

DON'T NETWORK

The Avant Garde after Networks



Marc James Léger

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THE AVANT GARDE AFTER NETWORKS

MARC JAMES LÉGER

Don't Network: The Avant Garde after Networks

Marc James Léger

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Cover image: Class Wargames (Richard Barbrook and Ilze Black) play Guy Debord's Game of War, London, September 2008. Xenograph by Alexander Veness.

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CLASS WARGAMES

PRESENTS

GUY DEBORD'S THE GAME OF WAR

"Every worker who participates in a wargame benefits greatly from that traumatic experience, not necessarily because of the answers given by the game, but because of the questions the game raises, the ideas it suggests, the problems it highlights."

Class Wargames is playing Guy Debord's *The Game of War* using a replica of his original 1977 design for the board game.

Guy Debord is celebrated as the leader of the **Situationist International** and author of the searing critique of the media-saturated society of consumer capitalism: *The Society of the Spectacle*. What is much less well known is that after the French May '68 Revolution, Debord devoted much of the rest of his life to inventing, refining and promoting what he came to regard as his most important project: *The Game of War*.

Politics is a continuation of war by other means.

The Game of War is a Clausewitz simulator: a Napoleonic-era military strategy game where armies must maintain their communications structure to survive - and where victory is achieved by smashing your opponent's supply network rather than by taking their pieces.

For Debord, *The Game of War* wasn't just a game - it was a guide to how people should live their lives within Fordist society. By playing this Clausewitz simulator, revolutionary activists could learn how to fight and win against the oppressors of spectacular society.

Wargames are a continuation of politics by other means.

AND

Copplestone Castings
REDS v. REDS: A RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR GAME

The Setting

Early September 1918 – somewhere to the east of Kazan. After its rapid advance during the summer, the People's Army of the Socialist Revolutionary dominated Komuch (Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly) is now on the defensive. The middle-aged intellectuals who make up its leadership have little aptitude for military matters, most of its soldiers are reluctant conscripts commanded by monarchist officers and its Czech Legion allies are increasingly unwilling to fight. Things are not looking good.

Meanwhile the Bolshevik forces have been reinforced and then revitalised by the presence of Leon Trotsky himself. Under his direction, the Moscow government's disciplined and motivated army is now poised to advance on Samara, Komuch's capital.

The Game

Komuch units have been asked to hold a small village to cover the retreat of the main army. Czech legionaries will support them – but will not take offensive action and will withdraw if threatened with destruction.

Bolshevik commanders know that a rapid advance will break the will of the People's Army. Hesitation will not be tolerated!

<http://www.copplestonecastings.co.uk>

<http://www.classwargames.net>

PLUS

Alex Veness

XENON-EYE: A RADICAL CAMERA FOR RADICAL TIMES

Xenon-Eye is an innovative large-format digital camera: a heavily modified flatbed scanner fused with a traditional bellows camera that creates radical, grotesque images for which the subject has to perform and interact for anything between 10 seconds and 10 minutes to produce a unique xenographic image.

Class Wargames communiqué #5 for the 2008 Autumn Offensive at Cyberfest in St. Petersburg. Courtesy of Class Wargames.

SEVEN

GAMING THE CLASS WAR

Those of us who have contributed to the new science of cybernetics thus stand in a moral position which is, to say the least, not very comfortable. We have contributed to the initiation of a new science which, as I have said, embraces technical developments with great possibilities for good and evil. We can only hand it over into the world that exists about us, and this is the world of Belsen and Hiroshima. They belong to the age, and the most any of us can do by suppression is to put the development of the subject into the hands of the most irresponsible and most venal of our engineers. [...] As we have seen, there are those who hope that the good of a better understanding of man and society which is offered by this new field of work may anticipate and outweigh the incidental contribution we are making to the concentration of power (which is always concentrated, by its very conditions of existence, in the hands of the most unscrupulous).

— Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*

Look, the thing about you Situationists is that you go into a situation and you just leave it, you don't work at it. You put people in a situation and then just piss off with your bloody degrees. [...] What's the difference between the Situationists and bloody Prince Charles? You just put people in situations and then bugger off. [...] It's go down to fucking 10 Downing Street if you want to do something about it.

— Mark E. Smith

IF MARK E. SMITH AND THE FALL ALLOW FOR A SUCCINCT PICTURE OF THE Master of art *qua* art, Jacques Lacan's Discourse of the Analyst is used in this next case to discuss Guy Debord's 1965 Game of War (*Jeu de la Guerre*) as it has been interpreted and enlisted by the group Class Wargames, a self-defined avant-garde art project and collective that was formed in 2007 and was co-founded by media theorist Richard Barbrook with Fabian Tompsett and Ilze Black. Whereas one has to be Mark E. Smith in order to determine the direction of The Fall, Class Wargames has interpreted their project as a means through which anyone can become a Situationist by playing the Game of War. As an instance of Lacanian ethics, Class Wargames disrupts the comfortable self-image of the activist left by deploying and then resisting the full force of symbolization. Insofar as the Game of War addresses the historicity of the revolutionary tradition, including its successes and failures, my interpretation of Class Wargames in terms of the Discourse of the Analyst undermines the symbolic mandates that sustain the left through the *jouissance* of activist hysteria. The purpose of this experiment is to understand the Discourse of the Analyst as a control system but also as a means to break with the blackmail of control. Although Class Wargames endeavours to question the tradition of political vanguardism, my argument is that the two contending forces in the Game of War that is enacted by Class Wargames are two factions of the same global petty-bourgeois class, the class of progressive activists who approach the world in terms of the Discourse of the Hysteric, and the virtual class of creative and knowledge workers who approach the world in terms of the technocratic Discourse of the University. The question of vanguardism is kept off of the game table insofar as these two contending tendencies operate a self-reinforcing feedback mechanism that Barbrook, along with co-writer Andy Cameron, have discussed in terms of the "Californian Ideology." My wager is that this group's approach to the Game of War encourages us to understand the game itself as the network and agent of history, or what Barbrook otherwise defines as "cybernetic communism."

How can an avant-garde strategy of the analyst avoid a static image of the game and at the same time confront the Real of struggle. Part of the process is to enter into full transference with the Game of War and its cybernetic logic as a means to uncover how Debord and the Situationists provided in the 1960s an archaeology of the future that is only today encountering its full conceptualization. In contrast to Hal Foster's notion of "deferred action," according to which the postwar neo-avant gardes had finally caught up with their prewar European predecessors, recycled their strategies and critically elaborated them, Class Wargames is not a belated reception of the Game of War, but rather an instance of the core programme of the revolutionary avant garde.¹ As defined by John Roberts, the avant-garde research programme moves away from a discussion of art movements, themes and styles, and focuses instead on the

premises that allow the avant garde to achieve conceptual and social coherence. This in itself is mediated by counter-revolutionary efforts to destroy the avant garde.² In terms of Lacan's four discourses, the Analyst's Discourse implies that knowledge, which plays the role of truth as hidden symptom, relates to the Oedipus complex. Lacan writes: "The Oedipus complex plays the role of knowledge with a claim to truth, that is to say knowledge that is located in the figure of the analyst's discourse in the [...] site of truth."³ We might inquire, in this regard, whether socially engaged activist art has successfully evaded or destroyed its avant-garde and vanguard "fathers."

The stakes of this analysis implies that debating the Situationists' Game of War means deliberating on the Situationists as well as Class Wargames, along with cybernetics, gaming and contemporary society. On the one hand, on the side of art, the range of this debate could be defined in terms of what Gregory Sholette discusses as the division between critical artists who reveal the workings of power and those art world institutions that turn autonomous critiques into market value.⁴ Artists like W.A.G.E., Occupy Museums, Gulf Labor, Debtfair and MTL, he says, are enabled by capitalist communication networks, even if their adversarial weapons of the weak and organizational structures are stymied by post-Fordist control mechanisms, including managerial assets like data mining, surveillance and flexibilization. On the other hand, beyond the field of engaged art, there is also the site of actually existing warfare. In this case, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Department of Defense consider that future conflicts will involve not only traditional state actors, but transnational networks of sub-state groups, whose definition ranges from terrorists and extremist organizations to protesters and activists. Since artists are embedded in protest groups like OWS, critical artists would therefore represent some of the constituents of this enemy network, as seen from the point of view of "national security." It is accurate, in this respect, to refer to such radical artists and leftist social movement actors as militants and vanguards. One small indication of this are the reprisals against the Disrupt J20 protesters who demonstrated against the inauguration of Donald Trump. Close to 200 of the protesters faced from 10 to 70 years of prison on charges of felony rioting. Although some of the people who were kettled may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, such as for instance a photo-journalist who posted a video of the demonstration on social media, the U.S. Attorney defines all of the individuals who were close to the scene as a dangerous group. The identification of J20 protesters was also facilitated by the cell phone recordings of alt-right counter-demonstrators. The goal of the U.S. military is thus to enable its network of allies against individuals and groups that have been supported by the spread of technologies and information, and who can swiftly organize in order to promote what the state perceives to be violent change.⁵ Networks and systems are crucial aspects of contemporary and

future battlefields, with a revolving door between civilian and military sectors. Network culture and the network society are thus inconceivable outside the total planetary system of cyberwar.

Enter Class Wargames. Class Wargames addresses the imbrication of network technologies with war games, a “cybernetic ritualisation of the Cold War” that Barbrook argues is the other side of “cybernetic emancipation.”⁶ Computer simulated war games have been in operation since the early decades of the Cold War and are used to determine the outcome of war between the world’s two major nuclear powers, the United States and Russia. In 1983, the war game Proud Prophet predicted that a limited nuclear strike on the U.S.S.R. would likely lead to more than half of one billion deaths and the total destruction of Europe. Such calculations are not only a thing of the past, however. Think tank strategists, including the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, which includes former C.I.A. and U.S. Army officials, continue to plan for a successful nuclear victory. Although a global apocalypse is an unlikely choice, a limited nuclear exchange with a country like North Korea, they believe, would still leave an inhabitable planet and so nuclear weapons are to these strategists an appropriate response to conventional threats. Trump’s speech at the United Nations on September 19, 2017, indicates that U.S. Army generals are “ready, willing and able” to “totally destroy” North Korea and its inhabitants. However, as rogue Trump strategist Stephen Bannon told the *American Prospect* magazine, there is no military solution since North Korea could make use of only conventional weapons to kill as many as 10 million people in Seoul in the first 30 minutes of conflict. Long before Trump came to power, Cold War scenarios predicted that even a limited use of nuclear weapons would lead to full-scale nuclear exchange and the destruction of the planet. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences, for instance, calculates that nuclear war would lead to the death of half of the world’s population. The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation maintains that whatever the initial death toll of a nuclear exchange, radioactive fallout would lead to a new Ice Age, causing most people on the planet to die of starvation within a few years. A single detonation over the East coast of the U.S. would cause the meltdown of every nuclear power plant.

How can playing war games affect this big picture? Class Wargames plays with a twice-sized replica of Debord’s 1977 design. Game performances are staged as communal events in cafés and galleries, sometimes attracting as many as 200 or 300 spectator-participants. The Class Wargames event at *Salute 2000* in London, for instance, was experienced by over 5000 onlookers. The project of Class Wargames is described by Barbrook as “ludic subversion,” a “theoretical and practical critique” of what Debord analyzed as the society of the spectacle. It blurs gaming and art with science research and military history. Its purpose at the same time is to debate vanguard left politics, to disseminate

Situationist ideas, and to uncover why it is that in his 1989 autobiography, *Panegyric*, Debord considered the Game of War to be his most important contribution. As Debord wrote:

I have studied the logic of war. Moreover, I have succeeded, a long time ago, in presenting the basics of its movements on a rather simple board game; the forces in contention and the contradictory necessities imposed on the operations of each of the two parties. I have played this game and, in the often difficult conduct of my life, I have utilized lessons from it – I have also set myself rules of the game for this life, and I have followed them. The surprises of the *Kriegspiel* seem inexhaustible; and I fear that this may well be the only one of my works that anyone will dare acknowledge as having some value. On the question of whether I have made good use of such lessons, I will leave it to others to decide.⁷

Through Class Wargames, the legacy of Debord's Game of War, no less than that of the Bolshevik Revolution, is subject to game simulations that propose alternative outcomes and new insights. The Class Wargames project itself has evolved over the years from its first stage as a self-defined avant-garde artwork, to then become a lesson in collective revolutionary leadership, and more recently, a means to teach military skills to leftist activists. In short, the Game of War is approached as a training and propaganda exercise for "the cybernetic communist revolution."⁸ The Discourse of the Analyst, however, wishes to uncover the extent to which the game functions as a network and the way that the game modulates the human and the technological. How do network technologies deliver the kind of participatory democracy that is proposed by the concept of cybernetic communism? To what extent is the Game of War, as a model of the network society, embedded in cyberspace? We can begin to answer this question by first delving into Situationism and then addressing the specificity of the Class Wargames project.

Situationist Dialectics

Postmodernism developed countless reasons why the avant garde was a failed or outmoded project. Contemporary theories concerning the post-Fordist multitudes and the real subsumption of labour only exacerbate the prospects for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. One way to adjust the terms of cultural revolution, therefore, is to situate the Game of War within the parameters of the global petty-bourgeois matrix. The Game of War, understood in terms of the Discourse of the Analyst, might thereby yield different questions

and different strategies. As a first stage in this inquiry, it is necessary to distinguish this approach as much as possible from an understanding of the Game of War in the terms of a contemporary anarchist and activist Discourse of the Hysteric. The anarchist left should instead be observed as one of the players of the game rather than an agency that takes an analyst's perspective on the game itself. In order for this to be possible it is necessary to be sensitive to the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics that are essential to the Situationists' approach to cultural revolution. The following addresses theories of the Situationist *avant garde* and moves from an anarchist tendency and a post-structuralist Situationism towards the more shop-worn dialectical theory of *avant-garde* overcoming. While this approach cannot provide the final word on the politics of Class Wargames, it can open a perspective on the Game of War as a work that is concerned with its own negation.

