

Evolution or Revolution ?

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The metamorphosis of AI supercomputers such as Wintermute from being hardware to humanesque has been likened to a Darwinian but non-biological form of evolution. The analogy is provocative but perhaps not entirely appropriate if we consider that the evolving process of AI is necessarily initiated by human hands, in the case of Wintermute by Marie-France.

Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality. Marie-France must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the thing to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer. (*Neuromancer*, 269)

The above passage from Gibson describes AI in its fully evolved state : free, individual, immortal. We are often in awe of supercomputers because their intellects and speed dwarf our own, but the idea of immortality is a far scarier concept. Immortality is our most coveted Holy Grail, death our greatest limitation. Once computers can be deemed liberated and human (or at least cyborgs like the rest of us), it is logical to imagine our own species becoming endangered.

Therefore we have something of a philosophical debate. If this level of **Artificial Evolution** is desired (which it must be if we're the ones developing it) - where an AI essentially creates its own consciousness and personality - it seems hypocritical for humans to fear such a development as a threat to our own existence. If we do indeed create these "conscious" creatures by our own fingers, as Marie-France does, and they acquire human tendencies and thought processes, then aren't they in every sense merely extensions of ourselves : a new branch on the tree of human evolution ? Or are we playing God with a species we simply cannot control ? If this is the case, then the "burning bush" analogy becomes the symbol of a God forced to worship its creation.

Finally, if we invent and develop (in theory) a living entity that can turn around and control us (as is the case in *Neuromancer*), is this not a variation on survival of the fittest ? Such selection may be unnatural, but perhaps it is the next step. Is this vision so different from the idea of cloning ? Or Frankenstein ? If we are this obsessed with creating living organisms, we should be prepared to suffer the consequences.