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The Messianic Ideology of Big Tech

Grégory Aimar

Despite a call in spring 2023 by the main leaders of the big digital corporations (including Elon Musk) for a pause in artificial intelligence research, AI has made rapid progress and spread to all areas of human life (work, news and information, health, arts, culture, defence, legal systems). Like all the great scientific advances that preceded it, AI is both fascinating and troubling. It offers hope for revolutionary change that could improve our lives, but also generates forms of manipulation and other risks that are a source of concern, hence prompting calls for its control. Here again, as with any scientific innovation, what it will become is what society agrees to let it be. Yet what scope for action do individuals and regulators possess (including institutional regulators, such as states and international organizations) when they are up against the hyper-powerful multinationals developing the technology? What is driving these promoters of AI and what are the plans of these 'big tech' companies whose power grows a little more each day?

In this article, Grégory Aimar shows how the Big Tech companies are formulating their plans against a drumbeat of messianic ideology, turning state-of-the-art technologies into a veritable religion, a new creed

for mankind in a direct line of descent from transhumanism. He shows how the language of most of the leaders of Big Tech is shot through with an evangelical spirit and faith in the omnipotence of their inventions, the two strands mutually reinforcing each other. And, even more worryingly, he points to the way the regulatory ethical bodies in that industry are losing influence, if not indeed being progressively eliminated, raising fears of that necessary guardrails may disappear — with unforeseen consequences for so-called modern societies.

Towards the De-Consumer Society?

Trends and Perspectives for Consumption in France

Cécile Désaunay

Four years after the Covid interlude, which saw consumption in most developed countries collapse in many sectors then bounce back as a catch-up effect kicked in, a new trend in material consumption seems to be emerging — at least in France. That trend is clearly downward, with levels of French household consumption in mid-2024 falling back to their 2015 level. Is this slow-down here to stay? Does it hint at a move toward a 'de-consumer' society? Are the underlying factors economic, ecological, social or something else? What might the consequences be in terms of economic models, public policies, household practices and behaviour?

In this article Cécile Désaunay, who covers these questions for *Futuribles*, analyses French consumer trends. She identifies the main drivers of the observed slowdown (demography, saturation of material needs, economic constraints and self-restraint), points out the divergences between public views that seem increasingly in favour of responsible consumption – or even de-consumption – and practices not always compatible with those positions, going on to outline the trends that might ensue from this in the medium-to-long term.

The Reindustrialization of France: Prospects and Constraints

On France Stratégie's Report on Reindustrialization to the Year 2035

Pierre Papon

Following the disruption of some logistical chains as a result of the Covid crisis and the current ongoing conflicts (Ukraine, Gaza etc.), the countries of Europe have realized the importance of controlling certain strategic supplies (medicines, cereals, raw materials etc). France is not exempt from these developments and, after several decades of industrial offshoring, it has begun to turn things around and revive its manufacturing activities in various sectors. The question arises: is this practicable on a large scale? What sectors might be involved and what will be the effect on employment?

France Stratégie, which is charged with providing the Prime Minister with medium-to-long-term analyses as a background to his thinking and action, published a series of scenarios this summer on the prospects for – and constraints on – reindustrializ-

ing the country over the next decade. Pierre Papon outlines these studies here, pointing out the extent of the resources, both physical (materials, energy) and human (skills), required for a revival of manufacturing industry on French soil.

Climate, Justice and Democracy

The ECHR against Switzerland – The Progress or the Derailing of Human Rights?

Olivier Godard

If it is desirable and necessary, as *Futuribles* regularly stresses, to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions (GGE), the question is to what extent and whether courts can legitimately force states to adopt a precise climate policy framework in the name of human rights. Following judgments in the Netherlands (and, indeed, in France in the 'Affair of the Century'), Olivier Godard contests the legal basis for the ECHR/European Court of Human Rights' decision on 6 April 2024 to penalize the Swiss state for tardiness in establishing a quantified framework for reducing GGE. His reasoning is based on four main arguments: misuse of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's studies, particularly with regard to the 1.5°C limit; the ECHR's doctrine departing significantly from its foundations in the European Convention on Human Rights; the 'quasi-dissolution' of the required 'causal connection' between the alleged government shortcomings and the climate damage suffered by citizens (an excess of heatwaves); and, lastly, a misconceived extension of the right to a 'clean, healthy, sustainable environment' to cover meteorological phenomena beyond the control of any human agent. How, then, can civil

society act to defend the ecological cause? Is this not, in fact, a political question that takes different forms in democracies and totalitarian states?

