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Resonance

“If acceleration is the problem, then the solution lies in resonance.”

Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (2018)

There are foliage plants everywhere, with trees and birds on the branches. There is also a piece of the sky, through the leaves, where the light goes through. Let's just say it is a step up from the Ditch.

“Please, have a seat. Coffee?”

I think, Why not? While I'm at it. I don't know what I'm doing here. I got a text yesterday as I was watching the 18th G.O.T. spin-off. An audio text, with a real human voice. A guy who absolutely wanted to meet me. Close to a park, outside the city.

“Face to face interviews may seem strange,” he says, handing me a *real* coffee – in a *real* coffee mug.

All of this is strange indeed. What does he really want from me? Does he want me to fix his computer? No need to get me here for that, it can be done remotely. Repair water damage in his office maybe? No, he is barking up the wrong tree. In any case, it is all linked. Hose, connector, syphon loop, seal... even if his gear doesn't repair itself as the 2039 new generation, certified repair guys get automatic notifications. No, I am not here to repair anything.

“Please, relax, this isn't a trap,” he says, reading my mind. “I will explain everything. My name is Eric Courtier. It is funny because I am not at all a courtier. I am a headhunter. Might be the same thing after all. At the end of the day, I am courting too, it's just that my transactions are human, not financial.”

What does it mean? Is he here to hire me out? I don't need to physically meet with someone for that. What are online algorithm tests for? What about the Dashboard? This is public record. With the Dashboard, he knows about my skills, my IQ, my GMAT, my citizen rating, and my real-time social ranking. Why does he need to meet me if he can access any available data about me? I take a sip, confused. Strange. Crazy. It is clear that, in the Ditch, we don't drink that everyday.

He goes on: “Before, I would spot big fish – meaning the handful of people that can lead multinational corporations. You don't need me to explain. You're coming from the Ditch, I know, with universal income, freelancing, uberized market... But you probably know that, over the Ditch, there is something called the Summit. It is a mix of about 300 companies that are leading the economy – meaning the world. I used to work there. For the most part, they are organized monopolies, divided into sectorized platforms, all following the ‘Winner takes all’ theory. To get information, you have Google: explorer, digital press. For entertaining, there's the Huawei-Netflix venture: cinema, movies, videogames, comic books... For transportation and tourism, Uber is there for you: planes, boats, autonomous cars (FYI, they are buying Tesla). Alibaba for food and consumer goods. And, last but not least, Facebook for social relationships: friends networks, family networks, dating websites. All in all, 200,000 people work for these companies. This accounts for the entire wage bill and, let me tell you, it amounts to nothing – 1 in 4,000 people. And yet, their platforms make up for 90 percent of the economy.”

I take another sip. I still don't understand what he's getting at.

“This elitist circle gravitates almost alone. When my mission was to find people to replace big bosses, my life was simple. I would generally choose among their descendants or their friends' descendants. Genetically, it works. They really do work you know, in spite of what everyone says. At the same time, it is true that it is a small circle and that social reproduction has not really changed since the 1980s. Anyway, pay was good, but I didn't feel very useful. Then, last year, I met someone. A woman – tall, brown hair, thirty-something, green eyes. She had a real presence, something I'd never felt during any of my interviews. Not in the Summit or in the Ditch. Her look was luminous, her movements alive. It looked as though she lived more intensely than other people. She refused my offer and, instead, asked if I was interested in joining an entrepreneurial project. A special company. As we were talking about this company, I realized the world wasn't divided in two. It isn't the Ditch on the one hand and the Summit on the other. There is a third way.”

He looked at me for a minute.

“Does the word Resonance mean anything to you?”

I shake my head to indicate that it doesn't.

“It is the name of that special company. Well, it isn't really a company but rather a sort of community. There are elected leaders but no employees per se. Also, it isn't in a city but in the countryside – Touraine to be precise, not far from Amboise. Five years ago, they renovated an old castle, with its outbuildings and gardens, and they got settled there. Finally, it doesn't own anything; the great assets of a traditional company belong to all the members: the buildings, the gardens, the vegetable garden, the permaculture fields, the equipment, as well as the values, personalities and talents. They are called ‘commons.’”

“What is their business model?”

“There isn't really one. Everyone gives what they have, makes full use of their talent. The only indicator to know if someone has found their path, is using the right talent, is the feeling of being connected to the world. When someone isn't up to the task, when they give up a little, there is a committee, where everyone is involved, with a mutual aid and support system.”

“This sounds like communism.”

“It is more like a small, secular community. One/two hundred members per space at the most. Indeed, they have several spaces now. Resonance is growing quite fast. They are opening up new areas in the countryside, renovating new buildings. They don't want large structures. Would you like to work there?”

I don't answer. I simply shrug, thinking that it is too good to be true. There must be a trap somewhere.

