

THE ORAMELLON

*A Philosophical Vision of Human Becoming*

*Not a utopia, but a direction.*

# METANOIA

*Inner Colonization and the Reconquest of the Human in the Algorithmic Age*

**Christian Mahoukou**

*Translated from the French by the author*



*“The question is not whether AI is intelligent. The question is what it does to human intelligence.”*

**Christian Mahoukou**

*The Civilization of Saturation, Work II (2026)*

*“The transformations underway are not just quantitative. Above all, they are qualitative, because they affect the way we perceive reality and human nature itself.”*

**Pontifical Academy for Life**

*Rome Call for AI Ethics (2020)*

*“Metanoia: a change of direction. A conversion of gaze. A turning-around of being.”*

**Etymological definition**

*From the Greek μετάνοια*

*In memory of Father Gérard Eschbach, O.P.,  
whose website was called "Metanoia"  
and who understood, before many others,  
that the central question of our age was spiritual  
before it was technical.*

† May 13, 2021

## PROLOGUE

**Metanoia**

Why this word. Why now.

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The Greek word *metanoia* designates a change of direction — a turning-around of being. It runs through the New Testament as a fundamental demand: before speaking of faith, before speaking of ethics, before speaking of law, there is this primary movement of a being who turns around. Who sees differently. Who understands that the direction in which it was heading was not the right one.

This word belongs to the Christian tradition. It also belongs to the philosophical tradition, under other names: *conversion* in Augustine, *resolution* in Heidegger, *metamorphosis* in Ovid. Everywhere, the same intuition: there comes a moment when continuing in the same direction becomes impossible. When the movement underway short-circuits what it was supposed to produce. When the only way out is to turn back.

We are at such a moment.

The digital civilization we have entered is producing effects we did not choose and do not yet fully understand. It produces connection — and loneliness. Information — and confusion. Speed — and exhaustion. Formal freedom — and real capture. And above all, it produces a type of human being who reacts but responds less and less, who is connected but less and less present, who is informed but less and less capable of discernment.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a moral judgment on technologies. It is an anthropological diagnosis. And this diagnosis calls for a *metanoia* — a turning-around of our way of conceiving, regulating, and inhabiting the digital world.

This book is an attempt to name what we are living through with the precision the situation demands. Not to condemn technology — technology is a gift of human intelligence. But to identify what, in the current use of this technology, threatens what is most essential in the human: its capacity to respond freely to what calls to it.

Father Gérard Eschbach, a Dominican priest, had named his website “*Metanoia*.” He had understood, before many others, that the questions posed by our era are spiritual before they are technical. This book is dedicated to him — and its title borrows from him the word he had chosen with wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

***Metanoia. Not a program. A direction. Not a reform. A turning-around.***

## PART ONE

# The Civilization of Modulation

*The Great Historical Shift*

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We are leaving the industrial civilization of production and entering something we do not yet know how to name with precision. Words are lacking — or they arrive too late, always behind the realities they attempt to grasp. What we are living through is not simply a technological revolution. It is an anthropological shift.

## CHAPTER ONE

## The Real Power of the Twenty-First Century

*Who organizes the interpellations of humanity?*

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### 1.1 — From the control of bodies to the modulation of subjectivities

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For centuries, powers sought to control bodies and territories. Armies occupied spaces. Laws regulated visible behaviors. Prisons disciplined refractory bodies. Foucault analyzed with genius this disciplinary regime of modernity: a society that produces docile subjects by subjecting them to the constant gaze, the norm, the hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Something has changed. Not that discipline has disappeared — it remains, in refined forms. But a new register of power has installed itself alongside it, infinitely more discreet and infinitely more penetrating. It is no longer the control of visible behaviors that is the central stake. It is the **modulation of subjectivities** — the capacity to act on what subjects pay attention to, what they desire, what they believe, what they are capable of perceiving or feeling.

The great powers of the twenty-first century no longer seek only to produce goods, control territories, or extract resources. They seek to organize the flows of attention, desire, behavior, and interpellation. Real power, from now on, is the capacity to **structure the cognitive and relational architectures of populations**. And this power is exercised —

often without being named as such — by digital platforms, recommendation algorithms, and artificial intelligence systems.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 — Algor-ethics: what the Vatican has seen

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In February 2020, the Pontifical Academy for Life published the *Rome Call for AI Ethics* — a document signed with Microsoft, IBM, the FAO, and the Italian Ministry of Innovation. Since then, the text has been co-signed by the three Abrahamic religions (Rome, January 2023), then by the major Eastern religions (Hiroshima, July 2024). A worldwide interreligious arc has formed around a shared conviction.

The *Rome Call* establishes six principles: transparency, inclusion, responsibility, impartiality, reliability, security. It affirms powerfully that AI must be developed “not with a focus on technology, but rather for the good of humanity” — and that it must expand “those areas of freedom that could be threatened by algorithmic conditioning.”<sup>3</sup>

This document is necessary. And insufficient. Why insufficient? Not through any failure of will on the part of its authors, but because it remains in the technical and juridical register: it says how to regulate AI. It does not yet possess an anthropology of the subject capable of saying what AI does to the human being from within — to its capacity for listening, desire, discernment, free response. This is precisely what the present work seeks to provide: not an additional regulatory framework, but a ***theory of what is at stake***, before fixing rules to protect it.

