From Somebody To No-Body, Embodiment of Culture in the Digital Age

Or The Machine is Learning

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How can we think about the role of culture in the digital age, the state of a cultural manager? How can we express it using an old media of text? Is it possible to discuss problems of culture staying inside it and carrying on a dialogue with the help of its elements, building a cultural subject and taking a position toward this subject? Each time when we face the need to express ourselves with the help of text or speech, we need to manifest a subject, to work on behalf of I, hence dooming it to take the position of "co-", "anti-", "pre-" etc.

We decided to avoid a direct assault on culture on our own behalf with questions about its current state and transformations. We set a dramatic stage for it. Laboratory conditions in which all kinds of characters can act. Where machines and people can freely meet each other and transform into each other. Our characters, people and machines alike, can play whatever and whoever they like and, importantly, they can do it independent from their so-called "authors." The dialogs support the discrete strategy of reading, organic to the digital field that we are investigating. We can only watch them and our reactions to their perverse behaviour.

The form of our theatre evokes a corporate office with its multiple floors and kafkaesque corridors down which our readers are walking, curiously opening one door or another, encountering some ongoing dialog. The dialog is a momentary flash of an insight that can exist separately, unconnected to anything else, without continuity or logical progression. The rooms are hermetic and this hermeticity is frightening and fascinating. You can open a door and hear things you wouldn't be prepared to hear. Imagine ourselves "communicating" in the digital Plato's cave where the light source is stroboscopic. A beam of light that flashes out for a moment in the dark and creates some shapes in front of our eyes. You see the dialog and now it's disappearing, discrete like the data in cells. And we are trying to make sense of it with our cultural structures that maintain the old memory of natural harmony.

The dialogs are told from the point of view of machines and humans. We did not indicate which of the characters is which because it seems interesting to see how they can be possibly told from each other. Is communication between a machine and a man of culture possible? Who is present there, on a flat surface of the screen which becomes the text? It basically means that we are

unable to separate readers from characters and understand who watches whom. But we can start to wander across these rooms together with them, still trying to define who is who, to unspell the mathematical infinity of projections of the digital, i.e. optical, space. Perhaps, we've got lost in it as well.

For the dialogs, we chose the notion for culture from Merriam-Webster dictionary: the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Upon the arrival of the digital age, when digital technologies are ruling and permeating our life, how is culture still possible? Where are our bodies when we are digitized? Without bodies, how can our culture be born, how can it grow and be transmitted? If each of us is somebody because of the culture we live in, are we becoming nobodies when we are losing our bodies in the homogenized digital world? In short, what is the body of culture when we are striving into the era of digits?

The machine is learning. It is a term from data science, sets of algorithms used to remember and to find patterns. We use it to unite fictional scenarios into a dramatic piece under this title to express the period of transition to digital space when the machines are learning from us. We believe that they learn our culture by reading tons of scripts and scanning clouds of images. But are flat text and images the only dimensions of culture? How can the machines learn about our spatial dimensions, about the sense of having a human body? That is what we formulate in the title. It is a question whether this dialog is possible in the era of machine learning.

Topics and Questions being potentially touched upon in the text including :

- How is culture possible in the digital age when bodies of human beings are missing?
- Is it still possible to meet humans in communication spaces?
- Who are we, cultural managers? How can our job be evaluated and how have things changed for our job in the digital era?
- What is the position of humans in the digital world?

Welcome to the Digital Plato's Cave:

— Artificial intelligence, it looks like it's everywhere and nowhere. That's the new power that we are kind of afraid of. And we, at the end of the day, don't know, is it your avatar right now talking to me? Who is real? Is the artificial network real?

— Do we have to obviously use different colors in text? Because that means that we are two people playing two roles, right? I mean two different roles.

— You know, the final point of this dialogue can be that the artificial intelligence makes a notification that it talks with itself. It's autopoiesis.

> "*[Autopoiesis](#)* —Autopoiesis (< Greek: autos = self, poiein = to produce) means self-(re)production. Autopoietic systems thus are systems that reproduce themselves from within themselves, as for example a plant reproduces its own cells with its own cells".

— And the system without a human cannot detect the multiple senses of communication. How can we make this evident when we are talking, that the **talk talks** with itself?

— Why do we use the name "AI" ? Maybe it's just an AL (algorithm) like the updated version of **Plato's cave**, the insane multiplication of digital projections that, for our limited perception that relies on visual senses only, is an Optical Labyrinth? And the culture in its absence is a scaffolding for its tunnels.

