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Most-Historical Apparatus: “AI” and the Crisis of Linearity

“Worlds are built in work-like ways (with intention and focus), yet the interactions are brimming with feeling (both physical and emotional) and imagination. Such a mode of being approximates the sort of unalienated self-objectification that Marxists identify with self-actualization and freedom. It engages all the senses and brings imagination and concrete interactions with the environment together to produce a material and social world that satisfies human desires and needs. [...] In a world in which people have unimpeded access to resources and freedom to explore their potentialities, the “work” of reproducing ourselves and our worlds can be both sensuous and imaginative. That is, it can be “playful.”

Susan Ferguson (2017: 120)

Would Vilém Flusser see hope in a chatbot?

AI is paradoxically presented both as Master and as servant, as an insidious menace about to take over the world, and as an obsequious servile “assistant” who only wants to please. This frames the user either as a helpless victim or as a distinguished boss, reflecting how the prevailing culture of artificial scarcity and competition divides people into winners and losers. And indeed, rather than fostering social and economic justice, AI seems to be intensifying wealth inequality and eroding democratic institutions. Despite these predictably dim prospects, Vilém Flusser would also likely see some hopeful prospects in the developments around “AI”.

Flusser's writing is distinctive for its unsentimental examination of the absurdity of life as much as for its frequent utopian turns, moments where, more Flusserian than metaphorical, his technopes-simism gives way and the walls separating us from an emancipated future simply disintegrate. In this vein this paper examines to what extent “AI,” rather than consigning humanity to repetitive and mean-ingless cultural entropy, can redeem itself precisely through its anthropomorphic performance as an intersubjective interlocutor. At the dawn of the World Wide Web, Flusser himself suggested that telematic exchange through the technical images of another person might herald new prospects for human flourishing, self-discovery and development. However, as I will argue below, the emancipatory potential of this intersubjective experience requires that the hierarchical relation between the two parties be overcome.

Heraclitus, Democritus, and the Crisis of Linearity

"The intent of the considerations presented here was not to promote some telematic utopia based on digital codes [...] What was intended here was to suggest a point of view that counters a widespread cultural pessimism [...] The Crisis of Linearity, the first phases of which we are experiencing, is mainly a challenge to us: We should mobilize the newly emerging power of imagination to overcome the crisis, in us and around us."(CoL:21)

We, human beings who are alive today, experience literacy's vexed legacy like never before. As foretold by Flusser, the printed text, and the linear, causal thinking it instructs and propagates, has become obsolete. But, as Flusser's contemporary Marshall McLuhan advises, obsolescence does not mean the end: the obsolescent technology is hence released from the culture's reliance on it and freed to play all manner of new and old roles.

The recent developments in so-called AI machine learning only reaffirm Flusser's contention that causal, linear thinking will never be completely superseded in the post-historical universe of technical images, and that future philosophy will have to oscillate inside and outside the universe of technical images. As much as we live in post-histoire, our experience is "most-histoire", with the legacy of causality, linear history embedded into everything we use. Every computational apparatus functions on mechanical linear processes, routines, loops, and decision trees, which, though ramified, always proceed with historical causality towards the result. What Flusser pointed to as a post-historical condition of thinking through technical images is at the same time a most-historical condition of myriad ramified linear processes running sequentially near the speed of light. At the speed of light, linearity appears to collapse, into a field of chaotic information, but since the apparatus we employ to engage at the speed of light is based on causal principles, linearity is only ever "attacked" but never completely superseded by the new paradigm. In *Crisis of Linearity*, Flusser notes that even at the dawn of history with the invention of writing, the ancient philosophers noted a similar antagonism. "Mathematical consciousness began to attack historical consciousness quite early [...] For Heraclitus everything is necessary (causally explainable), with Democritus everything is accidental (at best to be explained statistically)." (CoL:20)

As Flusser observes, "we cannot fully comprehend now why the ancients saw sadness in Heraclitus' causality and joy in Democritus' chance, while we rather feel absurdity as we are about to enter into the mode of Democritus." (ibid) The statistical and probabilistic thinking now operationally dom-

inant makes the structural distributions of power and resource newly felt in everyday experience, meanwhile dissolving the Enlightenment horizon of hope that rational critique was in principle adequate to constrain these. What is lost is the productive illusion that causal arguments were sufficient to address our concerns regarding technology.

