



THE BRAINS OF DR. WEINSTEIN

GERMAIN DROOGENBROODT

*"Devices must only be used to the benefit,
not to the detriment of human beings."*
—Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker



On the 13th day of the 13th week, a nondescript, innocent-looking advertisement caught my eye:

Wanted:

WINDOW-CLEANER

Male or female

contact:

FOUNDATION FOR NEUTRALIZATION

1313 Avenue des Champs Elysées

Brussels

I had no particular diploma. I had worked in a factory for years, but it had gone bankrupt a few months ago, leaving me unemployed and looking for a new job. Window-cleaner? Why not. I wasn't afraid of heights and a company with an English name would probably be an important international company, so work was assured and on top of that, maybe a nice salary. Since there was no phone number with the ad, I looked up the company in the phone book, but strangely, the name FOUNDATION FOR NEUTRALIZATION could not be found therein. No doubt there will be other candidates, I thought, so I didn't waste any time, took my car and drove to the capital. As always, there was a busy, abundant CO₂-emitting morning traffic. But apart from a few green guys, no one worries about that anymore. Least of all the politicians who promoted the sale of electric cars—business must go on—but where one they would get the extra electricity, remained to be debated.

Although I left early, the slow traffic made me nervous. There were certainly more candidates interested in a kind of work that required neither experience nor higher studies. I was lucky. Not too far from number 1313, I found a parking space and walked hurriedly to the building in question. Somewhat to my surprise, the building was not conspicuous, rather unremarkable, even rather somber and nowhere was the name or any publicity of the company displayed on the façade which one would expect from an international foundation. Only at the right of the entrance was a button next to which, almost illegibly, I read Foundation for Neutralization. When I pressed the button with my index finger, I did not hear a bell on the other side of the door, but some kind of electronic hum. Seeing no microphone or speaker next to the bell, I waited, assuming someone would come to open the door. It took some time until I heard footsteps coming towards the door that apparently needed to be unlocked. It was opened by young woman who, somewhat to my surprise, was wearing an army uniform which, however, did not obscure her apparently elegant body. Her lips were also trimmed light pink as was her pretty face with makeup that contrasted with that drab army uniform.

‘You are probably coming for that job as a window-cleaner?’ she asked with a somewhat strange smile. I replied affirmative. ‘

Please follow me’ she said kindly.



At the end of a long, bare corridor, was a lift. With her long index finger, whose nail was colored pale pink, she pressed a button that caused a soft murmur. A few moments later, the lift arrived and its door opened invitingly.

‘Get in, please,’ said the young woman, joined me and sent the lift what I thought to be the third floor, but the lift went up higher and stopped with a little jolt at the thirteenth floor.

The lift door slid open, and with a hand gesture she invited me to follow her. About five meters farther was a metal door, painted in army green and to its right a box with a dozen buttons where the lady pressed a code, causing the metal door, which actually looked more like a gate than a door, slid open with a soft squeak. Behind the door was another door that seemed to open automatically and again revealed a very long, narrow corridor with a lot of doors—also painted in green. The interior looked more like a military barrack, which one would not immediately expect in this area of luxurious buildings, with several foreign embassies in the vicinity, including that of the United States of America. I followed my female companion who stepped towards the second door and knocked on it. The door opened immediately. Behind a rather large desk on which were all kinds of computer-like soft-spinning devices sat a tall man who invited me with a gesture of his hand to take a seat opposite him. Like my companion, he also wore an army uniform on which at least a dozen medals and badges of honor were pinned. What heroic deeds did generals and kings perform—even in peacetime—to earn so many decorations I always wondered. And why are women, like my companion, not honored with them?

‘You come for the job of window- cleaner?’ the uniformed man asked, stroking his hand briefly through his long but neatly groomed beard. I nodded affirmatively, still somewhat impressed by the rather strange reception.

‘Working hours are 9am to 4pm with a 2-hour lunch break. One and a half months' holiday every year, but no longer than a week each time. Your salary is 5,000 euros and is paid in cash at the end of the month and adjusted annually for inflation,’ he said. Five thousand euros! That was double what I had expected. Despite the strange atmosphere, I did not hesitate a second and, without reading the text, put my signature on the form the uniformed man presented.

