

The Third Enlightenment (or Globalizing Meritocracies)

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By

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A BRIEF PREFACE

Humankind used to be relatively slow learners. The ancient Greeks and modern Leonardos failed to progress from mechanical toys to the industrial revolution. Philosophers in the Age of Reason failed to progress from “raison au cheval” to a historical synthesis of pragmatic doers. Political entrepreneurs, radical and conservative, failed as well – neither Jesuits nor the Bolsheviks managed to build a paradise on Earth. They left initiative to the piecemeal social engineers of the welfare state and free enterprise, to entrepreneurs who plan settlements on Mars and urge “Go up, young men and women, go up; the sky is not the limit.” They left the Enlightenment to us, proud owners of the World Wide Web, speed-dating robots, the European Union, and crowd-sourcing bitcoin entrepreneurs.

The core problem of contemporary knowledge-intensive societies is the explosive growth of the unknown that accompanies the systematic enlargement of the cloud of knowledge. Balancing acts between exploring and exploiting become difficult; viruses go viral more frequently than usual. Universities and hospitals slowly evolve from elitist centers of emergency services for the ignorant and the sick to proactive platforms for health consultants and knowledge facilitators. Is the long march from a dictatorship of science and the divine rights of experts to the democracy of knowledge and the third enlightenment a brilliant success or a dismal failure?

Left or right, north or south, rich or poor, we have increased collaborative networking on a planetary scale but not all disseminating measures deserve moral praise under the umbrella of progress. The faithful followers of the encyclopedic enlightenment imposed the dictatorship of reason by sword and gallows. Revolutionaries guillotined their political enemies because there was no freedom for the enemies of freedom. Their terror made way for the imperial return of “reason on a horseback”. Some revolutionaries tore down cathedrals, others blew up statues of Buddha. Our new enlightenment, carried by the World Wide Web, continues closing churches to prayers and public squares to Christmas trees. Our ecological child crusaders demand that lobsters no longer be served in restaurants because animal lives count. Political correctness – the zeal, the faith, the mobilization – attracts the attention of the masses by appealing to our small, individual

mobile phones. The mobile phones owned by billions are Big Brothers in disguise. They are the messengers of the new third enlightenment, advertising the robotized troops of artificial intelligence, promoted as machines of loving grace. And yet the smooth transition from pocketbooks to pocket computers, iPads, iPhones, iWatches, and bodywear is not an unmixed blessing. Flash crowds and viral mobilizations cripple public debate; fakes and hate limit the growth of knowledge. The monopolist power harvesting our attention and predicting our dreams threatens democracy. Why is the democracy of the Internet undermined by sinister experts with access to giant databases? Partly, at least, because we have looked only at the promises of the new information and communication technologies, leaving the threats to blade runners. We have neglected to look at the legacies left by the Cold War warriors. We should have noticed that we have been contaminated by the radioactive dust of propaganda of cultural wars. We? Who is us? Well, the educated, knowledge-producing classes. Why are media professionals and fellow teachers still following the instructions issued by the masters of the Cold War universe in order to control the damage? Why do ecologists with their extinction rebels threaten us with Armageddon? Why do vegetarian trendsetters and Occupy Wall Street flash crowds insist on imprinting their edutainment inside our collective souls? Enlightenment's light lite is not enough. Edutainment is neither educational nor entertaining. Weeping for dolphins is not an alternative to the class struggle.

Haarlem, October 2, 2020

INTRODUCTION

1. Learning to evolve

Natural landscapes attract more attention than cultural ones. They are registered and publicized to make many points. And yet, we should perhaps pay more attention to cultural landscapes because they come first. Natural landscapes cannot be protected before the cultural ones are in place. Cultural landscapes matter more because they can, or at least could, make us more aware of ourselves than ever before. Observing cultural landscapes, we will notice – for instance – an accelerated emotional and intellectual warming. The evolving cultural climate gets red hot and evolution accelerates, perhaps not only for the hell of it (cf. Magala, 2015). Life evolves, evolution lives, cognition thrills, time flies. It takes decades, not centuries, to make and break ideologies. The first enlightenment of humankind has been traced to the inventions (or discoveries?) of agriculture and writing. It was accompanied by the discoveries (or inventions?) of the grand monotheistic religions and the design of ecclesiastical bonds. The monks kept the books readable; the sailors kept the commercial routes tradeable; and, in the slightly longer run, the Europeans stole the best-kept Chinese business secrets. Well, the monks did not only keep the holy books. In the 7th century AD, two Nestorian monks went to China to proselytize for the Byzantine (later called Eastern Christian) pope-emperor. Silkworms were smuggled out of China on living bodies or inside bamboo canes. The Byzantines started producing silk and broke the Chinese and Persian monopolies. Ten centuries later, a French Jesuit monk went to convert the Chinese to Christianity. He had a keen eye for porcelain and made good use of it in the factories of Jingdezhen. Porcelain and chinaware were plagiarized as Wedgwood chinaware and Delft Blue. Paper and printing, compasses, and gunpowder were reinvented, and the Chinese patents, copyrights, and monopolies bypassed. Looking back without anger, we conclude that print turned out to be a much more important prize of this industrial espionage than silk or porcelain, equal to or even more important than gunpowder. Printing allowed individuals to keep more ideas in the air than ever before. Chinese mandarins tried to locate their libraries on islands so that they could limit the circulation of books. European mandarins were governed by less groomed emotions; they were more easily fired up by religious disputes and political struggles. Their dreams and passions disseminated books and

printed papers far beyond a single class, caste, guild, or region. They did not know it but when they chose circulation over accumulation, the fathers of the second enlightenment accumulated more books and more knowledge, more know-how, and more disruption.