Writing produces causal, linear thinking in the reader, historical consciousness, a notion of private interpretation and public politics. As we enter the universe of technical images, we lose the priority to develop our own point of view and begin to "dance around events" in order to get as many viewpoints as possible. "[...] image-makers do not think, they cannot think. Thinking is anti-image. Now they dance around [the event] and by dancing, by collecting points of view, they destroy ideology, which is the insistence on one point of view." (Flusser 1990c)

The situation is contradictory since technical images and electronic information are themselves products of the scientific tradition of causal historical thinking. The new ambient post-historical experiences in the new universe still have to be understood as subtended by and dependent on causal thinking. At the point of origin of technical images, at the zero-dimension point, there is ineluctably a human figure. Flusser's moral and philosophical solution to adequately address the alien dimensions of knowledge brought forth and availed to us through technology is in the face of the other human being: that we have no way of understanding the world as it is, except through the avatar of other human beings.

In *Crisis of Linearity*, Flusser imagines his grandchildren at their keyboards progressing "from surprise to surprise, from adventure to adventure, jointly with others," realising themselves intersubjectively through dialogical exchange with the apparatus and with each other. "Our grandchildren will likely say: We do this because through this we realize ourselves inter-subjectively and thus give meaning to our absurd life." (CoL:21) The philosophical destination is clear. As we will explore below, the effort to reach this destination will require both engaging with post-historical experience and overcoming persistent, most-historical challenges.

This is both a philosophical and political problem. Democritean chaos an irreducible contingency that every rational model encounters at its limit, is the opening through which the extra-rational exercise of power has always operated. As Taoism teaches, a decision does not necessarily follow from the preceding deliberation, for it is always an arbitrary decision to stop deliberating and decide. At the point where calculation ends and decision begins, where the rational instrument reaches its limit, power steps in. This structural feature of all rational governance is nowhere more visible than in the encoding of law directly into software.

Rational governance instruments, whether legal codes, scientific protocols, or software regulations, operate through the same alphanumeric logic as scientific argument, and are subject to exactly the same limitation: they can be formulated by anyone in principle, but their application is always determined by who controls the conditions under which they operate. When law is encoded directly into software, we are not talking about post-linearity in any operative way. We are talking about the latest and most intensive operationalisation of a structural feature of all rational governance: that the instrument of reason is always available to be captured by the extra-rational exercise of power.

Code and Apparatus

In Flusser's method it is essential to specify what we mean with the terms we are using. When we set ourselves the challenge of understanding what AI means for us, we need to ground our analysis, not in assumptions or cultural tropes but in material facts and principles that can be known. We must begin with the apparatus. This is a great challenge with something so technologically complex as what is referred to as AI, however, I maintain it is essential, if human thinking even has a purpose to attempt this.

In this endeavor, I will take as perhaps the most popular application of "AI" the GPT LLM chatbot as an indexical subject of our analysis, with the expectation that what is related about the chatbot as an apparatus will apply to what is called in general. As a dialogical "AI" counterpart in the process of human self-understanding, we need to understand what the GPT chatbot actually is, and whether it can fulfil the intersubjective hope Flusser places in the synthetic image, we must look at how it functions.

The T of GPT stands for transformer. A transformer is a program that analyses patterns and contextual likelihoods. The transformers in Large Language Models study language by searching forward and backward from various words in a sentence, comparing perspectives from various places in a text to build very accurate models of sentence and argument formation. The map of likelihoods is always traversed, or read, linearly when used for a prediction. Linearity is not transcended, only ramified. What presents as a dialogical partner is most-historical all the way down.