‘Fine, then we will see you tomorrow at 9 o’clock,’ the man said, stood up and stretched out his hand for a handshake.

I felt a gentle pressure on my back. The lady who apparently had been standing behind me the whole time gently urged me to leave the place. I followed her through the somewhat dark corridor to the lift that was still there. We got in and descended. She asked if I were satisfied.

I nodded. She led me to the exit and said with her friendly, rather strange smile.

‘See you tomorrow,’ and I heard how she locked the outer door behind me.

Wonderful! After months of unemployment, I had a job again! The washing of windows would not be very tiring, and the building seemed not to have many windows. On top of that, these were attractive working hours and a generous salary. What more could I wish? Yet a strange feeling crept over me. Not just the building and the military uniforms, but even though I had no inferiority complex, I wondered why I had gotten the job so quickly. The uniformed officer had not even asked about my previous work or whether I had ever been a window-cleaner. Was I the only candidate then? The ad was in one of the country's leading newspapers, and a long epidemic had caused a lot



of businesses to go bankrupt, resulting in higher unemployment. Strange. But I shoved off the doubts and looked forward to my first day at work.

The next day I got up early, quite nervous, probably because it was my first working day. In order not to be late, I was already at the entrance of the building at a quarter to nine. Should I ring the bell or was that not appropriate, I wondered. Maybe it was more convenient to wait a little bit. I didn't want to give a bad impression and I walked back and forth, regularly checking my wristwatch, because I neither wanted to be late. When the hand indicated five to nine, I decided to call.

Exactly like the previous day, I heard an electronic buzzing on the other side of the door. A few minutes later, the door was unlocked, and it was again the young woman who opened the door. She was still wearing the same army uniform, but instead of army trousers she was now wearing a rather short skirt that touched just above her knees and showed off her elegant legs. On her face, again, that friendly, rather strange smile.

'Welcome to your first day at work!' she said, let me in, and made a sign to follow her. Like the previous day, the lift took us to the thirteenth floor. Somebody had apparently already prepared everything one needs for my job. Even a small ladder. The corridor was rather narrow, but very long with a door every five meters on either side. As far as I could see, they were all identical with a metal handle and on the right side of each door a small keyboard. Would there be an office with uniformed or non-uniformed employees behind each door, I wondered. But I did not hear any voice.

'All rooms are the same and all have a window,' the young lady informed me.

'The idea is that you clean the windows one after the other, and when you are all the way around you start again from the beginning. To gain access, you normally have to press a code, but during working hours, you don't have to, and you can enter anywhere to clean the windows. My office is next to the director's. For any information you can come to me. Under no circumstance, may the director be disturbed. I am the only one having the code to open the door to his office. I will come to see you at noon so you can go out for lunch if you wish. See you later, she said, opened the first door, smiled and left.

To my surprise, there was nobody in that rather spacious place, but the walls were full of numerous electronic, computer-like rigs that blinked red and green at irregular intervals and hummed softly. The windows had apparently not been cleaned for quite some time, they were gray with dust on the outside. Below each window was a small balcony on which I could place the ladder I had been given. Fortunately, I was not afraid of heights, because below the balcony yawned a dark probably fifty-meter-deep abyss.

I immediately set to work. After cleaning the windows of the first room, I opened the door of the next one. There was no one there, either, but identically as in the first, the walls were full of blinking and buzzing electronic devices. Would all those rooms be identical and full of electronic devices? The name of the company came to mind: 'FOUNDATION FOR NEUTRALIZATION'. Was the whole building full of computers? Strange though was that there was apparently no one in any place to operate those rigs. Was it the bearded one who controlled all those harnesses? And what were they actually used for, I asked myself. Was the world then so evolved that people were



no longer needed at all, and one person had so much power to control, program, and make everything work to his liking?

