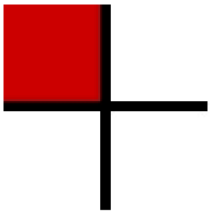

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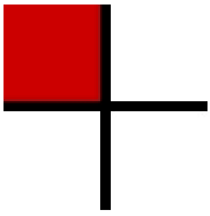

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Vorsprung durch Technik?

Chris Land and Steffen Böhm

> *Modern times*: half a century after Columbus' four journeys, the orbited, uncovered, represented, occupied and used earth presents itself as a body that is combined into a dense weave of traffic movements and telecommunication routines. Virtual shells have replaced the once-imagined ether sky. Through radio-electronic systems the forgetting of distance is technically implemented in literally all centres of power and consumption. In aeronautical terms the earth is reduced to a aeroplane route of no more than fifty hours; satellite orbiting and *Mir*-circulation time units of ninety minutes and less are now standard practice; radio and light messages have pulled the earth together almost to a standing point – it rotates as a time-compacted globe in an electronic web that surrounds it like a second atmosphere. (Sloterdijk, *Sphären II: Globen*)

According to Heidegger the modern world is an image, a *Gebild*, a structured perception, which is put and held in place by the *Gestell* – TV and computer screens, stock-exchanges, business schools and automobiles, which enframe or emplace the world for us. The goings-on, the hustle, of this emplacement as well as its perception is *technology*, or maybe better, *technics*, as Heidegger suggests in his essay '*Die Frage nach der Technik*' ('The Question Concerning Technology', or, 'Questing After Technics'). Now, for Heidegger technics is not just technology: Tamagochi is never just an electronic toy, the Internet is not just an information and communication tool, a cookbook is more than a guide to preparing meals, skyscrapers are not just buildings to house people. The power plant does not just generate electricity, but is the concrete (em)place(ment) where modernity reveals itself as technics, not just in the form of power-generating technology, but also as a specific cultural, economic and political network effect. In other words, the power plant (*Kaftwerk*) brings forward a world, like a work of art (*Kunstwerk*), which puts its actors into a specific place: seeing a 'natural' landscape is to go for a drive through the country; buying goods is to go for a Sunday shopping trip to a Super-Mall at a motorway junction; relaxing the body and mind is to go on a holiday trip to Mallorca or Nepal, gazing at the other through tourist eyes, organised by a now global industry.

Hence, following Heidegger's terminology, perhaps we should understand technology in an expanded sense. Not just as a technical artefact or tool, but as a component of our sense perceptions. As Oswald Spengler put in writing in the early part of the twentieth century:

> We think only in horse-power now; we cannot look at a waterfall without mentally turning it into electric power; we cannot survey a countryside full of posturing cattle without thinking of its exploitation as a source of meat-supply…

An animal-becoming-McDonalds? But further:

> …we cannot look at the beautiful old handwork of an unspoilt primitive people without wishing to replace it by a modern technical process. (Spengler, *Man and Technics*)

A Greek vase or the heat between pre-modern faces: both André Spicer and René ten Bos & Ruud Kaulingfreks open their discussions on the question of technology (or should we say the questing after technics?) with a somewhat romantic return to a pre-divisional pre-technological ideal. Spicer's looks, with Heidegger, to the ancient Greek vase as an example of a *poiēsis* that is both art and technics. Ten Bos and Kaulingfreks look, with Sloterdijk, to the middle ages for a model of the relationship between faces that is still full of a human passion, embodied desire and sweating brows. But now we moderns have split the world. For Heidegger, like Spengler, modernity invites us to see the world as objective resource – tools and technical rationality dominating our understanding of life itself. Ten Bos and Kaulingfreks turn attention to the cool, even cold, technological interfaces of the Internet generation. No more the heat and passion between faces, now just the cold, objective and objectifying glare of the screen as mirror. But neither writer is satisfied with reporting on this modern state of separation. Nor are they suggesting a return to a pre-modern world of vases and hot-flushes. Instead both seek a reformulation of the question of technology by also considering the human – the other side of the object/subject dyad – as a cyborg who knows nothing of this dualism. We cannot return to an idealised past that never existed. Nor can we continue to live as we do. Escape is not only imperative. It is the only option. Ultimately, even the face is inhuman: "In truth there are only inhumanities, but very different ones, of very different natures and speeds" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*). Not one humanity, but a multiplicity of inhumanities. The only illusion was the belief in one face of man – Jesus Christ on the Turin Shroud. But where does this leave the question of human rights? Perhaps we are better to leave that one to the police, or the 'international community'.

