

Suppose that.

"Hypotheses non fingo." (Sir Isaac Newton).

Introductory considerations.

A terrorist with his machine gun is running through the landscape. He runs toward the future. A futurologist is watching the terrorist running on his computer terminal: the terrorist runs along a probability curve toward the present. Then the terrorist jumps out from the landscape and/or the terminal unto the desk and kills the futurologist. He says: "I had to kill him, because he stood on my way toward the future". The futurologist, could he still speak, would say: "I guessed so". This knot of absurd contradictions is called "the dialectics of freedom".

The terrorist and the futurologist have two different views with regard to the future. The terrorist is standing amidst the crowd of incoming promises and threats: he is "committed". The futurologist stands on tip toes to look beyond the crowd: he is curious. This book will stand on tip toes. Like the futurologist, it will "suppose" what is coming. But it will be no futurology.

The futurologist sees virtualities as they approach the present. They come in from an empty horizon. As they approach, they become denser. This is a well-known situation: like iron filings approaching a magnet. One is tempted to propose a "field theory of the future". But one cannot do so. He who is standing on tip toes, is still within the field: the terrorist may kill him. He does not have a theoretical distance. As long as metaphysical cranes have not been invented, all theories concerning the future should be mistrusted.

Furthermore, the comparison with the magnetic field is not a very good one. If and when a virtuality reaches the present, it becomes real, but it may also deviate, leave the field, and become impossible: iron filings are incapable of such ontological somersaults. The future looks more like a congress of ghosts: some materialize, others disappear into thin air, still others collide and mingle. How is one to get hold of them?

By supposing that virtualities grow more probable as they approach the present "Proximity" may be measured. One may construct probability curves, one may have them converge, diverge, cross, and bundle. One may have them cancel out each other. One may extrapolate them. Thus a scenario of the future will appear on the terminal, and one may feed ever new virtualities into it. One may then measure the degree of probability of that scenario. Of course: margins of error cannot be avoided. But those margins themselves may be calculated.

However: the category "proximity" is chilling. It says that I stand in the middle of my future, and that the incoming virtualities concern me less and less, the farther they are, because they grow less and less probable as I look toward my horizon. But I am not alone here. Others are standing around me, each of them in the center of his own future. Some of those others stand so close to me that our futures overlap. Some virtualities occur in this overlap which are far away from myself, but close to my other. They concern me. It is only after having included "love of one's neighbor" into "proximity", that it may be accepted.

But can it then still be measured? By constructing a future common to everybody. A gray zone of all futures. This will have two consequences, however: There will be no empty horizon around it, (death will have disappeared from vision). And it will become impossible to recognize oneself and one's neighbors within that future. But it will permit ever more exact calculations. This book will have to sacrifice this exactness: it does not want to make suppositions which lose death from sight, and which do not permit self-recognition and recognition of others. This book will be no futurology.

Still: it will stand on tip toes. And will suppose, it will deal with virtualities, and it will try to present them. So that the terrorist might jump out from the book onto the desk of its reader. Like Escher's lizards which crawl from a sheet of paper. By doing so, this book will be neither true nor false, because truth and falsity have to do with the real. This book has to do with what is possible, not with what is real. Now what is possible is more or less probable. Futurologists try to eliminate those virtualities which are improbable, which renders their future insipid. Man is an animal who feeds on the improbable, and he does so to make it real. This book will do the opposite from futurology: it will be interested in improbabilities.

Another word for "future" is "adventure". This book promises adventures. It does so now, in its introductory considerations, to whet the curiosity of the readers. Because it is curiosity which makes us stand on tip toes. The suppositions this book will make will be curious ones, and if the readers admit this, they will gain a curious vision of a curious future.

The future approaches: tomorrow will become today. Curious people want to jump from today into tomorrow. This is silly: wherever I am, there is today, and tomorrow is where I am not. Why do those people want to do such nonsense? Because they want to suppose. To put this more elegantly: they search freedom. This book will be a lot of nonsense. Any futurologist will be able to show so. This book will try to serve freedom.