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**CUM DEUS CALCULAT, FIT
MUNDUS, OR THE WILL TO
TECHNOLOGY: DIAGNOSIS
AND CURE**

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Introduction

The question concerning *technology*, and the question concerning *the will* is perhaps one and the same. If this conjecture is, however, too bold, then let it be enough to say that technology, and the will is indeed inseparably and closely related phenomena; the will's titanic manifestation in technology is as obvious as the fact that we never chase the objectives of the will without being armed to the teeth with technology. In short, the will does not reach far without still more advanced technology at its disposal.

The idea of technology's liberating potential is accompanied by the idea of technology as a mirror image of the human mind or intelligence. If not earlier, then from the pioneering work of Turing – who outlined the conditions of possibilities for artificial intelligence – the idea of technology as something rational, intelligent or 'smart', comparable to the human brain, has been the dominant way of understanding technology (cf. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"). Since the very first offspring of digital technology, the image of technology as a "Giant Brain" – which a spellbound press tellingly named the world's first digital computer ENIAC – has been reflected in public opinion about technology, not just in academia.

Strange as it may seem, the idea of technology as rational is really a 'humanization' of technology. Since Aristotle's widespread shibboleth that the human is a *rational animal* ('zoon logikon'), human distinctiveness has primarily been defined through rationality, and with Descartes' attempt to externalize rationality as a 'thing' – a 'thinking thing' – the way to imitate rationality, that is AI, was developed (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1037b13-14; Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*). For centuries the 'ratio', or the 'intelligence', has thus been seen as the most

human 'thing', and therefore also the 'thing' that is to be imitated if technology should be as perfect as the human. When Turing and others began playing their imitation games, they were in decisive ways thus humanizing technology in accordance with Aristotle's persistent anthropology; technology had to be a rational as well.

However, what if humans were instead determined by an *unruly will*; a will to sex, to power and ultimately to life as such? To what extent would an alternative anthropology, which determines the human as a *willing animal* by subordinating rationality to the will, influence, and maybe even enrich, the understanding of technology?

In any case, the understanding of technology as rational means to well-defined ends does not make sense anymore. To a still greater extent the usage of digital technologies is compulsive, and without clear purpose. Like a patient suffering from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, washing the skin of their hands, the rationality of the late modern human has been flushed out by "the flood of precise information and brand-new amusements", as Adorno and Horkheimer incisively remarked at the dawn of the digital culture industry (xvii). Today this flood has whirled into a disastrous tsunami absorbing any kind of rational singularity into a repetitive techno-groove of uniform obsessive-compulsive behaviour, where the user is trapped in a binary logic of a rigid *yes* and *no*. Consider for instance, how many of the million clicks and finger slides performed every day on various touch screens all over the world have a distinct purpose or fulfill a recognized need, and how many are mere compulsions.

It would be tempting to interpret such repetitive and useless behaviour in a Batailleian sense as an accumulation of *excess energy*, which would cause a state of ecstasy that encounters the hegemony

of utility (Bataille, *The Accursed Share*). However, the compulsive behaviour is only apparently useless. The circuit of exuberant energy produced by the compulsive user is the very life nerve of the anonymous digital industry, which absorbs every click, finger slide, retweet, like or Google-search – deliberately as well as compulsively – to ensure its growth and power. As Ernst Jünger's figurative notion goes, we are living in an age of *total mobilization*, where all *energies* – as he notably calls it, in line with Bataille – are mobilized to work twenty-four seven on a giant plan, which nobody seems to know (cf. "Total Mobilisation"). In this sense, technology seems to be neither a sheer material extension of human rationality, nor an abundant source of excess energy, but a blind, ravenous, and limitless will to nothing but itself.

Bataille's notion of excess energy is indeed an obvious choice for interpreting the compulsive behaviour of digital culture. Although Bataille's reception of Nietzsche is evident, he only slightly touches upon the obvious relationship between his notion of excess energy and the will. For instance: "The subject – weariness of itself, necessity of proceeding to the extreme limit – seeks ecstasy, it is true: never does it have the will for its ecstasy" (*Inner Experience* 89). However, emphasizing the will more thoroughly, offers an opportunity to explore the 'total mobilization' of digital culture, in which excess energy is completely exhausted through its transformation into profitable and functioning zeros and ones.