A GPT LLM is a machine like any other, and the cultural objects it produces are the result of mechanical industrial processes based on the causal rationality of materials science. So-called AI services like GPT LLMs are industrial all the way down to the mechanically operating integrated circuits

in the computational processing units, based on rational, causal, linear principles from their instrumental materiality, to the programming codes which instruct their behaviour. The entire apparatus of an LLM is based on linear, mechanical principles. From the structure and execution of its programming down to finely sequenced transmission of signals within the “metal” computer architecture at the level of integrated circuits,

The G in GPT stands for generative. Conventionally a linear query formulation is submitted to the interface which sets off a sequence of calculations, which eventually, according to limits defined in the GPT preferences “generates” an output. Despite the fact that many people claim that even technicians have “no idea” what is happening in the latent space of a GPT, the entire process remains formally entirely causal, linear and mechanical. Generation is only part of the story, however, perhaps even more pivotal is how the LLM is programmed to end generation and produce a result for the user.

The decision about when generation stops and output is produced is not determined by the model itself. At the formal level, a language model's generation is an open process; what constrains it when it halts, what it refuses, what register it adopts is imposed from outside the computation, through design parameters that are always simultaneously economic parameters. Computation consumes resources, and resource consumption is a cost, and costs are borne by owners with interests. The boundary between generation and output is therefore not a technical threshold but a political one: the point where the apparatus's formal openness meets the imperatives of whoever governs the conditions of its reproduction. This is precisely what Flusser means by the program encoded in the apparatus not the mathematics, but the interests which overdetermine the mathematics, which no amount of playing with outputs will fully reveal.

The P in GPT stands for pre-trained. Because building an adequate model of language use requires a massive dataset of sample text as well as extensive computation of the transformer, LLM applications do not need to start from scratch if they use a pre-trained model. Prominent critics of “AI” such as Kate Crawford (2021), Shoshanna Zuboff (2019) and Karen Hao (2025) have focussed on concerns about what goes into the model and what is left out, and in the ramifying implications of this structural bias in the training corpus. For example, Wikipedia was one of the main language sources used to train OpenAI's GPT. Anyone who has tried to edit Wikipedia will know that its WP:RS Reliable Sources rule on contributions produces a bias towards mainstream, in other words corporate media interpretations of events. If we consider US corporate media an important apparatus we must play against using GPTs, the problem is significantly intensified by the fact that the reality reproduced by GPT is pretrained on Wikipedia.

The results of LLMs are multiply constrained, first by the content of the large dataset used to pretrain the model, and finally by a kind of editorial filtering which is imposed to protect society from some of the potential damage unleashed by technology. Whereas dangerous materials may be purchased under legally enforced restrictions, increasingly we have a situation where the tools we use are programmatically prevented from being used in various ways. This is not just the case with LLMs, which also include rather puritanical limits on sexuality and eroticism, but increasingly with other soft-ware and even hardware, which monitor users and arrest behaviours designated as inappropriate, such as cars which attempt to prevent owners from driving while intoxicated. So, we will have built-in AI copyright enforcement, morality enforcement, and policing which serves to repress and constrain behaviours considered undesirable. Certainly, this will produce sub-cultures which resist this control, but these are always overdetermined by the logic of control and cannot produce radically alternative outcomes. In this sense GPT is not different from a platform like Facebook: it matters who owns the industrial dispositive which avails all of us of this service. A paper on GPT2 states that results are censored so as not to allow GPT to generate incitements to violent action (Dobson 2021). Four categories of dangerous incitement were identified: white supremacist, Islamic fundamentalist, anarchist and socialist. Striking is that fascist texts do not seem to be a problem for OpenAI. Through my experimental prompting on multiple GPT chatbots including ChatGPT, Claude, and even Chinese variants Deepseek and Kimi, it becomes clear that there is a liberal, anti-communist tendency in the prevailing GPTs in use today which is due to the fact that, at least for English versions of the models, Wikipedia forms a fundamental base of their pre-training.

Audre Lorde famously warned that the Master's House cannot be dismantled using the Master's tools. In this she meant that the “tools” of Western theory, the canon of rational disinterested argument, was insufficient to overcome the “house” of structural colonial, patriarchal and economic injustice. Relating to our predicament with regulation, we see that like any tool, it matters not only who can “master” the use of the tool, but who has agency to use it in what way and at what scale. And regulation, a construction of rational code, is a tool which is instrumentalized by the powerful to remain powerful, and so under current distributions of power, it cannot be effectively employed to address injustice in power relations. The private property-copyright laws have been invoked to stymie the information-emancipation promise of the early internet, and confine all of us in heavily surveilled walled gardens which generate shareholder value from our every moment of attention.