After cleaning the windows of the third room, I could no longer contain my curiosity. The long corridor was dead silent. With the doors closed, one could not even hear the hum of the computers. There was no one to be seen. I decided to walk soundlessly to the end of the long corridor. And yes, both left and right everything appeared the same, the same doors, the same rooms packed with flashing, buzzing electronic rigs. Halfway, I thought to turn back and continue cleaning the windows one by one, as I had been instructed, when I noticed that just a little beyond the middle of the corridor on the left was a door, significantly larger than the other doors, on which was painted in large red letters *'Room of Geniuses, ACCESS STRONGLY PROHIBITED!'*

The uniformed lady had not said whether or not I had to clean the windows of that place, but since it was so clearly indicated in red that its access was strictly forbidden, that would certainly be for everyone, including me. But why was the access prohibited? Curious, I pressed my ear against the cold metal of the door lock. No, I heard nothing . . . or . . . unlike the sound of the electronic rigs in the other rooms, I heard a faint completely different sound. It was not a humming, it was more like the sighing of a human being. But apart from the bearded one and the woman, there was no living creature here. Maybe a window is open, and the sound is from the wind, I thought, but I still found it strange. To the right of the door, as with the other doors, there was also a keypad. Would one have to press a different code on it, or would this door also not be closed during working hours. I wondered. I could barely contain my curiosity, but no. Now that I had obtained this generously paid job after months without work, I did not want to risk losing it because of my curiosity, and I went back to where I had last cleaned the windows. It was almost noon. I had just returned as the young lady came to me and pointed with her right index finger to the watch on her left wrist. Almost twelve! Lucky, she didn't see me at that door, I thought, and smiled at her.

'Good afternoon. You have been working well I see', she said, apparently pleased with my work. I did not know the neighborhood and had not seen a bar or small restaurant anywhere. If one could eat something nearby, preferably not too expensive, I asked her. "Not near here actually," she said. "But I have some myself, too much for me alone. If you want, we can eat something together in my office," she said, put her arm around me and led me to her spacious office. In the middle of her office was a low table on which she had apparently prepared lunch. Even two plates. The second plate might be for the bearded one, whom I called "the general" for myself, I thought upon entering. But she invited me to sit in the seat at the little table and sat down opposite me. Her dress had been pushed up a little higher, showing her slender legs. She apparently took pleasure in my admiring her legs and did not pull her dress down but smiled at me. Not just her legs, her face was seductively beautiful. She was also quite young. Barely thirty, I estimated. She poured me a glass of beer and invited me to eat something. If I liked the work, she wanted to know. I nodded affirmatively.

I wanted to ask her what all those electronic devices were for and, yes, actually, mainly what was in that place to which access was forbidden. But asking that seemed rather rude. She had apparently guessed my thoughts.

'This building with all those electronic rigs is actually the most important part of a system that operates worldwide and controls everything,' she said.



‘It is the engine room of an immense company; you could call it its brain. The owner is one of the richest people in the world, maybe even the richest. He has businesses all over the world, so his capital grows by day and by night. He is not a benefactor, however, but he is obsessed by technology in which he has largely invested his capital. His international company employs not only the most intelligent specialists worldwide, but also the most intelligent computers and the most important ones are set up here. They design the most sophisticated things. The latest is a swimming goggles like device that allows wearers to project themselves into the strangest places or circumstances, not only those of the present but also those of the future and even the past. For example, you key in the September 11 Twin Towers date, and a moment later you can choose whether you want to be just a spectator, a victim, or a terrorist. The device is still being developed, but one suspects that, just as there is hardly a human being left who is not addicted to the so-called Smartphone, soon everyone will be wearing such Smart Glasses which will not only make the entrepreneur even richer, but will allow him to control and dominate the people wearing it—anywhere in the world—more than any dictator ever.

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. But the woman was serious, and as she spoke, even the smile had disappeared from her beautiful face. Where had I ended up? I didn't immediately know what to say. Had even forgotten to continue eating. "Aren't you hungry anymore?" the woman asked kindly and smiled again as if she had said nothing serious before. I took another bite, but my hunger was over. With her right hand, she poured a cup of coffee and with her left she stroked my right hand briefly. Her hand was soft but felt cold. On her arm, just above her wrist, she had a small tattoo; but what it meant I could not immediately decipher. Apparently, she had noticed that I had seen the strange tattoo. "The writing is Chinese, it means TAO, translated into English as 'The Road,'" she explained. "Unlike the digital devices that addict and affect people's lives, the TAO leaves doing and thinking free. I studied Chinese philosophy, but see me now, surrounded by devices that have made us forget to think," she said and smiled exposing her beautiful teeth.

