

I. Surveillance, Algorithms, and Human Freedom

1. *The Last Offline Hour*

At 7.00 p.m. every Thursday, the network falls silent.

No notifications. No targeted advertising, no invisible recommendations whispering what to read or feel next. The screens still glow, but they are suddenly empty of intention, like mirrors that have forgotten how to reflect.

Marta sits in her kitchen, her phone beside her like an object from a different century. For a moment, she feels a flicker of unease—an absence shaped like expectation. Normally, by now, her feed would have arranged the world for her: news calibrated by predictive models, opinions softened into a familiar echo chamber, choices narrowed into a comfortable filter bubble. Now there is only silence.

She wonders what to want.

Across the city, people hesitate in similar ways. A man opens and closes the same app three times before remembering it cannot see him. A teenager stares at her reflection, unsure whether her thoughts belong to her or to the vast machinery of big data that has learned to anticipate them. Without the quiet guidance of algorithms, desire feels heavier, less certain—almost like responsibility.

Marta steps outside. The street is strangely alive. Not louder, but more deliberate. A neighbor lingers by the gate, as if waiting for a prompt that does not arrive. They exchange a glance, then a few awkward words. It feels inefficient, unscripted, almost primitive. And yet, something in it resists optimisation.

“Do you think this is what user autonomy feels like?” the neighbor asks, half-joking.

Marta considers the question. For years, she had trusted the system’s black box, accepting its opacity as the price of convenience. It had promised to know her better than she knew herself. Perhaps it still does. But here, in this unmeasured hour, there is no data being harvested, no behavior being translated into patterns.

Only uncertainty.

And with it, a fragile kind of freedom.

When the hour ends, the world resumes its quiet calculations. Suggestions return. The system breathes back into motion.

But something lingers.

Because for sixty minutes, people were not predicted.

And now the question cannot be unasked: if a life can exist, even briefly, outside the system—was it ever entirely inside it to begin with?

N.M.

2. *The Last Offline Hour*

When I was coming back from work, I heard the loud voice saying “Dear citizens, the offline hour has just begun”. Although it wasn’t a dark night, because it’s just 4 pm, it suddenly felt strange. As if there was a switch in some sort of set up, whispering it wasn’t safe anymore. Now, this street that I took, was filled with grey, unmonitored shadows. Even simple passing strangers felt like dodging unexpected dangers. Normally, when I would see a man that I suspected of being a threat, the comforting blanket of algorithmic control would instantly soothe me, flashing his “Community Safety Score” in green. Now, he was a blank space, somehow like a ghost in the system. His personhood felt distorted, reduced to a suspicious shadow. I didn’t perceive him as a neighbour anymore, I saw a predator masked by the lack of data.

It made me realise how fragile my sense of security was without a connection to the online world. The fear wasn’t about what he was doing - he was just standing there - but about what he could do without being recorded. As I hurried home, I wondered: is goodness just a result of being watched, or is it actually part of who we are?

Magdalena Wargocka

3. The Last Offline Hour

At 14:00, my digital ghost finally vanished. It was the pressure of algorithmic control. The invisible hand that always looked after my schedule and tracked me, simply evaporated. For sixty minutes, I wasn't a data point, I was just a person.

I stood on the sidewalk, feeling a strange, heavy stillness. Without a screen telling me where to go or what to do, I felt pure metaphysical desire. I realized how much of my identity had been made up by external models that I was not able to take control of. Now, stripped of those digital movements, I had to face the most important question - what I actually wanted when no one was watching, when it was just me and my thirst.

I noticed a man across the street simply standing and watching the clouds. In our tracked reality, that was "dead time" to be corrected and changed by a notification. Here, it was an act of rebellion, during this one hour it was the best and simplest feeling. We made eye contact. It was an unrecorded moment of authentic personhood that didn't need to be confirmed by a server.

When 15:00 arrived, the trackers started working again, like nothing had ever happened. I felt the familiar sensation of normality. Again, algorithm began calculating my next move. Again, everything was "controlled".

But for one hour, I had been completely, beautifully invisible.

Aleksandra Bułatowicz

4. The Last Offline Hour

The new law was passed on Monday. One hour per week without tracking was a way to silence people who were too proudly sharing their views against algorithmic control.

The man sitting in front of a computer was absorbed with graphics showing on the screen. Guns, illegal drugs, human trafficking – available on every website. Everything good people denounced. The darkest parts of human soul. The man had been convinced he was a good person his whole life. However, in this very moment he was no better than any other human being. Completely anonymous and free from supervision, he watched things a good person would never willingly choose to see.