## 1.3 — The three blocs and their implicit anthropologies

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Three major civilizational logics are emerging, each carrying a different implicit anthropology.

***The American-platform model*** — that of Meta, Google, OpenAI, Amazon — rests on the attention economy. Its implicit anthropology is that of the *predictable and optimizable profile*: the human being is valued by its degree of engagement, its vulnerability to emotional triggers, its capacity to be retained. Its freedom is a constraint to be worked around; its interiority is data to be extracted.<sup>4</sup>

**The Chinese model** — centralized algorithmic sovereignty, systemic surveillance, state AI — thinks the human being as an element of a coordinated civilizational order. Collective stability takes precedence over individual autonomy. The macroscopic management of behaviors replaces self-governance.

**The Global South** — heterogeneous, vast, irreducible to any single formula — is in a position of structural vulnerability: it receives digital architectures designed elsewhere, without always possessing the regulatory infrastructures, technical capacities for moderation, or corresponding technological sovereignties. But it also carries something that the hyper-digitized societies of the North are in the process of losing: communal structures, less industrialized temporalities, thicker relational forms, living spiritualities, less individualistic anthropologies. This paradox is one of the most important things to think through.

#### 1.4 — The real conflict of tomorrow

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The great conflicts of the twenty-first century will not be only territorial, military, or ideological in the classical sense. They will increasingly bear on what we may call **cognitive sovereignty**: who structures the attention, affects, narratives, imaginaries, and collective desires of populations?

Digital platforms have become quasi-civilizational infrastructures. Dependence will be less on oil, and more on informational and algorithmic architectures. States will seek to protect their narratives, their data, their educational systems, their digital infrastructures. New types of dependence will emerge — no longer colonial in the territorial sense, but **cognitive and attentional** in the anthropological sense.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the fundamental conflict to come will not be only geopolitical, economic, or military. It will be **anthropological**: what type of human being will global digital architectures produce?

***Whoever organizes the calls of a civilization organizes its soul.***

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Implicit Anthropology of Platforms

*What they think of the human without saying so*

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## 2.1 — Every technology carries a vision of the human

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No technology is neutral. Every tool presupposes a certain conception of the one who will use it: its capacities, its needs, its limits, its nature. The plow presupposes a body that works the earth. The book presupposes a mind capable of silent and sustained reading. The telephone presupposes a subject who wishes to be reached by others.

Contemporary digital platforms presuppose a human being who is fundamentally **reactive**: a subject who responds to stimuli, who engages with content, who clicks, likes, shares, comments — and whose value is measurable by the time spent connected. This implicit anthropology is rarely explicitly formulated. It is inscribed in the architectures themselves: infinite notifications, bottomless scroll, dopaminergic reward systems.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this anthropology is philosophically impoverished. It ignores what makes the human being in its depth: its capacity to be *reached* by a Call that displaces it, to *respond* from its interiority rather than from its reflex, and to *resonate* within a community that remembers it. In other words: it ignores the Call–Response–Resonance structure which is, according to the anthropology of the interpellated being, the fundamental structure of human existence.

## 2.2 — From person to profile

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One of the most profound transformations that digital architectures have introduced into social life is the shift from **person to profile**. The person is a singular, historical, incarnate subject, bearer of an irreducible memory and a freedom always in process. The profile is a numerical representation made of behavioral data, optimizable, predictable, exploitable.

This shift is not only a matter of privacy. It is an ontological question: what counts is what can be extracted and exploited, not what cannot be reduced to data. Yet the capacity to be freely interpellated, to respond in a creative and unpredictable manner, to resonate over time — all of this escapes the profile by definition. It is precisely what the profile cannot capture. And it is also what algorithmic systems, by progressively substituting themselves for human relationship, threaten to render unnecessary.<sup>2</sup>

### **2.3 — The Magnifica Humanitas and the question that remains open**

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In May 2026, Pope Leo XIV published his first encyclical: *Magnifica Humanitas*. Subtitle: “Attention to the Human Person in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.” This historic text opens the most fundamental debate of our era within the space of the Christian tradition. It says, in substance: the greatness of the human is what digital saturation threatens. And this greatness deserves to be defended.<sup>3</sup>

But defending human greatness requires knowing exactly what is threatened. And this is where the question remains open. The *Magnifica Humanitas*, like the *Rome Call* that preceded it, poses the right question and calls for the right answer — but does not yet possess, in the terms of ecclesiastical or even philosophical discourse, a sufficiently precise theory of what is being reached within the subject. It is to this theory that the present work seeks to contribute.

*“We do not lack regulations. We lack an anthropology of the subject capable of saying what digital captation destroys within it.”*

## PART TWO

## Inner Colonization

*Attention, Desire, Discernment — The Three Territories*

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When I speak of inner colonization, I am not speaking of manipulation, propaganda, or advertising. These phenomena have existed for a long time. What I am speaking of is deeper and newer: the fact that external systems progressively manage to penetrate the very mechanisms by which subjects orient their attention, form their desires, and exercise their discernment.

