

2001 : THE INDIVIDUAL'S ODYSSEY

International Convention of Data Protection Commissioners

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The extract of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" we just heard is an awesome appeal to prospective thinking on data processing, technology and freedom.

Richard Strauss' work is the key piece of the Stanley KUBRICK's splendid motion picture : 2001, A Space Odyssey". We are in 2001. We are gathered here because we are members of various organisations that, throughout the world, are acting to protect freedom in a computerised environment. What lessons are we learning from this vision ?

And first of all, what are we seeing around us ? A world rather similar to the one imagined by Kubrick. Kubrick had worked long to find out about computers, artificial intelligence, robots. He imagined a dramatic scene, where after launching a rocket, the focus is no longer on our terrestrial society, by on an encounter with the individual, the computer and the universe, symbolised by the endless galactic night. In reality, no scene is ever cut off that much from social complexity. Both at CNIL and at each of our organisations, the "data processing and freedom" issues are not separated from a work, health, housing, administration, police, social help situation, etc... But the more data processing progresses and the more society moves forward, the more we know we are at the outposts of a new society problem, emerging from the encounter of the individual, the computer and the modern notion of the universal.

Recently, Steven SPIELBERG paid a tribute to KUBRICK's views by completing AI, the movie on artificial intelligence KUBRICK had offered before he died, released this year. As the movie was being released, KUBRICK's widow emphasised the magnitude of the work accomplished by her husband to prepare 2001 and the soundness of his views. Apart from one point, said Kubrick's wife, who is a painter : we made a mistake on colour. When preparing 2001, we thought the dominant colour would be white. But the predominant colour now is black.

Well then ! And why black ? Everyone likes technology, and Internet has aroused an enthusiasm computers had not generated since a long time. Everyone likes information society themes and its promises of individualisation and personalisation. Each one of us wants to believe in the concept that more technology leads to more communicating and exchanges, and therefore more democracy. So then, what is the reason for these black robes we, men and women, are more than often dressed in ?

White or black ? When focussing on data processing and freedom issues, we receive a sequence of blinding flashes. Everything associated with the individual is lit up in a stroboscopic light : king or slave, person on file or master of interactivity. In no way do such oppositions stem from a binary mind or from Machiavellism. We are coming out from a tunnel and discovering a new world. The light is blinding us. We are at the outposts and can make out shapes. We cannot make out colours yet. Therefore, I will just deliver a black and white message on the upcoming future White : the irresistible rise of a new individual. Black : the questions it raises as to our notion of Time, Space, Power and Double.

1 – THE FUTURE IN WHITE : THE INDIVIDUAL'S ODISSEY

The power of the mutation underway, including around the Internet, does not result only from a technological break. It is also the result of a deep change in society, precisely in the area of the individual and the individual's place.

I will refer to a project that has just been completed by LaSer, Galeries Lafayette's services and technology department. Every year, LaSer publishes a book of thoughts, and this year, the subject was society and social changes. The LaSer Book, to be released soon, attempted to understand the elements of new modernity.

One of the strongest lines of the change that was identified relates to the issue of the individual. Just take a look at the titles of books published during the last half year, some of them written by major French sociologists. Jean Claude Kaufmann : “Ego”. Robert Castel : “Propriété privée, propriété sociale, propriété de soi”. Alain Touraine : “ La recherche de soi, dialogues sur le sujet”. What a change in sociology ! What became of systems ? What became of the social player ? where is the psychoanalytical will to deconstruct the subject ? Now is the time for rebuilding identities. According to Alain Touraine, the priority, before the issue of social action, is the issue of who we are. The same applies when analysing the sociological thinking in other countries of Europe or in the United States.

That is because there is strong break due to the fact that the romantic programme of the XIXth century, encouraging the elite to become the architects of their own lives, is now becoming a programme for the general public. Each one of us is looking for his/her identity, his/her individuality. Everyone wants to escape any form of social determinism. Fashion, the media, the changes towards personalisation, the very organisation of markets : all this is drawn by the same demand.

What is going on in the movie and television business is meaningful. Society is no longer satisfied with having stars, i.e. a small number of gods sometimes living in Mount Olympus, sometimes living in the gossip of daily life, so all can relate to the. People are not satisfied either with a broadening of the circle of idols to these “people” character TV anchors, heirs and crowned heads, athletes, politicians, models and big bosses. We want more and more heads, looks, physical features, always more “doubles” of ourselves. Sitcoms and reality TV programmes provide an imaginary material not centred around a few characters, but around a galaxy of increasingly different humans, increasingly similar to the individuals we mix with, increasingly closer to us.

To find oneself, the ideal thing is to be able to handle a broad portfolio of identities, one could change like a watch. Me at work, me as a sportsman or me as a vamp, me with my friends during my leisure time or off-work time. There is no limit to that process, as illustrated by the success of Madonna, based on the affirmation of a personality through a permanently changing appearance.

