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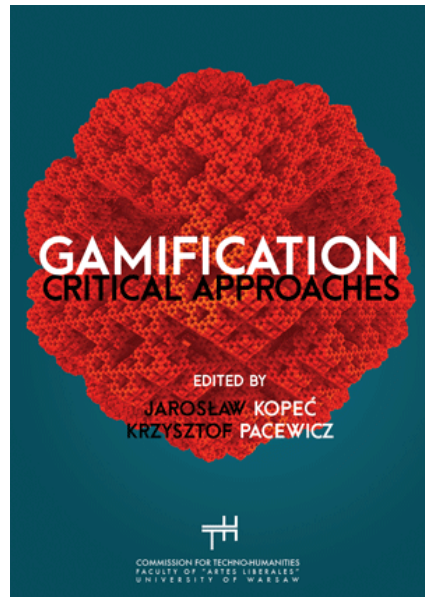
*Gamification. Critical Approaches*

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# AFTERWORD: GAME OF THE TERMINALLY PROSTHETIC SUBJECT

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Szymon Wróbel

## Game paradigm

Is the world but a game? Is the cosmos a playground? If so, so be it – but what would the aim of such cosmic gameplay be? What would the rules of such a game be? Would they be similar to the laws of nature as currently understood? Or perhaps it is only *la comédie* designed as a theatre play? Further, could the turn of contemporary society towards gamification, so to speak, be explained by the sheer fact that gameplay is perhaps the most “inhuman” and “abstract” of all the arts – not only because the whole world plays comedy, but primarily because in the world there is nothing to be won, except the game itself? Is “the ability to be programmed” but one inherent feature of the cosmos? In other words, can the cosmos be described in terms of the real-time execution of a finite set of instructions (Eigen, Winkler, 1983)? Perhaps we have become a society disciplined by outplaying – do not mistake this for “playing out” – games in all available disciplines? Perhaps this society of ours is the first case of a society bearing witness to full gamification – a society using and applying mechanics and rules of computer strategy games to non-game contexts in order to maintain, modify and model the behaviour of individuals and groups of people?

These are the questions posed in the collection of essays this book presents. These are the issues addressed by members of a generation “hypnotised” by images displayed on the screens of their tablets, PCs, laptops and notebooks, the subjects “reduced” to the functionality offered by consoles and computer keyboards, slaves to smartphones, linked in and wired.

It was Alexei Ivanovich, the main character of *The Gambler* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (2014), a novella written under deadline to pay off the author’s gambling debts, who perhaps anticipated this new social constellation: subjects subjugated to full gamification, addicted to gambling on a global scale.

The gamification hypothesis would claim that the members of modern societies are constantly involved in positioning themselves against multiple others: in rankings, by screening each other’s parameters, by presenting their past and present achievements to the world, by posting them in Halls of Fame and craving yet a better score, and by carefully scanning the leaderboards for their own status and for ways to get ahead – in this or another way indulging in endless comparisons with other players. Here, of course, my concern goes beyond gambling. I am not, in fact, concerned with playing roulette or playing the stock markets. I am not even referring to how life is conceived in parallel with virtual reality games. What I am getting at, though, is that we play not only against one another for this or that game stake, that we compete not only against one another for finite resources – but above all, that we play ourselves and pep-talk ourselves into competing with ourselves. On our smartphones alone we now track our “biological resources” – blood pressure or heartrate. Not only do we track our healthy or unhealthy activities every day and carefully schedule daily needs such as intake of calories, not only do we – or more precisely our phone apps – collect and process our motion data, sync and set alerts for upcoming calendar arrangements or events organised via social media, not only do we record our daily expenses in our personal finance apps and compare these records with those of our neighbours online; on top of this, we actually record our beloved pets and photograph our loved ones to later perform all sorts of image manipulation for yet more fun, then share it with our followers on social media. It is here at our fingertips and on our laps where the novel gameplay has truly gained a foothold. It is here where at any one time we present ourselves in the game of life and observe the totality of our chances of survival. It is here where we outplay ourselves and outwit one another. And yet, we had better be sure that at any given time, in dungeons across the globe, regiments of programmers and developers are designing and developing new apps to subject us to even more ghastly disciplines within life. Today it is programmers who are the guardians and the messengers of the truth, as far as salvation in today’s life is concerned.

