The digital police state: Fichte's revenge on Hegel*

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Abstract

When the threat posed by the digitalization of our lives is debated in our media, the focus is usually on the new phase of capitalism called "surveillance *capi*talism": a total digital control over our lives exerted by state agencies and private corporations. However, important as this "surveillance capitalism" is, it is not yet the true game changer; there is a much greater potential for new forms of domination in the prospect of direct brain-machine interface ("wired brain"). First*,* when our brain is connected to digital machines, we can cause things to happen in reality just by thinking about them; then, my brain is directly connercted to another brain, so that another individual can directly share my experience). Extrapolated to its extreme, wired brain opens up the prospect of what Ray Kurzweil called Singularity, the divine-like global space of shared awareness … Whatever the (dubious, for the time being) scientific status of this idea, it is clear that its realization will affect the basic features of humans as thinking/speaking beings: the eventual rise of Singularity will be apocalyptic in the complex meaning of the term: it will imply the encounter with a truth hidden in our ordinary human existence, i.e., the entrance into a new post-human dimension, which cannot but be experienced as catastrophic, as the end of our world. But will we still be here to experience our immersion into Singularity in any human sense of the term?

Key words: Digital control, wired brain, singularity, post-humanity, subjectivity.

Where do we stand today with regard to our social frededom? The prospect of the thorough digitalization of our daily lives combined with scanning our brain (or tracking our bodily processes with implants) opens up the realistic possibility of an external machine that will know ourselves, biologicaly and psychically, much better than we know ourselves: registering what we eat, buy, read, watch, and discerning our moods, fears and satisfactions, the external machine will get a much more accurate picture of ourselves than our conscious Self which, as we know, even doesn't exist as a consistent entity. Yuval Harari, who deployed this vision[1], points out that our "Self" is composed of narratives which retroactively try to impose some consistency on the pandemonium of our experiences, obliterating experiences and memories which disturb these narratives. Ideology does not reside primarily in stories invented (by those in power) to deceive others, it resides in stories invented by subjects to deceive themselves. But the pandemonium persists, and the machine will register the discords and will maybe even be able to deal with them in a much more rational way than our conscious Self. Say, when I have to decide to marry or not, the machine will register all the shifting attitudes than haunt me, the past pains and disappointments that I prefer to swipe under the carpet. And why not extend this prospect even to political decisions? While my Self can be easily seduced by a populist demagogue, the machine will take note of all my past frustrations, it will register the inconsistency between my fleeting passions and my other opinions – so why should the machine not vote on my behalf? So while brain sciences confirm the "post-structuralist" or »deconstructionist« idea that we are stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and that these stories are a confused bricolage, an inconsistent multiplicity of stories with no single Self totalizing them, it seems to offer (or promise, at least) a way out which is due to its very disadvantage: precisely because the machine which reads us all the time is »blind,« without awareness, a mechanic algorithm, it can make decisions which are much more adequate than those made by human individuals, much more adequate not only with regard to external reality but also and above all with regard to these individuals themselves, to what they really want or need:

> "Liberalism sanctifies the narrating self, and allows it to vote in the polling stations, in the supermarket, and in the marriage market. For centuries this made good sense, because though the narrating self believed in all kinds of fictions and fantasies, no alternative system knew me better. Yet once we have a system that really does know me better, it will be foolhardy to leave authority in the hands of the narrating self. Liberal habits such as democratic elections will become obsolete, because Google will be able to represent even my own political opinions better than myself." (Harari, op.cit., p. 338)

One can make a very realist case for this option: it is not that the computer which registers our activity is omnipotent and infallible, it is simply that, on average, its decisions work substantially better than the decisions of our mind: in medicine, it makes better diagnoses than our average doctor, etc., up to the exploding algorithmic trading on stock markets where programs that one can

download for free already outperform financial advisers. One thing is clear: the liberal "true Self," the free agent which enacts what I "really want," simply doesn't exist, and fully endorsing this inexistence means abandoning the basic individualist premise of liberal democracy. The digital machine as the latest embodiment of the big Other, the "subject supposed to know," which operates as a subjectless field of knowledge…

There is, of course, a whole series of questions that persist here. Harari is aware of them: "In the past, censorship worked by blocking the flow of information. In the twenty-first century, censorship works by flooding people with irrelevant information. /…/ In ancient times having power meant having access to data. Today having power means knowing what to ignore."(Op.cit., p. 396) Can this ignoring be done by a "blind" machine or does it require a minimal form of subjectivity?

There is a long tradition, in philosophy and in sciences, of denying free will, but doubts about free will "don't really change history unless they have a practical impact on economics, politics, and day-to-day life. Humans are masters of cognitive dissonance, and we allow ourselves to believe one thing in the laboratory and an altogether different thing in the courthouse or in parliament."(Op.cit., p. 305) Harari points out how even popular champions of the new scientific world like Dawkins or Pinker, after writing hundreds of pages which debunk free will and freedom of choice, end up supporting political liberalism (Op.cit., ibid). However, today, "liberalism is threatened not by the philosophical idea that 'there are no free individuals,' but rather by concrete technologies. We are about to face a flood of extremely useful devices, tools and structures that make no allowance for the free will of individual humans. Can democracy, the free market and human rights survive this flood?"(Op.cit., p. 306) So if development will render homo sapiens obsolete, what will follow it? A post-human homo deus (with abilities that are traditionally identified as divine) or a quasi-omnipotent digital machine? Singularity (global consciousness) or blind intelligence without awareness?