The economy is not beyond such changes. The innovative services of the fifties was mostly the result of the very personality of entrepreneurs. Innovation today, inspiring Internet success stories, is an innovation of services enabling clients to acknowledge themselves as people.

Politics itself is now going through the same phases. Some topics are increasingly present : what pertains to identity, privacy, cloning, data processing and freedom. In the United States, a major event occurred in the very recent years. Several surveys showed that the privacy issue had become a major issue for American internet users. When asked about why they do not use electronic trading more, why they don't buy on the Internet more, they answer : "privacy". We are asked too many questions, too many traces are left, there is not enough respect for our anonymity. And when asked : "what do you trust to avoid that ? Company loyalty ? Ethics codes ?", American internet users answer : "No way. We can only trust the Law". The fact that such an opinion gained such a place in a country such as the United States is a sign. Politics is facing a new ambiguity, a new black and white situation. The Odyssey of the individual does not guarantee a future in white.

II – THE FUTURE IN BLACK : INCREASINGLY TRAPPED BY THE GALACTIC NIGHT.

In 2001, human society is white. On earth, everything is white. Inside the rocket, white prevails too. Individuals, cosmonauts wear white suits. Black is outside man, it is the colour prevailing in that infinite galactic night environment.

The problem arises from the feeling that night is progressing. Night enters in us and invades our souls. The other side of that Odyssey of the Individual needs to be explored. To that end, we will remain close to KUBRICK's movie, while calling on other authors : Georges ORWELL, the father of modern thinking on power and freedom, and Alan TURING, the father of data processing and artificial intelligence.

We will do so in four phases :

- a reflection on Time and cycles ;
- a reflection on Space and personalisation ;
- a reflection on Power and the meaning of Big Brother ;
- a reflection on the Double and the universal today.

Time

In 2001 A Space Odyssey, the film ends on a metaphysical meditation on the relationship between Space, Time, thinking and people. The hero slips into a consciousness zone nobody had ever reached. Time coils up on itself, like the spiral of Light of the Galaxy. "It seemed to him that time itself was backing up. He saw, he sensed again all the sensorial impressions he had had. Everything was passing by faster. His existence was like a tape rewound at increasingly high speeds... But the regression was coming to an end.. The eternal moment ended.. The clock resumed its moment. In an empty room floating in the middle of the lights of a double star twenty thousand light-years away from Earth, a baby opened its eyes and started crying".

This reflection on cyclic time makes one wonder about time in 2001. The script for the films was written in 1967, one year before the first showings and the release of Arthur C. CLARKE's book, who had written the script with KUBRICK. 34 years to go before 2001. This could make us ask : what can we say about 2035, about what will happen in 34 years ? For the moment, let us make only one comment : mid-way in these 34 years, between Kubrick's script and 2001, is another key date : 1984/ 17 years after the motion picture, 17 years before 2001. As you know, "1984" is the title of Georges ORWELL's novel, written 34 years before, in 1950. In the last part of the novel, the hero lives out the same moments as the hero of 2001. He sees his life flash by. His mind leaves him little by little, to be absorbed by the mind of another. He sees himself in a mirror, older, and does not recognise himself.

"Get up from that bed. The bonds had loosened themselves. Winston lowered himself to the floor and stood up unsteadily. 'You are the last man,' said O'Brien. 'You are the guardian of the human spirit. You shall see yourself as you are... Go on, stand between the wings of the mirror. You shall see the side view as well. He had stopped because he was frightened. A bowed, greycoloured, skeleton-like thing was coming towards him. Its actual appearance was frightening, and not merely the fact that he knew it to be himself. He moved closer to the

glass. The creature's face seemed to be protruded, because of its bent carriage. A forlorn, jailbird's face with a nobby forehead running back into a bald scalp, a crooked nose, and battered-looking cheekbones above which his eyes were fierce and watchful.

Space

Another parallel should be drawn between KUBRICK and ORWELL. It is an outstanding anticipation of personalisation stakes and the issues it raises. Personalisation is not only the individual king, its also the individual slave and hopeless slave, because salve of himself. The torture chamber where Winston is locked up is called room 101. Not 2001 : 101 'You asked me once,' said O'Brien, 'what was in Room 101. I told you that you knew the answer already. Everyone knows it. The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world.

The door opened again. A guard came in, carrying something made of wire, a box or basket of some kind. ...

The worst thing in the world,' said O'Brien, 'varies from individual to individual. It may be burial alive, or death by fire, or by drowning, or by impalement, or fifty other deaths.

He had moved a little to one side, so that Winston had a better view of the thing on the table...

'In your case, said O'Brien, 'the worst thing in the world happens to be rats.'