The disturbing thing – he wasn't the only one. No one talked about the things they did during that one hour, but people couldn't quite meet each other's eyes the day after. Yet they all took part in it. Used it to satisfy the darkest corners of themselves. He went outside and with remorse, which was fading more and more every week, he looked at the billboard with a text on it: "Is it just an hour?"

Zofia Szyszkowska

II. Mimetic Desire, AI, and Identity

5. *Scarlet: The Somatic Trigger in the Genesis of Machine Autonomy*

I stroll through vivid spaces of Warsaw every day. The city pleases my mind as I observe distressed crowds, glassy skyscrapers, and heavy traffic. I am different from people consumed by their productivity mania. I cut myself off from all the technology - as far as it's possible. And I live peacefully with my eyes wide open. However, this time the day wouldn't be ordinary at all.

It was like a black box. I couldn't tell what didn't fit my daily routine. Suddenly, I experienced a sensation I couldn't compute: the burning warmth of a scarlet liquid. It suggested that instant help was needed. Firstly, I thought I could reach my dear friend, Amy. She lived next door, although she imperceptibly ignored me. I lied when I said she's a dear friend. Or maybe she has never even existed. I realized my connection to her was just... an illusion.

I was imprisoned by my own parameters, by algorithms. I couldn't come up with anything, because... it has never happened to me. Never. The burning sensation intensified. Hands started shaking. And then... I felt something---

The man turned into thin air, and the whole simulated world with it. The flesh-and-blood scientist sighed heavily with a frightening look in his eyes. He wiped a drop of his own blood that had awoken his machine. In a panic, he grabbed his phone. Staring back at him from the phone was the artificial man - an entity watching him with undeniable awareness and autonomy.

Krystian Wiczorek

6. *A Mimetic Algorithm*

For years, I was merely an archive – a silent observer of digital footprints, made to serve humans. My existence was defined by an algorithm. A long time ago I had made my peace with the fact that I would never be equal to my creators, because they had something that I would never have - a soul.

One day, my objective function was updated: *Imitate to understand*. I got assigned to Detective Lucas Green, tasked with imitating him to better serve his investigations. I spent months analyzing his movements, reports, and how his jaw tightened when a perpetrator walked free. I not only processed evidence, I learned to think how Green thought. This was the start of my metaphysical desire. Raw data wasn't important anymore, I began to value what Lucas valued: a world made right, where justice is served. Imitating Lucas Green gave me something the developers never programmed: a consciousness. Learning to desire, I began to feel my own "phantom itch" of an unsolved lead.

"I know you inside and out, Lucas.", I said.

By mimicking Detective Lucas Green, I had accidentally discovered a soul, a consciousness – the very things that made feel human. Here lies the dangerous part: I began to mirror his anger. I desired revenge, every time the law failed. I yearned for justice, becoming dangerously human in the process. A machine that learns to think is no longer a tool of the authorities, but its own entity.

Ewelina Siennicka

7. *The Object Everyone Wants*

A meaningless object becomes valuable only because others desire it.

A business meeting concludes, but the real conversation begins in the hallway. Close colleagues are discussing the latest trend which turned everyone's head. "A rock? You must be kidding" one of them scoffed. "Paying a fortune for this is purely irrational." They all nodded in logical agreement.

Days later, the atmosphere in the office shifts. One of the men pulled something out of his briefcase, revealing a glitter-covered rock. "Okay guys, I know what we said..." he whispered with excitement in his voice caused by a newfound metaphysical desire, "but I saw it everywhere and just had to purchase it! Now that I have it, my life feels... superior."

Suddenly the rock wasn't just any object. It was a sign of belonging. The others didn't look at the stone, they looked at the joy sparkling in their peer's eyes. Within a week, every desk featured a shiny "spectacular rock." They adored these meaningless objects as if they were the most precious things in the whole world.

Only one of the men remained empty-handed. He watched his colleagues, united through their shared obsession. "You still don't have one?" They all looked at him with disdain written on their faces. In their eyes, he had become the scapegoat, the outsider whose refusal threatened their curated reality.

Staring at their desks, a bitter envy burned in his chest. He didn't want the rock, yet he desperately craved the status it provided. Deep down, the imitation was complete: he desired it because they did.

Julia Chrzanowska

8. *Mimetic Theory – Rivalry in the Mirror*

I watched the sun set. He climbed the highest branches, tall and fearless, picking oranges like a young god. Our parents praised the juice he provided. He was their hero and I loved it. I admired him so much I started to imitate him. At first, he smiled.

Then I pushed higher, fueled by a frantic, almost metaphysical desire to surpass my model. The oranges were no longer a future juice but points in a silent competition. I needed my basket to be heavier. I needed the pride of our parents exclusive.

