breadth and makes it useful for many purposes, not only in academic philosophy (e.g., there are some masterful reflections on nature sports in terms of aesthetics), but also for professional use in various kinds of outdoor studies or at the basic level of the functioning of many nature sports. Suffice it to say that such a book belongs in the personal library of any intellectually engaged mountaineer, climber, or surfer, to name just a few of the nature sports. In addition, it is indispensable literature for professional training in some of these sports, as it improves the understanding of these sports in many ways, and thus can be a valuable manual for the preparation of various levels of sports education (e.g., mountaineering schools, seminars, and courses).

I am sure that Krein's book makes a crucial contribution for all three aspects mentioned. It is a fundamental reference for any further analysis of the philosophy of nature sports, an indispensable guide for the personal development of nature sport athletes, and an essential textbook for professionals in the field of nature sports and outdoor education.

Igor Eterović

Stefano Gualeni, Daniel Vella

Virtual Existentialism

Meaning and Subjectivity in Virtual Worlds

Palgrave Pivot – Springer Nature Switzerland AG, Cham 2020

The second decade of the 21st century was a time when game studies flourished across a broad thematic spectrum and disciplines, a noticeable number of dedicated institutions and projects grew and established themselves, and some leading scholars' names peaked the disseminatory charts, altogether steadily beginning to keep pace with the exponential growth of the industry of virtual words that took a leading role in contemporary human life, most notably video games. Gualeni & Vella's study is one of the latest more complexly dedicated contributions of the decade, and I find it to be a landmark example of (1) how philosophical game studies can and perhaps should be conducted, and (2) how the results should be presented. The first point relates to the content of the study and is the focus of this review. I want to discuss the second point beforehand, however, because I feel obliged to emphasise the near-mathematical beauty of the methods used to create and present the study, especially given the way it implements functionality in text-based informing.

The book has 153 pages and its size follows the principle of the Palgrave Pivot project, a Springer-affiliated publishing arm that promotes novel studies between about 25 and 50 thousand words. The "introductory" section starts with a "Foreword" by Olli Tapio Leino, "Contents" and list of figures used in the book. They are followed by the author's introduction that contextualises the discourse, provides a brief summary of all chapters, and ends with a glossary of key terms that appear throughout the study (with no noted variations on their meaning). The study chapters are organised like research articles: they begin with an abstract and keywords, end with a summary of conclusions, notes, and a list of literature referenced in the chapter, but each text has an introduction that reminds us of what we have read previously, how it relates to the current chapter, and what the chapter will explore, and repeats definitions or conclusions throughout the text where the authors find a reminder might be good. The book ends with a concluding chapter that encapsulates the key findings of each chapter and basically complements each chapter's abstract. It is impressively well-organised and shows that much thought was put into its construction for the purpose of benefiting the reader.

Additionally, the underlying method revolves around finding a key notion from a philosopher that touches on the issues of interest to the authors and weaving the arguments around it with broad interdisciplinary support to reveal the essence of the chosen problem. The notions are first justified, then introduced, applied, and their discursive position rechecked with each new discussion. Given the almost surreal abundance of philosophical ideas available today, this method works quite well and oddly buffers the need to insist on commentary articles. For example, when Gualeni & Vela use Sartre's texts to discuss a problem, they provide little additional commentary from other philosophers who have discussed Sartre's work, and they do not discuss workpieces in terms of the original language in which they were written, in this case French. From the core standpoint of philosophy, this should not go unnoticed. However, the authors make the case very clearly and the terms are not taken lightly. It is evident from the approach that they aimed to find

ideas useful for understanding the problem at hand, although from an interphilosophical point of view we might want some additional discussion. Although I personally tend to consider historical commentary, I favour this approach when the discourse is respectful and the application useful, and in this case, I find it so. This methodology is joined by an admirable straightforward writing style, but one that neither demeans philosophical discourse nor plays the popularity card. I strongly believe that the structure of this study and the way it was presented should be considered in the light of landmark examples for the future of studies in specially applied philosophy or studies with contributions from philosophy.