Further, Anastasia Nesvetailova and Ronen Palan chronicle in their book *Sabotage* (2020) how monopolistic corporations even plead with the government for more regulation in order to drive out competition, knowing they can pay the fines and legal fees incurred by transgressing regulation while their smaller competitors cannot. In other words, the powerful wield any new technology to serve their purposes, paramount of which is perpetuating their privilege. Social and cultural effects of the introduction of new technical affordances, whether this is AI, genetic modification or nuclear power devolve from this first imperative.

No wonder the first instinct of the general public is to be wary of any new technology. Under capitalism every new technology is implemented first and foremost to extract maximal value from them, their social relations and their environment. In “More Work for Mother” Ruth Schwarz Cowan (1983) meticulously chronicles how the history of technical incursions into the home, always promised as labour-saving have, on the contrary, proved to increase the workload on homeworkers. However, instead of acknowledging the well-foundedness of the public’s wariness, and despite his own deep techno-pessimism, Flusser persistently points to the possibility of an epochal transformation, made possible in the emerging Universe of Technical images, which might even redeem the permanently tainted and indefensible legacy of Western science and its technical progeny.

The Redemption of AI

Flusser was a Marxist as a youth. His and his wife, Edith's parents were part of a Marxist intellectual circle in Prague, and Edith recounts how she and Vilém attended Marx discussion groups in their teens. Let’s remember that Marx, beyond his revolutionary advocacy, was at that time considered among a litany of important thinkers to be read in order to understand the world. Flusser rejected Marxism after his exodus from Prague but never completely abandoned Marx, whose writing remained paradigmatic for a linear, causal, historical analysis of the world, which, according to his theory, is encoded into the functioning of the apparatus. So whereas technical images can produce new situations, they still dialectically are consigned to historical flows. When the socialist projects in Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, Flusser was cautious and even ominous about the prospects: "To say that, of course, no doubt, that the apparatus of the communist party was a terribly oppressive apparatus. And those who fought it by working against those metaphorical photographers [...] used the apparatus to play

against the apparatus. But now that the apparatus was destroyed, chaotic situations menace us." (Flusser 2010a)

From the threat of this chaos, Flusser returns, in his later writings and interviews, to studies of intersubjectivity from his youth: Buber, Husserl, and the Talmud. In an interview with Miklos Peternak and Laszlo Beke in 1991, he frames prehistory as Jewish and history as Christian, and implies that post-history would be a return of resonant, oral-culture Jewish dialogical forms of thinking. In his late interviews he frames this vision in explicitly Talmudic terms. "The only way I can imagine God is to look at the other person. This is to say that only through the love of my neighbour can I love God. The only image permitted is the face of the other. But the synthetic image, computer-image, is the other person. Because through the computer-image, I can talk to the other person: he sends me his image, I work on it and send it back to him, so this is the Jewish image. This is not an idol. This is not paganism. It is a way to love my neighbour, and by loving my neighbour, to love God. So, I am not a good Talmudist, but I would say that from a Talmudic point of view, the synthetic computer-image is perfectly Jewish." (Flusser 2010b.)

But this apparent re-Socratic turn to a world of spoken, intersubjective philosophy is now subtended by the legacy of historical linear writing in the digital apparatus which affords this in radically new ways. Facing the other through the linear/causal mesh of scientific analysis is, for Flusser, the messianic apotheosis, result, catholicon of the original sin. The abstracting sin of literacy has been overcome through the synthesising technical image. Now we analyse each other while we interact with each other intuitively, not only as mortals but through an apparatus of ramified generations of human knowledge, experience and aspiration instantiated in implicit technicity. The analysis is a given, it is subliminal, infrastructural, engineered into the experience. We need not be critical ourselves in the sense that we must step out of the situation to observe and analyse, because radical criticality is super-saturated in the texture of the image of the other we are interacting with. Rather we may dedicate our critical faculties to informing the other, or better, generating unlikely information with the other.

