

## THE NINTENDO Wii, VIRTUALISATION AND GESTURAL ANALOGICS

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*The hand cannot be spoken about without speaking of technics.*  
(Derrida, 1987: 169)

This paper will examine the significance of the innovation in home console gaming introduced by the Nintendo Wii. The Wii offers a different interactive experience of the virtual space of the game played. Entertainment systems such as the Nintendo Wii are exemplary of the experience design milieu in which audiovisual media develop and compete for their user's attention. These contemporary interactive audio-visual systems are central vectors of transformations in what Jonathan Beller has characterized as the 'attention economy' (2006). This economy, built on the capture, channelling and sale of the conscious attention of consumers, has been the mainstay of commercial entertainment and leisure industries since the rise of 'cinematic media' (film, animation, television, video, dvds, gui-enabled computer gaming, not to mention the gramophonic media of radio, vinyl records, optical discs, and mp3s). The interactive game consoles focus a rapid tendency to media convergence in the domestic space around a repurposing of the television screen.

In this context the Wii system proposes a further step forward, and 'outward' from the existing videogamer market, by strategically recalling 1980s and 1990s virtual reality discourses of enhanced interactive engagement in a technically delivered virtual space. The specific innovation that the Wii console system offers revolves around how the body of the Wii user is recruited in the attentive practice of play (or other modes of Wii use, such as fitness training with the *Wii Fit* equipment) in an explicitly different manner to existing consoles. This, I will argue, brings the domestic context of mediation between user and system into play differently. With the

prospective launch of Microsoft's next generation X-box, 'Project Natal,' a prototype of which is being promoted at the time of writing at industry expos such as E3 2009 and the Tokyo Gameshow, as well as online in YouTube promotional videos, it can be seen that the Wii's redefinition of interactive media engagement will have inaugurated a wider process of the development of a more embodied media technicity of virtual experience.<sup>1</sup> The Project Natal interactive system is built on a 3D object sensing technology that promises a controller-free interface with the virtual space of the screen via full body motion capture, facial and voice recognition, and also the capability to digitise images of real world objects (the player's skateboard, for example) for use in the virtual playspace. The tagline for the project - 'The only experience you need is life experience' - summarises Microsoft's energetic outbidding of the Wii's successful strategy for extending console gaming beyond the identified demographic of technically savvy young males.

The Wii's innovative technical system - simulated scene generator, Wiimote and infrared position-sensing and realtime communications - needs to be understood in terms of the developmental lineage entailing both the envisioning and technical implementation of audio-visual, interactive virtual experience. My argument will be that the release of the Wii recalls but also decisively modifies the fulfilment of the earlier promise of VR (virtual reality) technicity. It is certainly not the first gaming platform to make widely available an experience of embodied virtual interactivity, the Sony i-Toy being its most significant precedent. Its major success, however, in terms of sales figures and the opening up of new markets for home gaming and its provision of a consistent and flexible virtuality across a range of game modes, genres and peripheral devices, marks the Wii system as inaugurating a new phase of the media technicity of experience design systems.

By media technicity I mean the way in which human experience in general is constituted in and through what Bernard Stiegler would call the technical substrate that enables the recording, recall, sharing and producing of what can be experienced (Stiegler, 2001: 116). The media are central to the production and recollection of experience in contemporary technoculture. As a significantly popular new system of domestic media entertainment, the Wii can be said to refigure the conditions and scope for mediated experience in our contemporary interactive digital media world via its refiguring of experience in and of the domestic space in particular. What hits home, as it were, in this latest phase in the convergent repurposing

of the television screen is the sense of a movement beyond the well established eye-hand-screen program of interaction and the effective launch of gestural-spatial interaction in a revised, applied version of VR technicity.

To develop this analysis of the Wii system as both extension and transformation of an interactive media technicity I will compare the Wii to the other major domestic console systems - the Sony Playstation and the Microsoft X-box - against which it battled so successfully in an intensely competitive home entertainment market. This comparison of the technically conditioned staging of interaction in virtual spaces will draw upon Martin Heidegger's influential analysis of the equipmental character of everyday human existence. Readers familiar with Heidegger's account in *Being and Time* (1962, first published in 1927) of how the world is primarily encountered in and as sets of equipment more or less ready-to-hand for employment in the tasks of living can no doubt see how amenable virtual interactive systems such as game consoles are to being approached in the terms of this analysis. Indeed, virtual systems appear from this perspective to have developed as working models of Heidegger's analysis in that text of a worldhood given 'equipmentally.' As Howard Rheingold suggested in his 1990s account of the brave new future of Virtual Reality technology, VR answers to the challenge of the complexity of the technical milieu by working toward 'tools for coping with that complexity' (1991: 98). The virtual space becomes in this view a medium for managing the 'world' of contemporary technology by 'worlding' equipmental doubles of what Heidegger would have called regions of concerned preoccupation. Game consoles could be understood as the entertainment modality of this medium, a modality serving to familiarise users with this domesticated instance of an interactive technicity in which the virtual space of the screen provides an interactive instance of, and interface to, the wider, connected, complex and realtime world of everyday concerns.