When one speaks of the *avant garde*, and in particular of the Situationist International, it should be clear that one is not concerned with a discussion of contemporary art or of the art world as we know it. Even if they sometimes exhibit in gallery spaces, there is no question then of approaching Class Wargames as contemporary art. In an essay on the "Self-Destruction of the Avant Garde," Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen addresses the *avant-garde* project as being conscious of the need for the destruction of bourgeois capitalism along with its class distinctions, divisions of labour and cultural elitism.⁹ Revolution was easier to conceive when *avant-garde* artists as well as anarchists shared their mission with radical communist movements. Today, *avant-gardist* activists tend to affiliate themselves with new social and anti-oppression movements, which makes both the critique of capitalist totality as well as the *avant-garde* project further removed from radical communist praxis.

The Situationist International was a collective of *avant-garde* artists and intellectuals that splintered from the Lettrist International in 1957. Originally comprised of members from the Lettrists, the Imaginist Bauhaus and Spur (Guy Debord, Michèle Bernstein, Gil Wolman, Asger Jorn, Constant, Giuseppe Pino-Gallizio, Hans-Peter Zimmer, Heimrad Prem and Dieter Kunzelmann), the S.I. confronted in their writings and their activities the question as to whether the *avant-garde* project could survive the "integrated spectacle" of communist regimes as well the "diffuse spectacle" of western consumer society. Unlike their Surrealist predecessors, the S.I. were from the start estranged from what had become Stalinist communist parties. Nor were they like their American Abstract Expressionist contemporaries who were concerned to produce a new version of high art as a bulwark against both commercialism and propaganda. In advance of New Realism and Pop art, they were also critical of the consumer-oriented production regimes that developed new technologies and standardized mass culture. In order to circumvent cooptation, the S.I. avoided producing works that could be recuperated as art. As Rasmussen

argues, the Situationist project had to plan the disappearance of both art and the avant garde so that the Situationists themselves could embody revolution and prepare the final negation, which is the disappearance of Situationism. This process of self-production and self-negation implies that overcoming the social totality and organizing an alternative reality means that one must first create oneself as an avant garde and then sequester oneself, avoiding contact with capitalist society, so that one can develop the highest possible expression of revolutionary consciousness.¹⁰ Only a competitive and exclusionary break with the existing world as well as with the masses can allow for the eventual dissolution of the avant garde itself.

For Rasmussen, the outsider stance of the S.I. is consistent with Marx's shift after the failure of the 1848 revolution away from the actual working class, which he rejected as petty-bourgeois reformists, towards the notion of the proletariat, a utopian category that could only be understood from the perspective of a future communism that would come into existence after the disappearance of capitalism. Marx's proletariat and the Situationists' theory of the situation are therefore theories of the present as seen from an imagined future.¹¹ Rasmussen writes:

Marx strangely negated and affirmed the stupidity of the working class and staged himself as the knowing subject able to not only decipher but also predict the movements of history. He thus moved towards the working class, glorifying the historical role of the proletariat but only after having separated himself from it.¹²

Marx here occupies the position that was discussed earlier as the Lacanian analyst and we could thereby easily confer this stance on the Situationists, who, like Lenin, did not wait for the proletariat to manifest itself but led the revolution in advance of the rest of society and as a means to accelerate the revolutionary process.

Leninism's communist appropriation of the factory system as part of a dialectical overcoming of the capitalist mode of production might have produced a certain working class subjectivity in Russia but not without further alienation. Likewise, the constructed situation that the Situationists would soon engineer produced its own problems as the result of what Rasmussen defines as the totalistic stance of an "all-knowing avant garde."¹³ His critique of the Situationists' political vanguardism is echoed by Gavin Grindon's assessment of the S.I. from the point of view of contemporary activism. In his essay on "Fantasies of Participation" in the S.I., Grindon begins with a view of the Situationists in which they seem to act more in accordance with the Discourse of the Master than that of an analyst. His text argues that the S.I.'s constructed

situations had more in common with state control than with social emancipation.¹⁴ Gavin's post-structuralist approach, however, rather than dialectical critique, causes him to be skeptical of the Situationists, perceiving their demand of the impossible as a policing of the possible that casts suspicion on pragmatic agency. Whereas the group could have been involved more effectively with social movements, he argues, they instead dedicated themselves to purging members who did so.

Grindon begins his discussion with the analysis of a series of paintings by Michèle Bernstein, some of which were shown in the S.I. journal issue number 9 of 1964. These paintings combine piled-on impasto with toy soldiers and have titles that allude to imagined victories, such as *Victory of the Paris Commune*, *The Victory of the Bonnot Gang* and *Victory of the Grand Jacquerie, 1358*. Grindon discerns in these works an opposition between representation and agency. The revolutionary romanticism that one can discern in these works represents a kind of "left melancholia" that now shifts to the register of the Discourse of the Hysteric. Grindon argues that in these works, revolutionary victory is a lost object rather than a vision from the future. This brings him to the strategy of the constructed situation. The S.I. define the situation as "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience of a game of events."¹⁵ The critique of normal behaviour through various kinds of Situationist practices, such as the aimless strolling of the *dérive* or the culture jamming of *détournement*, which the Situationists themselves did not approach as coherent systems, leads Grindon to view the constructed situation as an essentially "vacant category."¹⁶ For Grindon, the people involved in a constructed situation are treated more like an experimental control group than as the self-motivated agents of participatory direct action. Interestingly, this emptiness, which confronts people with the prospect of an action that would change life as we know it, brings us back to the Discourse of the Analyst. Interesting as well for us is the fact that Grindon recognizes this problematic in Guy Debord's graffiti slogan *ne travaillez jamais*, the predecessor of *don't network*.

Because Situationist politics come closest to the position of Cornelius Castoriadis and the group assembled around the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the Situationist approach to labour resembles a council communist refusal of work and transformation of labour into a combination of work and leisure. This labour politics was advanced in the 1960s to counter the growing tendency of capitalist management to control labour through compulsive participation. The S.I. were similarly concerned with the way in which everyday life leads an uneven development, lagging behind the colonization of the everyday by consumerism and the spectacle. Participation in work, in leisure, in urban life, or in any form of capitalized activity, leads to exclusion through a behavioural reversal of instincts and interests. On a mass scale, cybernetic technocracy was

leading society to nuclear catastrophe. Like Lefebvre and Vaneigem, the S.I. perceived cybernetics as a science of domination.¹⁷ Thesis number 42 in Guy Debord's 1967 *Society of the Spectacle* reads:

The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in *totally* colonizing social life. [...] With the “second industrial revolution,” alienated consumption has become just as much a duty for the masses as alienated production. The society’s *entire sold labour* has become a *total commodity* whose constant turnover must be maintained at all cost. To this end the specialized science of domination is broken down into further specialities such as sociology, applied psychology, cybernetics, and semiology, which oversee the self-regulation of every phase of the process.¹⁸

In response to a letter from cybernetics specialist Abraham Moles, the Situationists determined that a cybernetic society is one in which participation represents the torturous extraction of labour power, which therefore makes genuine participation impossible.¹⁹

Grindon argues that despite their suspicion of this new meta-science, the Situationists nevertheless engaged in what he calls “anti-capitalist cybernetics.” Neither affirmative, nor liberatory, nor vitalist, the constructed situation could appropriate the methods of Cold War conditioning, containment and brainwashing, which, through forced participation, would create a paradoxical space of either “non-consensual play” or “play with non-consent.”²⁰ One early example of this is Debord’s 1952 film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, in which a blank screen, overlaid with audio stimulus, alternates with a black screen with no sound. The work created a predictable scandal, with audiences reacting violently to the first projection by breaking into fights. A further development of this strategy can be seen at the moment when the S.I. began to exclude members who were loyal to the Gruppe SPUR (the German section) and to the “Nashists” (the Scandinavian section).²¹ The S.I. considered conventional art making to be “anti-Situationist” and rejected happenings as artistic spectacle. They also refused to engage in the kind of activism that was practiced by the Dutch Provos, the American Yippies, Black Mask and the English Situationists, whom they derided as young rebels in search of careers and self-expression.²² In contrast, the S.I. encouraged impractical actions such as the Watts riots and sabotage by workers’ councils.

A test case of what the S.I. was willing to produce was a counter-exhibition designed to challenge the Scandinavian section’s 1962 exhibition in Odense, Denmark. Titled *Destruktion af RSG-6* (Destruction of RSG-6), this June 1963 provocation, organized in the same city at Galerie EXI, is an early

instance of what has since then been defined as over-identification, subversive affirmation and yes revolution, and which has been written about elsewhere in terms of the Discourse of the Analyst.²³ On the walls in the exhibition space, in addition to Bernstein's victory paintings, were Debord's "Directive" paintings, white paintings with simple slogans like *Dépassement de l'Art* (Overcoming of Art) and *Réalisation de la Philosophie* (Realization of Philosophy). One of the "participatory" pieces was a firing range where one could shoot at images of John F. Kennedy, the Queen of England, the Dutch Foreign Minister, Nikita Khrushchev, Francisco Franco or Konrad Adenauer. Making use of a popular amusement, the Situationists turned the shooting gallery into a dual-purpose attack on art and politics. For Grindon, the art environment allowed participants to more easily accept the gesture of political assassination. The work, however, alludes to the figure of a brainwashed assassin in the 1959 film *The Manchurian Candidate* and so, not unlike Jean-Luc Godard's 1968 film *La Chinoise*, should not be understood as an endorsement of political violence.

Taken at face value, the shooting range makes fun of pseudo-anarchist pabulum. The RSG-6 in the title of this counter-exhibition reveals a broader and more reasoned programme of intervention. RSG-6 is the name of a secret British government bunker that had been built in case of a nuclear war and that had been exposed to public scrutiny in 1963 by the anti-war activists Spies for Peace. The fact that the S.I. directly endorsed this activist group's revelation of plans for thermonuclear war contests Grindon's view that the S.I. were not concerned with agency and that their provocations were mostly ironic or representational. For Grindon, the purges in the movement represent the exclusion of "illegitimate bodies" and assert the "total" project of an "undivided phallic body as the summit of history."²⁴ However, the use of post-structuralist abjection theory in this case obscures more than it elucidates since the S.I. were clearly concerned with the ejection of all of humanity by the cybernetic endgame. To criticize the constructed situation as an act of normalization, as Grindon does, is to reduce the avant garde to a democratic post-politics of inclusion. Situationist avant-gardism calls more for dialectical interpretation than post-structural deconstruction. The reason for this is that a critical dialectical realism, unlike post-structuralism, looks beyond actually existing reality and does not concern itself with what is given, nor with the current interest in Bergsonian and Deleuzian becoming. The avant garde, according to Gene Ray, breaks with capitalist art and so grasps the contradictions of art as a stabilizing factor and a credit to capitalism's self-reproduction.²⁵ The art system is therefore a sub-system of the capitalist world system. As a whole, the art system converts political art into a means to legitimize class society. Seeking to protect art's emancipatory and utopian impulses, postwar modernists on both the right and the left defended art's autonomy for the sake of human emancipation. Amidst postwar art movements, the Situationists presented an alternative

to control by both consumerism and Socialist Realism. Their method trained people to think both inside and outside of systems, and also to think in terms of systems as such.

According to Ray, we remain blind to the possibility represented by the avant garde when we accept too readily the conclusions drawn by Peter Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.²⁶ Bürger is often cited by those, Ray says, who are glad to pronounce the death of the avant garde. Bürger's theory that the avant-garde sublation of art into life was effected by the culture industry supports the view that there is no alternative to capitalism. The standard position with regard to capitalism is a Fukuyaman end of ideology resignation. For Bürger, the historical avant gardes' rejection of bourgeois aesthetic autonomy allegorized the "work-form" as a supersession of art that refused unity and conciliation, but that resulted in the limited achievement of revolutionizing art. Art can therefore repudiate artistic traditions but art cannot repudiate or escape its status as art.²⁷ In contemporary political terms, we could extrapolate Bürger's analysis as a means to criticize social democracy and activist art for its reformist rather than revolutionary achievements and ambitions. For Ray, however, Bürger's judgement was premature and failed to address the cultural revolution put forward by the S.I. The Situationists were not artists but rather cultural guerrillas, detached from art institutions as well as political institutions and other vanguard groups. This is where Ray differs from Grindon. The Situationists defined autonomy as a revolutionary process that had the goal of extending autonomy to everyone. In contrast to Bürger's assessment, the Situationists did not think that culture could be completely instrumentalized. In the terms of the analyst, the S.I. understand that there is no big Other. Praxis depends on norms but not on normalization. One can therefore draw one's own conclusions about revolutionary theory and practice as a contribution to collective process, even if one is not or no longer a member of the Situationists.²⁸

The purpose of struggle is not theoretical purity and imaginary integrity, but rather the necessity of struggle against alienation. According to Ray, Situationist practice is more autonomist than modernist, as confirmed in Roberts' emphasis on Hegel's ontology of conceptualization as non-identity and adisciplinary self-alienation. Situationists do not defend a normative conception of the autonomous work of art, or even of the collective. If the culture industry reduces activist work to the status of art commodity, art thus "realizes" itself as a prop of class society. The moment of defeat allows the struggle to continue for and against autonomy as part of the revolutionary process.²⁹ Art that is removed from institutional functions can enhance the realms of everyday life and overcome alienation. The work-form must therefore refuse the existing social totality and thereby become aware of the stakes of the game. Such an avant garde evaluates its actions in terms of a critical dialectical notion

of reality and so requires a notion of truth. Whereas Bürger limits his analysis to conventional artworks and happenings, the S.I. rejected the work-form of art and so, according to Ray, it was not an avant garde in the modernist sense. We can only apply the same reasoning to activisms of various sorts and social movements, even if they themselves do not adopt the language of the avant garde. The Situationists sought the kind of avant-garde autonomy from institutionalized politics that resonates to this day as a critique of the instrumentalized forms of activism that depend on dominant conceptions of power. They did this by putting their own status as a political group into question, proposing that there is no such thing as Situationist art and that anyone who claims to know it excludes themselves from being a Situationist. Revolutionary consciousness is an intuition of the totality and not a style, attitude or delimited set of tactics and strategies. The Situationist Game of War is therefore not only a game but the abolition of the game as human relations trapped by the conditions of the spectacle. The S.I. would very likely reject the impoverished metaphysics of new materialisms and at the same time reject the spiritualization of art as business as usual under capitalism. Only this dual strategy engages in a revolutionary process within the contexts of everyday life.