‘Are you married?’ she asked, completely unexpectedly.

But as if my answer were unimportant, she immediately continued,

‘I am a widow. My husband died. He was also a window cleaner,’ and as if she wanted to avoid my question, she immediately continued speaking.

‘No, he did not crash here, but with his car. A road accident. People still tried to resuscitate him, but they did not succeed. I had no job then and they hired me as a secretary here immediately, a year ago.’

After lunch, I went back to cleaning. Nothing special happened for the rest of the day, although everything the woman had told me kept reverberating in my mind. Even as I drove home between polluting, honking cars. Soon they will all be driving computer-controlled, I thought to myself. But what will they do if such a vehicle, without a human driver, carrying goods, causes an accident and injures people? Will it then call an ambulance of its own accord, pre-programmed describing exactly what had happened? And if all employees will have been replaced by computers, who will pay their salaries, how will they survive?



Normally, I had a steady, dreamless sleep, but that night I was haunted by strange dreams. Again and again, I seemed to find myself not in my bedroom, but in one of the rooms where I had previously cleaned the windows where The General, who had apparently lost control of the rigs, was desperately trying to quiet the no longer buzzing but loudly whooping, protesting machines that also surfaced. Still a little tired from too little sleep, I drove to the company where everything was going normally, and like the previous days, the charming lady opened the door and kindly, even seductively, smiling, led me to my work and wished me a pleasant working day.

The long corridor was dead silent. Only when I entered the room could the hum of the apparently day-and-night functioning machines be heard. Everything the secretary had told me about the globally present company had further whetted my curiosity. After cleaning the windows of one of the rooms, I could no longer contain my curiosity.

I scanned the long corridor. Looked left, looked right. No, there was no one, NONE! And yet, as I approached the room 'PROHIBITED ACCESS', I thought I heard a voice, a very faint, male voice. Could I be suffering from schizophrenia, hearing voices all the time? To listen better, I held my breath. But I heard nothing at all. Would I dare to open the door? I looked behind me for a moment, the corridor was empty. Would I? But my hand did not hesitate. Despite the ban, this door too was apparently unlocked and opened silently. The walls of the "Dark Room" as I had named it in my mind was painted all black. But the room was not dark; on the contrary, it was bathed in an immoderately energy-wasting artificial light. There were no windows. The walls were bare. Not like the other rooms full of electronic gear, only at the back, against the wall where there was a window in the other rooms, were strange devices, exactly as I had seen them in my dream the previous night. Devices with flashing lights, buttons and switches connected to a number of glass bells. Under each glass bell connected to the devices was something that I couldn't immediately recognize entering the room; but it seemed, though barely visible, to be moving. Not the glass bells, but what was underneath was apparently connected to the electronic harnesses. for a second, I thought of the image of my father, when before he died in a hospital, he was connected to several plastic tubes, which were connected to a device that showed his heartbeat.

One of the glass bells, which were all the same size, was significantly larger than the others. When I approached the large glass bell close enough for me to see the moving something, I was startled and could not believe my eyes. Under the glass bell was a mouth! No, not an image of it, but a real apparently living HUMAN mouth that was constantly moving, just as if it were speaking. A mouth with gray, slightly wrinkled lips, like those found in older people. I felt nauseated. Was this reality or hallucination?

How can amputated lips, how can a mouth move independently, articulate animatedly, as if talking, praying, or swearing? At both ends, left and right, the upper lip was sewn to the lower lip. At the back of the lips were tiny needles, tubes, and gossamer threads connected to one of the electronic harnesses. Would they be the ones administering intermittent impulses to the restless speaking organ, or was it the other way around? As if the display wasn't gruesome enough, I now heard again. That Voice, that hoarse, helpless, pleading human voice.



‘KILL ME . . . KILL ME . . . Please!’