“Look, I know it may seem easy, but this is what makes Resonance successful. They know their system is attractive. The only problem is that they can't spot new employees with the Dashboard. It is impossible to spot a possible new member with online tests. The total score of the community's members is basic. They have an average IQ, an average GMAT, an average cultural

foundation, an average standard of living, and an average social ranking. Before they joined Resonance, they all lived – or rather survived – in the same conditions you do. And yet, they are unique, I am sure of it. They can change the world. In my jargon, we call them black swans.”

His tone has changed. Introductions are over. Awkward first glances are gone. Something quiet and empathic is coming from him.

“If you are here today, it is because you are one of them. You are unique, you are a black swan.”

For a moment, I wonder if he is referring to the color of my skin but I pull myself together. It isn't an insult but a compliment. I ask:

“How do you know?”

He smiles. He was obviously waiting for a question like that.

“Actually, I am not sure of anything,” he says. “It is a belief, a deep feeling that is waiting to be confirmed. And I don't think that the Dashboard can help. The Dashboard is incomplete. I know I am taking a big risk saying this, but it is incomplete. Measuring instruments are crucial to grasp a part of reality, to simplify what is too complicated, to be organized, it's true. For instance, I can't know everything about you. Though willing, I could never understand everything you have been through. And I don't have the time or money for that. This is why I could be tempted to use the Dashboard. And it's a good thing, it is necessary. Of course Resonance uses algorithms too, for several activities. But at the same time, we have the feeling that it isn't all there is. We feel like reality is wider than a series of data; that no one is a mannequin that can be taken to bits; that an algorithm cannot reveal one's true self. And we're not the only ones who believe that. Everyone believes it, everyone is saying it, but nothing is changing. I have decided to change, at my own personal level, my dimension, around me. I'm not saying that I am going to turn the world upside down, or even make a revolution – there are enough revolutions every month, they're all over the place. I decided to change when I joined Resonance, offering my headhunting services to the community. To offer my services, to spot profiles that elude the radars, talents the Dashboard cannot recognize, I created a tool. It is a very sophisticated tool but it is invisible, to avoid digital controls. I named this tool, *‘Conversation.’*”

I roll my eyes in wonder. The wind is blowing in the leaves above us. There are rings of light on the table.

“Have you ever had a conversation to get a job?”

“Never. Usually, I get a notification. Some automated thing sent by connected objects. Workforce is needed there; a delivery here; an intervention is requested there; an article needs to be proofread. If I got good ratings on my previous missions, I get a bonus when I receive a new offer: a minute to think before the notification gets back on the market, open to competition. In that case, the fastest and highest bidder wins.”

“I am not offering a notification,” he says, “but a conversation. I believe conversation is made up of three ingredients, three things an online algorithm doesn't offer. Firstly, slowness. I take the time to talk; I am not in a rush. I don't want to have ten thousand conversations but two or three good ones. We're meeting today; we can meet again tomorrow. Step by step. Do you know what Kundera used to say at the end of the twentieth century? He said that we have lost the pleasure of slowness. He said that this pleasure was stolen by technology. ‘Speed is the form of ecstasy the

technical revolution has bestowed on man,' he said. I can't live in never-ending ecstasy. I can't always live in full speed. I am breathing, looking at what surrounds me. I want to feel connected to the world, you know?"

"I do. I don't know who Kundera is but I like what he is saying."

"The second ingredient for a good conversation is authenticity. When I ask you a question, you need to tell me what you really think. Few people can do that but it is essential. Don't tell me what everybody is saying. Don't talk to me about your technical skills. Don't tell me that you are thorough and determined. First, it is probably not true. Second, I really don't care. Three, it is typically the type of information I can get from the Dashboard. No, what I want to know is who you are, really, deeply. What is your story? What are your passions? What do you dream about at night? What do you think of all this – life, your presence here? What meaning do you give this moment? There is no wrong answer. The only wrong answer is a fake answer, an answer that hides the truth, that doesn't look to the core of things, to your own core. And I can spot that immediately."

"How can I join your company, Resonance? What test do I need to take?"

"I told you, there is no test. It's a conversation, a simple conversation. Do you want to start?"

He pauses, looks at me nicely.

There are foliage plants everywhere, with trees and birds on the branches. There is also a piece of the sky, through the leaves, where the light goes through.

Silence feels good. Silence when you are alone can make you crazy. But silence with someone is powerful; there is something magical. Maybe it is the third ingredient for a good conversation. Silence, talking silence. Something is happening between us, between him and me. There is a sort of truth to this silence. A connection is being made. I feel myself coming back to life. I feel that I can breathe. I look up. The world is there and it is worth being here. I am not alone. We are not alone. It's like a third person is here between us. And this third person is called being present in the world. Resonance.