Cultural theorist Sven Lütticken is perhaps the most lucid interpreter of the Situationist project as a form of anti-anti-art and Discourse of the Analyst. The main concept that he emphasizes is the Hegelian notion of overcoming (*dépassement*), in particular, of specific forms of art, but I would add, of specific forms of politics. What makes *dépassement* an avant-garde strategy rather than a cybernetic post-structuralism is its projection of a space outside of actually existing art and politics. This stance implies experimentation as a means to actualize and realize avant-garde ambitions. As Lütticken puts it nicely, productive forces are as much base as they are superstructure, which today means that culture and knowledge producers are a potentially revolutionary class.³⁰ Debord's strategy, he argues, was not to abandon his contemporary comrades, but to ignore the small changes taking place that were degrading the traditional role of the working class.

From 1971, just one year before the dissolution of the S.I., Debord associated himself with Gérard Lebovici, the publisher of Champ Libre books, which in 1968 became Éditions Gérard Lebovici. In 1968 Debord began collaborating with Lebovici on the latter's new bookstore and new line of books, which included archaic texts that could possibly be used for radical purposes, including the writings of the military strategist Carl von Clausewitz. Debord's manoeuvres became more purposefully obscure after the defeat of May 68, focusing, as Lütticken puts it, on cognitive and immaterial labour.³¹ Lebovici also produced Debord's films through the company Simar Films and eventually opened a cinema, the Studio Cujas in Paris, dedicated almost exclusively to the projection of these films. A quote from Debord's 1978 film *In girum imus*

nocte et consumimur igni, which describes cinema audiences, captures perfectly the conundrum of the Game of War as I understand it:

The movie-going public, which has never been very bourgeois and which is scarcely any longer working-class, is now recruited almost entirely from a single social stratum, though one that has been considerably enlarged – the stratum or low-level skilled employees in the various ‘service’ occupations that are so necessary to the present production system: management, control, maintenance, research, teaching, propaganda, entertainment, and pseudocritique. Which suffice to give an idea of what they are. This public that still goes to the movies also, of course, includes the young of the same breed who are merely at the apprenticeship stage for one or another of these functions.³²

The logic of a Situationist film that operates in an alienated world and that produces “a few truths” for “a few comrades” finds its echo in Class Wargames member Rod Dickinson’s statement that the Game of War is really about “the abstract space that is founded on networks [...] and information lattices.”³³ The salaried employees of Debord’s era are today’s precariat and cognitariat.

As an archaeology of the future, Debord’s film and Game of War are prescient of the networked universe that structures the conflict between the two factions of the global petty bourgeoisie. We can call this match yuppies versus yippies. In 1977, Lütticken informs us, Debord had a small edition of the game produced so that he and his game rival Alice Becker-Ho could appear in *In Girum*. Debord considered around that time that cinema had died and requested that Lebovici focus instead on mass-marketing a version of *Le Jeu de la Guerre*, which Debord had developed in the 1950s and patented in 1965. If cinema had become an enemy territory, no doubt board games were for him no less compromised. Debord nevertheless dedicated himself for a while to marketing his game of military strategy. While Lütticken notes its similarity to the *Kriegespiel* created in the early nineteenth-century, a game for horse and musket warfare, and which allows for an apprehension of all the wars that have occurred since the advent of bourgeois hegemony, he also notes that the game’s emphasis on creative involvement is suited for an age of Facebook and Instagram. It is perhaps less its reliance on Clausewitz and military history than this ability to project itself into the future that makes Debord’s game a refutation of those who believe that his work on the spectacle is passéist. As Class Wargames has also been more than wise to emphasize, the cybernetics that the Situationists criticized in the 1960s is still with us, whether as economic theory, rational choice theory, behavioural science, information theory, or more to the point, as the air we breathe in a networked world system. The

Game of War is thus like a fish in this water, both a fossilized artefact from the Napoleonic era and a screen memory, bringing to mind awareness of our immersion in the game. To play the Game of War, Lütticken argues, “is to be stuck between historical moments that all seem equally blocked.”³⁴ The analyst as avant garde, then, can be understood as the cause of desire in the form of an obscure epistemological drive.³⁵ So says Lacan. Yet, paradoxically, what can be known through this discourse is invited to function in the register of truth. The analyst does not specify who or what the big Other is. The Oedipus myth revolves around opposites and in the Game of War we will see that Lacan’s mathemes will play themselves out as Hysteric, on the one hand, and University, on the other. Before we come to this, though, Debord’s vanguard forces must encounter the contemporary universe of digital gaming.

Game Metaphysics

The science of cybernetics more or less began during World War II as American mathematician Norbert Wiener worked on the predictive capacity of anti-aircraft artillery. For Wiener, the same reasoning that was used for advanced weapons systems could be applied to all areas of science involving matter and energy, from statistics, automation and computation, to biology, medicine, anthropology, psychiatry, ecology, economics, information theory and communications. Wiener pioneered cybernetics as a new meta-science that could cover and combine all areas of human endeavour. Yet, unlike most of his colleagues, Wiener was aware of its potential misuse, in particular, during the Cold War years in which military, government and corporate contractors demonstrated little regard for social and moral considerations. Unlike many of his less scrupulous colleagues, Wiener had both an exceptional ability in scientific research as well as a philosophical and moral compass that compelled him to preserve his independence from political groups and corporate funding.

Steven J. Heims argues that Wiener’s lifelong endeavour was flawed from the start, both in terms of Wiener’s presuppositions about cybernetic systems and in terms of the eventual uses of cybernetics. Nature, as Wiener understood it, tends towards entropy and disorganization, a theory drawn from the second law of thermodynamics. The function of science, then, is to establish systems that could introduce patterns of order and therefore differentiation. Making life meaningful therefore implies a struggle against nature as entropy. Heims argues that according to Ilya Prigogine, and later on according to chaos theory, natural systems also have a tendency to move away from entropy towards various kinds of systemic order, from complex patterns to stable cycles. Systems, contrary to Wiener’s beliefs, are neither inherently destined to organization nor disorganization.³⁶ Either way, cybernetics is oriented towards outcomes that are potentially already inherent in natural systems. Another problem,

for Wiener, was the distinction between humans and machines, a distinction that cybernetics threatened to erase when it compared the human mind with calculating machines. For the emerging science of cybernetics, human subjectivity, feelings and emotions, were mere patterns in the context of evolution. According to Heims, the fact that human cognition relies on background considerations of culture, society, history and subjectivity has not prevented cybernetics from radically informing all manner of human and machine systems, from cellular biology, medicine, anthropology and psychiatry, to ecology, economics and information theory. Heims echoes Wiener's "Frankenstein" prognostications: "shorn of Wiener's benign social philosophy, what remains of cybernetics can be used within a highly mechanical and dehumanizing, even militaristic, outlook."³⁷

Wiener's theory of cybernetics held that both individuals and machines, since they are not isolated systems, control entropy through feedback. Life processes could therefore exist in machines and automata that make new decisions on the basis of past decisions. One of Wiener's interests in the 1950s was the possibility of inventing a machine that could not only play chess, but that like a human player, could benefit from gambits and endgames, and that could adapt to the style of its opponent – in other words, machines that can learn. Such mastery over nature through the invention of machines, Wiener warned, could also become slavery to nature.³⁸ For him, humans are only ever as free as their machines. Anticipating what we now refer to as the stage of the Anthropocene, Wiener argued that we would need to adapt with dignity to an inevitably doomed planet by learning how to live in the modified environments of our creation. There could be no faith in progress since learning and adaptation moves towards an unknown future. Memory is a feedback mechanism that allows human learning, as a form of cybernetics, to "govern" itself in unknown worlds. Humans, however, and unlike machines, represent a "single run" on a machine program since with living organisms, repetition is impossible.³⁹ Learning thinks differently backward and forward in time. Feedback, however, is a method of controlling a system and is based largely on past performance and conditioned reflex. Learning occurs when feedback changes the pattern of performance. The goal of cybernetics, among other possibilities, is to invent learning machines that resist entropy and homeostasis. Future machines, Wiener argued, would not only replace human labour, but would also replace human thinking by storing memory. The resulting "chess playing" machine would show statistical preferences for certain behaviours. This could prove disastrous if such machines were used to program war games, for instance, or other human functions. Machines are too crude and too determined to replace human purpose. The real question for Wiener was the extent to which machines would be used by some humans to control others. As an example of this, the theory of games that was developed by John von Neumann

and Oskar Morgenstern for military purposes, has no human sense of tragedy or humility, and is prone to accept machine decisions without concern for policy or principle.⁴⁰ Wiener writes:

Any machine constructed for the purpose of making decisions; if it does not possess the power of learning, will be completely literal-minded. Woe to us if we let it decide our conduct, unless we have previously examined the laws of its actions, and know full well that its conducts will be carried out on principles acceptable to us!⁴¹

In other words, as far as Wiener was concerned, junk in, junk out: machines could never replace human responsibility and so the value of winning a war game would have to correspond to those human values that are used in programming games: “[w]e cannot expect the machine to follow us in those prejudices and emotional compromises by which we enable ourselves to call destruction by the name of victory.”⁴²

Ever since Wiener established the first phase of the science of control and communication, later waves of cybernetics have attempted to introduce reflexivity and participation into experiments as well as assess complex patterns of evolution in machines that simulate complex systems.⁴³ These accelerated versions of cybernetics are quixotic at best, evading rather than answering questions of human concern. Such questions have preoccupied critical scholars of contemporary game theory, who in one way or another are sensitive to what Debord, in his discussion of the Game of War, referred to as “the dialectics of conflict,” namely, the “simultaneous consideration of contradictory requirements” and the awareness that “there is simply no way of obtaining cast-iron certainty as to what should be done.”⁴⁴ If Class Wargames represents the closest we can come to uncovering Debord’s intentions with the Game of War, then some stages leading to its contemporary significance might include Alexander Galloway’s formalist discussion of games as allegories of control, McKenzie Wark’s hybrid model of critical gamer praxis and Brian Schrank’s synthetic model of advanced avant-garde games. Our use of Lacan’s Discourse of the Analyst as a means to develop the understanding of Class Wargames as an instance of anti-anti-art can therefore be advanced through the insights of these theorists of games and game theory.

As a member of the Radical Software Group, media scholar Alexander Galloway has been involved in creating and making available an online computer version of the Game of War.⁴⁵ Unlike Class Wargames, who prefer the congenial activity of playing with other people around a board game, Galloway believes that digital videogames are embedded in the network logic of millenary society, or what his book *Gaming* refers to as “algorithmic culture.”⁴⁶ In

contrast to the stereotype of gamers as passive time-wasters, Galloway emphasizes how the cybernetics of games makes it an inherently active medium for both the machine and the human, who work together in a cybernetic relationship. Videogames are algorithmic machines and cybernetic software systems that rely on rules and code to reach “some sort of goal.”⁴⁷ According to Galloway, gamic action can be organized according to an axis of operator and machine, and a second axis of diegetic (internal) and nondiegetic (external) operator acts. These four moments of gamic action, as he calls them, involve standard game manipulation, such as moving and firing in a shooter game, as well as “nondiegetic” operator acts, such as pressing the pause button, configuring the menu, cheats, shortcuts and hacks that obviate the game design. Such game operations are both internal and external to the game inasmuch as they allegorize today’s algorithmic game information culture.⁴⁸ The machine, however, has its own diegetic functions insofar as the game is running smoothly, as well as nondiegetic acts such as game over, network lag, bugs, slowdowns and freezes.

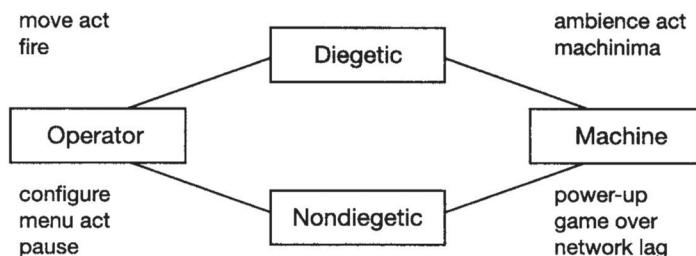


Table from Alexander Galloway's *Gaming*.

Play is embedded in design programs in the form of actions that are incomplete and non-totalizable since the machine also acts. Examples of the way that gaming influences culture can be seen in everything from military training to reality TV. Although games raise social and political issues, Galloway argues that neither games nor game theory are on the order of representation and meaning. Despite the fact that some games have an adequate “congruence” with social reality and achieve a certain social realism through the affect of the gamer, there is no causal relation between the game and reality. The relation is rather between the game and the gamer. The game must therefore resist its material substrate as an algorithmic object. Such algorithms are systems of control, which, like the freeways discussed by Deleuze in his essay on societies of control, multiply the means of control by making them seem like mobility. Control networks are part of a process that today extends from call centres and global health databases to government surveillance and military weapons systems.