The voice apparently came from one of the devices. Was it a recording that repeated itself from time to time? I didn't know what to do, run away or find out what was going on. The pleading words bit into me

‘The mouth!’ suddenly flashed through my mind. But how could a mouth speak without a body? I was petrified. Then I heard that pleading voice again:

‘DON’T ABANDON ME . . . KILL ME . . . ‘

What could I do? I certainly didn't want to kill someone, maybe help him? The rig to which the mouth was attached stood amidst the other devices apparently connected to it, constantly sending signals at the same rhythm. They resembled a heartbeat. Or was I imagining it? At the top, at the front of the largest computer was a screen behind which was a small illuminated space. I stood on my toes. What I saw next horrified me. Behind the small window there was a slightly moving, white-gray mass full of tiny veins into which, like a pincushion, long needles had been pricked. Attached to the ends of the needles were thin cables that, bundled together into a thick cluster, disappeared into the computer.

Could the supplicant see me? Next to the screen was a small smartphone-like keyboard. ‘Press Dr Weinstein Foundation for Neutralization’ begged the voice.

I hesitated. What would happen if I typed in that code?

It all seemed unreal to me, as if I had landed in the middle of a science-fiction movie. Had my curiosity involuntarily made me a guinea pig for what would become ‘normality’ in a future era dominated by artificial intelligence?

But maybe the whole thing was normal, and the owner of the voice was somewhere far away, suffering such severe pains that he no longer wanted to live and wanted to commit euthanasia in which I had to assist him. But then what did that mouth, which looked and moved so lifelike, mean? With trembling fingers, I keyed in the code.

‘Thank you,’ spoke the voice, which now seemed to come from very close by. It sounded like a sigh of relief. Would that person hear me now, too?

‘Where are you and who are you?’ I asked.

‘I am Dr. Weinstein, Albert Weinstein,’ replied the voice.

‘But he died a long time ago,’ I said, incredulously.

‘I am his brain. Just his brain and his mouth.’

My God! Could that moving gray mass be the brain of Dr. Weinstein, who died many years ago? I had once read that Dr. Weinstein's brain was on display in an American museum. Could this quivering pile of human misery be the brain of what was once the world's most brilliant physicist, artificially reanimated and kept alive by those electronic harnesses? Why, I wondered. I thought of Franco, whose entire body had also been cut up before they sent his soul to the hell of Mao, Stalin, and other dictators who had been laid to rest. Would their brains also be digitally animated to be abused for some obscure purposes in the future? Just recently, the current Russian dictator had a statue erected in honor of his predecessor Stalin. Fascism appeared to resurface in recent years, and



the masses, deluded by lies and spectacle, allowed themselves to be manipulated. Would it all happen again, more thoroughly and gruesomely than before? God, up there in heaven, why don't you send us poets, instead of dictators?

Weinstein had apparently read my thoughts.

'The digital indoctrination that has made man into willing followers of the rulers destroying humanity and nature will lead to the Apocalypse, to man's ultimate self-destruction,' the voice said.

'And what happens here, in the Hall of Geniuses?' I asked.

'Here, the brains that can somehow serve to expand world power are kept alive and stored as living intelligence to be used as artificial intelligence. The computers, to which the brains are connected give instructions through digital impulses and boost the mental productivity of the human parts. If efficiency drops or there is protest, The System automatically sends a series of penitential impulses to the guilty object. Stripped of their natural resistance, the body parts are so sensitive that the horrific pain caused by the impulses not only suppresses their resistance, but at the same time drives them to greater productivity.'

I wanted to know whether only the brains of the scientific geniuses are preserved and used here.

'No, Hitler's brains were also stored here and served The System for demagogic manipulations that were then digitally disseminated worldwide in the form of information.

'And what are your genius brains used for?' I asked, curiously.

My question caused a deep sigh on which a long silence followed.

'Trapped by the machines and providing them with the impulses that their reasonless harnesses cannot produce, the memory of computers, artificial intelligence, cannot itself think and only disposes of what was previously experienced and stored. The brains kept alive here serve to design what has not yet been stored or discovered. The latest invention is the Smart glasses that will addict and manipulate the docile masses even more thoroughly than the Smartphone, but that is not even the worst thing for which my brain is being abused. What tortures me day and night and drives me to madness is my next mission: the Omega bomb, a weapon with a destructive power more than 10,000 times greater than any nuclear weapon on earth. At the speed of light, the craft flies towards its target with staggering accuracy, its size and location can be precisely programmed. What makes the Omega bomb so special, however, is that it does not do any material damage but like a virus infects the whole area, indoctrinates and dominates people's brains.'