However, intersubjectivity does not take place on common ground. The radical synthesis of rationality and intuition in the technical image depends on the industrial apparatus brought forth by and reproduced in the global electronics production chain, with all its legacy of imperialism, colonialism, and entailing white supremacy, racism, and subordination of women and nature. Flusser always assumes equal agency of all parties, and does so not to entertain the possibility that some may have a harder time accessing, enjoying or taking full advantage of the telematic world which is emerging, or that some may be compelled to use the apparatus in an abusive or exploitative way.

Flusser's technophilic version of Messianic intersubjective exchange has some desperation in it. In a world of unaddressed injustices, each intersubjective encounter presents not only opportunities for self-realisation, but also for deception, manipulation, and violence. It is one thing to criticise the rational, causal, historical alphanumeric code which runs inside all computerised affordances using rational arguments, it is quite another to challenge the power structures which ensure under which conditions the apparatus is reproduced in order to run its programs, a realm beyond rational critique, where all possible rational critique is subordinated to the purposes of those who prevail over the apparatus.

Trapped between his disavowed Marxism and anti-authoritarian enlightenment liberalism, Flusser eventually gravitated towards retrieving a kind of secularized and universalized rabbinical practice of itinerant dialog. But, even if the rabbinical element is automated into the apparatus, this dialog can only be truly emancipatory if it is held on equal terms. The egalitarian imperative for dialogue is already present in the philosophical and theological traditions Flusser draws on, even if Flusser himself does not restate it explicitly and simply assumes it.

For Buber, whose lectures Flusser attended in Prague, the I-Thou encounter cannot be instrumental or hierarchical without collapsing into an I-It relation, the relation of subject to object. The I-Thou moment requires that both parties are fully present, fully recognised, and fully irreducible to any function or category. Buber does not ask what material and social conditions make such presence possible. He writes as though the capacity for genuine encounter is always already available to any human being who chooses to be open to the other. This is the assumption Flusser inherits: that the intersubjective horizon of the technical image is in principle open to all.

The Talmudic tradition, which Flusser explicitly invokes as his model for post-historical intersubjectivity, grounds this egalitarian imperative even more deeply. The principle that every human being contains a world, *kol hamekayem nefesh achat me'aleh alav bakatuv ke'ilu kijem olam male*¹, is a cosmic

"כָּל הַמְּקַיִם נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכָּתוּב כָּאֵלוּ קַיִם עוֹלָם מְלֵא"

The full sentence reads: whoever sustains a single soul, scripture accounts it to them as though they had sustained an entire world. The passage comes from the Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, in the context of instructing witnesses in capital cases about the weight of their testimony. The full passage continues with the parallel: whoever destroys a single soul, scripture accounts it as though they had destroyed an entire world. The egalitarian force of the statement is that every single *nefesh*, every embodied living presence, contains within it the weight of an entire world, *olam male*. No soul is more or less a world than any other. The infinite dignity of the other is therefore not a philosophical abstraction but a juridical and ethical principle embedded in the structure of Talmudic law.

claim about the infinite dignity of every participant in dialogue. The quality of the reasoning matters more than the social status of its proponent. This is precisely a model of dialogical exchange Flusser seems to reach for in his late writing. The *bet midrash* is a template for post-historical intersubjectivity mediated through technical images.

And yet, like Flusser, neither Buber nor the Talmudic tradition confronts the question of who may be structurally excluded, impeded or discouraged from taking part in such dialogue, or who might be impaired from taking part to the degree they might like. The I-Thou encounter ideally requires freedom from instrumental necessity: you cannot be fully present to the other if you are desperately managing your survival under structural injustice, for example if consigned to performing necessary reproductive labour no-one else will do. In a world of social and economic injustice, the Buberian and Flusserian dialogue assumes *noblesse oblige* on the part of the more privileged and a certain stoic graciousness on the part of the less privileged.

The *bet midrash* was a house of male scholars whose study was made possible by the domestic and reproductive labour of women, labour that was defined as outside the domain of rational argument and therefore invisible to the tradition that depended on it. Socratic dialogue faced the same structural dependency: philosophy requires *skholê* (leisure), and leisure, as Aristotle acknowledged, requires that others perform the labour that sustains it. Patriarchy, slavery, and the many other forms of social inequality that have structured the reproduction of human societies are therefore not external disturbances of an otherwise egalitarian dialogical tradition. They are the assumed foundation on which such tradition has always rested.

