

What if?

A series of scenarios in search<sup>of</sup> images.

(1) Suppose that. (First scenario)

Suppose that a terrorist (with his machine gun) is running through the landscape. Is he not running toward his future? And suppose that a futurologist (with his computer) is calculating the terrorist's progress. Is he not calculating how the terrorist approaches the present? Now suppose that those two curves, (the one in the landscape and the one on the computer screen), meet; what will happen? The terrorist will jump out from the landscape and out of the screen, and he will kill the futurologist saying: "I had to, because the man was standing on my way toward the future". And the futurologist, could he still speak, would say: "This is a probability which I took into account during my calculations". What we have here is a knot: two curves, (which may be one and the same), have tangled. The knot may be called "dialectics of freedom", and it may be untangled.

The terrorist runs into the future, the futurologist sits in the present and waits for the future to present itself. It looks as if the terrorist were an "actor": he does something about the future; and as if the futurologist were a "spectator": he looks at the future. But this is not so: the futurologist's vision, (his "theory"), may become a scenario, it may be projected into the future, and it may change it. But of course: we have a feeling that those are not identical futures. The terrorist's future feels like a challenge, and the futurologist's like a supposition. History has familiarized us with the terrorist's future. Let us consider the futurologist's future:

It looks like a field of possibilities which surrounds the present, and as if the present acted like a magnet: it attracts some possibilities and renders them real (present). Still: a field theory of the future, (similar to the magnetic field theory), is difficult to imagine. The future possibilities do not behave like iron shavings: they may recede from the present to become impossibilities, they may bundle, they may cancel each other out, and as some of them approach the present, they change into near realities. Iron shavings cannot perform such ontological somersaults. The field of future possibilities behaves more like a congress of ghosts which materialize and de-materialize than like a magnetic field, and the reason is that we do not have a theoretical distance toward them: the possible terrorist may kill us. As long as we do not possess a metaphysical crane, futurology will not become a hard science.

But it can measure the future by supposing that a possibility becomes the more probable the nearer it approaches the present. Proximity used as a measuring rod permits to organize the swarm of possibilities into curves which converge, diverge, cross, bundle: it permits scenarios of various degrees of probability to be computed. Those scenarios, as they appear on the screen, may be rendered ever more probable by progressive introduction of ever more curves, and the margin of error can be calculated ever more exactly. Those ever more probable scenarios may then be used as models for a manipulation of the field of the future.

If we consider those highly probable scenarios, (those simulations of the future), we shudder, (ghost stories have this effect). What does "proximity" mean? Close to where I am standing? But I am not alone, there are others around me. Is a possibility less probably because it approaches my neighbor, but not the place where I am standing? If the scenarios are to be meaningful, the category "proximity" must include love of one's neighbor. Of course; it does so. The future those scenarios suppose is one common to everybody. A curious future indeed; it is not limited by my death, nor by the death of anybody else; it is a gray, limitless future, and it becomes the grayer and the more extended the better it is calculated. I cannot recognize myself nor anybody else within such a future.

And there is a further reason why we shudder. The better that simulated future is calculated, the more probable it becomes, and this renders it undigestible. Man is an animal which feeds on improbabilities and he swallows them in order to make them possible. The future of futurology makes us vomit. This is not the way how to suppose the future: one where we cannot recognize ourselves nor our beloved ones, and one which we cannot swallow.

This is why the scenarios here submitted to possible image makers will suppose a different sort of future. A highly improbable one, but one where we may recognize ourselves, one from which death has not been eliminated. An adventurous future. Of course; those scenarios will resemble the futurologist more than they will the terrorist, because they will suppose a future which is adventurous; one that approaches, ("ad-venire"). The terrorist is no adventurer; he does not suppose a future that approaches, but is committed to advancing into it. Still; those scenarios will feel more like the terrorist's than the futurologist's future. This is the reason why:

The scenarios promise adventures, which is a way to say that they want to provoke curiosity. Curiosity is the impossible wish to jump from the present into the future. This is impossible, of course; wherever I am, there is the present. But if curiosity is the motive which stands behind those scenarios, then they do what the terrorist does; they try to run into the future, which they know they cannot do. The whole thing is an impossible, unreasonable endeavor. Which is to say that the whole thing should rather be imagined than articulated through reasonable discourse. The sheets of paper covered with letters ordered into lines which you are holding in your hand are therefore not really a text, but a pre-text for image making. But how those images are to look like, (for instance the image of what I just have written), I cannot imagine. This series of scenarios is a provocation for creative imagination.