Today, looking back at the printed word, we find that we (we – the people, we – the 99%, the “we” in “us”) used to be slow learners but “improved with time.” Our accelerated learning has been rewarded with many labels, including “populism” or even “leftist populism”. A Bacon or an Ockham had no encyclopedia in which to lock up knowledge for the next generations, nor did da Vinci or Newton. But the latter could already read the most dissident views on everything because knowledge was stored in many cunning printed passages, which included not only good books. In fact, quite a few thinkers and researchers kept a secret diary of the speculative background of inventions and discoveries. Newton is a case in point as much as Leonardo. This tradition goes on undisturbed. The fathers of cybernetics, which launched our digital revolution, hoped that their secret algorithms would help them win in Las Vegas casinos. Shannon actually did win there, and so did Thorpe, but not as much as they wanted to – which didn’t prevent them from designing the first portable computer small enough to be smuggled under a jacket. The ultimate irony – progress as a by-product of gambler’s luck; Las Vegas as the mother of invention.

Monks gave way to researchers and monasteries to royal knowledge-friendly societies, although Darwin was still passionately interested in theology and refused Marx’s request to dedicate *Das Kapital* to him. After Darwin, we, the best and the brightest academics, the overeducated representatives of humankind, finally acquired class consciousness. We became the knowledge-accumulating class for itself, not only in itself. Knowledge is merit, merit is power, knowledge is power. Or is it?

“Knowledge is power”, says an adviser to a powerful queen in *A Game of Thrones*. The queen accepts the challenge and, after a brief hesitation, orders her soldiers to arrest the adviser and cut his throat. The adviser trembles as the knife’s blade comes close to his face. The queen watches, amused, and just before the soldier executes him, she says, “Stop! I have changed my mind, let him go”. Soldiers release the expert and march away. The queen, relaxed and pensive, says to the shaken adviser, “Power is power,” and leaves. Knowledge guides us towards intended actions but power allows us to undertake them. The exercise of power produces consequences – some of them quite palpable, material, and irreversible. Evolution is not what it used to be before powerful collective actions changed it forever, turning its

course into history. History is evolution – but it is an accelerated evolution with comments, feedback, and afterthoughts; history is evolution that was more frequently and systematically reflected upon. We compare knowledge and powers, epistemologies and armed forces, critical evaluations and corrective actions.

We have started comparing ourselves not only to previous, less affluent generations but also to the other species on Earth. Human beings, when compared to rocks and flowers, rats and ants, trees and viruses, looked increasingly universal and versatile – because we could imagine what it would be like to step down from the throne of planetary conquerors. We could imagine what it would be like to harness noble horses (Swift, 1726), domesticated animals (Reymont, 1924; Orwell, 1946), and noble trees (Powers, 2018) to manage a harmonious life on Earth. We like to see ourselves as fast learners, going steadily faster and faster. Maybe humankind has finally stopped being slow learners, and the mind is finally seen as a natural outcome of evolving nature after all?

The second enlightenment allowed more and more of “us” (those citizens who could become literate in the 18th century) to study and learn in more and more schools, academies, and universities. It prompted humankind to pursue knowledge with more rigor and happiness with less restraint. The second enlightenment promised to be proper and the ultimate one, and it is still the only enlightenment of the three that is called simply “the Enlightenment” in history books despite what we know now about the pre-Enlightenment being composed of three successive renaissances – the Arabic, the Catholic, and the Italian. The one that still bears the name without any other qualifiers is the one with the encyclopedias, industries, reason on a horse, and mass terror aided by the guillotine. The one that expressed itself and impressed everybody, suppressing bias and oppressing the enemies of liberty. Liberty, equality, fraternity. Liberty? Yes, but not for the enemies of liberty. Equality? Yes, but not for women or black laborers, children or slaves. Fraternity? We are not done with liberties and equalities yet, so fraternizing and sororizing have to wait. In due time, perhaps all men will be brothers and all women sisters, but not yet. Fraternity requires genuinely feeling that “all you need is love, love is all you need”. Meanwhile, all you need is discipline. For the time being, Bonaparte conquered the obsolete monarchies while Kant and Hegel declared that humans had just graduated to the next class in the school of life. The school of life included more systematic schooling of the population, sometimes at the universities, which the more stable and reasonable of the two von Humboldt brothers was reforming. Humankind had reached adulthood and

learned enough to listen to the voice of reason forever. Grand political ideologies replaced grand religions, and steam engines were successfully employed to make coal mining profitable and railroads feasible (Lovelock, 2019).

The first enlightenment gave us a university for reconciling faith with reason and reason with faith (the Bologna University of 1088 AD, where monks managed learning as they knew it, is a European case in point). The second enlightenment gave us faith in reason and an expansion of universal education, including, but only after WWII, to the university level. Studying at the university became more frequent for the generations coming of age after 1968. The overproduction of the overeducated driven by the upward over-sized mobility ideal has finally resulted in a growing supply of diploma holders landing the job of baristas at international airports (cf. Alvesson, 2014) – overeducated not in the sense of overburdened with wisdom but in the sense of being overtrained before landing jobs requiring far less knowledge. And right now, after the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium of the recorded history of humankind, the third enlightenment is slowly emerging. We can assume that it started in Bologna in 2000 AD when the ministers of higher education of the EU member states standardized educational modules worldwide, attracting students from China, India, and elsewhere to the diploma mills of the West (Noble, 2003). What is this third enlightenment like?

The third enlightenment developed in the shadow of the Cold War, reaping the benefits of military research (ARPAD should have helped military communications but turned into the civilian WWW instead). Personal computers are a spillover of the military-industrial complex; Wikipedias are the spillover of the storming of the encyclopedic Bastilles. WikiLeaks are the spillover of the warming of the information space. In a sense, the Wikis are the midwives of the third enlightenment. Some call this third enlightenment Anthropocene but others, much more responsible (though it is not clear to whom, cf. ten Bos, 2017) call it Novacene, claiming that much of our thinking can be outsourced to the machines of loving grace (Brautigan, 1967, Lovelock, 2019). Most routine but difficult problems – so goes the usual educated praise for AI – will be solved by superior infrastructures and super-intuitive bots running artificial intelligence systems for us. Bots with minds and computers with souls will beat us in the games of Chess and Go, able to think many moves ahead. They will follow the proactive imperative (cf. Fuller, Lipinska, 2014), letting us humans evolve towards even more creativity, towards ever more open-ended futures, more liberal arts for sense-making, and more beneficial

scientific technologies to sustain large urban populations. Instead of complaining about rising consumerism, we should embrace it as a much softer and more humane coordination of individuals in complex societies than the distribution and control of labor. After all, if anyone wants to show their merit to the world, they can dance with the stars or develop an Apple computer in a garage. If one does not, the bottom line is that survival is guaranteed by the sheer abundance of earthly delights even for the meritless (and even if the introduction of a basic income for all citizens turns out to be more difficult than we thought).