## CHAPTER THREE

## The Colonization of Attention

*When the rhythm of consciousness belongs to another*

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### 3.1 — Attention as the gateway of existence

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Attention is not one state among others in psychic life. It is the gateway of existence — that through which the world reaches us, that through which Calls reach us. What we pay attention to shapes our world, selects our reality, builds our priorities, orients our memory, determines our sensitivities. A being whose attention were entirely controlled from outside would be a being whose inner world were entirely controlled from outside.<sup>1</sup>

Yet digital platforms now organize what appears and what disappears in the cognitive space of the subject. What returns. What interrupts it. What solicits it. Their economic model rests entirely on the captation of attention — not on its quality, but on its quantity and frequency. Attention time is the currency. Engagement is the measure of success. And the most profitable engagement is often the most anxiety-inducing, the most outrageous, the most emotionally charged.

### 3.2 — The fragmentation of attention as an impediment to Resonance

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The anthropological effect of this architecture is precise: the subject progressively loses the capacity to be deeply present to anything. Not because it has become lazy or incapable. But because the environment in which it lives was designed to make sustained attention structurally difficult.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it is precisely sustained attention that is the condition of Resonance in the A-R-R structure. For a Call to truly reach me — for it to displace me, transform me, become an authentic interpellation — I must be sufficiently present to receive it. A subject whose attention is fragmented into micro-intervals is a subject structurally impeded from Resonance. It receives signals. It no longer receives Calls.

Simone Weil, long before the digital age, had formulated what she called the philosophy of attention: *“True attention consists in suspending one’s own thought, leaving it available, empty, penetrable.”* This availability — this active emptiness that is the condition of all true reception — is precisely what the attention economy destroys methodically.<sup>3</sup>

*“The colonization of attention begins when the subject no longer inhabits the rhythm of its own consciousness.”*

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Colonization of Desire

*When external architectures govern what attracts us*

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### 4.1 — Human desire and its slow maturation

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Human desire does not form instantaneously. It matures. It requires time, lack, encounter, failure, discovery. It is in this slow maturation that the subject learns what it truly wants — not what it wants at this instant, but what it wants over time, from its depth, as the orientation of its existence. The philosophical tradition has called this *reflective preference* — as opposed to immediate preference which only reacts to the stimulus.

Algorithmic architectures radically alter this maturation. They learn what activates the subject's emotional circuits, what triggers engagement and return, what maintains excitement or anxiety. Then they optimize these mechanisms — not for the good of the subject, but to maximize its screen time. Desire becomes accelerated, reactive, continuously stimulated, oriented by invisible architectures.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.2 — The captation of desire as an impediment to free Response

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This phenomenon has considerable anthropological consequences. The authentic Response — the one that engages the subject from its depth — presupposes that the subject knows what it truly wants. It presupposes a certain transparency of the subject to itself: the capacity to distinguish what it genuinely desires from what the environment has led it to desire.

When desires are progressively shaped from the outside by invisible architectures, this self-transparency becomes increasingly difficult. The subject no longer knows with certainty whether what it wants comes from itself or from the system that has pre-conditioned it. And when the Response is no longer free because desire itself has been captured, it is human freedom in its essence that is reached.<sup>2</sup>

### 4.3 — The question of the young and the precocity of capture

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This colonization of desire is particularly serious in children and adolescents. Their desire is in the process of formation. Their attentional structures are not yet stabilized. Their self-regulation mechanisms are still fragile. Their relational identity is under construction.

Exposed to algorithmic architectures designed to maximize engagement, they develop desire habits that could accompany them throughout life: immediate gratification rather than delay, permanent comparison rather than interiority, desire as response to a stimulus rather than as the orientation of an existence. And this produces an anthropological vulnerability that does not disappear at adulthood.<sup>3</sup>

***The colonization of desire begins when what I want is already decided  
before I have been able to want.***

## CHAPTER FIVE

## The Colonization of Discernment

*The gravest threat*

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### 5.1 — Discernment as a fundamental human capacity

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Discernment is the capacity to hierarchize, interpret, maintain distance, judge — and above all to defer the reaction in order to let the response mature. It is that by which the human being is not merely reactive but responsive: it does not simply react to the most recent stimulus, it evaluates, weighs, asks itself what truly deserves a response and how.

The spiritual tradition — Christian, Buddhist, Stoic — has always considered discernment as one of the highest human capacities. Not because it would be reserved for the wise, but because it is the condition of all real freedom. A subject without discernment is a subject who reacts — not a subject who responds.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.2 — How digital systems undermine discernment

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Dominant digital systems structurally favor immediacy, rapid reaction, emotion, polarization, simplification. Not out of malice — but because these elements generate engagement, and engagement is what the economic model remunerates.

The result is a subject progressively **highly reactive but weakly deliberative**. It responds to everything. It responds to nothing in depth. It is informed of everything. It understands less and less. It is present everywhere. It truly inhabits nowhere. And this weakening of discernment is not without political consequences: a democracy needs citizens capable of deliberating, of distinguishing the true from the false, of weighing before voting. The contemporary democratic crisis has an anthropological component that purely institutional analyses do not see.<sup>2</sup>

### 5.3 — The capture of the capacity to be interpellated

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And here we reach the most fundamental point. An authentic interpellation — in the sense of the Mahoukou Law — presupposes that the subject is available to be reached, that

it has the time to let the Call resonate, that it has the freedom to respond from its interiority. Yet digital architectures tend to produce exactly the opposite: saturation, dispersion, continuous reactivity, multiple solicitations.

