

# IT AND THE “GAY SCIENCE”

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*Abstract.* My paper discusses in parallel two meanings of the “Gay Science” metaphor – the first portrayed by medieval troubadours and the second presented by Nietzsche. The analysis of the metaphor will offer us some insight into the directions, expectations and illusions connected to Information Technology (IT), and to philosophy in general.

Thus this historical standpoint is important for the intellectual discussion of accelerating change.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL CHANGE

In a broader sense, IT represents the current level of public awareness about the weight of “information” as “*information has become an ontological universal value*” (M. Drăgănescu, 1996). Information sciences have led to a new level of conceiving science: integrative (M. Kafatos, Mihai Drăgănescu, 2001) and careful about the integrated evolution of society, actually a revolution which has included, and still includes the entire corpus of sciences, of knowledge.

How effective is IT?

IT makes us wiser. We learn more, faster and easier. We notice significant details, experience the richness of our existence and understand abstractions quicker and fuller.

IT facilitates our work. It delegates mundane tasks of our intellectual pursuits to algorithms and routines hidden from view and operating without our involvement.

IT saves us time allowing us to create more and achieve better results.

IT elevates communication to heights only dreamt about before.

IT helps us increase our living standard by expanding our reach for material and spiritual goods.

IT opens wide “The Gates of Choice”. The world is richer and closer and choice is abundant. The world changes as we choose.

IT makes the world familiar and accessible to us and makes us perpetual virtual nomads.

IT allows us to enjoy ourselves fuller and makes the end fade away.

IT makes us believe we are eternal. The progress of the medical sciences masks our suffering and mends our chemical structure.

IT transforms us into benevolent masters of nature. We understand it better and treat it as a partner and not as a subordinate.

IT makes us unselfish. We became worried about things that happen in corners of the world we never knew existed. We build web sites to disseminate

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ideas, to organize work groups and international conferences, to attract project funding and to attract attention to suffering and tears.

IT invalidates the sceptical view of the future and introduces a gentle optimism so good for us.

I have listed only a few aspects of IT. The current revolution in the science and technology fields under the IT umbrella will lead, as all previous revolutions, to the betterment of the human condition and will breed further *changes*.

We study the process of change starting, in general, from two methodological premises:

1. The changes generated by previous revolutions had positive and negative results and the popular perception of such changes has been both positive and negative.
2. The process of change is in progress. The future is wide open.

If the past, in spite of some contrarian views about it, is behind us, the future depends fully on the decisions of the present generations.

Consequently, the common individual restrained or refrained from making major decisions will conclude that the future is not its responsibility. Furthermore, at the height of the IT revolution, the common individual is willing to relinquish any responsibility for its thoughts or actions and wallows in its “narrow and cold horizon” (Eminescu).

However, we have entered the IT era for a few decades only. We are going thru a rather long transition period, especially for the more languid types. Letting apart the new quality of problems and means to treat them, the way humankind has always solved its problems, at least when such problems have become much too urgent and disturbing, the same way it will solve its problems nowadays. At any rate, the degree at which the mind and the body are set free has never been as high as it is now. We are not only talking about the level of one country, especially not about the level of a country as Romania, which still needs decades in order to catch up the EU<sup>2</sup> countries, but about the world as such, even though it is marked by the

<sup>2</sup> Let us remember the conclusions of the experts set forth at the round table organized within an Open Dialogues program, “Romania will cover the economic difference toward the UE in 20-80 years”, *Gândul*, 3 October 2006; but also C. Popescu, Iosif Dumitru Bati (2000, pp. 126-127): “Under the circumstances of the existing economic differences and the annual average economic increase rates taken into consideration, it results that in the event of the economic growth, for Romania, of:

- 3%, the equalization would never occur in the case of Austria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Poland, because in these countries the annual average economic increase rate is higher than 3%. The equalization could be achieved in 154 years with the United Kingdom and 1778 years with France, taking into account their extrapolated annual average economic increase rates.

- 5%, the equalization would never occur in the case of Ireland and Poland, as they record increase rate higher than 5%. Such equalization could be achieved in 55 years in the case of the United Kingdom and 857 years in the case of Finland.

- 7%, the equalization would never occur in the case of Ireland which has an increase rate higher than 7%. Such equalization could become possible in a period of 35 years in the case of the United Kingdom and 79 years in the case of Finland. Generally speaking, for all the other compared countries, the period necessary for equalization varies around 4–5 decades, even in the case of countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain or Poland.”

huge differences worldwide in the standard of living, education and distribution of wealth. IT can somehow compress the time: people's responsibility could increase when they better understand the things with the help of IT that integrates knowledge.

