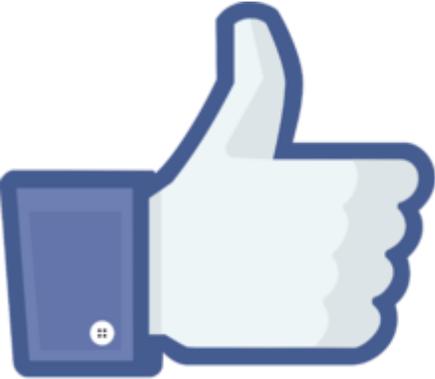


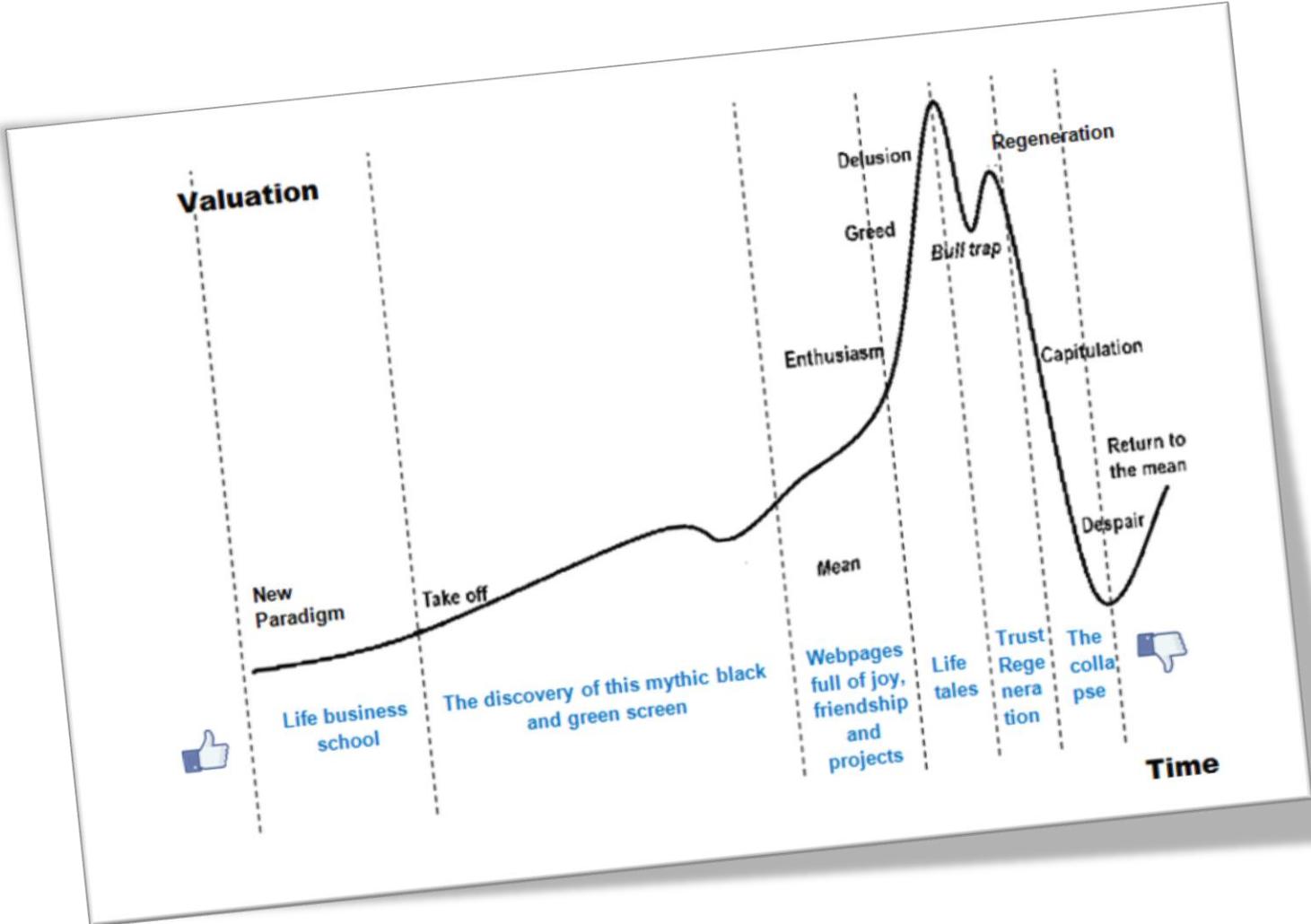
Like  Life



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Steps of the life bubble

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Step 1: A new paradigm taught in *Life business schools*