Adopting the metaphysics of will, developed by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and others in the 19th century will help to diagnose an already arrived future, where no energy is left to transgress binary logic. However, one must keep in mind that philosophy always comes too late: Evidently, the digital industry has already come up with the same conclusion, and applied the metaphysics of the will

in their own golden terms, and incorporated obsessive-compulsive behaviour into the very heart of their designs and business models. The cure must thus be found outside the realm of the will, as Bataille also seems to suggest in the above quote.

In the philosophy of Nietzsche – who at his most critical and at the same time most productive way takes over the central concept of the will from Schopenhauer, his 'educator', as he calls him – the understanding of technology as a blind will is sharpened. However, since Nietzsche himself does not unfold a proper philosophy of technology, an interpreter, who are able to link the will to technology, is required. Heidegger, who brought the metaphysics of will into relation with technology, is such an interpreter. Thus I will first distill Heidegger's comprehensive reading of Nietzsche; and secondly, see what Heidegger is doing with the diagnosis that his immersion in Nietzsche's philosophy results in. In other words: diagnosis first, then, perhaps, a cure.

Diagnosis

Heidegger's Nietzsche

Before the middle of the 1930s Nietzsche only sporadically appears in Heidegger's works. From the middle of the 1930s to the middle of the 1940s Heidegger was, however, intensively occupied by Nietzsche's thinking. The mere existence of the approximately 1000 page lecture notes on Nietzsche, published in a double volume (GA 6.1 and GA 6.2) in the *Gesamtausgabe*, gives a clear insight into Heidegger's comprehensive studies of Nietzsche's thinking. As will become clear, it is not a coincidence that Heidegger in the same period starts to employ and define the

word 'technology' (Technik), and its Greek root 'technē', which surprisingly does not appear one single time in Heidegger's famous account of the human Dasein's ontological relation to the tools (die Zeuge) in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger is far away from being a neutral reader of Nietzsche. According to the acclaimed Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann, "Heidegger read Nietzsche the way theologians and preachers have read their sacred texts, selecting a verse, or even a half sentence, disregarding the context, and using it as a prop" (75). Heidegger willingly acknowledges this style of reading, and bluntly adds that his own contribution to the text "is what the layman, comparing it to what he takes to be the content of the text devoid of all interpretation necessarily deplores as interpolation and sheer caprice" (*Nietzsche vol. I-II: 191f.*) Even though Kauffmann is right in his critique, it is difficult, at least in the present context, not to appreciate how Heidegger unrestrainedly is squeezing, twisting, and selecting Nietzsche's thinking to make it fit his own. If he had not, and instead offered a neutral exegesis, it would not have been likely that an explicit link between technology and the will would have emerged.

The will to will

As already anticipated the fundamental concept in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is *the will to power*. However, according to Heidegger, also power must be conceived as will. In Heidegger's reading, the will to power therefore becomes a *will to will*, that is, a kind of tautological doubling of the will; or, pure and simple, the ultimate will:

But now, to anticipate the decisive issue, what does Nietzsche himself understand by the phrase "will to power"? What does "will" mean? What does "will to power" mean? For Nietzsche these two questions are but one. For in his view will is nothing else than will to power, and power nothing else than the essence of will. Hence, will to power is will to will, which is to say, willing is self-willing (Nietzsche vol. III-IV 37, my italics)

Thus, a typically example of Heidegger's peculiar reading, in which Nietzsche indeed becomes *Heidegger's Nietzsche*. Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's concept of the will (to power) as a will without any external aim; the will wills nothing but to empower itself. With that Heidegger also forestalls a common misunderstanding of power as the object of the will: "In the strict sense of the Nietzschean conception of will, power can never be pre-established as will's goal" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV 42*). However, Heidegger still defines the will as *self-overcoming* ('Selbst-Überwindung'), since it is characterized by a double effort to preserve the already seized power, which it at the same time seeks to enhance and improve: "Only from such certainty of power can archived power be heightened. Therefore, enhancement of power is at the same time in itself the preservation of power" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV 197*).