If game consoles have helped familiarise a certain modality of interactive technicity, the Wii's arrival has to a degree, and for a time, de-familiarised it through its revised framework of gestural input. Corresponding to this has been a reshaping of the domestic space 'around' the virtual world on the television screen. This space has a different relation to the virtual world inasmuch as it is mobilised as part of the interactive medium of virtuality by the tracking technics of the Wii system. The established framework of the use and intelligibility of the domestic media node is, for a time at least,

suspended while its successor has not yet become habitual. A contingent experience of this mediated domestic space becomes available in this transitional moment; one which in Samuel Weber's terms I will consider as a mediated production of an encounter with the theatricality of (domestic) space 'as such'.

The Wii has heralded the arrival of new technical systems for virtual worlding. This transitional phase between regimes of mediated interaction offers, however, some critical and creative opportunities for inflecting the mainstream roadmap to virtualisation. The Wii is certainly conceivable as having inaugurated a further stage in the 'enframing' trajectory toward a becoming calculable of everything that Heidegger mapped out in his essay, 'The Question Concerning Technology' (1977). From the perspective of Stiegler's 'post-Heideggerian' account of technicity, the Wii instrument can also be approached as harbouring other modalities of what Stiegler would call an 'idiomatic instrumentality' available via, and only on the basis of, the 'instrumental condition' of the human (Stiegler, 1998: 206). Consequently, the potential for reframing the human articulation with others and with(in) the shared milieu of technocultural becoming is at stake in the possible adoptions of the technical systems for worlding the virtual like the Wii and what will come in its wake.

### **The Wii and Other Home Consoles**

The Nintendo Wii is designed and sold to be used in the domestic setting. The actual variety of adoptions of the Wii is an historical and therefore contingent process, and I will consider some non-domestic appropriations of the Wii system below. But the Wii's commercial design and marketing conditions, without fixing permanently, the significant impact the Wii is having on domestic practices of interactive play in virtual spaces. We can gain some perspectives on the nature of this conditioning if we compare the features of the Wii system to those of the existing commercial home game consoles such as the Sony Playstation 3 and Microsoft X-Box 360 consoles, against which it has positioned itself in the consumer market. In general, the Wii solicits the involvement of more of the player's body in controlling the interface with the game. Rather than being primarily a 'digital' interface, that is, one passing principally through the digits on the player's hands, the Wii is also designed to accept larger limb and bodily gestures as control input. Graeme Kirkpatrick sees in this innovation the possibility of a new aesthetics of

interaction (2009). New possibilities of the human-technical co-production of forms of expression and experience present themselves, he argues, through Nintendo's redesign of the interface system, and this opens onto other potentialities for 'game' systems as such. Kirkpatrick envisions, through reference to Walter Benjamin's schema of kinds of human gestural activity (sport, play, work, idleness), a passage of digital interactivity forming from ludic involvement (where it predominantly sits today) toward other creative and productive domains of human action (2009: 138).

Kirkpatrick tries to think here the undetermined potential of the Wii system's conditioning of a new kind of home gaming experience. His identification of gesturality as a key aesthetic dimension through which to approach the deeper significance of the Wii as technical innovation is, I would argue, acute and accurate. While scoping for the creative potential of the Wii's reforming of gestural production is an important task, I would also suggest that it is critical to analyse carefully to what extent the Wii design advances existing, well established elements of the technocultural program. By doing so one can discern the conditioning techno-logic of virtualisation that the Wii system adopts and transforms in its redesign of gestural interactivity. Any assessment of the Wii's potential to increase the scope of critical or creative production needs to keep in view its industrially designed and commercially developed character as a commodity that promises to deliver certain experiences of virtualised interaction.

In this regard we should pay attention in our comparative analysis to the fact that, like the X-Box and the Playstation, with the Wii it is still to a significant degree a matter of the hand, of hand-held controls and 'digital' input. Exemplified by the game that shipped with the launch of the new system in 2006, *Wii Sports* (Nintendo, 2006), Wii play was associated immediately with an image of physical, embodied activity that contrasted against the stereotypical sedentary, trance-like figure of the 'button-mashing' videogamer. The hand on the end of the arm, on the end of the body, however, is still a *sine qua non* of Wii use. The 'Wiimote' controller is the enabling input device, allowing the user to activate the system, select among its 'channels' or operation options (play game disc, go to one of the online connected information services, communicate with other consoles, design and edit the 'Mii' player avatars). The Wiimote has buttons and triggers, supplemented by the 'Nunchuk' additional controller for the other hand. Either or both of these are modifiable via other add-on peripherals such as the 'Steering/Sports

Wheel,' the 'Wii Boxing Gloves,' the 'Airplane Controller Stand,' 'Fishing Rod,' 'Light Sword,' 'Ping Pong Set,' 'Blaster Shotgun,' and the extraordinary 'Wii Crossbow.'