I was shocked, speechless. But the voice continued.

'Far more thoroughly than the Smartphone. No human being, simple or intelligent, is immune or can escape it. Possessing that weapon will be able to control and manipulate the earth. You must destroy my brain so that the terrible weapon never gets into the hands of a power-mad individual. I am powerless. Uninterruptedly, the computer sends me questions, sucking from my gray matter with its octopus arms the information I cannot stop. Occasionally, I try to slow down the flight of information by sending erroneous data that then confuses the system, but as soon as it is noticed, my brain is bombarded with such horrifying torture impulses that all its resistance is broken, and my brain again calculates formulas, necessary for the construction of that all-conquering Omega Bomb. Help me. Please help me to undo this inhuman torment and save humanity from mental ruin. Please, do it now, now!' he begged.

Kill him. I have to kill him. I have to kill a human! I was horrified. It is only his brain left, but it can still think, still speak. Wouldn't killing them be murder? God in heaven, bring me enlightenment. What should I do? The last plea had sounded weak and exhausted. Was the brain



close to a breakdown? Suddenly the computers apparently started functioning busier, made significantly more noise and blinked restlessly. The voice no longer spoke, I heard only a murmur. But just as I was about to ask Weinstein what was wrong, he screamed:

‘NO . . . PLEASE . . . NO!’

Apparently, the brain was being mercilessly tortured and forced into greater productivity. ‘Aaaah ..’. The cry was horrifying.

‘What should I do, what should I do?’ I cried in desperation.

‘Press ... three times on the red button...The little window behind which my brain lies will then open. Pull all the needles out of my brain. Please...please...’ sounded weak his voice.

I trembled. What was I supposed to do? Was this murder or an act of human compassion?

‘PLEASE...’ Trembling, I pressed the red button and yes the window opened. The brain jolted, as if tortured by violent electricity surges. The pleading voice kept vibrating in my head like an echo. One by one I pulled the needles out of the grey mass that calmed needle after needle and the computers too appeared to be calming down.

But what should I do with the brains? Leaving them here seemed dangerous. If The General noticed it, he might replace the needles back in brain and everything would start all over again. They have to get out of here, it flashed through my mind.

Carefully I slipped them into my bucket, put the chamois on it and ran out of the creepy hall, down the long bare corridor, towards the lift that took me to the exit. Barely had I left the building or I heard numerous howling sirens and saw dark blue raid trucks in the distance, apparently racing towards the Foundation for Neutralization building. ‘So they also belong to The System’ flashed through my confused head. But I had no time to think about it further. Where should I take the brain so that it would never be abused again? To the canal, I must go to the canal, it shot through my head.

The pedestrians thought it was a strange sight, a balding man running like a fool to the canal.

Did I imagine that I was preventing a global indoctrination of humanity? Nodding, gasping violently for air, like a washed-up fish, I arrived at the redeeming watercourse. For a moment I hesitated, but when I heard the blue Cerberuses approaching with howling sirens, I swung the contents of my bucket into the gently flowing stream.

For a moment, the brains still floated on the surface of the water. Did I hear them say ‘Thank You’? Slowly they sank towards the bottom, towards the mother earth, where they could finally rest in peace.

Meerbeke July 1979, Erkensruhr 5 April 1980, Altea February 2023



GERMAIN DROOGENBROODT is an internationally known poet, yearly invited at international poetry festivals. He is also publisher and promoter of international poetry. He wrote short stories and literary reviews, but mainly poetry, so far 18 poetry books, published in 31 countries. As founder of the Belgian publishing house POINT Editions he published more than eighty collections

of mainly modern, international poetry, he is co-founder and advisor of JUNPA (Japan Universal Poets Association), advisor of the Chinese Huifeng Literary Association and founding president of the Spanish cultural foundation ITHACA. He also set up the internationally greatly appreciated project *Poetry without Borders*, publishing twice a month poetry from all over the world in + 40 languages. He received dozens international poetry awards and was recommended in 2017 for the Nobel Prize of Literature.