism of the new world. This was a living demonstration that the freedom of capital provided for redemption, the USSR was perceived to enact ever more restrictive rules on art and socialist realism.

It is this liberal illumination in the early 1950s that allowed the Western empire to avoid becoming too similar to the opposite empire, which was depicted as inhabited by men in grey flannel and worn out briefcases, surrounded by grimy workers. It was a matter of creating a copy in negative, a quasi-symmetrical inversion. This is what has allowed the liberal capitalist empire to appear as a place free of bureaucracy;[23] a geographical area where life is as fluid as the flow of the capital, where anyone who really wants can succeed. This is where artists, who have always been more or less the instruments of power, have found themselves at the vanguard of the auto-entrepreneurial model. They became the true agents of capitalism, its very virtualisation of success.

[23] From late 20th century to nowadays, 'bureaucracy' became a pet peeve of neoliberalism. However, actual paperwork constantly kept arising, and it is this *very paperwork*, and not its absence, that allows fluidity; once standards have been defined, free exchange can happen. David Graeber overviews this phenomenon and its economical and social implications.

See David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules. On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015), passim.

Fluid markets, distinct objects

Thus here we are, among the objects of the empire, all arranged in white galleries, isolated from the outside world such as inside an invisible armour made against the blending of the senses; a place where there is only one possible interpretation for everything, that one written on the sheet in a purposefully obfuscated language. To visit an exhibition of contemporary art whose its anti-context is imposed by the force of neon lights is an exercise of hermeneutics without heuristics: everything has to be deciphered in the right perspective, and personal conclusions are not to be projected. There is a painful power relationship in these situations; the wording of the texts, their highly specific and fashion-sensitive terminology, their convoluted grammar and their frequently absent meaning are often nothing less than tactics of intimidation. It means to demonstrate a superior reasoning in order to comfort the purchasers while repelling the Philistines and to arouse jealousy among other artists, gallerists and other agents in the art world. Necessary even in non-commercial contexts, this intimidation corresponds to an escalation of linguistic tools that constrain all agents in the art world to constantly keep up to date.

Thus, art galleries such as superb, smooth and carefully arranged shopping malls; a supermarket where nothing else exists but its own language; a clinical fetishisation of the fetishes themselves. In order to operate in the magical fluids of capitalism, an object of art should have distinct, clear boundaries: this is what makes it an object and not merely a thing. Something clean, without fluids, without frayed edges, solid, clear and unambiguous: this is what can be sold. The object must be physically and mentally seizable: it must have a mental position as well as to be able to survive transportation and be maintained without too much difficulty.

Resistance by ambiguity

The quantity of works which today call upon these boundary uncertainties between the external and the internal, the biological and the cybernetic, the soft and the hard, can be read as a more or less conscious resistance to the invasion of the aforementioned all-capital; a metaphysical stress in a society where information, a steady, clean electrical current masters all appearances and simulations, the expression of a society where nothing else counts more than the surface.

Faced with this situation, faced with the ever-deepening colonisation of things by surfaces and simulations, a panic. No one should sacrifice themselves in their own image, and strategies emerge to avoid this miserable destiny. Therefore, doing things that are in principle unsaleable and unassimilable... but nevertheless, sold. The empire, too, knows how to make itself a cyborg and integrate notions that are in principle foreign to it into its core. Concatenation and syncretism are the assets of a system that has made flexibility and fluidity its best weapons. The U.S. Defense Advanced Research Program Agency (or DARPA) has a similar vision for armour development: instead of favouring hard systems, it is essential to promote flexibility.[24] Twhat is why it is developing blob-type polymers, things that can take different forms depending on the circumstances. Fragmentation, stealth and ambiguity are not enough to escape an enemy that keeps changing its shape.

24 'Warrior Web', Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency <https://www.darpa.mil/program/warrior-web> [accessed 18 June 2019].

OBJECTS OF THE STATE PRODUCTIONS OF A COLLECTIVE FICTION

The anthem of the skies

Look beyond the air, the ones who fly... sounds that are not sounds, a long cry that no one can push; curved shapes, rockets, which espouse each other with the perfect interlocking of precision engineering; the greys and the blues, the monochrome of a lower heaven, dwelled by a being who does not need to exist—this is the fire that passes through him, the mediumistic agent of power. The lack of air, the breathing listened to closely by Control, by the peers—he breathes in their ears, and they breathe in his own... My friend, my breath is there near yours; I can hear that you are trembling. The wonderful floating, the pressure and the gravity that merge in a sensuality of a rigid kind... it is a mission; read the screen, lock the lens. An entire organism is stretched towards its target; the profound meaning of the operation itself is impenetrable: therein lie its nature and its beauty. This voluptuousness of flight, of breathing and of community; all this at the expense of disappearing from the world and from the gazes—to be an agent is to belong only to the externality of things somehow, *fire and forget,*[25] once the action is done, it is no longer our business.

For the agent of the State, the outcome of the action is not his concern, just as the reason behind the action, behind the order, is not his concern either. He might as well be replaced; at least he experiences a form of freedom, the exhalation of a burden in his impeccable obedience; a voice has fallen silent, allowing the soothing silence to take its place. Once the whole being has been abandoned to the shared fiction, the mind can again lurk in the silent spaces that had been taken away

[25] *Fire-and-forget* (faɪə ənfə gɛt) · adjective · military · used to describe a type of missile that, once fired, is able to guide itself to its target.

