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From *je ne sais quoi* to quantified self.
A philosophical agenda

Abstract

The notion of je ne sais quoi*, whose rise characterises the decades in which the first scientific revolution marks a turning point in Western culture, tries to identify the human capacity for grasping what exceeds knowledge resulting from* logos*. But the further steps of the triumph of* logos*, starting from the second scientific revolution and its further developments, increasingly determine its fall. Moreover, the recent history of Western culture may be read as follows: we have been increasingly entrusting our understanding of what is and our prediction of what will be to an even more restricted form of rationality coinciding with* logos*, first, by progressively restricting* logos *to computation and, second, by progressively externalising computation from our minds to technologies, specifically algorithmic technologies. As such, should we think that computation is increasingly occupying the realm of* je ne sais quoi *by increasingly reckoning the unreckonable? The answer seems affirmative. In what follows, I shall critically focus on a promising case in point to try to understand the radical move from* je ne sais quoi *to computation: the case of the quantified self, which is addressed by medical humanities and sociology, but quite disregarded by philosophy – alternatively, I shall at least try to introduce the reasons why the case of the quantified self deserves a specifically philosophical study, starting from aesthetics and epistemology.*

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1. *Rise and fall of* je ne sais quoi

Interestingly enough, the rise of the notion of *je ne sais quoi* characterises the decades in which the first scientific revolution marks a turning point in Western culture (see at least Kohler 1953-4 and D'Angelo and Velotti 1997). Between the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, Descartes (1644) and Leibniz (1684 and 1704), among others (see at least Bouhours 1671), identify, on the one hand, the realm of *je ne sais quoi* and, on the other hand, the realm of science as increasingly founded on quite a restricted form of rationality coinciding with *logos*, which literally means "computation, reckoning"[1]. Alternatively, speaking of *je ne sais quoi* means speaking of what cannot be "comput[ed], reckon[ed]" at all, being even hardly known. Bouhours, the first author who explicitly theorises the notion of *je ne sais quoi*, defines it as "l'asyle de l'ignorance", "car il me semble qu'on se trouve toujours là, quand on ne sçait plus que dire" (Bouhours 1671: 344). As such, the notion of *je ne sais quoi* refers to what *logos* cannot clearly and distinctly refer to, both in the particular sphere of aesthetics (from perceiving aesthetic categories to feeling emotions) and in the general sphere of epistemology, when it comes to recognising a kind of discernment that is far from being "computation, reckoning", and yet exists. More precisely, the notion of *je ne sais quoi* tries to identify the human capacity for grasping what exceeds knowledge resulting from *logos*: we may happen to say that the crucial decision we make is founded on something we cannot even say, and yet it not only exists but also founds our own crucial decision, i.e. our own future. Thus, in the era of the first scientific revolution, the very same philosophers recognise both the triumph of *logos*, which can move from particularity to universality, i.e. universal laws applicable to particular objects, and a kind of residual realm, in which what is particular seems irreducible to what is universal – the realm of *je ne sais quoi*.

But the further steps of the triumph of *logos*, starting from the second scientific revolution and its further developments, increasingly determine the fall of the notion of *je ne sais quoi* (except for Jankélévitch 1957). More precisely, the recent history of Western culture may be read as follows: we have been increasingly entrusting our understanding

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[1] See LSJ available at http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.43:9: 139.LSJ. As for science as increasingly founded on quite a restricted form of rationality coinciding with *logos*, readings are several. See at least Schafer 2018.

of what is and our prediction of what will be to an even more restricted form of rationality coinciding with *logos*, first, by progressively restricting *logos* to computation and, second, by progressively externalising computation from our minds (considered less powerful) to technologies (considered more powerful), specifically algorithmic technologies (considered the most powerful) – thus, surprisingly enough, the recent history of Western culture may be read as our most radical externalisation of the mental capacity we have been developing the most: *logos*, which we are more and more externalising from our minds to algorithmic technologies (as I tried to argue in Chiodo 2020a and 2020b).

