Computer science and technology:
historiography V (3 - part three)

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(The politics of The X-Files.)
The X-Files Season 11 overview - more detailed

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Ep. 4 is about memories and memory manipulation:

It starts with Mulder’s memory of seeing his first Twilight Zone episode, except it doesn’t seem to exist ("Confuse the Twilight Zone with the Outer Limits? Do you even know me?!"), and grows to a whole person in the process of potentially being erased, Reggie - founder of the X-Files and member of the team before even Scully...

But, why manipulate memory?

"For the simple reasons that Orwell said. 'He who controls the past controls the future.' The ability to manipulate memory creates unlimited power - political, economical, cultural."

The 1983 US invasion of Grenada is mentioned. Illustrating the point of the episode perhaps, Mulder either remembers the events or knows about them, Scully doesn’t, so he goes:

"There was a Marxist overthrow of the government, and Reagan was concerned about some U.S. students at a university hospital."

— a shockingly basic, if not naive explanation that seems out of character, but could be representative of his political leanings. (Mulder’s and Scully’s political opinions were never made explicit? Which viewed in today’s context seems bizarre, esp. for a work dealing with its topics - although this would be consistent with government workers policies, however this should not extend to private moments.)

The series, constantly fighting on two levels, with its own history and wider history, in another meta commentary and comic moment sees Mulder apparently finally giving up: "The world has become too crazy!”, even for people open to conspiracy theories, like himself.

An interlocutor, (possibly the grandest conspirator of all if he is to be believed), is more harsh and tells a cold ruth: Mulder and his times have passed, time to close shop...

". . . a time when people of power thought that they could keep their secrets secret; and were willing to do anything to keep it that way. Those days are past! Gone. We’re now living in a post cover-up, post-conspiracy age. "

"As long as the truth gets out.” Mulder mumbles back. The interlocutor laughs,

"They don’t really care whether the truth gets out. Because the public no longer knows what’s meant by "the truth". . . . no one can tell the difference anymore"

In ep. 6, M. advances "The DoD and the CIA have been working on various incarnations of mind control projects since the '50s." and lists the following: "Project BLUEBIRD, MKUltra, MKDELTA." Tempered by Scully: "Well, those programs were supposedly ended in the early 1980s." Their interlocutor, in this scene, doubts that after so many efforts spent on this kind of research, with all its potential, . . . it ‘d be completely abandoned: "Do you honestly believe that after 30 years of research and development (.) it would just be thrown in the trash?"

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1 In a later episode, 8, Mulder comments he doesn’t like perfect because it makes him uncomfortable yet, in this case, has no issues accepting a version of events that sees Reagan, of all, saving little Grenada from the 'Marxist threat'. - despite everything known about US foreign policy from the last hundred years alone, Cold War tactics, South American coups, Middle East invasions based on - again - "concerns". But, there is always a reason for US interference.

1 [Mulder is likely a 'civil Libertarian' in the American tradition of the 1990s, as are some of The Lone Gunmen; while Scully esp. as she is aging is turning into a full lib.]
Ep. 7 is a reflection on daily life in a society characterized by increasingly omnipresent computer automation and reliance: "smart" homes, hotlines served by machines, online services, "driverless" cars, no-staff food places, drones ("roboex - a drone delivery service"), etc.

It pursues the double, critique and self-critique that is arguably one of the defining features of the new X-Files:

In the introductory sequence, Mulder and Scully instead of conversing like they used to are now preoccupied with their phones where one is busy solving captcha i.e. humanity tests, and the other is bombarded with targeted ads, corporate 'social' media messages;

Scenes that are in stark contrast with the hundreds of hours of the 1990s set seasons (we can't recall a single instance of this happening then, on the contrary the lively exchanges between the two were and remain one of its great, endearing qualities).

Both are at a robot operated restaurant. Convenience has a flip side in this context: a dish is served that is not satisfactory but there is no one to talk to, for instance. The situation evolves from there into ever greater amounts of absurd. A No Exit for the 21st c. of sorts: they are trapped inside the sushi restaurant, Mulder's phone voice assistant plays a Crosby and Nash song instead of Prince, and navigation instruction makes him drive in circle (back to the restaurant) ...

If computers are relied upon for all aspects of life, then control can easily be lost by humans. – appears to be a possible message, boldly illustrated:

Scully’s case exemplifies the perils of "smart" homes: soon enough she finds she has no control over large parts of her home, intimacy and privacy: a vacuum cleaner sends a "mapping" of the interior to some other service, while her toiletry and even a sex toy become the basis for targeted advertisement. Fox’s house, a cabin, is meant to obviously provide a contrast to Scully’s "smart", fully-automated residence: But, even then he is not safe from technology.

Lastly. Mulder and Scully attempt an escape – but escaping technology in a technologically advanced, or rather saturated society is not easy...

Scully. "They’re tracking us. Our phones. They know everything. Where could we go?"