The nature and number of these accessories that refigure the hand-held Wiimote and Nunchuk indicate both the technological and merchandising logics of the system. They serve to better evoke and condition the player's actions in the simulated spaces of different games through an analogical enhancement of the finger-based digital input, which is taken for granted in the hand-held controls. The 'digital' hand is now combined with analog qualities of hand, arm and body that assume a far greater importance than in existing home consoles. The mini-joystick and sliders on X-Box and Play Station controllers, and even the stand-alone joystick, car control, handgun and other analog devices developed for those systems, are overtaken by the Wii's passage toward a more definitive deployment of analog gesturality as major input to the virtual world.

This is evident in the way that motion-sensing of the user's input is central to most of Wii software's interface design, even if a more conventionally-styled 'Classic Controller' device is also available as an alternative controller. This latter makes possible the Wii's pursuit of the Playstation and X-Box gamer market as part of its 'backward compatibility' coverage, but it only points up the difference in the system's redefinition of virtual interaction. The micro-movements of finger-based input, which were the core of hand/eye/screen interface design in the existing game consoles, have been absorbed as one modality of the wider range of Wii interactivity with the virtual world.

The Wiimote - standing here also for the Nunchuk and all the analog supplements that can be grafted onto these - opens up newer, bigger gestures as part of gameplay. *Wii Sports* was the vehicle for Nintendo to showcase the Wii's innovation in console gaming equipment. *Wii Sports* play involves performing (and watching others perform) analogs of sporting gestures, such as punching, blocking, ducking, and swing on a bat, a racquet or a club. These gestures are comparable to the movements of bodies in the physical situation of playing tennis, baseball, golf and boxing, as opposed to those of the hand/eye in videogame screenspace. Comparable, but not identical. These are analog models of real world gestures, necessarily undergoing a process of simplification, schematisation and translation into the 'language' of the spatial and event simulation technics which underlies the Wii's realtime scene generation system.

*Wii Fit* (Nintendo, 2007), heavily promoted in a 'second wave' of Wii marketing in 2007, extended this model of Wii play as physical activity. It provides a user interface which is non-manual (albeit requiring, of course, use of the hand-held controller to open up and launch the software), the 'Balance Board' on which the user can stand in various poses, balance or do pushups. New sport simulation games such as *Family Ski (Wii)* (Nintendo, 2008) and *Shaun White Snowboarding* (Ubisoft, 2008) have also designed gameplay around this new input device. *Wii Fit Plus*, released in 2009, follows up this offer of vicarious participation in the hi-tech feedback-based training and fitness evaluation systems of professional sports. It appeals to the fun aspects of emulating high performance, cybernetically conditioned athleticism, either ironically (as a kind of arcade amusement in the home) or with the serious intent of an expanded console-using demographic, motivated to work out in the privacy of one's living room.

It is unclear to what extent the *Wii Fit* 'games' are used for the purposes of fitness conditioning - in keeping with the other personal-improvement 'games' that Nintendo have specialised in, such as the 'mental fitness,' makeup and cooking games promoted for their hand-held DS devices - or whether they are mostly taken up as novelties to demonstrate the new regime of virtual interactivity, and played more in the manner of dancing or music-playing games in a social context of shared performance. The Wii's mapping of control input onto a less 'digital' manipulation of buttons and a more analog range of bodily movements that they so proudly display is of chief concern in this paper. The wider significance of the success of the Wii system needs to be unpacked by analysing this remapping. The Wii has initiated what amounts to an 'arms race' of embodied virtual interactivity, with the aforementioned Microsoft's 'Project Natal' aiming to leapfrog the 'embodiment gap' opened up by the Wii. At this transitional moment in the rollout of a new phase of virtual media technicity, the task is to apprehend the Wii's reconfiguration of the user in the everyday space of interaction in virtual space.