A luminous green curve on a black screen measuring the time-frequency of heartbeats. Medicine defines life as heartbeats, some scientists emphasize cerebral activity, but since the 2030s, a new discipline has been integrated into the debate: economics. Life is no longer a mere state of being or a state of health, it has become an economic stake and has a value that needs measuring. This is how the “like” index emerged, evaluating people’s lives on the basis of their social media profile. Life is now pictured by a green luminous curve fluctuating against a dark background, just like the variations of currency values. Not driven by medical principles anymore but by economic rules. Electrocardiograms belong to the past. Eyes are now focused on the life stock exchange and this has deeply changed people’s existence.

This viral system has spread to all social spheres. It implies new kinds of expertise, new actors and new skills. One aspect is therefore the training of these new society actors. This is the mission of a specific kind of school that has become highly requested. The content of their promotional brochure can be an instructive way to approach the logics of this time:

“Your life is your own business, but your business can be your life itself. Life business school educates the elite of our society. It delivers an education adapted to the evolution of the contemporary and future labour market conditions.

Life business school opened its doors in the 2030s following the contemporary social transformations, and in particular the creation of a financial life market based on the like index. People’s job opportunities and level of remuneration depend on the number of like that people get on social media for their postings. Those publications focus on “moments” of their existence that they produce and display on social media platforms. The index has paved the way for a new work system that allows people to earn their living by capitalizing on their personal activities.

At Life business school you will learn to value each of your daily actions and produce attractive “moments” with high profit expectations. Today, earning one’s living involves various skills such as creativity and reactivity so as to create distinctive profiles. Our experts are dedicated to accompanying each student to find his or her own style towards the path of success.

The backbone of life-entrepreneurship is that daily actions have a potential value. This implies the mastering of various practical methods that you will be taught : for instance being reactive by scanning every single deed of yours with a Smartphone camera, publishing relevant comments that will make your life unique, make people like it and finally make profits.

The school provides a comprehensive training offer in different departments and specialties, such as the Business and Economics department, with specialties in Life-trading, Human resources and Profile analysis; the Communication and Information department with specialties in Moment-management, Moment-advertising, Social media publishing; the Social Sciences department with a specialty in Like-

sociology and the Computing department with a training in Evaluation system engineering. In addition to specialty-related theoretical classes, the training includes a language module to choose among Html language, Java Script, a practical course on Pack Word/Office, Photoshop, Hootsuite and a workshop to select among Social media writing, Creative self-portrait photograph, Profile watch and analysis.

Life is priceless, and economics, whose essence is to allocate scarce and therefore treasured resources, is the best approach to appreciate it. There is nothing more valuable than life. Being aware of the value of our actions is the key to enriching our existence.”

Step 2: Take off - the discovery of the mythic black and green screen

Elliot was a freshly graduated student from a *Life business school*. Today was his first day at *TechnoWorld* Company’s headquarters, one of the top companies specialized in the world trade of technological items. He woke up early and got ready, paying attention to the most minute details of his clothing. He knew the importance of making a great first impression. In front of the company's building, a million questions pressed upon his excited mind. He resolutely entered the company’s hall, took a big breath, and walked to the smiling hostess behind the reception desk.

“Good morning, this is my first day here.”

“Good morning sir, may I have your name please?” asked the hostess.

“Elliot Johnson.”

“Would you please sit down and wait for the Director over there?” She gave him his badge and pointed to chairs against the wall behind him.

The room was not as impressive and as welcoming as he had imagined the hall of such a big company would be. A white room, with a table in the middle, displaying promotion brochures and flyers “It is not really different from a doctor’s waiting room,” he thought. At first, the simplicity of this place had a soothing influence on him. But then, he became increasingly nervous as minutes went by. “Research and Development Service Assistant” he read on his badge. From now on, it would be his second name here. He pinned it on his jacket carefully.

The Director opened his office door and called: “Mr. Elliot Jones.”

Taken by surprise, Elliot felt embarrassed to be called by the name he had chosen earlier for his social media profile a few years prior to *Life business school*. It was at a time when people were still suspicious about protecting personal data on the internet. He just stood up and shook the hand of the Director, who invited him to sit down.

“Welcome to the *TechnoWorld* family,” the Director said from behind his desk. “I have no doubt we will do a great job together! You will work as assistant to Mr. Evans, a Computing Engineer, and Mr. William, an Analyst. Mr. William is on holiday so you will first help Mr. Evans. He will give you further details and take you around this afternoon.”

