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Relates to project “RUSH” (comic series)

THE THIRD SHADOW

Speculative exploration of technological uncritically

1.

Thus, spoke man…

The symbiosis between humanity and technology has been a defining characteristic of our species' evolution, setting us apart from other life forms on Earth. This relationship, marked by an ever-increasing dependence and iterative advancement, has not only shaped our societies but has also fundamentally altered our interaction with the natural world. As we have progressively immersed ourselves in artificial environments of our own creation, we find ourselves in an increasingly precarious position—one where technology has become not just a tool, but a vital tether to our very existence.

Stanley Kubrick's seminal work, "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968), provides a poignant visual metaphor for this technological journey. The iconic scene where a primate discovers the use of a bone as a tool, which then transforms into a space station (Fig. 1), encapsulates what David Nye refers to as "technological determinism" (2006, p. 15). This concept posits that technology is the primary driver of social progress, evolving according to its own internal logic. In the digital age, this determinism has taken on new dimensions, with technology—particularly digital systems—seemingly functioning to perpetuate its own expansion and integration into every facet of human life.

As we enter a new technological era, it is essential to evaluate our evolving relationship with technology. Growing dependence risks diminishing human capabilities, replacing them with fragile extensions. This review examines humanity's reliance on technology, the speculative futures it may create, and the philosophical questions that emerge as boundaries between human and machine, mind and body, and reality and illusion blur. Through this exploration, we aim to deepen understanding of our technological present and future, promoting thoughtful innovation that preserves human essence while embracing progress.

The Evolution of Humanity's Relationship with Technology

From early tools to today's digital revolution, technology has driven human progress, enabling environmental transformation, productivity, and capability expansion. However, this progress comes with growing dependence, making humanity increasingly vulnerable. Alan Kay's remark, "Technology is only for people who are born before it was invented" (Tapscott, 1998), reflects how society often adopts technology uncritically, overlooking its implications.

The Digital Revolution and Technological Determinism

The digital revolution has profoundly connected humanity, erasing physical boundaries (Katz & Rice, 2002). Yet, as Nicholas Carr (2010) warns, the internet disrupts focus and attention, detaching us from the natural world. Scholars like Merritt Roe Smith (1994) highlight the dominance of technological determinism, which positions technology as society's primary driver. However, Nye (2006) challenges this view, citing examples like the Japanese samurai's rejection of firearms, showing that cultural choices can resist technological dominance.

Artificial Environments and Cognitive Overload

Increasing urbanization and digital immersion reduce time spent in natural environments, contributing to alienation. Richard Louv's "nature-deficit disorder" highlights how this disconnect diminishes our appreciation for nature (Louv, 2008). Clark and Chalmers (1998) suggest that as digital tools shape cognitive processes, human consciousness itself may change. This shift has led to cognitive overload, as constant notifications and media fragment our focus (Rosen, Cheever, & Carrier, 2013). Tom Chatfield (2024) cautions that relying on digital systems diminishes our ability for sustained thought, leaving parts of our mind "missing."

Technological Dependence and Vulnerabilities

Technology provides convenience and empowerment but leaves humanity exposed to risks like cyber-attacks and system failures. Bruce Schneier (2018) warns that this reliance heightens vulnerabilities, especially as we delegate critical decisions to AI. McAfee and Brynjolfsson (2017) argue that over-reliance on algorithms erodes critical thinking and adaptability.

Existential Risks and Digital Integration

Traditionally, humans integrate with their physical environments for cognitive and biological growth. Clark and Chalmers (1998) argue that "the self outstrips the boundaries of consciousness," but modern integration increasingly occurs within artificial digital spaces. This raises questions about what we lose in the process. The digital era risks creating "brainless zombies" blindly adhering to technology or "emancipated ghosts" who embrace it without question. Either way, humanity must ask: Are we destined to thrive or to lose our essence?

Memory, Speculation, and Reclaiming Reality

Humanity is at a crossroads where speculative approaches to time—past, present, and future—are critical to navigating challenges posed by technological determinism and transhumanism. Often overshadowed by utopian or dystopian futures, the speculative present demands immediate attention. By reevaluating the past and critically engaging with the present, we can resist the artificial narratives imposed by external forces. Central to this effort is

memory, the foundation of identity and agency. Without authentic memory, life risks becoming a curated construct controlled by technology.

