



Dialectics of Game Design

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Gameplay is politics | 4 |
| Dialectics of game design | 6 |
| part 1A: place of the subjective | 8 |
| part 1B: action, manor of the subject | 10 |
| part 1C: the real is the impasse of formalization; formalization is the place of the forced pass of the real | 12 |
| part 1D: hegel: 'the activity of force is essentially the activity reacting against itself' | 16 |
| part 1E: subjective and objective | 21 |
| Does a digital game industry exist? | 26 |
| Developing a game is developing a joint spirit | 27 |
| Personal Relationships as the ground of Economy | 28 |
| Players and Game Developers as Ecosystems | 29 |
| Game Creation Space as a Pre-Economical Interspace | 31 |
| Genre-ification of Games as the industrialization of the ecosystem | 33 |
| Game Genre as a form of universal social labour-time | 34 |
| What is the raw material of digital game ecosystems? | 35 |
| Enthusiasm as spiritual raw material | 37 |
| Playing as a realization of enthusiasm | 39 |
| Antiprogression Chain | 43 |
| General Will as Full speech | 44 |
| Narcissistic Antiprogression | 45 |
| Suture | 46 |
| Antiprogression Chain | 47 |
| Antiprogression Chains in The Purloined Letter | 48 |
| Antiprogression Chains in Capitalism | 50 |
| Bibliography | 51 |

Gameplay is politics¹

We attempt to bridge the concepts 'gameplay' and 'politics' by reinterpreting Alain Badiou's *Theory of The Subject* (FR:1982—EN:2009) in terms of the contemporary game design praxis. The book is written in the context of political practice; it has no official relevance to game design or gameplay, but we discover that Badiou's dialectics is also appropriate to use in the context of digital games. If this latency in discovery is partly due to Badiou's political motivations in developing his theory, it is also due to the fact that the most popular game was Pong at the time when he gave these seminars in the 1970s.

The book is well-organized in 6 parts, each distinct and building on the previous ones. It is in a style similar to Jacques Lacan's seminars, and it was an actual seminar that took place in 1975-1979. This chapter consists of the interpretation of the first part, 'The Place of the Subjective', which elaborates the fundamental concepts in the political theory.

Badiou develops his materialist dialectics by following Marxist theory of the Maoist tradition, with a reinterpretation of Hegel by referring also to contemporary thinkers such as Lacan and Mallarmé. His practical motivation at the time was to make clear that communist politics cannot restrict itself to building and defending a stable socialist party-state, and that the next task consists of abolishing this apparatus. He invents purely abstract concepts, while at the same time keeping in mind political events such as May '68 and the Cultural Revolution for the practical relevance. For example, "outplace" and "splace" are concepts defined in their own right, but

¹This is a reproduction of Badiou's theory by replacing his political terms like 'proletariat/modern revisionism/imperialist-bourgeois world' with game design terms like player/avatar/gameworld. Written in February 2012. Non-submitted to ICTs and Society-Conference 2012: Critique, Democracy, and Philosophy in 21st Century Information Society. Towards Critical Theories of Social Media in Uppsala.

they also refer to the “proletariat” and the “imperialist world” in political practice. In terms of game design, we take these to refer to “player” and “gameworld”.

Badiou begins by presenting the One as Two, as the scission between something (A) and something-in-its-place (Ap). We take these as the player and her avatar. The avatar determines this scission Ap(Ap) which in turn divides into the determination proper Ap(A) of the player by the avatar (immersion of the player) and the relapse Ap(Ap), the dead-end of 'rightist' deviations such as 'trade-unionism' or 'economism' in politics (too much focus on game structure and mechanics, metric-based design, as well as grinding and gold farming practices in MMOs). Then the player counter-determines her determination by her place: A(Ap(A)) which is called torsion. This divides into the proper counter-determination or limit A(Ap) (engagement) and the relapse A(A), the dead end of 'leftist' deviations such as 'terrorism' in politics (too much focus on gameplay, leading to smaller games, as well as imaginary terrorism and violence in games).

To demonstrate his notions' relevance to Hegel's dialectics, Badiou applies them to Hegel's conception of Christianity, which as a matter of fact also works for our interpretation. Referring to the Nicea statement that “The Son is consubstantial with The Father”, he designates Son/Father by the scission A/Ap. This means for us that The Father was the player and The Son was his avatar. The Earth was the gameworld, and the Crucifixion was the ultimate “Game Over” screen.

A primary aim of Badiou is to provide a theory for periodization: to comprehend the historical successes and failures of revolutionaries as a real historical process, an ongoing struggle of opposing forces that at times actually close older periods and open new ones. Badiou refers to the repetitive nature of revolutionary political practice and its conditions for achieving real progress. For us, this refers to the repetitive nature of gameplay and its conditions to improve a player's gameplay skills, as well as her becoming a game designer by this experience.

But there's an inherent ambiguity: Were the older revolutionaries 'merely' playing their own game? Or are current players and game designers secret revolutionaries?

We don't know. Time will tell.



Dialectics of game design

*The game designers have only designed various games;
the point is to design the world.*

Gameplay is another name for politics. They both call for engagement. They are the same logic of opposing forces identified in separate contexts.

Gameplay is the dynamical aspect that discerns games from other imaginary and fictional media. It is grounded in the structural properties, the mechanics of a game, but it cannot be reduced to it. Thus, gameplay cannot be an academic research field, it is a praxis that unites its practice with its theory, its past with its future, its play with its design.

Is reality less fictional or imaginary than games? Capitalism is a great massively multiplayer game, which incidentally has awfully balanced mechanics and is not really fun for the most of its players. Just like when we were playing *Sid Meier's Civilization* we wanted to create worlds like it or even better than it, nothing keeps us, as players of capitalism, from imagining and aspiring to design and realise a far more balanced world with a satisfying gameplay for everyone, be it called communism or not.

In this work, we reinterpret the Part I in Alain Badiou's *Theory of The Subject*, "The Place of the Subjective". In this part, Badiou presents a dialectics of subject, based on its *scission* between itself (A) and itself-in-its-place (Ap). A is the subject and Ap is its placement in the world. As the subject A is out-of-place with respect to the world, it is called *outplace*. Its placement Ap is located in the space of placements P, called *splace* in short. In Marxist context, the outplace A designates the *proletariat* as the political *motor* of history, and its placement Ap designates the *working class* that forms the *base* of social structure as the productive force. Then, he develops the notions of *determination* (of A by Ap); counter-determination or *limit* (of Ap by A) as well as the relapses, or dead-ends in the dialectical movement, self-determination of Ap and self-determination of A, which in turn define the rightist and leftist political deviations.

In our interpretation, A designates the player and Ap designates her avatar. The avatar is player's placement in the gameworld. In this case,

- the scission between A and Ap becomes the *embodiment*, since the avatar embodies the player;
- the determination of the player by her avatar becomes *immersion*, since she is immersed in the gameworld through the avatar;
- and the counter-determination or limit of the gameworld by the player is her *engagement*, since she counter-determines her immersion by engaging in the game.

The 20th century witnessed the failure of state-party socialism as a strategy to organize proletariat as a political class. The problem had severe social and structural effects, but it was in essence a political problem, a problem of *engagement*. The communists of the last century failed to construct a social organizational form that would embody a universal political engagement to redesign the world.

In the last decades of the 20th century, a new medium emerged that would serve as a testbed to design abstract worlds to better engage people: digital games. Since then, game designers managed to create extremely large game worlds that engaged thousands of players with their economical and social structures, even their own working classes.

It is time for game designers, as players of capitalism, to anticipate to design the ultimate game.

part 1A: place of the subjective

A player that exists in a game is already divided into player-as-such (A: the player) and player-in-place (A_p : the avatar). This scission (AA_p) is determined by the avatar as the place in the game: $A_p(AA_p) = P$, where P is the structure, set of places, the game world. This determination is in turn divided into two:

- $A_p(A)$: the determination proper, of the player by the game world
- $A_p(A_p)$: the relapse of structure, determination of the avatar by the game world

What player does in a game, is to determine the determination of herself by the gameworld, the torsion $A(A_p(A))$. It is then split in two:

- $A(A)$: the reaffirmation of the pure identity of A. The player being the player, having a freedom. This is correlative to the avatar being an avatar, completely determined by the gameworld: $A_p(A_p)$
- $A(A_p)$: the limiting application of player's efficacy to the avatar, its place in the gameworld

The player belongs to the gameworld as an avatar, but she is also included as a player, and thereby becomes a limit, an obstacle in this gameworld. That's why a 'simulation' game cannot exist. 'Simulation' signifies a gameworld where only the full belonging of the avatar $A_p(A_p)$ and pure freedom of the player $A(A)$ exist.

But the true terms of game design are $A_p(A)$, determination of player by the avatar, and $A(A_p)$, the limiting of this determination by the player, the terms by which the gameworld affirms itself without closure, and the player includes itself therein without abolishing herself.