As eccentric as this might sound it is not just philosophical gibberish, but captures a shared experience in hi-tech cultures. Indeed everybody, who uses digital technologies experiences this basic feature of the will: The digital camera, the smartphone, or any other digital device establishes a (feeling of) power and empowerment, and to ensure this power one needs to enhance and improve the device by upgrading it to the latest version; otherwise the power is lost. Since this chain

of upgrading is endless, the object of the will fades out of sight, and becomes a pure will to technology as such, that is, a will to will.

The Heideggerian concept of the will (to will) thus offers a metaphysical-anthropological interpretative framework to understand the rather compulsive relationship to digital technologies; a relationship that does not seem to fit into Aristotle's claim about the *rational animal*. Quoting Nietzsche, Heidegger clearly strips of this rational privilege ascribed to humans: "Everything that lives is will to power. 'To have an to want to have more – in one word, growth – that is life itself'" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 196, my italics).

Nihilism as transitional period

To Heidegger, Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power is primarily a forecast of what we might expect of the future: "a historical decision concerning what is to come". (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 202). In accordance with Nietzsche, Heidegger defines this future event as *nihilism*, that is, the *annihilation* of all values. To Heidegger, nihilism has been on its way since Plato, but with the metaphysics of the will to power, and Nietzsche's herald of the death of God – let alone the death of any other historically sedimented values and concepts – the completion of Nihilism's slow journey through the history of Western metaphysics has come to an end (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 204).

However, it is not enough to understand nihilism as an annihilation of all values. The values had certainly been emptied of content – they have been *devaluated* – yet they have not disappeared. Rather, they appear as empty containers waiting to be filled with new content, that is, waiting for a *revaluation*

('Umwertung'). Consequently, nihilism is a transitional period, where devaluated values are waiting to be revaluated (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 200ff.). This implies that nihilism is also an opportunity for liberation (from the old stubborn values): "Nihilism thus does not strive for mere nullity. Its proper essence lies in the affirmative nature of liberation" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 204).

The one, who is able to devalueate – say *no to* – all the old values, and at the same time revalueate – say *yes to* – them is of course *the superhuman* ('das Übermensch'); Nietzsche's famous archetype of the coming human. When the values are not any longer valuated and fixed by the church, philosophers, or other institutions, humans face the fact that the world ultimately still remains, and that this remaining something has to be given new values (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 218f.). That is definitely a job description that matches the superhuman's ability to say yes and no at the same time!

It is, however, important to understand that the superhuman is not an alter ego for Nietzsche, with which "Herr Nietzsche", as Heidegger expresses it, arrogantly distances himself from the mediocrity of the crowd (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 227). Rather, the superhuman is a messenger of a new kind of metaphysics, which prompts humans to will, and to empower themselves enough to decide what the beings surrounding them are to be.

Productionist metaphysics

Only in the first volume (vol. I-II) of the lecture notes on Nietzsche, Heidegger regards Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power, and the accompanying concepts of nihilism and the superhuman, as a passable way to overcome metaphysics. In the second

volume (vol. III-IV) it is instead conceived more disappointingly as the culmination or, as the English translation goes, *the consummation of metaphysics* (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV passim*). According to Heidegger the human subject has – in the history of Western metaphysics, at least since Plato – been placed as the necessary medium, through which the truth of Being had to be mediated. Consequently, the truth of Being cannot be anything else than a representation. In Nietzsche's thinking Heidegger now sees the consummation of this simmering subjectivism, because the subject – that is, the superhuman – here is completely left alone without gods and institutions to decide the Being of beings (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV 218ff*). Before Nietzsche's superhuman, that is, before the death of God, God was conceived as the Being, which, as an absolute subject, was able to create and decide the objective world, including the human (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV 226*). In this Heideggerian theology, Christianity is seen as permeated by a *productionist metaphysics*, as the Heidegger scholar Michael Zimmerman incisively puts it (157); or with Heidegger's own words: "The supreme being (summum ens) is the Creator himself. Creating is conceived of metaphysically in the sense of productive representation" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV 226*).