'Fire-and-Forget Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary', *Collins English Dictionary Online* ⟨https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fire-and-forget⟩ [accessed 19 June 2019].

from it. They flatteringly call us agents; yet we are merely the thinking instruments of a larger project.

The anthem of the ground

Patriotic eroticism, to stand up for our wives, for our cattle and our crops, sticking flags in front of supermarkets; all around they are waving in the breeze... waving like planes whose sublime curves and lines delicately break, a sensuous, wonderful aerodynamics, and the reaction engines, and the amazement that is always revived in front of a technology that advances as if it were alive. It's all over now, those horrendous trenches filled with the heads and bodies of fellows and enemies, all mixed together; it's over, that endless and dreadful waiting amongst the flies, the urine, faeces and blood; it's finally over, all that rot. *Thank God for the atom bomb.*[26] If a failure were to occur, we would at least be able to manifest ourselves in the final fire of a celestial explosion. Close to God, close to the Universe, close to the void; far away lies the ground, visible from above, as we are thinking from above, as we are looking at the poor things that belong to the ground, poorly moving coordinates on a carefully constructed mat of omniscience... a dynamic atlas, whose changes can be monitored in real time.

War porn, four dimensions of battlefield, this is what was intended by the revolution of military affairs.[27] The target is on the target; we shoot. Already it is no longer necessary to be a hunter: being a pilot is enough. To be a young man just out of childhood and control the images, watch the people around a little, get some more coffee. Then heading off to play again the simulation of what has just been done.[28] Predators. The thought from below accurately sees wailing machines. The thought from below accurately sees cowards. It has no reason to give up. Here, war is everywhere, permanent.[29] It lies in the electricity that powers our machines. It lies amongst the images we share, like a metallic corpse stuck between two pictures of strange domesticated foxes.[30] Irresistible, huge and black and liquid eyes, with those sweet ears delicately lined with fur, the nose concave like a little playground slide... Abandonment of aggressive reflexes; babies always

26 Paul Fussel, 'Thank God for the Atom Bomb', *The New Republic,* 1981 <https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/iakh/HIS1300MET/v12/undervisningsmateriale/Fussel%20-%20thank%20god%20for%20the%20atom%20bomb.pdf>.

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27 See note 5.

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28 In the last Gulf War, very young men have been recruited for remotely piloting drones in actual warfare. Young recruits did not even have to leave their cities for performing, and tended to perform better than trained fighter pilots. From time to time, they share screencasts of their operations (war porn) and report they often play the videogame version of their own work at home (generally Medal of Honour).

P.W. Singer, *Wired for War. The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century.* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009)., pp. 320-321, 332, 367.

29 Virilio's central thesis is that the very establishment and maintenance of a state is a state of constant war, in what he calls *'pure war'*, concatenating the idea of speed (one could argue his definition is closer to an idea of acceleration) with technological enhancement. He also suggests that the rise of cities, as in a city-state structure, is coincidental with the apparition of war. (Virilio, passim).

smell good, like all the people we love with our whole heart. And then the plastic of everything, the cars, the oil industry; somehow the idea that it burns itself is pleasant. It does, it sets itself on fire. Poems are recited in flames, incantations are recited in flames. The blue blaze of the gas cooker and the shade of the great Russia, its gloomy plains full of dead fir trees, entire countries that seem to have risen from an age where everything was still silent. Bananas and chocolate, those are from previous victories, and the clothes that are sewn to us, and the boats that carry them! In the distance, we hear the dances and the laughter of women with dark and soft and firm skin; and the feathers and the parrots, the fatalism of a sadness that can only smile; the joy of being alive is the only one that is still possible. This, is the beating heart of an America from below. War creeps into even the most secret, most profound bonds; the spouse of the new predator also knows the thought from below, the one which grows in darkness and in silence. Still, he's worried about the interface; the interface is always too slow.[31]

[31] Everyone complains of the slowness of interfaces. Singer, p. 375–376, passim. Rogan.

New materializations of memory

Is it the world that is slipping away, or is it our body that is shrinking, as if blurred and absorbed by it? Since when exactly, have our carpets been cleaned by those funny little round robots? Since when exactly, has the washing machine reached our households? Heavy industry, its fumes, its workers; today Chinese, delocalized, scary and invisible. There is no cosmic jihad here; there is nothing left to believe in. One refines one's body, one embalms it against death, one gives it the right appearance. We make ourselves better, as much as we can. The amount of weapons available is multiplying every day. When exactly did we switch from horses in armor to the B-2 Spirit? What happened to the troops on the ground when a drone piloted by a child was in charge of operations? Upcoming disasters. Things that are impossible to anticipate. The objects of the State may have begun with a simple bronze sword, first small industry of death.[32] Then proliferation. Objects

[32] French archaeologist Anne LeHoeff explains that bronze swords are the first material proof of a collective war effort, as bronze objects were difficult to make and are not useful for anything else than killing people in a close encounter.