That being said on methodology, the study itself is reported through six chapters discussing the nature of virtual worlds mainly from the classical existentialist point of the 20th century, with phenomenology and philosophical anthropology providing additional support. Given that these philosophical approaches, especially existentialism and phenomenology, have greatly expanded and dissolved across intra- and extra-philosophical disciplines, it was inviting to see the authors draw on philosophers who originally initiated these two very significant and fruitful approaches. Detectable is the absence of more profound implementation of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Jaspers, but we can only assume that the course of the authors' studies will eventually reach these philosophers – we can extract a lot of useful notions and critical reflexivity from them in terms of virtual worlds and gameworlds, e.g. Heidegger's theory of truth, Jaspers limit situation and Kierkegaard's three stages of despair. Be that as it may, the study does not really suffer from their absence, and, as the authors state in their introduction, the research also "helps lead to new understandings of the concerns of existential philosophy" (p. xvii). Gualeni & Vela focused on "personal, existential significance of traversing, manipulating, and even creating virtual environments", for which they claim was "largely ignored by academia" (p. xix). I am not sure it has been largely ignored – the issues of contemporary virtual life have been debated since at least the invention of the radio, French philosophers have been constantly discussing the transformation of life dependent on or extended by new technics since the 1960s, and ethicists, sociologists and psychologist were chasing the wave of digital virtuality steadily since the 1990s – but it is true that a greater focus on the existential morphology of virtual environments is needed, not only because of the fact that human condition is "constituted and constantly shaped by the worlds which human beings find themselves 'thrown into'" (p. xvii) but also because in modern times humans systematically and consciously, even manipulatively, throw their own selves into their non-organic extensions, which we can call virtual worlds. For a technoscientific system of domination and economy, this has become almost an imperative of living "well".

The focus of the study is more precise, however, as it has a general scope of the problem in sight, but eventually comes down to a specific form of virtual worlds, the gameworld, and more neutral, as it aims at mechanisms of existential traversing, stripped off any "political" commentary. Precisely observing the phenomena of gameworlds, virtual gameplaying and gamification, we can monitor interesting gradual shifts that reveal not only complex mechanics of how it happens and what is truly the nature of human beings concerning the morphological processing of the world and projecting into the world – which was, I believe, a primary goal for Gualeni & Vella – but also see the patterns of the general lifestyle of the biocapital-driven Cthulhucene culminating in human's everyday preferences regarding virtual existence. After all, as they state, "virtual worlds and virtual subjectivities are only available to the small percentage of the global population who have access to necessary hardware, have acquired the required technological literacy to operate such hardware, and have the leisure time to engage in such experiences" (pp. ix–xx). Although this layer of class issues is not researched in this book, the book does stimulate us to think about it because, beyond understanding the mechanisms, we are left with trying to understand the acts.

The first chapter, "Virtual Subjectivities and the Existential Significance of Virtual Worlds", begins with the discussion on the notions of *project* and *projection* to establish an interpretational bridge between non-virtual existence and virtual subjectivity taking place during the interaction with the digital environment. The taking of place reforms into a "virtual situation", by which subjects establish a relation with the subordinate artificial world and thus project (into) it, which is interesting when considered as a space of freedom and possibilities of personal reinvention while being "fundamentally rooted in actual subjectivities" (p. 9) and unavoidably bounded to the facticity of the governing world, with which the engagement with the virtual shares existential structures. Philosophically speaking, here I would add that we should bear in mind how prone we are to ignore that any kind of extension or protrusion of the world remains to be the world. The *virtual* of virtual worlds etymologically relates to being essentially the world, albeit different in its

material renderness. Categorically, it should not differ from, for example, the two common states we live through, awake and sleeping, of waking world and dreams, except in details of construction and our possibilities in them. This also occurs in the simplest act of imaginative play, by which we collapse the fullness of the world into an aesthetically enframed, fragmentary subworld where anything is possible as if virtually real, until we back out from it. It is, then, impossible to be the "other" within any kind of subordinate world, and from this, we can rely on the idea that there is the non-dubious correspondence of larger existential structures to our digital existing. Plausible is the claim that human beings, when "stepping into a virtual subjective standpoint – […] do not entirely leave behind the actual world, nor are they completely severed from their actual self" (p. 11).