The deep danger is thus the progressive impossibility of being truly interpellated. Not because Calls are lacking — they are more numerous than ever. But because the subject no longer inhabits the silence necessary for their reception. It no longer dwells. It no longer lets things resonate. It is present to everything and therefore to nothing.

We may be entering a ***civilization of permanent solicitation*** that profoundly changes the human structure. Before, the scarcity of information and long timeframes protected a certain interiority. Now, the excess of solicitations, permanent interruptions, the captation economy, and continuous attentional optimization have eroded this protection. The deepest risk is not to lose data or even privacy. It is to progressively lose the minimum inner sovereignty that permits a free response.<sup>3</sup>

***Inner colonization begins when external architectures become more influential than the subject's inner work in forming its attention, desire, and judgment.***

## PART THREE

## Vulnerable Generations

*Children, the Global South, Global Asymmetries*

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## CHAPTER SIX

### An Anthropological Pediatrics of the Digital

*What children risk that adults have forgotten to protect*

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#### 6.1 — The fundamental anthropological asymmetry

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A child is not a miniaturized adult. It is a being in formation — whose attentional structures are not yet stabilized, whose discernment is still maturing, whose self-regulation mechanisms are still fragile, whose relational identity is still under construction. Exposed to algorithmic architectures designed to maximize the engagement of adults, it is in a position of fundamental asymmetry: it receives tools calibrated to be captivating, without yet possessing the psychic resources that would allow it to escape captivity.

Historically, the great mediators of social interpellation were family, school, community, and cultural traditions. These instances, imperfect but situated, proposed calls calibrated to the child's maturation. Today, global algorithmic systems penetrate directly into children's psychic space — often without sufficient mediation, without critical formation, without cultural protection, without solid state regulation.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.2 — What can be altered early

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**Attention.** The child can be accustomed very early to hyperstimulation, permanent interruption, instant gratification. Research in developmental neuroscience shows that these habits, once entrenched in childhood, leave lasting traces in the neural architecture of attention.

**Desire.** Digital systems can short-circuit slow maturation processes, accelerate comparison dynamics, sexualize prematurely, produce dependencies and anxieties. The child's desire — still malleable, still seeking its own forms — can be oriented in lasting ways by architectures it cannot yet identify as such.

**Identity.** Identity can become hyper-exposed, dependent on external validation, shaped by social metrics. The human being needs, in order to construct itself, gazes that recognize it without measuring it. The algorithmic gaze — the number of likes, followers, views — is a gaze that measures without recognizing.<sup>2</sup>

### 6.3 — The heightened risk in developing countries

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This risk is universal, but it is considerably aggravated in countries that do not possess the regulatory infrastructures, digital educational devices, powerful control authorities, or adapted legal frameworks. In these contexts, extremely sophisticated technological architectures, designed by global economic powers, enter into sometimes very vulnerable social spaces.

The danger is not only moral — it is structural. It is not simply about avoiding “bad content.” It is about protecting the very capacities of inner maturation. And for this, what we would need is what we do not yet have: an **anthropological pediatrics of the digital** — a science and ethic of protecting human development in the face of digital interpellation regimes.<sup>3</sup>

*“We have health standards for food, medicines, and chemicals. We do not yet have health standards for attentional architectures. This is a silent scandal.”*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Global South and the New Colonization

*Digital asymmetry and anthropological justice*

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## 7.1 — The colonization of the twenty-first century does not occupy territories

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Classical colonization occupied territories, exploited resources, imposed cultures. It was visible, nameable, contestable. The new form of colonization we analyze here is different: it does not occupy geographical spaces — it occupies cognitive and relational spaces. It does not exploit natural resources — it extracts behavioral data. It does not impose a culture by force — it homogenizes imaginaries through the attractiveness of platforms.

Countries of the Global South that do not have the means to design their own digital architectures, to train their youth in critical use, or to regulate the effects of global platforms are in a position of structural dependence. Not by choice, but because the global digital market is profoundly asymmetric.<sup>1</sup>

## 7.2 — The hidden resource of the South

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But we must pay attention to an important paradox. Many societies of the Global South retain communal structures, less integrally industrialized temporalities, thicker relational forms, living spiritualities, less individualistic anthropologies. These are precisely the resources that the hyper-digitized societies of the North are in the process of losing — and of which they would have need in order to resist algorithmic saturation.

The paradox can be formulated thus: the South could be technologically dominated and anthropologically the bearer of alternatives. This is not consolation — it is a real political and philosophical resource, provided the South becomes aware of it and makes it a strength rather than a nostalgia.<sup>2</sup>

## 7.3 — For a global digital justice

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Digital justice is not only a question of access to the Internet. It is a question of ***anthropological sovereignty***: the capacity of peoples to define their own modes of interpellation, their own life rhythms, their own forms of resistance to captation.