The Director took him to his office and introduced him to Mr. Evans. While they were talking together, Elliot barely paid attention to him. Actually, he was captivated by the presence of a huge screen on the office wall.

The windowless office was furnished with two desks. Each desk had two computer screens. Above Mr. Evan's, this mythic black and green screen was hung on the wall, showing a live broadcast of the evolution of the *like index*. Elliot had so often been taught about this screen at school. He was now in the heart of the world he had been trained for, and relished that moment.

"Fascinating, isn't it?" Mr. Evans said, suddenly concerned by the new recruit's curiosity. "Its appearance coincides with your arrival." This is a brand new screen that we need to get used to! It will mark the beginning of our close cooperation."

Step 3: Enthusiasm - webpages full of joy, friendship and projects

"First, I will ask you to help me with job interviews that Mr. William has planned for tomorrow." Mr. Evans said. The company is recruiting a new team member. Ten applicants have been selected. You will lead the interview with me. Here's the file with their names. You need to check their social media profile. Would you please write down some specific questions to put to them? You can work here." He added, pointing at the desk that Elliot had glimpsed on entering the office. "This will be your workspace." Mr. Evans handed him the file, already busy at his computer.

Elliot took the file, sat down at one side of Mr. William's desk, turned the computer on and began to work. The applicants had been selected according to their quotation on the *life index*, that is to say, their incredible number of *likes* on their social media page. He went through their profile one by one, surveying their hyperactive and blooming lives as evidenced by their webpages. They were filled with joy, friendships and projects.

Catherine Taylor was committed to a humanitarian association helping the needies. She listed the association activities on her page, prompting her friends to take part. She was the team designer, and published her most striking creations. She was also systematically writing her opinion on global issues and current affairs.

Lilian Turner, 26 years old, Project manager... "L I L I A N T U R N E R... Is he... ? He doesn't look that different from secondary school." Short brown hair, bright green eyes and a charismatic smile reminiscent of the good moments of friendship they had shared. "He made it! Columbia University, job experience at the OECD... He deserves it." Elliot was both excited and anxious at the idea of seeing him again the day after. "I hope he will remember me." To judge from his numerous pictures, he had been travelling a lot. "Lilian at Singapore encountering a friend... Lilian in Paris attending a lecture... Lilian in Canada visiting his family... Lilian in the United States for a congress... " - a diversity of experiences that made Elliot feel dizzy.

After Elliot had finished the questions for the tenth applicant, his attention was drawn by his friends' publications. He could not help going through them: Jennifer celebrating her graduation... Maria doing a dance competition... Xiao Hua visiting Montmartre during the Chinese Golden week... Sebastian anxious about a possible volcanic eruption near his city... Victor celebrating his birthday... Pauline... "My dear Pauline at the Temple of Heaven in China... climbing the Great Wall... enjoying nights at Hou Hai... travelling through Inner Mongolia... but not one minute left to answer my messages for months!" Elliot had met her at *Life business school*. After her graduation she had applied for a job in China. They had both admitted it would be difficult to pursue a long distance relationship but still, they were not willing to break up. However, since her last message a month before, Pauline had not answered Elliot's calls anymore. The only way to hear from her was via her social media site, which made him crazy.

"Enough!" Elliot could no longer bear her arrogance, nor his helplessness. He turned the computer off and gave his work to Mr. Evans. "Mr. Evans, here are the specific questions you could ask the candidates."

"Perfect Elliot, thank you. I'll check them tomorrow. Six o'clock, that'll be all for your first day. You are free to go."

Step 4: Greed and speculation – the designing of *life tales*

The interviews were supposed to begin at 8 am. Each applicant had been invited at a precise time. Elliot was in charge of welcoming them. At 9:30 am, he was still waiting in the hall of the company. Mr. Evans didn't even show up, which showed little concern for the missing applicants. All in all, out of ten initially planned, only two came. Elliot asked Mr. Evans, on his way back from lunch break: "Did you know they would not come?" "It's not the first time it has happened. This kind of situation is commonplace," he replied in a fatalistic way.

Elliot was really disappointed. He had been excited to lead the interviews with Mr. Evans, but instead of a busy and interesting morning, he had spent particularly boring hours waiting for applicants who had not turned up. That Lilian his friend didn't come either was his greatest cause of disappointment. Elliot decided to go and visit him after work.