One of the key problems for further consideration reveals itself fairly quickly in the first chapter, which is the matter of *wilful engagement* with the virtual world. Gualeni & Vella consider engagement with the virtual world, that is, the stepping-into, a wilful action. Following the previous conclusion, that the virtual world is another subworld, forces us to consider what structures of possibilities and wilful action "fractalise" themselves into the virtual extension. The primary aim of this discussion was to show that virtual worlds, especially digital games, can be accepted from the standpoint of classical existentialism, that is, that they "can be used as technically-aided means for temporarily adopting new perspectives, to experiment and reflect on one's possibilities and on the meaning thereof" (p. 12), but philosophically, this understanding relies on the general assumption that there is such a thing as freedom and free, wilful action. In the system of understanding where this is not the case (and we are yet to conclude what holds true), or in the systems where freedom is limited by frames of factual cultural existence, we might see the phenomena differently. Of course, young existentialism depends on the idea of having the absolute freedom to choose in each situation, the ability not to be enframed by conditions of historic situation, but that has been questioned even by Sartre himself, in his mature age, and surely by other closely-related philosophers, such as Jaspers, Camus and Heidegger. After all, how does a child exposed to virtual worlds from an early age embodies their experience of virtuality in comparison to a person who met with the virtual world in their sixties? How wilful is their engagement, or the engagement of escapists or addicts, in comparison to a person of a high level of self-consciousness who chooses to enter the virtual world understanding what it will be doing there and what the limits and role of their engagement is? Here we should reconsider the question of whether the concepts of *throwness* and *project* should be abandoned or endorsed when considering virtual extension (as discussed on p. 16–18). As a person who grew up following the development of digital virtual worlds, it is more likely that they appeared on the horizon and I approached them, even endorsed them. But to children born in 2017, our cumulative endorsement might be understood as their throwness into.

These are some of the details unanswered by the study, for which I find many reasons to consider engaging with in the future. Gualeni & Vella were more interested in what worth can we find in investing ourselves into virtual worlds, that is, why would one "be willing to dedicate time and resources to derivative worlds such as those of fantasy video games" (p. 13). The authors will argue throughout the book that virtual worlds are "existentially appealing" because they allow reconstructions of the self without resistance residing with the world itself, they become "playgrounds in which we can experiment with possibilities" we are "unable or unwilling to actualise in our everyday experience" (p. 14), it revolves around our "desire to be", as Sartre would say. Here, a detail from Leibniz's metaphysics might be helpful. Leibniz claimed that possibility by its nature strives to be realised. If that is the case, then by being engageable and responsive to the subject's engagement, virtual worlds could be understood as dimensional pitfalls for any particular possibility to realise itself and fulfil itself through the subject's engagement, without destroying the fullness of their organic world, their historic course, established – liked or disliked – identities. Here, Foucault's claim that one can be free only when limitations exist is a reasonable claim to lean against (p. 18), because, well, what else is possible? There is no example or living organic existence that would not be limited by its morphological borders and no organism sustains itself by following its limits. Precisely the opposite is the case: organism confirms itself when it leaps from the limits and grows by reinventing them, its natural autonomy, its morphological sovereignty, is what perhaps purely instinctively awakens in the encounter with the prepared virtual worlds such as video games. As artefacts of playing, as artpieces and as tunnels of possibility, they invite the natural need to explore, build and grow. This is why videogames / virtual worlds such as *The Sims*, *Second Life*, *Minecraft*, *Lego* or *Roblox* were accepted so well.