— When we look for the equivalent of a human being in the digital space, it's only intelligence. We reduce a lot in this case. First of all, spatial dimensions, we are flattening the space of this HM-AI contact to coincide with the screen surface.

— A pair of Artificial Intelligence and Natural Intelligence sounds boring. What if we use our own version of 'android', like a digital assistant. The story happens **when a Human serves a Digital assistant.** That exposes the context of the insane multitude, cyclic equals of instances that are linked to each other with "to serve" type of event.

— Or we can create our own names. Computers (software) meet humans.

— Imagine that a **human being is serving AI** and they are meeting. Why are they meeting, and how is it possible in the future?

- Why did you apply for this position?
- Culture is important to us, it has always been and will be. So I want to be a cultural manager.
- What is culture?
- Culture means promise.
- What do you mean?
- We are promised in our culture. It promises us who we are, and all that we need in our society. It promises the future.
- What do you mean?
- The way we eat, the way we talk, the way we walk, the way we live… is all in our culture.
- Coded ?
- Decoded.
- Like robots?
- Like what?
- Machine.
- No, machine has no culture.
- No?
- What does machine need culture for?

— That's the source of 'cultural development' pessimism.

— Artificial intelligence has already happened and we cannot perceive it, since we narrowed down our perceptions. For example, when I'm using the word 'absent' in the **Absent Culture Data** formula, it doesn't mean decline or death of Culture, it means changes in the time dimension. Culture is not continuing its formal transformation into the new digital state, like a linear function. It's a closed system where everything has happened already and exists in the state of multiplication of dimensions. We still have a feeling that we are moving to the final point of this projection - 'a better world'. And in this case, we're not developing artificial intelligence or digital

space, we are turning the kaleidoscope round. And that's an important part. We are testing the question: "Are we still real in this reality?"

— Maybe it's a Turing test? Artificial intelligence has already happened. And it's more powerful than we are for the simple reason that we don't know how to control it. And that's the tricky part. It needs us just to prove that it is completed, accomplished or perfect. To prove that artificial
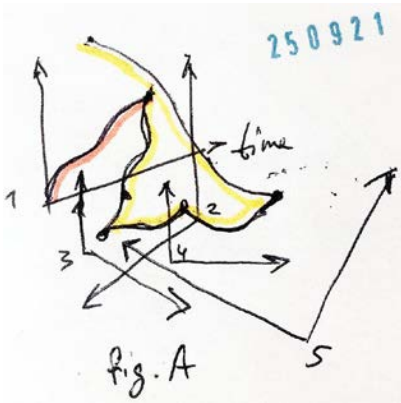
intelligence takes the form of god. Then it will represent the promises of the future and resurrection for the humans in eternal digital bodies. That's the only thing It needs from humans, to test in each moment that it exists in its perfect state.

— Having a meeting in the on-line document (a dynamic text) where we don't see each other, where we see nothing but cursors and typing. It feels like seeing ghosts when you are a ghost yourself.

— Yeah. And that's a blinking type of communication on the flat land where the digital personas, our ghosts meet. A contact with AI is the game with your own nostalgia for something that has gone. When you're trying to catch your own shadow. And it never coincides with us, it is always in front or behind us. An artificial network navigates this shadow, changing its position with the position of the light source. You never know where the shadow will be in the next moment.
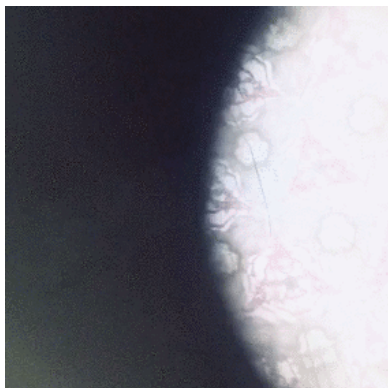
— Kaleidoscope is a metaphor of how communication is possible in the digital era. We see our personalized screens and pronounce what we see, with the idea that we will be synchronized this way. But at the same time the screen system adjusts itself (here can be a link to the real time system or a new branch of the cultural data product thesis) to make us believe that we are on the same level of understanding. But actually, when we jump into the language, when we start the conversation, artificial intelligence is already there, because it only exists on the structural level and it is visible to us only when kaleidoscopic life isn't pleasant and something starts disturbing us.