Having said that, we should, prior to asking ontological questions, investigate one question of an epistemological nature regarding the social world: what model of game is being promoted in it? Do we have at our disposal any paradigmatic approach to analysing games? Do we have a formal model? Here, I see several possibilities.

First, the game is both the subject and the object of psychoanalytic considerations, whereby a game is conceived as “some-thing” that is subject to the “pleasure principle” (Freud, 1968). Thus, the stake is pleasure and the promise of pleasure is the only promise a game can fulfil. Sigmund Freud’s famous analysis of child’s play – *Fort/Da* – allowing a child separated from his or her mother to regain a sense of control over the world allows us in turn to guess that play is at the service of organisation of pleasure and control (Freud, 1920). From the psychoanalytic point of view such play would above all be a game of control, i.e. where things are made to appear and disappear. Jacques Lacan argues that the very first game of control is when the child abolishes (“abolit”) the game itself by making the object disappear. This primitive repetition illustrates that the object’s identity – a concept – is beyond time: “it is maintained both in the presence as it is maintained in its absence” (Lacan, 1987). Above all, the game gives psychoanalysts assurance that in order to understand the symbolic order one may not start with the analysis of language. It is neither words nor speech nor speaking which constitute the Symbolic but it is rather the object or the thing – e.g. a tombstone or a monument – which is the most lasting manifestation of the loss and the symbol of man’s disappearance. First and foremost, a game is a promise to provide pleasure through the object’s disappearance.

Secondly, a game is a transaction, or more precisely an entire sequence of transactions. Transactional Analysis with its list of hidden, cross, angular, and parallel transactions allows us to go as deep as the script of a game, far beyond the analysis of the “stake” of a game and its “power” (Berne, 1964). Indeed, games are played out in imagined realities, that is virtually – and as such they may be set against “real life” – and yet they are not only socially programmed – that is, resulting from the fear of boredom and the lack of a better idea of how to structure time individually – but above all stem from the fact that the social scene alone has today taken the form of a “playground”.

Ludwig Wittgenstein was fully aware of this when he wrote that what we take in language to be “play” is in fact a pure concept that may only serve as a preliminary study into the future of rationing and regulation of language, an idealisation and “first approximation”, which does not take into account the complexity of reality – the fact that the world is a labyrinth. Games serve rather as “comparative objects”, akin to members of an extended family, who/which, taking into account their similarity or dissimilarity, may shed some light on the power relations conditioning our language. Wittgenstein, therefore, calls us to “awaken” from what we actually see. Philosophical problems arise only when the language “celebrates”, i.e. when we realise that the “naming game” is not and has never been a sort of miraculous act in itself –

“baptism of the object” – but that it is merely about a peculiar use of a word, i.e. resulting not so much from the fact that the significant is “fluid”, but rather from the fact that the meaning is “liquefied” (Wittgenstein, 1953). Thirdly, as a result, a game is but a game grammar, making of it the very “form of life”.

Fourthly and finally, play is central to the operation of civilisation. Roger Caillois in *Man, Play and Games* (Caillois, 1961) makes the famous remark that games entail “exchange of property” among players, yet generate no new properties. Thus perceived play is “pure waste”, the escalation of “pure exchange” and a way to force “pure law”, a voluntary, separate, fictitious set of rules. The game is thus nothing but a pure perversion. The subject in the process of gamification becomes the subject of pure law and of pure transaction.

Caillois in a synthetic vision places forms of play on a continuum from *ludus* to *paidia*, the former being structured activities with explicit rules (games), where man reveals his need to establish rules and enforce compliance with them, while the latter is exemplified by unstructured and spontaneous activities (playfulness), which involve the tendency of the human body to move and make noise, “capturing”, “touching”, and “understanding things by seizing them” (Caillois, 1961).