Let us take a closer look. Should we – the proud representatives of a collective of global meritocracies, the representatives of a supreme academic caste or the alumni of their educational institutions – take a look? Should we take a closer look at the third enlightenment, which the pessimists warn us against and optimists praise as the promise of immortality? A look from our point of privileged (scientific, supported by the top experts with the best academic credentials) view? Our academic, objective knowledge is packaged as if it was created above our heads; as if for most of our fellow citizens, it came from a distant “nowhere”, from the hidden gods who talk only to Einsteins and Nobel Prize winners. Does God and the gods talk to our caste in smart underground tunnels (like the one housing CERN under the city of Geneva) and distant spatiotemporal locations (radio telescopes, Davos, Porto Alegre)? Do they reside in a “nowhere” of super-secret projects (like the one termed Manhattan, which led to the successful testing of nuclear weapons)? A nowhere of super-extravagant geniuses, from Albert Einstein and Maria Sklodowska-Curie to Jennifer Doudna (genetics) and Donna Strickland (astronomy), from Nicola Tesla to Elon Musk?

A look from nowhere is an abstract invention. We pretend to leave the material constraints of daily life and launch our ideas, clustered into a cloud of knowledge, for everybody to use as they see fit. Navigating through this cloud of knowledge, which expands and changes as we explore it, we connect, invent, create, multiply, and subtract, performing piecemeal social engineering and pursuing happiness. We work against the day, under gravity’s rainbow, on the bleeding, cutting edge of knowledge (Pynchon, 2006, 1973, 2013). The last philosopher of science, as it used to be perceived in the long period between the explosion of the “little boy” and the first million users of Facebook, still believed in evolutionary continuity, a contingency of science. When science was still admired as the shining goddess of just and fair government and a benign patron of corporate experts, the best-known philosopher of objective knowledge for open societies, Karl Popper, said that Einstein differed from amoeba in that he

learned from his mistakes while amoeba did not. We are now less critical of amoeba and more critical of Einstein. Learning to evolve is a full-time job in all available spaces, and every amoeba, every Bohm counts. So does every Orwell, every Camus, every Miłosz, and every Solzhenitsyn. Why? Because our information space has exploded in a big bang of multiplied communications on all frequencies.

2. Democracy in informational space

Because of the Big Bang and the expansion of our communications, all these dissidents and many other willing participants in the great conversations of humankind count. They count because of democracy, which requires counting the individual votes. Because an even more democratic knowledge game, the third enlightenment, waits at the starting blocks. The test case – *experimentum crucis* – of the third enlightenment is about to be invented and then tried before the tribunal of the public opinion. Our judgment will require a new ability to face the dangers of new superstitions and ideologies, especially if they are posing as life-saving boats for a humanity lost at sea. Even a rational regard and emotional sympathy for our planet can be twisted into a new green-red ideology and hidden from democratic scrutiny behind a smokescreen of political correctness. I like intelligent penguins, endangered whales, my academic caste, and Plato, but I like truth even more. Truth, not post-truths. Shaken by scientific revolutions but not stirred by ideological illusions. If we want to continue learning how to evolve, we must distinguish between the phantom of eco-utopia and the actual, available, ecologically responsible policies. Between a critical comparison of post-Kyoto rescue plans for humankind (like the one presented by Freeman Dyson in NYRB, cf. Dyson, 2008) and an irresponsible call for a children’s crusade (as we saw on a web platform for political mobilization campaigns with an anti-establishment ring called Avaaz in 2019). We must distinguish between environmental analysis and dystopian black propaganda painted red and green for captive audiences. If we want to continue learning, we must continue to hone our professional lives, improve the tracing and following of our values, and try to avoid seduction through opportunities. If we want to continue learning, we must change both our individual and our more-or-less collective lives. By collective life, I mean, for instance, the institutional life of our profession, not only the lives of some professionals within this institutional framework (Sloterdijk, 2009). We must find a way to defeat the dictatorship of science and establish a democracy of knowledge (Innerarity, 2013). Our consciousness, our self-reflection, and our knowledge, coupled with awareness and spiced with sympathy, must be more critical

than any critical theory has so far dared to be. This is what learning to evolve among unknown unknowns means. It means a fair and firm recognition and acknowledgment of the dangerous fact that political correctness kills. It also means that democracy should be defended against the new madness of the eco-religion that calls for children's crusades, eliminating humans to make room for animals and viruses, and a ritual, ascetic self-punishment celebrating the utopian wishful thinking.

Democracy is known and reputed to be better than non-democracy, at least in the slightly longer run. But does it fare better when societies face unknown unknowns? What should we choose? Sparta or Athens? Closed ranks or open minds? Davos or Porto Alegre? Academics are of two minds. The elite, the meritocrats, the best and the brightest – all sound nice, especially to those who hope to get to diploma heaven and relax in the exclusive gated communities of acknowledged merit. The masses, populations, people – all sound safe and sound, especially to those who really believe that equality matters. But what if we must choose between truth and democracy, and rationality and equality? What if rational academics defend evolution and egalitarian democrats defend intelligent design as an alternative to evolutionary explanation of life on Earth? Academic self-reflection cannot be based on the avoidance of hard choices. No matter how highly our merit is praised, we should not forget about the costs of idealizing, of an abstract reduction of real life to a covering law or even to a grounded theory. The evolution of academic communications favors formal brevity, abstract formulae, and the universal validity of the “all ravens are black” type. But is this how we really control life processes and predict the outcomes of our activities? Is it really how we argue and convince? Egalitarian deliberative democracy is an ideal of the philosophers of politics, but is it a fair report on the emergent reality of abduction in politically sanctioned reasonings or an ideological wishful thinking disguised as a compelling report on reality next door (cf. Cerovac, 2018)? Is “epistocracy” – the rule of the epistemic meritocracy (us, in fact) – possible and desirable? Does it have to be based on abstract “as if” clauses, on virtual cognitive angels, that help us round the sums up and win arguments without necessarily existing (cf. Appiah, 2017)?