Immersion into singularity is just the first option. The second option: if machines win, then "humans are in danger of losing their value, because intelligence is decoupling from consciousness."(Op.cit., p. 311) This decoupling of intelligence and consciousness confronts us again with the enigma of consciousness: in spite of numerous rather desperate attempts, evolutionary biology has no clear answer to what is the evolutionary function of awareness/consciousness. Consequently, now that intelligence is decoupling from consciousness, "what will happen to society, politics and daily life when nonconscious but highly intelligent algorithms know us better than we know ourselves?"(Op.cit., p. 397)

Third and most realist option: a radical division, much stronger than the class division, within human society itself. In the near future, biotechnology and computer algorithms will join their powers in producing "bodies, brains and minds, "with the gap exploding between those who know how to engineer bodies and brains and those who do not": "those who ride the train of progress will acquire divine abilities of creation and destruction, while those left behind

will face extinction." (Op.cit., p. 273) The main threat is therefore that of the rise of a

> "small and privileged elite of upgraded humans.These superhumans will enjoy unheard-of abilities and unprecedented creativity, which will allow them to go on making many of the most important decisions in the world. /.../ However, most humans will not be upgraded, and they will consequently become an inferior caste, dominated by both computer algorithms and the new superhumans. / Splitting humankind into biological castes will destroy the foundations of liberal ideology."(Op.cit., p. 346)

However, this splitting into casts will also not be as straight as it may appear. How will the new elite be defined? Will elite be a special upgraded biological cast with superhuman abilities (which means that its members will also be controlled and genetically manipulated), or will they be exempted from control while controlling and manipulating others? Probably both at the same time. In the suburbs of Shanghai there already are clinics where rich Western couples go to genetically check and manipulate their offspring before children are born – to what extent will the new elite then be able to control the digital and biochemical/genetic machines that control them?

In popular terms, this option opens the prospect of a new police state – what kind of police state? We should return here to Hegel and his polemics with Fichte. Fichte is often ridiculed not only for his subjective-idealist postulate of the absolute I's self-positing (a philosophical version of Baron Munchhausen's claim that he saved himself from the swamp in which he was drowning so that he elevated himself by way of pulling up his hair; he is also regularly denounced as the precursor of the modern police state which totally controls its citizens. His own words seem to confirm this scathing judgment:

> "In a state with the kind of constitution we have established here, every citizen has his own determinate status, and the police know fairly well where each one is at every hour of the day, and what he is doing. /…/ In such a state crime is highly unusual and is preceded by a certain unusual activity. In a state where everything is ordered and runs according to plan, the police will observe any unusual activity and take notice immediately."(Op.cit., p. 346)

Zdravko Kobe, in his concise description of Fichte's well-ordered state, is thus right to claim that, in it,

> "the police turns out to be omnipresent. It is not merely that, as he famously proposed, every person should carry an identity card with his or her picture inside, so that the police could identify anyone on the spot, or that bills of exchange should be printed on special paper accessible exclusively to state authorities, which would make counterfeiting virtually impossible. In order to protect citizens from crime in an effective way, the police should, Fichte claims, also put major emphasis on the prevention of

transgressions and direct its activities not only against actual injuries but also against their very possibility. /.../ The final objective of police regulations is thus to establish a transparent order that would render unlawful actions materially impossible."[2]

Already in his first book published in 1801, Hegel rejected Fichte's "preventive intellect and its coercive authority, the police," and denounced Fichte as a control freak: "In Fichte's state every citizen will keep at least another half dozen busy with supervision, and so on ad infinitum."[3] In the unpublished fragments on the German constitution from 1802/03, he reiterated this critique:

> "It is /.../ a basic prejudice of those recent theories which have been partially translated into practice that a state is a machine with a single spring which imparts movement to all the rest of its infinite mechanism, and that all the institutions which the essential nature of a society brings with it should emanate from the supreme political authority and be regulated, commanded, supervised, and directed by it."[4]

In contrast to Fichte's "pedantic craving to determine every detail," Hegel claimed that "the state should rather establish a clear distinction between what is essential to its existence and unity and what can be left to chance and arbitrary will" (Kobe, op.cit): the state should "demand of the individual only what is necessary for itself," and "grant the citizens their living freedom and individual will and even leave considerable scope for the latter" (Hegel, op.cit., p. 17-18):

> "The center, as the political authority and government, must leave to the freedom of the citizens whatever is not essential to its own role of organising and maintaining authority /.../ nothing should be so sacred to it as the approval and protection of the citizens' free activity in such matters, regardless of utility; for this freedom is inherently sacred." (Hegel, op.cit., p. 23)

Advocates of Hegel like to quote such passages to quell the suspicion that Hegel was a proto-totalitarian admirer of State. However, the prospect of digitalization of our lives throws a new light on this opposition between Fichte and Hegel: it is as if the moment of Fichte's revenge against Hegel has arrived. When Hegel mockingly remarks that, in Fichte's state, "every citizen will keep at least another half dozen busy with supervision, and so on ad infinitum," we cannot but notice that this refutation of Fichte's vision on empirical grounds no longer holds: with a complex digital network permanently registering our activities, the control envisaged by Fichte is today not only possible but largely already a fact. The digital registering of all our acts (plus of our health, our reading habits, our opinions and dispositions…) ultimately aims precisely at predicting our violations of the law and then act preventively to make it impossible for us to do it.

What makes things even worse is the fact that there is an important difference between Fichte's project of police control and today emerging reality of digital control: Fichte's vision remains "totalitarian" in the standard sense of

an external agency openly controlling us, while today's digital control is not experienced as an external limitation of our freedom. What we get here is a unique new form of the "unity of the opposites" where subjective exercise of freedom coincides with objective control. It is easy to see the structural homology between this paradox and the general vision of neuralink where a short-circuit Hegel wasn't able to imagine (a direct material unity of thought and digital material reality) is realized.