### **Equipmental Virtual Worlds**

With the Wii system the preponderance of analog, gestural input is decisively increased, then, in relation to digital, finger-based input. There appears an increased contiguity with (conventional, pre-

digital) intentional activity in the real everyday in the manner of the Wii's provision of a responsive connection between the player and the perceived screen events. There is, in other words, an analog boost to the 'real' feel of the virtual interactive world. I am speaking of the everyday real in everyday terms here, 'ontically' rather than 'ontologically' as Heidegger would have it in *Being and Time* (1962: 32). As noted above, Heidegger's account of the factual conditions of *Dasein's* existence is powerfully apt for evaluating the Wii and the more general system of virtual technicity, of which it is an innovator. Heidegger insisted in *Being and Time* that philosophy eschew its metaphysical presuppositions concerning the grounds of experience in favour of an existential analytic of the everyday. This move provides both justification and some valuable insights for my approach to the refiguring of mediated experience today via analysis of a new game console system to be found in one of the most everyday of spaces - the home.

Heidegger's account of how *Dasein's* world is comprised of regions constituted through an always already oriented engagement with equipment-sets provides a productive conceptual model for the virtual realities one encounters through console game systems. While, as we will see, the relation of the mediated virtual worlds and the everyday domestic space is a question Heidegger could not pose, his comments concerning the 'de-severance' of the distant (*Entfernung*) by the domestic radio set provides some resources for thinking the later passage of media technicity from world nearing to virtual worlding (1962: 138).<sup>2</sup> I will need to move beyond Heidegger, however, to articulate the more critical and creative potential of the Wii system in this new venture of media technicity. At least, I will need to avoid Heidegger's evocation of an authenticity hidden by modern technics that followed, somewhat as a denegation of its more radical potential in the view of Stiegler, his analysis of the facticity of *Dasein*.

Using Heidegger's terms, I would propose the Wii user has a more unreflective, 'ready-to-hand' encounter with the virtual. The designed familiarity of controlling gestures based on real movements (swing the bat, turn the steering wheel, point the rifle) rather than combinations of buttons could be understood as reducing the player's need to pay attention to the control system interposed between the player and the worlding function it performs through its adoption and use. If this is so, then this does not mean there is a greater degree of intuitive 'naturalness' in the Wii's gestural input design. This immediacy comes, following Heidegger's analysis of the



facticity of *Dasein*'s coming to be there, in time, from the fact that one is always already oriented in and from 'being alongside the familiar,' that is, the world of everyday involvement (1962: 144). This is what the Wii system is designed to boost - the familiarity of its attentive, embodied engagement of the user in virtual interaction.

The Wii system can be added to the list of sets of equipment (such as equipment for writing (*Schreibzeug*), sewing (*Nähzeug*), working (*Werkzeug*), transportation (*Fahrzeug*) and measurement (*Messzeug*)) Heidegger provides to exemplify the character of technology as contextual and constitutive of a region (*Raum*) of concerned, engaged activity (1962: 96-97). The Wii is entertainment-*zeug* that is found in the domestic region of leisure and 'free time.' In its provision of a 'space' for interactive playtime it is consistent with the reorientation of involvement in the everyday given factually by the home console industry for the last few decades. From the beginnings of home console-based entertainment in the late 1970s with the Atari, Sega and Nintendo systems that dominated the first phase of console gaming, the home became a new 'zone' for the kind of play associated with arcade videogame systems. The videogame units in these arcades shared and then largely superseded the older amusement arcade staples, such as pinball machines and other analog games of skills and kinaesthetic thrills. The character of the region of entertainment offered in the videogame arcades, often replaying the somewhat disquieting role the amusement arcade has had for decades in mainstream discourses around the regulation of adolescent behaviour, was reinvented in the domestic incorporation of the videogame playing equipment.

While the consoles of the 1970s and 1980s pulled the arcade zone into the domestic interior, the home console systems were also premised on a re-purposing of the home television set that had hitherto taken over the pivotal role from the radio set in the living rooms of Western modernity. In relation to the latter, Heidegger famously noted in the course of his analysis of *Dasein*'s spatiality that radio's capacity to reconstitute the sense of *Dasein*'s immediate region of concern - by bringing the geographically remote into the home - was so novel that its 'meaning for *Dasein* cannot yet be visualized' (1962: 140). While this meaning may be clearer now in the era of 'globalised technoculture' - the very conception of which emerges to no small extent out of debates concerning the constitutive role electronic and digital media play in determinations of local and global, geopolitical and virtual determinations of space, community and politics - for our purposes it is worth noting that

Heidegger identifies the speed of electronic communications as decisive in radio's 'de-severance' of remoteness. And it is this speed which is central to the realtime interactivity that forms the basis of the home console system's provision of a virtual world of immediate, concerned preoccupation. The player is in this space as another region of the general 'de-severance of the "world"' accomplished by the speed of modern electronic media and communications (1962: 140). The shift in the function of the television screen from 'nearing' the distant real to accessing the playful worlds of videogames amounts to an equipmental reframing of de-severance as virtualisation. This extends but also transforms the tendential trajectory of the mediated technicity of general de-severance that Heidegger envisions over the horizon from the 1920s. From the movement Heidegger perceived of bringing ever closer (and more rapidly) the distant, emerges the simulated, hypothetical projection toward and, indeed, in anticipation of, the real via the operational (realtime) interactive screen.