In a strange sense, the question of technology is raised in a more general sense by the events of September 11th, 2001, when terrorists, apparently members of the Al Quaeda network, flew passenger planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. Gary Gemmill's paper on the question of 'Leadership in the Shadow of '9/11'' takes the consequences of these events head on, by examining the psychodynamic forces driving responses to these events, and particularly the role of 'leadership' in these responses. On a somewhat different tack, Spicer's review of Paul Virilio's *The Information Bomb*, in his 'Technical Questions', also considers the role of terrorism in a way that is particularly relevant for the events of 9/11. In choosing the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre as their targets, those responsible for these events struck at the heart of the symbolic order of US global dominance and the New World Order: the combination of military might and an increasingly global network of commerce, working in coordination with the interests of a single national government. Indeed, rumour has it that a third plane was planned to crash into the Capitol Building, but it is interesting that this is the one attack that failed,

a coincidence that nevertheless points toward the ultimate redundancy of national governments in a new world order that some have dubbed 'Empire'. While Goliath W. Bush makes plans for the new, super-fast, high-tech, son of star-wars missile defence system, David loads his sling-shot. The super-power, with the most sophisticated weaponry, explosive powers and defence systems was attacked not by another superpower with even more powerful technology, despite the paranoid fantasies of *Independence Day*. Instead it was a decidedly low-tech solution that dealt the blow. Rather than pulling ahead in an ultimately self-defeating arms race, Al Quaeda used the equivalent of a really big rock. The planes were not designed as weapons. They were not bombs or missiles but simply very large objects that were literally thrown at their targets. That the most primitive of weapons, the knife, was used to gain control of them, similarly points to the paradoxes of high technology, a point that was well realised by Frank Herbert. In *Dune* the most advanced body shielding armour can protect a warrior against any number of laser and projectile based weapons, but a knife – so long as it moves *slowly* enough – can still kill with relative ease. When faced with an enemy much faster, and more powerful, the race of war cannot be won. But competitive advantage is not a matter of absolute speed. It is a question of relative rates of deterritorialization. The sling-shot/plane-as-missile was not just a perfect example of lateral or creative thinking, it was also a relative slowing: a becoming-imperceptible that simply slipped below the threshold of digital, high-speed-high-tech-defence-system.

But what was 9/11 anyway? Repeated *ad nauseam* on our television screens the images of planes impacting the Twin Towers meant that tragedy and death were first and foremost passively consumed as spectacle. Certainly that spectacle might have served to bring some people together with a sense of community in the face of adversity, but it also served to help people to forget. Indeed, according to Frederick Jameson, this forgetting is one of the primary functions of the postmodern mass media. Disconnected on the screen, viewed time and time again from every conceivable angle and viewpoint, the image took on a schizophrenic clarity, dissociated from any framework of meaning or narrative, no less shocking for its apparent lack of reality. If there was a narrative to frame this tragedy, it was the recollection of so many similar events, simulated by the Hollywood culture industry. That we should look for a hero at such times – a strong leader – is hardly surprising. In his discussion of this turn to leadership in the shadow of 9/11, Gary Gemmill suggests that perhaps we should reflect a little more on our selves and our responses to violence, than seeking out an external enemy and demanding that a leader rise to take revenge. Rather than seeing the horror of meaningless spectacle stare back at us from the screen as a reflection of our own shadow-side, perhaps there is a way of finding a different interface. Like ten Bos and Kaulingfreks, the suggestion is of a face-to-face relationship of group learning and therapy, of emotional exchange and interchange rather than repressed anger and self-loathing bursting through as retribution.