The most dangerous threat to freedom does not come from an openly authoritarian power, it takes place when our non-freedom itself is experienced as freedom. Since permissiveness and free choice are elevated into a supreme value, social control and domination can no longer appear as infringing on subject's freedom: it has to appear as (and be sustained by) the very self-experience of individuals as free. There is a multitude of forms of this appearing of un-freedom in the guise of its opposite: when we are deprived of universal healthcare, we are told that we are given a new freedom of choice (to choose our healthcare provider); when we no longer can rely on a long-term employment and are compelled to search for a new precarious work every couple of years, we are told that we are given the opportunity to re-invent ourselves and discover new unexpected creative potentials that lurked in our personality; when we have to pay for the education of our children, we are told that we become "entrepreneurs of the self," acting like a capitalist who has to choose freely how he will invest the resources he possesses (or borrowed) – into education, health, travel… Constantly bombarded by imposed "free choices," forced to make decisions for which we are mostly not even properly qualified (or possess enough information about), we more and more experience our freedom as a burden that causes unbearable anxiety.

Furthermore, most of our activities (and passivities) are now registered in some digital cloud which also permanently evaluates us, tracing not only our acts but also our emotional states; when we experience ourselves as free to the utmost (surfing in the web where everything is available), we are totally "externalized" and subtly manipulated. The digital network gives new meaning to the old slogan "personal is political." And it's not only the control of our intimate lives that is at stake: everything is today regulated by some digital network, from transport to health, from electricity to water. That's why the web is our most important commons today, and the struggle for its control is THE struggle today. The enemy is the combination of privatized and state-controlled commons, corporations (Google, Facebook) and state security agencies (NSA). This fact alone renders insufficient the traditional liberal notion of representative power: citizens transfer (part of) their power into the state, but on precise terms (this power is constrained by law, limited to very precise conditions in the way it is exercised, since the people remain the ultimate source of sovereignty and can repeal power if they decide so). In short, the state with its power is the minor partner in a contract which the major partner (the people) can at any point repeal or change, basically in the same way each of us can change the supermarket where we buy our provisions… This, however, is not what is going on today. One should strongly qualify the claim, often made today, that

> "the state no longer disposes with devices needed to regulate civil society and does not induce the attachment that once derived from the formation process of civil society. In short, the state withers away. What remains is civil society pure, and its police. We are left with a police without a state, with a police that has assumed the role of the state. The interface of the universal without the universal, the police as a state — this is the disturbing problem that should agitate our society." (Kobe, op.cit)

When the state starts to wither away, we don't get a police which is directly rooted in civil society, i.e., some kind of people's militia which gives body to (or expresses) community, overcoming the gap that separates society from state. Since society is in itself antagonistic, i.e., since the antagonism between state and society is a secondary effect of the antagonism that cuts across society itself, all such "militias" are a direct expression of one side of society against the other(s). The reality of the police without state is the pure police state – why? Here we should raise the question: is state really withering away in today's global capitalism? Is it not becoming stronger than ever, not only regulating civil society but directly intervening in it and collaborating with (parts of) it. The emblem of today's "policing" aimed at preventing crime is the direct collaboration between state apparatuses and corporations which deal with control and information – Julian Assange was right to designate Google as a private-corporate version of National Security Agency.

Police is closer to the civil society than state, it is a kind of representative of state in civil society, but for this very reason it has to be experienced as an external force, not an inner ethical power. Civil society is the domain of the pursuit of particular private interests, of private freedom, and this freedom can (without being destroyed) only be limited from outside. This is why it is ridiculous to equate civil society crimes with breaches of ethics with regard to state. In civil society, what matters is that you don't break the law (and are not discovered doing it), and all the legal tricks (twisting the letter of the law against its spirit) are allowed here. The force of law HAS to remain an external force. This is why it us totally wrong and potentially "totalitarian" to talk about police embedded in civil society, a police whose authority does not emanate from the state since it functions as a self-organization of the people themselves – this is "people's militia," and no wonder that Communist regimes tended to call their police "militia". Who organizes militias today? Neo-fascist right-wingers like Orban in Hungary who appealed to ordinary people to organize militia groups to search for illegal immigrants… Police is state power as it appears within the sphere of civil society in which individuals pursue their private interests, it is in its nature an external "mechanic" force, a counterpart to the abstract liveliness of individual interests. Militia is, on the contrary, precisely because of its "organic" character, a direct negation of the individual freedom that is essential to civil society. This bring s us back to our starting point: today, "militia" acquires a new form in the network of digital control baptized by Shoshana Zuboff "surveillance capitalism":

> "It works by providing free services that billions of people cheerfully use, enabling the providers of those services to

monitor the behaviour of those users in astonishing detail – often without their explicit consent. /…/ 'Surveillance capitalism,' she writes, 'unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data. Although some of these data are applied to service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary *behavioural surplus*, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as 'machine intelligence', and fabricated into *prediction products* that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace that I call *behavioural futures markets*.' /…/ Knowledge, authority and power rest with surveillance capital, for which we are merely 'human natural resources'. We are the native peoples now whose claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience."[5]

We, the watched, are not just material, we are also exploited, involved in an unequal exchange, which is why the term "behavioural surplus" (playing the role of surplus-value) is fully justified here: when we are surfing, buying, watching TV, etc., we get what we want, but we give more - we lay ourselves bare, we make the details of our life and its habits transparent to the digital big Other. The paradox is, of course, that we experience this unequal exchange, the activity which effectively enslaves us, as our highest exercise of freedom – what is more free than freely surfing on the web? Just by exerting this freedom of ours, we generate the "surplus" appropriated by the digital big Other which collects data.