### **The Wii's Theatre of the Virtual**

What, then, of the specificity of the Nintendo Wii in its development of this factual provision of the de-severed remote - from geographical to virtual - to the player at home 'alongside the familiar'? The Wii could be said to boost the immediacy of the virtual world by enhancing physical involvement in the mediated, virtualised world of play. In proposing the greater immediacy of the Wii interface, we are of course in the terrain of classic Virtual Reality discourse, where the vision of a compelling immersive experience is sought via a comprehensive and increasingly transparent technical interface. I would argue that the Wii is a major vector for the revivification of this discourse, although one which bears a somewhat different projection of the future of virtuality than that of the more extreme end of 1980s imagining of a quasi-mystical passage to a 'hi tech-topia' of subjects liberated from corporeal constraints. The Wii's popularity (56.14 million units shipped by September 2009, according to Wikipedia) with newer, older demographics is undeniable. The marketing of this expansion of console use has centred on two elements: the offer of a new mode of interaction in virtual space and the prospect of a more social, media-based leisure-time spent among family and friends gathering around the Wii as both participant and audience of these more embodied interactions. Oliver Grau characterized VR talk of embodied telepresence in the 1980s-1990s as reanimating the old, perhaps

ancient myth of magical presence at a distance (2003: 279). The Wii system promises to deliver a domesticated and socially functional application of embodied telepresence. Its success shows that, despite the way that the grand promise of VR ('transcendence now') seemed to fizzle out and become slightly embarrassing over the course of the 1990s, the digital imaging, simulation and interactivity research agendas of the mainstream have not given up on realtime interactive environmental innovations and applications.

In its different engagement of the user, the Wii represents a significant commercial application of that continued effort. Its solicitation of the VR promise of telepresence needs to be considered from this perspective. For example, when I play *Wii Sports*, I swing a virtual baseball bat, therefore I am (playing baseball). I already know how to play baseball 'in my body' from previous experience with the game in real space.<sup>3</sup> I take up the controller somewhat in the manner I take up a real baseball bat - as equipment ready-to-hand belonging to a set of equipment that goes together in the region of baseball gameplay. The virtual world the Wiimote 'worlds' involves the player in an analogical illusion of, and allusion to, another space and time, in the past of its older, new user.

If the Wii worlds a world ready-to-hand differently than in more 'digital' console play, this is not to say that the Xbox, Playstation, or for that matter the hand-held, mobile phone or PC game-world is not a 'real' region of concern for the player. Nor is it to deny that the player fairly quickly makes these other game controllers ready-to-hand in learning a new configuration of its hardware by a new piece of game software. On the contrary. As I argued above, the Wii can be placed in a lineage of de-severing technics that have colonised the domestic space in the time of (post)modernity. But in this established virtual worlding, the player's everyday milieu tends toward the invisibility (or relative distantiation) of the most physically proximate equipment. The domestic environs of play can be compared to Heidegger's example of the spectacles on the nose of the person preoccupied by a picture on the wall (1962: 141). Or, if the spectacles are perhaps better likened with the console controller held in the hand, then the room in which the console is installed is more like the inconspicuous, pre-given totality of equipmentally-directed dealings that is the worldhood of the world comprised by the living environment.<sup>4</sup>

The Wii gameworld, on the other hand (that is, via the other hand-held interface), is a virtual world brought close via the control

system as a double of, or superimposition on, the everyday real. This is in contrast to the virtualisation of space on screen in standard console games. The fuller gestural involvement of the Wii player goes together with this different de-severing of the virtual. The latter enables the design of a less 'digital' interface based on analogising 'real' regions of equipmentality. This different mode of virtualisation incorporates, on the basis of its greater incorporation of the user's body, the everyday milieu (the domestic environs) as ludic, performative, or what Samuel Weber would call 'theatrical.' Summarising in an interview his notion of theatricality, Weber provides a 'minimal definition' of it as 'representation for another', that is, as representation that has to take place on a kind of stage, dependent for its constitution on how it is received, adopted or apprehended outside of the frame of this staging:

Theatricality is the dimension which presupposes but also transcends its delimitation or instantiation in and as any defined theatrical space since such a space is constitutively dependent on what it doesn't contain, on an elsewhere whether in time or in space or rather in both. (Weber & Crogan, 2008: 381).