#### IT AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM

Indeed, IT generates a high degree of *trust* in people<sup>3</sup>. In 1999, 89% of Americans believed that the current level of the science and technology fields will bring about a substantial and general improvement to life while in 1996 only 77% held forth this opinion. 55% of Americans are convinced that the inconveniences are negligible when compared to the benefits of the IT and, thus, it is legitimate to rely completely on science and technology. Only 39% of the respondents have objected to the fact that such a situation could make people much too dependent on these two and as such making life too complicated. Finally, the education level, the income and age have influenced these opinions: optimism was higher for those with a higher degree of education, with a larger income and for those amongst the younger population<sup>4</sup>.

There are *objective motivations for this optimism*. Today, the majority of those using the computer at work and at home consider that they benefit from the access to this technology. This benefit really does exist due to the fact that this is the only way in which many activities are performed with a high degree of efficiency. That is why the IT companies are determined to develop accessible technologies geared towards the disabled and the older people and to include these groups into the technology aware world<sup>5</sup>.

By sliding further into the expanding realm of digital technologies upon which the development of personal computers, multimedia, Internet, and virtual reality is based, people's dependence on time and space will diminish. The email and the voice mail will allow constant communication. As in the case of 'pay per view TV and radio', the Internet will become a global universal factory and shopping mall in which we will be omnipresent. Our abilities to appropriate different cognitive and expressive styles will grow; the speed and efficiency of performing various tasks will increase exponentially. Rigid work structures will decentralize at the request of different groups or even individuals. Distances and inhibitions will become insignificant. "Access, mobility and ability will be the one differentiating the future from the present" (N. Negroponte, 1995, p. 231). This is

<sup>3</sup> As was the case of the scientific and technological progress related to the first industrial revolution. See (Stefan Zweig, (1942), 1964).

<sup>4</sup> See (*A Future Full of Promise*, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> (*A Research Report Commissioned by Microsoft Corporation and Conducted by Forrester Research, Inc.*, 2003).

not a science-fiction scenario – it is happening now<sup>6</sup>, and it will happen more so in the immediate future.

However, the problems we are facing in the world could not be solved only by the means of the IT. Neither the invasion of privacy, nor the piracy and data theft, nor the competition of cheap labour from India and China, nor the famine and the right of life and death over one's fellow men, thus the multitude of abuses people inflict on others, will be solved only by the means of the IT. Although Negroponte believes that due to the abilities given to everyone by digital technology, the world will enter into an even greater harmony (*sic*).

As with any social phenomenon, IT is not simple and univocal. It is autonomous: but the fugitive melee of chance and opportunity that governs the discoveries and innovations all over the planet does not hide the network of special social relations and interests. If this network seems to be too complicated, impenetrable and powerful, people prove what we use to name *the technological pessimism*. Only 51% of the computer users feel optimistic about the new gadget<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, how have we to choose between pessimism and optimism?

#### NIETZSCHE'S METAPHOR OF "GAY SCIENCE"

I have tried to connect IT to the "gay science" – one might call it the merry science as the Nietzsche's Romanian translator did – as I am looking to suggest a possible choice. Let us remember that gay science or *gaia scienza* is the name of *ars poetica* of the Provençal troubadours of the 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Occitans. For Nietzsche, the medieval term represents the "unity between singer, knight and the free spirit" and opposes the hypocrisy of the "equivocal cultures" (F. Nietzsche, (1888), in the Romanian edition, 1991). In his view, *ars poetica* is the foundation and mechanism of the European construct of love and passion as proposed by the poet-knights (F. Nietzsche, (1886), § 260).

Nietzsche proposes the metaphor of *ars poetica* as science in his fight against the false characterization of philosophy and the prejudice directed at it (*Ibidem*, as a matter of fact the entire Chapter I, §7). It is important to not substitute the real world with the apparent one. Just this confusion led to false judgements in philosophy, for example the *a priori* ones (*Ibidem*, §10). As a result of the manipulated authority of this philosophy, "the *erroneousness* of the world in which we think we live is the surest and most certain thing our eyes can light upon" (*Ibidem*, §18). Or the science to move beyond the conformism of academic knowledge, generated by "real political" (*Ibidem*, §34) interests, is necessary. This

<sup>6</sup> It is a known fact that the present speed of implementation of the discoveries is even lesser than a couple of months old.