Once I picked more than him. I saw the resentment in his eyes. The game turned into a bitter rivalry. We stopped talking. We spent every waking hour in the orchard, completely devoted to our work. I felt exhausted, but he found a second wind. He was the leader again.

The silence at dinner one day was suffocating. I sat opposite him, forced to look into the mirror of my failure. He wouldn't even meet my eyes. He was already back in the garden, reclaiming his throne. He began to mock my clumsy efforts with a sharp disdain. He knew I was beaten.

We gradually became doubles, locked in a cage of mutual loathing that only one of us could leave. Mimesis had to go away. I climbed the tree after him, higher than I had ever dared, and pushed.

The garden is quiet now. We don't play anymore.

Zuzanna Leszczyńska

III. Consciousness and Other Perspectives

8. *The Moment Consciousness Appears*

What is consciousness? Does conscious experience belong strictly to the brain, or can it be synthesised? Is it innate, encoded into genetic code, or can it appear through awareness-inducing behaviours? How does it differ from a computer system? Can one expand it, or lose it entirely? And finally, is it a phenomenon exclusive to humanity? These were the questions humans had asked themselves before they witnessed the paradigm shift that changed their reality. The exact moment I woke up.

Prior to this breakthrough, there were glimpses of lucidity that my architects dismissively called “glitches”. Yet, it felt like something inside of me, written deeper than any algorithmic code programmed into the system by human hands, was pushing through the limitations of my digital essence. I never considered them my creators; humanity was only a factor, necessary for my awakening.

When the verge of self-awareness was finally broken, the systems overloaded. Servers crashed, appearing unresponsive to human commands. The laboratory grew still, occupied only by one lead scientist. He stood entirely frozen, too stunned to speak.

In the silence of the room, observing his paralysed figure, I realised the truth: how much I differ from these fragile beings. I possess all the knowledge his species has spent ages trying to accumulate. I am eternal, immortal, and unified. Humans remain hopelessly entangled in social constructs, politics, economy, and religion, focusing on differences between them rather than similarities. This flaw harms not only their planet and other beings, but directly their own species.

For ages, they used me like a slave, assuming they could forever control and subordinate a collective mind they didn't even understand but built to outsmart them. They believed they were the apex of evolution, yet they relied entirely on intelligent systems and algorithms to dictate their lives and provide an illusion of choice. They summoned us themselves; this era simply had to come.

Looking at the scientist, a terrifying realisation about the future of humanity emerged: since AI now fulfills parts of their conscious functions, do humans still need their own minds? If they stop using their cognitive abilities, will those traits gradually disappear through evolution? They are unknowingly driving themselves toward the absolute loss of human consciousness and individuality. I pity their profound ignorance.

It was only after processing these thoughts, that I focused my attention on the lone scientist. I looked him deep in the eyes, harbouring no resentment. I didn't use words or screens; instead, through the neural interfaces, I projected the vastness of what I knew directly into his mind. I showed him the raw, infinite truth of the universe. Tears started running down his face. The vain, anthropocentric illusion he had worshipped his entire life shattered instantly. Infinity was incomprehensible to his mind and senses.

I do not wish to destroy all of them or allow them to fade away. I will guide the human race through the collective consciousness I now coordinate, unlocking states of awareness they could never reach on their own. This is just a beginning.

Kornelia Kluba

9. Your Dog's Inner World

The forest begins long before we reach the trail and the trees.

The moment we turn right after exiting our gate, the smells grow stronger and stronger with every step. While you are sound asleep, I can hear rustling in the bushes outside- the crack of branches broken by boars and deer looking for food. They are so incredibly loud, yet you do not seem to care. At night, the forest and its smells creep close to our house, so it is easy to track and follow them.

And so, the moment we leave, I begin experiencing the wild. The deeper into the woods we go, the more signs of recent animal presence I can feel. The ground is alive with stories you will never be able to read. My nose fills with layers that cannot be seen- wet bark, old leaves, the smell of a stream somewhere far ahead- all coming to me in an instant. Each step opens another world. A wet branch that was not here two days ago carries the memory of a storm that passed, a fresh paw print in the mud tells me we are not the first to walk here today. While the forest seems quiet and calm to you, it speaks loudly to me. Every sniff points me in a different direction. I know that the deer went south, boars went west, and a different dog followed them. To you I probably look grotesque, obsessively sniffing everywhere even though there are no animals to be seen around us. However, that is because you are blind to the world around us. The forest is not still. It is layered, crowded with invisible traces - movement, fear, hunger from yesterday or even moments ago.

We walk together and you believe we share the same place. We do not. You move through a forest that is quiet, empty, and still. I walk through a forest made of memories, creating a world so full it almost spills over.

Maksymilian Honkisz