Let us look at the information space for all the messages exchanged between all speakers and listeners (for instance, using Max Boisot's “information space”, cf. Boisot, 1995) – something we call big data and harvest for political, commercial, or medical reasons. Speakers and listeners manage communication in patterned, institutionalized, organized interactions so messages swim in and between organizations. Organizations, in turn, swim

in information spaces like schools of fish. Space is 3D in the popular visual imageries to which Boisot subscribed. The position of an imagined cluster or school of organizational fish is determined by three coordinated dimensions. First, the information exchanged is either codified or not. If codified, we learn that today the temperature will rise to 30°C; if not, we only learn that it will be hot. The information can also be concrete or abstract and diffused or undiffused. Boisot, who was also an architect and an engineer, liked to keep things simple. He gave us a simple typology of organizational forms according to how they deal with information. Organizations swimming in information space like schools of fish can be like bureaucracies; info is coded (i.e., explicit, recorded) and abstract, but diffusion is controlled by a hierarchy and limited. Such organizations may resemble markets; info gets coded and becomes abstract but it is also openly diffused to all potential clients and partners and thus becomes broadly accessible. They may also be like fiefs or the feudal domains of a single powerful individual; the fief's informational exchanges tend to be uncoded or implicit, concrete, particular, and undiffused – think of a family restaurant run by an authoritarian father. Organizations can also be like clans (uncoded and concrete but spilling information over to a small community, network, or clan). Clans are less local and restricted than fiefs – they diffuse more info than fief-like family businesses. Some researchers of business organizations conceptualized the top business networks and extended family clubs in Japan (keiretsu) or Korea (chaebol) when imagining what a clan-like organization in information space looks like. Markets and bureaucracies dominate the contemporary organizational landscape (or perhaps are just more visible and better researched than all the other more sinister and Politburo-like types of power elites), but elements of fiefs and clans persist to give capitalism and bureaucracy a local human face. In fact, as the best and most frequently censored Chinese writers remind us, the human faces of corruption and nepotism are the softening, humanist lubricants of the hard cogs and wheels of the communist bureaucracy exercising power at the local village level (Yan Lianke, 2019).

When facing unknown unknowns, when sailing with our organizations through the information space, we try to communicate with other individuals and organizations – which means addressing clusters and weaving networks of individuals. What do we actually do when we communicate? We employ a mix of logic (to make sense) and rhetoric (to persuade). Both logic and rhetoric are saturated and flavored by our politics and mediated by our technologies. Politics is the values we want to uphold and the emotions we want to express, or which we do express even if we do not want to. Technologies, that is the media, format and twist our messages and can

become messages themselves. Academic politics does not differ from other professional politics. Communications are not ideology free; even if we, the academic caste, rely on algorithms, paradigms, and organizational routines, we are still prompted to act by our will and imagination. Communications are more manageable and in the longer run are more transparent in markets and bureaucracies than in fiefs and clans, but we are also prone to mobilizing emotions and purging evil spirits in business companies and government institutions. What will happen to our communications when direct and participatory democracies, directly experienced, provide palpable (if virtually enhanced) participation in imagined and real communities? We are now submerged in such communications, mislabeled as social media. But they, these social media, were imagined by poets in the 1960s. The most advanced evolutionary vision available was expressed by Richard Brautigan, an eccentric poet from the hippie city of San Francisco, in 1967:

All Watched Over By Machines Of Loving Grace

I like to think (and
the sooner the better!)
of a cybernetic meadow
where mammals and computers
live together in mutually
programming harmony
like pure water
touching clear sky.

I like to think
(right now, please!)
of a cybernetic forest
filled with pines and electronics
where deer stroll peacefully
past computers
as if they were flowers
with spinning blossoms.

I like to think
(it has to be!)
of a cybernetic ecology
where we are free of our labors
and joined back to nature,
returned to our mammal
brothers and sisters,
and all watched over
by machines of loving grace. (Brautigan, 1967, p.1)

Let us see how this simple vision evolves into a navigating vision that leads us through the contemporary mediated environment full of big thick data (Jemielniak, 2020) and small thin narrative projects. Let us see how this countercultural dream evolves into a multiverse or pluriverse of individually employed social media that put many more robot butlers and robot mentors at our disposal than our parents could dream of. Let us see what ecological utopias and dystopias it produces and what consequences it has. For whom? For everybody in the long run, but in the short run for our evolving academic community of researchers/teachers/experts – in other words, us, the knowledge discoverers, inventors, producers, traders, and brokers but also the primary consumers and serious stake and shareholders.

3. Making sense of evolution: Learning is artificial by nature

While Brautigan was dreaming up his vision of our return to nature as a garden of paradise, to our mammal brothers and sisters, the global Cold War turned hot in southern Vietnam as it was invaded by the northern Vietnamese army. American military commitment increased, more soldiers had to be drafted, more students became angry. Students were mobilized by activists – this is how the anti-Vietnam War protests gradually occupied the US campuses. Outside the campuses, hippie pacifists dominated the pop music scene and the lifestyle choices of the many young consumers, the children of the baby boom after 1945. Californian sports stadia (stadiums according to most media) witnessed mass concerts by The Grateful Dead with huge psychedelic banners designed by Jan Sawka waving in the wind, selling the California dream to the rest of the world. The Woodstock festival and its clones became the popular version of a return to paradise (even if only for a few days of camping and a few hours of dancing). The flower power utopia was, however, short-lived. The Paris accords of 1973 paved the way for the conquest of Saigon by North Vietnam in 1975, and the killing of student protesters by the National Guard on the campus of Kent State University in 1970 signaled the decline of student political activities. The Left lost, Thatcher and Reagan were elected. Flower power dreams and the new Left of contesting students were further buried under the wreckage of global communism. The Cold War counterpart of capitalism, the real global communist system, collapsed. It disappeared as a uniform Cold War military alliance allowed for wars by proxies in the Koreas, Vietnams, Nicaraguas, and Angolas. Neoliberal politicians and think tanks were on the rise. The spectacular breakdown of the global communist system in general (beginning with the Polish “Solidarity” strikes in Gdansk in 1980) and the