The audiovisual media have 'made theatricality ubiquitous today', argues Weber, and I would claim that the Wii theatricalises interactive gaming in the *domestic* elsewhere in a particular, marked acceleration of this general tendency (2008: 381). Beyond the promise of 'home theatre' systems to bring the cinema into the living-room, the Wii inaugurates a more 'uncanny' process of making the home contiguous with the 'distant' virtual space brought close enough not only to see but to touch and enter.

Comparisons could be made here to pervasive gaming, location based gaming, and similar technics and techniques of virtualising real regions, that is, to the technics of experiencing 'real' space as theatrical in Weber's terms. These technics open up the potential to experience the virtuality of space 'as such,' which would be a destabilisation of the regular frames of the 'theatre' of the real and, consequently, of experience, intention, and attention 'as such.' Perhaps this is the horizon of gameplay as a cultural practice historically, something which has been to a degree covered over in the industrial commercialisation of gaming in modern and information age contexts in which it is produced as an experience of prescribed *leisure-time* in designed and designated marketable

spaces. Beyond the simplistic readings of Johann Huizinga's notion of the magic circle, readings which unfortunately seem to proliferate unceasingly in the region of games studies, the notion of the 'magic circle' that play inscribes is none other than that of a process of virtualising the serious world precisely on the basis of the precedence of play in the human articulation of experience.<sup>5</sup>

To experience the virtuality of space 'as such' is what I just proposed as a potential outcome of Wii gameplay (and of other kinds of superimposing gameplay technics). In Weber's terms, this would be to experience the movement of theatricality that localizes the space of a kind of theatre, but always performatively, contingently. As Stiegler has shown in an acute commentary on *Being and Time*, technics is the condition and horizon of this kind of experience of life's constitutive contingency:

The support of all concern is 'equipment' (*das Zeug*), itself the support of the system of references that constructs the significance of the world; and the horizon of anticipation, the originary structure of all worldliness, is the *technical* world - the technicity of the world is what reveals the world 'firstly' and most frequently in its *facticity*. (1998: 6)

Equipmentality is the horizon and support of *Dasein's* world, starting with the experience of space-time in and through an orientation to things, others and the passage of time. For Stiegler, Heidegger's analysis of the constitutive nature of technical facticity with regard to the human sense of worldliness is the closest Heidegger came to a genuinely non-metaphysical thinking of the human-technology relation. His subsequent differentiation between the factual, historical world and an authentic mode of *Dasein's* encounter with being in time - which Stiegler situates as first occurring in the later chapter of *Being and Time* on historicity and temporality - returns to a more recognisably 'Greek' separation of the human and the technical (Stiegler, 1998: 205ff). To understand the human, however, it is critical to remain in a thought of human being as essentially prosthetic, that is, as essentially *inessential*, lacking in essence, projecting a being in a permanent becoming. This projecting always takes place in and through the available technical milieu of retained experience, or what we call (techno)culture.

I have analysed the Wii in terms of technics and techniques of acting in a virtual space, of bodily gestures, of concerned deployment of equipment. As part of the available technocultural milieu, these are modalities of mobilising the orientational potential of the equipmental horizon of human becoming. The gestures one performs in playing the Wii are none other than that. One takes up a technical system and the question, 'what to do with it?' is always the question 'what to become?'. The human has no transcendent essence *as such*, either to recover or to complete in fulfilment of a destiny. Or, which amounts to the same thing, the human, and human experience of space-time, is all and only 'as such,' in the sense that it is 'such as it is' on the basis of how it is anticipated to be *through* the constitutively technical milieu in which the human finds itself.

This is where Stiegler differs from Heidegger on the significance of to-handness; for Heidegger, the everyday world ready-to-hand is ultimately that characterised by the inauthentic, 'withdrawing' encounter with being. The everyday technical milieu is full of concerned dealings which cover over an authentic engagement with existence. Everyday concerns with what to do and how to do it shield us from confronting our inevitable but undetermined finitude, and prevent a more authentic encounter with our being-toward-death. The instrument, as tool at hand, is the material basis of this everyday existence lived out among the collective 'They' (*Das Man*). But for Stiegler, Heidegger fails to think the instrument adequately, in the way that would be adequate to the critical potential of his own analysis of *Dasein's* equipmental being. What is to hand is not (only) the tool which keeps us in the everyday, but, as essential prosthesis of the human being, the very (and only) means for another encounter with beings, another fictioning of human becoming. This is what Stiegler calls the 'instrumental condition' of the human (1998: 206).