Even, 14 Main Street. Elliot pressed the bell button. The sound of nearing footsteps made him even more excited.

"Good evening, I am looking for Lilian Turner," he said to a total stranger.

"Lilian is not here. I am Joe, his roommate. What do you want?"

"I am Elliot, an old friend of his. We were in secondary school together. Now I am working for *TechnoWorld* Company. Lilian has applied for a job there, but he didn't come to the interview this morning."

“It has been months since he left. He probably even doesn’t know about the application. If you can spare a few minutes, we could discuss this inside,” Joe said.

Elliot cast Lilian’s roommate a perplexed glance. He entered the small studio. Joe brought some drinks in the sitting room and invited Elliot to join him at the coffee table. Elliot thanked him. He was eager to ask more.

“Do you mean that someone else applied for him?”

“In a way this is what happened. Have you heard about the *like index*?”

“Yes, of course, all the recruitments in my company are based on it.”

“So you know how important it has become to display images of a wonderful life on social media. And you also know how difficult it is to find a job nowadays. Lilian studied hard to be admitted to prestigious schools. He would apply day and night for dozens of jobs without any answer. He had no time for an amazing life, and scored poorly on the *like index*. But he still trusted the recruiters to acknowledge his professional skills.”

“Are you sure we are talking about the same person? Lilian TURNER? He was a very serious student. But I also saw on his page how rich in experience his life was. Last month, he attended a Congress in New York, he was in Singapore last summer. He seems to have tone of projects. He published a photo with friends at the city center yesterday. The Lilian I am talking about has not gone: he was supposed to come to an interview this morning. I’m sorry it must be a mistake. I’ll check the address again.”

“You are not making mistakes and I am not lying,” Joe said angrily as Elliot was about to leave. “You see, you trust the *like index* more than people’s words. This is what Lilian could not bear anymore! This is why he is not here today!”

“Are you telling me Lilian and his pictures are not to be trusted?”

“The question is rather: why do people still trust for the *like index*? Lilian is probably not the only one who did not show up to the interview this morning. Am I wrong?”

“No, you are absolutely right.”

“This beautiful life required for a good job today is a fake. That’s the actual truth. Every picture has been built up, publications and job applications have been programmed.”

Elliot was astonished by what Joe was explaining to him.

“Let me tell you what happened,” Joe added. “Then you’ll be free to believe me or not. Lilian, as you said, is ambitious. He wanted to succeed at all cost. After studying in the United States, he came back here with some friends. They were planning to set up their own business, but his friends finally got involved in an underground computer agency. Actually, their work is to design the exciting life that needs to be displayed in order to have a good *like index* quotation. Lilian spent one day there and they created the pictures, wrote the comments and programmed the publications for the next two years. However, he had not imagined it would be so difficult to value what he called the “tale” of his life, more than his genuine life. It was like admitting his life was worthless. He soon could no longer bear to be judged on an artifact. All the criticisms and compliments were not for him, but for this tale. One day, he turned up at the agency, saying he wanted to stop the program - to no avail. His friends told him that so far, they had not managed to do so. Then, he could but leave and escape to live his life to the fullest. At the end, he chose to be himself. He went back to his hometown in Canada. Occasionally, I get a message. He seems to be fine, but I don’t know where he is now.”

Elliot could not speak a word. Those disclosures had thrown doubt on the *like index*, which was in fact the basis of his career, and of the entire socio-economic system.

“I understand it might be difficult to take it in. I can bring you there. They’ve also designed a *life tale* for me. That is now impossible to stop. Tell me when you have time and we’ll plan a visit.”

This discussion left Elliot with a lot of questions: “Apart from Lilian, how many other people are selling their lives to such agencies to succeed in their careers?”

Step 5: Delusion and trap - trust is everything

The following morning, Elliot arrived at the office. He stayed at the entrance and just like the very first day, he kept staring at the black screen and the shining green curve which was continuing its irrational ascent. However, this time suspicion had replaced excitement.

“Good morning Elliot. What’s the problem with the *like index* this morning?” Mr. Evans said before drinking his coffee.

“I have a question about the *like index*.”

“You are being curious! Great, I like it. This is a good way to begin the day. What do you want to know? Help yourself to some biscuits?”

“No thanks. My question is: do you really trust it? I mean do you strongly believe it is the reflection of reality? How can people change their lives overnight to be in accordance with work market requirements? Don’t you think there is something wrong with this?”