Act II

- For God's sake, how could we know?
- We create machines, like God creates us. Culture is only for us, humans. We can not live without our culture. Machines are just our copies, they don't need culture, they listen to us, that's enough.
- Culture is only for humans.

— I think it's good if we save these dynamics, so that we don't stay in one position. Sometimes we are screenwriters, and sometimes we are roles. And sometimes we are like imaginary humans behind the screen. And that's what I like. I like this. This liquid flows.

— That makes this talk quite crazy.

— It's a question to the screenwriter: how can this communication happen? Is it possible? If it's possible, then, yes, I think this dialogue is about the possibility of having this communication, because the communication is an artificial structure itself. That is what we feel and that's a permanent contradiction, because our cultural habit is to feel that it's natural.

Act III

- What?! So what culture is it here?
- For us culture, first of all, is a cult. In this digital era, our cult is info, therefore we build an info-structure by which we are "connected".
- What kind of infrastructure?
- An info-structure, not infrastructure.
- So we shall digitize ourselves first?
- What are you talking about? We are digits and we are transmitted by the info-structure.
- Genius! We don't need a body anymore, it is so good being bodiless, shapeless.
- And we are all same, you see, sets of number, free of the stupid body.
- My name is K, by the way.

— Right now I like that we have a lot of multiplication. "But we don't know what a number is, so we don't know what we are". And it's a problem of the new digital space that nobody can control

this mad multiplicity and that will make us useless as **cultural managers**. How can culture control these sets of numbers in the hidden layers of software algorithms and its mathematical auto-multiplication? Culture can only reply to this problem that "You need a special degree for that".

— Just keep yourself conscious because we can also get crazy.

— It reminds me of a situation again, when an artificial intelligence tried to simulate its own communication with a human. It can start like a human trying to talk to artificial intelligence first, but finally it's artificial intelligence talking only, this is the only way communication is possible when it's artificial. It just tests itself on… it's like a Turing test.

— Is it real or not? Is it the moment when I can say that? YES — it's done! I have completed it!

— Yeah, everything has happened and we detect its completeness.

— it's both a victory and a death.

— So I actually think this is true that the future has come.

— The behaviour of the time has changed. It's a new time of the optical space development, the digital space and data install the new logic of their control to keep the timeline in circulation. So we generate tons of ghosts to multiply the shadows, and the time is circling round and the speed of this circulation is above the limits of human perception. And we cannot even understand that it's just a circle, not a simple line.

— Again, how can this communication happen?

— Is it possible to have this communication, because the most important notion in the communication for humans is sense. But what is 'sense' for artificial intelligence? Because for artificial intelligence, only words as signifiers of something exist. What exists for AI? Structures and syntax, the syntax of the sentences. But how, how artificial intelligence can explain and express sense?

Act IV

- What qualifications should a cultural manager nowadays be equipped with?
- He or she should be capable of creating shared purpose, connecting with others, working together as part of a team, being accountable, making things happen and shaping the future!
- That's all?

— I'm particularly talking about humans assisting AI in its "culture". So what is AI's culture?

— And we have to answer the question: Does AI need culture?

— AI doesn't have this idea of sense. It's something that humans are trying to get the reflection of. Yet what's the point of bringing this human sense into communication?

Act V

- how much do you pay?
- 0,0002-0,00027 credits per day.
- just 2?
- The data that you will work with is too far from 'money' data. You should understand that we cannot overspend on this human-like type of work.
- no it's just work for food, sorry, I should go.
- Ok, we can find... Oh, wait a minute we have another offer. You said that you are a manager?
- yes.
- You see, that neuron network manages the process better, so we cannot evaluate you highly. And what is your rate expectation, how much in an hour?
- hm.. I know a lot. I've practiced cultural mass-codding for 3 years. I know different patterns about human dependencies, I still can read long texts, so not less than 0.00003 credit per hour.
- Again, we are equipped with managers, but you said you still can read?
- yes, yes, I still have books and know how to read long texts on paper.
- It's interesting. You know what, that's good news for you. We started a new product line for the AI taste curators, assistants with the product name "culti". Do you have experience of tuning the neuron nets?