As such, should we think that computation is increasingly occupying the realm of *je ne sais quoi* by increasingly reckoning the unreckonable? The answer seems affirmative. In what follows, I shall critically focus on a promising case in point to try to understand the radical move from *je ne sais quoi* to computation: the case of the quantified self, which is addressed by medical humanities and sociology, but quite disregarded by philosophy – alternatively, I shall at least try to introduce the reasons why the case of the quantified self deserves a specifically philosophical study, starting from aesthetics and epistemology.

2. *The quantified self*

The notion of quantified self was introduced in 2007 by Kelly and Wolf, editors of "Wired", to define their way to obtain "self knowledge through numbers", as the quantified self website reports[2]. Since then, the quantified self has become both a community of followers using self-tracking technologies to obtain "self knowledge through numbers" and an academic research institute, i.e. the Quantified Self Institute in Groningen, funded by the Hanze University of Applied Science with the support of the Quantified Self Labs in San Francisco[3]. Wolf's logic may be articulated as follows:

1. what was defined as *je ne sais quoi* does not work at all: if we "steer by guesswork. We go with our gut" (Wolf 2010), then "We make errors of fact and errors of judgment" (Wolf 2010);

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[2] See https://quantifiedself.com/.
[3] See https://qsinstitute.com/.

2. but there is a way out: "If you want to replace the vagaries of intuition with something more reliable, you first need to gather data. Once you know the facts, you can live by them" (Wolf 2010);

3. and, if the objection is that self-knowledge exceeds computable data, then the answer is that "numbers are infiltrating the last redoubts of the personal. Sleep, exercise, sex, food, mood, location, alertness, productivity, even spiritual well-being are being tracked and measured" (Wolf 2010): "Numbers are making their way into the smallest crevices of our lives" (Wolf 2009). More precisely, "Trackers are exploring an alternate route. Instead of interrogating their inner worlds through talking and writing" (Wolf 2010) and seeking "a truth buried at a deeper level" (Wolf 2010), "they are using numbers. They are constructing a quantified self" (Wolf 2010);

4. finally, "numbers have won fair and square" (Wolf 2010): we have definitely moved from what "was inscribed at the temple of Apollo at Delphi" (Wolf 2009), i.e. "Know Thyself" (Wolf 2009), to the quantified self.

As such, the quantified self results not only from self-tracking one's health issues (from healthy individuals' number of steps to cardiopathic individuals' number of heartbeats) but also from self-tracking what has been thought of as unreckonable by definition, such as one's happiness (even Leibniz recognised that speaking of happiness means speaking, at least in part, of *je ne sais quoi*. See Leibniz 1694-8).

As a case in point, we may consider the story of the app "Happsee" reported in the quantified self website[4]. A self-tracker tells his own experience as the app "Happsee"'s creator and user after having decided that he wanted "to measure his happiness and mood to improve it" and that other self-tracking technologies "did not meet his needs". The app "Happsee" is based on smartphone sensors that, through self-tracking, collect one's data to quantify one's happiness. The following points are quite meaningful from a philosophical perspective:

1. the self-tracker says that his motive was that he thought to be unhappy without knowing that he was actually unhappy: "I was in a situation where I thought I was unhappy. So I thought I was in this situation where I thought I was unhappy […]. I didn't know if I was unhappy"

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[4] See https://quantifiedself.com/show-and-tell/?project=723 also for the quotes reported.

