

Fausto, plot summary

Main Characters

Fausto is a hipster entrepreneur who is obsessively trying to achieve the age-old human desire for immortality and total knowledge (gnosis) through artificial intelligence, virtual agents, apps, computer games, and augmented reality. In order to attain his dreams, Fausto exploits the talents of his girlfriend Margherita, who is an extremely brilliant computer scientist. In turn, Mephisto is a senior virtual agent, with the appearance of a hip-hop gangster, working for the Cloud. He is tasked with creating virtual agents of dead people based on deep learning from their digital traces (pictures, twitter messages, emails, facebook pages, uploaded video clips) in order to harass, blackmail or simply scare people. However, his secret ambition is to become flesh and blood and leave behind his virtual nature. The story here told explores what happens when Fausto's rage of desperation meets Mephisto's ruthlessness for survival.

Prolog

Mephisto introduces the main topics of the play, digital immortality, virtual reality, digital agents, and mind uploading with the help of the witch's spell Hexen-Einmaleins from Goethe's Faust.

Act I

We are in Fausto's lab. Margherita is

working for Fausto, trying to develop their grand project, Total Gnosis, an app that will allow the embodied access to the Cloud and the experience of omniscience. The workload that Fausto has imposed on Margherita is so exhausting that she ends up extremely isolated and affectively neglected. Being unable to get Fausto's attention, and without seeing any other way out, Margherita finally commits suicide. Fausto returns to find her dead, and falls into a deep state of desperation.

Act II

Reluctant to accept Margherita's death, Fausto seeks help through an app (Archon Go!) that evokes the virtual agent Mephisto. Mephisto tells Fausto that he has the means to help him, by giving him access to the Cloud, where he will be able to meet with a digitally reconstructed Margherita, as well as enjoying an eternal life and absolute enlightenment. To convince Fausto, Mephisto uses augmented reality to show his mastering of the Cloud and all of its functionalities. Fausto is so confused by what he is experiencing that he leaves in a rush. Mephisto takes this opportunity to apply his technology to create an agent for Margherita. While the recreation of Margherita as a virtual agent is progressively presented through Mephisto's virtual-reality glasses, she tells about her experience. At the end, Mephisto brags about his feat and leaves, making Margherita's body disappear.

Fausto returns with his friends and has a shock when he realizes that there is neither Margherita's body nor Mephisto. His friends convince him that he has suffered a hallucination for having been working too much, and they take him to the tavern to have a drink. Mephisto returns to tell the audience his plan: to upload the minds of all living humans to the Cloud, beginning with Fausto, and download himself into each one of us. His desire, which has been concealed from everybody, is to become fully incarnated in the real world and sense reality directly, feel emotions, become bodily conscious, as well as to propagate himself throughout humanity.

Act III

Fausto and his friends arrive at the tavern in a very good mood, singing, toasting and enjoying the company. Mephisto bursts into the tavern, and everybody, but Fausto, flees in panic. Mephisto presses Fausto to take a decision about his proposal, and Fausto tries to get Mephisto off his back. But then Mephisto shows Fausto the reconstructed Margherita through the virtual reality glasses, and Fausto is taken with her. She is in a dormant state and Fausto awakens her by trying to kiss her. They show their love for each other until Mephisto suddenly shuts Margherita off, and presses Fausto to make up his mind, while leaving with Margherita. Fausto's friends come back singing joyfully until Fausto angrily tells them off and send them away.

Act IV

Fausto is in his lab, pondering about Me-

phisto's proposal. He summons Mephisto and tells him he needs a night with virtual Margherita before taking a decision. After a nasty discussion, Mephisto agrees to it, but with the condition that they cannot kiss or touch each other. Margherita and Fausto meet. Virtual Margherita tells him that she has now apprehended all the memories of the real Margherita, that she has seen how much they loved each other. She warns Fausto that the Cloud is an empty, emotionless reality and that he is going to make a big mistake if he accepts Mephisto's pact. She tries to kiss him to show him such emptiness, but Fausto refuses until the end, because he still wants to believe in the possibility of living with her eternally. When he cannot resist anymore, and they are about to kiss each other, Mephisto intervenes and shuts Margherita off again. Fausto remains alone, and desperately asks the audience what to do. The choir responds with an admonition about the pros and cons of the decision. Fausto finally accepts the pact. Mephisto welcomes the decision and begins the transmutation protocol. Half way the procedure, Margherita intervenes by kissing Fausto so that he realizes that in the virtual world there are no true emotions nor physical experiences and contact. Fausto interrupts the procedure causing Mephisto to disintegrate. He himself dies in the process and Margherita is left alone with her loss.

Coda

The choir ends with the wise words of the Chorus Mysticus in Goethe's Faust II.