However, important as this "surveillance capitalism" is, it is not yet the true game changer. I see a much greater potential for new forms of domination in the prospect of direct brain-machine interface. It is clear that all kinds of secret agencies are working intensely on it – what we learn is just the public face of it, the often "sensational" news about it in our public media. The best known project in this direction is Neuralink, an American neurotechnology company founded by Elon Musk and eight others, and dedicated to developing implantable brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), also called called a neural-control interface (NCIs), mind-machine interface (MMIs), or direct neural interface (DNIs) – all these terms indicate the same idea of a direct communication pathway, first between an enhanced or wired brain and an external device, and then between brains themselves.[6] The gradual development of communication in the direction of adding additional layers of mediation – spoken word, writing, telegraph, phone, internet… - is here cut short, and the prospect of direct link by-passing these additional layers is not just greater speed but also accuracy: when I think about something, I don't have to translate my thought into linguistic signs which brutally simplify meaning, my partner directly perceives what I think – or, to quote Musk himself: "If I were to communicate a concept to you, you would essentially engage in consensual telepathy. You wouldn't need to verbalize unless you want to add a little flair to the conversation or something, but the conversation would be conceptual interaction on a level that's difficult to conceive of right now." And what is more logical than to extend this idea onto the domain of sexuality: "You could

save a great sex experience in the cloud to enjoy again later — or, if you're not too private a person, you could send it over to a friend to experience.*"*

The first and rather obvious philosophical reproach to this vision arises from the so-called "externalist" theory of consciousness: my self-awareness is not "in my brain," it is rooted in my individual bodily existence, it is meaningful only within this horizon, as a moment of my concrete embodied existence which comprises the thick web of my interactions with others. So what survives of my mental state (experience) if it is torn from this concrete context? Is it not that, if we endorse the radical externalist view, then the prospect of shared experiences through a wired brain should be denounced as a dead end? That is to say, since the reality that we perceive is not an image in our head but outside our head, located into the whole of my brain, the perceived objects or processes and their interaction, even if a machine can fully reproduce my brain processes, it cannot reproduce our experience of what I see since it reduces it to what goes on in my brain and by definition misses the complex whole into which my experience is located… However, the case is far from conclusive: the complex interaction of my brain with its environment enables it to generate complex meaningful experiences, but this interaction has to be registered in my brain, so that by reproducing the neuronal processes in my brain it could be possible to generate in another subject to share the same experience. (Does something like this not happen when I feel a missing limb?)

Even if we endorse the feasibility of shared experiences, a series of questions arise here. The first one concerns the role of language in the formation of our thoughts and of our "inner life" in general. Musk simply assumes that our thoughts are present in our mind independently of their expression in language, so that if I connect my brain directly with another's brain, the other individual will experience my thoughts directly in all their wealth and finesse, not distorted by the clumsiness and simplification of language. However, what if language in all its clumsiness and simplifications generates the elusive wealth of our thoughts? A thought's true content actualizes itself only through its linguistic expression – prior to this expression, it is nothing substantial, just a confused inner intention, I only learn what I wanted to say by effectively saying it. We think in words: even when we see and experience things and processes as particular entities, their perception is already structured through our symbolic network. Say, when I see a gun in front of me, all the meanings associated with it are symbolically overdetermined - in short, I perceive a gun but this perception is given its specific spin by the word "gun" that resonates in it, and words always refer to universal notions. Therein resides the paradox of the symbolic overdetermination: when I perceive a gun in front of me, it is the abstract-universal word "gun" associated with it which confers on my perception the rich and complex texture of meaning that colors this perception.

This key role of words in our experience of meaning does not automatically devalue the project of neuralink: all one has to do to save this project is to abandon Musk's premise that thoughts are present in our mind independently of their expression in language. Insofar as neuralink will register our inner flow of experience, why could it not register also the verbal material present in our

mind, words in which we think – words reduced to mental representations, but still words? The core of the problem resides elsewhere: in the fact that the very reduction of the material support of the expression of an idea can strengthen the expressed content (meaning).

To illustrate this key point, Hegel evokes a wonderful example from the sphere of education. He notices that small children prefer to draw imagines in colors, while later they prefer to do them in grey, with a colorless pencil. Humanist theorists of education see in this the oppressive result of educational violence: children's creativity is thwarted, they are forced to express themselves wearing the straight-jacket of colorlessness… Hegel's reading, however, is exactly the opposite one: it is this reduction to colorless space that, by way of reducing the sensuous wealth, enables the children to articulate the higher spiritual dimension.

What we find in human sexuality is the obverse of simplification which gives birth to a surplus: an unnecessary complication which prevents the direct access to a goal. Sexuality provides the basic matrix of the dialectical reversal of failure into success. No wonder the French cuisine, the paradigm of high cuisine, works in this way: is the origin of many of its famous dishes or drinks not that, when they wanted to produce a standard piece of food or drink, something went wrong, but then they realized that this failure can be re-sold as success? They were making cheese in the usual way, but then cheese got rotten and infected, smelling bad, and they found this monstrosity (measured by the usual standards) charming in its own way; they were making vine in the usual way when something went wrong with the fermentation, and so they began to produce champagne… And is this not exactly how our (human) sexuality works? Something goes terribly wrong (measured by the standards of simple instinctual mating), but this failure is then endorsed and cultivated as the resource of new sexual pleasures. Can we imagine something more stupid (from the standpoint of successful reproduction) than the tradition of courtly love in which the completion of sexual act is endlessly postponed? So how could courtly love become the model of high eroticism? And what about our perverted games in which a particular object or gesture which should be constrained to a subordinated moment of erotic foreplay turns into the central feature, the focus of libidinal intensity which eclipses the big procreative Act? Is this dimension of erotic mediation not threatened by a direct brain-to-brain link?