For example, in Tetris:

- There is a scission AAp between the player A and the current piece Ap . This scission is determined by the current piece $Ap(AAp) = P$ that belongs its place in the gameworld.
- The shape and 2D placement of the current piece: (1) determines the player $Ap(A)$, (2) determines the piece itself $Ap(Ap)$. Of these two, only the first is the determination proper.
- The player then moves the piece by keyboard, by the process of torsion, thereby determining her determination by the piece: $A(Ap(A))$
- This torsion consists of: (1) the player's freedom $A(A)$ (correlative to piece's belonging $Ap(Ap)$), (2) her limiting of the piece's movement by being included $A(Ap)$. Of these two, only the latter has a real effect.
- The player, as being included, becomes an obstacle that prevents the blocks from becoming too tall.



part 1B: action, manor of the subject

In this part, Badiou translates his terms into Christianity.

Council of Nicea states that 'The Son is consubstantial with The Father'. This is the scission $A_p(AAp)$, the Incarnation. Then, $A_p(A)$ designates the determination of the Father by the Son, his death, the Passion. $A(A_p)$ designates the counter-determination (limit) by the Father on the son, his Ascension, Resurrection.

Badiou summarizes the 'redemptive adventure' as:

The consubstantial duality Son/Father, that is, the Incarnation, the death of the finite (the Passion), and its non-death (the Resurrection) are the immediate theological concerns of scission, determination and limit.

If we retranslate it using game design terms,

- the scission, or the duality of Incarnation becomes Avatar/Player, the embodiment,
- the determination, or the Passion becomes the consequences of the Avatar's fate on the Player (the Player herself 'dies' when the game is over, or she 'wins' when the Avatar wins). In other words, immersion.
- the limit, or the Resurrection becomes Player's counter-determination of her immersion. In other words, engagement.

In this case, Christ's crucifixion is the unsuccessful ending of a game session on the world by the God, the ultimate 'game over' screen.

GAME OVER

try again? y/n

part 1C: the real is the impasse of formalization; formalization is the place of the forced pass of the real

Dialectics states that there is the Two, and intends to infer the One from it as a moving division. Metaphysics posits the One, and forever gets tangled up in deriving from it the Two. There are others, like Deleuze, who posit the Multiple, which is never more than a semblance since positing the multiple amounts to presupposing the One as substance and excluding the Two from it. The ontology of the multiple is a veiled metaphysics.

For the 'dialectical game designer', first comes the Two as the scission: Player/Avatar. From this, the One as a moving division (gameplay) is inferred.

The 'right-wing' metaphysics begins from the One as the avatar in the game world; whereas the 'left-wing' metaphysics begins from the player's freedom, excluding the gameworld. And they never reach to the Two.

The Multiple as a starting point, i.e. richness, playability etc. is a veiled metaphysics that has to choose between Player or the Avatar as the One.

If, as Lacan says, the real is the impasse of formalization, as we saw when we ran up against the limit as return, we must venture from this point that formalization is the im-passe of the real.

Through the game, we reach the impasse of the gameworld. This is called real. But as the game is not a closed circle, or a simple repetition, we must articulate this 'impasse' as a 'passing' or pushing through the game's formal structure.

The algorithm scission-determination-limit, with its deviations to the right and to the left, is the truth of the structural dialectical sequence but only up to the point where this impeccable formalism is summed up in the 'do not trespass' that orders a return.

The movement of the scission Player/Avatar ends at a point where the process ends. But game sessions are not simple repetitions. A sequence of sessions are periodicized like a history. But where does the 'practical lessons learned' reside in between game sessions?

We need a theory of the pass of the real, in the breach opened up by formalization. Here, the real is no longer only what can be lacking from its place, but what *passes (pushes)* through by force.

We have to put this 'learned' between game sessions, outside of the formal structure of the game. We cannot assume it to be an in-game place to be reached.

Then, Badiou, referring to Mao Zedong, enumerates the three components of contradiction and their divisions as structural (game's formalism) and historical (when game is played, developed, etc). 'In a real dialectical process, the historical is anchored in the structural. This anchorage is the nodal point of the question of the subject.'

1. Difference

- **Structural:** Differences between places in the gameworld
- **Historical:** Antagonistic contradictions between places and states during the game

2. Correlation

- **Minimal:** Player's control as 'pure and simple position of the Two as a processual unity'
- **Structural:** Game mechanics (weak correlation as class contradiction: 'a permanent structural fact, which can be mapped economically')
- **Historical:** Gameplay (strong correlation as class struggle: 'process under particular conditions, entirely political in essence, which is not deducible from the weak correlation.')

3. Position

- **Structural:** subjugation of the player to the dominant gameworld (weak position as invariant asymmetry)

- **Historical:** player's potential to 'overthrow' the gameworld to become the principal aspect (strong position as reversible asymmetry)

In this case, the historical antagonism of differences are anchored in the structure of different places and states; the gameplay is anchored in game mechanics; and the player's potential dominance is anchored to her subjugation to the game. Each of these anchorages are the nodal points that form the Player as subject.

To confuse class contradiction with the class struggle, to practice the correlative indistinction of the contradiction, is the philosophical tendency of economism, of workerism, of somniferous Marxism for the lecture hall.

We can also describe an 'economism' of game design 'for the lecture hall', that confuses game mechanics with gameplay, focusing on in-game variables disregarding their 'political' gameplay context.

Then, Badiou describes two types of contradiction:

- the contradiction, called fundamental, between productive forces and social relations of production;
- the contradiction, called principal, between the antagonistic social classes.

The fundamental contradiction defines working class as the 'base', where all the rest are superstructure. The principal contradiction defines working class as the 'motor', where all the rest are ideology. Focusing on these two aspects separately leads to either trade unionism or terrorism. The true dialectical approach is to consider the motor as anchored to the base, and this anchorage as the nodal point of the subject.

The fundamental contradiction concerns the 'structural' contradictions and the principal contradiction concerns the 'historical' contradictions enumerated above for the subject of Player.

A 'trade unionist' player would be like a Chinese gold farmer, or a WoW grinder that focuses on the values of items and actions inside the game economy. She would struggle to receive 'higher wages', in XP, gold, etc. A 'trade unionist' player only looks at her stash and her 'structural' status and she only plays in order to develop in terms of these.

A 'terrorist' player could be destroying cars in GTA2 or fighting the police to death in GTA4. A player becomes a 'terrorist' when the 'structural' immersion fails.

As the gameworld is part of the reality of the (capitalist) world (they are both fictions, and their parallel 'history' is more conceivable in MMORPGs); we can re-state these contradictions including the game developers & managers as well:

1. Difference

- **Structural:** Differences between places & roles in a gameworld and its development
- **Historical:** Antagonistic contradictions between these places & roles during the game and its development

2. Correlation

- **Minimal:** Player's control inside the game / Developer's control during development
- **Structural:** Game mechanics, trade mechanisms, premium items; player/player, player/developer, developers/developer, etc. distinctions
- **Historical:** Gameplay, management, patches, real money trade, development of the game etc.

3. Position

- **Structural:** subjugation of the player; dominant position of the developer, manager
- **Historical:** players' potential to determine the game life, subjugating the developers & managers

Badiou's quote from Lenin: 'Politics is the concentration of the economy', we can restate it like 'Gameplay is the concentration of the game mechanics' etc.

Then he says: 'Even, I would say, when it is a matter of libidinal economy, the economy of the drives.' We can easily imagine game elements becoming objects of a player's economy of the drives.

The final part: 'Every subject is political. This is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics.' Game design is about gameplay. This is why there are few game designers and rarely any gameplay.

part 1D: hegel: 'the activity of force is essentially the activity reacting against itself'

In this part, Badiou focuses on correlation as the unity of opposites. The two dialectics of correlation are:

- structural dialectics as an infinite vacillation between whole-part (space-outplace),
- historical dialectics involving force and activity that unites essence and existence in interior/exterior.

We have previously identified the first one as 'game mechanics' and the second one as 'gameplay'. Here are the passages concerning the logic of forces that define the 'historical dialectic' or 'gameplay':

The structural is weak before the one of space [gameworld]. . . This is dialectical materiality without leverage. In 'Marxist' politics, .. there are those who hold on strongly to this weakness. They adore studying the 'laws' of bourgeois society [gameworld] and inferring from them what the proletariat [player] is, and what it must 'do'. . . . This proves that the unity of opposites is not what one believes it to be.

A game designer cannot constrain her focus on the structure of the game, i.e. game mechanics. She must consider player not only as her place as avatar, but as an active heterogeneous force that can never be reduced to the structure of the gameworld.

It is only insofar as the opposites [player/avatar] are heterogeneous or unalignable . . . that there exists a dialectical unity, one which does not make any Whole out of what it ties together. To distinguish the One [game] from the Whole [gameworld]: such is the simple and supreme proposal. Bear in mind that in this gap lies the whole question of the Subject [player].

The One [player] in its essence consists of the Two [player/avatar]: A=(AAP)
And only the avatar has a place in a whole, the gameworld. Player (as opposed to avatar) is out-of-place with respect to the gameworld.

This is why at this point we are faced with a severe expository problem: the correlation of the heterogeneous cannot be schematized. It can barely even be expressed. ... Strong correlation, which the word 'struggle' [gameplay] refers to its practicality, depends on an indirect investigation and on a concept without any representable assignment. It is by the name 'force' that we shall cover what overdetermines the exclusion from any place [avatar] in which the outplace [player] lies revealed.