The Artificiality of Memory

Memory shapes identity, yet its authenticity is increasingly compromised by artificial realities. In *Blade Runner* (1982), replicants depend on fabricated memories for a sense of self, denying them true agency. Similarly, in *The Matrix* (1999), digital illusions destabilize identity, rendering memory unreliable. These speculative works warn of the dangers of memory manipulation as a tool for control.

Contemporary technologies like social media, cloud storage, and AI-driven systems mirror these critiques. By externalizing and commodifying memory, they disconnect individuals from authentic lived experiences. Philosopher Bernard Stiegler (1998) describes this as "tertiary retention," where memory stored in external systems creates a gap between individuals and their histories, diminishing autonomy.

Reframing Time: The Speculative Cone

To counter these issues, the speculative cone—a framework for exploring plausible and preferable futures—must expand to encompass reimagined pasts and the present. Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy (1975) offers a foundation for this approach, revealing suppressed histories and the power structures that shape them. By challenging deterministic views of history, the speculative present becomes a space for reclaiming agency and reshaping reality.

Technological Determinism and Illusions of Progress

Technological determinism, which views technological progress as inevitable and beneficial, remains dominant in modern narratives. Langdon Winner (1986) argues that technology reflects specific social and political agendas, not neutrality. Transhumanism exemplifies this deterministic worldview, advocating the merging of human consciousness with machines. However, Yuval Noah Harari (2016) warns that such advancements risk alienating humanity from its organic roots and exacerbating inequality.

Artificial memory systems integral to transhumanism deepen this dependency, replacing the natural processes of remembering and forgetting with curated constructs that reinforce technological control over individual autonomy.

The Third Shadow: An Interpretative Speculation

I introduce the "Third Shadow" as a speculative interpretation of the digital age's impact on identity. Traditionally, human identity is reflected in two shadows: the tangible shadow tied to physical presence and the intangible shadow representing thoughts and emotions. The Third Shadow, however, represents a parasitic digital residue—a hybrid shadow that externalizes identity into digital constructs while feeding on both physical and psychological aspects of the self.

Unlike traditional shadows, the Third Shadow does not merely extend identity; it subtracts from it. As individuals increasingly outsource memory and cognition to digital systems, the shadow grows, leaving a hollowed sense of self. When digital systems fail—during blackouts, for instance—the void exposed is not new but a reflection of the Third Shadow's ongoing erosion of human autonomy.

Memory as Resistance

Authentic memory, with its imperfections and subjectivity, stands as a form of

resistance against the commodified and curated nature of digital archives. Walter Benjamin (1935) emphasized that authenticity lies in history and presence, not replication. Similarly, organic memory resists the artificiality of technological systems, providing a means to challenge deterministic narratives and reclaim autonomy.

Liberation from Illusion

The ultimate goal of speculative inquiry is not to reject technology outright but to transform our relationship with it. Works like *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* demonstrate the necessity of confronting artificial systems to reclaim memory and identity. Speculative approaches empower us to imagine alternatives that prioritize authenticity, agency, and freedom over convenience and control.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Present

To reclaim the speculative present, we must confront deterministic systems and address the interpretative concept of the Third Shadow—a speculative framework representing the digital residue of identity. This shadow thrives on curated illusions and erodes selfhood under the guise of connection and efficiency. By resisting its influence and redefining our relationship with memory, humanity can challenge the artificial constructs that shape reality.

The speculative lens allows us to navigate this fragile coexistence with technology, ensuring it complements rather than consumes what it means to be human.

2.
A SPECULATIVE GROWTH

The Third Shadow: Eproxiopathy and the Digital Infection of the Self

Abstract
There is a moment in every great tragedy when the characters realize they are caught in a trap of their own making. That, my friends, is us today, living in the midst of what I provocatively call *Eproxiopathy*—a disease of our modern, connected age. To understand it, let us go back to the most banal, everyday gesture: the swipe of a phone screen. This mundane act is not simply an extension of human agency; it is, in a very real sense, the *cutting away* of human agency. We have willingly amputated parts of ourselves to feed the digital machine. What emerges in its place is what I call *The Third Shadow*—the digital residue of our selves, a shadow that does not follow us but haunts us.