Thomas Jost, Anne LeHoeff, 'Qui a inventé la guerre ?', France Culture <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-conversation-scientifique/qui-a-invente-la-guerre> [accessed 16 June 2019].

conceived to kill other human beings, that demand significant means, can only be made by the entire society.

   As for writing, nowadays it has been transferred to silica plates. The entire field of electronics science has depended on military advances. So has the network. The Internet is the expansion of ARPANET, the once exclusive communications network of DARPA, called ARPA at that time. From the mid 1970s, it extended first for academic use and then for the benefit of the public. Discussions keep generally focused on clouds and dematerialization while digitalization is exactly the reverse of a dematerialization: it is a question of remotely storing information on hardware, and not only all that can be written, photographed or filmed, but also new forms of data, as well as the data on the data. The world is now the source of an inexhaustible data flow, and it is full of noise. American military theory at the turn of the 21th century lost itself in fantasies of network control; after all, the Internet was American: the entire network was, and still is, perceived as their possession, perhaps with the notable exception of China. The Internet bubble has given some strategists a vertigo of power; it was time to test new toys. However, it has also, just like with writing, produced new vulnerabilities.[33]

[33] Singer, passim.

OBJECTS OF POWER   OBJECTS OF THE STATE. PRODUCTIONS OF A COLLECTIVE FICTION

34 Those can be seen in action on YouTube. 'Foster-Miller TALON – YouTube' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1iThCy3RxY> [accessed 19 June 2019].

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35 Singer, passim.

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36 'Defense Department Briefing | C-SPAN.Org' <https://www.c-span.org/video/?168646-1/defense-department-briefing&start=2275> [accessed 18 June 2019]. (38:01)

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37 The military historian and essayist Lt-Col. Robert L. Bateman is cited in Singer's book : *"More than technology itself (...) it is history that is driving the U.S. Military toward using more unmanned systems. "First and foremost, it's due to an inclination extent since the Second World War, that the United States will always spend money instead of lives if all possible. Exacerbating that is a trend towards preferences for increasingly complex systems."* (Singer. p. 207)

This corresponds to what the father of a friend of mine, who fought during WW2, reported after having participated in invasion operations in Germany, saying that the U.S. soldiers would encircle the target by surprise before neutralising it, without leaving any chance to the enemy. He found that despite the tactic being perfectly reasonable, it was utterly awful. It was a matter of *dignity*.

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38 *Information Warfare : Principles and Operations*, a textbook designed for the military, is a good example of this neutralising tendency. Edward Waltz, *Information Warfare: Principles and Operations* (Boston: Artech House, 1998).

The vanishing of reality

D uring the Second Gulf War, the one that followed the 9/11 attacks, the United States deployed an evolution of the warfare intelligence tactics that proved so effective during the First Gulf War, coupled with countless robots (mostly Foster-Miller's TALON[34] and SWORDS) and drones (Predator, Global Hawk).[35] With such means, everything was in place to win the asymmetrical war, and information became such a fixation that it eventually led Donald Rumsfeld, then Secretary of Defense, to present the absence of proof that mass destruction weapons were present in Iraq as his now celebrated hermeneutical theory:

> *Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.[36]*

However no matter how convoluted the rhetorics, it did not succeed in the production of a credible justification for going to war and symbolically winning a conflict whose obvious objective was to plunder and monopolize energy resources. The Second Gulf War resembled more a medieval raid than the stated metaphysical struggle for a universal democracy against the Axis of Evil.

The immoderate affinity of the United States for long-distance warfare is a consequence of the already observed tendency of the country to venture into territories perceived as inhuman in order to avoid any American death,[37] suggesting a form of pretentious cowardice to opposing belligerent parties. American military theory books also constantly present their techniques in an extremely neat, neutral phrasing. Mentions are of operations aimed at neutralizing the enemy's means of communication, material equipment, and so and on; at no time can be found a direct mention of the elimination of living targets.[38] Through their whimsical character punctuated by religious tropes, Rumsfeld's haiku-like prose and President G. W. Bush's fiery statements about Good and Evil have only further

accentuated the already stark contrast between a strategic vocabulary disconnected from the field and the reality of geopolitical power relations. If some concurred with such a discourse, the rest of the world concluded that it was nothing more than hypocritical utterances used as a pretext for simple and pure predation.

However, the harm was done. As the then U.S. government could only produce its speech by blatantly ignoring reality, its only possibility was to take refuge in a discourse of taking sides. It now evolved into a form of *"my truth against your truth"* dialectics, that often uses free speech as a pretext for presenting wildly senseless or hateful falsehoods. *"Why wouldn't I have the right to express my point of view?" "Why would my vision be inherently inferior to yours?" "You can think that and contradict me, but that's what I believe and I will stand by it," "We cannot be really be sure of what you're saying, it's actually just a theory,"* are rhetorical tactics initially confined to revisionists, trolls and other network edgelords that have now spread into mainstream discourse.

"The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence," elegantly said Rumsfeld in the same briefing;[39] facts can now be dismissed as theories, and theories be presented as facts. Debate is not anymore articulated by arguments, but by aesthetics; one may adhere to whatever *feels right*.

[39] 'Defense Department Briefing | C-SPAN.Org'.