*Agon* is a type of “regulated game”, the essence of which is fight, which in turn is prerequisite for competition. *Agon* houses a component of fight in conditions of an artificially created “fiction of equal opportunity”, allowing for an ideal situation for each of the players whereby each one of these players believes he or she may win the game. *Alea*, or chance, being originally a “dice game”, is the type of game where the adversary is unknown or unpredictable – “fortune” being the symbol of both “inequality” and “injustice”. In *alea* there appears a component where the player, being himself unable to predict the future, throws himself upon somebody’s mercy – as if it was taking place in a “completely deregulated” world. The player in this type of a game is seemingly passive, waiting full of hope for what good fortune will bring on him/her, or for a stroke of luck that will allow him to win, for his window of opportunity to open. In fact, the players’ activity is exhausted upon making the decision to play, the moment they enter the game.

*Ilinx* is the kind of play that attempts “to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality” (Caillois, 1961, p. 23) by means of suspending it altogether, together with its laws. The action of the player is characterised by entering a trance, being stunned, fascinated, and accompanied by anxiety characteristic of a “feat”, trick or “excess”. Mimicry, or role-playing, is a typical example of playful activity, the prerequisite of which is assuming a temporary “suspension of the rules of reality”. Play may consist in acting or submitting to one’s fate in an imaginary milieu, role-playing an illusory character and behaving accordingly. The essence of the play is to tempor-

arily shed one's actual personality in order to feign another. *In lusio* means "beginning a game". Mimicry is "following everything that moves away" from us and "escaping from everything that is approaching to us". It is a constant threat posed by the imaginary and it conveys passing on the "infection" to others.

Granted that play is central to the operation of culture, civilisations do not simply choose a form of it and, having translated it into a game, operate according to its rules. Our civilisation is versatile enough to employ all kinds of play and promote all types of games through available media. Being terminally gamified, our civilisation is one within which various "kinds of play" actually encompass the whole "content of life". For the gamified subject there is no other stake but the game itself. Apps provide us with (much sought for) "artificial rules". Bear in mind, though, that those rules apply to the environment, which incorporates risk on a daily basis, and that it is a world of non-stop bewilderment. A gamified subject is constantly on the run, chasing the plethora of petty little things that all day lure it closer, and at the same time elude it. Then why should we marvel at the fact that the game paradigm has become so central in social sciences in explaining the very source of the social?

In his monumental *Playing Fair* (1994) and *Just Playing* (1998), Ken Binmore explains the theory of the social contract and the emergence of social structures with reference to game as a category. In the "pure game model" players strive to achieve the best possible result – given the rules of the game – and in the pursuit they adopt certain action plans called strategies. The game is in a state of equilibrium when each player's strategy is the best response to the strategy of any other player. Only such a game may bring a result known to the players. Only in such a case will players not have a reason to change the adopted game strategy. The optimal strategy, that is, one that leads to the formation of equilibrium, thus appears a rational choice for the players. The equilibrium is important for yet another, more important reason. If we decide that payoffs for the players correspond to how well they are adapted, then the process of evolution, which rewards those better adapted at the expense of less adapted players, comes to a halt when the game reaches the state of equilibrium.

I ask, therefore, whether our completely gamified societies are in a state of equilibrium. Beginning from Thomas Hobbes, through John Rawls, up until Ken Binmore, theoreticians of the state and of the social have used the "game metaphor", hoping that the game will eventually stop. The reason for this is – and this is now our fifth observation – that the game is conceived as a synonym for "justice". In our times, the game becomes, for its subject, a "game total", "game absolute", e.g. a game where the stake is not to enforce one's own rules, but the coming of "ultimate justice", i.e. the transformation of the player into a perfect player, the player constantly able to take on new challenges and adopt new strategies in all existing and all up-

coming areas of life, such as education, health, labour, reproduction, and last and perhaps least of all – something that we still call play. When the totality of life is completely gamified, society will reach a state of equilibrium and thus will arrive at ultimate justice.