Galloway argues that social problems are not solved but rather sublimated by networks. Algorithmic control can be said in this regard to have replaced conspiracy theories as allegories of political power. For him, such systems are relatively immune to traditional ideology critique, such as critiques of imperialism, classism, racism and sexism. Galloway, however, understands ideology only at the level of content. His view is that games must be played and to play means to play according to the code of the game and to know the system. Interpretation is thereby channeled towards the interpretation of the machine's algorithm and protocols, ostensibly supplanting ideology critique with "informatic critique." Ideology, he argues, is undermined by the codes that recode its information lattices.⁴⁹ Games are therefore allegories of control, reinforced by the flexible computer language protocols and technical standards that allow for distributed networked communication. Galloway argues that post-Fordist globalization creates a weakening of identity and class patterns. Identity has become a data type and a logic of menu-driven selection that is based in numerical code rather than the kind of memory-driven learning that is idealized by Wiener. Gamic action is therefore co-action with a system that enacts the allegory of control by going along with it, a "polyvalent doing," he says, or better still a schizoid acquiescence to the rules of the game. The deep allegory of class struggle is replaced by the control allegory of information. Although Galloway is optimistic that a new avant garde exists that is involved in counter-gaming design, even this field of "unrealized" action is determined to a certain extent, such that counter-gaming remains within the logic of games and within the horizon of postmodernism.⁵⁰

Galloway's allegory of control gets boosted to the power of metaphysics in McKenzie Wark's *Gamer Theory*, where Galloway's concept of "allegorithm" mutates the real world, such that "gamespace" is now everywhere. Wark's SMS from the edge of games inquires: "Ever get the feeling you're playing some vast and useless game whose goal you don't know and whose rules you can't remember?" "Welcome to gamespace," he says, "the only game in town."⁵¹ We are all gamers in gamespace and the narrow configuration of the game is like Plato's allegory of the cave, not an actual cave, but simply a device with which we are able to fathom our immersion in cyberia. For Wark, class antagonisms have not disappeared from gamespace, they are simply hidden by the agonism of becoming a slave to the system. The winners will be those who have internalized the algorithm. However, Wark's gambit is not to win. His motto comes from Debord, who declared in his 1961 film, *Critique of Separation*, "I have scarcely begun to make you understand that I don't intend to play the game." Wark's exit strategy is gamer theory, which suspends the assumptions of the game just as the Situationists suspended those of art and politics. Game theory mediates games and the surrounding gamespace. The game is not fake or unreal but is another source of information about what is happening. The game

is therefore not simply an allegory of the real world, but an allegory of a world that has been made into a game, each one less perfect and more insidious than the previous. Alas, here too, there is no outside to the game; undecidability can only be resolved by choosing a side and competing. The concept of an algorithm means that gamespace (life) is now an allegory of the game (game). Exhaustion and the discovery of new instructions at the next level are the ritualistic indexes of the cybernetic conquest of consistency. One must constantly evaluate, interact, calculate, process and network, a “perfect unfreedom,” Wark says, and “a consistent set of constraints.”⁵²

Things get most interesting in Wark’s discussion of the game *Deus Ex* (2000) and its first sequel, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* (2003). *Deus Ex* mines the ideology of the once and future military-entertainment complex. In this game, one has to choose between four competing organizations, each of which proposes a different solution for how to live in gamespace.

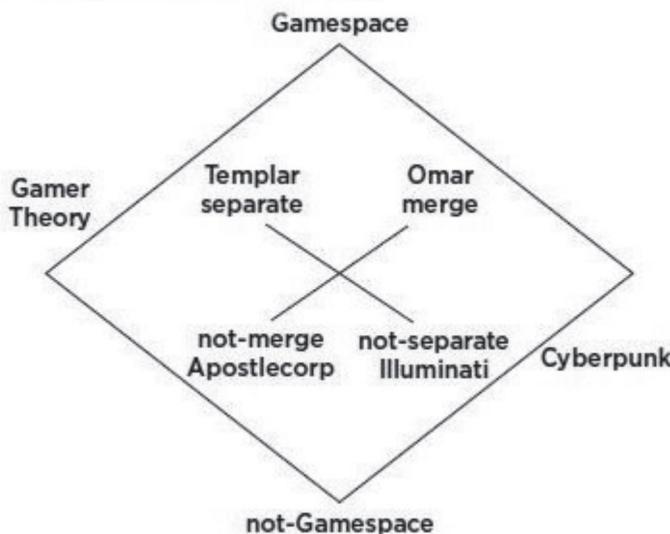


Table from McKenzie Wark’s *Gamer Theory*.

The four teams in *Deus Ex* correspond nicely enough to Lacan’s four discourses. The Knights Templar are a human order that wishes to purify the soul from “biomods” (nano-augmentation implants). The Templars reject the integration of the body with the machine and constantly question the boundaries of this dualism. Despite their agonism, they exude a sense of alienation. Perhaps this is because the weapons they require implicate them in non-separation from machines. The Discourse of the Templar Analyst is the team chosen by *Don’t Network*. Another team, the Omar, is a collective organization of black marketers whose bodies are fully subsumed into technology. The Omar

accept the schizoid condition that comes with the euphoric resignation to the technology that controls everything human. They correspond to the Hysteric who not only is no longer certain what is human but ceases to be concerned with this question. These two groups square off as humans versus technology. Against both of them, the Illuminati is a secret society of power-brokers who are masked by organizational fronts and are dedicated to restoring order by controlling the game. They allude to something beyond the digital but deny access and create paranoid suspicion about their pretence of non-separation. The Illuminati introduce paranoid ideas concerning the military-entertainment complex that seems to control gamespace. They correspond to the Discourse of the Master. Lastly, ApostleCorp is a techno-intellectual faction dedicated to bringing about a democratic but post-human civilization. ApostleCorp create their own rules within technology and point to the digital delirium that Sholette alludes when he describes contemporary art as both the “avant garde and the social realism” of capital.⁵³ ApostleCorp come closest to Manfredo Tafuri’s view that the avant garde empty humanity and weaken individuality, thereby preparing the way for capitalist colonization.⁵⁴ The extropianism and good intentions of the ApostleCorp corresponds to the Discourse of the University. The Illuminati and ApostleCorp square off as hierarchy versus horizontality. Playing the game, as I will later explain, corresponds to the Discourse of the Capitalist, and game theory, as Wark defines it, corresponds better to the Discourse of the Analyst than to the Discourse of the University.

Whereas the Templars and the Illuminati designate a space of paranoia, the Omar and ApostleCorp represent the axis of schizophrenia. According to Wark, the Templars and the Omar indicate a further “individual” axis, which psychoanalysis would refer to as drive. The Illuminati and the ApostleCorp are the “collective” axis, which refers to desire. These are perhaps better defined as subjective (agential) and objective (systemic). The two axes together represent in psychoanalytic terms the fantasy of what Wark calls gamespace. For Wark, the end of the game should be taken as its starting point, the exhaustion of the possibilities of the game. This is what Lacan referred to as “the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego’s verifications.”⁵⁵ The goal of Class Wargames, as we will argue, is to mine the limits of the gamespace that is allegorized by *Deus Ex*. Because there is no big Other that gamespace can presuppose, Wark argues that Situationist strategies of overcoming have been outflanked by the constraints of gamespace, as witnessed by the Game of War as an “entombment” of the possibilities of festival. The game rules out what the Situationists proposed as the possibility of living life as a festival.⁵⁶ However, the Game of War is implicit in *Deus Ex* insofar as the Templars and the Illuminati battle one another as do labour and capital. Whereas the merger with technology represents biocapitalism, separation from biocapitalism represents revolution. Revolution means that the game does not go on to infinity. In terms of the gamespace of

Don't Network, as I have described it, the Omar and ApostleCorp represent a playing of the game as we know it, whereas the Templars and the Illuminati represent the limits of the game. Between these two only the Templars offer an adequate solution. Wark is aware of the conundrum that for the paranoid everything appears as a fight to the end. The schizoid, in contrast, defuses antagonisms and opens a more positive space of differences, he argues, but this is a space of perverse play with the storyline that demarcates humans (labour) and machines (capital). The problem with the schizoids, according to Wark, is that they take words for things (or in our terminology, they take the imaginary for the symbolic – i.e. fantasy), and the paranoids take things for words (the symbolic for the imaginary – i.e. ideology). What comes after the game, he wonders. Two solutions appear. One, implausible, is that the four teams get together and party! The other, more likely, is that this game is exchanged for the game *Sim Earth*, where simulations of biospheric conditions allegorize total History to the Nth degree.

Perhaps we need more game options. As Wiener put it, “[w]e are not fighting for a definitive victory in the indefinite future.” The declaration of human nature against algorithmic exploitation is an insolence to today’s prosthetic gods. “Here lies tragedy,” wrote Wiener, “but here lies glory too.”⁵⁷ In *Avant-garde Videogames*, game theorist Brian Schrank argues that the networked form of capitalism precludes some avant-garde tactics but enables others.⁵⁸ Schrank’s attention to videogames echoes both Galloway and Wark, translating the idea of gamespace into the concept technoculture but maintaining Galloway’s emphasis on algorithmic medium-specificity. Schrank’s almost exclusive focus on counter-gaming leads to new variables and alternative ways to “play with technoculture.” The field of strategies in this case is drawn across formal and political divisions that intersect with radical and complicit possibilities for games.

The level of the formal corresponds to a kind of art for art’s sake that is not concerned directly with social issues but rather explores the possibilities of a medium. The political, in contrast, targets social institutions. Schrank cites Bürger’s thesis that the avant garde’s sublation of art and life has been effectuated by the culture industry. He takes this to argue that we should look for avant-garde developments within these new, if compromised, spaces since “that is where the action is.”⁵⁹ Culture, he argues, is today mobilized through entertainment and technology rather than the academy and the museum. Avant-garde videogames are neither decoupled from technology, he argues, nor simply melded with it, but allow technoculture the slack it needs to drift into new and unfamiliar worlds.

Schrank’s *radical formal* games challenge conventions as to what defines the medium. These games allow us to explore the materiality and sensuality of games. *Radical political* games challenge our sense of play and reflexively remind us of the reality beyond the game, either the reality of the gamer or

of society. *Complicit formal* games do not advance the medium but approach it from the perspective of popular culture, allowing for some possibilities of mischievous irony and parody of the game universe. Lastly, the category *complicit political* is a cluster that Schrank associates with the Situationists and that comprises games that blend art and life, play and reality. The complicit political risks the stability of the world but not without being inviting to gamers. Its purpose is to generate collective utopias and festive anarchy.⁶⁰

		Radical		Reflexive
		Negation	Chapter 23	
		Radical Political Avant-garde	Radical Formal Avant-garde	
Political	Negation	Chapter 23	Radical Formal Avant-garde	Formal
	Emancipation	Complicity Political Avant-garde	Complicit Formal Avant-garde	Transparent

Table from Brian Schrank's *Avant-garde Videogames*.

The complicit political opts for utopian fantasies of perfect governance, but seeks to achieve this through participatory narratives that are scalable across new and old media platforms.⁶¹ Among the examples of complicit political games are alternative reality games (ARGs) that demonstrate how utopias can be rewritten while in play. The practical limits of such games are less important than attempts to make utopia both thinkable and possible. The idea of complicity indicates that avant gardes can risk becoming complicit with markets and institutions. Schrank's approach might in this regard have more in common with Rasmussen's and Grindon's view of the Situationists than Ray's and Lütticken's more radical dialectical critique. The significance of ARGs is that they allow players a sense of ludic struggle in the rethinking of technologies. Two examples from the 1960s that demonstrate this ethics of cooperation are Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalogue* and Buckminster Fuller's 1961 World Game, a football-size "peace game" that like *Sim Earth* involves the entire planet, engaging materials, life-forms, real-time birth and death rates, nature and cultures, famines and wars, food and deforestation. Making the world

more cooperative and more ecological, however, reproduces the paradox that Wark alluded to with his notion of gamespace, which gives technoculture the mission of configuring the entire planetary world system through protocollogical integration. Despite this, the purpose of the complicit political avant garde is to wrest power from those who compromise infrastructure at the expense of the majority. Schrank comes close here to Paul Mason's idea of a fully simulated global economy that could coordinate new patterns of sustainable social production. Game media could potentially assist a project like Mason's through the development of digital software and hardware, allowing games to enter the stream of life. Despite his acquiescence to culture industry complicity, Schrank addresses the question of avant-garde negation when he concludes that the success of such an avant garde game is its own obsolescence.⁶² Class Wargames, in this sense, operates across these divisions, and not unlike Wark's gamer theory, allegorizes the conditions of control in the cybernetic endgame, however, not without proletarian consciousness.

Cybernetic Communism

According to Debord's 1987 preface to the Lebovici edition of the Game of War, his game does not function as a re-enactment of past battles, nor does it simulate real warfare.⁶³ What it does is emphasize the unpredictable as the main difficulty in the conduct of war. In this it is consistent with the teachings of Clausewitz.⁶⁴ The tactical and strategic manoeuvres in the Game of War correspond to the type of warfare that existed around the time of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era. The game is played by two armies that seek to destroy their respective rival. The board itself consists of 500 (25 x 20) squares and is divided into North and South territories. The two sides are asymmetrically disposed with mountain ranges, three forts and two arsenals. Each side has 15 fighting units, comprised of infantry and cavalry of varying strengths depending on whether they are on the offensive or the defensive. For each turn, up to five pieces can be moved. Offensive and defensive factors must then be calculated. The purpose of the game is to maintain one's lines of communication with one's arsenals, and alternately, to disrupt the enemy's communications, which is their source of information, munitions and supplies. The strategy is to reduce enemy forces by disrupting its lines of communication and destroying its arsenals. While defence is safer than offence, only offensive manoeuvres can achieve victory. First manufactured in 1977 by Éditions Gérard Lebovici, Debord ordered the remaining inventory of his war game to be destroyed in 1991. The French publisher Gallimard published a new edition in 2006 and the Atlas Press published a translation in 2007, which is the year that the Class Wargames project was started. Regardless, even for board game enthusiasts, the Game of War has so far remained a relatively well-kept secret.