Mr. Evans interrupted his express breakfast.

“You have struck the right chord. Trust is everything. Whatever reality is, the important thing is to trust the index ability to measure it.”

“But, don’t you think one day the discrepancy between the real and the virtual will be too obvious, and that it won’t be credulous enough to trust sham and bogus? People are not who they are boasting to be on the web!”

“You are a quick-sighted young person Elliot, and a skilled computer engineer. You see, these recruitment methods are quite relevant. You are exactly the kind of person we need here. You’ve noticed the index is not perfect. And you have precisely been hired to lower this margin of error. It wouldn’t be in anyone’s interest if this system crumbled. It would mean money loss, jobs loss and casualties. We don’t want to lose our jobs, do we? We don’t want another crisis to happen!”

“No Mr. Evans. Thank you for this challenging mission!” Elliot said, forcing the enthusiastic tone of his voice. Indeed, it was challenging, both on the professional level, since it was a big responsibility, and on the personal one, since he was in charge of strengthening a system he would have liked to destroy.

“I trust you, Elliot.”

He started to work. With his head between his hands, he was thinking. However, all those thoughts were not only part of the *like index*-saving mission he was in charge of. He remembered all the damage caused by the pursuit of high scores of the *like index* on his

friends. He did not stay indifferent to Lilian's unfair destiny. At this moment, he had no choice but to stick to what really mattered for him. Considering he contributed to a system detrimental to hundreds of people at least, would he still be able to support it? Besides, he was wondering: "Would saving the *like index* be worse than the chaos of its collapse?" He tried to concentrate again. Suddenly, he remembered what Joe had told him the day before: it was impossible to stop those underground computer agency programs responsible for Lilian's escape. "I've never seen programs carved in stone. The agency just wants to continue its business capitalizing on desperate people. Stopping a program would be like publicly admitting that social media profiles would be fake, and could jeopardize the whole *like index*-based system and therefore their business."

Elliot spent the day elaborating a plan: He would make Mr. Evans believe he will stay late at work tonight while in fact he would meet Joe at the agency. Joe would introduce Elliot to the agency employers. He would be a computer seller from *TechnoWorld* Company who came to offer the agency some new technology at a good price. Once Elliot had opened the door of the computer room to check the materials, Joe would distract the employers, asking about his own life program. It would only take Elliot a few seconds to schedule the deleting of all the customers' files for the coming night.

Back home, Elliot was satisfied with the work he and Joe had done. At midnight, all the *life tales* invented by this agency would have disappeared. The day after, he would go back to the company, playing the obedient skilled computer engineer, serving the interest of the *like index*. But this time, he would be unable to save it: "I'm sorry, so far, there has been no way out."

Step 6: Regeneration - *like index* purified

It was not so often Elliot was waiting for his alarm clock to get him out of bed. The night had been endless. He couldn't sleep, wondering about the success of his operation with Joe. What he had done the night before was certainly a turning point for him and for a lot of victims of the *like index* pressure.

When Elliot arrived at the office, Mr. Evans opened his arms wide:

"Elliot, you are a genius!" He pointed at the black and green screen, showing the fluctuations of the *like index* quotations. It had decreased sharply during the night and had been skyrocketing since the early morning: "I don't know how you did that. Fortunately, I was not here to see it. I think I would have got a heart attack."

"I've done nothing but my job," said Elliot, concealing his surprise.

"Congratulations, Mr. Elliot. You've well deserved to rest a bit after working so late. You look exhausted. You can take your afternoon off. Do you realize how much stronger the trust of the *like index* is thanks to you?"

“It’s a pleasure to see my efforts pay off,” he answered, continuing to play the benevolent engineer.

“Where is our dear benefactor?” The Director said on entering the office. “Elliot Jones, I admit you are quite impressive. All the team is proud of what you’ve done for the company. You are a rare bird, you know? If you need anything, don’t hesitate, just ask. We’ll find you a proper desk. You’ll be more comfortable when Mr. William comes back. Have a good day!”

Elliot finally understood what had happened the night before. His plan had worked but had not produced the expected effects. At first, the disappearance of all those fake publications had introduced doubt. The index seemed to be fallible. However, a few hours later, quotations had risen sharply. In fact, by suppressing all the *tales*, he had made the *life index* more trustworthy than ever. He had purified the system from its dysfunctions. There remained but the truth. The *life index* was regenerated.

