

## **The World as an Accident**

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The notion of accident extends to the whole world and beyond. Strangely enough, this is not the whole story. The "accident machine" is not the only machine: there is also an "escape machine."

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The science of endophysics claims that the world as it is given to us is only a cut, an interface, a difference inside what is real (the whole). This has some powerful implications, including the possibility to change the whole world (i.e. the interface world). From the viewpoint of science, this is good news because it enlarges our range of technological options.

But there is a philosophical correlate that is disturbing. The world as an interface is pure accident. The interface is an accident machine. Moreover, it is not even a machine. It is a violent imposition and has all the qualities of a bad dream.

This sounds ominous but can be proven if the theory is not misleading. Besides the two types of agency introduced by Newton (the "laws" and the, once-and-for-all specified, "initial conditions"), there is a new type of agency: the "assignment conditions." Assignment is a deliberate accident, so to speak. This can be understood as follows. The same universe run in a computer, so to say, acquires many faces (interfaces or cuts) depending for which particular, microscopically specified, subsystem (called observer) the rest of the universe is put on screen. A microscopic change in the observer-world assignment can radically change the interface. The universe as a whole remains majestically unchanged by this.

Normally, people tend to believe that, apart from the assignment of the universe itself, the "assignment of the body" is the only assignment to take into account in this world. This simple view is held by virtually everyone in the West but is incorrect and misleading. It ties in with the single-life-theory -- the belief that death is final -- people adhere to in the West.

People therefore usually believe that they can forget about the really important things as long as they are securely wrapped up in the bodies that they have grown accustomed to.

The cruelty of the two "acknowledged" accidents of birth and death remains the only reminder of a predicament that can otherwise be forgotten about, so they feel.

This complacent view is overturned by endophysics. The accident reaches center-stage at every moment because of the assignment conditions. While no one has talked about them much since the time of Aristotle, everyone experiences them most intimately at every moment. The Now is the best example. It moves through the world like a gong. Only no one seems to hear it. We are pushed forward on an invisible glass seat through the world, or so it appears. "High on the yellow wagon I sit near the driver in front," is an old, almost philosophical folk song (in Germany), only that this view, too, is still naive.

There is no motion in nature. Everything that moves does so because the Now moves. If the Now would not move, nothing would. All that would be left would be a frozen (stationary) cut. The brain determines the speed of the movement of the Now, so we are told. Actually, the speed of the movement of the Now is determined by the psyche, i.e. consciousness. "Without psyche, no time," said Aristotle. But this is not yet completely correct either because it implies a belief in continuous motion.

The Now is a moving cut -- or so it appears. If we give it a constant speed, its duration will still shrink to a point -- a moving point. Who or what assigns this moving point to me, now? Moreover, since each of the Nows is moving, jumping back and forth between them would make no difference, as far as I can tell. Note that the movement would never be interrupted since one would always find oneself snugly in a moving car seat after landing. Thus the Now may just as well be discontinuously assigned.

But then comes the next, even more intimidating fact. The world that appears on the canvas of the Now point need not even be consistent across the Now-points. A vertigo-like fractal tumbling takes hold of our minds at this point of the argument. But surely this is just philosophy -- and we have learned that philosophy has no consequences, or has it?

Yet, this is physics. As shown in Fassbinder's 1974 movie *Welt am Draht* (A Puppeteer's World), it is possible to build a lower-level computer-simulated universe that contains "ID-units" -- simulated persons. In endophysics, the lower-level universe is, in addition, microscopically reversible (there is no preferred direction of time). The little ID-units inside nevertheless suffer from the same predicament as we do. Their Nows and worlds (Now-worlds) are also determined for them at every moment by the external super-

observer ("demiurge"), who happens to be interested in one particular cut -- or sequence of cuts -- being put on screen as an interface to watch. The Marquis would have loved the contraption ...

"The world as an accident?" Worse: "The world as a deliberate accident!" The hypothetical prison that we started from is closing in. Death as an escape machine is growing more and more remote. The nightmare that grabbed young Descartes at the age of 23 in the town of Ulm is intensifying. In the first part of the bad dream, Descartes fought with the wind and ended up with a lame leg. In the second part, a book was blown in and landed on the table beside his bed. The book contained the most important answer of his life ("which life path am I to choose?"). But then the book was blown away again and when it returned this decisive chapter was missing. The dream was indistinguishable from waking reality. The Cartesian nightmare did not seem to go away.

In the morning, Descartes bravely faced his predicament and founded science as a means to investigate the relational consistency of the world of waking reality and to find out if it differed favorably from the dream world. For if this were to be the case, he would be safe. This consistency hypothesis proved extremely powerful because of its extreme weakness. (Because it was so extremely daring, it was extremely easy to falsify). It later enabled Descartes to claim that those who follow him would conquer old age and eventually death itself. A machine that could change the Now would clearly be a case in point. Now-control would imply immortality. Could the "helmet" of endophysics (called Sterlarc Helmet) change the Now? A mild microwave field of some 40 TeraHertz applied to one's own living brain might change the interface. But even if successful, this method would be of no use because the outcome would remain counter-factual. There is no place for another Now inside the Now. At best, a message could be left, albeit not in the form of a document but merely in the form of a decodable bit string in a seemingly universal physical constant.