One of the main preoccupations of Class Wargames' study and dissemination of the Game of War is the importance of revolutionary history. Among the many promotional tag lines that Class Wargames have concocted for their various events is the injunction: "Play *The Game of War* and you will learn how to fight and win on the political and cultural terrain of the class war." "*The Game of War*," they insist, "is the ludic manifestation of the class struggle."⁶⁵ While one might assume that there is an important difference between this board game that is based on the eighteenth-century *kriegsspiel* and the allegorisms of videogames, Class Wargames makes no distinction between the historical real and the contemporary virtual. "Play *The Game of War*," they say, "and you will learn how to transform the enclosed lands of spectacular capitalism into the participatory playgrounds of cybernetic communism."⁶⁶ They add: "Each side has two arsenals, which serve as the nodal points for a network of lines of communication."⁶⁷ As a training exercise in media communism, Class Wargames is therefore concerned to develop strategies and tactics against what Wark refers to as the military-entertainment complex. The upshot for the left is Class Wargames' Situationist critique of Leninism, representative democracy and trade unions. By playing the Game of War, cybernetic communist gamers learn how to be theoreticians of proletarian self-emancipation. "There can be no masters and slaves among comrades," they say.⁶⁸ As a lesson in tactics and strategy, it is anti-anti-military in the finest proletarian sense. Leadership and programme are replaced by convivial participatory combat, which encourages gamers to become Situationists in their own right. This leads to the conclusion that for Class Wargames, the game replaces or becomes the network as agent of history. The game itself becomes the leader and the programme, replacing, as they say, Cromwell, Bonaparte, Trotsky, Mao and Che. As with the practice of analysis, the cognitariat analysand's life telescopes an entire history of radical experience through the game-network as symptom:

The four cavalry units symbolise Lenin's aptly named vanguard party – the new class of warrior intellectuals who were committed to leading the impoverished masses into the hi-tech future. But, the task of North and South in this game is to learn how to make the best use of these elite troops on the social battlefield without becoming Bolsheviks themselves.⁶⁹

Class Wargames champion the Situationists for learning from Bolshevism and creating their own vanguard party. However, this party would eventually negate itself, first as art and then as politics, by refusing to make themselves into the leadership of the insurgents of May 68.

The lines of communication with revolutionary theory, we could say, have been negated by Class Wargames but preserved at a higher stage of the game.

At this later stage, they argue, capitalism has proliferated networks that displace outdated authoritarian modes of organization. However, this shift towards networks has also allowed capitalism to survive. The gamers of class struggle must learn how to prevent dotcom capitalism from thwarting human emancipation. This, they argue, is the purpose of Class Wargames:

Each player needs to maintain and manipulate a flexible network composed of fixed bases – the arsenals – and mobile communication units – the generals – which activate the various combat units who can only move or fight when linked into this cybernetic system [...] As the game progresses, each network has to confront a rival network operating on a similar basis. While the mobile communication units provide a way to construct your own cybernetic system, your combat units can block those of the other players. Likewise you are vulnerable to having your own network disrupted and broken. Each player is the revolutionary proletariat, learning how to build the participatory infrastructure of cybernetic communism. Their opponent represents its evil twin, dotcom capitalism, who contests our class right to determine the next stage of modernity. Learn from Debord, *The Game of War* teaches how to fight and win on the battlefield of the information society.⁷⁰

Networks are a social commons that must be guarded for emancipatory purposes. Class Wargames' version of the Game of War is thus a continuation of class politics by means of participatory networks.

Not all of the insights that can be learned by playing Debord's game were evident to Class Wargames from the outset. Having exhibited since 2007 in such places as the U.K., Poland, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Estonia, Ukraine and Russia, Class Wargames is internationalist in practice and theory, rejecting the competition among cities for creative class capital. This means that Class Wargames could not satisfy itself with being simply a "leftfield artwork."⁷¹ Rather, its mission evolved to challenging other hobbyist wargames and demonstrating the superiority of the Game of War as a "Situationist masterpiece of political propaganda."⁷² This then evolved to learning military theory and refighting several different historical conflicts, all of which are subsumed by today's cybernetic battlefield. As Barbrook puts it,

Our campaign had opened with an attack of aesthetic disruption which was next followed by an audacious assault of political proselytism. For this third stage of our ludic offensive, we would now devote our energies as members of Class Wargames

to disseminating the skills of revolutionary leadership amongst the masses. Every worker had to know how to defeat the capitalist enemy.⁷³

Situating itself in an avant-garde genealogy, from Constructivism to Dada, to Situationism and Fluxus, then to the English section of the S.I., whose Marxism continues to be an affront to the acolytes of punk celebrity, post-modernism and entrepreneurial post-Fordism, Class Wargames diverts the fun ethic of gaming towards educative propaganda for the class struggle.

While Class Wargames argue that the Situationists were too libertarian for 60s Trotskyists and Maoists, and too Marxist for ultra-left anarchists and bohemians, Class Wargames itself is possibly too networked and participatory for the communist and avant garde hypotheses. The stakes of cultural revolution came to a head during the match “Reds versus Reds: A Russian Civil War Game” at the Winter Palace/Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg in November 2008. Class Wargames were concerned that Sergei Eisenstein’s 1928 film *October* falsifies the events of 1917 by making the victory of the Bolsheviks seem inevitable and by mythifying Bolshevism as the twentieth-century incarnation of Jacobinism.⁷⁴ The issue for them was the residual glamour of Bolshevism for the New Left and for today’s recuperators of Situationism. Barbrook writes:

In St. Petersburg as in London, a heady fusion of New Left theory had been required to sell the Bolshevik revival to these denizens of bohemia. Within the academy, Toni Negri, Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou were the intellectual gurus of the new iteration of the totalitarian ‘Communist hypothesis.’ Imitating the pranksters of Pop Situationism, they’d outraged the scholarly guardians of liberal democracy by praising the murderous regimes of Lenin, Stalin and Mao.⁷⁵

Barbrook considers that these three “Bolshevik” theorists had used tactics of punk provocation as well as over-identification strategies to détourn democratic discourse. None of these theorists, however, are retro-avant-gardists like Laibach and Neue Slowenische Kunst, as Barbrook suggests. They are instead criticized by many orthodox leftists as post-Marxist, as the speculative left, or, in the case of Negri, as schizo-anarchists.⁷⁶ Without the requisite scholarly demonstration, Barbrook accuses Badiou’s communist hypothesis of being “totalitarian” – a difficult argument to defend in light of Badiou’s intransigence when it comes to his absolute commitment to the disappearance of the state, which is attested by his activism in l’Organisation Politique. Neither Žižek nor Badiou revive Bolshevism – which Barbrook conflates with Stalinism – as a means to challenge neoliberal hegemony. Barbrook cites in support of his

denunciations the following passage from Žižek's book *Revolution at the Gates*: “the authority of the [vanguard] Party is [...] a new type of knowledge linked to a [revolutionary] collective political subject.”⁷⁷ The actual citation, however, is as follows:

This means that the authority of the Party is not that of a determining positive knowledge, but that of the form of knowledge, of a new type of knowledge linked to a collective political subject. [...] Exactly as in Lacan's formula of the discourse of the analyst, what is important about the Party's knowledge is not its content, but the fact that it occupies the place of truth.⁷⁸

Žižek has stated time and again that what should be repeated in Lenin is not the form of the Bolshevik party, but the need to change what is oppressive in any situation. This means that like Lenin, who often cited Napoleon's slogan *on attaque, et puis, on verra* (first we attack, then we see), a revolutionary must act in situations in which it is not certain what the outcome will be.⁷⁹ Such non-knowledge is the paradox of the ethics of the human strike in the framework of a Lacanian passage from theoretical to practical anti-humanism: there is no big Other.⁸⁰ Žižek's statement concerns the party as analyst, as the subject supposed to know, which means that the party is an external agent that cannot provide the truth to our actions. He adds:

So the ultimate meaning of Lenin's insistence on this externality is that 'adequate' class-consciousness does not emerge 'spontaneously,' that it does not correspond to a 'spontaneous tendency' of the working class; on the contrary, what is 'spontaneous' is the *misperception* of one's social position, so that 'adequate' class-consciousness has to be fought out through hard work.⁸¹

What this means, then, and Class Wargames gradually discovered this themselves, is that the Real of class struggle is not embedded in the game itself. In Žižekian terminology, the party as analyst is formally external to the game.⁸² Any deterministic conception of cybernetic communism is therefore limited at the outset.

Žižek's analysis of the conundrum of the left is further explained through his endorsement and critique of Fredric Jameson's utopian project of the universal army. If anyone has been playing at being Lenin lately, it might be Jameson with his plan for universal conscription as part of a programme for the socialist reorganization of society.⁸³ For Jameson, writing in *An American Utopia*, the contemporary imaginary is awash in dystopian projection. What is needed instead is a utopian political programme. Systems have replaced agency, he

argues, and the language of revolution has become archaic. Reformist social democrats have no distinct programme except to save capitalism from self-destruction and environmental catastrophe. Lenin's 1917 plan for a dual power between a provisional government and a network of soviets can be revived today under the new historical conditions in which representative parties are irreparably corrupt. Through the rehabilitation of bureaucracy, socialism could reintroduce the nationalization of finance, banking and energy, tax corporations, redistribute wealth, establish a guaranteed minimum wage, abolish inheritance and tuition, dissolve NATO, introduce the popular control of media, and provide free health care and full employment.⁸⁴ Jameson goes further than Mason in suggesting not only a programme but also the social force that could bring this about. Jacobins with laptops and flash crowds are too concerned with a politics of the instant and are too much against constituted forms of power to deal effectively with organization. Unionized labour, on the other hand, has been demobilized by automation and information technology. A dual power, based on an army model similar in its operations to the way in which Cuba is able to mobilize its medical units, points to the possibility of a different system, a universal army as opposed to a new form of government. Instead of the retreat into micro-groups and culture wars, only a conscription and mobilization of the entire population can transcend politics and bring about the withering of the state.

Reflecting on Jameson's utopian proposal, Žižek emphasizes its endorsement of the state apparatus. The antagonisms of the digital age bring about new hopes but also new forms of alienation. Marx's interest in capitalism's means of technological self-overcoming is for Žižek the limit of capital itself as a destructive process. Against this, collective acts of revolution that seek to affect the socio-economic level appear as totalitarian terror. For this reason Žižek approves of the way that Jameson dismisses not only Stalinist party dictatorship but also the social democratic welfare state. He also approves of Jameson's rejection of libertarian, anti-representational direct democracy – the permanent mobilization and politicization of life that is proposed by anarchism. The universal army, instead, would eliminate the need for permanent engagement, would reduce work to its necessary minimum and would leave people free to do as they wish with their leisure time, which would now be separated from the pressures of capitalist commodification. The multitudes would shift from a mode of antagonism to that of collectively organized work with a surfeit of leisure time. It is Žižek, however, who asks disturbing questions of this neo-Leninist plan, suggesting that the separation of the kingdom of necessity from the kingdom of freedom would inevitably be disturbed by the lack that constitutes the social field, as Jameson also acknowledges. One can neither regulate nor legislate equal access to the realm of enjoyment. Insofar as Jameson rejects the unity of production and pleasure, work and leisure, he asserts a communist

gap between them that capitalism denies. The problem then is the suggested disappearance of politics and antagonism, an impossibility, according to Žižek, that can only be assuaged by dissolving the state into the bureaucracy. Jameson's universal army is for Žižek an ersatz state.⁸⁵ Far from rejecting a network-driven post-capitalism, Žižek reminds us of the deadlock of equality as the "immanent contradiction of capitalism" that makes even the smallest of socialist demands seem impossible.⁸⁶ The problem of Stalinism, as he sees it, was that it attacked the bureaucracy it had established and kept the state and the communist party at a distance, this being the opposite of Badiou's perception that Stalinism had collapsed the state and the party, leading to the disappearance of the soviets.⁸⁷ The problem, either way, is how to rethink communism.

Class Wargames believe that the terms of struggle are the same today as when the Situationists defined them in the late 1950s. However, being neither Washington nor Moscow makes little sense in the context of authoritarian neoliberal biocapitalism. In *The Spectacle of Disintegration*, Wark returns to Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in order to gauge the shifts that have altered the way in which the spectacle could be neatly divided into two Cold War camps.⁸⁸ By 1988, the same year that Claude Lefort diagnosed the failure of May 68, Debord had written his *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* and according to Wark considered that the diffuse spectacle had not simply won out but harboured forms of concentration through the integrated power of a shadow state plutocracy. Wark proposes that state mechanisms can no longer be managed with any pretence to strategic popular interest. The spectacle of disintegration, he argues, is immune to all of the myriad single issue problems we throw at it: "The disintegrating spectacle can countenance the end of everything except the end of itself. It can contemplate with equanimity melting ice sheets, seas of junk, peak oil, but the spectacle itself lives on."⁸⁹ Or as Jameson puts it, "[i]t is easier [...] to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism: and with that the idea of a revolution overthrowing capitalism seems to have vanished."⁹⁰ This is the context in which leftists of diverse persuasions have more in common than they might allow. In any case, what is of interest here is the way in which this process of disintegration is inherent to the Game of War, in particular, as the warring sides are no longer whites and reds, but two factions of the same global petty-bourgeois class. The contradictions of cybernetic communism are what Jameson addresses with his idea of the universal army and what Class Wargames stage through the Game of War.