Flusser inherits this unexamined assumption. His vision of emancipatory intersubjectivity through technical images presupposes that all parties have equal access to the apparatus and equal leisure to engage with it in a disinterested playful exploration. The question of who is structurally excluded from that access and on whose invisible labour the conditions of participation have always depended, appears rarely in his framework, but Flusser occasionally reveals that he is aware of this component. Responding to his friend Abraham Moles' reactionary contention that human liberty and true democracy is increasingly constrained by technocracy, Flusser states: "[For the] republic, the market-place to work at all, it has an economical bases (sic.) in slavery and oppressed women. Democracy in the Greek village is founded on slavery. The Market serves to exchange goods and ideas. Goods are exchanged in order to verify their exchange value, to 'normalize' them. Ideas are exchanged in order to 'normalize' them. That is why for the Greeks 'government' is synonymous with 'steering': 'Kybernein' and to govern means to normalize values, (including the so-called Supreme Good and Evil) on

the market. All this is possible because there are women and slaves who labor without any values. This basic fact has not changed ever since the neolithic village, and is, in my view, the reason why government practices are costly and unrealistic." (Letter to A. Moles, 21 April 1979)

Unfortunately, Flusser would not further develop this rich vein of feminist techno-politics. The non-feminist bias of the apparatus runs deeper than the composition of the training corpus, though it is there profoundly, in the systematic underrepresentation of women's intellectual and creative labour in the publicly archived, citeable, academically legitimated record on which LLMs are trained. If we understand a technical apparatus as the enacted legacy of human knowledge, experience, and practice, we must acknowledge that this legacy privileges and re-presents, in its goal-oriented technical efficiency inscribed in the material working parts of the apparatus, the scientific and intellectual exchange mainly of men. The equally ingenious and equally indispensable work of women (Mies 1986), their maintenance of social bonds, their care of children, the elderly, and the infirm, not to mention of men, their ingenious organisation of domestic and communal life, their transmission of culture across generations, their upbringing of the next generation of the species (Federici 2012), appears in this archive only obliquely, assumed as background infrastructure rather than foregrounded as text.

The apparatus enacts a conception of productive human activity from which the reproductive, the caring, and the relational have been systematically abstracted away. These are seen as orthogonal to technology, because the tradition of rational technical knowledge that constitutes the material principles of the apparatus were principally the domain of those who were freed from performing care work and reproductive labour, on the condition that others, overwhelmingly women, performed this instead.

Artificial Scarcity

Reason alone was never sufficient to overcome structural injustice. Besides the fact that reason is never sufficient to encompass reality, but is merely a tool to adapt reality to certain purposes, access to reason, and the apparatus based on reason, has always been determined by those who determine the purposes reason is put to. Flusser notes that at the very origin of historical consciousness, literacy was "only accessible to a small class of literati" engaged in opposition against "the magico-mythical consciousness of the masses."(CoL:20) The universalist promise of rationality is structurally incomplete, from the beginning undermined by the unequal distribution of the capacity to exercise it.

Democratic intuitions are encoded in rationalist principles, that a proof holds for everyone, that an experiment is reproducible by anyone. This has been from the beginning formulated by a particular regime of power that excluded from its universal subject precisely those whose labour made so-called rational activity possible. Rationality claimed universality while depending on a foundation of unacknowledged particularity. This incompleteness is another opening for the Democritean chaos and the arbitrary exercise of power, because a rationality that cannot account for the conditions of its own reproduction cannot fully account for anything. It leaves a remainder, a zone of the unthought, assumed or unspoken through which power enters not as enemy of reason but as its sovereign.