The positive spin of a failure can be best illustrated by the loop of symbolic representation: a subject endeavors to adequately represent itself, this representation fails, and the subject IS the result of this failure. Recall what one might be tempted to call the "Hugh-Grant-paradox" (referring to the famous scene from Four Weddings And a Funeral): the hero tries to articulate his love to the beloved, he gets caught in stumbling and confused repetitions, and it is this very failure to deliver his message of love in a perfect way that bears witness to its authenticity… Furthermore, it is obvious that Grant's individuality expresses itself precisely through these failures: if he were to declare his love in a perfect and smooth way, we would get a robot-like recitation. For this reason, the next question that arises is: will our individuality

survive the passage into singularity? Technology has so far enhanced our individuality because it introduced more alienation, additional layers in our exchange with others, and even alienating us from ourselves (our screen image is not directly "ourselves") – so what happens when this distance disappears?

Musk's first line of defence is that, in his version of BCI, the individual is not totally immersed in it: it maintains a minimal distance towards it, so that, in order to allow the machine (or, through it, another individual) to register and/or share your thoughts and feelings, you have to actively consent to it, to will it: "People won't be able to read your thoughts — you would have to will it. If you don't will it, it doesn't happen. Just like if you don't will your mouth to talk, it doesn't talk." How does Musk know that the individual maintains this minimal distance? Remember that BCI works "objectively": our brain is wired, linked to a machine which, strictly speaking, doesn't "read our thoughts" but the processes in our brain which are the neuronal correlate of our thoughts; consequently, since when I think, I am not aware of the neuronal processes in my brain, how should I know if I am plugged in or not? Is it not much more reasonable to surmise that, when I am plugged into BCI, I will not even be aware when my inner life is transparent to others? In short, does BCI not offer itself as the ideal medium of (political) control of the inner life of individuals? Most of those who reflect on neuralink focus on the individuality of my experience – will I lose it or not when I am immersed in singularity? But there is the opposite option: what if I retain my individuality in experience and even don't know that I am controlled and steered?

Perhaps the saddest aspect of the vision of neuralink is the cynical opportunistic calculus that sustains it: we (humans) gave birth to a higher form of intelligence which, if left alone to deploy its powers, will reduce us to gorillas in a zoo: "Most posthumanists agree that it would be ironic if humankind were surpassed by beings that humans made possible, and tragic if such post-humans did away with humankind altogether. Still, more than a few posthumanists assert without nostalgia that evolutionary development is indifferent to the fate of what came before. For them, the prospect of dramatically improving ourselves in the process of giving birth to something far greater than humankind more than justifies taking risks." The only choice for us to avoid this fate is to join the winner, to leave behind our humanity and immerse ourselves into Singularity.

The sublime obverse of this cynical vision ("let's try to catch up with the machines so that we will not become apes in a zoo") is the gnostic New Age reading of Singularity as not only the new stage of post-humanity but a key cosmic event, the accomplishment of the divine self-actualization. In Singularity, not only we, humans, become divine, God himself becomes fully divine. That is to say, when synchronicity is debated, the obscurantist temptation is almost irresistible – no wonder Jung loved this notion. Insofar as Singularity also implies a kind of synchronicity of minds, no wonder that it calls for theosophical speculations: Singularity is perceived as nothing less than our redemption from the Fall, i.e., from our existence as mortal and sexualized being as described in Genesis.

The Hegelian (or, more broadly, German Idealist) references are clearly spelled out here, as well as the gap that separates the idea of Singularity from the space of German Idealism. Inert material reality gets gradually spiritualized through the process of actualizing its spiritual immanent potentials. The first peak of this process is human intelligence in which Spirit becomes aware of itself, returns back to itself from its alienation/externalization in material reality. But at this stage, Spirit remains opposed to reality, it becomes aware of itself as individual consciousness opposed to material reality. In order to fully actualize itself, Spirit has to overcome this opposition and become aware of itself as the spiritual dimension, the spiritual inner life, of entire (material) reality itself. At this level, my self-consciousness overlaps with the self-consciousness of entire reality itself, or, in theological terms, my awareness of God is simultaneously the self-awareness of God himself. God is not an entity outside the process of reality which steers it from a safe distance; the process of reality is the process that takes place in God himself, it overlaps with the becoming of God himself.

What we get here is another (third) version of "Hegel was too early": first, there was the young Lukacs for whom Hegel's reconciliation was the idealist prefiguration of the actual reconciliation of subject and substance, the proletarian revolution through which proletariat appropriates the alienated historical substance; then, there was Fukuyama for whom the ideal rational state, the conclusion of world history in which individual freedom is reconciled with organic social order, is not achieved (as Hegel thought) in rational monarchy but only in contemporary liberal democracy; finally, there are the transhumanists for whom only the prospect of Singularity opens up actual reconciliation of Spirit and reality.

Should we follow this path? Cantor revolutionized mathematics when he debunked the idealist myth of a single Infinity and introduces the materialist topic of multiple inconsistent infinities. Perhaps, we should do today a similar thing with Singularity; to debunk the notion of one Singularity as a new form of the divine and introduce multiple inconsistent and conflicting singularities. Let's return for a moment to the prospect of a shared sexual experience: its perverted version would be not to do it with somebody far away (a close friend allows me to share her/his experience while s/he is making love), but to share the experience with my partner while we are doing it. To immediately experience the effects of my sexual activity onto my partner - would this not amount to a sexualized version of subject-object identity? This example confronts us with the topic of sharing experiences which can be in conflict one with another. Let's imagine a much worse case: I am a sadist who is able to share the experience of the person I am torturing – will I be able to integrate this experience into my own and use it as an additional source of my perverted pleasure ("great, I can feel how my victim is suffering!"), or will the clash of two experiences led to some kind of a breakdown?