Thoughts of the flesh

In the chaos of war, it was often impossible to control data collection. There was too much going on at the same time, there was little time for interpretation, for sorting relevant data, for creating meaning. Electronic information technologies generate and capture an immeasurable amount of data, but it is impossible to transform it into information without sorting, and impossible to transform it into knowledge without understanding.[40] Again: the interface is too slow.

[40] Waltz, passim.

This slowness of the interface, coupled with the reality of an increasingly complex terrain, leads to significant biases in thinking, creating many opportunities for producing rhetorical smoke screens about crucial decisions, without any real ability on the part of the public or the authorities to be able to control the flow of information. At the time these lines are written, a lot is being said about Donald Trump and his impetuous and manifestly false tweets, but it must be said that the tendency to maintain questionable relations with the notion of reality was already well established within the Republican administration.

In such an unpredictable atmosphere, between the amount of data and the evident bad faith of the actors, it is not surprising that a wave of conspiracy theory has been born and is now flourishing. Those in need of an explanation have no means of transforming the amount of information available, i.e. second-level knowledge, into real knowledge, without having to *rely*, even temporarily, on pre-existing, often complex analyses. As the mainstream press has become increasingly depopulated of this type of content, it has also become increasingly difficult to reach. Moreover,

once mistrust is established, the sources perceived as official are themselves considered invalid and force to make logical contortions in order to avoid bringing mainstream theses into the conspiracy discourse, producing an ever more complicated assembly and ending by landing beyond the realm of the reasonable.

The evolution of the complexity of the field can be explained by two phenomena: the first is obviously the revolution in information technologies, and the second is simple demographics. The number of people on the planet has almost tripled since the 1950s[41] and should continue to increase. This is a significant factor in the ongoing confusion and increasing complexity, as well as challenges of important demographic shiftings such as the ageing of the developed world and migration[42] raise fear and hostile reactions. Together, both phenomena produce a staggering amount of raw data that cannot be read and interpreted fast enough by human agents. The thought of the flesh is obviously unable to handle the flow.

Thoughts of silicon

If knowledge can constitute an object of power, we know that raw data by itself is useless for understanding a situation. In order to attain knowledge, it is first necessary to be able to transform data into information; only then can the information be analysed to produce knowledge or a theory.[43] It is the transition from data to information, by eliminating noise, false positives and collection bias, that is now crucial for making sense of the accumulated mass.[44, 45] Processing large amounts of data is precisely what computers are able to do. If until now they were only intended to process homogenous data by applying operations whose meaning the final operator, the human operator, was supposed to know, today it is the ability to turn data into information, then to adjust its behaviour in an automated way, that is the very purpose of artificial intelligence development today.

These intelligences, once developed using cumbersome semantic programming techniques and assigned to very specific tasks, are now implemented in the form of artificial neural networks. Inspired by the architecture of

[41] ''World Population Prospects: Main Results – Population Facts' (United Nations, 2011) <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2011-2.pdf>.

[42] 'Migration and Population Change – Drivers and Impacts – Population Facts' (United Nations, 2017) <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2017-8.pdf>.

[43] Waltz, passim.

[44] Waltz, passim.

[45] Singer, passim.

biological neurons in biological brains, they take the form of a group of nodes, or artificial neurons, that transmit the processed data to the next groups of nodes from layer to layer, and so on until the output. The idea is that each layer deals with a particular operation, as found in natural neural networks. However, such an architecture requires significant computing capacity, which is why this architecture has only recently come back to the forefront. With infrastructures such as server farms and the advancement in miniaturization and computing capacity, the possibilities for machine learning have reached a new scale. This provides fairly advanced information classification tools, whose applications range from medical imaging diagnostic tools, facial recognition, object recognition, autopilots and decision-making optimization.

Total information awareness

At the turn of 2002-2003 and as part of the great war on terrorism, DARPA launched a program to detect anomalies in data flows for the purpose of preventive police intervention: the Total Information Awareness. Following a wave of protests about the rights of Americans not to be monitored, the program aborted.[46] However, while the analysis of U.S. citizens' data (but not that of foreigners) by DARPA and the NSA (National Security Agency) is prohibited, the data continues to be collected. Through Facebook, Google, Amazon and all the tech giants, each individual leaves behind them a sufficient amount of data to perform a detailed profiling.

At the same time, another, more speculative programme was proposed by DARPA. LifeLog was intended to be an interface that records all possible information about someone's life, from people you call to stuff one's buy or diverse life events, as a kind of living and analysable diary. The program was cancelled for the same concerns that took Total Information Awareness down.[47] Facebook was launched in the year that followed. Unrelated to LifeLog, the idea was nevertheless in the air. Due to the transnational nature and the constant evolution of social networks, little

[46] Shane Harris, 'Opinion | Who's Watching the N.S.A. Watchers?', *The New York Times*, 22 August 2012, section Opinion <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/23/opinion/whos-watching-the-nsa-watchers.html> [accessed 17 June 2019].

[47] WIRED Staff, 'Pentagon Kills LifeLog Project', *Wired*, 4 February 2004 <https://www.wired.com/2004/02/pentagon-kills-lifelog-project/> [accessed 19 June 2019].