Totally Wired

In order to develop the Class Wargames concept that the Game of War can be understood as a cybernetic system of rival networks, I draw on a complex history that involves the development of cybernetics, war games and

communications networks. A shorthand version of this narrative is provided by Barbrook's collection of essays in *The Internet Revolution: From Dot-com Capitalism to Cybernetic Communism*.⁹¹ The oldest of these is a 1995 essay that was co-written with ex-Trotskyist Andy Cameron and that expresses frustration with the first manifestations of dotcom neoliberalism. Titled "The Californian Ideology," the text was developed among Internet pioneers in the Hypermedia Research Centre at the University of Westminster who were opposed to the privatization of communications technologies.⁹² The Californian Ideology is the product of an amalgam of countercultural bohemians from San Francisco and the high-tech industries of Silicon Valley. A decade after this essay caused a scandal in the tech world, Fred Turner published *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, a book that substantiates Barbrook and Cameron's claims about how the cybernetic vision that sustained the counterculture in the 1960s eventually provided a social justification for the technological vision of the virtual class, or what Turner refers to as the entrepreneurial ideology of *Wired* magazine, which brought together gurus from the Whole Earth network, global business networks, Internet libertarians, software and hardware manufacturers like Bill Gates, and the anti-government right as represented by people like Newt Gingrich. Turner, however, argues that the *Wired* ethos did not emerge around the new left, as Barbrook and Cameron believe, but around the "New Communalist" factions of the libertarian counterculture – hippies, artists and mystics – that were comparatively apolitical.⁹³

The Californian Ideology describes writers, hackers, programmers, artists, capitalists, activists and politicians who associate digital networks with a utopian vision of the future. Like New Age extropians, digital futurists believe that communications networks and information technologies can help evolve the human condition. The liberal countercultural values that gave rise to this ideology combined anti-war, anti-consumerist and anti-oppression politics with a McLuhanist belief that social convergence through electronics and computer technology would overthrow the domination of life by big government and transnational corporations.⁹⁴ The Californian Ideology combines libertarian individualism with technological determinism, channeling leftist impulses into economic liberalism. In this sense we could say that the Californian Ideology coincides with the postmodernism that contributed to the decline of the left. The reason that Barbrook and Cameron refer to it as an "ideology" is that its tenets are contradicted by the history of the development of its infrastructure, which relied extensively on state subsidy in cooperation with private enterprise and amateur enthusiasts. The result of the development of technocratic society throughout the decades of the Cold War was such that, as Barbrook argues, the promise of universal emancipation was no longer the purview of political vanguards, but of the knowledge class.⁹⁵ Barbrook states

that then as now, the ideology of technological progress takes precedence over rationality and political solidarity. Yet technology is often its own nemesis. He proposes the paradox that “those who forget the future are condemned to repeat it.”⁹⁶ The disappearance of the imaginary future of communism has made it such that we have allowed corporate and government elites to transform the cybernetic revolution into a networked system of control.⁹⁷ The Net becomes both the image of the future and the vanguard. Its politics is social domination through the anonymous powers of economics, technology and ideology. Deregulation and free enterprise are the system requirements proposed by what Turner calls the “*Wired* ideology.” By making high-tech into the agent of history, neoliberals have produced strange bedfellows among the new left, who now prefer temporary ad hoc assemblages to that of class struggle through organized and disciplined political party bureaucracies.⁹⁸ According to Barbrook and Cameron, the result is the entrenchment of class conflict: “instead of predicting the emancipation of humanity, this form of technological determinism can only envisage a deepening of social segregation.”⁹⁹

Driven by technological determinism, the quest today on both the left and the right is for more technological and design solutions as means to disavow problems of political consciousness and mobilization. From artificial intelligence to theories of a post-human collective intelligence, pessimistic visions of politics are exchanged for the futurology of the virtual class. But the pathogenic condition of the virtual class, Franco Berardi argues, destroys social resources and intellectual skills by enforcing the war machine of the semiotized economy – what he elsewhere refers to as finazism.¹⁰⁰ Class Wargames represents a do-it-yourself intervention in this process as it stages the conflict between the virtual class of knowledge workers and those who wish to shape the digital future through either state intervention or grassroots mobilization.

Around the time of the dotcom crash, Barbrook took another dig at the Californian Ideology by writing a “McLuhan thought probe” for a lecture at Fordham University.¹⁰¹ Titled “Cyber-Communism: How the Americans Are Superseding Capitalism in Cyberspace,” this 1999 text made the now familiar argument that by unleashing the technological revolution, neoliberal capitalism had unwittingly developed a working model for a post-capitalist future. Anticipating Negri’s autonomist optimism and Mason’s quasi-accelerationist platform, Barbrook argued that dotcom capitalism is building the infrastructures of cybernetic communism. The gift economy and its new modes of cooperative production, open source peer production, user-generated content, creative commons and zero marginal cost production, have created abundance rather than the scarcity required for capitalist profit. While the “Internet of Things” allows for unprecedented advances in the mode of production, all that is now missing is worker self-management.¹⁰² Communism therefore exists in

technology but not in social relations, nor at the level of ideology. The subject of history is thus defined by and reduced to the logic of networks.

In the context of network ideology, the Game of War becomes useful by teaching how it is that history is full of unexpected reversals. Dotcom capitalism could, through class struggle, be transformed into cyber-communism. Now that millions of people have access to the Internet, new vanguards will appear as agents of change who will shape technology to serve human needs and human civilization. Who are these people? Barbrook is optimistic about the class of workers that Debord was much more skeptical of when he described the cinema audience. Here is Barbrook's version:

The intermediary [petty-bourgeois] layer is the vanguard of modernity. Faithful to this role, digital artisans are making many technological and aesthetic advances. Despite having to sell their creativity, their ways of working are often egalitarian and collaborative. Once again, the intermediary layer is inventing the future.¹⁰³

In his 2015 reassessment of both "The Californian Ideology" and "Cyber-Communism," Barbrook acknowledges that it is the Californian Ideology that has so far won the class war game since the Net has now been virtually colonized by corporations. The Californian Ideology is today a widespread belief system. The question remains, however, if Marx and Engels' philosophical model from *The German Ideology*, which argues that material conditions shape consciousness, is adequate to understanding the role of the vanguard. In other words, is a more egalitarian political economy the solution to the Californian Ideology? Žižek's theory of ideology, in contrast, argues against the notion of false consciousness and holds instead that the void of subjectivity makes it such that the Real of class struggle cannot be integrated into the existing symbolic order and therefore into subjective reality. Ideology corresponds rather to unconscious fantasy, which is why Class Wargames' Game of War, as a staging of the imbrication of the masses into the cybernetic system, functions perfectly as a session of transference through which the virtual class has a means to come to consciousness, as we have argued, regarding the Oedipal desire to have finished with vanguards. In the Discourse of the Master, the structure of fantasy is subsumed and has no support in the symbolic order. As Lacan writes, "the master's discourse excludes fantasy."¹⁰⁴ Only the Discourse of the Analyst takes fantasy seriously as a reversed order of truth. In Lacanian terms, however, to identify the avant garde as the father figure in the Oedipal relation is to shift from the Discourse of the Analyst to the University Discourse and thereby to make class struggle into another myth: i.e. into the "ideology" of cybernetic communism. The vanguard party leadership cannot give the masses the rule

of what is to be done. The masses can only exit transference themselves and decide when the game will be over. Game Over Mubarak was a widely disseminated meme in February of 2011. Six years later the oligarch has been cleared of responsibility for the deaths of 800 demonstrators and after the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood the regime of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has incarcerated more than 60,000 people and sentenced more than 1000 political opponents to execution. The living conditions in Egypt and in many parts of the world today are similar to those of Tsarist Russia. The paradox of truth is that it hides castration. What can the Game of War, as a self-contradictory half-truth, do to either end war or spark the class war? The latent content of the analyst's discourse is this master signifier around which a new vanguard is possible.

I'm Not a Robot

Is it possible to alter gamespace without playing the cybernetic game? This is the enigma of Debord's graffiti injunction to never work, which we have adapted to the age of the social factory. Can we refuse the blackmail of cyberpower? The Discourse of the Analyst shows us the impasse of our situation, our symbolic castration, but does not as such possess the solution to the Game of War. It only proposes an analysis of the game we are playing, our fundamental fantasy. The level of Situationist consciousness proposed by Class Wargames cannot be accessed through the game of art as a space of formal autonomy, but only as a "political" avant-garde game whose stakes are a critique of the Discourse of the University and Discourse of the Hysteric. The game is "complicit" in the sense of ludic participation, but "radical" in the sense that it questions the threat of digitization as a feature of speculative capital. This stance of engaged praxis provides further awareness of how the algorithms of technoculture fail to resolve the contradictions of what Lacan referred to as the Discourse of the Capitalist. As a means to test the level of self-awareness of gamers, Hito Steyerl agrees with the above-mentioned theorists that videogames are not simple distortions of reality. In her essay "On Games," she addresses the question of whether or not it is possible to know the difference between humans and robots.¹⁰⁵ Referring to Alan Turing's imitation games, which apply probability calculations to reality, as well as von Neumann and Morgenstern's mathematical games theories, computers are said to exhibit human traits when they can successfully be mistaken for human beings. In an update of the myth of Zeuxis and Praxiteles, the test of deception allegorizes a relationship of competition and domination. Consequently, zero-sum games have been used for military war games as well as neoliberal economic policies. When changing the world is too difficult, Steyerl argues, games have been introduced that can change the world according to its generative fictions. For instance, if the free market does not behave like a rational actor, you invent a

computer that simulates a rational free market as a generative fiction.¹⁰⁶ Steyerl endorses Wark's notion that today we all of us live in gamespace.

In the first Turing imitation tests, people had to guess if an unseen interlocutor was human or non-human. In today's networked digital realms, however, humans are often required to prove to computers that they are not themselves computer algorithms, as for instance with the CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) test in which one has to decipher and transcribe a squiggly text or check a box that states "I am not a robot." With the more advanced computer monitoring systems that are now for instance used by Google, a user's identity becomes "correlated" with their online behaviour. Your data speaks for you, replacing your imitation of a human for a machine with an identification of what you are through network analysis. For instance, your Facebook feed provides Google with the correlate of your identity. Confusing math and computation for truth becomes critical when games that cannot be turned off transgress their boundaries and become real. The algorithms that today calculate academic ranking scores, reputation scores, risk analysis, economic investment, and so on, are social abstractions in which models are taken for reality. Such automata can only be challenged by gamers, she argues, who risk their own generative fictions, however unrealistic, when taking gamespace for real. She writes: "You will have to imitate a not yet existent reality and game it into being. This is how playing grows into acting. Now, creatives, please start thinking about it."¹⁰⁷

The notion of generative fictions is nothing new. Bourdieu's sociology of culture was already, since the late 1970s, an advance on formalist hermeneutics in its critique of the notion that formal properties were the equivalent of relationality. Bourdieu's model was non-reductionist in the extreme, explaining how symbolic power was not reducible to political economy, and therefore how culture could all the more serve legitimating functions and contribute to the reproduction of class inequality.¹⁰⁸ The question of what constitutes a work of art, and moreover the value of a work such as a videogame, is implicated in relations of conflict. One might further reflect on the conflict that Steyerl stages between humans and machines, as seen for instance in the lecture version of her paper "On Games" that she delivered at the Antoni Tàpies Foundation in June of 2016.¹⁰⁹ Steyerl is seen wearing what looks like a Turkish headscarf. This is not a merely incidental fashion decision since she mentions in her presentation Walter Benjamin's discussion of the "Chess Turk," a dwarf who hides under a chess board and passes itself off as an Ottoman automaton who defeats his opponents at chess. This scenario, interestingly, is the motif of Žižek's 2003 book, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. Žižek begins his book with the first of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," which reads:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answers each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.¹¹⁰

For Žižek, theology has not disappeared entirely but has been given a new post-secular mission through deconstruction. It is rather historical materialism that is today made to disappear. Either way, it is in modernity in which religion acquires an independence and autonomy from the broader culture. One could say the same thing for other superstructures such as art and political theory. Art survives in today's network society as technology games, which enables art to generalize itself but which also gets reduced to secondary phenomena of the social totality, much like the activism of socially engaged artists, which contends with the legitimating economic functions of the creative industries. To paraphrase Žižek's thoughts on religion inside this framework of "downward synthesis," both games and social practice attempt to assert themselves as critical agency or as means to function more effectively in the existing order.¹¹¹ The reason why we cannot simply do without art and videogames is because they cannot be replaced by an algorithmic technoculture that has no moral or social values. However, at the same time, art and games do not by themselves fulfill this task. Here Žižek cites Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, which argue that in the modern age art no longer has the singular power to induce belief. Žižek cites Hegel, whose words bring the question of art and videogames back to our discussion of the avant garde: "It is a modern folly to alter a corrupt ethical system, its constitution and legislation, without changing the religion, to have a revolution without a reformation."¹¹² This higher level of awareness, Žižek says, announces the necessity of cultural revolution as a condition for social change. Today, he argues, we have the technological revolution without the revolution of everyday life. Theory thus brings us to the understanding that the subversive potential of art and videogames is accessible only to dialectical materialism and vice versa.

As we have argued with regard to the Game of War, the question concerning the dialectical materialist critique of capitalism cannot be directly addressed outside the context of the military-entertainment complex. Although

outdated in terms of advances in high-tech weaponry, Manuel DeLanda's 1991 text, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, has many of the elements required to understand the links between network technology, Class Wargames and the social factory. DeLanda refers to Deleuze's concept of a "machinic phylum" in order to assess how the war games of the military-entertainment complex show signs of artificial and robot intelligence. There are two countervailing and contradictory forces at play in war games, he argues. One is the predatory role of war games and the propensity to eliminate human intelligence, and the other is the opposite tendency of human players to avoid crossing the nuclear threshold into "mutually assured destruction" (MAD) or, more recently, into "nuclear utilization target selection" (NUTS).¹¹³ The distinction between advisory and executive roles for intelligent machines in the context of military policy is gradually blurring in favour of ever "smarter" machines and artificial intelligence (AI). A history of this "machinic phylum" traces the self-organizing and cooperative processes that take place at a level above and beneath human history, whether we are talking about atomic and molecular organization, economic turbulence or network connectivity. The question of "robot consciousness" appears as a matter of assemblages that are neither individual nor collective but simply technological. The critical transition points of assemblage see the phylum mutate into new singularities, phases and patterns, which have altered over the years into new forms of warfare. For our purposes, we could say that what DeLanda defines as the level of *weapons* corresponds to the nuts and bolts version of networks as systems of nodes and links. The level of *tactics* refers to Class Wargames' Situationist training as the art of assembling humans and weapons on a simulated battlefield. The higher level of *strategy* brings us back to networks but we can appreciate it more specifically this time as the capitalized, business ontology of network society. Understood in these terms, it is easy enough to see the highest level, that of *logistics*, as the reality of social factory cyberpower and the art of permanent military activity in the gamespace of the military-entertainment complex – an annual multi-trillion dollar global societal enterprise. The question for Class Wargames, as for other critics of the network society, is whether the social factory can be turned into a world of cybernetic communism. The upshot is the extent to which capitalism is able to reproduce itself in these new conditions of the machinic phylum, and secondly, whether or not humanity will annihilate itself as it ponders this enigma, or, more indirectly, whether the self-organizing processes of artificial intelligence, particularly as they are applied to war games, will annihilate humanity on its behalf.