Gameplay as the strong correlation between the player and the game cannot be represented in a structural way, e.g. as the avatar's place in the gameworld. It is a matter of practical experience and indirect investigation.

Correlation means force against force. It is the relation of forces.

To investigate gameplay, we have to introduce the opposition of 'forces' in addition to contradictions among structural places.

The abstraction of the pair active/passive ... dissolves the qualitative heterogeneity. [in this case] the second (reactive) force is only determined, negatively, by the first: it is still the splace [gameworld] that fixes the place of the outplace [player].

'Force against force' is a heterogeneous relation, neither of these two can be reduced to a place in the other (e.g. using the abstraction active/passive).

We must come to understand that what raises me [player] up reactively against the active of the Other [gameworld] must also be the active of a force in which the Other [gameworld] is no longer represented.

Force of the player, even when it seems passive, is in fact active in itself, it is indifferent to the active-ness that solicited it.

To think correlation is to think force as acting and, thus, as grafted onto the other force, but according to its irreducible quality, for which henceforth the splace [gameworld] is no more than the mediation *to be destroyed* [redesigned].

When force meets force, the representations clash. They cannot be joined, because they are qualitatively different. When player's activity faces the gameworld, it is a force to 'destroy' it, or redesign it.

'Now in so far as this [existent] is a part it is not a whole, not a composite, hence a *simple*. But the relation to a whole is external to it and therefore does not concern it; the self-subsistent is, therefore, not even in itself part; for it is part only through that relation. But now since it is not part it is a whole, for there is only this relation of whole and parts present and the self-subsistent is one of the two. But as a whole, it is again composite; it again consists of parts, and *so on to infinity*. This infinitude consists solely in the perennial alternation of the two determinations of the relation, in each of which the other immediately arises, so that the positedness of each is the vanishing of itself.' (Hegel in Logic)

When the forces are disregarded, and we only consider the structure; avatar as the place of the player, first a part of gameworld, then becomes a whole of its own, and indexes other parts that in turn become wholes, to infinity. In this case, the avatar as place becomes the vanishing of itself in turn as a part and as a whole. Imagine you are merely discovering the structure of a game, browsing its software code. When you open a software component, it is the whole and other components are parts of it. When you go to another component, the previous one becomes a part and this new one becomes the whole. This is the infinite vacillation of structure as parts and whole. In this perspective, you only look at the mechanics. You cannot see the forces, thus cannot investigate the gameplay.

If one rules out force, this being-positing whose essence is to disappear in a perennial alternation, this vanishing term in which the dialectic of the whole is sutured, is the destiny of the out-place [player] (here posited from the start as part), which only finds a place by excluding itself from it as autonomous, and it is equally the destiny of the splace [gameworld] (here, the

whole), which only accepts the outplace [player] by cancelling itself out entirely, since it is what governs the locations.

Without the dialectic of forces, the player and gameworld become autonomous wholes that exclude each other by trying to reduce into parts in a perennial alternation.

Force is only thinkable as activity relative to another force, and this in its very being: 'the conditionedness through another force is thus *in itself* the act of force itself' (Logic).

Force cannot be deduced from structure. It is conditioned only to itself and other forces. Thus, gameplay cannot be deduced from game mechanics.

Hegel clarifies the interpretation of correlation in terms of activity and passivity under the name of 'solicitation of force'. He shows its interior active basis, with passivity being only an appearance, a derived empirical correlation.

A seemingly passive/reactive force is not really reactive. It may have been solicited by another active force, but its activity must have an interior basis. Player must have an internal basis to play this game, and the correlation of the gameplay depends on this basis.

Hegel posits that if force is essentially active in its correlation to the other, then the result is that what conditions it, which at first appears as the other force, the exterior, is in reality interior to it. The movement by which force unfolds itself towards the exterior, against the other force, is much rather governed by the *expansive wrenching away from itself*.

The force of the player might be directed to the game, but it is essentially conditioned to an interior expansion.

'Solicited' by bourgeois oppression, [proletariat, player] only acts as force, and only enters into a combative correlation with the adversary, by determining itself *against itself*, against the internal form of its former impotence.

Thus, the player's force is not only directed to the gameworld, it is in fact directed against the player herself, that part of her that gives form to what she dislikes.

And, likewise, an individual only arrives at his or her singular force within the given circumstances by entering into conflict with the network of inert habits to which these circumstances previously confined him or her.

This internal form targeted by the player's force is a confining network of habits created by circumstances of real life or other game experiences.

Hegel says: 'the activity is essentially [activity] reactive *against itself*'

If player's activity is reactive, it is not really a reaction to game objects. It is really the reaction of the player to herself.

In the logic of forces splace [gameworld] and outplace [player] are correlated in such a way that it is no longer possible to posit the second as the simple exterior-excluded of the first ... the unity of the opposites is not an orientable correlation.

As the logic of forces condition player to herself and the gameworld to itself, these two sides of the struggle/gameplay cannot be oriented against each other as a pair.

It is then that every subject [player] surpasses its place [avatar] by force, inasmuch as its essential virtue lies in being disoriented.

As a result, a player's force lies in her disorientation.

part 1E: subjective and objective

Symbolic is the space of places (splace), the structure of the gameworld, its mechanics, as they are before being played, in the box or loaded on the machine.

Imaginary is how, during a gameplay, a player puts her avatar on the foreground as opposed to a background that relies on the game's structure positively or negatively, thus it is more or less the intended gameplay, or its extreme consequences, like heroic distruption of the gameworld caused by the game's unbalance, the *formal negativity*.

Real is a player's radical ability to destroy or reinvent the game's structure during gameplay or as a game designer, it is the *absolute negativity*, the subjective (as opposed to symbolic and imaginary still being 'objective', relying on the gameworld) field where the player/designer in a way concentrates and purifies her gameplay, abstracting it from particular games, and becomes a real active force as subject to create the actually innovative.

The 'rightist' and 'leftist' deviations in game design were summed up by Ian Schreiber in an article titled 'Metrics (Part I)' he wrote last year. He characterises the 'rightists' as 'the young turks of metric-driven design' and 'leftists' as 'the old guard of touchy-feely game design'. What he offers is some kind of agreement where 'best parts of each get combined'. These are the two components of the contradiction we told about: the 'structural' (mechanics) and the 'historical' (gameplay).

In this part, Badiou describes how forces and places doubly determine the terms of the contradiction.

- The placement divides between the *objective* (the anchorages in the splace-gameworld) and the *subjective* (the outplace-player where the forces face each other).
- Then, the forces divide both the objective and subjective;
 - the objective splace is split into the gameworld and the avatar;
 - the subjective outplace is split into the gameworld's force and the player's force (gameplay).

Force is impure because it is always placed. The new of historicity is infected by the continuity of the structures. Something of the quality of force becomes homogenized with the splace, at least so as to figure therein its own abstraction and support the law.

A player can only develop a force [gameplay], as being anchored to the game's structure. New player behaviors may be emerging, but they are always partly a support to the old structure of the gameworld and its rules.

In any contradiction, force manifests its impurity by the aleatory process of its purification. The mode in which the subjected character of force unfolds itself, in its scission from its affirmative unity, is itself a movement, in which force concentrates (or not) its qualitative identity, thus expansively tearing itself away from that which nonetheless persists in fixing its site.

Force [gameplay] is impure, a mixture of player's will and gameworld's rules. Facing decisions, player tries to purify this force. The attempt to purify gameplay as a qualitative identity is an 'expansive tearing away from' the gameworld rules that continually fixes the player to her avatar.

The party [player] operates at the juncture of itself and its impurifying dissipation, being as it is that which gives direction, at the heart of the class, to the unstoppable battle between the two paths, without any claim to existence other than the manifest proof of a denser quality, a more compact heterogeneity, a newer destructive and recomposing power.

A gameplay being purified by the player is also continually dissipated by the gameworld. Player's only claim to existence is to be the proof of a denser quality in giving directions in battle, keeping her heterogeneity with respect to the gameworld in a compact subjectivity, trying to gain and keep new powers over the gameworld.

Mao gave this juncture a name whose simplicity is bewildering: struggle of the old and the new.

The player trying to develop newness in her gameplay, while struggling the oldness and repetitions enforced by the gameworld. Continual engagement of the player hinges on her success in her struggle to enforce the new over the old.

Struggle of the old and the new. The purification of force amounts to the concentration of its newness. Those 'right ideas' of the masses, which the Marxist party must 'concentrate', are necessarily new ideas.

An engaged player tries to discover new ideas and 'concentrate' them into her gameplay. Purification of force designates this continual renewal of gameplay.

Every science forms a party: just look at their congresses.

We can also view gameplay as some kind of science of playing that specific game. It is a constant innovation of concentrated new ideas. But it also forms a knowledge, something 'old', that can be taught (and also can get 'boring' [=fail to engage] after some time).

If the splace propagates itself by zeal, confidence, and love, as much as by coercion, contempt, and coldness, the concentration of force requires rather, for its singular transmission, the reliance on allusion, tension, and an oblique form of polite mistrust, whose art reaches its peak among the classics. Indeed, it is an understatement to say that Descartes and Fermat, or Pascal and the shadow of Descartes, did not like each other. It is through their essential nonlove that the force of truth circulated.