Universalism in Education: A Concrete Utopia?

Jean-Pierre Bellier

In September, French pupils went back to school in a political limbo that left teachers without any real vision of their educational goals, since, despite a string of different ministers and their reforming ambitions over recent years, no concrete project has emerged. As we are putting this issue of *Futuribles* to bed, a new minister of education has taken over the role, but for how long and to do what? Following the interview with Fabien Truong in our last issue on the aims and purposes of education, Jean-Pierre Bellier carries the debate forward, delving deeper into the granular detail of education in the French style. What are the established teaching methods now (and which ones have been abandoned)? Has there been progress on the place of 'soft skills' in the learning process and in assessment? How are we to view the teacher-learner relation and promote the desire to learn in a genuinely effective universalist perspective? In short what could/should the new educational paradigms be to prepare children today for the society of tomorrow?

performance when viewed against the financial investment in education. This leads, among other things, to repeated national education reforms and, with each one, debates over teaching methods return to the fore. Though there has undoubtedly been progress in this area, much remains to be done, on the one hand, to guarantee that students are well-taught and able to thrive and, on the other, to combat the effect of social inequality on learning. Now, as this article shows, advances in neuroscientific research could play a part in improving the operation of the education system, provided that students and teachers are alive to these developments.

Grégoire Borst reminds us here of the various processes that conduce to educational inequality — processes relating, among other things, to social background and circumstances and the effects of these on children's learning environment and brain development. On this basis and drawing on field studies conducted by his research laboratory, he points to the various brain functions that play a part in children's basic learning and highlights a number of biases and mental reflexes that adversely affect these processes but could very easily be corrected thanks to the malleability of the brain.

To achieve this, students, families and teaching staff would require familiarization with this science on the brain and its functioning. If they were better informed and aware of the possibilities open to them, they could adopt more effective learning strategies, permitting a reduction of disparities in school performance engendered by socio-economic circumstances and allowing children to overcome their difficulties and develop their talents.

Education: The Contribution of Brain Science

Grégoire Borst

International assessments of the academic level of French school students regularly highlight their woeful

Immigration to Quebec

A Major Factor of Demographic Dynamism

Ilyes Zouari

The relative demographic decline of the European nations (though distinctly less marked than that of Japan) and hence the ageing of their populations (though that was also long foreseen) is currently giving rise to many alarmist articles. At the same time, many EU member states are pondering measures to limit immigration into their country by foreign nationals and some have already adopted such measures. By contrast, Canada remains very open to such immigration, particularly the province of Quebec: its demographic growth has been substantial and is a result, almost exclusively, of the arrival of immigrants of highly diverse geographic, ethnic and cultural origins. If permanent immigration seems to be stabilizing, temporary immigration (which may stretch over several years) is skyrocketing. Ahead of a consultation exercise on immigration planning, the Quebec Ministry for Immigration, Francization and Integration has, in fact, published demographic projections for the years to 2071 which reveal that, unless around

50,000 immigrants arrive each year (all categories included), Quebec's population could seriously decline.

Vulnerable Europe

Jean-François Drevet

Two and a half years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the war is at an impasse and the EU finds itself at the heart of a territory under serious threat yet lacking genuine military and defence autonomy and reliant on protection by the Atlantic Alliance and the USA. As this situation persists and the peaceful interlude of the last half century rapidly draws to a close, the EU is becoming increasingly vulnerable. In this context, Jean-François Drevet points, in this Chronicle, to three particularly worrying elements: the risk of a European diplomatic defeat, the reality of the guarantees for protecting the continent which NATO is supposed to provide, and the EU's budgetary shortfall in terms of defence spending. How could — or should — these three elements develop to limit this increased European vulnerability? Given its finances and institutional framework, what is the EU's actual room for manoeuvre when it comes to preserving its peace and security? ■

***Futuribles* is a bimonthly independent transdisciplinary policy oriented journal (6 issues a year), also available in electronic form on the [Futuribles website](https://www.futuribles.com).**

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