

# After us the deluge?

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**F**or the second time in six months, one of our children is evicted. Not because they would be annoying or noisy tenants, but because the landlord is only allowed to charge a limited surcharge per year. It is difficult for a student to get a rental contract for an indefinite period. Rents in the Netherlands are currently rising so quickly due to the high demand and the housing shortage that it is much more lucrative for landlords to start with new tenants every year than to pass on the legally regulated annual rent increases. In our society the prevailing (economical) imperative is infinite growth from finite resources. This also applies to housing: providing shelter and security comes only in the umpteenth place. In addition, a rental company must keep expensive sports cars on the road. It is impossible to meet your status with only legally regulated rent increases.

My now evicted son, Thorvald, lives with his girlfriend Myrthe. Both work hard, next to their studies. Thorvald tutors pre-university students in mathematics and physics, his girlfriend works in a shop next to her internship. They also both courier a few hours a week for a delivery service ("to keep up our fitness"). However, their positive attitude does not help to qualify for a home.

Sometimes I'm ashamed of the world we leave to our children. Fortunately, the new generation has a lot of insight. On my way to a home inspection, Thorvald points out to me his "law": every well-intentioned innovation is eventually completely assimilated within the dominant imperative. For example, in VR glasses it has been devised to follow the eye movements, so that the image quality in the centre of your image field (the fovea centralis) is rendered high and low in the periphery. Less processor capacity for graphics leaves more for other aspects of the VR game. Meanwhile standard in VR glasses, used to pause commercials when users look away. Indeed, the imperative is earning, infinite growth from finite resources, and so this clever technical innovation is turned to serve that purpose.

## Technological innovation

In an internet lecture Elon Musk argues that technological innovation does not automatically lead to improvement. He argues that hard work is needed to prevent man-made things from getting worse (entropy). Many great techniques, and even very advanced civilizations have fallen. Most likely this will happen to us too, now more disastrous than ever. Musk wants perspective and wakes up hopeful every day: he's working on his big escape with his space program (his antidepressant). Musk sees the dangers, and apparently deduces that everything is allowed. For example, he causes terrible animal suffering by implementing brain chips in monkeys to develop 'biological' AI. He fills holes with holes.

Precisely because of said impossible imperative, every beautiful innovation also has negative effects. The internet, for example, made the World Library and a top encyclopaedia (Wikipedia) available everywhere. At the same time, we are all trapped in "personalized" advertising bubbles, like consuming cattle, ringing BigTech's cash registers and eroding democracy. We are continuously screened and classified according to our "needs", to stimulate our appetite with advertisements from the highest paying supplier.

The internet is a utility, but ultimately again completely in the hands of the big money. Just like the rental housing stock, politics and yes ... what actually not? Marx claimed as early as 1867: "Après moi, le déluge! is the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation" (*Das Kapital*, part 1). After us, the deluge is attributed to the mistress of King Louis XV. Dostoyevsky used this expression in *The Idiot* (1868).

Fortunately, there are great initiatives, such as Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economy. We desperately need the new generation to get out of misery. But first we have to give them living space! Oh yeah, and we need to get some fools off their backs akin to Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* from "after us the deluge" the deliberately incompetent, like Elon Musk and, in my son's case, the landlords.