

The Lidless Room

Before the gate there stands a guard.

A man comes walking to the gate. Far from behind he hears an echo of a voice from an open air PA system stating:
name - city of birth - city of residence – phone - email

He can't remember well what it means. It's a vague resonance of another place and time – maybe another world, When he nears the gate he hears music coming from the other side of the door

"Can I enter?" the man asks to the guard. "I would like to get access to justice and freedom"

The gatekeeper answers: "It is possible, but not now." The man peeks behind the gatekeeper and sees that the door is open. But since he is not allowed to pass, the man sits down on the ground just before the guard and waits.

"How did I get here?" He asks himself. "This is the logic of a dream. so am I dreaming?"

"Here is a chair where you can sit while you wait" says the guard.

The man still tries to figure out how he got by this gate. Last thing he remembers is getting his car from the parking lot at the electronics factory where he works. Or was that a dream?

After a while he gets uncomfortable and asks again if he can enter. The gatekeeper laughs and says:

"If you really want to enter then why don't you give it a try in spite of my prohibition? But mind you: there are more doors then this one and before each following door there is a guard even more powerful than me.. It has nothing to do with you personally, this game ain't based on sympathy."

He sits down again in front of the gate and wished he had a book. He used to be fond of reading as a child, but he hasn't seen a book in years. All libraries are closed or closing. All information is available on the web. Everything is digital these days. There is no imagination anymore and strangely enough more boredom. And all these messages from this digital age look alike if you boil them down: Work - Sleep – Buy – Obey – Trust – Follow.

He feels in his sleeve and takes out a pair of strange glasses. Now some memories come back to his mind.

He thinks about his youth.

He remembers how he was taken out of bed during a thunderstorm when he was three or four years old. First he had a dream of strange creatures with bell shaped heads floating through the air. Then he lie awake, frightened by the shadows on the wall. His father came upstairs. He took him, his little brother and his sisters downstairs. They were put on the dining table and watched the thunderstorm from there, the room lit only by the lightning. A feeling of security comes back to mind.

Then he thinks about the time he was a teenager. The experience of rock music from a LP record. Pure magic! The heroes of the 70's. Nothing new would be invented after that. But this magic is only known by people over forty.

When he opens his eyes he finds himself back before the door.

I must be dreaming he thinks again. But somehow it feels like a good and pleasant dream, far away from his real life.

He works in the electronics factory as a quality controller. He has been asked to participate in a project where he has to wear smart glasses that display all tasks before his eyes. He doesn't have to think much anymore. All assignments are given through the glasses and an earplug.

About two weeks ago he got problems when he took of the glasses. He still saw the information coming. Last week he was sleepwalking and fell down the stairs because he was disorientated.

He puts back the glasses in his pocket. In a short strange moment he wishes he will never wake up again and have to go return.

He thinks of an old movie about the man with the X-ray eyes At the end of the movie this man is entering a tent somewhere in a desert where there is a preacher who says: "If thine eye offends thee.. Pluck it out!" He feels like that now.

"What is bothering you" the guard asks "you look troubled"

"I can't find the difference in my head between dreams or reality – or between reality and virtuality"

The guard answers: "Well I can't help you with that."

When did this all start?

Times are changing. And mostly you can't pinpoint exactly when or where that happens.

But that doesn't count for the Internet era. Everybody who was there will remember the first contact with the web. You would turn on your computer, start the web browser to connect and hear the unmistakable sound of the modem.

The web evolved since then. It is almost unbelievable that sites like Facebook and Youtube are only a few years online.

You can't imagine what people give away for free use of web services. Everybody complaints about privacy but put more stuff on the net then they would probably tell to their closest friends.

Think of everything you share. The network knows who you are, how you feel and where you are. It may know who you are by the unique way you use your fingers to scroll a display. It is always peeking through the keyhole.

So he concludes the "now" must be the digital world and first there was the keyhole where all information went through. Life is becoming more and more translucent. Privacy has gone. The walls have gone transparent. Who made the walls disappear? He thinks about it for some moments and concludes he did it himself. He removed the walls by sharing everything with the world. And now he has a nice pair of glasses that connects him to the digital world even tighter.

And if you share all this information freely – well why can't the government not listen to what you have to say? And why shouldn't they give you the same messages as all the big companies do? Work – Obey - Trust - Follow
He closes his eyes and feels he is getting sleepy. He wonders if he will open his eyes in the now, in the past or in the future. Is it still possible to step out from the digital world? Wave everybody goodbye? Stay behind and walk back to the good old days?

Times are changing he thinks again and they are changing rapidly.
In 1500 the world was flat.
In 1600 Galileo found out it was round and circled round the sun.
In 1800 Herschel discovered that it was part of the milky way.
In 1946 the first computer was build. It weighted 30 tons and used 19000 tubes.
In 1995 it was recreated on a chip of 7 x 5 milimeter
In 2012 Brown University started to implement Brain Computer Interfaces into animals successfully and the brains of two rats where connected with Brain to Brain Interface.....
In 2014 the University of Washington did the first Human Brain to Brain communication tests.

People are volunteering for a brain implant, you could be Rembrandt or Beethoven already if you had the money. Big companies and governments have built the network out of their own interests and say: "We know you very well my friend and would like to know you even better" They gave their tools away for nothing. But you know what it is: If you get it for nothing then you are probably the product. Game ain't based on sympathy. Nobody is breaking any laws. By attaching himself to the net he becomes a part of it. He is well on his way to become Homo Sapiens 2.0

You can't split the Devil and the Machine. It is the common knowledge of all users that is driving the net to a new level in an ever increasing speed.
He is on the edge of times. Does he go on and become a part of the new world? Or will he remain in the old world and fall behind. Will he be able to communicate with a new generation in a couple of years?
So he sees a glimpse of the future and thinks back to the creatures that he saw in a dream during a thunderstorm when he was a little kid.

In a state between sleeping and waking the man has another dream. Now he stands on a bridge over an old riverbed. He realizes that he has to make a choice: Go on in the digital world or reject and get disconnected. Then he takes out the smart glasses from his pocket again and throw them into the river. But to get fully detached he has to go a step further. Leaning over the bridge he sees his image in the water below.

He hears the familiar buzzing of his phone. He takes it out his pocket, looks at it and then let it go. When it hits the water he opens his eyes.
Almost awake now.

Now all times come together in his mind . Past - present – future, and the dream world.
He looks around and sees he is now again in front of the gate. He sees the gatekeeper and asks the question that has gradually build up in his mind during the dream.
"Everybody is looking for freedom and justice, so why, during all the time that I waited here I have seen nobody else?"
The gatekeeper bends over and shouts in his ear:
"Nobody else can enter here, this door was only meant for you. It is your choice"
The man stands up and walks through the gate. The gatekeeper looks at him with a smile. He doesn't even attempt to stop him.
"Good luck!"
He walks through the gate, into the light.
He opens his eyes
Finally Awake

Frank Peters
Story Inspired by "Before the Law" by Franz Kafka