<sup>7</sup> (*A Research Report Commissioned by Microsoft Corporation and Conducted by Forrester Research, Inc.*, 2003).

science is scepticism, pessimism, dry analysis “without illusions” (*Ibidem*, §1), but precisely such knowledge is opened up to the “ideal” of “the most world-approving, exuberant, and vivacious man, who has not only learnt to compromise and arrange with that which was and is, but wishes to have it again *as it was and is*, for all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo*, not only to himself, but to the whole piece and play; and not only the play, but actually to him who requires the play – and makes it necessary; because he always requires himself anew – and makes himself necessary” (*Ibidem*, §39).

Such science is *not* destined “for future ruling and commanding the slowly ascending ranks and classes” (*Ibidem*, §56), but on the contrary, to attack the rules which have implemented the double discourse and the dissociated morals from the modernity of the first industrial revolution (*Ibidem*, §61). On the one hand, the traditional – religious and moral – discourses were and are full of compassion and selflessness; on the other hand, reality invalidates these discourses, being filled with a mix of hypocrisy and despise of the aristocratic morals towards suffering (*Ibidem*, §202, §203 and §46).

Certainly Nietzsche is contradictory and issues opinions difficult to adjust to the position stated above. Nevertheless, “we should...understand the possibility of his doctrine” (L. Chestov, 1925, p. 253).

“The gay science”, placed between inverted commas by Nietzsche precisely so as to show that the term is a metaphor, has to be, firstly, the understanding of the necessity to overcome the comedy of existence that did not yet become aware of itself, still being the time of tragedies, of morals and religions. “For cheerfulness, or, to say it in my own language, *the gay science*, is a reward, a reward for a lengthy, brave, hard-working, and underground seriousness, which, of course, is not something for everyone” (F. Nietzsche, (1887), Prologue, §7).

Pay attention, Nietzsche shows that one can enter from a prejudice into another: the “value of *truth in itself*” “is a belief in a *metaphysical* value”, “our faith in science rests on something which is still a metaphysical belief” (*Ibidem*, Third Essay, §24); more than that, the progress of science was not able to erase the prejudices, but on the contrary, this progress was confiscated by the promoters of the “ascetic ideal” (*Ibidem*, Third Essay, §22 and §23), namely that which has strengthened man’s self respect on the *grounds of myths* (*Ibidem*, §25).

In this respect, the science of the “cultured philistines” does not lead to the increase of culture, but on the contrary it leads to “barbarism”. But the new science, the gay one, implies the *subordination of reason, of reflexivity towards values*, by the means of criticism.

Science is at the same time incriminated and hyperbolised. In this latter sense, it is *ars poetica*: it adds wings to the knowledge of “the good life”. At the same time, it is connected to myths, which it reinforces. Beyond the discussions

about the meanings of aphorisms<sup>8</sup>, about interpretation, about the critique of modernity, about the post-modern perspective, I only remember the meanings Nietzsche gives to science one hundred and twenty five years ago.

**DESTRUCTION OF PREJUDICES (MYTHS),  
SCIENCE AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE IN A POETICAL MANNER**

The art of poetry was considered by troubadours the way to reach the gay knowledge (science), because poetry *has represented in the Western Europe of those times a quintessence of knowledge: it made life beautiful and strengthened the myths*. Or, *it made life beautiful by strengthening myths*. And if Nietzsche underlines precisely that the *destruction* of myths is setting consciences free, thus creating the space for authentic creation and life – regardless, here, of the pattern of this life taken into account, and of the blind alley where the philosopher arrived –, there are even today plenty of people who insist on the sadness caused by the destruction of myths and therefore they seek to support them. They oppose the affective nature of the poet deciphering the world, nature which supports the sweet myths, to the ruthless coldness of reason: they are the ones named scientophobes/technophobes.

Nowadays neither poetry nor sciences, taken separately, represent the “quintessence” of knowledge. The vulgar scientism seemed to exclude the non-physical aspects from man’s understanding. But in present, just on the basis of information science, we have a unified representation about sciences, in this framework – about man (M. Drăgănescu, 2006, Chapitre 1, La philosophie et l’Unification de la Science), towards the deepening of the dialectic of relations of differences and proximities. Philosophy corresponds to the current stage of general transition of knowledge: it is pluralist, integrative and, at the same time searching for unique and specific senses.

What does mean making life beautiful? In a dry philosophical language it means: the *understanding by people of their power and, at the same time, of their limitation*, as well as the *strengthening* of their power (which means also strengthening the conscience of limitation).