Soviet Union in particular (1991) made the neoliberals dream about the end of history. But history refused to end. Please note a very important fact from the point of social learning processes. The American presidential adviser, Francis Fukuyama, profiting from the mainstream media dissemination, was wrong when he wrote that history has ended. Richard Brautigan, the hippie poet from a marginal counterculture, mostly unnoticed by his contemporaries (his poetry volumes *Rommel Drives Deep into Egypt* and *Trout Fishing in America* went to a niche of subculture followers) imagined machines of loving grace watching over our pursuit of happiness. If there was a public contest, a referendum, or an expert panel to decide who was right, the former presidential adviser or a hippie poet, most votes would go to the former. And yet the niche poet was right, the mainstream philosopher was wrong. Deep learning continues with the machines of loving grace while the neoliberal happy end of world history with market economies and parliamentary democracies as the end station did not survive the World Trade Center attacks, the financial crisis of 2008, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The vision of machines of loving grace from a hippie subculture was perversely translated into the Facebooks, the Googles, the Apples, and the Amazons, but it has also given rise to a new generation of postcommunist mass control technologies. Poland is not the only country where the failure to hold a public trial of communist crimes and misdemeanors produced undesirable results; China and Russia are much more significant cases in point. Who translated the watching function of the machines of loving grace into the language of social credit certificates issued after millions of cameras and robots scanned behavior? Are intelligent politicians using increasingly smart machines of loving grace for purposes that are not gentle, loving, or desirable? Is Cambridge Analytica the new reason, on a winged chariot instead of on horseback? Are Russian troll farms the final defeat of the neoliberal argument about the end of history? Is the Chinese Big Brother, with Huawei in his left hand, the embodiment of a real and desirable future that works?

The breakdown of the communist regimes did not mean the breakdown of the communist power elites. It did not mean the total dismantling of the power networks of the former secret services and the young generation of communist party cadres, groomed to rule long after the communist system expired. They still had the political capital and acquired economic assets ahead of the rest of society. Under the round table of the bloodless Polish transfer of power from the communist monopolists to the democratic politicians elected in the partly free elections

of 1989, the ex-communists, especially those from former secret services, still pulled the strings. The evolution of the postcommunist societies empirically demonstrated the importance of political experience and skills carried over to the market economy and parliamentary democracy. In Vietnam, as in China, the former communist cadres gave up centralized control of the national economy and allowed the accumulation of capital by individuals, thus freeing – almost – the markets. But the dream of total control did not die. The Chinese politicians, banks, and local officials had noticed the windows of opportunities in communication and tracking technologies. This is how they introduced the social credit system that allows the state bureaucracies, the banks, the police, and other agencies to piggy-back on the freedom and mobility of mobile phone users. Indirect but omnipresent control is shaping the private and public behavior of Chinese citizens and determining their social and financial credit-scoring status. Tested in forty-three municipalities, the system became operational on a national scale in 2020, just in time for the Wuhan virus pandemic. It is called Plum Blossom Social Credit in Suzhou, Jasmine Social Credit in Xiamen, and Sesame somewhere else. The system makes use of the extensive network of the surveillance cameras of Skynet's Sharp Eyes Project and the online tracking devices for all operations online. Can the citizens fight back? Can they mock the system with surveillance cameras sculpted from marble, as Ai Weiwei did? Can they cheat or beat the system?

Most social critics and political commentators are skeptical. They point out that after the carnival of the French revolution and the Napoleonic conquest of monarchies, there came the backlash of the Vienna Congress and the Holy Alliance, which tried to lull societies into a well-ordered sleep. Are we going to sleep in our cocoons of safe distance, face masks, and avoidance of public gatherings? Critics point out that after the Woodstock-like concerts and Berkeley or Columbia-like university riots, there came the pacified and cynical students who voted for Nixon and Reagan, who reversed the radical left's gains and returned societies to the safe mold of a military-industrial establishment. More optimistic thinkers point out that the spillovers from the military-industrial establishment have already increased individual freedom, access to knowledge, and mobility. **These more optimistic thinkers point out that after oral communications came printed and written communications, and now we have arrived at the third possible form of technologically mediated communications – but this time not through the artificial form of words, sentences, and texts. This time we are communicating through the immediate and intimate exchange and comparison of direct experiences** (by means of WhatsApps and Instagrams and Twitters helping us with loving grace, cf. Dukaj, 2019).

We are, for the first time in technological history, talking to screens and the flat speakers who appear on them. Our mobile phones and iPads have microphones and cameras built in for our use as senders and respondents. What are the long-term consequences of this shift towards the naked truth of direct experience and immediate feedback?

The most important consequence is the performative turn – the empowerment of a learner as a performer. The role of the feedbacking individual grows even if they begin with watching and listening rather than acting on a stage. The role of the speaker after the second enlightenment and at the beginning of the third still seemed more important than the role of a listener. The role of performer (lecturer, leader, broadcaster, guide) was supposed to be more important than the role of viewer, listener, follower, and interpreter – a rank-and-file member of a mass audience and a constituency. This is not the case anymore. A celebrity in social media has no authority compared to the authority of a tenured professor fifty years ago or a pope five centuries ago. **It took the past five decades, half a century, from the end of the carnival of flower power to the emergence of bitcoin payments and crowd funding, to learn that following the leader is not what communication is all about (although the social credit system deciding who can buy a train ticket in China follows the lead of the communist party programmers).** It took a politically marginal literary scholarship to produce a literary theory of “the role of the reader”.