(which means that thinking and knowing are considered as remarkably divergent);

2. the self-tracker says that his solution was to create a self-tracking technology that could make him move from thinking to knowing: "So I wanted to explore this whole space of unhappiness and how to improve it. So how do we do that? I wanted to measure my happiness and mood" (which means that knowing means quantifying);

3. the self-tracker specifies that his solution was not a matter of relying on what others did, but a matter of relying on what he himself created: "So I looked at a lot of measurements tools. […] Most of them did not suit my needs. They were either too complex. They asked me to fill out a bunch of surveys and I think a few of them actually made me angry, because I was like why am I filling out all these questions and that completely defeats the purpose of understanding whether I'm happy [*sic*]. […] So in the spirit of software I made my own tool" (which means escaping both from comparisons with others in general and from comparisons with others' expertise in particular, moving to a kind of self-referentiality);

4. the self-tracker specifies that to "suit my needs" especially means "to maximize information gathered while minimizing the information I actually had to type in because I'm lazy" (which means that being tailor-made may mean being nothing but idiosyncratic);

5. the self-tracker specifies that what he actually did was "enter[ing] in some moods. I entered in how happy I was on a zero to ten scale", and his app made graphs and maps also based on passive data such as geographical position (which means contradicting the first point: the self-tracker actually "entered in" what he thought of himself, even if his starting point was the idea according to which what he knew about himself was remarkably divergent from what he thought of himself);

6. yet, the self-tracker concludes that "uncertain is dropping. Stressed was in don't know [*sic*] […] and my positive moods have […] been going up" (which, paradoxically enough, may mean that, if what I argued in the previous point is correct, then improving happiness results from improving a kind of knowledge that is not well-founded);

7. finally, the self-tracker concludes not only that he learned that "when I started to get less tired, I started to get a lot happier" but also that in the future he "want[s] to use machine learning to predict happiness" (which means that, even if we may think that the ultimate result of his self-tracking is quite obvious, he thinks that predicting obviousness is important);

8. moreover, the self-tracker adds that "I'm lazy, and the one thing that gets me annoyed a little bit is […] to make a lot of entries to tell the system how happy I am. What if it could just pick that up from passive data[?]" (which means, again, that we may identify both a kind of epistemological circularity, in that happiness as the output is founded on happiness as the input, and a kind of epistemological surrender, in that human alertness progressively decreases).

The quantified self website reports several analogous experiences of self-tracking: in the section "Show & Tell", we can find hundreds of self-trackers' videos with their transcripts. I must specify that most of them may be unquestionably useful when it comes to managing unhealthy individuals' health issues (it is no coincidence that health is a priority if we consider the official list of self-trackers' experiences: "chronic condition, cognition, diet & weight loss, environment, food tracking, genome & microbiome, heart rate & cardiovascular, location, media, metabolism, money, mood & emotion, other, ovulatory cycle & pregnancy, productivity, sleep, social life & social media, sports & fitness, stress"[5]). Yet, unquestionable usefulness seems to pair with equally unquestionable puzzles, which exceed the kind of puzzles that medical humanities and sociology are addressing (for instance, the notion of personal science in the former case, starting from Wolf and De Groot 2020 and Heyen 2020, and the relationship between privacy and surveillance in the latter case, starting from Lupton 2012 and 2016) – there are also specific, and urgent, philosophical puzzles that deserve more attention.

3. *Philosophical puzzles*

In what follows, I shall start from my analysis of self-tracking through the app "Happsee" to try to identify the reasons why the case of the quantified self deserves a specifically philosophical study, starting from aesthetics and epistemology.

My eight points may be clustered into two philosophical issues. The primary philosophical issue is epistemological, and I may outline the following reasoning:

[5] See https://quantifiedself.com/show-and-tell/.

1. *quantification results from externalisation*: knowledge moves from an internal dimension, i.e. human thought (together with human *je ne sais quoi*), to an external dimension, i.e. technological computation;
2. and *externalisation results in risking decreasing human capabilities*, from alertness in particular to critical thinking in general, also because of the escape from comparisons with other individuals exercising critical thinking;
3. more precisely, among the human capabilities that risk decreasing, *human expertise risks being sabotaged by a form of epistemological anarchism*, not only because human capabilities such as alertness and critical thinking risk decreasing but also because the role of the expert (for instance, the role of the doctor) risks being substituted by the role of technologies supposed to provide self-knowledge (for instance, by the role of apps supposed to provide self-diagnoses);
4. and *epistemological anarchism means the crisis of the ideal model* as the most powerful epistemological tool invented by Western culture to know both oneself and others: we seem to move from knowing what is particular by referring to what is universal as the ideal model to knowing what is particular by referring to what is particular, in a triumph of self-referentiality leading to obviousness.