In a note from GA 76 – a volume of the *Gesamtausgabe* consisting of unpublished notes and sketches about technology – Heidegger comes a step closer in showing the relation between technological production and Christianity. Under the headline *Die Frage nach dem Wesen der Technik*, Heidegger thus fragmentarily notes: "Leibniz: Dum deus calculat, fit Mundus" (*Leitgedanken 344*). The note refers to a frequently cited marginal note in a monologue by Leibniz. Here the exact wording goes: "Cum deus calculat et cogitationen exercet, fit mundus" (30). Loosely translated, that is:

When God is thinking and calculating, he is creating the world. To Leibniz, God's actualization of exactly this world as *the best of all possible worlds* is thus a result of a strictly logical procedure of selection. Bracketing God, Leibniz's note also acts fine as an epigraph to the dominant metaphysics of the present, where beings hardly are grasped as other than results of complex technological processes. Not *what is it*, or *how is it*, but *how is it made* goes the metaphysical refrain of our times. Just think about the platitude "maker culture", to get a feeling of how apt Leibniz's old note still is.

Productionist metaphysics thus does not disappear with the death of God. Quite the opposite: It is consummated with the superhuman and its affirmation of the will to power, which allow it to take the place of God as the one, who is able to make and (re)valuate everything. The superhuman wants to make and control everything that is, including itself, with the aim to increase its power. To that purpose the superhuman needs to be able to simplify and to automate beings, and in the description of this *will to simplification*, Heidegger eventually connects Nietzsche's metaphysics of power to technology through the neologism *Machinalisierung*, which is inappropriately translated into English as *mechanization*: "Mechanization' makes possible a mastery of beings that are everywhere surveyable, a mastery the conserves – and that means store – energy" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV 230*).

The reason why the translation is inappropriate is that Heidegger certainly seems to have a particular purpose with his neologism. First, Heidegger also uses the prefix 'Mach' in the concept 'Machenschaft', which is a difficult translated name for the essence of technology, and which he in particularly develops in *Beiträge zur Philosophie* and *Besinnung* from the same period as the lecture courses on Nietzsche. Secondly, while

the term *Mechanisierung* connotes science and objectivity, *Machinalisierung* clearly emphasizes a human actor or a subjective activity; a *making* (Machen), which at the same time is distinguished from a divine *creating* (Schöpfung) independent of technological means. Thirdly, the close relationship between the words *machen* and *Macht* (power), underlines Heidegger's interpretation of the will to power as a will to self-empowerment through technological making.

Cautiously playing on the prefix 'Mach', Heidegger thus makes it very clear that he sees both technology and subjectivism – or *humanization* ('*Vermenschlichung*') as he synonymously calls it – as equally effects of the consummation of the metaphysics of the will to power. In the course of history we have thus been pushed further and further into the centre of power, that is, into the ready-made world, in which we are left alone with beings we have made by ourselves. We have, in other words, become the Leibnizian God, who makes the world with complex technological calculating.

Obsession, compulsion, and disorder

If we accept Heidegger's interpretation of the will, which is indeed also a diagnosis of our present technological time, we find that the compulsive use of digital technologies is not so strange after all. Since control over technology is the essence of the still more complex ways of making, excessive and exact repetition of routine activities is unavoidable. For instance, 'tweeting' could be seen as a subtle way to affirm the will to power in order to be able to 'make values' by one's own, that is, ultimately to 'make oneself'. However, tweeting and information

sharing alike, easily slides into mildly compulsive behaviour, where the superhuman's double effort to preserve and enhance power is replaced by a rather meaningless loop of repetitive control of tweets, hashtags and followers. The technology that ought to control the making (of power), thus becomes the object of compulsive control itself, leaving the making, that is, the power, to others (to Twitter, perhaps?).

