

, Suppose that.

Preliminary doubts.

A terrorist with his machine gun runs through the landscape: he is running towards the future. A futurologist watches his terminal to see how the terrorist runs along a probability curve: he is approaching the present. The terrorist jumps out from the landscape and/or the terminal upon the futurologist's desk and he shoots him dead. He says: "I had to kill him, he stood in my way towards the future, and this having-to-shoot-him is my freedom". The futurologist, could he but speak, would say: "I have reckoned with this all along, it was a calculated risk which I had to run during my computations, and this is my freedom". And this knot of absurd contradictions is called "the dialectics of freedom".

The terrorist and the futurologist have two different views of the future. The terrorist sees it as a crowd of promises and menaces which surround him, and into which he must advance, if the promises are to become real, and if the menaces are to be avoided. The futurologist sees it as a swarm of virtualities which approaches him, coming in from an empty horizon. This difference of views is due to a difference in attitudes: the terrorist stands with in the crowd, he is "committed", while the futurologist stands on his tip toes, in order to see a bit farther. Thus the terrorist faces an urgent future, while the futurologist faces an hypothetical future. This book will try to stand on tip toes: it will consist of a series of suppositions. But it will be quite unlike the futurologist's attitude, for the following reason:

The futurologist sees virtualities which become denser as they approach the present, and which are seen to be strewn more loosely as the eye approaches the empty horizon. Now this is a well-known situation: very like the distribution of iron filings around a magnet. One might attempt a field theory of the future, (something like a theory of the magnetic field), but unfortunately one cannot do it. To stand on tip toes is to stand within the field, it does not provide theoretical distance, (the terrorist may still kill one). As long as no metaphysical crane is invented, all theories concerning the future are to be distrusted. Furthermore, the comparison with the magnetic field is not a very good one. Virtualities become realities as they enter the present, and they may turn around, disappear from the field, and thus become impossibilities, while iron filings are incapable of such ontological somersaults. The hypothetical future looks more like a congress of ghosts than like a magnetic field: some virtualities materialize, others disappear into thin air, while most of them collide and fuse the one with the other. How is one to get hold of those spectres?

By supposing that virtualities grow more probable as they approach the present. Proximity may be measured. It permits probability curves to be calculated. Those curves may be shown on terminals, they may be shown to converge, to diverge, to cross, to bundle, and they may be extrapolated. The

result will be a scenario of a hypothetical future. The scenario may be progressively improved, (rendered more probable), by introducing ever more virtualities, and by measuring ever more exactly the degree of probability of each. To be sure: there will always be some margin of error, but the margin will grow ever more narrow, and it may itself be calculated more or less exactly.

However, it gives one the kreesps, if one considers "proximity" as a measure of the future. It implies that I stand at the center of the future, and that I am less and less concerned with virtualities which stand near my horizon. But I am not alone, others are here with me. Each other stands at the center of his own future, and those futures overlap, and they do so the more the nearer an other one stands from me. Therefore I am concerned whith virtualities which stand near the center of somebody else's future, although they may stand near my own horizon. The category "proximity" can be accepted only if it includes the proximity of other people, what used to be called "love of one's neighbor". Can such a categy be calculated?

It can, if one constructs a future common to everybody. But this will have two consequences: the empty horizon, (death), disappears from vision, and it will become impossible for me to recognize myself and my nekgbhor within such a gray and colorless future. This is the reason why this book will not assume the futurologist's attitude: it will try to suppose a future which does not exclude death from vision, and which permits me to recognize myself and those who are near me.

Still: this book will stand closer to the futurologist than to the terrorist, because it will stand on tip toes. Consider the fascination of tip toe dancing, of suppositions: it makes the terrorist jump out from suppositions onto the desk, like Escher's lizards which creep on the desk from drawing paper. It is not that a virtuality turns real, but that a supposed, fictional virtuality becomes real. You may say, of course, that there is nothing mysterious about this transfiguration. It only means that an hypothesés is proven right, that a verisimiltude is is verified, and is not this the purpose of all suppositions? Yes, but, this does not render the thing less mysterious: how can a fiction become real? Is it not as if Dmitrij Karamazov was to jump from his book unto your, desk and kill you? What is implied here is the gray zone betzwen fiction and reality, between art and science. He who supposes, he who stands on tip toes, inhabits that gray zone. He is a kind of Pygmalion: he tries to make love to his statue. This is what this book will be attempting: it will inhabit the slippery zone between art and science.