But perhaps there are darker forces at work here. Projecting Baudrillard we could suggest that the point of 9/11 was that it *did* happen. It was a massive media event, a machine-reproduced image as if in a frenzy of overproduction. In his paper on Bataille and the general economy of information systems, Alexander Styhre suggests that just as the Incan economy was characterised by an excess that was disposed of through ritual sacrifice or potlatch, so the surplus of information produced by management information systems presents the organization with a similar problem: an unusable

excess that must, in some way, be disposed of. The question of excess is inseparable from the question of method, or to stick with our earlier theme: technique. Similarly, each of Rehn, Gemmill and Wilson's contributions to this issue raise questions about the methods and techniques of the social scientists, of critique. In 'Pretty Ugly: Notes on the Moral Economy of Method' Alf Rehn shows that scientific methods are often dichotomised along the now well-known formula 'you are either with us or…'; that is, they are based on clear divisions of inside/outside, do-rights/do-wrongs, true/false, "divisions between orthodoxy and the great unwashed. Those who have the method-capital, the correct tools of knowledge, and those who wander, poor, in the world." Social scientific methods do not exist in a vacuum, but are embedded in the economic, cultural and political goings-on of modern technics, Heidegger's *Gestell*. In short, methods are both economic and moral. It is this moral economy of Alvesson and Deetz's methods that Elisabeth Wilson questions in her review of *Doing Critical Management Research*. Besides pointing to important omissions of this book – class, race, gender and postcolonialism – she questions the 'cookbook' style of their version of critical enquiry into management and organization. Can critique be reduced to a set of methods, however 'postmodern' these might be? Perhaps there is only a fine line between critique and method as a technology of exploitation; the appropriation of other's work and capital.

In his attempt to formulate the rules of engagement for an etiological version of the war against terrorism, Gary Gemmill raises the question of method in a pedagogic and therapeutic context. Are there tools and techniques with which the organizational psychologist can help groups to confront their shadow and develop a mature autonomy, rather than constantly seeking to avoid responsibility by displacing their insecurities onto the perceived need for a leader? Or does even this role lead to a deskilling, as the therapist takes centre stage, distracting from the need for a self-analysis?

As we contemplate the question of empowerment and autonomy, it is difficult not to be reminded of the new managerialism that has 'liberated' us all from the stifling old rigidity of bureaucracy. It is the rejection of bureaucracy, both by management gurus and respectable academics, that Paul du Gay takes issue with in his *In Praise of Bureaucracy*, reviewed here by Thomas Armbrüster. In a critique that has a particular relevance for the new managerialism sweeping the universities and the European public sector more generally, du Gay and Armbrüster overturn Bauman's now virtually canonical Holocaust thesis to suggest that the bureaucratic ethos of legitimacy was actually opposed to these events, rather than enabling them. Du Gay's claim is effectively that the methods and techniques of the bureau have a moral economy that in many ways is superior to the performance driven ethic of the new managerialism, excellence and public/private partnership.

The final question of technique or method, which deserves the last word here, is raised in Søren Buhl Pedersen's obituary for Pierre Bourdieu. In loosing Bourdieu the academic world has lost one of its greatest thinkers, someone who never shirked the responsibility of the critic and intellectual by falling back upon stale, tried and tested methods, techniques and formulae. His approach to method was always rigorous but flexible to adapt to the question at hand, and reflexive enough to prevent his absorption by the totalising machineries of academic knowledge production that figure prominently

amongst his studies. Nevertheless, with this note of farewell we should not lament Bourdieu's passing, but be grateful that he tarried so long.