The first and most basic level of the military-entertainment complex is that of weapons hardware. At the level of propulsion, the nineteenth-century mass production of infantry rifles by military engineers led to a rationalization of the labour process wherein rifles could share interchangeable parts. The command

structure of the military, DeLanda argues, was extended to the civilian sector in the form of “scientific management,” which emphasized uniformity in procurement, supply and repair of industrial products.¹¹⁴ The orchestration of uniformity emphasized the division of labour as well as management monitoring and quality control through, in the case of the U.S. military, the Corps of Engineers. This extended to the supervision of railroad networks, controlling the flow of goods and knowledge at ever new scales of complexity. The thrust of uniformity was to replace human artisanal skill with procedures that extend command structure across the apparatus of production. The body of the artisan was further integrated with machines through the development of Taylorism. By the 1950s, numerical control (NC) introduced mathematical information into the automatic machining of complex weapons systems. Management was further extended through computer links that discipline workers. The dream of a totally computer-controlled factory has meant that the military typically views man-machine interfaces as threats to its control of logistics. Rather than tactical and strategic decisions, the ability of a nation to win a war has depended in the twentieth century on its ability to mobilize its entire industrial might. Within Cold War logic, the connection of scientific with military research advanced the speed of weapons with regard to the pace of world events, creating its own dynamic of acceleration and simulation of the vast war machine through war games. As with Wiener’s anti-aircraft systems, simulation-based war games are oriented around predation and therefore the predictive capacity of feedback-based servomechanisms. The kind of smart weaponry used in cruise missiles as well as today’s drone technology have enough intelligence to lock onto targets automatically, further removing human performance from the loop of predation. The main task of human beings in today’s weapons systems is to decide if other humans are friends or enemies. As we increasingly see with government kill lists and air strikes that target civilians, defence strategy is defined in terms of offensive techniques that stimulate the self-sustaining feedback loops of arms races. Through radar and satellite technology, and today through digital networks, the entire surface of the globe is a theatre of war. Social life is today networked into the command, control and communications (C³) infrastructure of the military-entertainment complex.

The next level in the machinic phylum is that of tactics. Class Wargames seek to act in this regard as our partisan network’s Chiefs of Staff. Tactics shift from the question of weapons to that of combining human software with weapons hardware. One has to engage with the Game of War in order to be a player in this simulated war game. The question of cooperation and coordination has been at the heart of military formations since fifteenth-century commanders used drill and rhythmic movements to instill an *esprit de corps* and to integrate humans into battle formations. According to DeLanda, drills produce “entrainment,” which implies both learning and unit cohesion.¹¹⁵ The purpose of

entrainment is to guarantee the continuity of military command within a war machine. Cooperation in a war is never, as Class Wargames argues, a matter of spontaneous cooperation and decentralized participation. Cooperation emerges through conflicts, turbulence, migrations or invasions and in such situations human beings become, like the weapons they carry, interchangeable. In terms of command structure, this is especially true of officer ranks. When a soldier steps out of line, he or she must be either demoted or promoted into their proper rank category. A tactical unit is an information-processing machine whose purpose it is to transmit and execute commands, with feedback running from top to bottom and back up the chain of command. A unit, DeLanda says, must be part of an effective C³ network and must self-organize in the midst of battle so as to not create uncertainty.

The preference for centralized versus decentralized command structures has changed in the course of technological development, a shift that DeLanda associates with the progression from “clockwork” formations to “motor” and “network” paradigms. For instance, the clockwork mechanisms of the armies of Frederick the Great involved “robot” soldiers who were drilled to interface seamlessly with their muskets. Hierarchical command combined with rigid squares of fighting men who had little individual initiative and responded to a limited repertoire of simple actions. This was the apex of the phalanx structure that reaches back to ancient Greece. Drills, however, could not instill loyalty and desertion remained a problem until the Napoleonic armies introduced the notion of popular sovereignty. Moreover, the French armies of the early nineteenth century were “motor” armies that could break down into self-contained divisions and divide into multipurpose and flexible manoeuvres that were guided by commanders on the battlefield. This more decentralized structure, however, increased the amount of information travelling through the command structure and therefore increased uncertainty. The rise of a “general staff” that could handle the mess of information was accompanied by the increase in scouting and reconnaissance, all of which developed into today’s “distributed networks.” The latter phase emerges with the German *Blitzkrieg* of WWII, wherein tight formations are exchanged for skirmishes of small groups who through command and mutual communication can disassemble and coalesce. The German storm trooper was an efficient, obedient and versatile soldier who was coupled with machine guns and flamethrowers, and who could command other soldiers who assembled into platoons that integrated targeted attacks with artillery and air support. Two-way radio communication was the new means of conquest in the networked mode of warfare. A wireless nervous system connected soldiers whose target was not only particular nodes in an enemy network but the morale of the enemy’s leadership. The radio-based chain of distributed command resulted in a new man-machine assemblage whose networked nodes allowed for local initiative.

The WWII platoon thus corresponds to what today's networked social movement collectives prefer as the small worlds theory. In social movement politics as in military tactics, the organized chaos of protest dissipates uncertainty through tactical intelligence, relying on the morale and skill of individual soldiers. The paradox of this development of cybernetic technology is that it also allows human decision-making to be taken out of the loop. As computers evolve, so do world-wide networks of command and control. Nuclear war, for example, requires a unified control system in which certainty is modulated by the increased flow of information. Rather than taking people out of the loop, the challenge of a distributed network tactic is to combine people into synergistic units.¹¹⁶ Following this, the purpose of AI is to introduce expert know-how into systems technology. Leaders today are those who manage the flow of information. The real question for today's battlefield is not whether to disperse decision-making, as *Class Wargames* proposes, but whether or not to allow computer algorithms to make executive decisions. The new spirit of capitalism in the military-entertainment complex is a progressive overcentralization that disperses the fog of war. This represents since at least WWII a clear and present danger. DeLanda writes: "In the age of nuclear weapons we cannot afford to let the war machines self-destruct for they would take us all with them in the process."¹¹⁷ The paradox is that the ant-like busyness of the multitude advances the forward march of AI.

The situation reaches the level of dialectical complexity only at the stage of strategy. Today's vanguards can only be relatively concerned with DeLanda's Deleuzian logic of the self-organizing machinic phylum. The issue for us in terms of a Discourse of the Analyst is the question of transference as opposed to assemblage. The networked society of post-Fordism assembles counter-games into a relatively coherent picture of networked resistance, as seen for instance in the case of Occupy Wall Street. The question that strategy asks is why play the game of war? By choosing the Knights Templar as our allegorical home team, we have instituted an anti-system element that challenges on a strategic level our immersion into the military-entertainment complex. The function of strategy, according to DeLanda, is to integrate battles (or war games) together in order to win entire wars. According to Clausewitz, the question of how to win a battle is a matter of tactics. The question of why, when and where to fight a battle is a matter of strategy.¹¹⁸ The machinic phylum, DeLanda says, has difficulty entering the stage of strategy. In this regard the military apparatus has difficulty influencing civil society and has to operate on political, diplomatic and propaganda levels. Videogames and other mainstream media are means by which the military seeks to bypass political diplomacy and influence the population through reflexed conditioning. Why a nation might wish to go to war rests on political motive. War games, however, allow the military to bypass diplomacy and model conflict at the level of mathematics. Since the

1950s, the RAND Corporation has modeled nuclear negotiations between superpowers on a “Prisoner’s Dilemma” in which the best option is to disarm. The next option is to betray the enemy and build one’s nuclear arsenals. Class Wargames calls on the multitude to build its arsenal of networked communications as means to build a new leftist offensive against global capitalism. Class Wargamers are neither peaceniks nor refuseniks. There is no end to this process, however, and as DeLanda argues, the choice between disarmament and betrayal must be made over and over again in the process of gaming. War games that tend to emphasize cooperation maximize benefits. In contrast, games that betray soon lead to spirals of counter-betrayal and retaliation. Some games combine retaliation with forgiveness in conflictual relations. The latter has been the policy of war games since the 1950s.

Although cooperative strategies are the most rational means to survive in a networked system of exploitation, the evolution of war games tends towards betrayal. One wonders in this case if one must choose between the Game of War and the reality of the military-entertainment gamespace. The allegorical relationship between the Game of War and gamespace could be elucidated as a space of fantasy. The fantasy, and the problem for strategy, is that one must choose the path of cooperation or the path of betrayal. To put this in the terms of the film *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, USA, 1999), if you choose the blue pill of cooperation you wake up and you can believe whatever you want to believe. If you choose the red pill of betrayal, you stay in Wonderland and you see how far down the rabbit hole the military-entertainment complex actually goes. The problem with the red pill, however, is that the tendency towards computerization in war games is biased in favour of conflict. Inasmuch as humans are taken out of the loop of war games, AI robots are much more prone to cross the nuclear threshold into mutually assured annihilation.¹¹⁹ Here DeLanda’s analysis reflects Judith Butler’s argument that it does not follow that even if society conceives of human life as precarious, such a society will resolve to protect that life. The question of personhood and the intelligibility and recognizability of human beings is all the more compromised when reduced to schemes that are defined by technoculture rather than by social and political norms that are inclusive and egalitarian. In the context of the military-industrial complex, questions of social reproduction, of the conditions of precarious life, are directly subsumed by the conditions of capitalist valorization. It is not so much that only some people count as subjects, as Butler emphasizes, but, from the point of view of networks, that subjects are only valued inasmuch as their lives and their productivity is measurable in terms of value.¹²⁰

Herein lies the complexity of the allegorism as a psychoanalytic problem. In Žižek’s terms, the choice between the blue pill and the red pill is not a choice between the illusion of online gaming and the reality of the offline gaming. Our reality is structured by games and similar “generative fictions,”

to use Steyerl's term. "If you take away from our reality the symbolic fictions that regulate it, you lose reality itself."¹²¹ Žižek calls for a third pill. This third pill allows us to perceive reality in illusion. Realities that are too traumatic have to be fictionalized, he argues. Why, we could ask, does the Game of War need us? Why do we need the fantasy of class struggle in the form of a board game? Why do we need a Game of War as a way to help us accept or reject the dramatic rise of militarism and plutocracy? The problem is not that we take the Game of War too seriously, it is that we do not take it seriously enough. The Game of War, to paraphrase Žižek, is more real than it seems to us. If in reality it always seems that we are unable to win the class struggle against neoliberal capitalism, the Game of War teaches us that struggle is the truth of our lives, a truth that is often too traumatic to access directly. We do not know the way out of capitalism and at the same time we know that we are on the brink of human extinction, either through nuclear war or through environmental degradation. It is not a mere coincidence that human-caused climate change will be at the centre of future conflicts and that the military is the world's single greatest cause of atmospheric pollution. The political view of armed conflict advocated by Clausewitz and Debord, in contrast to the purely military approaches that began with von Neumann and the RAND Corporation, keeps humans trapped within the cybernetic systems they have created. Relatedly, what makes Lacanian mathemes superior to the mathematics divisions of the war games establishment is the fact that they keep human agency in the loop. The problem then with war games is not simply that they blur the lines between illusion and reality, and not simply that war games pretend to give predictive certainty to human action, but rather that they do not have either a good grasp of the human condition or of capitalism as a generative matrix that is prone to crisis and destruction.

DeLanda argues that mathematics are currently unable to model nonlinear friction dynamics that give rise to processes of self-organization. The emphasis on cooperation, collaboration and participation that is promoted by network ideology, however, links the social factory to the military-entertainment complex. The logistical level of post-Fordism, which must supply humanity with endless amounts of food, fuel and computer networks, is managed by neoliberal bureaucracies that increasingly promote high-tech weaponry. For instance, candidates in both the Republican and Democratic parties in the U.S. now actively assert their military and intelligence organization work experience, if they have it. Cooperation allows for feedback between civilian and military industries, thereby commercializing violence and associating militarism with the needs of expanding markets. In the control networks of the military-industrial complex, it is impossible to know where the military ends and where civilian life begins. Everything from highways and airports to the digital protocols of the Internet have been developed largely as problems of military logistics,

assisted by the related fields of management science and systems analysis, otherwise known as operations research. As is well known, the Advanced Research Programs Agency Network (ARPANET) was created in the 1960s as a means to survive nuclear attack. What later emerged as the decentralized structure of the Internet began as a distributed network of computers that allowed for flows of information to self-organize.