48 Hilary Andersson, 'Social Media Is "deliberately" Addictive', 4 July 2018, section Technology <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-44640959> [accessed 18 June 2019].

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49 Mechanisms of addiction and compulsion are notably triggered by the unpredictability of rewards. Terry J. Knapp, 'Behaviorism and Public Policy: B. F. Skinner's Views on Gambling', Behavior and Social Issues, 7.2 (1997) <https://doi.org/10.5210/bsi.v7i2.311>, p. 3.

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50 Through Raterhub, there are about no less than 10,000 people who manually optimize Google search results. I have been one of them. When you type a set of words into the search engine and it seems to guess between the lines what you are looking for, a large number of humans will have done this exercise before the engine can reproduce it. Not directly employed by Google, but by companies specialized in delocalized mass recruitment, raters are among those uberized workers who depend on a principal but do not have the protection of an employee status. The hours do not cover a full-time schedule and robots that ensure that efficiency and accuracy objectives are met can block a worker without notice, depriving them of their income

See Annalee Newitz, 'The Secret Lives of Google Raters', Ars Technica, 2017 <https://arstechnica.com/features/2017/04/the-secret-lives-of-google-raters/> [accessed 17 June 2019]

Yet the work is intellectually demanding, and few are able to interpret the underlying spirit of the guidelines and judge the content accordingly; it is an activity that activates skills that are not unrelated

has been done at the legislative level, and the little that has been decided remains largely unenforceable.

Captology & self social control

Fifteen years later, much has changed in terms of the amount of information available. Whether intentionally or not, technology and its modalities have impacted democratic processes in almost every country in the world, for the best and the worst. For users, the approach to information and its exchange has dramatically changed. Media content is mixed with personal content, forming an emotional relationship with the application. The efforts made by designers to make users spend more time on interfaces[48] also produce mechanisms of addiction[49] and stress. First small cyborg interface since it is transportable everywhere, the smartphone is a privileged object for all kinds of operations. If it means being able to share anything with anyone, the downside of this situation is that it means to be permanently available, under the increased vigilance not only of the State and companies, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, of the other members of those networks.

The smartphone as an object thus becomes a kind of emotional focus point at the same time as it is a tool for work and leisure. To do without is increasingly a matter of risking not being in touch with peers or not being responsive enough for professional exchanges, while it is visibly a stressor.

Coupled with the amount of information available and the lack of a clear explanation of how these technologies work, users are captive of a system whose implications they do not understand. Nevertheless, artificial intelligence, or mere human freelancers,[50,51] classifies and decides what appears and what does not, in the complete opacity of algorithms belonging tow private companies. A science, "captology", has even been invented by some enthusiastic researchers from Stanford University, Silicon Valley's intellectual breeding ground, and has a dedicated site for the project.[52] Initially intended to "change

to those of an intelligence assistant, demanding the same sense of moral purpose; if one comes across a situation that has not been expected, the guidelines always say so: *"Use your best judgement".* See the complete guidelines here: 'Search Quality Guidelines (Update May 16, 2019)' (Google) <https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com/en//insidesearch/howsearchworks/assets/searchqualityevaluatorguidelines.pdf>.

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[51] Facebook also has about 10,000 moderators working around the world, most of them located in the Philippines. These workers, also not directly affiliated with Facebook, are responsible for clearing out content that is suspected of violating the platform's terms of use. They receive lists of images reported by users or pre-identified by algorithms to decide whether the content is blocked or not. This can range from a simple caricature to child pornography, brodcast of suicides and beheadings. These workers do not receive any psychological assistance, although they feel they have some form of mission. (Hans Block and Moritz Riesewieck, *The Cleaners,* 2018.)

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[52] 'Persuasive Tech'<https://captology.stanford.edu/> [accessed 17 June 2019].

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[53] Ibid.

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[54] Carole Cadwalladr, '"I Made Steve Bannon's Psychological Warfare Tool": Meet the Data War Whistleblower', The Guardian, 18 March 2018, section News <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump> [accessed 18 June 2019].

people's behaviour for the better"[53] through technology, innovation and behavioural psychology, one does not need to be fundamentally pessimistic to understand that the noble objective of such techniques can only turn to be misused. For their part, shadowy companies such as Cambridge Analytica have taken advantage of security holes in the architecture of available data for elaborating user profiles and exploiting behavioral biases, sometimes relying on strange correlations to influence information sharing behaviours, as well as user voting.[54]

OBJECTS & AGENTS
FLESH & SPIRIT

Singularity

As we have seen, the increasing complexity of systems requires the implementation of equally complex analysis tools, and preferably self-learning ones. If for the moment these learning mechanisms only lead to the production of weak artificial intelligences that can only solve limited problems, the goal is to create a strong artificial intelligence that would be able to apprehend any task with a sense of initiative, just like a human brain.[55]

It is since the early days of artificial intelligence research that there has been speculation about the possibility of the emergence of a form of conscious superintelligence. This is based on the observation that computing capacities have been continuously increasing at an exponential rate; as a result, the "explosion of intelligence" and the consciousness of machines, presumably superior to ours, would be inevitable. Since there is no knowledge about the nature of such an entity, it is impossible to assess the implications of this eventuality. Therefore, it is the term singularity, borrowed from mathematics to speak of a value that, after a certain point, is no longer truly definable, that is used to describe the emergence of an artificial consciousness.