The book bearing this very title was published in 1979 (cf. Eco, 1979). It took this long for the aristocrats of the epistocracy to come up with titles like this – despite the phenomenological influences culminating in the existentialist philosophical fashion after WWII. Husserl remained a relatively niched academic topic of interest, but Heidegger has been simplified, popularized, and discovered for the fashionable folk who practice individualism on a mass scale and invented mass lifestyles for the middle classes as a collective. Originally discovered by Sartre and (more reluctantly) Arendt (who used to be his PhD student), Heidegger managed to become a household name without being read. Other phenomenological influences – for instance Ingarden’s “Das literarische Kunstwerk” – have already introduced the points of view of the occupants of multiple spaces of aesthetic effects designed by artists, activated by their audiences and so influencing communications. The ways in which the fictional worlds existed with the real worlds in the living experience of the consumers, constituencies, or communities of literary fiction indicated a “beauty in the eyes of the beholder” rather than beauty as the fixed property of a unique authored object. Both Ingarden (and, more generally, a group of philosophers whose

reflection in aesthetics was based on phenomenology and hermeneutics, cf. Przyłębski, 2019) and Eco (and, more generally, the deconstructivist interpretation schools frequently following Lyotard and Derrida, and less frequently Serres and Girard) contributed to the growing awareness of media professionals and politicians that the main organ in communication is the ear and not the tongue. Twitters must be concise, and there is no automatic hierarchy in a twitting constituency on the virtual disco dancing floor.

Democracy of knowledge means that the listeners, readers, and viewers become communicational partners in the creative “crime” of forging a meaning.

Moreover, these growing ranks of communities, constituencies, audiences, receivers, and consumers of sophisticated experiences ask about the role of the senses and come up with the vision of an embodied knowledge, a concept of a corporeal activity of knowing, which mobilizes all five senses, asking for cognitive justice and postcolonial revisions and compensations (de Sousa Santos, 2018). This corporeal closeness is sometimes glimpsed by contemporary art critics in search of the ultimate aesthetic experience.

There is an odd but revealing phrase – ‘in the flesh’ – for seeing art in reality, not reproduction. With Lotto and other Venetian painters, it’s almost exact: to appreciate them properly you have to stand in front of them. Only then can you sense the carnal reality of the people they depict, the glistening of their skin, gleam in their eyes, the weight of their bodies, the texture of their clothes. These are physical experiences because paint is a physical substance: a layer of organic and inorganic chemicals that reflects the light, and consequently changes every time the light alters. There is no substitute for being there. (Gayford, 2019, 181)

4. The merits of democratic learning: Let a thousand merits bloom

Is democracy as directly accessible to our sensory perception as properly experienced art? And what is the proper experience of observing, participating in, and upholding democracy? Democracy as a political system is based on the idea that different social forces can compete for power. Representatives voice their differing views, which are not suppressed or censored but get a fair chance to prevail. Alternative representatives of constituencies can be voted into power for a limited time by a majority of citizens so everybody should, theoretically, be able to make it to the elite. However, this view of democracy is linked to the real traffic among human individuals and the

management of their representatives. Ideological democracy, the democracy of ideas, which are disseminated through communication media like droplets of scent clinging to our views, requires additional safeguards. **Democracy as a system of organizing knowledge creation and dissemination is not easy to imagine, design, implement, and maintain.** We do not have a full-blown theory of the democracy of knowledge but we do have a number of significant and relevant cases that merit closer inspection. Let us inspect these open cases, still under construction by professional and public opinion, which may yet turn into mythologies or ideologies or both.

When Klaus Fuchs was stealing the blueprint for nuclear weapons from the US and the UK, he justified the espionage with the historical necessity to compensate the other party of the Cold War, the Soviet Union, and create a level ground for both superpowers to compete against each other. Should we call him a democrat and praise him and the other Russian spies (the Rosenbergs, for instance) for accelerating the learning of the Soviet military-industrial establishment so that some rough parity between Russian and Western nuclear forces could secure peace? Perhaps we should because between 1945 and 2019, no nuclear weapon was used by any country in a war against another country. On the other hand, by stealing the scientific secrets, Fuchs gave a new lease of life to Stalin's genocidal dictatorship, whose heirs until the present day have failed to come to terms with their morally unsavory past. If we want to discuss a global democracy of knowledge creation and dissemination, we should be able to decide what we think about Fuchs. A fair referee on the global playground, who helped the keepers of nuclear conscience Joseph Rotblat and Bertrand Russell, or an accomplice of the dark empire, who helped mass murderers from Beria to Putin?

The democracy of knowledge also involves a free discussion on the uses of new knowledge systems. A discussion is difficult because what the participants in public debates know differs, and our interpretation of the relative significance of various inventions and discoveries also evolves – in the light of what we come to know or in the light of what we hope to know. For instance, we are slowly reinterpreting the evaluation of Fritz Haber, the Nobel Prize winner of 1919. Haber was awarded the prize for the invention of the so-called Haber-Bosch process, which relies on the industrial synthesis of ammonia from two gases – nitrogen and hydrogen. The most significant peaceful application of his invention was the production of artificial nitrogen-based fertilizers, which allowed for an increased food production (but also the cheap production of ammunition). On the other

hand, Haber's inventions enabled Germans to continue producing ammunition despite the maritime blockade of the imported raw materials, thus prolonging the carnage of the First World War. More significantly, he also developed poisonous gases and turned them into weapons, especially deadly in the second battle of Ypres during WWI. Because he introduced poisonous gases to European warfare, he barely escaped the death sentence after the war by migrating to Switzerland. Haber and his associates also invented an insecticide used as a fumigant in grain stores and based on cyanide gas called Zyklon A. Furthermore, he secretly developed new chemical weapons in Germany, Spain, and Russia between two world wars, helping Germans cheat on international agreements. Despite his significance to the German military, Haber, who was a converted Jew, was forced to resign in 1933 and died in Basel in 1934. His insecticide has been modified (the strong smell was removed) by a German business company, IG Farben, during WWII to become the instrument of genocide Zyklon B. What should be our verdict on the overall contribution of Fritz Haber to the development of artificial fertilizers and deadly weapons?