This justice requires regional regulations, locally rooted educational infrastructures, culturally situated digital models. It also requires a voice in the major international institutions that govern the global digital ecosystem. The *Rome Call for AI Ethics* had the wisdom to write it explicitly: “AI must serve the entire ‘human family’, respecting the inherent dignity of each of its members.” The human family includes those who are not yet seated at the table where these decisions are made.<sup>3</sup>

***Digital justice is not equality of access to tools. It is equality of sovereignty over the interpellation structures that shape peoples.***

## PART FOUR

## Ten Paths toward a Habitable Civilization

*From Critique to Construction*

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A diagnosis without proposals is only a learned lamentation. We do not deny the difficulty of what remains to be built: the economic interests at stake are considerable, the logics of captation structurally profitable, global governance complex. But complexity is not an excuse for inaction. The paths that follow are not utopias. They are directions.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Changing Paradigm

*The First Five Paths*

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#### **Path 1 — From the economy of captation to the economy of capacitation**

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The central problem comes from the fact that contemporary digital technology rests largely on the captation economy: attention time is the resource, engagement is the currency, dependency is profitable. As long as this model remains dominant, platforms will structurally have interest in intensifying solicitations.<sup>1</sup>

The first path is to deliberately shift to an **economy of capacitation**: technologies designed to strengthen attention rather than fragment it, support discernment rather than short-circuit it, favor autonomy rather than dependency, protect human rhythms rather than accelerate them. This shift will not be possible without a profound revision of the economic models governing platforms — and therefore without political will.

#### **Path 2 — Recognizing attention as a common good**

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Water, air, health, the environment are progressively recognized as common goods. Human attention is not yet genuinely so. Yet without free attention, there is no solid

democracy, no deep education, no inner freedom. Attention is the condition of all authentic human life.

We should therefore recognize legally attention as a fundamental human resource, limit certain forms of industrial captation, frame addictive architectures — as we frame addictive substances. The comparison is not exaggerated: the effects of digital dependency on the adolescent brain are documented by neuroscience research with growing precision.<sup>2</sup>

### **Path 3 — A digital paideia of the interpellated being**

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We teach mathematics, languages, sciences, sometimes computer science. But we teach very little about attention, digital discernment, the management of solicitations, the mechanisms of captation, the architectures of desire. We should develop a genuine *paideia of the interpellated being* in the digital world.

Such formation would teach how to recognize captures, how to inhabit silence, how to defer reaction, how to discern what deserves a response and what merely solicits. It would not be formation in refusal of the digital — but formation in the free use of the digital. What Aristotle called *phronēsis* — practical wisdom — must find its contemporary form in the space of digital architectures.

### **Path 4 — Differentiating anthropological ages**

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“The Internet for everyone” as if everyone were identical is anthropologically absurd. A five-year-old child, a fifteen-year-old adolescent, and a forty-year-old adult do not have the same attentional capacities, the same critical resources, the same psychic protections. We should imagine graduated digital environments — architectures adapted to psychic maturation, evolving protections, a progression in exposure.

This requires that technology designers accept the anthropological constraint: not “how to maximize engagement,” but “how to design an environment compatible with the maturation of this stage of human development.” The *Rome Call for AI Ethics* formulated it:

technology “must help people to develop their abilities.” We specify: this begins with protecting capacities still in formation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Path 5 — A global charter of cognitive integrity**

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What seems utopian today may become necessary tomorrow. The protection of child labor seemed utopian in the nineteenth century — it became a universal right. Health norms on medicines seemed impossible to impose on pharmaceutical companies — they became the global standard. Environmental regulations seemed a threat to the economy — they are today a recognized imperative.

We may perhaps need to invent, in time, international principles analogous to those of fundamental rights for the protection of cognitive integrity: right to unexploited attention, right to cognitive disconnection, right to algorithmic non-addictiveness for minors, right to informational plurality. These rights are the natural extension of fundamental rights into the algorithmic age.<sup>4</sup>

## CHAPTER NINE

## Building Differently

*The Last Five Paths*

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### Path 6 — Digital sovereignty for the Global South

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Many countries of the South receive digital infrastructures designed elsewhere, without being able to define their own anthropological models, protect their cultural rhythms, or build their own regulations. Digital sovereignty is not a nationalized luxury — it is a condition of cultural dignity.

We should develop regional regulations adapted to local contexts, create digital educational infrastructures rooted in local cultures, support digital models that emerge from the South and can propose alternatives to the dominant captation models. The African Union, Mercosur, ECOWAS — these regional structures could be sites for elaborating this sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

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### Path 7 — Non-capturing technologies

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Technologies aimed at attentional depth, cognitive sobriety, respect for rhythms, and the restoration of discernment are technically possible. They are not dominant because they are not profitable in the current model — not because they are impossible.

The *Rome Call* invented the concept of “algor-ethics” — an ethics inscribed in the very design of algorithms. We propose to extend this concept: a **non-capturing architecture** is an architecture designed to increase the user’s capacity to respond freely, not to maximize the time spent consuming. This distinction should become a criterion of certification and, in time, of regulation.

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### Path 8 — Rehabilitating silence and long temporalities

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This may sound spiritual. It is in fact anthropologically central. A civilization saturated with permanent interpellations risks exhaustion, hyperreactivity, loss of depth.

We will probably need to rehabilitate silence, long attention, deep reading, contemplation, unfragmented conversation, creative boredom, unoptimized rhythms.