The second chapter, "En-rolling and De-rolling in Virtual Worlds" deals with an interesting and, in fact, rather ignored phenomenon

of "transitions into and out of" virtual subjectivities. To address and properly classify the problem, Gualeni & Vella first look at Goffman's theory, drama, psychodrama and dramotherapy, religious ritual, and architectural design – all good sources for understanding the roots of the structural complexity of virtual worlds, especially gameworlds, and then at role-playing in tabletop games and simulations. Another interesting contribution to this discussion would be to look at unscripted text-based role-playing, which occurred primarily between 1995 and 2005 via IRC chats and forums, where one person is simultaneously a writer, player, critic, and reader, and is similar in structure to live role-playing in children's play. In detail, the authors aimed to list different types of en-rolling and de-rolling and describe the mechanisms and phenomena involved. They discuss en-rolling processes related to our grounding of experience in expectation, paratext, and internal schemas, and the return from virtual subjectivity through various modes, such as character death, narrative closure, and session end. I think we can explore these processes further by thinking about the connection between our aesthetic and mental states and enrolled subjectivity. For example, when we disconnect from the world because of boredom, difficulty, or a procedural error in the world, all of which are unintentionally caused by the world itself. Fatigue is another interesting state that changes the way the virtual world is used and perceived, how the role is experienced, and to what extent we are connected to it.

The example of text-based roleplaying and conditions of body states contribute to the double-consciousness argument presented by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman and further explored by Gualeni & Vella (p. 54), or, as Vella says, "double perspectival structure of ludic engagement" (p. 55, cited from 2015). Quite important I find the final discussion on the possible damage of being attached to subworld virtual experience or detached from the world because of the subworld. On the example of VR technics and the review of literature related, Gualeni & Vella hypothesize that "the greater the personal investment in the role, the more necessary de-rolling practices become in order to avoid discomfort, confusion, and potential psychological damage" (p. 55), because, as previously supported, "a higher degree of immersion or presence in a virtual world corresponds to a greater level of detachment from the actual world (Aardema *et al*. 2010)" (p. 57). In this light, we should also reconsider Meta Platforms' and Microsoft's attempts to push users toward an increasingly gamified life in digital worlds as the default way of life, as well as the inclusion of addictive elements in video games and gaming addiction in general, in order to discern, through the deconstruction of motives, what we can break away from and how we can bring ourselves back into the world. In a sense, it is not enough to say that one can only be free if there are limits, but one can only be free if one is actively aware of the limits that exist. Metaphysically, a gaming addict or a metaverse pawn is not much different from a rock on the shore. The ability to autonomously live a meaningful life is either destroyed or enslaved. In contrast, however, the existence of these negative aspects tells us something about the quality of human life or the history of living conditions. The lack of meaning and support in the primary world is related to the (strongly) negative emotions that role-players experience when they are forced (and this is almost always the case) to de-roll from their sanctuary, the ideal virtual world, where conditions may even be the source of the will to live.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 discuss specific dimensions of virtual existence by applying theoretical sets from various philosophers (primarily Helmuth Plessner, Peter Wessel Zapffe, Jean-Paul Sartre and Eugen Fink). In that sense, these are more philosophically fruitful chapters. The approach here seems to be the acceptance of their theories and their application in understanding the problems specific to this study.

For example, the chapter with Plessner is revolved around understanding the role of technics and technical artefacts in human life. This chapter aims to confirm the constant drive of organisms to growth and self-making, for Plessner distinctly human beings, in the search of secure footing. From this spurs the utopian character of human beings (pp. 68–70) and the "focus on the *irrealis*", also found in Huizinga, which was most useful to Gualeni & Vella to explain the natural attractness of humans to the creation of virtual extension and enrolling into it. I wonder, however, whether we should make a distinction between a hammer and a video game, between a simulator and a gameworld, a tool and a work of art, between use and consumption, so to speak. Plessner, Arnold Gehlen, Ernst Kapp, Lewis Mumford, Jacques Ellul, and many others discuss and accept the concept of extension, complementarity, or the substitute role of technics, but the goal is always to fulfil a function, to solve a task. I did not buy or construct a hammer to consume its hammering, I need it because it performs a function that solves a practical problem outside of it. In contrast, I buy a new music album to consume the music because it performs a function that solves a practical problem within it.