Interestingly enough, when some allied scientists tried to block his Nobel Prize because of his contribution to the death of thousands of allied soldiers in WWI, Haber replied that Nobel had also made his fortune out of deadly explosives. The discussion is even more complex today with the rise of ecological ideologies. What shall we make of Haber when the critique not only targets his military endeavors but also refocuses on his artificial fertilizers, which until recently had been considered a blessing, with no disguises, no dark sides? After all, we currently criticize artificial fertilizers as "explosives" in the soil, and some radical ecologists suggest switching to a more biodynamic agriculture that focuses on manure, composts, and the self-regenerative limits of soil, and which relies on local production and distribution. Harmony with nature should move us to allow ecological balances to restore themselves (since some form of the biological-dynamic agriculture legitimized by the mystic theories of Rudolf Steiner is often dismissed as pseudoscience, cf. Göldenboog, 2018). So please try to answer two questions: should we praise Klaus Fuchs for stealing US nuclear secrets and selling them to the USSR? Should we dislike Haber more for inventing weapons of mass destruction, bombing our soil with fertilizers produced from thin air, and damaging our planet more than any personal car, fossil-burning power plant, or palm oil producer ever will? Let us take a vote, shall we? The political democracy of free individuals merits our vote, and for the democracy of knowledge this vote is indispensable.

Democratic learning begins with the recognition that nobody knows everything everywhere and forever. We might recognize even the role of spies, the Julian Assanges (cf. Assange, 2014) and the Dr Strangeloves of mass destruction, in keeping the ball of learning in the air. Let me finish with the suggestion that the possible success of the third enlightenment (Third Enlightenment?) depends on our collective ability to design new social roles and formats for all institutions. We should remember that responsibilities begin in dreams. The multi-complex inter-networked super-bureaucracies of education and health care are already dwarfing all the other professional bureaucracies. These other bureaucratic complexes and networks include the military, which expands by surrounding itself with a military-industrial complex. We find there – among the organizing, managing, coordinating, and designing professional bureaucracies – the public institutions and the government administrations, which expand by surrounding themselves with the local self-government networks and numerous clusters of experts competing for the top positions or the ears of the decision-makers.

Two institutions stand out, both in need of change. Both, I mean hospitals and universities, change too much for some and too little for others. They have already evolved and learned a thing or two. Hospitals are trying to get rid of the Orwellian labels and become real “health centers” while trying to reduce their role as “centers for the sick” (by enabling the potential patients to help themselves, among other ways). Hence, they outsource monitoring to patients, who take over some of the control functions that used to require hospitalization. They invest in preventive campaigns to reduce the risk of falling sick, and the more they succeed, the less necessary they will become. So, hospitals should start preventing diseases and diminishing as places where disease concentrates.

Last not least, let us try to see how we can improve the reputation of universities. Higher education centers are heralded as “knowledge centers” but are managed by governments as drilling and disciplining centers for the ignorant new generations before they hit the job markets. In fact, we must start working on the same preventive program the hospitals are implementing. We should obviate ignorance so individuals can access knowledge on a global scale (cf. Krikorian, Kapczynski, 2010) and only in emergency cases look for the therapy and cure of their ignorance. The more successful we are in enabling and empowering individuals to access knowledge as easily, naturally and spontaneously as we access electricity today, the more we will succeed in reforming our universities. We should downscale universities as places where ignorance concentrates. My fellow

epistocrats, we have a unique chance to forge a new evolutionary form of compromise between rationality and equality or knowledge and democracy. We can contribute towards increasing global access to knowledge and providing multidimensional knowledgeable (not necessarily expert) assistance around projects with local and global networks. Knowledge should be more accessible (fewer gated communities), but its application should be under closer scrutiny (more publicly debated projects). A chance, fellow epistocrats? Let's not waste it.

CHAPTER I

LET'S MOVE

1. Learning on the move: Migrations as inventive discoveries

The ideal of learning imagined by the Prussian brothers von Humboldt was based on the concept of teaching learning to fit. Fitting meant entering the slots prefabricated by the enlightened state – in economy, politics, or culture. Knowledge was what the authors of successive editions of encyclopedias noted in their entries. Today, we have moved elsewhere. We are on the move. Encyclopedias are out; Wikipedias, Wikidata and WikiLeaks are in. Databases and other stores of knowledge migrate to clouds and other virtual banks and holds. Knowledge is won, stored, and disseminated in evolving constellations of individuals and infrastructures, collectives, and codes. It is traded, bought, and sold, brokered, stolen, hoarded, and donated in complex, unpredictable constellations. Copyrights are upheld but pandemics and intelligence services break them down and introduce voluntary or involuntary sharing instead of selling. Nor is there knowledge alone in those traded packages. Cognitive processes have arms and legs, families and friends, not only brains, each in a separate jar, a monad or a world apart. Individuals migrate from the former second and third worlds to the first. Sometimes they return or send some of their earnings back.

Regarding our attitudes towards immigrants, we often use two frequently evoked reference frameworks, which prompt developing a particular genre of knowledge maps, flavored with traditional biases and superstitions. One of them is the history of nomadic societies, usually rewritten from the point of view of the less nomadic ones. The concept of a stranger, among others, is a reminder of a collective memory of communities, even entire societies, that survived the bureaucratic technologies of management and never stopped being on the move. Gypsies in the European recent past is a case in point. Their communities tried, with decreasing luck, to disconnect from spatial ordering and avoid the allocation to specific territories. But gypsies tried to move around with no fixed abode to return to. If they did actually settle down, they still preserved, with varying luck, their subcultural traits.