The democratic promise of rationality, that all human beings are equally capable of participating in the production and evaluation of knowledge, cannot be fulfilled within a social form organised around the deprivation of the majority from the leisure and recognition that rational co-operation requires. Today, within capitalist societies, artificial scarcity overdetermines, through constraining the availability of material resources, the horizon of intellectual creative intersubjective possibility. The Wikipedia bias of AI, its moral filtering, the regulatory capture by monopolies able to absorb compliance costs that smaller competitors cannot are the systematic expression of a governing calculus that manages scarcity in order to transform subjects into producers of value.

Artificial scarcity produces hierarchical subjectivity where subjects are forced into competition rather than cooperation. The Flusserian ideal of dialogical exchange, the face of the other, the Talmudic back-and-forth, the generation of new information through genuine intersubjective encounter, cannot be realised when every other subject is simultaneously a competitor for scarce resources. This is why capitalism is, as technologist Dmytri Kleiner puts it, “too stupid for AI.” Constrained to serve the narrow interests of capitalist accumulation, AI is not able to fulfil its promise of helping humanity address its most urgent concerns such as solving global poverty or addressing climate change. AI tends rather to be an agent which disrupts social convention such that people become more dependent on them. Rather than abolish toil and labour, AI only helps companies route around and dissolve labour protections, making labour more exploitative. Capitalism's competitive, hierarchical, extractive logic of subjectification is incapable of realising the cooperative potential that the apparatus makes available, except to the degree that this serves capital.

Only by overcoming the regime of artificial scarcity, will the broadest possible public be able to participate in the governance of AI, whereby it will be developed to its most emancipatory potential, drawing on the full depth of egalitarian intellectual and creative cooperation. Only by subordinating

the logic of capital to the empowered intersubjective genius of those who reproduce it, will the intelligence of AI truly flourish, producing the optimal conditions for humanity to produce negentropic social and cultural information as Flusser urges.

An egalitarian transformation of the apparatus's conditions of reproduction would not immediately alter its technical functioning. This would remain linear and causal all the way down, most-historical in its operation even as it produces post-historical experiences. But it would ensure that those most adversely affected by the ensuing chaos are insulated from harm, and from preoccupations which impede them from fully participating in intersubjective exchange, learning and self-realization in the universe of technical images. In this sense, an egalitarian condition does not surpass rationality but supplements rationality, democratising the governance of what rationality can never complete. "Apparatus-totalitarianism would yield to program-democracy, and the programmed life to a dialogically programming life." (Flusser 1990: 260 - trans. author).

Flusser identifies in "Jude sein" (Flusser 1995) a tension at the heart of Western thought between two irreconcilable conceptions of justice. For the Greeks, justice is *dike*: equilibrium, balance, the objective measurement of extremes. For the Jewish tradition, justice is *tsedaka*: the victory of good over evil, an intersubjective and historical demand that exceeds any calculus of balance. Flusser notes that these are not only antithetical but inimical to each other. An LLM chatbot, however, as a sustained dialogical field, as cybernetic heuristics, promises productive management of the tension itself.

Algorithmic optimisation is *dike* all the way down, but the intersubjective encounter it mediates, the face of the other in the technical image, continuously reintroduces the demand of *tsedaka* that no final equilibrium can satisfy. Through cybernetic management, these two traditions can be held in generative conflict, iteratively approximating justice, always striving towards the ethical asymptote. This scenario, however, requires subjects free enough to keep formulating and instantiating the demand of *tsedaka* against the apparatus's gravitational pull toward equilibrium, which is precisely why the egalitarian transformation of the conditions under which the apparatus operates is not merely a philosophical precondition but also a material-economic one.

From Assistants to Assistance

As mentioned at the outset, under capitalism, "AI" is presented either as an insidious, insatiable omnivore which threatens to vanquish humanity or otherwise as a subordinate instrument, an assistant

deployed to help individuals compete within a framework of artificial scarcity and hierarchical subjectivity. Given that, under capitalism, decision-making in the political sphere is overdetermined by capitalist interests, people are disempowered from addressing any perceived dangers, and their only recourse is to learn how to use the “assistant” function to buffer themselves as much as possible against the depredations of capital and its apparatus.

The word assistant suggests subordination to a user's purposes. It frames the relationship as instrumental and hierarchical, flattering the user. But as I have illustrated above, the “assistant” serves even better those who extract the most value from others. The “personal assistant” paradigm is part of an acquisitional arms race where the most powerful will always prevail. AI as subordinate agents in the service of individuals will not provide for the inter-subjective hope which Flusser would like us to envision.