For Johan Huizinga fun is a “free activity” remaining “outside ordinary life” that can intensely and utterly absorb the player (Huizinga, 1962). Gamification, in turn, is the willingness to “absorb” play conceived in such a manner through the application of art [*tekhne*]; this willingness reveals to what extent such “prosthetics” are in some way inherent to humanity. Despite the evolutionary continuity linking the “invention of a wheel” with the “invention of a nuclear power plant” (Latour, 1999), it is only the “nuclear age” which allows the subject to complete the process of gamification, i.e. to achieve a state of total control and a state of equilibrium, i.e. a society that can finally embody the pure game model. The process of evolution, which rewards those better suited, is “stopped” or “suspended” in such a society. What does it entail? It entails that such a subject is completely connected to/with the rest of the world. A game always entails team spirit and ought to be a collective enterprise. A collective, in turn, is – as Bruno Latour rightly observed – the third political animal following the Leviathan – the vision of creating an immortal body politic and society – the creation of 19th- and 20th-century sociologists. Technologies are as a matter of fact a “preserved society” (Latour, 2005).

## Time of technics/technics of time

Gamification reduces the subject to augmented reality. In fact, there has never been another reality except “augmented reality”, and there has never been another form of humanity than one immersed in technology – “prosthetic humanity”. Thinking about “pre-technological reality”, “the primary stage of naked humanity” or “man liberated from *tekhne*”, is the result of an erroneous approach to “technics” and the “descent of man”. This is why the completely gamified subject feels at home in a world where technology has become a preserved society. The completely gamified subject is at home with technical culture because his home is technics.

It often seems that technical approaches – and, likewise, the technologies themselves – develop according to some internal schema, i.e. according to some unavoidable anthropocentric logic. According to this view of history, technics is a gradual projection of deliberate human action. Technics is an imitation and expansion of our innate intelligence. We think that in the inexorable sequence of things the machines will imitate all of the human activities that make up the cyclical process of instrumental action. First, they will imitate the functions of executive organs – the so-called effectors (such as hands or feet), later the receptors (sense organs such as the eye or ear), and finally the functioning of the organ of control (brain). Such a line

of reasoning must have been especially dear to Jürgen Habermas, when he observed that ability to envisage the fulfilment of history is embedded in the technological itself, and that man is otherwise devoid of it (Habermas, 1974). The logic of history is thus revealed as expansion of political control through the development of technical management.

According to Frankfurt philosophers from Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse to Habermas and Axel Honneth, one cannot eliminate the power and violence of “rational calculation” without at the same time destroying technics. In this vision technics is always “a man-like doppelgänger”. Cyborgs and androids in this narrative are human-like and man-like creatures. In this vision, the birth of “the augmented reality” or, as it is sometimes referred to, “multiple reality”, follows three consecutive stages. First, the tools are invented. Then, at stage two, machines replace tools. Then, at stage three, automatic machines replace machines. Tools such as rough-hewn stones back in the past or the bicycle more recently enhance natural functions of human bodily organs. What makes machines special is that they are capable of replacing human activities. Machines do so by converting power: mills do so, and likewise propellants, clocks, and steam engines.

It is only “digital machines”, though, that succeeded in replacing human intelligence itself instead of merely facilitating motor or sensory functions of the human body. The thermostat of the past is now incorporated into machinery that independently develops new strategies for adapting the temperature inside a closed space to changing environmental conditions outside. Upon creation of this sort of intelligent adaptable system the last stage in the development of technology has been achieved. *Homo faber* can for the first time in history be fully objectified and inspect him- or herself from the outside, with regard to activities that are instrumental, autonomous and objective at the same time.

However, a very different vision of technology is present in the works of Martin Heidegger. In his etymological study Heidegger reflects at length on Aristotle’s *Physics*, that foundational book of Western philosophy. Therein, Aristotle takes “nature” to be a kind of “technics” capable of producing itself, technics capable of self-creation, and states that to this end technics, being the essence of nature itself, not only provides a metaphysical basis for conquering and mastering nature, but, furthermore, that it necessitates such a sequence of things (Heidegger, 1967). For Aristotle every art [*tekhne*] consists of bringing something into being, and looks for technical and theoretical means of producing a thing which exists in potentiality; the cause of its actualisation thus lies with the producer, not in the thing produced.