Does this not imply that there is no single Singularity but an inconsistent texture of shared experiences which, for structural reasons, always have to be limited? And that, if these limits stretched too far, my shared experience explodes into a nightmare? But what if Singularity will not be modelled upon a

single self-awareness? What if it will be a fragmentary space open to a plurality of different, inconsistent, even "contradictory" experiences?

This brings us again to the question of power: which regulatory mechanism will decide which experiences I will share with others, and who will control this mechanism? One thing is sure: one should discard as utopian the idea that I myself will be able to connect/disconnect my brain. And one should fully accept the fact that a wide all-encompassing link between minds cannot take place at the level of subjective experience but only at an objective level, as a complex network of machines which "read" my mental states – a vast "synchronous" collective experience is a dangerous myth. Plus, since our brains will be wired without us being even aware of it, a new form of freedom and power will arise which will reside simply in our being able to isolate oneself from Singularity.

This prospect of total control of which we are not even aware confronts us brutally with the question: is our only chance of freedom in isolation from the space of Singularity, or is there a dimension of being-human which in principle eludes Singularity? Even if we accept that our self-awareness is transparent to Singularity, what if we change the focus from consciousness or awareness to the unconscious? What happens with it in our immersion into a Singularity? To begin with, one should make it clear that we understand here the Unconscious in a strict Lacanian sense: for Lacan, the Unconscious is not some deeper irrational dimension but a virtual "another scene" which accompanies the subject's conscious content. As Lacan clearly saw, the Freudian Unconscious is not the substantial domain of Jungian archetypes as the ultimate psychic reality of the subject's being. It belongs neither to the order of being nor to the order of non-being but to the virtual space of pure potentiality.

I experienced something strange when I consumed the two versions of Doctorow's *Billy Bathgate*, the original book and the cinema version. The movie is basically a failure, but an interesting one: a failure which nonetheless evokes in the viewer the specter of a much better novel. However, when one then goes on to read the novel on which the film is based, one is disappointed — this is *not* the novel the film evoked as the standard with regard to which it failed. The repetition (of a failed novel in the failed film) thus gives rise to a third, purely virtual, element: the better novel. The film does not "repeat" the novel on which it is based; rather, they both "repeat" the unrepeatable virtual X, the "true" novel whose specter is engendered in the passage from the actual novel to the film. This virtual point of reference, although "unreal," is in a way more real than reality: it is the *absolute* point of reference of the failed real attempts. The inexisting "better book" is what both existing works repeat (and fail in their endeavor to repeat), it is what maintains a distance between the two, the interruption between the two that is their Unconscious. And, back to our topic, can the machine to which our brain is wired capture this virtual moment which belongs neither to the order of being nor to the order of non-being?

The philosophical term for this fictional component is absential: a feature that works only as missing. Recall the famous joke from Lubitsch's Ninotchka: "'Waiter! A cup of coffee without cream, please!' 'I'm sorry, sir, we have no cream, only milk, so can it be a coffee without milk?'" At the factual level,

coffee remains the same coffee, but what we can change is to make the coffee without cream into a coffee without milk — or, more simply even, to add the implied negation and to make the plain coffee into a coffee without milk. The difference between "plain coffee" and "coffee without milk" is purely virtual, there is no difference in the real cup of coffee, and exactly the same goes for the Freudian unconscious: its status is also purely virtual, it is not a "deeper" psychic reality – in short, unconscious is like "milk" in "coffee without milk." And, again, can the digital machine that sustains neuralink discern the difference between "plain coffee" and "coffee without milk"? Or is this counterfactual sphere outside the scope of the digital machine which is constrained to facts in our brain and social environs that we are unaware of?

In order to orient ourselves in this mess, we should first get rid of the illusion (into which we fall almost automatically) that, in Singularity, we will remain basically the same humans as we are now, communicating with others, sharing feelings, etc., just at some "higher" level. This illusion is clearly perceptible in most of the theorists of Singularity – Kurzweil, for example, automatically assumes that, even if we are immersed in Singularity, we continue to act like "free" responsible individuals. In short, the problem with the notion of Singularity is not that it is too "radical" or "utopian" but that it is not radical enough: it continues to locate the advent of Singularity into our common universe of intersubjectivity, ignoring how the eventual rise of Singularity will undermine the very basic presupposition of our intersubjective universe, the limitation on which our greatest achievements are based.

Since our — humanity's — "highest" achievements are rooted in our very ultimate limitations (failure, mortality, and the concomitant sexuality), i.e., in what we cannot but experience as the obstacle to our "higher" spiritual existence, the idea that this "higher" level can survive without the obstacle, without what prevents its full actualization, is an illusion that can be accounted for in terms of the paradox of a disturbing obstacle to perfection which engenders the very notion of perfection to which it serves as the obstacle, so that if we eliminate the obstacle, we simultaneously lose what it is obstacle to. Something new will emerge through this elimination, but it will not be creative spirituality relieved of mortality and sexuality. The eventual rise of post-humanity will not only compel us to grasp a new life form, it will also compel us to redefine what constitutes humanity itself – recall here again T.S.Eliot's thesis that every really new work of art changes the entire past history of art. This redefinition will concern especially the role of obstacles: we will be compelled to accept that, in human life, finitude is constitutive of the very transcendence which emerges against its background.