However, the symptoms described above are also symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, where short-circuits in the brain's control mechanisms transform the vital control of actions to compulsive repetition of the same actions without any other purpose, but the control itself. At best such compulsive actions preserves the patients power, but they does not enhance it. In metaphysical terms this could be stated as a will to power that slides into a will to will, which, as suggested, is manifest in many digital technologies. Not everybody, indeed maybe nobody, match the qualifications of the de- and reevaluating superhuman or the calculating God of Leibniz, which could be why our technological culture is so full of compulsive behaviour and so full of fixed commercial values. Perhaps 'hactivism' or other DIY-activism are close to meet such qualifications, and thus will succeed in making their own values, but such privileges will presumably always be reserved for the few leaving the rest in the compulsive hands of the blind will of technology.

However, Heidegger is not only doing diagnostics, he also comes up with a cure, which is, in fact, quite the opposite of activism, since activism too would be just another kind of affirming the will that does not allow us to transcend the dominant metaphysics of our times.

Cure

Everything functions

In the dialogue “Anchibasie”, from *Country Path Conversations*, written between 1944 and 1945, Heidegger introduces the concept *Gelassenheit*, which is commonly translated as *releasement*. The dialogue consists of three characters: a scholar, a scientist and a guide (‘der Weise’, which is of course Heidegger himself!). In the first part of the dialogue the main topic is technology. Through his fictive characters Heidegger thus argues that we in fact know very little about technology, because we think to know it only on the basis of technical and functional terms. Moreover, every attempt to think about technology, which is not about its usefulness, is deemed to be pure speculation (*Country Path Conversations* 5f.). Pushing it to an extreme, this means that everything in the era of modern technology only is, as far as it is useful and has a well-defined function. As Heidegger puts it, in the infamous Spiegel-interview from 1966: “Everything functions. That is exactly what is uncanny. Everything functions and the functioning drives us further and further to more functioning” (Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us” 37).

To Heidegger this epochal state of mind calls for radically new way of thinking, which is what he explores with the concept of releasement. Not surprisingly, Heidegger begins his definition to oppose releasement to the will: “Then releasement lies [...] outside the distinction between activity and passivity, [b]ecause it does not belong to the domain of the will” (*Country Path Conversations* 70). After perplexed questions from the scholar and the scientist about how to practice this kind of thinking, which the guide only defines ‘via negationis’, the guide eventually

gives a more positive definition: “We should do nothing at all, but rather wait” (*Country Path Conversations* 71). Thus, releasement is waiting, but not a waiting for something specific: “Waiting has, properly speaking, no object [...] In waiting we leave open that upon which we wait” (*Country Path Conversations* 75). In other words releasement is about *letting be*, or letting the beings be, just as the German perfect participle *lassen* (to let), which *Gelassenheit* is the nominal form of, also suggests.

Practicing releasement is therefore about letting go of the will to immediately define, make, value, control, simplify and alter the beings we confront. Perhaps one could compare it to the perpetual response of Herman Melville’s famous Mr. Bartleby: “I would prefer not to”. At least the *functionary* Bartleby’s response is met as being completely meaningless, just as Heidegger described the reaction to thinking not concerned with usefulness. Heidegger (*Country Path Conversations* 92) moreover describes waiting as a resolute *non-willingly* comportment that *release* the beings, including ourselves, to the *open region*, which means that they are not reduced to an idea, a creation of God, a product of a willful mortal ‘maker,’ a function or any other fixed concept. Rather, beings should just be left they way they are!

Yes and no and both

Ten years later, Heidegger returns to the concept of releasement in an address entitled *Gelassenheit*, in which the contrast between releasement and modern technology is even sharper. For instance he makes it clear that releasement requires that we at any time are willing to discard the technology we are using. Our *yes* to technology must in other word be accompanied by a *no*:

But will not saying both yes and no this way to technical devices make our relation to technology ambivalent and insecure? On the contrary! Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher. I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses "yes" and at the same time "no," by an old word, release-ment toward things [Gelassenheit] (Discourse on Thinking 94).

