COMPUTING THE PLANET (2011)

animisme industriel

Technique de possession

*Powerpoint and films, 2006.
Realized in the context of the Spectral investigation collective (SIC) created with Ewen Chardronnet, Gabin Noir, Horia Cosmin Samoila and the collaboration of Benjamin Cadon to investigate the political, perceptual and ontological aspects of electromagnetic fields.*

*the Golem computer
(Weizmann Institute).*

NOTE 1 - In 1965 Gerschom Scholem inaugurated one of the first computer built in Israel, created at the Weizmann Institute of Rehovot by doctor Chaim Pekeris, by naming it « Golem n° 1 ». He underlines the similarities and differences in the processes of creation of the mythical golem and of the modern golem and compares the medieval mystical kabbalists and the fathers of contemporary cybernetics: Norbert Wiener and John von Neumann.

NOTE 2 - The Golem of Prague and the Golem of Rehovot, Gershom Scholem, 1965

NOTE 3 - Par-delà nature et culture, Philippe Descola, NRF, 2005

The end of the Second World War marked the emergence of new infrastructures which, by their scale, have led to the emergence of a state of emergency and, consequently, a permanent state of exception. But these facilities subject to the paradigm of security are intrinsically linked to the deployment of the computer, which, as an infrastructure of infrastructures, appears according to a circular logic generating both the complexification of the socio-technical organizations and the supposed resources for their regulation.

But the state of emergency and the permanent state of emergency were first produced by the emergence of new systemic risks. Among them, two are connected to the development of the computer: the nuclear risk and the climate risk.

The constitution of nuclear defense and attack systems was indeed based on the development of the computer. However, the development of these systems has led to the ultimate figure of emergency due to the possibility of a nuclear overkill. Consequently, this figure of ultimate urgency has prompted the development of military secrecy and reasons of state (closely linked to nuclear technologies), and the deployment of new techniques of war named "low intensity" (war on terror, etc..).

The social construction of a second kind of systemic risk has been carried out in the continuity of research initiated by Jay Forrester. This research computationally simulated the behavior of large socio-technical and environmental ensembles. In the 1960s they produced, a global model combining natural resource depletion and world population growth (Report of the Club of Rome). Then, in the years 1980-90 and on the basis of digital modeling of climate, they have raised the hypothesis of global warming, what the Marxist economist E. Altvater have called the imperialism of the greenhouse effect.

Thus, whether by contributing to the emergence of new systemic risks or by its ability to regulate socio-technical infrastructures, the computer can be considered as one of the main foundations of the state of emergency and of the global state of exception.

This machine of machines, despite the importance it has acquired in contemporary global society, remains an enigma. Critiques that have been brought against it were made from the viewpoint of society at large. They criticized the lack of control over the production system that resulted in replacing skilled workers. Its responsibility in the implementation of the control society and of the new security paradigm has been widely analyzed, or else, its responsibility in the deployment of new chemical and electromagnetic pollution.

Although these criticisms are fair, they don't reach the power and the magnitude of these new technological entities. Therefore they could usefully be supplemented by another kind of criticism which we will briefly outline the contours. This criticism whose contours we will briefly outline as ontological, could have been done by the Institute of Experimental demonology and magic that the specialist of the Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem, called for in his vows in his speech made on June 17, 1965, at the occasion of the inauguration of the computer built by Chaim Pekeris in Israel **(NOTE 1)**.

All my days I have been complaining that the Weizmann Institute has not mobilized the funds to build up the Institute for Experimental Demonology and Magic which I have for so long proposed to establish there. They preferred what they call Applied Mathematics and its sinister possibilities to my more direct magical approach. Little did they know, when they preferred Chaim Pekeris to me, what they were letting themselves in for. So I resign myself and say to the Golem and its creator: develop peacefully and don't destroy the worlds. Shalom **(NOTE 2)**.

Although we could take the call for the formation of such an institute for a joke, often jokes show the world with the utmost seriousness. This is actually what is suggested in a text by Norbert Wiener which makes a systematic comparison between computer power and the power of magical entities that come into contact with humans.

Speaking of demons or magic entities remains problematic if we do not extract ourselves from ontological simplifications of modern naturalistic thought. Indeed their evocation refers us to rely on a post-colonial ontology that by principle does not revoke the validity of what the anthropologist Philippe Descola calls animistic, analogical or totemic ontologies **(NOTE 3)**.

These ontologies allow to approach the following questions: What happens when we use computers? Can we speak of computers as a special kind of beings? In what ways do they act? What are these powers, largely unconscious and more and more autonomous every day, that, having moved from the cosmos to the psyche, are now externalized in our machines everywhere, impregnating the daily life of techno-capitalist societies? What are these fetishes that posses us in depriving us, bringing "back" to us, the dispossessed, the result of what we've produced?

The development of a scientific methodology, but with concepts of an essentially different nature from those of mainstream science, would allow to approach the computational fact in a way that helps us understand computers, beyond any naturalistic fiction, which, in ranking them among inert things, has overshadowed their deepest and most radical mode of action on our societies.