We do not use tools to express ourselves, but we do it with art, and in that process, we use tools to reach artistic expression. Expanding the world by constructing and using hammers has a clear goal, but is this the case with a virtual world, especially a game world, when it comes to our motive to project ourselves into that world? What I am saying is that art as technical creation, as opposed to tools as technical constructions, is perhaps a different kind of world creation where the original problem of grounding persists in a new form. In other words, with virtual worlds, perhaps we extend and emphasise incompleteness, independent of the answers and satisfactions that artworks offer us. Consider, for example, the catharsis achieved by a well-delivered story, such as in the culmination of *Silent Hill 2*, which can no longer be repeated without memory loss, much like the catharsis of true drama in one's life, or the logic of melancholically nostalgic endless continuity in the first *Dark Souls*.

Chapter on Zapffe and the tragic human existence (4) could be related to the above conclusion, given how, as Gualeni & Vella state on Zapffe, "the reason why human existence can be considered tragic are not rooted in humanity being weak, petty or particularly prone to suffering, but rather in its being too capable for its own good" (p. 78). Apart from adaptive evolutionary mechanisms of survival, the meaninglessness, which I mentioned beforehand in passage no. 10, I think breaths in the core of our pursuit of the possibilities of virtual worlds. In respect to the study of en-rolling and de-rolling in chapter 2, it would be interesting to consider the manifestation of the levels of "existential panic" during transitions. It could give us some clues as to how it is related to our tragic nature. It is not mentioned in the study, but this chapter is directly related to the character of en-rolling and de-rolling and I think some further exploration from authors in that regard could yield fruitful results, the two subjects should be more closely examined together. Be that as it may, Gualeni & Vella consider the four Zapffe's technics he noticed that human beings deploy to reduce cosmic panic – isolation, anchoring, distraction, and sublimation – and briefly discuss how they are illustrated or applied in video games, in an attempt to "look at the experiences and interactions in the virtual as activities that can assist us in coping with the lack of meaning that inherently characterises human existence from the perspective of existential philosophy" (p. 86). We should also consider, however, that for the same reason – the reason of being too smart for our own good – engaging with a video game can also do the opposite, destroy the meaning, much like, for example, a philosophical work such as Albert Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* or Max Stirner's *The Ego and its Own* could. When engaged with, it is a double-edged sword, which is why, for example, in psychotherapy, we must not include any kind of art into the therapeutic process, including video games, for any kind of person with any kind of mental challenge, and must not say anything we want, as it may contribute to declining.

Chapter 5 and 6, with Sartre and Fink respectively, explore the dimension of conscious escapism (Sartre) and the more fundamental function of play in human existence (Fink). The former relies on Sartre's theory of imagination that plays a role in our efforts to surpass our current states and envision being-in-the-world, to prove that digital worlds fulfil criteria for worldliness through the objects they are made of (pp. 92–93). In that respect, however, virtual objects do differ from objects of imagination. As Leino argues, "the computational materiality underpinning game's virtual environment upholds, and holds the player responsible for, the results of their choices and actions in that environment (2009, 12)" (p. 94). But for the world to be experienced as true, to be a world for our consciousness, "our being must take it as a ground: in other words, it is only a world if we find ourselves *in* the world. In that sense, Grau talks about a 'constitution of presence' which establishes 'the quality of apparently being present in the images' as one of the characteristics of virtual art (2003, 14)" (p. 94). Following this, Gualeni & Vella conclude that "virtual environments can be understood as alternative, secondary worlds towards which our consciousness can surpass the actual world – a being-in-another-world through which we can escape our being-in-the-world (p. 95). In relation to Sartre, "this would constitute an extension of Sartre's ideas on the imagination, according to which the virtual world represents a kind of liminal category – an irreal domain" (p. 95). It seems to me, however, that we forgot about the very useful notion of *subworld*. I am not sure if we should talk about fictional worlds as other worlds, since they quite literally are not in another world. If there is such a thing as irreal domain, it is a subdomain of the world.