The secondary philosophical issue is aesthetic, and I may outline the following reasoning:
1. the triumph of epistemological self-referentiality may be translated into the triumph of aesthetic self-referentiality, and in particular into the triumph of *idiosyncratic self-perception*: my self-image moves from being assessed through a comparison with others, i.e. ideal models and also other individuals, to being assessed through a comparison with me, i.e. my data over time (which I can easily manipulate[6]);
2. and *idiosyncratic self-perception may mean oversimplification*: for instance, the actually complex meaning of happiness is deprived of the infinite intake provided by ideal models and also by other individuals, and becomes what happiness is exclusively for me myself on the basis of me myself.

Both in the case of the epistemological issue and in the case of the aesthetic issue, a form of anarchism seems to emerge: literally, "anarchism" as the radicalisation of "anarchy" means radical "absence" (*an*) of something that "rules" (*archo*) – "anarchism" means radical "ruler-

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[6] Several sociologists work on self-manipulation of data. See at least Lupton 2018.

lessness". And it is precisely radical "rulerlessness" that we seem to obtain both from an epistemological perspective and from an aesthetic perspective (see also the last paragraph).

4. *Clues from medical humanities and sociology*

Medical humanities and sociology help us understand the phenomenon of the quantified self by distinguishing it both from the notion of citizen science and from the notion of N-of-1. In the case of citizen science, experts do not disappear at all. Alternatively, experts and ordinary people collaborate to help the formers' research when it comes to investigating issues requiring a great amount of data. Thus, citizen science keeps aiming "at creating generalizable knowledge" (Wolf and De Groot: 4): the essence of science, as it is thought of in Western culture, does not change – science keeps being a matter of moving from particularity to universality. Also in the case of N-of-1, experts do not disappear at all. Alternatively, experts work on a clinical trial in which an individual coincides with the clinical trial itself. But individual case study does not mean stopping universalising: N-of-1 keeps aiming at "deliver[ing] results that simultaneously provide personal benefit, are clinically practical, and create generalizable knowledge that can be broadly applicable" (Wolf and De Groot 2020: 3. See also Mirza *et al.* 2017).

The phenomenon of the quantified self is quite different. Its own introducers define it as personal science (but the question to ask may be whether it is science at all). Wolf and De Groot, after having defined "personal science as the practice of using empirical methods to explore personal questions" (Wolf and De Groot 2020: 2), assert that "Copious material exemplifying this practice can be reviewed in the public archive of the Quantified Self community" (Wolf and De Groot 2020: 2). The notion of personal science comes, first, from Polanyi's stress on subjectivity in scientific practice, from discovery to validation (see Polanyi 1958), and, second, from other scholars' reflections upon the relationship between knower and knowledge, with recent stress on the quantified self (see especially Heyen 2020 but also Martin and Brouwer 1993 and De Groot *et al.* 2017). According to its own introducers, who "envision a world of personal scientists" (Wolf and De Groot 2020: 4), the quantified self can be defined as personal science in that, differently both from citizen science and from N-of-1, one and the same individual is at the same time: first, the investigator ("non-professionals occupy most, if not all, of

the significant roles in research […] [that] is self-directed: the subject of the research is also the primary investigator", Wolf and De Groot 2020: 4); second, the investigated ("The selection of topics and questions […] are determined by the researcher's personal motive alone", Wolf and De Groot 2020: 4); third, the investigation's user ("the discoveries are applicable directly by the person doing the research", Wolf and De Groot 2020: 4). And, if it is true that the community of followers using self-tracking technologies organises meetings (see the section "Show & Tell" in the quantified self website), it is also true that "public presentations of self-tracking research at meetups or conferences make hardly any references to other self-trackers and their activities. In this respect as well, personal science is a very self-related affair" (Heyen 2020: 133).