A disturbing view of personalisation ! It reminds of KUBRICK, whose co-scriptwriter, Arthur CLARKE, starts the introduction to 2001 as follows : « Behind each living being are 30 ghosts, because such is the relationship of the dead to the living. Since the dawn of time, approximately 100 billion human being lived on this planet. »

The number is interesting, because, by a strange coincidence, there are also approximately 100 billion stars in our local universe, the Milky Way. Thus, for each man who ever lived, a star shines in space.

But each of these stars is a sun, often brighter and more powerful than the little star close to us that we call sun. An many star of the Milky Way – probably most of them – have planet revolving around them. This, there are probably enough worlds in the universe to give each man living on Earth a heaven or a hell of his own.

A heaven or hell of his own : the magnetism of the subject of personalisation rests on those terms.

POWER

ORWELL's novel is a key moment in the reflection on totalitarianism today. We all owe him a new analysis of power and its stakes. But why Big Brother ? Why is the modern figure of power a big brother ? Why not Big Father or Big Mother ? What is the meaning of this drift in the authority model, at a time when the economy and society are re-organising themselves according to the principles of cybernetics ? And why does setting up return loops and more flexible control methods, very different from the patriarchal, regalian or dictatorial order, make us fear the arrival of absolute power ? The question is that much more justified since the organisation fighting against Big Brother, in which it is easy to recognise the Trotskyist movement, which Georges ORWELL was came from, is called : the Fraternity. So why did brotherhood, with ORWELL, become the symbol of totalitarian power ?

Let us have a brief reminder of the novel, and try to find a few hints in it. The scene starts on April 4, 1984, by following a rebel Winston – who hates Big Brother and his various penetrating and serene posters : Big Brother is watching you ! We are told Big Brother has the face of a 45-year-old : therefor, he was born in 1939. Winston is 31 years old : he was borne in 1945. Between both dates, the horrors of war went by, and when ORWELL writes the novel, in 1959, the is the big issue of memory and remembrance. This issue is precisely the subject of the novel, since the totalitarianism of 1984, prevailing in the world, relies on the absolute negation of memory. Order relies on the mechanism of double thought, of the permanent adjustment of the mind to the commands of the power, thanks to an increasing formalisation of language (newspeak) and to the hunting down of human memories.

The end of the novel is a complete turn around. The hero went through uneasiness, love, revolt and conspiracy, through arrest and torture. « But he was well, all was well », as said in the last sentences. « The fight has finishes. He had won over himself. He loved Big Brother ». Thus the novel is not only a penetrating analysis of the new logic of power. It describes the passing from hatred to love for that figure of power : Big Brother. Why the hatred and why the love ? If one answers that question, one can also answer the starting question : why Big Brother ?

I will suggest an interpretation. First of all, the novel indicates : Big Brother does not exist. He exists in the same manner as absolute evil exists : in the head of everyone. That is what O'Brien, the torturer, says : « Reality exists in the human mind, nowhere else... Does Big

Brother exist ? Naturally he exists. The Party exists. Big Brother is the personification of the Party.

- Does it exist like I exist ?
- You do not exist”.

Another important hint is that the hero did have a father and a mother. We know little of the father. The mother often emerges in the hero's memories ; it is a nice women figure, who fights to feed her children, in the shortage of the fifties that came before totalitarianism. The hero doe not have a brother, however he has a sister, a little sister.

His little sister is 3 years old when he is less than 10. The age difference between them is about the same as the one between the hero and Big Brother. Between both of them, has occurred a tragedy that haunts the hero. He is the reason for his sister's death. His sister was a sick, fragile child, which he stole her food rations from, particularly her chocolate ration. He stole them, left, and she died, and he never saw his mother again. For this little girl, absolute, destructive power existed : the power of her older brother. But the older brother is the hero. Therefore, Big Brother, the being he first hates and ends up loving, is himself, his Double. In the time of information control, the dominating power figure is not the Other. It is the Double, and that is why 1984 is a visionary novel.

The DOUBLE AND THE UNIVERSAL TODAY.

More than ever, the world needs universal values of peace and shared value. Never have we been further from them.

The Yahoo case we mentioned this morning underlines the distance from such values in a terrifying way. In everyone's opinion Internet is a world-wide network, potentially providing universal communication. Wrong ! In this case, we found that two regions of the world, apparently very close – Europe and the United States – had a totally different approach to the same issue. And not just any issue : the issue of the Genocide. Precisely, the issue of which philosophers say there is a before and there is an after, that Auschwitz was a decisive step in universal conscience. Contrary to the principles we have in Europe, we found through the Yahoo Case that the United States did not restrict the auction selling of Nazi propaganda material, or pyjamas and objects that belonged to prisoners ! And even, that according to American principles, such restriction would have been a violation of freedom of expression. A lousy universal morale, conveyed by this powerful world-wide network !

