

Thursday, July 12, 2007

### **Another day, another singularity**

I've been pondering a post for sometime about the pure implausibility of capital-C Conspiracies. The one's where everything under the sun is orchestrated and executed by a behind-the-scenes power block "at the top" THAT CONTROLS EVERYTHING.

Bear in mind that everything is relative: One man's knitting circle is another's shadowy cabal.

Whether it was Alfred Pike meticulously planning three world wars over two hundred years ago, William Guy Carr's Luciferian-Communist conspiracy which engineered every significant event of the 20-th century, or even David Icke's "we really do live in a Matrix controlled by lizards" fantasy, there was an obvious impossibility to it that I was having a hard time articulating.

Then I saw a reference on Boing Boing to fiction themed around a "post-singularity" of some sort from authors like Verner Vinge (Not being a huge SF fan, I've only read his True Names anthology) and after doing a little reading on what the technological singularity is supposed to be, it finally occurred to me:

Various types of "singularities" have already occurred throughout history, and they make Capital-C "Conspiracies" impossible. Sure, various people will try to control the world, but it can't be done. Nobody is doing it. Nobody has ever done it. The world is by its nature, uncontrollable. We live in an out-of-control world.

The one line descriptor of a singularity, courtesy of Wikipedia is:

"a theoretical point in the development of a scientific civilization at which technological progress accelerates into infinity or beyond prediction"

The fallout of this can be described appropriately in the following two passages:

1) It is a point where our old models must be discarded and a new reality rules.  
(Verner Vinge)

and

2) In futures studies, a technological singularity represents a hypothetical "event horizon" in the predictability of human technological development. Past this event horizon, following the creation of strong artificial intelligence or the amplification of human intelligence, existing models of the future cease to give reliable or accurate answers.

[...]

as one approaches the Singularity, models of the future become less reliable, just as conventional models of physics break down as one approaches a gravitational singularity.

Both courtesy of The Singularity is Nonsense

There are entire movements both pro and con debating whether an approaching technological singularity, or rather The Approaching Technological Singularity is a Good Thing(tm) or a Bad Thing(tm). The argument revolves around AI (artificial intelligence), and the theory/fetish/dread of a moment when it emerges and begins a self-iterating feedback loop, supplanting human intelligence in a few measly billion cycles.

Personally, I think if you distill a singularity down to it's basic feature, it is a buildup and escalation of events to a point after which nothing is ever the same, and beyond which prior conventional wisdom breaks down. Perhaps we are really

talking about seminal moments and their unexpected consequences after they play out over time, especially if they feedback on themselves. Technologies that become so ubiquitous nobody can imagine, life before it emerged. (i.e. "How did people survive without radio, telephones, television, fax machines, email, ipods?")

If we look at singularities this way, then as the old detergent commercial used to remark: "You're soaking in it". Singularities are another word for history. Or maybe a subset of history called revolutions.

H.R Clements called the discovery of "perspective" as the context shift which touched off the Renaissance and spelled the end of feudalism and the Church as the central power structure of the day. They weren't too happy about it, (hence the Inquisition) but by the time they realized there was something to be unhappy about, it was already too late. The singularity had already happened and the writing was on the wall.

So if there were any wide ranging conspiracies to control all facets of mankind's existence, even if they were enjoying a degree of success at the time, they were turned on their ear by the discovery of perspective, and the accompanying context shift. The Matrix of the day was upended by it. Any plans the shadowy cabal had for the future of mankind had become meaningless, and in retrospect, almost comical. Best laid plans, and all that.

Future historians may reflect that today's War on Terror is the modern parallel to the Inquisition. Breathy tech evangelists may gush "yes! the internet is the singularity which spells the end of the nation state!", but they're wrong. It was the invention of the Corporation, hundreds of years ago, which started that snowball rolling.

That creation out of thin air, of a separate legal person, created a logic of it's own, and once capital formation and investment began their long iterative feedback loops into the future, the days of the nation states became numbered. It was only a matter of time before Corporate entities emerged with GDPs larger than countries. Analogous to the fictional Aspen Research Corporation in Brian Fawcett's 1990 Public Eye: An Investigation in to the Disappearance of the World - after awhile a logic of its own asserted itself into the affairs of men and of nation states. The corporate twin imperatives increase profits and minimize taxation spun out a multitude of stratagemms and tactics which iterated over the fiscal years, and if successful, compounded. Placed into the primordial soup of an ostensibly free market the feedback loops reinforced themselves (and each other) and it's making national sovereignty as obsolete as fealty.

What all this means is that it is inherently impossible to project any kind of control structure forward indefinitely. Sooner or later something comes along that makes it impossible to keep a plan on the rails. There may well be Freemasons, Illuminati, Bilderbergers, Trilateralists, little grey aliens and reptilian overlords running around trying to control things. But they don't have the ability to assert control over the next paradigm's control structures because nobody knows what they're going to be until it's already happened.

A new conspiracy could be initiated when these bifurcation points occur, but they won't be Capital-C Conspiracies, they'll just be little baby small-c conspiracies. Small-c conspirators compete in an open market like anything else. Whether it be P2, PNAC, Triads, Al-Queda, biker gangs or the Flat Earth Society: these small-c conspirators may become powerful, for a time. But none of them will ever achieve Total World Domination.

Because singularities happen.

The emergence of perspective in European art created a context shift which made feudalism unworkable, gave rise to a merchant class and ended the hegemony of the church.

The advent of an organizational singularity: the corporation eventually made it impossible for nation states to "make reliable or accurate assessments about the future" (which is why I always chuckle when I see straight faced congressional testimony about how best to "manage" things like the macro economy).

Not to leave the breathy tech evangelists flat from my earlier remark, an informational singularity did occur on the internet. With the advent of dynamically created web pages, cross site API's, XML, SOAP et al, the number of web pages in existence has at some point become essentially infinite, and I couldn't tell you what the other end of that looks like, it's still pretty new and I'm no futurist - I'm just along for the ride.

But at the end of the day, if a tree falls in the forest, or a plane crashes, or you got passed over for that promotion at work, it isn't because some all-seeing, all-powerful cabal has ordained it.

If these entities truly did exist and truly "ran the world", we would have never seen things like the free enterprise, capitalism, freedom of speech, property rights, private savings or the internet. The hegemonms would simply run a well-oiled command economy, leaving nobody any illusions about their ostensible freedoms. There would also be no

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conflicts, anywhere.

Conflict means disagreement and as long as they occur, it means nobody is really truly "king of the world". Fortunately.

It appears as though we're faced with another one of those paradoxical tradeoffs which define the human condition. I've read that the ultimate price of sexual reproduction was death, (as opposed to those asexual reproducers which spawn perfect copies of themselves and have a type of de facto immortality as a result), the presence of worldwide freedom brings with it out-of-control conflict everywhere you look.

The old maxim is true, don't ascribe to conspiracy what can be explained by stupidity.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 14:23

Hi Mark!,

Regarding your latest post.

Check out a guy called Alan Watt. A resident of Estaire, Ontario.

He has great knowledge of such matters and does not have a slant as such.

Well worth a listen to a few of his mp3 "blurbs" on his site <http://cuttingthroughthematrix.com/>

All the best,  
John Paul,  
Dublin,  
Ireland.

Anonymous on Jul 30 2007, 08:00