### **Gestural Programmatic**

Where will the Nintendo Wii system go, in its adoption by global technoculture and its members in their shared becoming? I have already proposed that the Wii can be thought of as inaugurating a major redesign of home console gaming, judging by its success and by the advance publicity for Microsoft's 'Project Natal' upgrade of the X-box console. Natal promises a controller-free interface with the virtual world, outbidding the Wii's move toward a greater

embodied engagement in the virtual. The marketing claims of a decisive move beyond the Wii belie, I suspect, Project Natal's extension and elaboration of the Wii's reprogramming of gestural control input from finger to arm and body. Like the Wii, Natal's promised immediacy must involve the (re)training of user movement to serve as interactive communication with the game system technics. Before it is superseded as a no longer necessary prosthetic appendage, then, the Wiimote gestures toward the future course of embodied interactivity. If every gesture is technical, that is, futural, projecting a being to become, as I was claiming following Stiegler, then the Wiimote gestures tend to expose a mainstream programming of the future of gesturing 'as such.'

We can begin to get a sense of this gestural program by noting the considerable Wii hacking activity that has sprung up in the period following the Wii's release. Johnny Chung Lee, a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University, for example, has disseminated several hacks mobilising the Wiimote's realtime interactive position-sensing capabilities to produce enhanced 3D immersion, user tracking and interaction systems.<sup>6</sup> Lee's hacks are typical of the adoption of the Wiimote's comparatively cheap, standardised position sensing and communicating hardware. Something like the Wii capability was what 1990s VR enthusiasts were looking for *in practice* as they imagined disembodied cyberspatial futures. As the Wii demonstrates, the technocultural program, however, develops today with a muted projection of radical ontological redefinition and more as the pursuit of potential deployments in commercial, applied virtuality.

These amount to prototyping what Stiegler would call a grammatisation of informational, 'immaterial' gesturing via increased analogisation of the digital interactive system. Technocultural programs are instantiated in 'grammars' of behaviour. These are actions, habits, rituals, practices that amount to sets and sequences of grammes - gestural components exteriorising and recording, and making repeatable, experiences conditioned and channelled by the ensemble of grammars which comprise the cultural pro-gram (Stiegler, 2009: 72-73). The Wii's reprogramming of virtual gesturing may, paradoxically, be even more radical in its eventual redefinition of 'spatio-physicality' than the old metaphysical dream of bodily transcendence. If the screen image has increasingly become what Stiegler has called 'analogico-digital' (2002: 148), interactive systems are now following suit in the wake of the Wii system. This promotes a further withering of what are

seen as the outmoded, writerly limitations of the digital interface, opening up a further making-transparent of the provision of access to ready-to-hand information. A concomitant reformation of the user is also opened up here in the passage to an applied virtual milieu of human becoming.

In the course of reporting on some micro-ethnographic research into Wii play, Helen Kennedy made some observations on the strange weightlessness she experienced playing *Wii Sports* (Kennedy & Giddings, forthcoming 2010). This sensation, experienced during the initial phase of familiarising herself with the system, evokes for me the status of the Wii as an ambivalent and uncertain harbinger of a new regime of human-technical becoming. Inheriting and advancing a lineage of modern technics of spatial and temporal orientation to the proximate and the distant, the Wii provides a functional reorientation of everyday body-space relations via sophisticated computer input technology. In this it could be seen to perfectly exemplify the instrumental 'enframing' that Heidegger later identified as the essence of modern, rational calculative technics in his famous essay, 'The Question Concerning Technology' (1977). The 'blob-tracking' hardware central to its realtime effectivity may be confirmation that 'we' remain on course toward the ultimate convergence of Western rationalist metaphysics with the mathematical 'levelling off' of phenomena in an operational relationality already being pointed to in *Being and Time* (1962: 121-122).<sup>7</sup> What Stiegler would describe as an increasingly discretised, grammatised body, counterpart of the functionally delimited virtual milieu, is a perceptible projection of the gestural program the Wii advances.

This program is most clearly visible in the many mini-game packages designed (or re-designed) for the Wii interface. If *Wii Sports* and *Wii Fit* encapsulate the heavily promoted perception of the Wii as providing a more immediate interaction with the virtual based on analogons of real world gestures, releases such as *Warioware: Smooth Moves* (Nintendo, 2007), *Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games* (Sega/Nintendo, 2007), and the *Rayman Raving Rabbids* series (Ubisoft 2006-2007) concentrate on exploring and exploiting the operational possibilities of this new technics of gestural control input. In these games one plays numerous smaller games, alone or with other players, that require different kinds of utilisation of the Wiimote and Nunchuck hand-held controllers. Mini-game goals vary widely from vehicle-racing, targeting and shooting, to running, jumping to avoid obstacles, to pointing, shaving, playing an



instrument in a band, stirring a pot, picking your nose, burping, and so on. The extent to which the gestures they require of the player analogise real gestures varies widely - so much so in fact that this cannot be assumed to be the primary interface 'logic' in these games. Across the range of mini-games in *Warioware*, for instance, the player needs to hold the Wiimote perpendicular, horizontally with its head held to the left or right, flat or tilted in relation to the screen (and scanning bar); sometimes button presses are part of the routine and sometimes not; movement of the controllers can be back and forth, up and down, twisting pivoting on an axis, in time with music, with Wiimote and Nunchuk in synchronisation or alternately moving, and so on. In playing these games one gets a powerful sense of the elaboration of a new grammar of gestural communicative actions and an exploration of the possibilities for their syntagmatic articulation.