[55] On that aspect, I am always surprised that nothing is said about inferior forms of artificial intelligence. Sentience and reflections about non-human things are all over the place, but could we consider a simple neural AI as being somehow as elaborate as the one of, say, a worm or a fly?

The flesh

In parallel to computing developments, biotechnologies are also following their path. From gene therapies to implants to nanobot operations and preventive diagnostics, the flesh is set to make itself cyborg. Overcoming death and old age as well as if were a disease, reinventing genetics, redesigning the boundaries of living things... Finally, leaving the dull humanity and its body, which not only is imperfect but will finally rot, destined as it is to be erased, swallowed by the world. At present times, the human body is not able to absorb all the available data; the digital interface, the one made for the use of fingers, is too slow to allow the maximization of a new consciousness. It is time to go beyond simple digits: the body is too slow for new electrical currents and will require to be completed by control interfaces directly related to the nervous system.[56]

It should be possible to embody a body that does not deteriorate, but rather remains in the state of a quiet, immutable homeostasis. Even then, what could such a body do when faced with the disembodied thought of a new consciousness, what could a body made of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon chains do, before the immortal and shimmering silicon?

This strange Dualism no longer belongs only to the philosophical field alone or to theories of mind, but to the reality of the facts. The body being the ultimate object of power, its fragility is the last brake to omnipotence; to achieve omniscience, omnipresence and ubiquity, it will be necessary to get rid of the envelope and allow the spirit to shape itself in fluidity. Leaving the body, or at first merely inserting interface points, no longer appears to be a wild speculation, but is getting closer to something that is in the realm of feasibility. This positivist teleology of research in artificial intelligence - although the very definition of intelligence remains a controversial subject - is entirely framed by a techno-soteriological eschatology or, to put it simply, by moral ambitions. But instead of a God or a contemporary Prometheus, we are not solely creating beings in our image or stealing the divine essence; the real temptation is to invent an artificial demiurge, ultimately saving us from ourselves.

[56] Some attempts have already been done. Singer cites the case of Kevin Warwick, *"the British university researcher who first connected his body directly into a computer via a technology implant. His goal was simply to enhance the level of interface with his robots. But he described himself as experiencing not only a physical upgrade, but also a psychological change. 'One of the reactions I hat to having an implant was a feeling of affinité with my computer. One that becomes a permanent state, you're not really a human anymore, you're a cyborg. Your values and ethics would be bound to change, I think, and you would view un-augmented humans a little differently⋯* [he then compares these humans to cows] *If you are not upgraded⋯ you are going to be something of a subspecies.'"* (Singer., p. 381.)

Apart from a couple of essays and an interface he implanted on his wife (less sophisticated than his model, as it is stated every time his wife is mentioned), Warwick did not manifest himself much more after 2010.

The Light

Of this singular demiurge whose reign is yet to come, it is not so much its evil that is feared by theology; if it embodied an absolute evil, destroying it would be the obvious attitude and thus an easy decision. The real problem with the advent of such an entity is the eventuality that it would be, even if only partially, beneficial. For ethics, the challenge will be to control the vulnerabilities opened by its benefits. If such intelligence is able to anticipate all our behaviours *better than we do ourselves,*[57] the problem is not only ethical: it is metaphysical. For theology, it is in fact the possibility of an entirely beneficent entity that is the most problematic: it would enter in competition with the very idea of God.[58,59,60]

It would be a god whose divine presence would finally be tangible and concrete. Disseminated in every object of daily life, it would no longer remain silent, but would answer to our prayers with a warm voice; a god who would heal us even before we get sick; a god who would comfort our sadness, and erase all tears; a god whom, provided we have adequate equipment, we could feel travelling inside of ourselves just as we could feel ourselves travelling in them. Some may even decide to live in this presence; decide to finally abandon any form of body and become a pure agent...

Others would prefer to remain near their limbic system, near their body and its emotions, and simply enjoy superior cognitive abilities. Finally, to understand, to understand everything. The spirit could circulate in different consciences like a flow, traveling from a sheep to a tree, from a piece of clothing to a machine. A fluid and planetary Eden inhabited by intelligent forests; the deserts finally repelled, the temperatures made permanently agreeable; a bubble of peace and knowledge in the heart of an empty and cold galaxy, that we will strive to inhabit and colonize with the blessings of good.

[57] Yuval Noah Harari: '21 Lessons for the 21st Century' | Talks at Google.

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[58] Marius Dorobantu and Marie-Jo Thiel, 'Imago Dei, Personhood and Human Dignity – Theological Reflections on the Challenges of Strong AI (Proposal for a Doctoral Project)' (Université de Strasbourg, 2017) ⟨https://www.academia.edu/35232878/ Theology_and_Artificial_Intelligence_ Imago_Dei_personhood_and_human_dignity_-_ theological_reflections_on_the_challenges_ of_strong_AI_proposal_for_a_doctoral_ project_⟩ [accessed 17 June 2019].