The Tragedy of Shadows
Philosophers love shadows—Plato with his cave (Plato, 1997), Freud with his unconscious (Freud, 1923), Jung with his archetypes (Jung, 1964). Shadows, it seems, are where the truth hides. But with *The Third Shadow*, the truth does not hide; it *mutates*. Traditionally, we have two shadows. The first is the **tangible shadow**, tied to our physical body and actions, the extension of our presence in the material world. The second is the **intangible shadow**, the echo of our thoughts, memories, and emotions—what we might call the psyche or spirit.
Now, the digital age introduces a monstrous offspring: the **Digital Shadow**. This shadow is neither physical nor intangible—it is a parasite, a semi-physical, semi-psychological appendage that leeches from both realms. Every interaction with digital technology feeds this shadow, but it feeds us back in the most insidious way: by reducing us. It is not simply an extension of our identity; it is a *subtraction* of identity. We lose parts of our physical and intangible selves to make room for this digital phantom (Turkle, 2011).

The 100% Limit: Why We Cannot Be More Than We Are
Consider this: humans have a finite capacity for selfhood. Call it the *100% Limit*. For every new layer we add to our identity, something must be sacrificed. The digital shadow demands a toll—it takes from both the tangible and intangible shadows. As we build our digital selves, we forget things we once remembered, delegate tasks we once performed, and lose connections we once maintained (Carr, 2010).
This is why, when the digital shadow is suddenly removed—during a blackout, say—we feel the void. This is not just an inconvenience; it is an existential crisis. The self, accustomed to outsourcing parts of its identity to the digital, is left hollow (Vierboom and Härlen, 2009). What do we do when the screen goes dark? We panic. We flail. And here lies the terrifying insight: the void does not come *after* the digital shadow is gone—it was always there, growing, hidden beneath the glow of our screens.

Technology as Tyrant, Kafka as Prophet

Let us bring in Kafka, the great diagnostician of modernity. In *The Trial*, Josef K. is trapped in a bureaucratic nightmare—a system that seems to have no origin, no center, no master. It is a "tyranny without a tyrant" (Arendt, 1970). This, I argue, is precisely the structure of our relationship to digital technology. We built the system, yet it now rules us, and no one—not even the tech billionaires—seems to be in control. Technology is the perfect Kafkaesque bureaucracy: faceless, endless, and inescapable.

But Kafka's nightmare has a twist. In *The Judgment*, the protagonist's collapse comes not from the system but from within. His downfall is an act of self-destruction, a surrender to the absurd (Kafka, 1997). This, too, is us. We do not merely suffer under the weight of technology—we *desire* it. We embrace it. We love our chains. This is why I describe the digital shadow as a *Geiger Facehugger*—it is both an alien parasite and an extension of our own body. It is the externalized form of our inner drive to connect, to consume, to be consumed.

The Digital Church: A Religion of Trust

Here is the paradox: as we lose faith in traditional institutions, we place blind faith in technology. The digital world becomes a kind of secular church, promising salvation through convenience, efficiency, and endless connection (Fadeyev, 2021). But this is not trust—it is a pathology. We trust the digital not because it is trustworthy but because we cannot bear the thought of being without it.

This is why I call technology a religion. Like all religions, it asks for a sacrifice. What do we sacrifice? Memory, autonomy, e nnven identity itself. The more we trust the digital shadow to store our memories, the less we remember ourselves (Carr, 2010). The more we trust it to mediate our relationships, the less we connect directly. The digital church demands not belief but dependence, and we are all its faithful disciples.

The Übermensch as Digital Mutant

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was supposed to transcend humanity, to create new values and rise above the herd. But what if the digital shadow is a perverse realization of this ideal? Technology allows us to transcend our biological limitations, to overcome the inefficiencies of memory, labor, and communication. But this transcendence comes at a cost: we are no longer human in the traditional sense. We are diseased humans, *Eproxiopaths*, trapped in a spiral of dependency (Nietzsche, 1883).

Freud helps us here. Think of his tripartite psyche:

- **The Id** is the psychological shadow, our primal desires and instincts.
- **The Ego** is the physical shadow, grounded in reality.
- **The Superego** is the digital shadow, an idealized self constructed by societal norms and digital validation (Freud, 1923).

The digital shadow, as superego, is the ultimate tyrant. It imposes its ideals on us—be more connected, more efficient, more productive—while eroding the very foundations of our individuality.

Conclusion: Salvation or Submission?