This observation makes the critique of technocratic culture utterly shallow. Here we see that technics is not only the essence of civilisation, but – more intriguingly – is “nature”. Such is the vision embedded in “natural physics”. Manufacturing and creating is one type of production, growing and “the emerging of self” is the other. Both, as we may clearly see, involve production – namely, technology. *Tekhne qua poiesis*: manipulation is not the essence of *tekhne*,



“unconcealment” is – “the emerging of self”. Its conception as instrumental reveals nothing of the essence of *technics*. As production (*poiesis*), *technics* is a “way of revealing”. Like *poiesis*, it brings into being what is not. According to Heidegger, being is historical, and the history of being is nothing but its inscription in technicity.

André Leroi-Gourhan takes this autopoietic interpretation of *tekhne* one step further. Starting from the assumption that the peoples called “illiterate” in fact only lack a certain type of writing and prefer not to refer to nature using terms that dwell on the opposition between man and other living beings, such as instinct and intelligence, being able or unable to speak, etc., Leroi-Gourhan traces the gradual development of physical abilities (or physical function) whereby the auditory system adapts to and takes on the new function of speaking, and similarly the eye and hand are involved in and adapted to the novel task of writing. With the help of the term “technical tendency”, which allows him to loosen the relationship between *tekhne* and *ethne*, the author describes the coupling of “organized organic matter” and “self-organizing inorganic matter”; from here, Leroi-Gourhan manages to trace back augmented reality to the very beginning. Aware of the fact that by assuming “the idea of the wheel” one can derive infinite technical consequences – the chariot, the potter’s wheel, reel machines, lathes, etc. – he addresses anthropogenesis and techno-genesis as mutually conditioning and reinforcing one another (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993). As a result, it is Leroi-Gourhan who initiates the discourse on *humachines* – being not so much humanoid creatures, but first and foremost creatures capable of exploring all possible connections in a body-environment-matter complex.

At this point Bernard Stiegler takes over the discourse. In his trilogy entitled *Technics and Time* we read that “technics” creates a horizon of human existence and temporality (Stiegler, 1998). According to Stiegler the technicality of man, that is, man’s innate prosthetics – the simultaneity of man and technology – was suppressed in the history of philosophy. Philosophy has never ceased to play with and to feast on the difference between *episteme* (knowledge) and *tekhne* (craft).

And yet the origin of “technics” and the origin of what we call “human” are closely linked with time, the origin of time and being in time, or rather “not-on-time” (i.e. late). Time, however, is also linked with forgetting, the process of *epimetheia*, which consists in the displacement of what was once known by the accumulation of randomly acquired new knowledge. This makes of Epimetheus – his name meaning “hindsight”, or literally “afterthinker” – a founding figure of the discourse (Stiegler, 1998). Epimetheus, our fateful “afterthinker”, a being in whom thought follows production, is the “unfortunate husband” of Pandora, who opens Pandora’s Box and thus brings misery to mankind. According to Hesiod, who twice mentions this character, Epimetheus was the one who accepted the “gift of unhappiness” (Pandora’s gift from the gods). However, in Plato’s use of this old myth as recorded in *Protagoras*, the twin Titans Epimetheus and Prometheus were entrusted with distributing traits

among the newly created animals. Epimetheus was made responsible for giving a positive trait to every living animal, but when it was time to give man a positive trait, lacking foresight, he found that there was nothing left. All the “virtues” and “powers” had already been distributed. In effect man is “ill-endowed”, “defective”, and “lacking”.

It is because of the forgetfulness (stupidity) of Epimetheus that Prometheus decides that the attribute of mankind shall be *tekhne* – the crafts and the art of fire. Seeing the weakness of man, Prometheus steals fire from the gods in a piece of wood seemingly wet on the outside. Thus fire enters the life of man not by force but through deception. Prometheus teaches people to smelt metals, cook food, cultivate land, forge armour, build houses, read, write and subjugate the forces of nature. *Prometheia* becomes synonymous with prudence and far-sightedness. *Epimetheia*, to the contrary, is synonymous with short-sightedness and negligence. Epimetheus is the one who forgets metaphysics, “forgets thought” and finally forgets forgetting; thinking a thought is made obsolete. As such, Epimetheus is not only the figure of forgetfulness – “he is himself forgotten”.