These practices are not nostalgias — they are anthropological resources that spiritual traditions — Christian, Buddhist, Taoist — have cultivated for deep reasons and that contemporary research in neuroscience and psychology confirms as necessary to human well-being. Meditation, silent prayer, the Sabbath — these are technologies of resistance to captation that humanity needed long before the algorithmic age.<sup>2</sup>

### **Path 9 — A new ethic of technological design**

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Engineers and designers of AI systems and digital platforms have become, without having truly chosen it, the *architects of human interpellation structures*. Their responsibility is no longer only technical. It is anthropological, political, civilizational.

The *Rome Call* formulates it in terms we can make entirely our own: “those who design and deploy the use of AI must proceed with responsibility and transparency.” We add: responsibility includes asking — for every design decision — whether it increases or diminishes the capacity for free response of the users. This question should be at the heart of the training of computer scientists, product managers, and user experience designers.<sup>3</sup>

### **Path 10 — The Mahoukou Law criterion for just AI**

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All the preceding paths articulate around an ultimate criterion that the anthropology of the interpellated being allows us to formulate with precision:

***A technology is just if it increases the human being's capacity to receive, elaborate, and give free responses. It is unjust if it organizes the capture of this capacity — even in the name of convenience, efficiency, or well-being.***

This criterion is more demanding than the six principles of the *Rome Call* (transparency, inclusion, responsibility, impartiality, reliability, security) — not because it contradicts them, but because it grounds them anthropologically. It answers the question that the *Rome Call* poses without yet fully answering: what exactly is the human

dignity that AI must respect? It is the capacity to respond freely — the A-R-R structure in its full breadth.<sup>4</sup>

***Just AI is not the most powerful AI. It is the AI that makes humans more capable of responding freely to what calls to them.***

## EPILOGUE

## The Civilizational Task

*A technologically advanced and anthropologically habitable world*

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We have traveled a long road since the Greek word that opens this book. *Metanoia* — the turning-around. It does not designate a return backward. It designates a change of direction. A conversion of gaze. A decision not to continue in the same direction when that direction leads toward something we do not wish to become.

The direction in which we were heading — and still are, in large part — produces highly connected and inwardly impoverished societies. Individuals saturated with information and less and less capable of thinking. Children exposed to architectures that colonize their inner formation before they have the resources to resist. Entire countries depending on digital infrastructures they did not design and whose effects they do not control. Democracies weakened by algorithmic interpellation regimes that amplify polarization and short-termism.

Faced with this, *metanoia* is not nostalgia. It is not “let us return to the pre-digital world” — that world no longer exists and in any case had its own failings. *Metanoia* is a demand for lucidity: let us build the digital world differently. With a different purpose. Based on a different anthropology. In response to a different question than “how do we maximize engagement.”

The real question is this: ***what type of human being do we wish to produce?*** For every technology, in the end, is a machine for producing a certain type of human being. And if we wish to produce human beings capable of listening, of responding freely, of resonating within communities of duration — then we must design technologies equal to this ambition.

The *Rome Call for AI Ethics* said it in its way, in 2020, from the Vatican: “It is time to begin preparing for a more technological future in which machines will have a more important role in the lives of human beings, but also a future in which it is clear that

technological progress affirms the brilliance of the human race and remains dependent on its ethical integrity.” The *Magnifica Humanitas* of Leo XIV said it again in 2026. And this book seeks to say the same thing from the anthropology of the interpellated being: human dignity is not in its pixels. It is in its Response.

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Father Gérard Eschbach, to whom this book is dedicated, had named his site *Metanoia* because he knew that conversion was never accomplished once and for all. That it was a permanent orientation — a work of each day, a vigilance of each hour. A gaze that turns back constantly toward what is truly essential.

Perhaps this is, at bottom, the task of our era: not to cease turning back. To return to the central question. To refuse that the direction taken by technology should also be the direction taken by humanity. And to insist — in every design decision, in every educational choice, in every political regulation, in every personal use — that the technologically advanced world we are building remain also a world that is *anthropologically habitable*.

***Metanoia. The turning-around is possible.  
The direction is choosable. The human is still here.***

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## Notes to the Prologue

- [1] The diagnosis of reactivity without response was established in its full depth in Work II of the Oramellon collection, *The Civilization of Saturation* (2026), Chapter 2: “The Civilization of Acceleration: Confiscated Time, Impossible Response.” The present work radicalizes that perspective: the aim is no longer merely to describe saturation, but to analyze its long-term civilizational consequences.
- [2] Father Gérard Eschbach, O.P. (1939–2021), Dominican theologian, resided in Brazzaville from 1968 to 1980, at the height of Marxist ideology. He was, for the author of this book, the first guide toward dialogical phenomenology and toward Peter Wust. His website *Metanoia* (now closed since his death) was devoted to the questions of Christian existence in the contemporary world. The choice of this title is an act of memory and gratitude.
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## Notes to Chapter One