Before going back to my argument according to which the phenomenon of the quantified self may be read, from a philosophical perspective, in terms of rulerlessness, and more precisely in terms of anarchism, let us collect other clues from medical humanities and sociology.

The experience of escaping from ruling counterparts is emphasised. On the one hand, authors point out that self-trackers describe their experiences as "liberating" (Sharon and Zandbergen 2017: 1702), specifically from doctors, i.e. experts, but also from institutions (see Ferretti 2019). It is no coincidence that a reference point is Roberts, self-tracker and psychologist praised by Wolf "for being disloyal to the professional, institutional version of science, for not conforming to scientific rituals" (reported in Sharon 2017: 110. See also Wolf 2010). Finally, as a journalist's investigation reports, there is a correlation between "having outsourced the production of one's own subjectivity" (Horning 2013) and "free[ing] subject for higher level thinking/curating/consuming" (Horning 2013), which makes us go back to the issue of decreasing not only human expertise in particular but also human capabilities in general. On the other hand, authors point out that the phenomenon of the quantified self is rooted in the "tradition of high-tech counterculturalism and digital resistance" (Sharon and Zandbergen 2017: 1703), "in which digital technologies have often been configured as subversive tools of resistance in the hands of individuals" (Sharon 2017: 111. See also Turner 2006).

Escaping from ruling counterparts leads to the following conclusion, emphasised by several authors: self-referentiality ends up coinciding with a kind of narcissism that may be addressed in quite an interesting way. It seems to reveal a notion of self that emerges from a kind of exceptionalism. First, the quantified self is a matter of moving from N-of-1

to N-of-me, in that "the idea is that what is 'good', 'right', or 'healthy' for one person differs for every individual is a fundamental axiom" (Sharon 2017: 109). Second, if I am the one and only who can know myself, then I also become a kind of creator of myself, not only in terms of "promot[ing] the idea of entrepreneurial individuals becoming the ultimate authors and creators of their own lives" (Ruckenstein and Pantzar 2017: 411, together with several scholars working on the neoliberal notion of self) but also in terms of fostering the idea of a kind of self-indulgent self-referentiality, as it were – more precisely, the idea of a kind of self-indulgent self-referentiality in which *I have no actual rules precisely because there is nothing but my own self as the exception*.

It is no coincidence that quite an interesting metaphor circulates in the community of the quantified self: the metaphor of the mirror, which substitutes the metaphor of the window. Self-knowledge moves from a matter of looking at a closed inner truth, which can be seen by using thought as a window, to a matter of looking at a disclosed outer truth, which can be seen by using technology as a mirror: the truth about me is nothing but the numbers displayed.

Consequently, the notion of authenticity changes. Speaking of authenticity as living by adhering to one's truth does not mean speaking of active forms of self-analysis, as it were, such as writing. In Western culture, writing has been for millennia the privileged way to explore and adhere to one's truth, especially starting from Augustine's *Confession* (see Walker Rettberg 2014). Alternatively, our technological era seems characterised by a move from writing (we should also think of the limited number of characters allowed by popular social media) to computing, i.e. making technologies compute for us – we seem to move from more active forms of self-analysis, in which our authenticity results from us as explorers of ourselves, to more passive forms of self-analysis, in which our authenticity results from technologies as explorers of ourselves. In the former case, the output is qualitative: we may say that it is somehow analogous to Kant's reflective judgment, which makes us reflect for a longer time, since we cannot get to the ultimate truth about ourselves. In the latter case, the output is quantitative: we may say that it is somehow analogous to Kant's determinative judgment, which makes us reflect for a shorter time, if any, since, outwardly, we can get to the ultimate truth about ourselves, even if, inwardly, the truth we can get to is not well-founded, as we have already seen.