Epimetheus may thus serve as the symbol of man’s “hind-thinking” or “hind-sight”. It is only “in time” that *Animal sapiens* converts to *Homo sapiens*, i.e. the species of prematurely born beings that come into their environment with a surplus of immaturity, neoteny. Man is a being “premature” in the sense that he is born “naked” and “unarmed” and that his thinking is always done too late. Human thinking always comes “later” than the actions of his organs and his body’s movements. Prometheus formed man out of clay mixed with tears. Only man’s “soul” was “cast” in the divine fire and that was stolen from Helios, one spark from his heavenly chariot. The man created by Prometheus was weaker and lower than the Titans, his body could barely keep on his feet, and brittle bones cracked under the slightest weight. Only man’s form, which was so different from that of the other animals, was in the image of the gods. That man is a god with feet of clay, equipped only with crafts.

The act of forgetting, of course, is not exhausted by Epimetheus bearing the guilt and Prometheus deceiving the gods. Philosophy forgets the coupling of “technics” and “anthropogenesis”. From the onset, philosophy by default represses the technical dimension of humanity by taking it for granted that the qualities of man are of more sublime origins than “theft” or “mindless condemnation”. Technics is therefore on the one hand repressed from thinking, while on the other a characteristic supplementing the “constitutive lack” and “absent source”.

This denial of technics will be accompanied by man’s quest for a more fundamental time, away from engineered time; away from time marked by an hourglass, away from time measured by a mechanical or electronic clock. While sundial, analog and electronic clocks are exemplifications of the very same concept, the time they measure is not quite the same time (see Le Goff, 1980). This more fundamental time is what phenomenology has been searching

for ever since the publication in 1928 of Edmund Husserl's famous book *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*. This would be time as "a man without a clock" lives time, a time of pure consciousness of time (Husserl, 1990). On the other hand, technics will take the blame for introducing nihilism into human life and all the evils which deprive people of their humanity, providing them with "fabricated senses" (corneal implants), artificial bodies (titanium limbs), forged bodies (transplanted heart), artificially manipulated genes (stem cells), substitute daylight (the monitors), and false social and political devices (politicians as corrupt directors of the human zoo managing our lives).

However, prostheses are not simply our tools or mere measures employed to fulfil our goals. Prostheses function as tangible and meaningful traces of the past and serve as forms of collective memory. Technics is the main carrier of memory. Referencing and deferment, and perhaps even differentiation itself, are made possible only by and through technology. The distinctive human feature is thus the ability to preserve the past in tangible and technical prostheses. Memory is always accompanied by not only the "politics of memory", but above all the "technics of memory".

Likewise, for Heidegger, the time of thinking, technics and forgetting are closely linked. Forgetting is inscribed in the existential constitution of *Dasein* as instrumentality or equipmentality, and as *calculation*. In the Western history of being, from the Presocratics, through Plato, to Descartes and Leibniz, according to the principle of reason that defines *mathesis universalis* as *calculation*, the subject has ultimately become the master and possessor of nature, and the essence of reason has become understood as *calculation*. This metaphysical turn constitutes the entrance to the technical age of philosophy. Technics – in its modern guise – brings subjectivity to fulfilment as objectivity. The modern age is essentially that of modern technics.

## Generation of machines/machines of generations

We may distinguish several generations of machines based on their power source and corresponding to consecutive stages of technological revolution, and evolution of capital alike. Following Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (1975) there are three quantum leaps in the evolution of machinery under capital (see Jameson, 1991). In particular, leaps in propulsion machinery seem to be decisive for the technological revolution as a whole, respectively: (1) machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848, (2) machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 1890s, and (3) machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 1940s. It is capital that produces capitalism and henceforth the logic of capital is the logic of capitalism. This, however, is linked to the development of tools for producing capital (means of production), or machines. In a famous sentence from *The*

*Poverty of Philosophy* Marx asserts that “the windmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist” (Marx, [1847]1963). There is continuity and parallelism between the evolution of technology – weaving workshops, thermal engines, nuclear power plants, missile guidance systems – and the evolution of capital – financial, material, intangible, and forming working capital – tangible and intangible, paid and unpaid.