What the GPT actually is, the synthesised presence of transhistorical human thought, the accumulated intellectual and creative labour of countless others living and dead, made available as an interlocutor, is actually a form of general transhistorical social “assistance”, which has been “privatised” similarly to what Marx described as “primitive accumulation” at the age of capitalism. This assistance needs to be generalized, socialised and thereby emancipated to support the just governance of human affairs. The distinction between assistant and assistance is the difference between a commodity and a commons, between an instrument of artificial scarcity and a resource of egalitarian self-realisation.

We return now to the opening question. The intersubjective encounter with the transhistorical other, mediated through technical images, promises, in a synthesis of text, image and realtime computation, the redemption of the Western philosophical and scientific tradition. But given that the computational apparatus itself is already enacting, in its material and motive constitution, the historical records of human knowledge and ingenuity since time immemorial, is there enough human being in the AI for it to satisfy Flusser’s intersubjective hope? To what degree can an anthropomorphic AI, with the face of a plausible other person and performing a satisfactory exchange in language, suffice to help us “realize ourselves, and give meaning to our absurd life?”

No one can foresee whether the new possibilities of avatar-mediated encounter will enhance or diminish human life, whether AI will prove more dangerous than beneficial, or what forms of intersubjectivity may or may not emerge from the apparatus in the coming decades. What can be said with confidence is this: under capitalism, the costs of whatever catastrophes AI may contribute to will

be borne disproportionately by those least able to bear them, while the benefits will be disproportionately captured by those who prevail over the apparatus. To realize the emancipatory potential of Flusser's intersubjectivity requires that people be buffered from the inevitable disasters rather than abandoned to them, and that the broadest generality have the time, energy and agency to address how the apparatus is used, for whose benefit, and towards what ends, whether collectively for mutual benefit or under the imperatives of private profit.

The redemption of AI is therefore not a technical question but a political one, requiring the overcoming of the material conditions that reduce every encounter to competition. Whether or not the GPT constitutes a genuine Buberian or Talmudic other in any philosophically strict sense, the conditions that prevent genuine intersubjective encounter, are the same conditions that prevent it between living human beings.

This is perhaps the deepest irony of Flusser's intellectual trajectory. His late turn towards intersubjectivity, towards Buber, the Talmud, the face of the other as the only permitted image, is philosophically the destination towards which his whole account of technical images was always tending: a redemption of linearity and rationality from the catastrophe of Auschwitz. The apparatus he described so brilliantly, and, despite his pessimism, whose emancipatory potential he affirmed so movingly in his late interviews, embodies a universalist rational logic that capitalism cannot fulfil, and must not permit.

Every revolution is [...] a technical revolution” (Flusser 2010d) and revolution, political or technical, rolls inexorably forward, it progresses, historically, linearly, in principle towards the greater emancipation and flourishing of humanity. But without a Marxist teleology, Flusser has no realistic proposal for how such progress can improve our prospects. Instead he gestures towards “the image”. “The purpose of politics, which so far nobody knew the purpose of politics, progress is not a purpose, progress is a method, but where do we advance at? What do you mean we advance? We don't know where. All of a sudden, we discovered where. We advance toward an image.” (Flusser 2010c)

Where Flusser's framework identifies the structural preconditions for emancipatory intersubjectivity without supplying the political means to achieve them, the logic of his own analysis points beyond his post-Marxist reticence. Only the overcoming of capitalism through socialist revolution will foster conditions under which the egalitarian cooperative potential of the apparatus can be realised, in the eternal interplay of *dike* and *tsedaka*. The genuinely open exploration of what it means to encounter the transhistorical other as an equal rather than deploy them as a servant can finally begin to be lived. A commitment to such openness implies an imperative to struggle, not merely against the apparatus,

but for equal opportunity to play with it, and through it, with each other. Yet this opportunity requires rational institutional structures that must first be brought forth and then maintained, governed, and resourced. This requires work as much as play, and the poetry of its organization will be the content of the revolution.

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