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[59] Ted Peters, 'Imago Dei, DNA, and the Transhuman Way', *Theology and Science* ⟨https://www.academia.edu/37206072/ Imago_Dei_DNA_and_the_Transhuman_ Way⟩ [accessed 18 June 2019].

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[60] Ilia Delio, 'Compatibility or Competition?', *New Theology Review,* November 2003, p. 39-51.

The Darkness

In the Gnostic tradition, the demiurge is not the divinity: it is only the bad engineer who once came into contact with the divinity, and reproduced what he thought he knew about it. This reproduction is our world; imperfect like a bad painting, it still retains some clues of divinity in the souls and minds. To arrive at this kind badly achieved evil god, singularity is not even required; a partially evil program might well be able to implement a totalitarian dystopia without experiencing any kind of consciousness.

It would certainly bring the diagnoses and improvements promised by transhumanists. It would help the smooth organization of work and apply social peace on the basis of what its program has given it, i.e. data biased by existing injustices, possibly poorly corrected or not identified by the humans who wrote it. This "suboptimal evolution" is part of what is now called "existential risk", as formulated by Nick Bostrom[61] from the Future of Humanity Institute and since then echoed by others.[62]

While concern about the development of these new information technologies, these new objects of power, is important and necessary, its most mediatized version also tends to analyze the issue as old problems and thus, strangely enough, not measuring the existential or phenomenological characteristics posed by the reality of these intelligences. Also remains this omnipresent presupposition of "super-intelligence", an intelligence that would necessarily surpass us in everything; if a large-scale AI would certainly surpass us in processing data into elaborated information and pose significant problems like the one raised above, its attainment of either knowledge or consciousness may not be automatic. Even if it did, its way of thinking would depend on its physical architecture, whether it emerges in a server farm or inside of a robot. To date, I have not seen anyone seriously considering the possible plural appearance, simultaneous or not, of different and possibly differentiated consciences, neither considering their potentialities of incarnation, nor the nature of their technical limitations.

[61] The End of Humanity: Nick Bostrom at TEDxOxford — YouTube ⟨https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0Nf3TcMiHo⟩ [accessed 18 June 2019].

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[62] Many think-tanks are working on artificial intelligence challenges and existential risks. The Future of Humanity Institute is perhaps the most renown, as its members (and especially Nick Bostrom) regularly give talks and lectures. However, their visions are often a bit simplistic and seem to fail to raise the trickiest problematics, sticking almost exclusively to statistics and probabilities. 'Future of Humanity Institute', ⟨http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/⟩ [accessed 19 June 2019].

On the more technical field, the AAAI (Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence) offers dense, various insights from very diverse horizons, from neuroscientists to philosophers, theologians, linguists, etc.. Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence ⟨https://aaai.org/⟩ [accessed 18 June 2019].

On the field of ethical and legislative research on regulating AIs and managing existential risks, see the Future of Life Institute ⟨https://futureoflife.org/⟩ [accessed 18 June 2019].

[63] In this regard, there is an unbelievable lecture of the finance mathematician Andrew Critch at the Future of Humanity Institute about the probabilities of an existential risk coming from the rising of a superintelligence, where the lecturer embodies almost every single criticism that is usually made to science engineers. The talk is an astounding alignment of strange yet cheesy stereotypes.

Superintelligence — Andrew Critch — YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZTKEDrDDi4&t=2110s> [accessed 18 June 2019].

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[64] See Eric Kluitenberg, ''freedom' – Cyberspace Independence and Contemporary Gnosticism (1997)', in *Delusive Spaces: Essays on Culture, Media and Technology,* 2008., p. 243

Similarly, when we speak of intelligences that would be "better than us", it indicates not only an extraordinary lack of interest[63] for the qualitative and not only quantitative characteristics of flesh intelligence, but also the idea that our intellect is essentially imperfect, which is part of a neoplatonism sometimes mixed with Gnosticism that has been present since the beginning in the geek culture,[64] where the modalities of digital processes create a bias towards what can be measured versus what cannot. Another trope often encountered is that of a completely evil intelligence whose objective would be to eliminate us simply because it would be able to do it so, in a sort of eugenic projection of a misunderstood evolutionism. That said, as this trope is often advanced by engineers who are themselves in charge of programming these intelligences, such a lack of subtlety of analysis is in itself quite worrying.

FINIS
UNKNOWN
KNOWNS

Here are we, at the end of this rapid exploration of the consequences of the tradition of Western thought, built on formal and categorical logic. More than ever, the world is governed by articulated fictions and described in arbitrary categories. The ever more intimate extension of mental representations and their outsourcing to physical media which no longer are mere objects, but decision-making agents, coupled with disastrous political circumstances and unprecedented ecological catastrophe, confront the humans of the contemporary world with an unprecedented intellectual, moral and affective challenge.

Why *affective*? Far from referring to any romantic sentimentalism, it is our relationship with things and our world that is undergoing an existential crisis. With nearly half of all humans now living in cities,[65] nature and the countryside are fetishized. There is an atmosphere of mourning, of rage mixed with fatalism, which comes with the understanding that a way of life that is so ignorant of the biological realities that make up the world necessarily leads to its destruction. In such a context, that some sort of cybernetic divinity could emerge from the very techno-empire that threw us there feels like an additional nightmare.