- [1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1977. The notion of the disciplinary society is developed in Part III and IV (Discipline). The present work proposes a shift: from the disciplinary society (which acts on bodies and visible behaviors) to the captation society (which acts on the interior structures of attention, desire, and discernment).
- [2] The notion of “structuring the cognitive and relational architectures of populations” is our own contribution to the theory of contemporary power. It builds on the Mahoukou Law (A-R-R structure) — developed in *Respondeo ergo sum* (2026) — to show that power no longer exercises itself only on the Response (behaviors), but on the Call itself: systems that determine what interpellates subjects determine structurally what they will become.
- [3] Pontifical Academy for Life, *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, Rome, February 28, 2020. Available at [www.romecall.org](http://www.romecall.org). The *Rome Call* was signed successively by representatives of the three Abrahamic religions (Vatican, January 2023) and then by major Eastern religions (*AI Ethics for Peace* event, Hiroshima, July 2024), demonstrating a worldwide interreligious arc of unprecedented scope on these questions.
- [4] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2019. Zuboff identifies what she calls “behavioral modification” as the deep purpose of surveillance capitalism: it is not only about extracting data, but about orienting future behaviors. The present work radicalizes this diagnosis: it is the very structure of human interpellability that is at stake, not only behaviors.
- [5] The notion of “cognitive colonization” connects with what political scientists like Joseph Nye analyzed under the concept of “soft power” — but displaces its meaning toward something deeper: not influence over opinions, but action on the interior structures of opinion formation. Yves Citton, *The Ecology of Attention*, Cambridge, Polity, 2017, offers a valuable theoretical framework.

## Notes to Chapter Two

- [1] The dopaminergic mechanisms of platforms have been analyzed by researchers in neuroscience and behavioral psychology. Anna Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, New York, Dutton, 2021, offers an accessible clinical analysis. Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google and founder of the Center for Humane Technology, testified before the U.S. Congress (2017) that platforms were “designed to create engagement, not well-being.”
- [2] The distinction between person and profile connects with what Paul Ricœur called the tension between identity-*idem* (sameness, reducible to stable properties) and identity-*ipse* (selfhood, irreducible to any profile because constituted in fidelity to one’s commitments). Cf. *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, Study VI. The digital profile captures the *idem* and ignores the *ipse*. Yet it is the *ipse* that is the seat of freedom and responsibility.
- [3] Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, encyclical, May 2026. This is the first encyclical of his pontificate — a rare fact that testifies to the urgency the Pope attaches to this question. The convergence between the intuitions of this encyclical and the theses developed in the Oramellon collection since 2026 is not coincidental: it signals that a set of thinkers, traditions, and institutions are converging simultaneously toward the same diagnosis.

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## Notes to Chapter Three

- [1] The philosophy of attention as access to existence is developed by William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, New York, Holt, 1890, ch. 11 (“Attention”): “What I attend to is for me reality.” Yves Citton, *The Ecology of Attention*, Cambridge, Polity, 2017, updates this intuition in the digital context.
- [2] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, New York, Norton, 2010, produced one of the first rigorous analyses of the cognitive impact of hyperconnection on the capacity for deep reading and sustained concentration. His empirical observations have been confirmed by subsequent studies in cognitive neuroscience.
- [3] Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, New York, Harper & Row, 1951, p. 57 (letter to a student, 1942). The essay “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God” develops this philosophy of attention as the supreme form of presence to another. Weil: “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”

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## Notes to Chapter Four

- [1] Roger McNamee, *Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe*, New York, Penguin, 2019. McNamee, a former mentor to Zuckerberg, describes from the inside the logic of engagement maximization that governs platform design decisions.
- [2] The notion of “authentic desire” as orientation from the depth of the subject is developed by Charles Taylor under the term *strong evaluations*: preferences that engage what one truly is, not only what one

feels at this moment. Cf. *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard UP, 1989, ch. 1–2. The colonization of desire is the systematic production of *weak evaluations* — reactive preferences — at the expense of *strong evaluations*.

- [3] Jean M. Twenge, *iGen*, New York, Atria Books, 2017, and Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, New York, Penguin, 2018, empirically document the correlation between the rise of smartphones and social media among adolescents and the increase in anxious and depressive pathologies.

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## Notes to Chapter Five

- [1] The notion of discernment as a fundamental human capacity runs through the entire spiritual tradition. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* (1548), rules for discernment (nos. 313–336), offers its most systematic formulation in the Christian tradition. In the secular philosophical tradition, it is Aristotelian *phronēsis* — practical wisdom — that constitutes its equivalent.
- [2] Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*, New York, Penguin, 2011, analyzed how personalization algorithms create cognitive bubbles that impoverish discernment by systematically confirming existing biases. The contemporary democratic crisis has an irreducible algorithmic component.
- [3] This risk — the loss of inner sovereignty — is formulated in related terms by Tristan Harris (Center for Humane Technology), Bernard Stiegler (*Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stanford UP, 2010) and Byung-Chul Han (*In the Swarm*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2017). Our contribution is to provide its systematic anthropological foundation from the theory of the interpellated being.

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## Notes to Chapter Six

- [1] Frances Haugen, former product manager at Facebook, testified before the U.S. Senate in October 2021 that the company knew of the negative effects of its algorithms on teenage girls (body image, depression) and had said nothing publicly. This historic testimony illustrates the tension between the economic logic of engagement maximization and anthropological responsibility toward minors.
- [2] Maryanne Wolf, *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*, New York, Harper, 2018. Wolf, a specialist in cognitive developmental neuroscience, documents how fragmented reading habits induced by digital technology modify the neural circuits of deep attention in children, with lasting consequences for the capacity for long thought and sustained reading.
- [3] The notion of “anthropological pediatrics of the digital” is our own terminological contribution. It is inspired by pediatric medicine — which understood that the child is not a miniature adult and requires specific treatments — and transposes this into the domain of digital interpellation architectures.