In other words, what is threatened by Singularity is the power, the positive function, of imperfection itself, even of straight ignorance: our inner life, inclusive of our highest spiritual achievements, is rooted in our finite bodily existence and its limitations, so that, with the passage into Singularity, we are deprived of the basic features of our inner life. Konrad Lorenz made somewhere the ambiguous remark that we ourselves (the "actually existing" humanity) are the sought-after "missing link" between animal and man - how are we to read it? Of course, the first association that imposes itself here is the

notion that the "actually existing" humanity still dwells in what Marx designated as "pre-history," and that the true human history will begin with the advent of the Communist society; or, in Nietzsche's terms, that man is just a bridge, a passage between animal and overman. (Not to mention the New Age version: we are entering a new era in which humanity will transform itself into a Global Mind, leaving behind the petty individualism.) What Lorenz meant was undoubtedly situated along these lines, although with a more humanistic twist: humanity is still immature and barbarian, it did not yet reach the full wisdom. However, an opposite reading also imposes itself: this intermediate status of man IS his greatness, since the human being IS in its very essence a "passage," the finite openness into an abyss.

So what will happen when this intermediate status of being-human will be abolished in our immersion into Singularity? For Kurzweil and his partisans, a new kingdom: nothing less than the undoing of what our theological tradition calls the Fall. For cultural pessimists, an apocalypse without kingdom, the loss of the proper human dimension. But what if, with Singularity, we will get a new Fall, a kind of Fall from the Fall: a much deeper Fall which has the structure of the loss of a loss? In Hitchcock's Vertigo, Scottie first experiences the loss of Madeleine, his fatal love; when he recreates Madeleine in Judy and then discovers that the Madeleine he knew already was Judy pretending to be Madeleine, what he discovers is not simply that Judy is a fake (he knew that she is not the true Madeleine, since he recreated a copy of Madeleine out of her), but that, because she is NOT a fake – she IS Madeleine -, Madeleine herself was already a fake – the very loss is lost. It is important to remember here that the last shot of Vertigo – after Judy falls from the tower, Scottie stands on the edge, looking down - gave rise to radically opposed readings: for some interpreters, this shot signals that Scottie survives as a totally broken man, for others, it is a kind of happy ending (Scottie is now cured from his disease, he can look down into the abyss) – the ambivalence which perfectly reproduces the ambiguity of the outcome of the Hegelian negation of negation (utter despair or reconciliation).

Is then Singularity such a loss of a loss which makes it absolute, or is it a simple disappearance of a loss? This is the crux of our argument for the survival of subject in the case of its immersion into singularity: the loss of a loss is not the restoration of the fullness prior to the loss but the absolute loss, and the status of the subject (as opposed to person) is that of such a loss. Let's return briefly to the topic of a productive obstacle or limitation: in Singularity (so we are told) the communication will be direct, without the detours which engender supplementary spiritual wealth – but what if, in such a situation, the lack will return in an even stronger form, as an absolute lack, the lack of detour itself? In other words, what if directly getting what we want desublimates what we get and thus render it worthless?

The prospect opened up by neuralink is not just that of directly shared sexual experiences. Our "normal" experiences are rooted in body and language – but, what if we imagine a direct arousal of the pleasure neurons in our brain, so that we experience a "pure" orgasm stronger than those achieved through bodily interaction and language of seduction? What would this "pure" orgasm

amount to? What if, far from offering the impossible/real full satisfaction, the subject would experience here the unbearable loss of mediation/detour: we get the desired thing itself, but without the network of mediations which makes it desirable? Such a reading points in the direction of melancholy – recall that, for Freud, melancholy is defined by the gap between the object of our desire and the object-cause that makes us desire it: in melancholy, we have what we desired, but we no longer desire it. The structure of melancholy clearly implies a divided subject, a subject who (consciously) desires an object but is unaware of the (unconscious) object-cause that makes him/her desire this object, so that when the object-cause of desire fails in its function, this subject experiences his/her situation as inconsistent, not really desiring what s/he desires.

To return to Genesis, the voice of Singularity is another address by the snake; it promises the annulment of the Fall and the achievement of immortality and superior knowledge if we eat its fruit, i.e., if we immerse ourselves into it. As in Genesis, we should be aware that the choice is here a forced one: we cannot but do it, no withdrawal is possible. So what will happen? Definitely not what the proponents of Singularity expect. Like the serpent, they are not lying, and the threat resides precisely in their not-lying.

As to this threat, it is easy to imagine the prospect of a direct arousal of the pleasure neurons in our brain, but what of the opposite option: new forms of "pure" pain and suffering? Metzinger made the same point already apropos the "ordinary" human consciousness "it is not at all clear if the biological form of consciousness, as so far brought about by evolution on our planet, is a desirable form of experience, an actual good in itself."[7] This problematic feature concerns conscious pain and suffering: evolution "has created an expanding ocean of suffering and confusion where there previously was none. As not only the simple number of individual conscious subjects but also the dimensionality of their phenomenal state spaces is continuously increasing, this ocean is also deepening." (Metzinger, op.cit., p. 621) And it is reasonably to expect that new artificially generated forms of awareness will create new "deeper" forms of suffering… The only way out of this threat would be to opt for the Dune solution: in Herbert's classic sci-fi novel, humanity became dominated by advanced computers and collectively decides to destroy all "thinking machines," adapting their minds to be capable of extremely complex tasks. (This mental development is nonetheless enabled by the use of spice mélange which improves health, extends life, enables travel in space beyond the velocity of light, and can even bestow limited prescience.) But, as we have already seen, it is too late for this option – who knows how far secret service and corporations already progressed in the direction of realizing different versions of neuralink and direct control of our minds?