But why the crisis of the universal. Society ? Society went to all ends to lose memory, as ORWELL sensed, in order to conceal the importance of what happened with the birth of modern robots, to ignore what was going on with the rise of the Double imagination, to forget the very names of the people who were the landmarks of this new age we have entered. Alan Turing is little know. That is strange, because he is after all the father of data processing. More specifically, he is the father of a rather innovative concept : that of the universal machine. With this concept, what Alan Turing wanted to say in the fifties, is that what can be calculated in the universe, what can be decided, foresee, meets a precise definition : it is what can be calculated by Turing's machine, i.e. a computer. In the mid-fifties, man was removed from the very issue of a decidable and calculable universe. Man was condemned to define a new place for himself in the universe, far from the central, rational and governing place he intended for himself during the Renaissance and that the Enlightenment.

We have not found this place yet. Is that why these ideas seem scandalous, and remain concealed and taboo ? Not only. Turing was not only a great mathematician, a great logician and a British war hero. He headed the group that cracked the Enigma code, the ciphering code of the German navy, thus contributing to the Allies' victory. Turing was also a strange person, obsessed by the questions of identity and double. A homosexual, he thought he was the reincarnation of the mind of one of his friends who had died when he was young. Whimsical, he was a great fan and knew all the tunes of « Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs ». His very theory of computer intelligence was based on what he called the « sexuality of thought » and on a logical game the principle of which was a displacement of sexual differentiation. That is the basis of his invention of data processing, the increasingly present tool.

Those of you who want to find out more can read the LaSer Book (where we attempted to contribute to rehabilitate Turing). However, the reason for the taboo is Turing death. In 1953, he filed a complaint with the police for robbery by one of his friends. Though a national hero and a scientific prominent person, he was prosecuted for homosexuality, arrested and sentenced to chemical castration. IN 1953, in England. He could not bear it and committed suicide in Jun e1954. Not any suicide. Like Snow White, he bit into an cyanide-poisoned apple. That is the founding taboo of world data processing. That is the image of the apple, which Steve Jobs is said to have used to create Apple.

The universal machine, the apple, sexuality, the double : these strong images mark the beginning of a new social problem where the issue of the universal comes back in a wave to merge with and oppose the issue of the individual. The setting up of a “radical cloning” between an abstract and universal instrumentalism and autonomism identities rooted in history is the big issue today. In “La Société en réseaux”, Manuel CASTELLS writes : “our societies are increasingly organised around a bipolar opposition between the Network and the Self.

At stake is knowing who can act on such an opposition, and how, who can be part of the cloning to develop reasons to hope. My dear friends, my colleagues, my conviction is that the organisations responsible for data processing and freedom, for privacy and human rights, are at the heart of this challenge of the future. The world is full of the upcoming conflict between Good and evil. Our role, in relationship to technology, is to help draw a path into a Black and White future.

The task will not be easy. The more the issues of data processing and freedom are separated from the issue of the Leviathan, State and mega-files, the more they go beyond the very threat of major companies using tracking cookies to develop electronic trading, the closer they come to the issue of the Double, and the loss of landmarks we have as conscious and moral being, the more difficult they are to grasp. More than ever, the road to Hell will be paved with good intentions.

This can be seen, for instance, in the upcoming debate in France on the fanciful project of the citizen’s electronic safe. In a sudden contraction of Time, Time tries to please everyone. Here are my personal feelings : this project is impossible, and therefore fanciful. It is an attempt to bring together, in an unprecedented chimera, the old notion of egalitarian democracy (electronics for all), new expectations emerging around the individual (the personal safe) and the traditional vision of a State successful at going beyond senses of identity, in the name of universal Law (the citizen’s safe). Liberty, equality and fraternity in the Internet age : the synthesis is too easy. This little Brother is paved with too many good intentions. Let us leave it aside, before it takes us to a new Dante’s Hell.

My friends and colleagues, let us persevere. The night is young and the future is not white. Let us not hesitate to face the most demanding conceptual issues, because our place gives us a specific responsibility. And when we see clearly, let us act with courage and resolve.

In closing, with a note of hope and to get ready for this long cosmic Odyssey, I would like to remind you of Kepler's paradox. In the XVIIth century, this scientist, this predecessor of the Enlightenment, engaged in a major scientific debate on one question : why is night black ? Why, while being surrounded by 100 billion suns in our Galaxy – we now know that – why is night black just because our local sun sets ? Newton and many others took part in the debate. Edgar Poe sensed the answer we now know since the Big Bang theory and the expanding Universe. Night is black because the Universe is too recent. At night we only see the light of a few close stars. When all stars send their light through cosmos up to Earth, then night will disappear fade away forever.