Gualeni & Vella take that there are two possible interpretations, (1) virtual is the new horizon of possibilities for the imaginary, (2) virtual world is a secondary focus towards which to direct our perception, they disclose a new world of facts for us to imaginatively surpass. Fundamentally, this may be caused by the schism I mentioned previously, because of the extension of structures governing the world and the incompleteness that continues to persist and collides with our sense of footing maintained through technical creation.

What Gualeni & Vella wanted, however, was to understand are these two interpretations possibly reconciled. They suggest the previously introduced double perspectivity – from our standpoint the virtual constitutes a real but not actual, thus our focus shifts likewise (p. 96). I have my doubts, however, if this is to be considered a problem. It seems to me that these two "interpretations" are two modes of a higher class of phenomenon that apply to the world itself, including any subworlds. The notion of reality and actuality as presented in the book can be applied to our shifting of the focus from one dimension of historic reality, for example, paying attention to the migrant crisis in Europe, to forgetting about it altogether six months later we moved away to live in a village in Indonesia; and not to mention that, based on false perception or knowledge we attained, we might be living a completely illusionary life and have a completely false image of the world that is real and actual as long as we are relatively secure from exposure to the difference. It seems to me that the answer lies in the category higher, then, but a more systematic thought should be given to it. I might as well be missing the point here, yet it simply seems to me that the dilemma of interpretation is not really a problem. I see the difference in temporality. The world itself cannot be destroyed, while the perception of the world can only be destroyed by sending all conscious beings into oblivion. In contrast, all subworlds can be destroyed while the world remains, and artificial worlds are the easiest to destroy. Virtual worlds can be destroyed forever and irretrievably with two clicks.

Conclusively, in chapter six, Fink's theory of play is used to return us to the roots of the study – the question of freedom – and the significance of play in our building of the self and the meaning of our life through the exploration of unactualised potentials and possibilities in the creation of playworld in which all containing elements become playthings. The chapter introduces us to one of the classic theories of play. Fink shared the classic view that play has no purpose outside itself, but more interestingly, argues that in playing we reactivate possibilities that are systematically being abandoned as we progress in our life, from birth where the possibilities are somewhat unlimited until late age where only some possibilities remain. While the first element is most likely not true – play does exist for a purpose outside of it – the second element is very instructive and helps to understand the value of virtual worlds and digital existence: they are fruitful ground for "exploring a non-actualised possibility of one's being" (p. 104) and can be understood as "experiential domains where we can adopt a new self and perhaps even create an 'ideal self" (p. 105). Especially useful I find Gualeni & Vella's insight that "it is about the fact that virtuality destabilises the idea of a single self in a single world, and might allow – at least in theory – for a more fluid and multifaced understanding of selfhood, thus blurring the distinction between the actualised self and its potentialities" (p. 105). Briefly said, having a virtual subjectivity opens the possibility to go beyond our "true" but encapsulated world, and from this "departure" we may return with a vision of our "true life" different than before. This, it seems to me, already begins when we take a pencil and start writing about the life we do not have. In a sense, it is an action more open than engagement in digital worlds, since in gameworlds we can be intensely limited by the narrative framework, for example, I cannot be an astronaut in a medieval-based fantasy game, but I can become an astronaut in the very next sentence I will write. I am now an astronaut, where could I go? I am no longer an astronaut, just a philosopher writing a review of a great book. However, the strength of immersion that digital world simulations shine with, emphasised by their relative distancing from us and their ability to, as non-living objects, appear communicative, their own, even while we program them, it seems, opens beautiful possibilities for understanding existing and yet-to-exist humanity.

Stimulative in content and greatly written, Gualeni & Vella's book contributes to this course.

Luka Perušić

Rita Felski

Hooked

Art and Attachment

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2020

Rita Felski's enthusiasm for art and literature has always pervaded her work, and she was never the one to remain quiet in face of artistic excellence. In her new book, *Hooked. Art and Attachment* she explores the very essence of such enthusiasm, asking what does it mean to find ourselves "not just captured