<sup>8</sup> Used purposefully by Nietzsche precisely so as to oppose the systematic philosophy. Purposeful fragmentation of discourse, in order to impose the relativist perspective, is also a sign that Nietzsche’s thinking lies, aiming at conceiving the world in a critical and original way, in a metaphoric stage. At the same time (and leaving aside his philological formation), Nietzsche wants to disrupt knowledge with the bi-valence of his aphorisms: which were so powerfully significant and at the same time so difficult to decipher, precisely because of the new light cast over the world, a light from “in its sunny clarity, distance, breadth, and certainty”, but also because of its critical meanings, see Nietzsche (1887), § 8.

The current science (IT) could reach the principle of incompleteness and insufficiency of the old type science, i.e. that which sees reality in a fragmented manner – regardless of the level of generality and thoroughgoing study. To construct on this new approach presupposes a superior degree of power and understanding of limits: a challenge which involves the poetry of hardships (of solving problems).

Nietzsche has shown that the destruction of the Pharisaic morals and of the Pharisaic use of science – and this destruction supposes the serene assuming of contradictions – is necessary because people *must understand life in a poetical manner*. Or things were quite opposite to this requirement: even in Western Europe, full of self-pride based on the level knowledge attained, “almost all the people are similar due to the fact that they look for work so as to earn a monthly wage. Work is a means for everyone and not a purpose in itself”<sup>9</sup>. But “the good does not mean to transform someone into the function of a more powerful cell”<sup>10</sup>. Only the artists and those who have time enough to contemplate considered labour as a pleasure (F. Nietzsche, (1882, 1887), 118). Creation (*poiesis*), therefore the understanding of life in a poetical (artistic) manner, meant to no more live within the constraint of the urgent needs, or, differently saying, to live and experience creation as the most urgent need<sup>11</sup>.

During Nietzsche’s time, science had opposite consequences: it had begun to help people fulfil their urgent needs in a way which allowed optimism, and at the same time it contributed to emphasize the dependencies and the separation of society between the crowd (formed by what Musil later called “the man without qualities”) and the “cultivated philistines”, and, on the other hand, the artists and the powerful men. In this way, for Nietzsche, *poetry* continued to be the ideal of creation, of warm inter-human relationships, of free solicitude, of the Kantian imperative. In this sense, scientific knowledge itself should have been poetic (in the sense of a nonconformist, brave and taboos breaking creation).

Therefore, a first moment of knowledge – but, maybe, permanent –, that of Nietzsche’s concept of gay science, is the *destruction of prejudices, of myths*. We can observe the change Nietzsche did: while the troubadours have believed that the role of their art was precisely the strengthening of myths, the philosopher thought the opposite, his radical non-conformism unifying the permanent questioning of truths, relativism and, on the other hand, a Dionysian representation about the human freedom, reinforcing the spirit of freedom in front of the *possibility* highlighted by the myths (F. Nietzsche, 1872).

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, (1882, 1887): § 42. See the German edition, 42.: „Sich Arbeit suchen um des Lohnes willen – darin sind sich in den Ländern der Civilisation jetzt fast alle Menschen gleich; ihnen allen ist Arbeit ein Mittel, und nicht selber das Ziel”.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*. In the German edition 118: „Ist es tugendhaft, wenn eine Zelle sich in die Function einer stärkeren Zelle verwandelt?”

<sup>11</sup> See the same idea in (H. Arendt, 1958).

**THE CONTRADICTORY CONSEQUENCES OF IT  
AND THE PRESENT TWO MEANINGS OF SCIENCE**

The topic of these pages is neither the opposition between science and poetry, both strictly considered, nor their unity/consensus/confluence, finally based on information. Science has its own poetry. Metaphorically speaking, science is poetry. But beyond metaphors, the dry science cannot be equated to poetry.

Therefore, like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants (Bernard de Chartres), nowadays we know that there is not a single ideal of creation, there is not a single kind of reason: there are, in full legitimacy, the poetical, the musical, the geometrical one, etc. The *current* science is a creation that is understood and used both in the manner of the troubadours, creating myths, and in Nietzsche's one.

IT illustrates this complexity. At the first hand, information science and the revolution caused by it shake the myths off the concrete sacrosanct closing of domains, worlds and universes. IT demonstrates the unreality of the linear, unilateral, fragmented and abstract determinism. IT destroys the taboo concept of the *unavoidable*, as well as the one of the *irredeemable*, a concept always relative. These last concepts are related to the knowledge of the material world and the world of the mind. But the irredeemable in the social life is not yet satisfactorily explained and it still remains one of the harshest phenomena of existence. IT shows precisely that the separation, the isolation between domains is the cognitive fundament of the dilution of human responsibility: every man for himself or *percat mundus*<sup>12</sup>.

