

# The Quest for Immortality

1 There will always be a myriad of ways our mortal forms can go wrong. And we've seen that physiological constraints seem set to always hold us back from drastically extending our lifespans and remedying the root cause of ageing - if there even is one.

5 But on the border between science fiction and pioneering science rest exciting technological ideas that could perhaps unlock a different kind of immortality. Technology can already help us catch age-related defects early, but it holds the potential to become even better: what if we were able to circumvent biological trade offs? entirely?

10 Billionaire Elon Musk's company Neuralink is already on the march to set us down this transhumanist path. It envisages a future where humans are far more intimately connected with their electronic devices than we are today. It invites us to work towards a brain-machine interface that would fundamentally integrate us with our technology, achieving a truly symbiotic relationship.

15 The research is still in its early stages, but brain-machine interfaces are already in use in the form of ear and eye implants that can restore our senses, and brain implants that allow disabled people to remotely control computers and robots. Neuralink aims to take this a step further by seamlessly connecting us to electronic devices, the internet and even other humans. Essentially, we'd all have encyclopaedic information on hand and be able to communicate with one another telepathically.

20 To make this remarkable enhancement possible, a brain-machine interface would be injected into our bloodstream and travel to the brain. There it would self-assemble into a mesh-like structure on the outside of the cerebral cortex, entwining technology to the core of our intelligence and sentience.

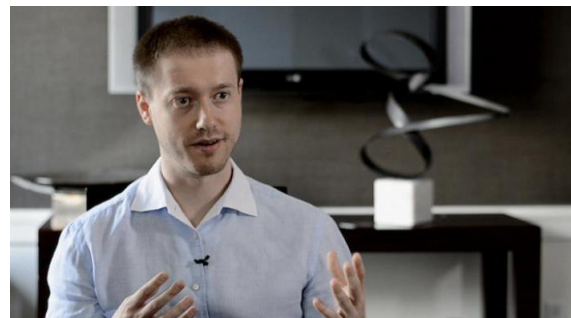
25 Despite the invasiveness of Neuralink's implants, there are already a host of healthy individuals who are eager for such artificial enhancement. Some have even gone so far as to perform surgery on themselves just to install a gadget of meagre real-world value. But this may be just the start.

30 Neuralink and the technology it inspires could become a gateway to a post-human future. Through research in this area, we may decipher the means to accurately translate our organic, chemical neuronal pathways into electronic data that could encapsulate them. And so we may, eventually, be able to capture our beings within a computer, living forever as digital memory accessed by a piece of software.

35 This might be an extreme solution to the question of how to live forever, but there are wealthy individuals, such as entrepreneur Dmitry Itskov, devoted to the idea of merging with a computer. Itskov's 2045 Initiative views brain-machine interfaces as just the first step in a four-part journey that culminates in an artificial brain housing a human personality that controls a hologram-like avatar.

40 Itskov and other futurists are promising immortality, but to attain it we'll have to make possibly the biggest trade off of them all, giving away one of our most precious and defining gifts: our human form. The organic brain has forever been the vessel of our soul. An artificial copy may go as far as capturing your entire network of 100 trillion connections, but would it truly be you?

*James S. Horton & Nicholas K. Priest, "Silicon Valley's quest for immortality -and its worrying sacrifices", The Conversation, Dec. 12, 2018*



Dmitry Itskov