We can interpret this as follows: Teaching of the mechanics of gameworlds as structures can be either fun or boring, it does not matter. But when players innovate by learning from each others' gameplay, it is usually through the (possibly unpleasant) conflicts that arise between their engagements.

We will call *subjective* those processes relative to the qualitative concentration of force.

In other words, those processes relative to development of a specific gameplay.

Correlatively, we will call 'objective' the process whereby force is placed and is thus impure.

In an objective process, gameplay is shaped by the gameworld constraints, by the place of the avatar with respect to the structure.

Inasmuch as it concentrates and purifies itself qua affirmative scission, every force is therefore a subjective force, and inasmuch as it is assigned to its place, structured, splaced, it is an objective force.

Subjective gameplay is determined by the engagement of the player, whereas objective gameplay is determined by the gameworld.

More exactly, we will say: the being of force is to divide itself according to the objective and the subjective.

Gameplay only exists as divided between subjective engagement and objective gameworld.

We must conceive the imperialist society not only as substance but also as subject.

As opposed to the subjective of player engagement; there is also the subjective of the gameworld. It sustains itself not only through objective rules, but also through supplying players with an imaginary subjectivity that directs them to reproduce the gameworld. This is not engagement proper; we define engagement as the player's counter-determination against the gameworld's determination. In this imaginary subjectivity, the gameworld

merely reproduces itself through affecting the player (by material that is useless for a player's continual engagement of creating novelty). This the 'old' in its struggle against the new.

Science of history? Marxism is the discourse with which the proletariat sustains itself as subject. We must never let go of this idea.

Science of gameplay? Game designers need a discourse with which they can sustain themselves as game designers even when the structure and mechanics of games change over time.

- a) The terms of the contradiction are doubly determined: as to their place (splace/outplace) and as to their force.
- b) Force is doubly determined: objective and subjective.

a) Terms are divided between gameworld/player and also between gameplay aspects old/new.

b) Old and new gameplay are divided into objective (placed in gameworld), and subjective (wrt. the engagement of player)

We can formulate the twofold dialectical criterion of periodization:

- that splace be caught up in the destructive flagrancy of the outplace;
- that the subjective aspect of force attains a threshold in its qualitative concentration.

This is the double precondition for the advent of a subject-process.

- that a gameworld be caught up in the destructive flagrancy of a player;
- that her engagement in this game attains a threshold in its qualitative concentration.

This is the double precondition for this player to become a game designer. Periodization means that game designers belong to periods with respect to the games in which they purified their gameplay.

For the materialist, there is no beginning unless it is marked by a novelty that is undeducible from the periodizing closure.

A game designer makes a 'beginning' only when her design is marked by a novelty that is undeducible from her experience as a player.

Does a digital game industry exist?²

*'If we take eternity to mean not everlasting time but timelessness,
then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.'*
(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1921)

When we say 'Digital Game Industry', we can forget most of the assumptions we have learned at courses on economy. Games are not homogeneous, each is one of its kind. They have no standard use, they have quite different forms according to game genres and players. Most games cannot be picked up as a 'product' or cannot be put on market shelves. We can't even 'open' some games, we only 'enter' or 'leave' from its door. What is being sold as a game in fact looks like a ticket. Entrance ticket to a perpetual virtual world, or entrance ticket to a virtual world that will be instantly created for you. There are single tickets, monthly tickets, unlimited tickets. Sometimes the door is left open and there are only 'items' that we buy from the virtual shelves of the virtual world. These concern the players.

Now let's consider the developers. The collaboration required by a comprehensive game needs a medium of collective creation perhaps never required in any other production domain. Members of a team developing games work more closely than in most other professions. They are in a position to read each other's minds and form a joint spirit, so to say. Music prepared for the game, scenario written for the game, engine developed for the game etc. is always something more than a dossier or a 'work' sent from a nearby desk. Because, playing a game that is made like an obligation also becomes like an obligation... To be precise: in however a 'state of mind' game developers have made the game, it shall be such a 'state of mind'

²Written in October 2012. Presented in ECREA Preconference: Experiencing Digital Games: Use, Effects & Culture of Gaming in Istanbul

into which they invite the players. This basic 'production of a joint spirit' aspect of game development has probably been experienced by those who participated in the event Global Game Jam. I'm not being romantic: developing of a game is always also the developing of a spirit. Thus it requires a cooperation of spirit as much as possible. Game developers' excessive tendency to become attached to their 'work' concerns this fact that game development as a whole cannot become 'work'.

Developing a game is developing a joint spirit

It is often told of digital games that their economic value surpassed that of Hollywood movies. However, we don't usually discuss how the processes of development or playing of digital games go beyond the values expressed by 'economy'. We accept that we have some commitment to digital games in our private life, but when we want to advocate digital games on a public-official level, we give prominence to 'economic benefit' etc. Now it's clear that they are profitable. But what makes digital games so special? What does it mean to be committed to a game? This 'economy' that comes with these games, what does it rely on, in other words, what is the grist to this mill?

We mentioned that there is a close relationship between players' commitment to a game and developers' commitment to their work. Thus, to understand the players, we have to look at the culture and logic of 'work' formed by the developers. The first thing that catches the eye is here called 'networking'.

We usually consider a 'degree' as the legitimate ground for recruitment (at least in our words), and we tend to consider attempts through personal relationships as 'fixing' and declare them illegitimate. Even if we accept the decisiveness of personal relationships' in work relationships, we are not peacefully reconciled with this idea, and we rather consider it as a 'thorn of the rose'. In the Game Developers' Conference that I attended in 2009, I saw that the picture was totally opposite. 'Networking', or finding a work or an employee (a project or a developer) by personal relationships was not some 'sad reality of life', but it had become almost a lifestyle attended with joy. In my notes, I told about this phenomenon:

'Game development process involves many roles of work: Game design, visual design, programming, music, sound effects, environment design, visual arts, character modeling, animation,

game testing, level and puzzle design... These roles intersect in different ways and their definitions mix together. Therefore the companies turn to personal relationships to meet their needs for employees. Moreover, forming a personal relationship network has become a must to be in the industry and has become institutionalized to a certain extent under the name 'Networking'.

Lots of parties in the evenings and the nights of the Game Developers' Conference each of which were organized with some other game company, pointed to this fact. The party organized by IGDA for its members also had the same purpose.

Let us also state that overworking (crunching) is a widespread practice in the industry to complete big games, and so it makes it difficult for its employees to develop a social circle and communality that is outside the industry.

In this industry, the activity to make people meet each other directly or indirectly has formed into a game/ritual by itself. Someone says 'hey let's do networking'... and everyone stands up to form circles of 3-5 people. The rules are given, if you approach to a circle, they open a place for you (if they don't, you move away), you listen to what they talk for some time, and then you begin to talk about the topic. After some time, you finish meeting those people, and after swapping your business cards, you turn to other circles.' (GDC notes. Source: dijitaloyun.wordpress.com)

How can we define the 'work culture' formed here? We see that the unofficial parties-meetings and personal relationships are crucially decisive in the 'economy' that we call the game industry, but the system we designate as 'economy' cannot contain the relationships formed here. It looks like we encounter another level that forms the ground for 'economy', but how can we name this ground?

Personal Relationships as the ground of Economy

Even the name of METUTECH-ATOM that we have in our proximity should light up something in our head: PRE-INCUBATION CENTER. A strange name for an institution for university-industry cooperation... So what is this pre-incubation center?

'The main objective of pre-incubation structures and systems is to prevent the loss of creative ideas produced by participants and to convert these ideas or projects into experience and investments.' (METUTECH-ATOM website)

There is a question to ask in view of this explanation: How exactly is some 'idea or project' that is not 'lost' but also has not yet been 'converted into experience and investments'? The enigma of the name 'pre-incubation' rests in this 'in between'ness. An 'idea or project' that does not yet have an economic payoff, still needs a space to live, an 'interspace'. Because, game developers have to keep alive 'a joint spirit'. How should we name these 'pre-economical' life spaces that form the ground of the economy we call 'game industry'?

The first pre-incubation center of Europe had been founded in Bielefeld University of Germany in 1997. We will find the answer to our question in this sentence by Paul Virilio dated 1998:

'The globalization of trade is not, then, *economic*, as has been the constant refrain since the development of the single market; it is, primarily, *ecological*!' (Paul Virilio, Information Bomb, 1998)

Ecology... The word we were looking for. We can designate the cultural spaces of creation that were founded around playing and game development as certain 'ecosystems'.

Players and Game Developers as Ecosystems

How should we apprehend a pre-economical ecosystem that forms the ground for an existing economy? When we say ecosystem, we don't need to talk in terms of real or potential numbers/gains/utilities, therefore we can conveniently move our attention away from popular games to independent and experimental games. So let's move... Independent game developers were described in the conference notes as follows:

'When you first enter the expo hall in the northern building, there is Rock Band, Blizzard to the left, and various game companies around them. Game videos are displayed on screens in their booths, and all games look familiar. Wandering around

the booths, we can almost see the titles on the shelves, FPS, RPG, RTS... On the other hand, if we move further to the backside, we find the booths that were reserved for Independent Games Festival and IGF Mobile. On the tables arranged around circles, each team presents its own game. On each table, there is a computer/mobile device to show the game, and someone from the developer team right next to it.