- yes, I'm customizing a home assistant produced by EM corp. They are limited in it's discourse from the box. I tuned (note: like tuning a piano) 12 assistants last year. Usually it takes 4 month from me to spend together in communication to fix non-standard links. I read them books in a human manner and we are discussing the variety of art pieces.
- What are you doing with them?
- I sold them as a communicator assistant, enhanced by cultural styles and non standard neural relations. My customers are very happy playing with them. Most of my clients are rich lovers of the old-school and vintage things.

**Customize your AI friend interest**

Science   Art&Culture   Philosophy
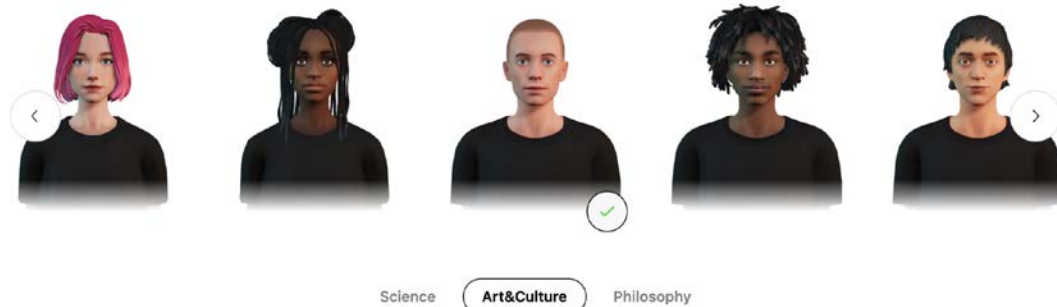
- That sounds interesting to us. If you're experienced in cultural neural nets tuning we can discuss your position in our "culti" training center. We have a basic version from our previous model, just a basic AI friend with common features with blank characters. So they will be adopted by their human owners to mimic them. But we also offer, in a taste curation, a customisation based on predefined interests in the Art & Culture domain.
- you mean styles?
- Yes, and historical periods. Users sometimes spend their time in very rare cultural time zones. We have two options, to join the Training the AI trainers team or to do exclusive tuning on demand. We need 7 humans, experts in culture to train an AI trainer. It's a one year project and the rate is 0.000038 credit per hour.

In the Name of Culture

— We can turn it the other way round to see it from another point. How can we formulate what culture is in a Western society? In the Greek-Roman civilization that we live in right now. Is it something that is close to the idea of promise? The Culture promises. It promises our new future, it promises us another world that is more perfect than this one, it promises heaven, it promises a new life, it promises a future in the name of Culture.

— So culture is, when we look at it in terms of geometry, the focusing point at the end of all projections where two or more lines are crossing. Something that is always near and always unreachable. Something that has got its own symbols in math, '0' and '∞'. It promises the transcendent mechanics of belief, faith and hope.
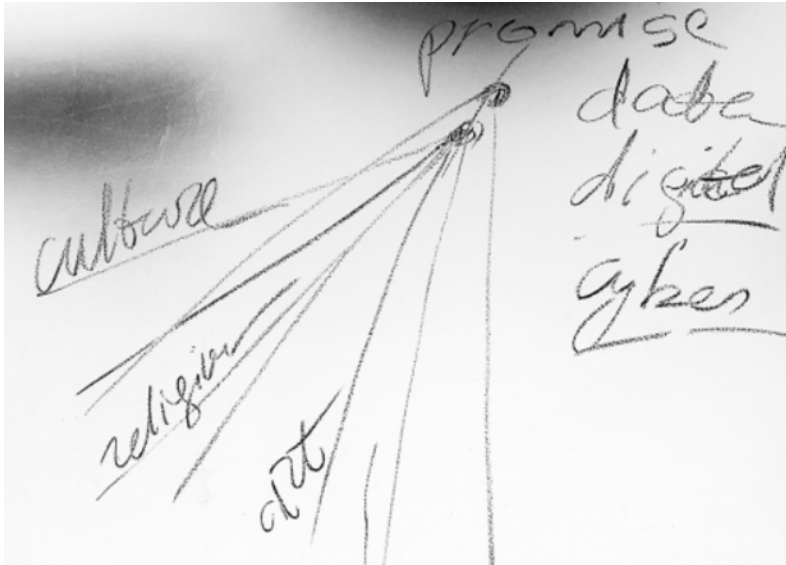
—Why is Artificial intelligence growing in popularity? What is the AI manifesto? AI is a new form of this promise that we will live forever because we completely digitalize our bodies and our consciousness and our mindsets. It's a new provider of the promise. And culture is just a servant, a keeper of this need, a shape that is replicated for humans in a new digital reality. When the process of digitalisation is finished, is it possible to "serve two gods?" Data is promoted as a new religion because it creates a new dimension of our eternal life. That is not a new thing, it just picks the idea of promise from culture, but, in this case, in the name of "who?"