A different sort of nomadic mobility has emerged in the temporary migrations of seasonal labor, starting with the peat fields in the Netherlands and grape harvest peaks in France and Spain and ending with the forced labor of the German and Russian totalitarian empires. Industrialization and urbanization, which started with the enclosures and fencings in 13th-century England and continued until the fully blown industrial revolution in Great Britain and the rest of Europe in the 19th century, also contributed to the mobility and growth of wandering populations, sometimes leading to migrations on a large scale. Both the United States and China are currently witnessing large-scale internal migrations to large centers with metropolitan hearts (California and Texas in the USA and Guangdong and coastal cities in China). Domestic migrations continue until today, no matter how much more stable and territorially managed contemporary societies became. On the one hand, territorially settled societies can be distrustful and repressive towards some nomads (gypsies, the homeless, vagrants, minority sects, exiles, hippies, gold diggers, spies, terrorists, and economic migrants with the alibi of a refugee). On the other hand, some forms of temporary nomadism are encouraged (tourism is a business, and so is education, health spas, pilgrimages, wars, and world events like the Olympic Games and the Chinese New Year).

Another reference framework is much more recent but at the same time reshaped and disguised by the fashionable political ideologies of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Socialist and communist activists made ample use of migrations and the new inequalities. They thought that capitalist entrepreneurs and their managers played a useful role as evolutionary midwives in the history of class struggles. By herding the working class into urban housing close to industrial sites, capitalists laid bare the inequalities in the sharing of the spoils of progress. With slums next to powerhouses and factories as well as department stores, these inequalities became visible to the visitors of the Manchesters and Parises of the industrialized world. The agitators tried first to appeal to the peasants migrating to industrial centers in order to become industrial workers. When capitalists were too slow in herding the peasants into cities, the communists took over and accelerated the process; then communist party activists started to address workers as a favorite target group, the main actor on the historical stage. Nikita Khrushchev promised them more refrigerators and washing machines than Dwight Eisenhower could supply, and, generally speaking, the communist parties promised to build more suburbs and cars than their capitalist counterparts ever did; suburbs in which every socialist worker could safely turn into an established member of the middle class.

The competition for the title of the best provider of upward visible loci of social mobility was lost by the communists when their inefficient economies could not keep pace with the “star wars” challenge of a new framework for high tech armaments and digitally enhanced consumption. If historians succeed in rewriting a history of the Cold War, they will be able to see the launching of Sputnik in 1957 as a Soviet victory, followed by the landing of the US astronauts on the Moon in 1969 and the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983 – both clearly demonstrating that the US had regained the lead in the Cold War competition for the hearts, minds, and weapons of men and women. The absolute victory of the Western allies in the area of ideological climate control – including celebrity production and the new media of individualized dissemination of all messages – was pronounced by a Slovak peasant who had migrated to the bohemia of New York City. Andy Warhol correctly predicted that in the future everybody would be famous for 15 minutes and that it would be easier to do so in Manhattan, Boston, Beverly Hills, and Stanford than in Moscow.

But the history of the Cold War is also being rewritten as we slowly glimpse into the secret sections of the Moscow archives of the Soviet Communist Party. These new insights were made possible by historians and dissidents who managed to access documents about the financial aid sent by Russian communist elites to peace movements and military aid sent by Russian state agencies to terrorist groups. The dissidents managed to uncover significant documents before these archives closed again (cf. Bukovsky, 1996, 2019). **Reading the documents salvaged from the Russian archives, we understand that while ARPAD gave us the World Wide Web, the KGB gave us “no nukes” activists and “no nuclear energy”, Antifa, and Black Panther movements.** The Cold War turns out to be a great matrix of the present world, which did not disappear with the breakdown of the Soviet Union. It faded from the public attention in the mainstream western media but continues to attract the attention of the communist and neocommunist power elites who are acutely aware that McCarthy, whom they finally disgraced, did not unmask all their assets. But even part of the unmasking deserves to be ridiculed and branded as paranoia according to the PR masters of the postcommunist and neocommunist power elites – especially now that the Cold War assets have become relevant again. Unfortunately, most Western European and US mainstream media felt justified in dropping the red menace theme when neoliberals trumpeted the end of history as a class struggle. As Martin Amis, the literary representative of the baby boomers who got carried away by the sexual and hippie counterculture, put it while commenting on Francis Fukuyama’s pamphlet celebrating the

victory of the neoliberal West over the neocommunist East in summer of 2001,

The End of History and the Last Man (1992). Its thesis: history was over in the sense that ‘mankind’s ideological evolution’ was over. Conflicts would of course continue, and there would continue to be events, possibly titanic events, but the only viable state model was capitalist democracy... As it happened, a titanic event was only seven weeks away – one supposedly heralding a different state model: that of a (worldwide) caliphate which would enforce Islamic law. (Amis, 2020, 268)

However, no matter how successful mainstream media are in spreading political correctness, the global class struggle for a vision of the future re-emerges from the Cold War archives and continues on the front stage of contemporary world history. Both Warren Buffet and Xi Jinping agree that the class struggle goes on as usual, although they point to a different winner. And it is not very likely that the participants in this class struggle (investors migrating to hedge funds, peasants migrating to sweatshops, and minorities migrating to radical ideologies) might be approaching the finishing line (if a finishing line can be imagined at all).

The language of the Cold War had been suspended in political discourse to make place for a neoliberal illusion that history had ended and it was parliamentary democracy and market economy from now on – and that this divine lucky mix would last forever, celebrating the end of history, herstory, and their story. The illusion did not last. First, the dot-com crash of 2001 made clear that technology does not stand alone, and then the 2008 financial meltdown brought state bureaucracy back from the night watchman’s lodge to the front office of contemporary societies.

The temporary defeat of the neoliberal ideologies and the continuing clinical death of the communist utopia left all media playing for global audiences, looking for plots about progress that were strangely empty– temporarily empty for the empty space was filled by emergent semi-ideologies, which did not suffice to bring the leftist political parties to power but dominated global media for the first two decades of the 21st century. The green ecologists and the pink LGBT activists filled the spaces in streaming public communications left empty by the communists who lost the Cold War and failed to convince the masses that a classless society watched over by the KGB was worth dying for. These empty spaces thus arose when it became clear that the communists lost the Cold War. Or did they? Their communist ideology was certainly dead. Or so it seemed at the time, between the victory