He turns to you, noticing that you are interested. He first explains the game's logic. He has maybe told this to a hundred people... But he knows that you won't understand the game in the first look, because these games do not belong to the genres that we are usually familiar. Then he gives the keyboard/gamepad/iPhone to you for you to give it a try. Maybe you are not so willing, maybe you think that you won't probably make it; but from this point on, your quickness in adapting the gameplay is very important. Maybe it takes longer for juries to fiddle with these games before awarding their playability, quality of sound, arts, innovation, etc. but a game in the market has at most a few minutes to engage the player. Therefore, the developer keeps a watchful eye on you. After you finish, he asks 'How do you like it?'

You will probably say something he has already heard, but still he cannot risk to miss a valuable opinion. He knows that a small adjustment, a little editing in the game can have a great effect for players' behaviour, expectations and playability.

When we say game, we usually think of 'titles', Fallout 3, GTA IV, ... (the industry calls a game that has become a product, a 'title') But the relations among teams that develop these games, and their relations with their publishers, urge these teams to follow certain assumptions about consumer behaviour and keep themselves away from the abyss of the market. Therefore, although they form the prominent form of perception of the industry, these structures, forming their own crust and armour, keep the basic dynamics of the market away from attention (what it worse were the overlong queues of people up to their sessions). But when we look at an independent studio, in that one meter-square place reserved in the expo hall, we personally confront all of the primordial drives and anxieties of game development. It's as if we witness the moment of birth of

the industry.' (GDC notes. Source: dijitaloyun.wordpress.com)

What is hereby defined as the 'moment of birth of the industry', is the ecosystemic/pre-economical interspace that the 'pre-incubation center' wants to realize, the space where the 'spirit' that forms the game is born and developed as a joint 'idea or project' among the developers and players.

Game Creation Space as a Pre-Economical Interspace

Economy begins with a purchase. Thus, we can designate as 'pre-economical interspaces' all of the space for creation and relationships that exists before a monetary transaction. To an investor that aims to realize the purchase, this interspace looks like a misty abyss. A game's economical value is determined only after its 'release' to the market. Everything done up to that point, from an investor point of view, corresponds to swinging above this abyss for an extensively long time...

Game development as a 'labour process', if we use Karl Marx's term, is a 'salto mortale / deadly leap' that takes a quite long time. To reveal digital game's difference from other commodities, let's go through this passage that is a bit lengthy:

'The price [price of iron in terms of gold] while on the one hand indicating the amount of labour-time contained in the iron, namely its value, at the same time signifies the pious wish to convert the iron into gold, that is to give the labour-time contained in the iron the form of universal social labour-time. If this transformation fails to take place, then the ton of iron ceases to be not only a commodity but also a product; since it is a commodity only because it is not a use-value for its owner, that is to say his labour is only really labour if it is useful labour for others, and it is useful for him only if it is abstract general labour. It is therefore the task of the iron or of its owner to find that location in the world of commodities where iron attracts gold. But if the sale actually takes place, as we assume in this analysis of simple circulation, then this difficulty, the salto mortale of the commodity, is surmounted. As a result of this alienation – that is its transfer from the person for whom it is a non-use-value to the person for whom it is a use-value – the ton of iron proves to be in fact a use-value and its price is

simultaneously realised, and merely imaginary gold is converted into real gold.' (Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859)

Marx here tells the tragedy we always go through as digital players and game developers:

1. **'it is a commodity only because it is not a use-value for its owner'**. But what we call a 'use of digital game' is immediately a subjective experience, a unique and singular 'action of playing' that takes place through an interface. It begins and ends in a certain timespan. Consequently, a digital game, precisely due to the fact that it is interactive, is inevitably 'a use-value only for its owner'.
2. **'his labour is only really labour if it is useful labour for others'**. But a digital game, because it's a subjective experience, is not 'useful for others'. We cannot locate or define this 'usefulness' no matter how hard we try.
3. **'and it is useful for him only if it is abstract general labour'**. But for every digital game, the labour that develops/designs it is particular to this game, we can find 'abstract general labour' only in the production of music, graphics, codes etc. that complement the game. The 'production of spirit' that generates the game's fundamental essence can never be an abstract or general labour.
4. **'the task of the iron or of its owner to find that location in the world of commodities where iron attracts gold'**. Absolutely. Putting 'game' instead of 'iron', and 'player' instead of 'gold', we can accept this sentence as it is.

Note the sentence in the beginning: 'The price while on the one hand indicating the amount of labour-time contained in the iron, namely its value, at the same time signifies the pious wish to convert the iron into gold'.

The 'labour-time' indicated by the price points to the need for developers to make their living. The other thing indicated by the price, the 'pious wish', on the other hand is what we have called a 'spirit' above.

Then what does it mean to 'give the labour-time contained in the game the form of universal social labour-time'? When does a digital game take

a universal social form? It takes such a form, when it belongs to a 'game genre' or when it becomes the first instance of a 'game genre'.

In that case, we can pinpoint the concept 'game genre' as the point of transition between the ecosystem and the economy.

Genre-ification of Games as the industrialization of the ecosystem

To place the phenomena of genre-ification in the industrialization of digital game ecosystems, let's take another look into Game Developer Conference notes:

'As the games followed the example of movies, the cultural structure of the industry had repeated the divisions in cinema. At one side is the blockbusters growing with the 'core' gamers' interest, at the other side are the independent game developers supported by those who want to see distinctive and different games... But, because games are not movies and they do not need stories or characters to keep our interest (Tetris!), this picture is in fact a deceiving one. We can moreover say that: there are as many varieties of publishers and game developers as there are game genres. From big game publishers releasing blockbusters to web portals selling 'casual games' to facebook distributing small game applications, every platform has created its own payment/income sharing models.

Every publisher, to engage the players in its target group, chooses the games that are known to appeal to them, thereby forming the basis for genre-ification in games. To explain by an example; it is not that booksellers distribute books to shelves because these books already belong to certain genres, in contrary, book genres emerge because booksellers sell these books through some shelves, where these books undergo an artificial selection.

Since independent game studios has not internalized this selection mechanism of these publishers, whether consciously or not, they can distance themselves from established game genres. Whence the greatest variety is observed among independent developers, each game, each team represents different characteristics.' (GDC notes. Source: dijitaloyun.wordpress.com)

The point I want to emphasize here is the phenomenon of genre-ification of markets in parallel with the genre-ification of games. That is to say, game genres go beyond being 'products' in a common market, and they also bring along a differentiation of market structures. We can say that the genre-ification and separation in digital games immediately genre-ifies and separates the industry itself, forming economies that become independent from each other.

Therefore, no single 'digital game industry' exists, there are 'digital game industries' that are constructed above networks of digital game ecosystems that are supported financially by these industries, and these multiple industries differentiate in several stages from creation to markets.

Games in different genres often do not appear in a common market. So, while comparing games from different genres, we cannot rely on the numerical ratio of their prices/exchange values. The separation of their markets signals that these game genres are separated from each other at the stage of selling, in other words, when their 'use-value' is 'proved'.

To develop a game of an existing genre can be considered as 'selling a product to a market', but to develop the first instance of a new game genre, beyond all existing markets and economies, is to expand the ecosystem of digital games by inventing a new 'use-value'.

A market formed by a game genre, in an economy point of view, consists of particular features (who is the audience, what is the production model, etc). But from a digital player point of view, each game genre is unique. That is to say, each 'game genre', with respect to the ecosystem, is a new 'form of universal social labour-time'.

Game Genre as a form of universal social labour-time

To summarize the story up to this point: Digital games do not resemble the economies that we know of. Players and game developers relate through a 'spirit' they incorporate into the game. The phenomenon of 'networking' points to this spiritual relation in game industry where personal relationships come in view as work relationships. Development of a game requires interspaces where this 'spirit', 'idea or project' will live without a need to be converted into economical value, where it will continue its existence in an extended 'salto mortale'. We can call the sum of these spaces as digital game ecosystems. The economy is constructed on this ecosystemic ground through digital game genres. But these game genres cannot be consid-

ered as various products in a market, because each new game genre, to be 'proven' as a new 'use-value', needs to create its own market and its own economy. That is to say, the genre-ification of digital games will have to take place on the ecosystemic level that relies on personal relationships.

We reach the conclusion: Digital game industries are economies that are firmly grounded on ecosystems formed by digital game developers and digital players. Since these ecosystems consist of subjective points of view, to an investor, digital games resemble an immense abyss, an extended 'deadly leap'. Digital game ecosystems, due to this characteristic, resist against being 'economized' and converted into an ordinary 'exchange values' in the market. They cannot be virtualized by finance capital. In other words, digital games, often blamed to be 'virtual', when considered as an industry, since they cannot be separated from the ecosystems that keep them alive, forms the most real and most well-grounded economies. Their exchange values cannot be determined beforehand, because they are only converted into use-value when they are played. Therefore, the selling of a digital game is always a selling before the real selling, and thus their 'markets' become separated from each other.