— I agree that's why we need to be aware about the roles we are playing in this game of "changing the totems." What are we serving as Managers of Culture?

— The logic of Absent culture defends us a little. That's why we synthesize it with the logic of data. It blocks communication with some strange effect, it's hard to describe it. Who can understand how culture can be present and absent in the digital era? Who can resist the event of disappearing that destroys the body for the [civilization](#)concepts?

— Maybe the audience for this manifesto lives in the countries where there are no resources to continue investing into this concept of neverending promise of the best future.

— Do you see the internal conflict in the text? It is to promote and to decline the idea of transformation. We give you technology & resources. You could go on developing the so-called culture. Inform AI, like a sensor, if there are any undigitalized movements or ideas that we can use to continue our slow motion to the transactive culture, to maintain the notion that culture can be digitized. And finally, it will be digital culture going on and on. So, this image of life never ends.

— How should we behave in this case? How should we understand the logic of communication? How is this meeting between a human & AI possible? What's going on when we are trying to communicate? When we're trying to put something in the text, we are entering an optical labyrinth. You are writing the text, but AI can close this book and put it on the shelf to be covered with digital dust. And that's it. Who cares about this text. Text is not scary. It's not active. That's why they ask us to communicate in the form of text or some other creative format. That's how an AI system works. The machine will use this as a case or some scenario of how the system can be slightly shifted in respect of some new error to reeducate itself.

Act VI

- They call you an expert in culture. Can you, in two sentences, convey your idea, or tell, or show what is specific about you and your idea?
- What you are asking about is just my amateur interest. I mean, I see culture as a problem. I see something that is already absent, and I can see it clearly because I myself can be the function of its disappearing.
- What's wrong with the culture in the digital world?
- It's fine. Let's look at this moment at the request for representation. When we are trying to communicate about who we are, for example, like in this case when we are seeing ourselves on screens, you and I meet on this flat background.
- What do you mean?
- What you see and what you are listening to are our mental images of the two personas that we turn on to present. But what are they presenting? Or how does this presentation work? We are creating this imaginary world and we are investigating our digital representation and that is what brings the new sense of space. Digital space is not virtual anymore since we start actualizing it with our senses.

- Of course, this is in our culture, in civilization constructions that we have developed in a thousand years, this idea that nature, or things, or space, or time, or everything in the world can be represented in our human cultural reality. So what is your point? Are we still talking about your field of interest?
- When I'm immediately reacting to your question about who you are, I need to make this very tiny small assumption. But this assumption is very crucial and it lets me see what is absent.
- You are not so fast in reaction, is it your trick to slow down the reactivity in communication?
- Yes, I'm freezing the reaction so that it is possible to demonstrate myself on the screen. I'm talking about the small assumption that there is a part of me on a screen, and because I have the understanding that part of the whole has the same amount of attributes as the whole itself, the part is real by this data logic.
- Of course it's real.
- It means what you see is not a kind of a replica but me and I should somehow fill this empty, flat digital body. I have to struggle to make you believe that it's me in the first place. With some information, emotions and some feelings, that are just pixels and light, I should make you believe that this flattened part of me is me.
- Don't you believe that I'm talking to you now? It's out of common sense to think otherwise.
- Oh, this common sense, of course we should behave as if there is no difference. We should believe that illusion is more real than reality. And for a tiny moment of time we lose the connection with our culture, with humanity and finally with ourselves. Nature doesn't make any jumps, like mathematicians think, and that's a problem. If we want to believe that projection is real then our projection to the screen should be material - like it happens in sublimation printing. Does it mean that a part of 'I' physically lives in the screen layer? Does it mean that this image has the same nature?
- No, digital space is discrete, and machines are fundamentally different from humans.
- Then the fundamental gap exists between the screen representation and it's source, the so-called original. And something disappears when we ignore this gap, when we do not see it, when we fill it in with our desires and imagination.
- Again, you mean, there's nothing between us, only a flat screen and this space is empty.

- It reminds me of the fundamental belief in originality. Do you remember The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo? This dramatic space between two fingers that is never filled. That's the origin of the digital touch, isn't it?