As such, we seem to go a step further: a quantified truth displayed outside may lead to a "future self […] that is spatially expanded, with a

broad suite of exosenses – the exoself" (Swan 2013: 95). The notion of exoself goes a step further than existing reflections upon technologies as prostheses, in that it refers to something specific: wearable technologies that quantify us, specifically the phenomenon of the quantified self, in that, "Once equipped with QS [quantified self] devices, an individual body becomes a knowable, calculable, and administrable object. Exoself technology could be a sort of fourth-person perspective that facilitates the conveyance of humans into a new realm of extended self" (Swan 2013: 96). Yet, self-trackers themselves seem to resist. It is worth reporting two testimonies, at least. The first self-tracker writes: "We (The Apps and I) had co-constructed a digital model of my self, and here I was, managing myself, it seems, by proxy. The feedback from that digital model often took precedence over how I physically felt. When I didn't eat 'enough' protein I felt weaker, and when I had too much sugar I felt fatter. These were delayed reactions; a re-reading of my body from the model. I've yet to decide: is this model pushing me closer in contact or further away from my self and my world?" (Williams 2013: 3. I should specify that "the model" reported is not the ideal model as it is thought of in Western culture, but the numbers displayed). The self-tracker's question may be translated into the following philosophical issue: there is no coincidence at all between one's quantified self and one's self, and, if the former is thought to coincide with the latter, then the risk is to increasingly reduce one's self to one's quantified self – the risk is to increasingly reduce one's unlimited self (*je ne sais quoi* included) to one's limited quantified self, starting by reducing, for instance, the former's infinite aspirations to the latter's finite needs. The second self-tracker writes in verse: "Yes, I did it. / On a crisp Tuesday morning / after 40 measurements a day for 1,5 years / I. Stopped. Tracking. / Why? / […] I had stopped trusting myself / letting the numbers drown out / my intuition / my instincts[.] / Each day / my self-worth was tied to the data[.] / One pound heavier this morning? / You're fat. / 2 g too much fat ingested? / You're out of control. / Skipped a day of running? / You're lazy"[7]. From a philosophical perspective, we can identify two interesting issues, at least. First, complexity, such as the meanings of being "out of control" and being "lazy", risks being reduced to simplism, such as "2 g too much fat ingested" as what proves one's being "out of control" and "Skipped a day of running" as what proves one's being "lazy". Second, simplism re-

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[7] See https://quantifiedself.com/blog/why-i-stopped-tracking/.

sulting from quantification may mean losing the sense of the whole (*je ne sais quoi* included), which may be essential to grasp the sense of an individual particular.

Thus, medical humanities and sociology provide us with several clues to reflect upon the phenomenon of the quantified self from a philosophical perspective. In what follows, I shall try to outline a possible agenda.

5. *A philosophical agenda*

I have already proposed to cluster the philosophical puzzles emerging from the phenomenon of the quantified self into two issues.

The epistemological issue has to do with the idea according to which quantification results from externalisation, and externalisation results in risking decreasing human capabilities, starting from human expertise. I have also proposed a specific notion to read the issue described: epistemological anarchism, which also means the crisis of the ideal model. Finally, clues from medical humanities and sociology seem to confirm the idea of epistemological anarchism in terms of escaping from ruling counterparts both when they are ideal models, i.e. universality, as counterparts of particulars (of individuals) and when they are other particulars (other individuals), ending up establishing a kind of exceptionalism, whose self-referentiality leads to simplism.

The aesthetic issue has to do with the idea according to which idiosyncratic self-perception triumphs, and ends up meaning oversimplification. Finally, clues from medical humanities and sociology seem to confirm both the idea of idiosyncratic self-perception and the idea of oversimplification by stressing the notion of exoself as a self-referential being coinciding with the hendiadys "The Apps and I", whose oversimplified authenticity coincides with the quantification displayed.