We can consider what Marx called the 'pious wish to give the labour-time contained in the iron the form of universal social labour-time' as the 'pious wish to form a game genre'. Game developers should recognize this wish. In that case, what is the raw material that this 'pious wish' relies on? When developing a digital game, when relating to each other as developers and players for this purpose, what do we truly shape?

What is the raw material of digital game ecosystems?

At the moment we consider a spiritual raw material that can carry economical value, we are stepping out of the existing 'political economy' paradigm. Because, political economy is the logic of interests and conflicts of interests. What comes face to face in ecosystemic relations are, on the contrary, desires, not numbers.

Maybe we need to comprehend 'politics' in a new way to understand digital games. Maybe digital games' narrow acceptance in society, their becoming into 'objects of fear', stems from a radical incompatibility between digital game ecosystems and the existing logic of 'politics'...

This fear against digital games, can it be the 'turning point' where the existing logic of political interests reaches to an impasse and becomes more

and more conservative?

Our new question is this: If the logic of numerical 'interests' we are used to see in political economy is based on 'exchange value', what is the 'raw material' that provides the base for the ecosystemic logic of digital game creation and playing?

If you please, let us lend an ear to this interview with Slavoj Žižek from last year. Žižek offers an alternative to the politics of fear:

'I call [this] the politics of fear. You are never escaping fear. In societies where everything is managed technocratically, the only way to mobilise people is on the basis of fear. The fear of taboos, of pollution, of outsiders, of who knows what.

In the West, we have no longer the capacity to produce a positive vision. Everything is predicated on the technocratic management and mobilisation of fear. And Left and Right are united on this. You have rightist fears – immigrants, homosexuals, etc; you can have leftist fears – ecological devastation...

— *So, if not fear, then what?*

Badiou and I have been debating this thing privately, and we are now going to write about it. There is one place where Lacan should be theoretically corrected. You know, Lacan, following Freud, says that the only emotion that does not cheat is anxiety. The idea is that all others can be masks, so even love can be a mask of hatred and so on. But not anxiety. With anxiety, you encounter the Real. To this one should add: enthusiasm. Already Kant, while talking about the French Revolution, hinted that enthusiasm (as in the sublime) is where you touch the noumenal, the thing in itself.

And in politics, with enthusiasm you cannot cheat. Now, you might say, what about the fanaticism of racists, of Nazis? But that is not enthusiasm, and I can prove this. Enthusiasm is not fanaticism.

— *How do we distinct enthusiasm from the fanaticism of the fanatic?*

By its inherent structure. My reproach to Nazism is that it is negative, it is based on fear. How should I put it... enthusiasm does not need a Jew. When you talk with an anti-Semitic racist, it is already wrong to frame the discussion on the terms of 'what

Jews really are like'. Anti-Semites have no interest in finding out what Jews are really like; in fact, they were strongest in Germany in the very places where there were almost no Jews.

— *So what is enthusiasm?*

We know that it is not fear. In a Badiou-Kantian sense, it is a commitment to an idea. The idea, in my understanding, is a Communist idea. For example, in politics, you cannot have enthusiasm for your nation. It has a universal dimension. You can have enthusiasm for equality, justice. For something greater than the particular. A certain kind of enthusiasm.

Now, you might say, what about the enthusiasm of an élitist artist? Is that universal? I would say, even in the case of a very difficult poet like Mallarmé, composers like Schoenberg, their work, despite its élitism, has an underlying enthusiastic dimension. In enjoying it, in enjoying its enthusiasm, you want to share it with everyone. It has this universal dimension. Of sharing.' (Shuddhabrata Sengupta's interview with Slavoj Zizek)

With some help of speculation, we can conclude: If Slavoj Zizek were a digital player or a digital game developer, he would tell that the spiritual raw material that this industry relies on is 'enthusiasm', which is a 'commitment to an idea' that involves a universal dimension of 'wanting to share it with everyone'.

Enthusiasm as spiritual raw material

We claimed that digital game playing, digital game development and the spirit of personal relations that develop around those consist of enthusiasm in a Zizekian sense. To support this thesis, we will consider the relation between enthusiasm and anxiety. In his book 'Less Than Nothing', Slavoj Zizek describes the emergence of enthusiasm as follows:

'The Event in its first emergence causes anxiety, since by definition it shatters the transcendental coordinates of a world. It is this anxiety which affects everyone, all subjects of a world, and denying or ignoring the Event, trying to reintegrate it into the coordinates of the (old) world, etc., are reactions triggered by this anxiety, reactive ways of coping with the Event's traumatic impact. (Social democracy, liberal ignorance, and fascism are

reactions to the anxiety caused by a communist event.) But only an authentic subjective fidelity to the Event succeeds in 'converting' anxiety into enthusiasm (almost in the Freudian sense of converting affects): it displays the courage to confront or accept the Event in its full traumatic impact, and to transform this anxiety into the enthusiasm of emancipatory struggle. In this precise sense, anxiety is the necessary background of enthusiasm: there is no enthusiasm without anxiety, enthusiasm does not begin in itself, it is formally the result of the conversion of anxiety.' (Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 2012)

In brief, enthusiasm requires a prior anxiety, and anxiety requires that our world being shattered or that we enter into a shattered world. When we think about our generation, along with the short history and cultural life of Turkey, it would not be difficult to trace this shattering to the main whereabouts of its roots and its continuation.

Leaving aside a possible dispute about an 'event', its place of emergence, etc, we can clearly state that the abyss that separates the pre-1980 and post-1980 times, has created directly or indirectly a generalized shattering and anxiety among the generations that also include ourselves. The world that has been shattered in this process is the world of 'old times' that we see in Yeşilçam movies. Today, the fact that we are not able to add on Yeşilçam movies in terms of truth, beauty and goodness, points to the fact that the shattering marked by 1980, and our generalized anxiety due to it, continues much the same as it was. In the space of culture, which now also contains digital games besides cinema and television, it is inevitable that we confront this same shattering and anxiety, even if indirectly. We confront it in both senses, as the great anxiety that arises against a novel situation, and as the powerful enthusiasm produced in this process.

Žižek defines enthusiasm as the emotional form that anxiety is converted into. The greater the anxiety in the beginning, the greater the enthusiasm that will be produced in its conversion.

Let's also read this passage to find the reflection of enthusiasm in digital games:

'In each truth-domain, anxiety signals the encounter with a minimal difference which hinders the absolute reduction or purification, that is, which is simultaneously the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility (the immanent limit) of the

domain in question: in science, ontological difference, which prevents the scientific reduction of the object of knowledge to a positive entity (as in cognitivist brain sciences); in politics, class difference, which prevents the political project from fulfilling itself in a new non-antagonistic 'harmonious society'; in love, sexual difference, which stands for the impossibility of the sexual relationship; and, in art, the minimal gap between art and daily life which condemns to failure all modernist attempts to unite the two. Each time the difference persists; however, each time, the point is not to 'respect the limit' but to push through to the end in order to encounter the minimal difference: to push through the cognitivist reduction of man to a brain machine to discover the 'negativity' of the death drive; to push through the modernist unification of art and life to discover the 'minimal difference' between the two dimensions (Malevich, Duchamp); to push through love to confront the limit of sexual difference; likewise, one must push through a revolutionary process to the end in order to confront the insurmountable antagonism.' (Slavoj Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, 2012)

The 'immanent limit' of entertainment in digital games and use in digital interfaces is, likewise, the difference between the player/user and her embodiment, her avatar in the virtual world. If our purpose is to make anxiety convert into enthusiasm, the point is not to respect the distinction formed between 'real life/virtual life' and take sides according to it, but on the contrary, to push through the possibilities provided by the digital game and its interface to their limits with courage and thereby confront the minimal difference of user/avatar in its most abstract form.

New genres of interaction that are created each time in digital games and interfaces, and the progression of this process with newer genres and forms of games/interfaces, show the process in which the generalized anxiety of our shattered world is being piece by piece converted into enthusiasm. This emotional conversion is progressing in parallel with the changes that take place at the immanent limits of digital interfaces. The 'substructure' that we call 'ecosystems', which grounds the economy while containing the whole of digital players and game developers, takes its 'ludic spirit' that keeps it alive, from this generalized process of historical transformation where 'anxiety is converted into enthusiasm'.

Playing as a realization of enthusiasm

After closing up this parenthesis about enthusiasm and anxiety, if we agree that we have found the raw material (enthusiasm) that our industry relies on, we can repeat our quotation from Karl Marx with small modifications:

The playing [playing of game in terms of enthusiasm] while on the one hand indicating the amount of creation contained in the game, namely its value, at the same time signifies the pious wish to convert the game into enthusiasm, that is to give the creation contained in the game the form of game genre. If this transformation fails to take place, then the game ceases to be not only a commodity but also a product; since it is a commodity only because it is not a use-value for its developer, that is to say his labour is only really labour if it is useful labour for others, and it is useful for him only if it is abstract general labour. It is therefore the task of the game or of its developer to find that location in the world of commodities where game attracts enthusiasm. But if the sale actually takes place, as we assume in this analysis of simple circulation, then this difficulty, the salto mortale of the commodity, is surmounted. As a result of this alienation – that is its transfer from the person for whom it is a non-use-value to the person for whom it is a use-value – the game proves to be in fact a use-value and its playing is simultaneously realised, and merely imaginary enthusiasm is converted into real enthusiasm.