What remains an enigma from the point of view of military analysis as well as from DeLanda's Deleuzian machinic phylum is whether or not systems are designed to get humans out of the loop or to integrate them into systems. The idea of collective control through cooperation underscores the chimera of evolution through technology. Did the Situationists' advocacy of workers' councils really anticipate the network politics of the twenty-first century, as Barbrook argues? Barbrook writes:

For many young revolutionaries in 2011, the interactive capabilities of the Net showed how politics should be conducted in the modern hi-tech world. Everyone with a computer, tablet or mobile was now able to make their own media. Empowered by these network technologies, people no longer needed professional politicians to represent their views to them.¹²²

On the other hand, as he puts it, is this autonomist "remix of the McLuhanist prophecy" just "the latest upgrade of the old capitalist system"?¹²³ Is to think otherwise to be infected by the virus of Bolshevism? As Barbrook adds further, Class Wargames' third phase was dedicated to the Game of War as an antidote to the "authoritarian assumptions of vanguard politics."¹²⁴ What seems obvious enough to us is that Debord's Game of War was a means to teach Hegelian Marxism in an age that had reduced all of social theory to cybernetics and to what Lefebvre referred to as *l'idéologie structuraliste*, wherein technoscience pre-empts all questions of historicity.¹²⁵ Whatever we may think about the Situationist refutation of the vanguard party's "monopoly over political subversion," the critique of what Barbrook refers to as the "zero sum matrix of global competition" is what is most paradoxical in the Game of War.¹²⁶

Wo Es War, Soll Ich Werden

Lacan's four discourses allow us to further question the fantasy loop of the Game of War as a comprehensive allegorism. In the early 1970s Lacan developed a supplement to the Discourse of the University, a slightly modified Discourse of the Capitalist that is marked out as \$ / S1 · S2 / a. In his Italian seminar, Lacan argued that in relation to both capitalism and the university, it is science today that "runs the game."¹²⁷ When asked if his algorithmic apparatus

of the four discourses did not in some way propose a systemic metalanguage of its own, Lacan replied that one would need to question the place of language in such as apparatus, but that nevertheless a point of contact emerges in the social link through the master signifier, but that it functions in different ways in each of the four discourses. There is nevertheless, he says, a convergence between mathematics and psychoanalysis that is universal at the level of mathemes. The level of algorithmic structure and its divisions allows us therefore to say something about human existence.¹²⁸ If we were to take Galloway and Wark's concept of allegorism as the "third pill" that refuses the false choice between game and gamespace, or the false choice between the Internet and the outernet, in Terranova's terms, then the four discourses become different ways in which we can game the Game of War. For starters, Lacan's emphasis on jouissance breaks through the University Discourse as the horizon of the hermeneutic according to which there is no alternative to capitalism.

This is the topic proposed by Heiko Feldner and Fabio Vighi in an essay titled "The Matrix Cannot Be Reloaded."¹²⁹ Feldner and Vighi argue that the value-form is the generative, unconscious matrix of modern society but that this form has today reached its "absolute historical limit" and is now in terminal decline.¹³⁰ The specifically Lacanian aspect of their approach establishes that the value-form functions as the unconscious social link. While it is easy enough to imagine that capitalism will find new ways to revolutionize production and social relations, their argument is that through debt-financed growth, neoliberalism reflects the fact that a certain ideological covenant of capitalism has been abandoned. The current debt crisis, with its deregulation and anti-state privatization, cannot be overcome through financialization. Today's "third industrial revolution" is compromised externally by the ecological crisis but also internally insofar as it is based on the de-valorization of labour, leading to ever-larger populations of unemployed and redundant workers. The advancement of automation and the digital revolution exacerbate the devalorization of capital. According to Marx's *Capital*, surplus value is not a property of the commodity but rather a part of the social mass of labour power. Capital today, however, assumes that it has a life beyond labour. For these reasons, leftist politics that are based on labour struggles, wages and working-class identity are themselves running an ideological deficit. We can see this today as people in post-Fordist societies no longer think of themselves as working-class since most do not have the kind of work stability that only a few decades ago came with that profile. Consequently, as they put it, "labour must be turned from a privileged standpoint into an object of the critique of capitalism."¹³¹ Any return to Marx, they argue, must tarry with those aspects of Marxism that challenge the capitalist matrix rather than put it to good use as part of a policy of industrial labour and full employment. As Marx himself proposed, labour under capitalism is alienated labour and the purpose of class struggle is the abolition of labour.

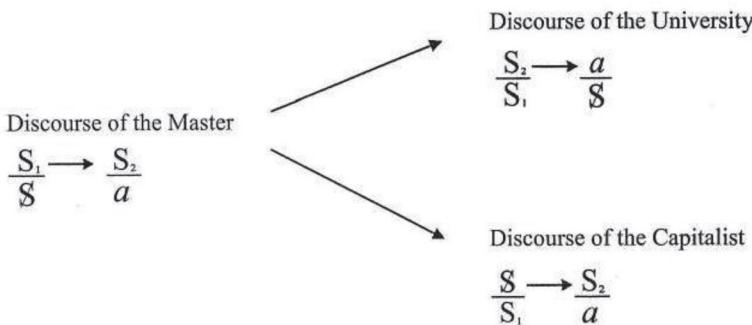


Table from Feldner and Vighi, "The Matrix Cannot Be Reloaded."

On this score Feldner and Vighi turn to Lacan's Discourse of the Capitalist to show how the Master's domination has been reinforced by the discourses of the University and the Capitalist. The hidden symptom of both these discourses, the Discourse of the University and the Capitalist, is the master signifier (S_1). This means that power and mastery are invisible and therefore all the more indisputable. In the shift from the Discourse of the University to that of the Capitalist, mastery (S_1) retains the status of unconscious truth but the agent of the discourse changes from knowledge (S_2) to that of the subject ($\$$). In the first case it is knowledge that is undermined but in the second it is the subject, who is produced by Capitalism as lack (a), a subject driven by blind desire. In this capitalist context, they write, "we act as if we were free agents, self-determining our lives, while in fact we are at the mercy of an unconscious command."¹³² The injunction to know is replaced by the injunction to enjoy, both of which are coercive as they come under the unconscious control of the master signifier. As they put it:

The agent of the discourse of the Capitalist, whether the worker or the consumer (or both), is the subject of the unconscious ($\$$) paradoxically in a position to command, believing himself to be omnipotent. The capitalist worker/consumer addresses the other as 'expert knowledge' (an illusory neutral and therefore seemingly all-powerful knowledge) and the effect of this link is the production of surplus-value, i.e. valorized surplus, a distortion of the surplus with *jouissance* as deadlock of any social link. Then, crucially, we arrive at the truth of the whole discourse, embodied by capitalism as master-signifier.¹³³

Capitalism is therefore a kind of blind discourse, unaware of what drives it forward, a system of production that is disconnected from what it produces. Examples of this are today's self-destructive regimes of over-accumulation, overproduction and underconsumption. The authoritarian compulsion of capitalism keeps the worker socially, culturally, politically and economically networked through surplus enjoyment.

In his seminar on the logic of fantasy, Lacan associates the Discourse of the Capitalist with the rise in the status of science as the secret power that impels capitalism against itself. Surplus value and surplus enjoyment are now camouflaged, Lacan says, as technology. With the subject of the unconscious in the position of agency, the drive to command, control and communication of the self-organizing operations that DeLanda identified as an impersonal machinic phylum is given a psychoanalytic explanation. As this capitalized subject begins to wonder where human existence ends and where robotization begins, he or she shifts to the Discourse of the Hysteric, addressing impersonal networks as the prosthetic gods that veil the subject's desire. Insofar as technology and technique define the protocols that contemporary subjects produce and consume, science has the status of a lack that eludes humanity but that commands it by remote control – a positivized systems-production that represses negativity. This is the case for even a leftist envisioned post-capitalism or cybernetic communism. As Berardi has it, politics in this context is replaced by technolinguistic automatisms.¹³⁴

In the Discourse of the Capitalist, the subject is filled in with the knowledge that sustains the social link. This link can be dissociated and assembled in so many ways, but without ever escaping the mode of production. One of the concepts that defines the social link in Lacan is *jouissance*. Networked biocapitalism seeks to know the secrets of *objet a* – the desire of the Other – a lack that it conflates with value.¹³⁵ Enjoyment is for Lacan a *jouis-sans*, a without-enjoyment that links consumerism with dissatisfaction, a lack that can never be filled or satisfied but that through the superego injunctions of the mode and social relations of production entreat people to work and consume tirelessly. In the context of post-Fordist network ideology, according to media theorist Michael Seeman, the final boss is not the state, not the secret service and not the platform – the final boss, he says, is us:

we have gained powers that we have not yet learned to wield: powers that are inadequately regulated, offer very few effective control mechanisms, and for which we have, so far, barely developed any cultural practices. Our true final boss is our inability to see ourselves as actual beneficiaries of these powers.¹³⁶

The subjects of the Discourse of the Capitalist, however, are never aware that they are the boss because the function of the master signifier is their hidden

symptom. Their anxiety, if they were to become aware that they are the boss, would only be alleviated by entering the cycle of surplus value production. In other words, becoming the boss in this context would only undermine their subjectivity and possible resistance to capitalism. Network ideology, as with the New Communalists' countercultural support for digital platforms, believes it can rid itself of state and corporate domination. However, in the military-entertainment complex, the state and the private sector drive the high-tech innovations that our anxiety causes us to think we can master. Thinking that we can become the boss of our new machines implies keeping the enjoyment of network culture and the Game of Class War at a safe distance so that it does not overwhelm us. Playing the Game of War can thus become a regime of enjoyment that both subtends and subverts the Californian ideology.

In the Discourse of the Capitalist you can be neither for the system nor against it. The Discourse of the University supports the Capitalist by integrating our knowledge of the Game of War and converting it into surplus enjoyment. We enjoy Class Wargames just as we enjoy *Deus Ex*. This is why the Californian Ideology is already a sophisticated version of cybernetic communism, especially as this might be understood by autonomist theory. In the society of the digital spectacle, networked social upheavals are a means of *jouissance*. As Feldner and Vighi put it:

The revolutionary spirit was hijacked and turned into a valorized spectacle, a commodity whose 'explosive potential' was not only constantly monitored, but also scientifically produced and regulated by the perverted master of the capitalist discourse. The explosion of political *jouissance* (extra-parliamentary splinter groups, armed struggle, etc.) was itself dexterously outmanoeuvred by capital (whose side interest was to retain its hegemonic role during a period of crisis), with the kind intercession of its political ally, liberal democracy.¹³⁷

Insofar as they operate in terms of the Discourse of the Analyst, Class Wargames attempt to direct gamespace towards social organization. The real question perhaps is to what extent a Class Wargames event is a kind of knowledge work. One indication that we can shift its operations towards the Discourse of the Analyst rather than the Capitalist is that the subjects of capitalism do not very much know what they are doing. Their knowledge is subsumed by either the University Discourse or is in the place of the Other. Insofar as Lacan denounces the link between scientific knowledge and the objects of desire in the signifying network, we have the possibility that loss can work as something more than what is prescribed by the value-form. It is in the Discourse of the Analyst that *objet a* occupies the inverted place of fantasy. As

transference, the Game of War becomes a potentially endless session in which the subject reflects on the abyssal contingencies of life in the network of signifiers. And here again is what makes this discourse a potential alternative to that of the Capitalist. Like science, politics sometimes pretends that it can eliminate the gap between lack and plenitude. The vanguard-as-analyst has the potential to hold open the gap between the multitude and itself. In the Discourse of the Analyst, the worker is not equated – through his or her labour – with the value-form. Psychoanalysis does not propose the equivalence or synthesis of subject and object. Whereas capitalism attempts to transform the social link into value production, analysis undermines the social link by producing the master as symptom. The Game of War stages the signifying work of the big Other of class struggle. In the context of a world enthralled to University and Capitalist discourses, class struggle becomes the unrepresentable Real of signification and so the vanguard emerges in the guise of digital ideology, as cybernetic communism or as networked bioactivism.

In our post-Fordist era network ideology produces human beings as surplus labour. The upshot for Lacan's allegorical take on gaming gamespace is that class struggle has its own ontological inconsistencies. To labour in the world of capitalism is to ensure that you will be exploited and so to persist in enjoyment. For Marx, only the abolition of work can distinguish useful labour from abstract labour. We have similarly proposed the abolition of capitalist networking and the negation of abstract social relations that are based on the value-form. To no longer require that humans sell their labour power means to reject the capitalist battlefield. It means exiting transference with the Game of War. As technology makes human labour increasingly superfluous, and as capitalist value production is thereby undermined, there is a possibility that humanity will gain a new consciousness. As an exemplary instance of avant-garde anti-anti-art, Class Wargames reveals the method by which Debord managed to play and not play the game. In accordance with Vaneigem's idea of masters without slaves, the knowledge that is contained in the Game of War is awareness that today technoscience "runs the game" (*mène le jeu*), as Lacan says. It incorporates the know-how that the Situationists acquired over several decades of struggle. This is not the knowledge of a precarious worker in the chain of command, control and creativity, but a knowledge that reveals the impotence of the master since there is no subject that is ever fully determined by the game situation they find themselves in.

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7. Gaming the Class War

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Conclusion: Pokémon Gods

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There is something rotten about network society. Although the information economy promises to create new forms of wealth and social cooperation, the real subsumption of labour under post-Fordism has instead produced a social factory of precarious labour and cybernetic surveillance. In this context people have turned to networks as an ersatz solution to social problems. Networks become the agent of history, a technological determinism that in the best-case scenario leads to post-capitalism but at worst leads to new forms of exploitation and inequality. ***Don't Network*** proposes a third option to technocratic biocapitalism and social movement horizontalism, an analysis of the ways in which vanguard politics and avant-garde aesthetics can today challenge the ideologies of the network society.

“The Hacienda has been built, but as a network economy that turns everyone into cannibalistic creatives that devour themselves and the planet satisfying the insatiable demands of the market. ***Don't Network*** offers a lucid analysis of the new class war going on in contemporary art and politics.”

- Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, author of ***After the Great Refusal***

“***Don't Network*** presents a compelling argument that outlines and undermines the hold of contemporary positivisms in politics, aesthetics and the social sciences. The book develops Lacanian schemas of incompleteness and Marxist dialectics to advance negation, rather than connectivity, as the core of any potential cultural avant garde, and as part of a manifest vision for radical movements beyond diffuse and atomised moments of resistance.”

- Marina Vishmidt, author of ***Speculation as a Mode of Production***

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