## Notes to Chapter Seven

- [1] Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Cambridge, Polity, 2019, analyzes how algorithmic systems reproduce and amplify existing inequalities. Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*, New York, NYU Press, 2018, documents how search engines systematically distort the representation of minority groups.
  - [2] This intuition — that the Global South carries an anthropological resource that the North is in the process of losing — connects with the reflection of authors such as Achille Mbembé (*Critique of Black Reason*, Durham, Duke UP, 2017) and Souleymane Bachir Diagne on the philosophical value of African traditions of thought as alternatives to post-Cartesian individualism.
  - [3] Pontifical Academy for Life, *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, 2020. The reference to the “human family” comes from the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), cited in the Vatican document. Our reading radicalizes its scope: if AI must serve the entire human family, then Global South countries must have a place in the global governance of AI and platforms — not only in their regulation, but in their conception.
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## Notes to Chapter Eight

- [1] The distinction between “captation economy” and “capacitation economy” is developed in Work III of the Oramellon collection (*Toward an Ethics of Non-Capturing Presence*, 2026, Chapter 5). It also draws on Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction*, New York, Crown, 2016, which shows how algorithmic models can optimize metrics while degrading human well-being.
  - [2] Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, New York, Penguin, 2024, is one of the most documented analyses of the impact of smartphones and social media on adolescent mental health. Haidt proposes, among other measures, a minimum age of 16 for access to social networks — a measure since adopted in several countries.
  - [3] Pontifical Academy for Life, *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, 2020, “Education” section. The Vatican text is one of the rare normative documents to have integrated education as a central dimension of AI ethics. Our contribution is to give this education a precise anthropological content: not only to teach “digital skills,” but to form the capacity for free response in a world of algorithmic interpellations.
  - [4] The notion of “anthropological rights” in the digital age is developed in Work II (*The Civilization of Saturation*, 2026, Chapter 5) where we propose four new rights: right to psychic opacity, right to non-solicitation, right to cognitive disconnection, right to unpredictability.
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## Notes to Chapter Nine

- [1] The African Union published its first continental AI strategy in 2024: *AU AI Policy*. This document represents an important step forward, though still lagging behind the sophistication of the systems it

seeks to regulate. African digital sovereignty requires massive investments in training, research, and infrastructure — which cannot come exclusively from global tech powers.

- [2] Contemporary neuroscience confirms what spiritual traditions have known for millennia: the regular practice of meditation, contemplative silence, or silent prayer favorably modifies the circuits of attention and reduces stress responses. Cf. Sara Lazar et al., “Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness,” *NeuroReport*, 16/17 (2005), pp. 1893–1897.
- [3] Pontifical Academy for Life, *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, 2020, “Rights” section, principle 3 (Responsibility). The full formulation in the original document: “those who design and deploy the use of AI must proceed with responsibility and transparency.” We extend it: responsibility includes anthropological responsibility, and transparency includes transparency about the effects of architectures on the human capacity for free response.
- [4] This criterion of anthropological evaluation of AI systems is our own contribution to the debate on AI ethics. It complements existing approaches (deontological, consequentialist, virtue-based) by adding a specific anthropological dimension: the preservation of the A-R-R structure as a condition of the subject’s humanity. This criterion is developed more systematically in the Monograph *The Human and the Algorithm* (2026), Part Six.

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End of *Metanoia*. Inner Colonization and the Reconquest of the Human in the Algorithmic Age.

The Oramellon Collection — A Philosophical Vision of Human Becoming.

Not a utopia, but a direction.

## BACK COVER

*What if the digital crisis were not primarily a technical crisis, but a crisis of the human?*

At a time when artificial intelligence is profoundly reconfiguring the modes of existence, relation and thought, *Metanoia* proposes a radical displacement: to stop regarding the digital as a tool to be regulated, and to begin thinking of it as an anthropological environment to be inhabited — or refused.

The Greek word *metanoia* designates an interior turning, a conversion of the gaze. This is precisely what this essay operates: it turns the question posed to artificial intelligence back upon itself. No longer *what can AI do?* — but *what does the human being become in a world where AI structures the calls, anticipates the responses and colonises the resonances?*

Grounded in the Mahoukou Law and its triadic structure **Call — Response — Resonance**, this text maintains that the human being is defined not by what it produces nor by what it calculates, but by the irreducible quality of its response to what calls it. *Respondeo ergo sum*: I respond, therefore I am. And it is precisely this capacity for free response — condition of all dignity, all relation, all transcendence — that contemporary algorithmic architectures threaten in their very structure.

*Metanoia* yields neither to technological enthusiasm nor to reactionary panic. It holds the line of a demanding lucidity and a grounded hope: that of a human being capable, if it consents to the necessary turning, of remaining the subject of its own existence in the age of algorithms.

*A foundational essay. A compass for our time.*

**Christian Mahoukou** is a philosopher and the founder of the Mahoukou Law and the A<sup>2</sup>R triadic structure (Call–Response–Resonance). *Metanoia* is part of the **Oramellon** collection, the visionary and prospective line of *The Interpellation of the World*.