Still, this minor success would amount to a "world bomb." Like an ice-cream bomb, it could be used to improve everybody's life, immortality being part of the package. "Accidents Controlled" would be a possible name for the manufacturing company.

At this point, a second step to controlling the nightmare presents itself. It is here that the real escape hatch lies. Previously, we only tried to manipulate (bite) the leash, so to speak. This time, we turn around.

But to do so would be of no use to a slave, you might say. Epictetus the Cretan was a slave in ancient Rome. His master enjoyed torturing him. One day he twisted Epictetus' arm behind his back. Epictetus said: "Master, if you twist my arm just a little bit more, it will break." The master did. Epictetus said: "Master didn't I tell you that if you twisted my arm a little bit more, it would break?" This remark prompted the master to set him free.

Epictetus was, so to speak, the first computer that passed the Turing test. For slaves were believed to have no soul. The same escape is possible from the slavery of the interface. How does the trick work?

This is not difficult to ascertain. The interface is not everything we have. The world is not everything we have. The world appears on something. You could call it the "screen of consciousness" (the soul). I call it the "TV set." Why? So far, we have only talked about the ever-changing program and its assignment. The program is accident and cruelty, or so it appears. But this is not the whole story. The program is not everything there is.

The TV set is the envy of the gods. No one drives a better Lamborghini. The TV set is indestructible. This is because it was never created. "Heaven and earth pass away but breeches made of buckskin last forever" (another German poem). When the creation of Adam's body had been completed, consciousness was "blown into his nose," it is said. Creation stops with the body and the interface. Only the content of the screen (the program) can be manipulated. The screen (TV set) is more than eternal. How can one be sure? He or she who is not afraid to wrestle with the angel (demiurge) will prevail and be accepted as his equal. What is the reason for this strange symmetry?

The secret is the kiss. Not the kiss on the screen, but the kiss between screens. Descartes saw it first, Levinas worked it out. Indestructibility implies omnipotence. But where is the omnipotence? It lies in the exteriority relative to other screens.

So far, we have stuck to the naive picture of science and artificial universes in a computer. All of this is program-ware. Worse, it is shadow-ware. Within the big program of living consciousness, with its deep colors and pains and intangible Nowness, there is the small program on which science focuses. It relies exclusively on the shadows (relations) present within the big program. The machine hypothesis of science applies to

this subfeature. "The world is a machine." "The brain is a machine." Since machines can be manipulated, I can manipulate your brain, for example. For I am exterior to you if the world (the small program) is consistent. This is Descartes' hypothesis of demiurgic omnipotence. Exteriority applies not only to lower-level worlds in the computer (vertical exteriority) but also to one's fellow inhabitants of the world (horizontal exteriority).

But the world may not be a mathematically consistent machine after all. This is only a falsifiable scientific hypothesis. Yet, as long as it has not been falsified despite our best efforts, the hypothesis that the other people we meet are "just machines" can be upheld. The hypothesis of omnipotence is irrefutable up to that moment.

Many hypotheses are unrefuted, without this having any consequences. Why should this particular hypothesis be more important? Because refraining from misusing the infinite power of exteriority is holy. "Holy" means giving without taking, pure benevolence.

The accident and the kiss would perhaps be a better title for this note. What has not been covered here is the fragrance of the TV set. Another word for it is charm. People who act fairly are irresistibly charming. And, conversely, acting fairly is not possible without seeing the irresistible charm in the soul of the potential victim.

A final point concerns the relationship between the two stories that have been told. The first story was about the fairness of a machine towards another machine (compassion on the level of science). The second story was about becoming aware of the existence of one's own TV set and its indestructibility (and about the fact of ceasing to be afraid of the assignment-attributing instance). Both stories were called the kiss. Is this correct?

Strangely enough, the two stories are identical. Again, this identity was seen by Descartes. Refraining from misusing an infinite power is also an emancipatory act. It does not prove that you are equal to the gods but that the gods are not afraid of your acting in a manner reserved for a god. This was Descartes' famous proof of the "non-malignancy" of heaven.

Acting fairly and seeing one's own indestructibility are one and the same thing. The mouse and the elephant went for a stroll, and the elephant inadvertently stepped on the mouse. He was awfully concerned but the mouse with its last whisper told him: "Don't

worry, the same thing has happened to me before." There is a bittersweet smile in this. Is it more bitter or more sweet?

To conclude, the notion of accident is one of the most difficult to face squarely. We went in three circles around the hot mush in order not to get burnt like a kitten. Life is infinitely more dangerous than we usually think. There are pains that do not ache at all (like having lost a child in an accident), which one would nevertheless trade in for virtually any real pain. One such child wanted to build a time machine when grown up. Color shines. The Now shines. The TV set shines. The elephant is still wondering what the mouse had in mind.

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