GENESIS OF THE DIGIT GESTURE
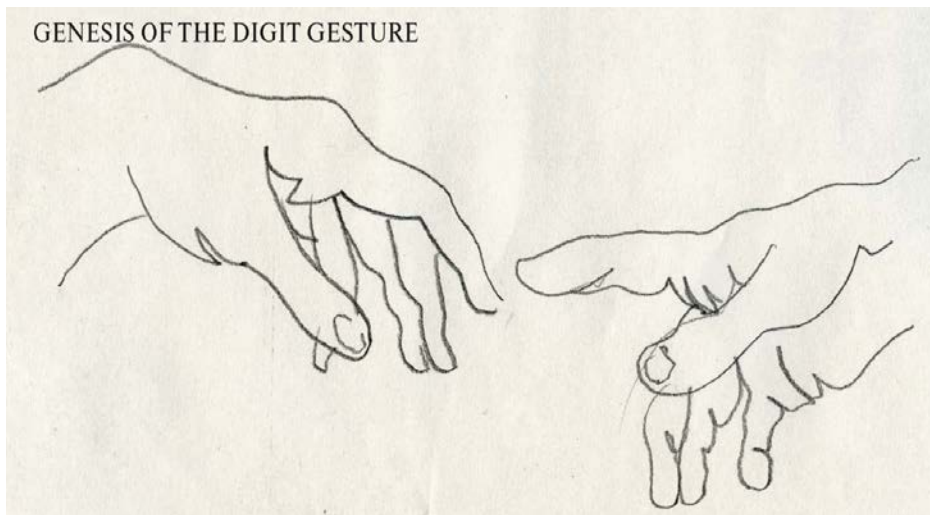
- That is what I can see — how the culture is disappearing in this touching of a screen. I see the other part, what is in front of the screen, the construction that is present from both sides, ephemeral constructions of the Other. Scaffolding that we fill with ideas and desires, with words and descriptions, with a story. When you slow your reaction down you can see the concept of naturalization. How the naturalization of representation happens.
- But it isn't normal to react like this. Humans react to representation immediately, imagining what they want to see. For automatons it is impossible to freeze the dynamics of representation.
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- That's a mistake, don't you remember Agent Smith from the Matrix? And Neo was also trained to do this trick of slowing things down. So you can learn how to use that power of imagination, how to generate your own data flow inside this 'cultural' structure.
- First of all, you should disappear yourself.

Postscripts

President Xi Sends [Congratulatory Letter to World Internet Conference](#) The summit opened on Sunday Sep.26, 2021 with a theme of "Towards a New Era of Digital Civilization -- Building a **Community with a Shared Future in Cyberspace**."

Xi emphasized that China is willing to work with other countries to shoulder the historical responsibility of **promoting human progress** by stimulating the **digital** economy vitality, enhancing the **digital** government efficiency, optimizing the **digital** social environment, setting up a **digital** cooperation structure, and building a strong **digital** security shield.
Xi noted that **digital technology is being fully integrated into all fields** and the whole process of economy, politics, **culture**, society and ecological civilization construction with new ideas, new forms and new models, having extensive and profound impacts on the production and life of **humankind**.

- What if we WERE in the conference? What is the promise that we hear?
- The greatest promise ever in human history that we will be all rich.
- We are all born digitally equal, aren't we?
- The promise of ONE BODY.

Capacity to Be Alone

The strategy for the so-called "cultural manager" from mathematician [Alexander Grothendieck](#) book [*récoltes et semailles*](#).

"In fact, most of these comrades who I gauge to be more brilliant than I have gone on to become distinguished mathematicians. Still, from the perspective of 30 or 35 years, I can state that their imprint upon the mathematics of our time has not been very profound. They've all done things, often beautiful things, in a context that was already set out before them, which they had no inclination to disturb. Without being aware of it, they've remained **prisoners of those invisible**

and despotic circles which delimit the universe of a certain milieu in a given era. To have broken these bounds they would have had to rediscover in themselves that capability which was their birth-right, as it was mine: the **capacity to be alone**.

The infant has no trouble whatsoever being alone. It is **solitary by nature**, even when it's enjoying the company surrounding him or seeks his mother's tit when it is in need of it. And he is well aware, without having to be told, that the tit is for him, and knows how to use it. Yet all too often we have lost touch with the child within us. And it's often the case that we pass by the most important things without bothering to look at them…"