Walking back home, he kept staring at his feet. He was like guided by an internal geo-localization system. Elliot’s mind was absorbed by the exact contrary of what he had been hired for. He knew that a very simple trick would be enough to impair the whole system. The challenge was to find it out. He was thinking of the right combination of programs that could lead him to eventually stop this machinery. As he reached the porch, he caught sight of a pair of red shoes with black laces. He looked up and saw worn out blue jeans, then a brown leather jacket hidden by long black hair and a large woolen scarf wrapped up around a girl’s face. Those two familiar twinkling eyes... Elliot recognized Pauline.

“Hello, M. Johnson,” she said.

“Pauline? You are back!” Elliot gave her a hug that lasted long seconds as if to make up for the months they had not spent together.

Step 7: Blow-off – the *like index* collapse

Elliot showed her in, invited her to sit comfortably on his sofa and rushed to the kitchen, leaving her to find her bearings.

He was now back with the heartening hot drink. He sat down next to her. "Why didn't you tell me you were back? I was really anxious; I had no news, no messages, nothing. I thought I simply did not exist anymore for you. I was glad to see from your profile that you were having some good time in China. I only hoped you would keep a space in your heart for me."

"I tried my luck in China, relying on my skills and goodwill to find out good job opportunities. But I realized I could not get anything without an impressive quotation on the *like index*. That was why I paid a programmer to design an ideal profile. At the beginning, it worked. But then, I felt he had simply stolen my life," Pauline said, regretfully.

"I was so worried this might happen to you. I am aware of those underground computer agencies that create *life tales*. I wish I could have helped you. I have a friend who

did the same. He simply dropped this life down to travel around the world. I am glad your final choice was to come back to me."

"I thought you would understand my situation and do something about it. You studied in a *Life business school*. You must know how everything works. I just need to convince you how damaging this system is. I have dozens of friends who have broken down after resorting to such agencies. Others have chosen to prioritize reality again. This cannot keep on like this."

"No need to convince me Pauline, I am on your side, more than you can imagine. I have a high responsibility job working on the *like index*. In my company, they are convinced I am the best skilled and the most obedient engineer. I had the best *like index* quotation, that was why they chose me. But paradoxically I spent my time trying to invent a way to topple down the system I was hired to save. I have already tried to delete the program of an underground agency to make the *like index* collapse. Unintentionally, I have only made it more trustworthy. I need to find another way. There must be a way!" He took his head between his hands, then turned his computer on and began to review the programs he could use to impair the *like index*.

Pauline impulsively closed Elliot's laptop and looked at him in the eyes. "What are you doing Elliot? I don't think the situation is as complicated as you think. I have a clear idea of what we could do."

"I know you want to help Pauline, but trust me, this is a powerful machinery that ... "

"If I couldn't send anymore messages from my profile, it was because I had not only been taken the control of my page. But all my messages had also been censored since the day I had decided to post a particular comment. By letting this agency publish the pictures of this incredible life I could not afford, I realized how fake this *like index* quotation was. I was severely angry against it, and against this virtual life that I was supposed to lead in reality. Thus, I just wrote what I felt : "I don't trust the *like index*." The day after, I could do nothing on my profile, but type the login and password."

Elliot kept holding his head between his hands, his eyes right open. "I see..." "I DON'T TRUST IN THE LIKE INDEX" he wrote on his page and pressed enter.

During the night, Elliot sent an e-mail to a thousand people to invite them to do the same. Only two hundred actually did. But even a small effect would be enough, rumors would spread and the effect would be amplified. The *like index* had already went beyond reality. Elliot and Pauline hoped that would be the needle that would burst the bubble.

It was now too obvious that the *life index* was only speculation. Trusting it was trusting the veracity of what people were saying on their pages. But more and more people were simply saying it could not be trusted. Believing that the *like index* was still a relevant way of recruiting people was acknowledging that people were lying, and therefore that the system was not reliable anymore.

This marked the beginning of the *like index* fall. Hundreds of hackers around the world repeated the operation. The *like index* did not have any meaning any longer. Reality had caught up with the virtual. People's lives, in the blinking of an eye, were not measurable

anymore. This was precisely what life deserved according to Elliot, Lilian, Joe, Pauline and the thousands of other people who had spread the epidemic that was fatal to the *like index*.

But for the thousands of others who complied their existence with the index demands, that was the end of all their hopes, all the time, all the moments of being dedicated to their quotation increase. It was in fact an electroshock to remind them all the time they had failed to be who they were not. Their hearts were beating again for the sake of the real.

But what about a *dislike index*?