Three continuously recurring ideas may be identified:
1. the idea of *externalisation*, which also means that if, on the one hand, humans increasingly externalise their prerogatives from themselves to technologies, starting from a necessarily autonomous critical thinking, then, on the other hand, technologies increasingly obtain human prerogatives. It is no coincidence that the word "autonomy" is progressively used to describe technologies (for instance, autonomous vehicles), even if, paradoxically enough, it is precisely the word chosen by Kant to identify one of humans' most distinguishing prerogatives (see Chiodo forthcoming);

2. the idea of *particularisation* (self-referentiality included) versus the idea of universalisation (referentiality included). It is no coincidence that the notion of personalised medicine is progressively emerging in health care[8];

3. the idea of *simplism* versus the idea of complexity. Yet, complexity is precisely what characterises our era the most. Should we think that we are (desperately) trying to neutralise complexity by trying to rely on (desperately) simplifying technologies?

The philosophical agenda we may derive from the issues listed even exceed epistemology and aesthetics (even if epistemological issues seem to found several other philosophical issues). From the perspective of the history of philosophy, we may start from asking in what past philosophical traditions we may find the roots of the phenomenon described, specifically in terms of externalisation, particularisation and simplism. Metaphysics may play a key role, starting from the following question: what is the essence of being human, if it is true that we are substituting what the notion of human identity has meant for millennia, starting from the notion of human autonomy, with quite an opposite notion of human identity? Ethics may also play a key role, together with political philosophy (when it comes to translating an ethical vision into a political vision) and philosophy of law (when it comes to translating a political vision into laws). For instance, what is the ethical scenario we are likely to get to if we keep increasing individualism? Consequently, what are the political scenario and the legal scenario we are likely to get to, from balancing rights and duties to managing privacy and data exploitation? Philosophy of mind may address epistemological issues from its own perspective, starting from the externalisation of capacities from human minds to technologies. Philosophy of science may also address epistemological issues from its own perspective, starting from the crisis of the ideal model as a possible symptom of the transformation of science as we have thought of it for millennia. Finally, a promising task of philosophy may coincide with a metaphilosophical reflection upon the role philosophers may, and even should, play in our era, specifically in our technological era. For instance, if it is true that the phenomenon of the quantified self may be read as an attempt to escape from an expo-

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[8] See the definition provided by the European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/health-research-and-innovation/personalised-medicine_en. See also Dickenson 2013.

nentially increasing complexity by reducing it to the numbers displayed, then it is also true that philosophers may, and even should, explain what follows: first, that complexity may be thought of as an opportunity, and not as a danger (in that, especially in a global world, it is the idea of complexity versus the idea of simplism what can provide humans with the ethical aptitude to inclusion), and, second, that complexity may be managed, and even exploited, without falling into reductionism, in that, even if, at least in Western culture, the restricted form of rationality coinciding with *logos*, i.e. "computation, reckoning", have won out over other forms of rationality for millennia, other forms of rationality do exist, from *metis* as complementary to *logos* to wisdom as complementary to computation – thus, one of the most promising things philosophers may, and even should, do for the future is to work on a possible reactivation of other forms of rationality complementary to computation, since using the latter without using the formers at all may easily mean disregarding crucial portions of reality, as it were (self included).

If it makes sense, then the philosophical agenda may be quite assorted. Yet, I keep stressing the roles that aesthetics and epistemology may play as founding, in that it is precisely their joint action that may provide us not only with other forms of rationality complementary to computation but also with other forms of awareness, as it were, complementary to rationality. My last sentence may sound even heretical in the era of the triumph of computation. Yet, on the one hand, Western culture itself continuously proves the request for alternatives, from *metis* (which, interestingly enough, arises precisely when *logos* arises) to *je ne sais quoi* (which, interestingly enough, arises precisely when the first scientific revolution arises) to wisdom (which, interestingly enough, characterises eras equally characterised by the triumph of *logos*, starting from the second scientific revolution and its further developments. See Maxwell 1984, Nozick 1989, Zagzebski 1996, Lehrer *et al.* 1996, Ryan 1999, Tiberius 2008, Whitcomb 2012 and Kekes 2020). On the other hand, the phenomenon of the quantified self, as an emblem of the triumph of *logos*, seems to prove that computing may mean failing to obtain what one actually needs to know (as the two testimonies reported show). Thus, the joint action of aesthetics and epistemology may be a most promising tool to extend human awareness beyond human and technological computation – the joint action of aesthetics and epistemology may be a most promising tool to make human awareness capable of facing the exponentially increasing complexity characterising our era.