On the other side, IT integrates within the functioning, therefore within the logic of the current order. IT lies at the ground of revolutionary medical sciences and thus, of a new biogenesis full of hope. This new biogenesis makes our life better and more beautiful. At the same time, IT has the most significant uses in the technique of war whose perpetuation is, thus, supported just by the advance of reason. IT allows for abundance, for exceeding the needs to simple survival and for entering into the era of the creative fantasy and the life enjoyed by all. But the IT revolution is transfigured in gadgets and mechanical entertainment and kitsch which diminish the creative action (*poiesis*) to *mere commands given to robotic structures* and to *self-limitation for fear of a Big Brother type of control*. IT is not only the place of coagulation of collectives and of responsible communication, but also the place of perpetuation of global trading relations, of the separation between the "info-rich" and the "info-poor" (Toffler), of "empiricism" but also a place of cyber-crime. Once more here, a significant IT supply consists in *games* that bring billions and at the same time make smooth the cortex and annul the restlessness of questions. All these aspects show the capacity of IT to create new myths, "technical" ones, that *deepen alienation and the old myths of the eternal order based on domination-submission: fear and fatalism*.

<sup>12</sup> This is actually the main slogan of the present social order.

### IT, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE MODERATE OPTIMISM

Therefore, the answer to the question put in this paper is that we should be optimistic (gay) when we have in front of us the openness and the qualitative transformation of today's *science* (whose core is the level of information). The development towards fundamental principles for the unification of the knowledge of the existence – of matter and spirit, of reality, dream and the virtual, of the inorganic and of the living – allows the understanding of man's double reason for being: that, as living being, to exist and to last, but also that to exist and last as *rational, spiritual* being (M. Drăgănescu, 2006, Chapter 11), “to generate and perpetuate the spirit” (*Ibidem*, Chapter 1). The ambiguous consequences of sciences (technologies) over people do not diminish our optimism, but moderate it through the *evaluation of their consequences* according to the specific values of the present level of science and knowledge and of the present human expectations. Here, we have to answer the *questions* regarding the incongruence between the logic of science and technology, and the logic of the decision-makers over the uses of science and technology.

The present *philosophy* is also contradictory. With its quality of being “a bridge between science and poetry” (and even though “the future is philosophic”) (*Ibidem*, Chapter 11), philosophy is much too impregnated by the old fashion, exterior to the newest tendencies in science, so that it offers both a viable research of human universes – meanings, communication, its evolution and results, theories of the and rational-affective and social-individual connections – and ideological interpretations missing the consciousness of historicity and transitoriness. An important aspect of philosophy still remains the *legitimising approach of the social*, delaying (rolling) the issue of the contradiction between the rational character of the individual and, on the other side, the irrational character of the development of society. It is not only the place of man in the universe that is still elaborated by using myths, but also the existing social relations are considered in the current *mainstream* practical philosophy as being rational, unavoidable and eternal. And philosophy behaves in such a manner because it reflects the fact that we have not yet entered into what is called *the society of knowledge*. It seems that philosophy remains to some extent, a creation based on illusions because it refuses the integrative knowledge of society, or differently said, it refuses to integrate – as a *sine qua non* moment of understanding the existence – the *social philosophy* (let us say, structural-phenomenological *sui generis*)<sup>13</sup>. Usually, this one is substituted with particular ideological philosophies (political philosophies of culture etc). Or the social philosophy offers constructs whose role is precisely to act as *medium terms* in the explanations, au fond isolated, concerning the physical and the spiritual world, the sub-social or of the “supra”-social.

Philosophy was the origin of rational knowledge, of science. And here philosophy has a lagging-behind status towards the science. Our moderated

<sup>13</sup> And here Marx is the founding father.

optimism concerning IT and the human future is also dependent on this lagging-behind status of philosophy. From this standpoint, the present philosophy is not (yet (?)) the “gay science” in a Nietzschean way. It could make our lives more beautiful, it may direct us towards reveries and poetry<sup>14</sup>, but its contribution to the knowledge of man’s power and limitation is still ambiguous. Still: the present global transition can overcome the rupture between the understanding and decisions belonging to science and philosophy, and, on the other hand, men’s real life and the decision-making over this life. Is this life infinite? Is not the life of every individual unique and finite?

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<sup>14</sup> It is significant that Heidegger insisted a lot in the last part of his creation, on the taking over of the capacity of understanding of poetry by philosophy.