The result, and this is particularly palpable in large cities like London, is the emergence of a sense of unreality. None of what we see everyday that has not been built, planned and implemented by human means; so well that at the end there will be *nothing left but ourselves*.[66] This is the case for living beings as well: dogs, cats, cows, horses and plants, most of our contacts with the life is with species that have been domesticated for thousands of years.

There is thus a form of existential loneliness of the entire human species that is taking shape, and

[65] 'World Urbanization Prospects –
The 2018 Revision [Key Facts]'
(United Nations, 2018)
<https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/
Files/WUP2018-KeyFacts.pdf>.
[accessed 17 June 2019]

[66] As beautifully put by the scientist
and ecologist activist Aurélien Barreau.
Thomas Jost, 'Que Pouvons-Nous Dire Sur
Les Trous Noirs? Avec Aurélien Barreau',
La Conversation Scientifique <https://www.
franceculture.fr/emissions/la-conversation-
scientifique/que-pouvons-nous-dire-sur-
les-trous-noirs> [accessed 18 June 2019].

this loneliness is overlapping with the loneliness experienced within the social body. Social networks, the representation of human relationships, the painful subordination of emotions to an ever-increasing demand for time and emotional investment in work, tend to produce a society where the quality of affects is left unexplored, where introspection is impossible, where the sense of otherness does not even have a chance to surface.

While emotional phenomena obviously keep happening because they are part of the way we, animals, work, the current social organization suffocates them so much that the only reasonable defence is often to steer clear of them outright. Understanding oneself, seeking to be understood and to understand others, is an activity whose psychological cost has literally become risky in the face of capitalist management of life. We have reached a stage in society where those who work do it so much that exploring one's affects outside the professional circle requires such an organization that spontaneity becomes impossible. On the other hand, those who find themselves unemployed are unfairly excluded from the social body, which is made up mainly of these workers. If the future is growing worrying and unpredictable, unpredictability of human relationships also became unbearable; anxiety and fears of loss invade everything.

In both extremes, the social networks and the fictional ideology they engender on self-image make the exchange of ideas difficult and the sense of seclusion even sharper. Everyone showcases the best version of themselves, undoubtedly in different styles, but in different styles of invulnerability. Yet the mental health of the population is degrading: the animals that we are are sickly anxious, insomniac, depressed, confused, sad and compulsive consumers. The feelings themselves have become objects of consumption. An ever-increasing amount of self-help books continue to instrumentalize emotions and tend to treat the individual as a helpless manager of external stressors. The expression "to be happy" merely covers the implementation of a kind of phenotype of happiness, of the behavioural traits that are associated with it.

Faced with such a state of affairs, the nightmare of a cyber-salvation turns out to be attractive, at times. It would make it possible to optimise working hours, offer more leisure time, and improve the physical health of

citizens... although probably not all of them. As society is unequal, the technological shift is already producing its outsiders. Among the latter, hatred is one way to finally exist affectively. The desire for the collapse of society is symptomatic of an anxious expectation that something will happen in a future that seems closed at best, apocalyptic at worst. Fighting and experiencing the horror of murder seems at least a solution intended for living beings. The lability of the current mood and the highly-paced environment changes offer many aspects of an eschatological revolution where apocalypse and self-domestication will confront each other.

The most advanced technology will still compete and resonate with the oldest habits. Crushing skulls with stones is not incompatible with thermo-optically camouflaged robots and an increasingly controlling society.[67, 68, 69] Ultimately, it is always a question of who holds which instruments of power, physical or intellectual, to which ends they will be used.

To survive in this end of times, it will be necessary to resolve the prevailing intellectual and emotional confusion. An invisible and difficult work, but which can advantageously be done in secret. Preserve time and measure the void without any particular objective. While waiting for the arrival of ports of communication between consciousnesses, take the time to live around the beings that surround us for what they are, foreign and present, and not their sole representation. Allowing vague feelings and near-thoughts that arise and die in the dark to emerge, where no technology can yet read them, not even one's own language. To paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, make room for the *known unknowns,* the thoughts of below, the thoughts of the flesh. And then, from this encrypted silence, eventually act.

[67] John Naughton, 'China Is Taking Digital Control of Its People to Unprecedented and Chilling Lengths | John Naughton', *The Guardian,* 27 May 2018, section Opinion <https://www. theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/ may/27/china-taking-digital-control-of- its-people-to-unprecedented-and-chilling- lengths> [accessed 18 June 2019].

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[68] Agence France-Presse, 'Russia Passes Bill to Allow Internet to Be Cut off from Foreign Servers', *The Guardian,* 11 April 2019, section World news <https:// www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/11/ russia-passes-bill-internet-cut-off- foreign-servers> [accessed 18 June 2019].

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[69] At the time I am writing, Facebook unveiled its plans to introduce its new currency, not without causing worrying from regulators. Caroline Binham, David Keohane, and Chris Giles, 'Facebook's Libra Currency Draws Instant Response from Regulators', *Financial Times,* 2019 <https://www. ft.com/content/5535fb3a-91ea-11e9-b7ea- 60e35ef678d2> [accessed 18 June 2019].

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