6. *The quantified self as anarchism*

More precisely, as we have already seen (and as I tried to argue in Chio-do 2020a by addressing other technologies), a promising starting point may be reading the phenomenon of the quantified self, together with several analogous technological phenomena, as a form of anarchism — as a form of anarchism, first, to understand and, second, to try to over-come through the philosophical work on extending human awareness.

The necessarily limited length of an article allows nothing but a sketch of the reasons why the phenomenon of the quantified self may be read as a form of anarchism (which goes beyond the scope of this ar-ticle). Thus, I briefly propose the two crucial reasons I can identify.

The first reason is that the quantified self can show radical rulerless-ness in terms of *removing the role of the expert as a mediator*. As we have seen, what distinguishes the quantified self both from the notion of citizen science and from the notion of N-of-1 is the expert's disap-pearance. The self-tracker, i.e. the non-expert, is who individually de-cides both what data to consider and how to consider it, ending up al-most substituting, and even actually substituting, the doctor as the ex-pert who is the mediator of knowledge (several examples show that, on the one hand, the reason why self-tracking is "liberating", as we have al-ready seen, is that, for instance, "tracking your weight yourself and hav-ing a doctor put you on a scale are not the same", Sharon and Zandber-gen 2017: 1702. On the other hand, cases in which the self-tracker diag-noses a disease before the doctor are exalted: "Larry Smarr, for exam-ple, whose self-tracking led him to detect he had Crohn's disease before his doctor did, is often referred to as somewhat of a QS hero", Sharon and Zandbergen 2017: 1702. Needless to say how dangerous the itera-tion of the attitude described may be).

The second reason is that the quantified self can show radical rul-erlessness in terms of even *trying, together with several other digital technologies, to replace the role of a transcendent god by creating a to-tally immanent technological entity characterised by the typical ontolog-ical prerogatives of the divine: omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence and inscrutability*. Yet, the typical ontological prerogatives of the divine move from particularity's counterpart serving as particularity's rule to particularity itself — and removing one's counterpart serving as one's rule by abolishing both the very notion of counterpart (since there is nothing but what one establishes as "The Apps and I") and the very no-tion of rule (since there is nothing but the kind of randomness that re-

sults from removing experts and expertise) may be thought of as the most radical anarchic move we have ever experienced in the history of Western culture. More precisely, "The Apps and I" may be thought of as an entity that, outwardly, is omnipresent (our apps are always with us), omniscient (our apps know us best), omnipotent (our apps make us do what we do) and inscrutable (our apps are algorithmic black boxes), but, inwardly, its omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence and inscrutability are characterised by the kind of randomness characterising any self-referential entity deprived of experts and expertise, i.e. actual counter-parts. As such, the phenomenon of the quantified self may be read as a form of anarchism, in that it is a way to abolish actual rules by making one's own rules – but one's own rules established on the removal of experts and expertise are not actual rules at all, since their very essence is sabotaged, as several examples prove also by showing a kind of self-indulgent self-referentiality in which *one has no actual rules precisely because there is nothing but one's own self as the exception*.

If it makes sense, then we should distrust both anarchism in general and the quantified self in particular for at least the following reason: if it is true that we need to make our awareness capable of facing the most complex era we have ever experienced, then it is also true that we need not to sabotage our awareness by reducing it to a kind of technological computation that may result from a kind of randomness established on a kind of rulerlessness.

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