There are few places to hide in the modern world. Radical decisions are made: all of their tech. equipment gets thrown away into the trash. Along those same lines, M. decided to go "old school" and use a road map earlier on.

The episode ends on the same absurdist note: tipping the restaurant where the problems began results in a sudden end of all of their troubles. The next day everything is not quite over: the duo gets to relax at a "non-smart", honest-to-god American diner yet - echoing our earlier comments - Scully in this final moment realizes how technology has disconnected them, puts her phone down, and takes Mulder’s hand.

A voice-over narration served as introduction for this story: "a major American software corporation" created an A.I. "as an experiment" on social media. The bot, learning from humans there, quickly turned "racist, hateful". The analysis provided here was our own: It seems that the producers ultimately prefer the liberal interpretative route, compatible with capitalist production, expressed at various times, of "we must teach robots better"...
A parallel is created between the beginning and closing scenes of Mulder and Scully in this episode (which some may consider heavy handed): the change in attitude, i.e. immersion in social media creating disconnect followed by (momentary) rejection of technology in favor of human contact, coincides with a change in location from the fully automatic Japanese sushi restaurant to a good old, mom-and-pops, eggs and coffee American diner.

Il. The X-Files S11E7 - start and end of the episode: [1] kept apart by 'social media' (automated sushi restaurant) [2-3] Scully puts phone down, grabs Mulder's hand (diner)


An alternative not explored - and possibly rejected - in this episode is the hacker's perspective, and the perhaps optimistic belief and philosophy that consists in using technology against technology (to improve it, redeem it, counter it, impair it ...)

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S11E8 | witchcraft and hysteria, ancient and modern, in Connecticut; presumption of innocence as a fleeting value "in the American experience"

S11E9 | vampires, maybe. [general inspiration likely Sunset Boulevard]

S11E10 | End of humanity ("My struggle", part 4).

Ep. 9, at first may seem distant from our topic, but the vampire myth can be interpreted, less fantastically, as an expression of obsession with youth, beauty, extending life, or even living forever - a concern definitely not remote or foreign to the technological elite (as if one life lived in vain wasn’t enough...).

Barbara Beaumont, child actor, failed career, leads a "life extension" "commune", originally from Northern California and transferred to the Bronx (where, according to one superintendent, it is easy to go unnoticed because everything is just enough weird). Her doctor husband launches into a Libertarian delirium (that in turn would go unnoticed in Silicon Valley, and sounds like an average founder pitch):

"Have you ever asked yourself what could be achieved, what would be possible if we were free from government restraints and regulations?
I found a cure for the greatest disease to afflict mankind.
Every human being has a time bomb built into their genes."

(Holmes could have said the same, up to word for word, to her idiotic, gullible millionaire-billionaire investors...)

One aspect worth highlighting of this "solution" to aging is that it involves drawing the life from one and in fact many people - to preserve the recipient of the "treatment".
"Donors" are recruited mostly among vulnerable groups, poor, Black, immigrants (judging by the composition of the bottom members of the cult).

Ep. 10, finale - Tad O’Malley and his "Truth Squad" program are back streaming. Claims are the same: a conspiracy is unfolding to end humanity (pandemic). The X-Files are closed.
BOOKS

Collection of essays, interviews. Included are ‘Designing the Future’ by Syd Mead, ‘Movie Science’
Asimov, an interview with G. Miller (Mad Max), Scott, etc.

Described officially as “the most extensive collection of Mead’s visionary work ever printed, com-
piling hundreds of images, sketches and concept arts from a career spanning almost 40 years”.
Chapters : Blade Runner (pp. 88-153), Johnny Mnemonic (196-199), Strange Days (22-23), Blade
Runner 2049 (250 f.)...

DOCUMENTARY

With The poverty of philosophy, Marx - gathering all his philosophical, economic, otherwise train-
ing and knowledge - produced one of the great takedowns in the entire annals of criticism. Proudhon,
in those long, long, unbearable pages received a once-in-a-lifetime lesson like few others have, impos-
sible to recover from.

Today’s anarchists do not need a piece like that one handed to them : they already do the "critical"
work just by being themselves, full of contradictions in the absence of a coherent theory. Only there
could hardcore free marketeers and capitalists mix with culture warriors, and sympathetic but highly
confused hippy folks - whose erratic journeys somehow have taken from Buddha to anarchism, while
not bringing them any further to clarity about the world...

— The anarchists (2022)

Because anarchism tends to attract a lot of people from the technology sector, (being the main
ideology after Libertarianism and average liberalism - Marxism, with its ideas of e.g. class, being too
explicit an invalidation of what nonetheless remains their core beliefs and also objective identities),
this documentary on 21st c. anarchists features some of them.

Generally these types are associated with cryptocurrencies, and dubious "liberation” promises and
"freedom” far away from quote "The government” (they are less worried about privacy than taxes,
one is inclined to believe), one more sketchy than the other.