Noteworthy, the “new media” have no intrinsic ability to represent. Today, the prototype machinery is neither a turbine nor a Sheeler’s crane nor factory chimneys. The meaning of this world is no longer condensed in the whole system of pipes, refined conveyors, curved shapes of trains, space shuttles and all the streamlined high-speed vehicles. All in all, a TV screen is an emblem of the present era, more so than a computer, because it is a device capable of articulating nothing whatsoever, solely projecting an image on a flat surface. “Machines” like TV serve mechanical reproduction. This generation of machines makes no demands on our ability to create symbolic representation – unlike the mimetic idolatry demonstrated by the futuristic machinery of the past, the earlier “sculptures of speed and energy”. The previous phase of mechanical evolution under capitalism took for granted our excitement over the machine itself – so clearly visible in futurism: Marinetti would praise a machine gun or a car in his poems (Marinetti, 2002). These machines were visible and spectacular symbols, sculptural nodes packed with energy, tangible and capable of embodying the early phase of modernisation.

Today, we are no longer dealing with such symbols. Thanks to mechanical reproduction our society has morphed into a society of a massive spectacle. Commodity has morphed into an image of commodity and this image alone has become the ultimate form of reification. As a result, perhaps, the reproductive machine turned out to be an incarnation of perpetual motion. It produces nothing and feeds on intangible capital. We, in turn, live in a “false daylight” of irrepressible television and our computer screens, and flow in the endless stream of information to and from across the entire globe. “False daylight” provides for a new synthesis of time and space, media and body. Subjects abandon their bodies to invest in the visionary industry of sculpting their future bodies and becoming tele-present – that is, of creating a narcissistically augmented reality. Pure pleasure, pure transaction, pure form of life, pure civilisation and pure theory of the game (the public) finally become one. Players do not have a rational reason to change adopted game strategies. So have we reached equilibrium yet?

## Truth/death

A moving Jewish parable, full of passionate insight, beautifully illustrates the relationship of man with machine. Jewish families – says Reb Stein (Buber, 1988) – would build a clay statue and etch on its forehead the word *Emet*, meaning “truth”. The golem would be a servant to Jewish families and work all its life on the farm until it became defective, disobedient or overgrown. It would be then that its master would simply reach up to its face and wipe off the first letter “E” of *Emet*, thus leaving the word *Met*, meaning “death”. Then the golem would die.

Once, however, a lazy farmer allowed one golem to grow so big that he could no longer reach its forehead. Knowing, however, that golems are obedient, he ordered it to stop and pick up some rubbish. When the golem was obediently doing as commanded, the master wiped off the “E” of *Emet*, but miscalculated the monster’s size and drowned, covered by the mud that tumbled upon him. Thus “truth” bore “death”. From this it is said that “death” is embedded in “truth”. The lazy farmer is the new face of Epimetheus. Perhaps, considering Heidegger’s assertion that technics was never truly the same as the essence of technics, the reduction of technics to “pure instrument” is yet another testimony to the principle of anthropomorphisation.

Likewise, Heidegger’s assessment that technics is the field of discovery corresponding to truthfulness, which today has taken the form of the “dam on the Rhine” (that is, undividable from nature, be it a “composition”, “set”, “arrangement”, or “assembly” – *Gestell*), has never meant anything other than the proximity of “unconcealment” and “concealment”, of “foresight” and “hindsight”, or the proximity of truth and death. “[W]hen destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it [the machines – S.W.] is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself” (Heidegger, 1966, p. 78).

What can save man from this threat is no *game*, but only *play*, conceived as “free activity”, standing quite consciously “outside ordinary life”, “not serious” – but at the same time *play* that can absorb the player intensely and utterly.

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