However, the simultaneous yes and no that characterize releasement is also a subtle way to renounce the will, which Heidegger clearly states in a fragment from the before mentioned GA 76: "Wille in sich *nein und ja*" (*Leitgedanken* 10). The quintessence of the will is thus exhausted in the statements "Yes, I will", and "No, I will not". Consequently, Heidegger's insistence on the simultaneous yes and no can be seen as an attempt to transcend the metaphysics of the will, which, broadly speaking, is stretched out between Schopenhauer's no – that is his' rejection of the will, which we have not touched upon here – and Nietzsche's yes, that is, his affirmation of the will (to power). However, this is not only of interest for philosophy, it also adds a new interesting perspective to the binarity of digital technologies.

Binary numbers

Just as a simultaneous yes and no make no sense to, and indeed disturbs, the metaphysics of will, a bit, which at the same time has the values zero (off) and one (on), is self-contradictory to the binary (or Boolean) number system. Although Heidegger does not examine this connection explicitly, he actually comes quite close in the lecture course on Nietzsche, where he described how the superhuman's affirmation of the will to power, that is, to make and reevaluate, depended on the possibility to simplify and automate the beings. To represent beings through combinations of zeros and ones must indeed match the demand for simplicity and automation.

Incidentally, it is worth noticing that most, if not all, programming languages are permeated by imperative expressions, such as: "Print", "Execute", "Return", "Edit", "Order", etc. A command and control language thus, which fully complies with the cogent simplicity and binarity as required by the metaphysics of will. It is well worth noticing that it was Leibniz – whose calculating God, Heidegger saw as a kind of antecedent for modern technology and its foundation in the metaphysics of the will – who in 1679 invented the binary number system.

The thinking of releasement is thus flowing between a contrasting yes and no to technology: "It would be shortsighted", as Heidegger states, "to condemn it [technology] as the work of the devil", but at the same time he rejects the optimism, which exultantly argues that technology "is a road to a happier human life" (*Discourse on Thinking* 94; 91). Neither the resolute yes, nor the resolute no, are, according to Heidegger, able to comprehend that technology radically changes our relationship to the nature and the world. On the other hand, the thinking of releasement

is an opening to the concealed meaning of technology; it is “openness to the mystery” as Heidegger idiosyncratic puts it (*Discourse on Thinking* 95).

Accordingly, Heidegger also has a peculiar view of the prospect of nuclear warfare (the address is from 1955), which emphasizes the principle of the simultaneous yes and no: The danger is not, Heidegger says, that another atomic weapon is used in war (‘the yes’), the danger is that it is not used! (*Discourse on Thinking* 95) The reason for this offensive statement is that without a massive manifestation of technology, Heidegger fears that technological thinking will unnoticeably diffuse into every corner of the human life-world, which is an even worse disaster, since it would make the dependence on technology too large to be able to reject it (‘the no’). However, since technology actually spreads in this way the ‘mystery’ remains closed, if not the thinking of releasement is resolute and persistent.

Heidegger does not come closer to define how to practice releasement, and neither has this ‘cure’, as it is here audaciously called, been the subject of clinical trials. However, it still gives rise to some questions, and questioning can – at least to Heidegger – be curing. Thus, what if this resolute thinking between affirmation and renouncing of the will to technology really were able to release both the compulsive ‘user’ and the obsessive ‘maker’ from the repetitive stuttering staccato-like choreography, in which they are staged? What if the global circuit of zeros and ones, which the familiar world is made up, suddenly collapsed, and began to speak in non-Boolean tongues? How would that leave Being?

Concluding remarks: Releasement versus ecstasy

Heidegger’s concept of releasement and Bataille’s central thought about consuming the excess energy to reach a state of ecstasy pursue the same overall goal: to transgress the given metaphysical order as well as the societal boundaries. As mentioned in a quote in the introduction, also Bataille defines ecstasy as a realm beyond the will. Moreover, he emphasizes that “in ecstasy one can *let oneself go*” (“Inner Experience” 82, original italics). However, while rapture, violent sacrifice and erotic excess are essential to Bataille’s concept of ecstasy, they are unfamiliar to Heidegger’s resigning and passive comportment of releasement, which is more akin to a the positive notion of *fatigue*, recently developed by Byung-Chul Han (2010). Releasement and ecstasy can thus be seen as two different approaches, or perhaps even cures, to cope with the symptoms of compulsive-obsessive behaviour in digital culture.

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