The Third Shadow is not merely a metaphor; it is a diagnosis. We have created a digital parasite that feeds on our identity, reshaping it in its image. The question is not whether we can escape it—we cannot—but whether we can learn to live with it without being consumed. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* envisioned humanity overcoming itself to create something greater. Perhaps our task is the opposite: to overcome our digital selves and reclaim the humanity we have lost.
But let us not delude ourselves. This is not a battle we can win through sheer willpower. The digital shadow is too deeply entrenched. The most we can hope for, perhaps, is a kind of détente—a fragile coexistence where the void does not swallow us whole. Until then, the shadow looms, a silent witness to our Faustian bargain with technology. We are haunted not by ghosts but by our own reflections in the black mirror.
And maybe, just maybe, that is the real tragedy.

So far, our philosophical journey, through complex tunnel systems and thick jungle has finally led us to a pristine shoreline. Now, in front of us, we see a wide-open sea waiting to be explored. On the shore, close to the water, lies a boat that we must first learn to steer before setting sail. This boat is ***Dualism****.*

(Dualism serves as a tool. It is both bone and spaceship for us to wield unto a speculative reality, to broaden our eyes revealing the horizon. To look up, beyond our technology.)

3.
Dualism

Substance (Cartesian) **dualism**, which traces its origins to René Descartes, views the body as made up of one substance that is radically different from the substance of the mind. The physical body is spatially located and can be seen and touched, whereas the mental is non-physical and non-spatially located, yet real. The mind must be distinct from the brain, as the brain is a physical organ. Substance dualism often encounters the problem of interaction, where it is unclear how the mind and body interact with one another.

On the other hand, **property dualism** perceives all of reality as being made up of physical substance, where the mind is a non-physical byproduct of the physical brain. Certain combinations of the physical have the ability to give rise to the non-physical and interact with them. One could question the dualistic properties of property dualism and could conclude that it is much more of a monoism. With the opposite of reality being non-reality, reality is on a spectrum, a line of singular value. (Robinson, 2020) (Philosophy Vibe, 2022)

User and Non-User

A "User" is defined as a physical being, in acceptance with their mind, who actively partakes in the usage and therefore impacts another body, mind, or process. In contrast, the "Non-User" rejects participation, either due to a conscious decision made by the mind or because of a physical inability to do so. The User is typically seen as the societal norm and will, therefore, impose upon the Non-User, as active rejection hinders the evolutionary mindset of the User's acceptance.
When approached with the same logic as the mind-body problem, it can be expected that categorizing beings as either Users or Non-Users presents a dilemma similar to that of interaction between two distinct substances. However, unlike the mind-body problem, Users and Non-Users are inherently of the same substance—both are physical beings—but differ in their compliance between mind and body. One chooses to engage, while the other opposes, making it a matter of choice. Thus, the User and Non-User dilemma places them on opposite ends of a spectrum, with the User being all-accepting and the Non-User all-withholding, based on the limits set by physical reality.

Does one even have to choose? The User represents an overarching notion of engagement, while the Non-User represents the opposite. By not actively choosing, one automatically assumes the position of the Non-User, as the world passes by without one's engagement. This is particularly relevant to the Non-User, who, though not forced to adapt, is nevertheless passively adapted. It is as if the Non-User has already chosen the role of User by merely existing in this binary choice of participation and non-participation.

Dualism and Exploration in the Graphic Novel

Ready to set sail, the project now extends into world-building and the creation of a graphic novel, where dualism becomes a central theme in examining humanity's relationship with technology. The story presents a world divided by a genetic disease into two groups: Flickers and Glarers. Flickers, tied to their innate state, symbolize introspection and detachment, while Glarers, deeply immersed in digital technology, represent external engagement and adaptation. This division reflects the dualism of User and non-user, exploring the tension between participation and rejection in a technology-driven society.

Flickers' non-participation limits their influence, while Glarers highlight the vulnerabilities of technological over-reliance. The novel uses this divide to question what it means to be human in a world increasingly mediated by digital systems. It avoids a straightforward dystopian narrative, instead creating a reflective space where biological inevitability meets personal choice, prompting readers to consider how technology reshapes identity and agency.

Through speculative storytelling grounded in dualistic principles, the graphic novel explores the spectrum of human experience, inviting readers to reflect on their own place within the interplay of technology, selfhood, and free will.

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