This text would probably be familiar to a game developer. Here are our modifications:

1. **iron = game:** our candidate for a 'commodity' is the digital game itself.
2. **labour-time = creation:** the labour process of digital game consists of the creation that takes place in the pre-economical interspace.
3. **form of universal social labour-time = form of game genre:** game creation only gains a social economical value through being a 'game genre'.
4. **price = playing:** a player expresses her valuing of a game not by money but by the action of playing it.

5. **gold = enthusiasm:** as the raw material of a digital game is enthusiasm, what happens among the developers as well as between developers and players is not an economical 'transactions', but an ecosystemic relationship. This relationship is not measured by 'gold' that is exchange value, but immediately by the sharing of 'enthusiasm'.

I want to emphasize the last sentence in our new passage: 'As a result of this alienation – that is its transfer from the person for whom it is a non-use-value to the person for whom it is a use-value – the game proves to be in fact a use-value and its playing is simultaneously realised, and merely imaginary enthusiasm is converted into real enthusiasm'. Therefore, the 'transfer/proving of use-value' and the playing of the game is simultaneous. The real base that keeps the digital game industry standing is not the realization of price in market, but the realization of enthusiasm in playing. The resistance of digital games ecosystem against economical virtualization, the failure to found a digital games market independent from game genres and playing, etc. are direct results of this characteristic of digital games.

According to these results, we can name digital game development as 'enthusiasm engineering'. Digital game is a form of creation that forces the economical markets that are based on preservable 'exchange values' into structural transformation.

Before finishing this article, let us say that the logic of 'enthusiasm' that we described through digital games in fact forms a context that is more general than digital games: if 'gold' is a value that can be reserved/stored at some place, 'enthusiasm' is a value that cannot be stored anywhere because it has become placeless and it has to repeat its realization each time it is realized. When we pass from 'gold' to 'enthusiasm', we are forced to reconstitute our relationship with time and space in our reality. As Virilio says:

'Henceforth, here no longer exists; everything is now. The end of our history has not happened, but we do have the programmed end of the 'hic et nunc' (being-here) and the 'in situ' (being-in-place).' (Paul Virilio, Information Bomb, 1998)

The relation between an economy and the ecosystem that grounds it, is the relation between a place and the time of its existence: economy always bases itself on a place of calculation, a cash box. But ecosystems are collections of relationships that continue in the form of lively-emotional flows.

In the process where enthusiasm carried by personal relations that exist in present time becomes prominent as a universal value, places of economy and calculation that require an extended time and permanence in some box (including cash boxes as well as computer boxes) are losing their absolute-ness and are becoming relative.

Just like how gold and places where gold accumulates had relativized all other social values in the old times, now enthusiasm and the 'present time' where enthusiasm emerges is gradually relativizing to itself places of its emergence and places of value accumulation.

One can re-examine every issue that falls under the topic 'Digital Game Industry' keeping these in mind. Thus, let us remind the readers the books 'Digital Game as a culture industry product' and 'Digital Game Reader' by Mutlu Binark and Günseli Bayraktutan (dijitaloyun.wordpress.com/kitap).

Centuries ago, Alchemists were looking for a magic formula for Gold, which was preparing the end of the sovereignty of God.

After some time, by spreading trade relationships around the whole world, Gold founded its own system: Capitalism, which produced Gold from Gold, eliminated Alchemy and overthrew God.

Are not game developers ('enthusiasm engineers') in a sense, Alchemists of today? They are looking for a magic formula for Enthusiasm, which is gradually lifting its effectiveness against the current sovereignty of Gold.

Maybe we need to direct our attention to the Enthusiasm itself; that is to say, to the Ludic Spirit that is infesting the workplaces by producing Enthusiasm from Enthusiasm, the mole that is undermining real gold by its 'virtual' gold that rely on real relationships...

Antiprogession Chain³

Readers of Slavoj Žižek are familiar with the superego injunction to 'Enjoy!'. This superegoic injunction is a codename for *desire* in our age of globalization:

'It was Nietzsche who observed that 'human beings do not desire happiness, only the Englishmen desire happiness'—today's globalized hedonism is thus merely the obverse of the fact that, in the conditions of global capitalism, we are ideologically 'all Englishmen' (or, rather, Anglo-Saxon Americans. . .). So what is wrong with the rule of the pleasure principle? In Kant's description, ethical duty functions like a foreign intruder that disturbs the subject's homeostatic balance, its unbearable pressure forcing the subject to act 'beyond the pleasure principle,' ignoring the pursuit of pleasures. For Lacan, exactly the same description holds for desire, which is why enjoyment is not something that comes naturally to the subject, as a realization of his or her inner potential, but is the content of a traumatic superegoic injunction.' (Žižek, 2012)

Žižek has been showing the significance of this injunction in various contexts, in helping us to detect various forms of compulsions that effectively keep the system going. However, this 'continuation' of the system is certainly not a *forward progression*, but -let us say- an historical *antiprogession* in which many production & development systems of modern capitalism are becoming piece by piece unsustainable theoretically and practically on their respective historical foundations.

³Written in October 2013. Presented in amberconference'13: did you plug it in? fişe taktin mı? in İstanbul

This is not to say that our actions are distinguished from capitalism, capitalism itself from the resistance against it, or *antiproggression* as we call it from partial *progressions* of various kinds. Insofar as we cannot understand it, we cannot reason on it, we cannot be part of it, the whole thing that includes social media, resistances, fundamental rights, immigration, war, peace, hunger, economy, ecology, commons, communication, tradition, lifestyle, terrorism, agreements, institutions and so on and so on that we call 'humanity' at times, 'civilization' or 'capitalism' at times, becomes a mystery that cannot be captured by some kind of a *principal contradiction*, so to say.

In a recent conference in Istanbul (Tok, 2013) apropos of the Gezi Park resistance, Alain Badiou asked a question to express such a principal contradiction: *How can we combine the question of 'equality' with the question of 'freedom' today, given that they were defined and solved as two separate problems in the French revolution?* These two separate solutions correspond to what we now know as 'law' and 'art'.

In Gezi Park and other resistance movements, we can observe the return of this question of the French revolution. In general, globally, it is becoming clearer and clearer that 'law' has become *equality for those that are more free*, and 'art' has become *freedom for those that are more equal*. In the same conference, Slavoj Žižek proposed to revitalize Rousseau's concept of *General Will* as the new universality of this emerging revolutionary question.

General Will as Full speech

A social problem becomes a 'revolutionary question' insofar as it cannot be reduced down to 'issues' and 'topics'. Such reductions may reach at grammatically and/or politically correct sentences, policies, reports, figures, activities, balances, but none of these 'assets' can express itself as General Will.

The concept of General Will is closer to the psychoanalytic concept of 'full speech':

'Full speech is speech which aims at, which forms, the truth such as it becomes established in the recognition of one person by another. Full speech is speech which performs. One of the subjects finds himself, afterwards, other than he was before. That is why this dimension cannot be evaded in the analytic experience.

We cannot think of the analytic experience as a game, a lure, an intrigue based on an illusion, a suggestion. Its stake is full speech. Once this point has been made, as you might have already noticed, lots of things sort themselves out and are clarified, but lots of paradoxes and contradictions appear. The value of this conception is precisely to bring out these paradoxes and contradictions, which doesn't make them opacities and obscurities. On the contrary, it is often what appears to be harmonious and comprehensible which harbours some opacity. And inversely it is in the antinomy, in the gap, in the difficulty, that we happen upon opportunities for transparency. This is the point of view on which our method is founded, and so, I hope, is our progress.' (Lacan, 1988)

Full speech is a speech act that can result in decisions that can be conscious or unconscious. These decisions can be said to belong both to the speaker(s) and the listener(s), since 'full speech is defined by the fact that it is identical to what it speaks about' (Lacan, 2006). Since General Will of a revolutionary question consists of full speech, what we call 'capitalism' is ultimately any situational background that can prepare for such full speech.

Narcissistic Antiprogession

To describe the situational background of the current revolutionary question, let us return to the superego injunction to 'Enjoy!'. This is something closest to us, something we can recognize in our relations and communications. To give an example from the technologies of new times, consider the well-known figure of a narcissistic social media user that compulsively tries to increase the number of his/her followers, or the number of positive responses to his/her items. What is this narcissistic figure, of which millions exist in all around the globe? Is it an evidence of degeneration? Or is it to be accepted as part of our civilization's 'progress', or as we may as well call it, 'antiprogession'? In his earlier work, Žižek suggested 'mandatory narcissism' as a social form of capitalism (Žižek, 1986).