We can but recall, however, and this is not insignificant, the theatricality of the Wii's provision of space for meaningful action. Wii space is sign-based; it is pervaded by signs. It is *all sign* in a way; sign first of all of a 'real space' of attentive, active embodied involvement. Heidegger discusses the sign as a special kind of being ready-to-hand that is both conspicuous - it has to be to do its job of indicating something else - and inconspicuous, inasmuch as it takes its place as sign on the basis of the presumed totality of referential assignments with which *Dasein* concerns itself in the everyday world (1962: 112). As sign of itself *as a virtual environment of preoccupation*, then, the Wii always opens up a way toward an encounter with the collapse of its referentiality into tautology and contingency. This loss of indicativeness would make it something like the missing or faulty tool for Heidegger, which 'acquires the disturbing obtuseness of something most closely ready-to-hand' (1962: 112).

Being-oriented might be the best term for this something, and, after Stiegler, I would argue that it is a contingent, cultural, and therefore always techno-cultural, metastability. As such, to analyse the Wii's impact on the routines of orientation to and within the domestic space is not only to elaborate and update Heidegger's detailing of the everyday (but inauthentic) 'existentials' of individual *Dasein*. Understanding being-oriented and how it is maintained or changed is always a political project addressing itself to the familiar but always selective technocultural apprehensions of the everyday. Theatricalising being-oriented spatiophysically in the era of the analogico-digital image would be the potential of less commercial

adoptions and critical assessments of the Wii system and of those following in its wake. Or, more to the point of its cultural political potential, a non-mainstream theatricalising, one which would lay open the Wii system's capacity to re-analogue the user-world in a less preemptive, programmatically circumscribed fashion, is certainly possible on the back of its hackability and its suspension of the familiarity of domestic virtuality.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> 'Microsoft Surface' hopes to reform the standard graphical user interface in a similar vein. It is a new 'hands-on' tabletop interface that does away with the mouse-click system of interactive engagement. Its high cost means that it is currently marketed to businesses and retail establishments rather than to the individual consumer.

<sup>2</sup> *Ent-fernung* is Heidegger's modification of the German term for 'removal' – *Entfernung* - to recall its etymological work to and fro across the distance that constitutes *Dasein*'s relation to things in the world. See the translator's footnote on p. 138 of *Being and Time*.

<sup>3</sup> 'I' here means me, a 40-plus player, part of the new market Nintendo is pursuing with the Wii. The situation with younger players, inexperienced in the games simulated in *Wii Sports*, playing these simulations is an extremely interesting one given the reframing of what amounts to the reference points of the learnt competences and conditions from actual to virtual space-gesture technicity.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the case of Local Area Network (Lan) or multiplayer console play is a little different here. See Melanie Swalwell (2003) for a detailed analysis of Lan-gaming, an analysis which has much to say about the way a certain technicity is central to opening up a milieu for everyday sociality. In this regard I would be tempted to propose the following trajectory of the commercial adoption of the Lan-gaming phenomenon: console multiplayer adopts and domesticates Lan play sociality by making it easy to set up at home via a delegation to the system of the technical production of the networking (something which was particular to the Lan group's collective provision of the region of social interaction in and around gameplay). The Wii takes this 'further,' which is perhaps also a further diminishing of the Lan group phenomenon, enhancing the embodied populating of the game-space in the hope of designing a

more socially accessible playing (this is what is emphasised in the recent television advertising campaign around the *WiiFit* offering).

<sup>5</sup> ‘The Play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play can very well include seriousness’ (Huizinga, 1970: 65).

<sup>6</sup> See Lee’s website for details of his adoptions of the Wii, <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~johnny/projects/wii/>. See also <http://www.wiihacks.com/> for an example of the Wii hacking activity that has grown up around the new possibilities offered by the Wii system. I witnessed a demo of a virtual whiteboard controller using the Wiimote at Bristol’s Pervasive Media Studio in June 2008.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Blob-tracking’ is Chung Lee’s descriptor of the key component of the Wiimote’s object-sensing technics. The path toward this virtualised, instrumentalised future may, as most environmental science today indicates, be crossed by the disruptive trajectory of a physis no longer capable of sustaining its adoption as standing reserve.

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