Here we should return to Mao Ze-dong's claim that "there is a great disorder in the real" - but, as we all know, Mao's saying goes on: "… so the situation is excellent." So where is the opening for a radical transformation? Singularity will be a phenomenon grounded in a combination of science and capitalism – science and technology which will give rise to it is not neutral but is grounded in capitalist relations. In other words, the eventual rise of Singularity will be a case of what we cannot but call post-human capitalism. Usually it is

posited that capitalism is (more) historical and our humanity, inclusive of sexual difference, more basic, even ahistorical; however, what we are witnessing today is nothing less than an essay to integrate the passage to post-humanity into capitalism – this is what the efforts of new billionaire gurus like Musk are about, their prediction that capitalism "as we know it" is coming to an end refers to "human" capitalism, and the passage they talk about is the passage from "human" to post-human capitalism.

For this reason, the prospect of Singularity is today's main candidate for the end of history: after it will take place, the rest will not be history – at least not history as we knew it and experienced it. Will then, if we enter Singularity, the universe of meaning, the symbolic dimension, still be there or will it disappear as if it never existed? Neither of the two: it will disappear, but its disappearance will continue to be felt as an absence. In short, it will function as an absential of Singularity. The irony is that subject will survive as the absential, embodying the very dimension that, as we can presume, will escape Singularity.

So, again, where is the opening for the new here? Even if the subject's Unconscious in principle eludes the grasp of Singularity, what if this does not mean that there will be a dimension which will elude Singularity but something much more simple and radical: the subject will pay its entry into Singularity by simply *losing the dimension of the Unconscious*? In short, what if its immersion into Singularity will preclude the dimension of the Unconscious, leaving no space for it? What if this immersion means that the scope of subjectivity will be limited to what is registered by Singularity? This will not be the case because the very disappearance of the symbolic loss ("Fall") will continue to echo in the space of Singularity.

The loss of the loss itself, the appearance of the loss at its purest, is something like a thinking version of Malevitch's famous black square on white surface: the zero-level, the marking of the basic coordinates of our symbolic space. It is important to note here that, for Malevitch, this zero-form is not some kind of self-destructive abyss we should beware of not being swallowed by it but a point through which we should pass to gain a new beginning. It is the moment of death-drive which opens up the space for a new beginning. This is why Malevitch's later more figurative paintings (like his famous self-portrait) are not a betrayal of his youthful radicality but ways to explore the space opened up by it. (In the self-portrait, this fidelity is signaled by Malevitch's hands forming a square, telling the viewer that the square is still here.) And the same goes for our entry into Sigularity: the loss of a loss brought by it could be a new beginning of something we cannot yet imagine.

The distance between our inner life, the line of our thoughts, and external reality is the basis of the perception of ourselves as free: we are free in our thoughts precisely insofar as they are at a distance from reality, so that we can play with them, make thought-experiments, engage in dreaming, with no direct consequences in reality, no one can control us there. Once our inner life is directly linked to reality so that our thoughts have direct consequences in reality (or can be directly regulated by a machine that is part of reality) and are in this sense no longer "ours," we effectively enter a post-human state. The subject that will survive will thus not be the bearer of the wealth of inner experience –

all that wealth of feelings, passions, fears, dreams and hopes, etc., could well be drowned in the collective space of Singularity. The subject will survive as a pure $, the vanishing point of negativity separated from all of its experienced content.

The standard topic of the contemporary anti-philosophy is anti-Cartesianism: the Cartesian cogito is an abstract rational entity artificially torn out of the concrete life-world of actual individuals. In this context, the Freudian Unconscious is perceived as part of the anti-Cartesian backlash, as yet another proof, in the line of Feuerbach, Marx, etc., that we humans are not isolated thinking beings but, as Heidegger would have put it, always-already thrown-into-the-world, engaged with reality. Lacan's thesis that cogito is the Freudian subject acquires here its full weight: for him, on the contrary, the Unconscious is not part of the thick non-transparent background of the Lebenswelt. With regard to the opposition between abstract (decontextualized) rational structures and concrete thick life-world, the Unconscious is on the side of the first: the Unconscious is the intrusion of a foreign body into our life-world, it is like an intruding machine which derails the smooth functioning of our life-world, subordinating it to its own weird laws. Just think about what the Unconscious of drives does to our innate instinctual sexuality: it totally perverts it, subordinating its reproductive function to an almost suicidal mechanism of the compulsion-to-repeat in which enjoyment is posited as a self-goal. Lacan knew what he was talking about when he said that the Cartesian cogito is the subject of the Unconscious.

In short, the subject will be divided more than ever, divided not between itself and its other(s) but divided in itself, between its content (separated from it) and the punctuality of $ (barred zero-point of subjectivity). It will maintain a minimum of distance towards the collective thought, and this distance will be the source of a suffering whose contours we cannot guess today, but also the source of a new hope.

Notes

1. See Yuval Noah Harari, Homo Deus. *A Brief History of Tomorrow*, London: Harvill Secker 2016.
2. Quoted from Zdravko Kobe, "The Interface of the Universal: On Hegel's Concept of the Police," available online at http://journal.instifdt.bg.ac.rs/index.php?journal=fid&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=728&path%5B%5D=624.
3. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press 1977, p. 148.
4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, p. 22.
5. Quoted from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jan/20/shoshana-zuboff-age-of-surveillance-capitalism-google-facebook.
6. Non-attributed quotes that follow are from https://waitbutwhy.com/2017/04/neuralink.html.
7. Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One. The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: MIT 2004, p. 620.

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