During last decade, such narcissistic adoption of social media was something consistently criticised by public, private, political, ... all kinds of established social institutions. To return to our key phenomenon; the injunction to 'Enjoy!' that was apparent in social media narcissism was something these societal institutions tried to purge, to cleanse themselves

of, or at least something to keep a secure distance from. In the 'public spaces' of society, it was expected from all reasonable human beings with a care for 'society' to try to keep a footing on at least some such 'public' organizations/institutions or people affiliated with them, and keep their socio-narcissistic activity in their 'private' spheres, even if this activity becomes increasingly 'common' as a global phenomenon. However, social media was also a problem for 'private sphere', as it became a popular locus of jealousy and all kinds of other relational problems.

What does social media stand for, and how does it have a political force? To make a provisional definition: *social media is playfulness against the immersion of capitalist game*. This might be associated to Roger Caillois' well-known distinction between game (that consists of rules for winning/losing) and play (that is without rules, consists of playfulness), but that would be another approach to the question (Caillois, 2001). Insofar as it can 'aim at' and 'form truth', social media can produce *full speech* as in analytic experience, thereby becoming a locus for *General Will*.

Suture

To speak of loci to place our speech, we need a concept of time or history that is appropriate for our speech acts. In what 'tense' can we describe the historical situation? It is a common habit to describe history in past tense, as I did in previous paragraphs. But this use should not to be taken in the sense of 'something will be over' or in a catastrophic sense that 'something will destroy itself'. This would be coining hypotheses about the future that we are evidently unable to test. I would rather interpret past tense in a sense that our system is becoming more and more 'vulnerable', in a sense used by cryptanalysts, except that it is getting vulnerable not to *decryption*, but to *decipherment*.

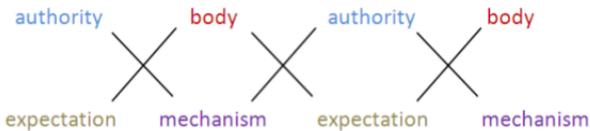
A decryptor wants to find the key to a 'Crypt', so his time passes when he finds this key. However, a decipherer (like Freud or Marx) is not after some key, since he does not see a locked Crypt. He knows that the truth lies in the concrete process, in the accumulation of images in dreamwork or the accumulation of capital in history, in the concrete form of this accumulation. So, a decipherer's time passes only when the *cipher* can repeat itself in a new context, when the given concrete process can be captured in some text, some discourse or some model. A decipherer is not after some locked Crypt, to find its key, to open it or to destroy it altogether, but he's after a *cipher*, simply to repeat it truthfully.

In whatever we say or do, keeping in mind that sayings become doings and doings become sayings, the truth will be in the instances we recognize, in a way that what is said or done shall be its own evidence. We can call this *self-evidence* by the psychoanalytic concept of suture, which according to Miller implies the position of a *taking-the-place-of*. (Miller, 1966)

To be concrete, what we are after is not some imagined *future*, but a collective *suture of knowledge* and action towards it. Note that a suture of knowledge is not like the societal institutions we know of: universities, courts, unions, political parties, governments, non-governmental organizations, etc. Such an institution with missions, visions, plans and projects for an imagined *future* has to exist in a *present where history has ended*. To become a suture of knowledge means to sew up this scissure between *past that has ended and present that drew a line between itself and its past*. We can be a suture only when our past is present while our presence belongs to history. In this case, our action or speech in the present shall be this *suture*, which I have just called a *cipher*, a recoding of reality that is its own key.

Antiprogession Chain

To come to the point of this paper, I want to present a cipher that will be referred to as *antiprogession chain*, which consists of the interrelations among four basic terms. These four are: authority, expectation, body and mechanism. Their interrelation is represented by a chain in the following form:



In this chain, upper and lower levels can be considered as superstructure and substructure in a Marxist sense. To put it simply: authorities are grounded on expectations, and bodies are grounded on mechanisms. Moreover, according to the cross-relations that link the chain: authorities are shaped by mechanisms and bodies are shaped by expectations. These relations can be put in different words, but the basic structure of the chain will remain the same.

This structure can be explained in terms of different distinctions. Consider these explanations: An authority represents a 'use' with a certain utility, whereas a body represents a 'play' with a success. Authorities make themselves listened, bodies make themselves seen. Authorities are symbolic codes, bodies are imaginary instances.

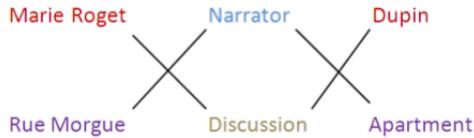
However it is described or explained, the chain's function or truthfulness owes to its structure, which can be recognized in an immediate way. In other words, it obtains a valid 'use' or 'authority' only insofar as its image drawn on paper can become a 'body' that shall meet the 'expectation' of the reader, and insofar as this 'body' can ground itself on some 'mechanism', a language or a protocol of some communication or activity. It does not depend on an axiomatic structure, it does not depend on any external institution. It consists simply as a pattern whose repetitions we shall recognize when we see them: a cipher.

This chain can progress leftwards or rightwards by incorporating new terms, just like nucleotides of a DNA double helix. Its progression has no direction: it is at the same time an antiprogession, a progression that continues because it is failing. This *negativity* can be expressed in different verbs: authorities are fooled, expectations are fueled, bodies fail, mechanisms fall, etc. But whatever term do we refer to, any fooling / failing / fueling / falling refers to the whole of the structure, as suggested by the etymological similarity, namely the common initial letter of these f-words. And the whole of the structure is nothing but the chain we have described above. In this precise sense, the chain that is being presented is a model both for progression and antiprogession.

Antiprogession Chains in The Purloined Letter

In this section, we will demonstrate the antiprogession model through a well-known story 'The Purloined Letter' by Edgar Allan Poe (Poe, 1845). The structure of this story was examined by Lacan in his 'Seminar On "The Purloined Letter"' (Lacan, 2006).

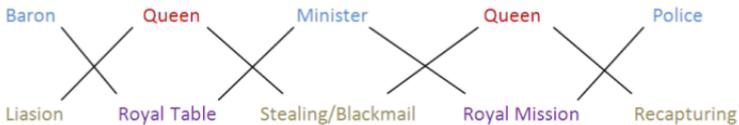
The story begins with the narrator visiting Dupin in his apartment and considering a discussion with him about the killing of Marie Roget, the affair of the Rue Morgue:



Then as the Prefect enters the apartment to tell about an official business -in a 'coincidence' according to the narrator- and then Dupin decides to keep the place dark. Prefect tells about oddities that made them puzzled.

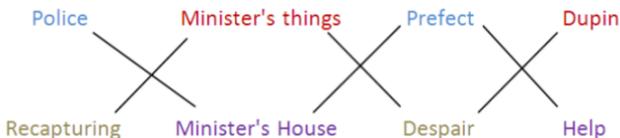


Then he tells the initial event that led to his mission: the Queen had received a letter from a Baron, with whom she is in a secret liasion. Then her minister came at an inappropriate time, and stole the letter from her table. This act was effectively a blackmail to the Queen, who then charged the Police with a mission to recapture this letter back from the Minister:



It is significant that the Queen's inappropriate liasion with the Baron does not shake her power to charge the police with a secret mission to protect this liasion. Her power is enabled by the 'Royal' mechanisms that ground her existence as a 'Royal' body. In this way, a 'Royal' chain can repeat itself as an antiprogession, in its failure, as a result of its failure.

The police searches Minister's house, but cannot find the letter. Then the Prefect, seeing the Police's despair, secretly approaches Dupin to ask for his help:



In the previous chain, Queen's secret was the source of her failure to keep the letter. In the current chain, it is police's failure that is the source of Prefect's secret request to Dupin. In both cases, we see that structure repeats itself in an interchanging movement of failures and secrecies. As the story goes on, other similar chains are formed, and in the end, they are eventually solved as Dupin succeeds in the task given to him. But what all of this has to do with capitalism?

Antiprogression Chains in Capitalism

The four terms we introduced and their positions in the chain may sound arbitrary. But if you look into any social intercourse that is part of what we call capitalism, in their most prototypical forms, you can see this chain appear. The color codes we used are also not arbitrary, 'red' for body and 'blue' for authority carry symbolic value in social relations. 'Purple' mechanisms ground the 'red' bodies, and 'yellow' expectations are remainders of such mechanisms, and that which can ground 'blue' authority.

To summarize our model, let us describe its process: authorities are grounded on various expectations that remained. These authorities match themselves to bodies, by recognizing and modifying the mechanisms that ground them. Then, bodies in turn match themselves to authorities, by recognizing and modifying the expectations that ground them. As a result, if we can follow the antiprogression of such chains, we can show (1) how expectations conflict through mechanisms, and (2) how mechanisms conflict through expectations.

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a quote on encryption=entombing. antigone about her brother:

"as rumour saith, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will." <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html>

creon: "Eteocles, who hath fallen fighting for our city, in all renown of arms, shall be entombed, and crowned with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest."

creon continues: "But for his [also antigone's] brother, Polyneices, -who came back from exile, and sought to consume utterly with fire the city of his fathers and the shrines of his fathers' gods, -sought to taste of kindred blood, and to lead the remnant into slavery; -touching this man, it hath been proclaimed to our people that none shall grace him with sepulture or lament, but leave him unburied, a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a ghastly sight of shame."

it's about the right to encryption.

antigone encrypting her brother against the law:

