

On Computational Power of Interacting Bodies¹

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Abstract: After sketching the difference between implementation and embodiment, and some related problems concerning the Turing-type computation and the so-called hyper-computation, the contribution proposes EG-systems as a suitable computationalistic formal framework for study some of the relevant properties of embodied autonomous agents acting in computationally complicated environments.

1. Introduction

We have become very good at modeling fluids, materials, planetary dynamics, nuclear explosions and all manner of physical systems. Put some parameters into the program, let it crank, and out come accurate predictions of the physical character of modeled system. But we are not good at modeling living systems, at small or large scales. Something is wrong. What is wrong? There are a number of possibilities: (1) we might just be getting a few parameters wrong; (2) we might be building models that are below some complexity threshold; (3) perhaps it is still a lack of computing power; and (4) we might be missing something fundamental and currently unimaginable in our models wrote R. Brooks (2001, p. 401). The situation is similar studying cognition, intelligence, perception, etc. We use the traditional conceptual framework of studying computing devices and their behaviors interpreted as computation to dissolve the miracle of the mentioned phenomena. Having at hand the prepared set of notions and scientific rules which express possible relations between them we try to explain the nature of these phenomena. We are in certain extent successful in doing that. But fundamental difficulties even with formulation of some questions concerning these miraculous phenomena remain open, but there have high actuality for better understanding of the just arising completely new meaning of the concept of machines; for more details concerning the cultural and scientific evolution of the concept of machine during the 20th Century see (Horáková, Kelemen, 2003).

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The concept of machine is not the only one which has been changed considerably during the second half of the 20th century. Important changes have been started already at the end of the 19th century in viewing the relation of human psyche and body thanks to the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud. In his unpublished during his life paper written in 1895 (Freud, 1954) he sketched the figure like the following one:

We can clearly recognize Freud's division of the psychic and the somatic (in the picture the horizontal *somat.-psych. Grenze*) as well as the humans "I" from the outer environment (in the picture the vertical *Ich-granze*) in his representation of the sexual function; cf. e.g. (Panhuysen, 1998). The continuous interaction of the human body with its environment is the base for complicated processes the psychic processes inclusive, which results in a specific state of the human mind and in performing some sexual behavior. Without the body as certain kind of "interface" the state of mind nor the related with it behavior does not emerge in human beings. From this fact, among other, follows the importance of the human body for human mind and bel

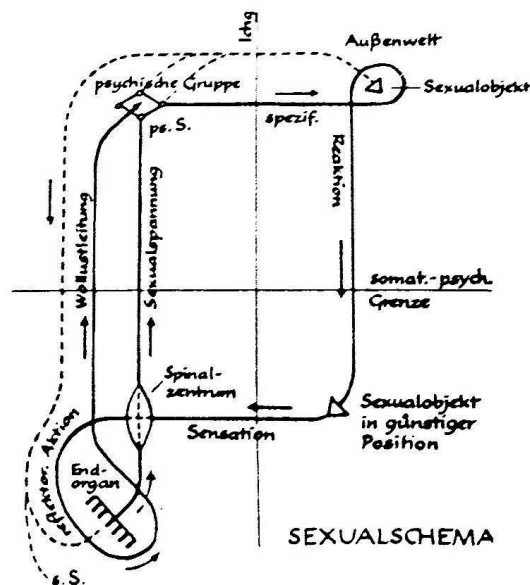


Fig. 1: Freud's schematic representation of the sexual function; from (Penhuysen, 1998).

Situation is very similar in nowadays research in many disciplines focused to human beings, to machines, or to the intersection of the both categories in some branches of science, cf. e.g. (Humphrey, 2000). Some of the specialists, esp. some of those working in the fields of cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and advanced robotics, argue that the source of problems with discovering more adequate and effective ways how construct (esp. how to program) machines in

order to provide their continuous functioning in dynamically changing environments consists in the embodiment of systems, the phenomenon which remained almost completely ignored in our recent computationalistic models. The traditional so called *mind-body problem* of philosophers and cognitive scientists, and the actual *software-hardware problem* of computer programmers and robot builders are from the perspective of embodiment in certain sense identical.

The core of the problem consists, according (Scheutz, 2002), in the simple fact that since symbols are abstract entities, computations cannot be performed on them, but have to be mediated through something physical (like organic bodies of living beings or inorganic machines) that can be manipulated by some physical operations that correspond systematically to the ones performed during the abstract computational processes over abstract symbols. Moreover, because of the same reasons the symbols themselves must be represented in certain ways by suitable physical entities. These entities are then manipulated by the above mentioned physical processes and the results of manipulation are reinterpreted as the results of an abstract computation. The just described *abstract-physical dichotomy* remains unmentioned at all. But when we concentrate to build embodied systems acting in a dynamic, often unpredictable environment, we are confronted with the question how the abstract and the physical is related and how this relation influenced the behavior of our robots, for instance. This is the core of the *problem of embodiment* (at least for the purposes of this paper).

The problem of embodiment is highly actual e.g. because of effective construction of different physically embodied autonomous agents but, unfortunately, we have no effective tools at hand to study them with theoretical rigor up to now. The aim of this contribution is to sketch, on the base of a short analysis of the story of Artificial Intelligence efforts and on some developments in of theoretical computer science, a computationally relevant sub-problem of the general problem of embodiment, and to sketch some of consequences of the previous developments for a way how to deal with this sub-problem in the frame of EG system.

2. The Very Short Story of Artificial Intelligence

An important achievement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was the discovery of the methodologically new possibility how to test our hypotheses on how (some of) the intellectual processes run. The history of AI is full of different hypotheses on how to “automatize” processes like general problem solving, theorem proving, natural language understanding and communication, diagnostics, image processing and recognition, scene analysis, etc. in order to obtain working computer-based systems performing these tasks at the similar (or at better) qualitative level as (specially trained) human beings perform them. In all these cases:

- (1) A working hypothesis is produced first – in the majority of the cases it is based on author's own introspection, then
- (2) the formulated hypothesis is implemented (often using a suitable programming language that might be developed for such purposes), and
- (3) the developed system of programs (the implemented version of the hypothesis) is then tested on real (or more or less similar to the real ones) data.

To proceed according such methodological guidance seems to us as something natural. It might be because intellectually we feel prepared for contemplations about our own intellectual capacities. Perhaps the most deeply developed system of this kind is the well-known system GPS (General Problem Solver) by A. Newell, H. A. Simon and their collaborators (Newell, Simon, 1972), (Ernst, Newell, 1969) continued in the frame of the project SOAR (Newell, 1990).

The most illustrative achievements of the use of the above-sketched methodology are the knowledge systems [15] having symbolically represented ontologies of notions, their chunks, taxonomies, relations between them, etc. As the consequence of that, knowledge systems do not need any bodies (in the physical sense). The situation is completely different in the cases when the artificially created systems (intended to be intelligent in certain sense, e.g. cognitive robots) are situated and execute tasks in real physical environments. In such a case the systems are faced with physically grounded ontologies of objects with real physical properties that exist and act in real time scales. Very hard problems appearing in such situations in the traditional good old fashioned AI were pointed out first from very different positions and with very different conclusions by M. Minsky (1986) and R. Brooks (1999).

Brooks (1999) in his concept of the new AI emphasizes the principal role of systems reactivity, which is necessary for their low-level rationality, while Minsky (1986) emphasizes the principle of decentralization and organization of simplest units (agents) into more complex ones (agencies) and presupposes that an agency may play the role of an agent in a more complex agency. Both of these positions might be – according to our conviction – combined into one unified approach. The main idea consists in two basic steps:

- (1) in emphasizing the role of as direct as possible interaction of the cognitive systems with their environments at least at the lowest level of sensing and acting, and
- (2) in exploiting the power of organization and of the emergence in highest levels in order to receive more complex behaviors.

Both of the above mentioned steps lead us to realize the principal difference between *implementation* of our ideas on how cognitive processes run in natural systems and how they may run in artificial ones, into more or less traditional but in certain sense rigid computers usually equipped with suitable input-output

devices which isolate them from their environments by providing data from it for them, and between *embodiment* of our ideas into artificially created systems equipped by sensors providing signals for them, by units for processing signals and perhaps compute the decisions, and by actuators for making changes in their environments, and situated and working continuously in real, dynamic, and noisy environments; for more details see e.g. (Ačová et al., 2004).

The bodies of our more or less smart machines became the principal problem of our scientific consideration. We have very deep experience with understanding physical machines as physical systems, e.g. in mechanics. However, as we have mentioned above, the mechanistic view of bodies is not sufficient when we are interested in behavioral aspects of functioning of machines. In computer science we are interested rather in virtual machines, in machines in the case of which we make a shift in abstracting behavioral aspects of these machines (the software) and exclude from any considerations their bodies (the hardware). This type of separation has been and still is fruitful in certain situation appearing when the computers are used in traditional ways, but is not sufficient in some other cases.

3. The Very Short Story of Traditional Computing

According this traditional understanding of computation and computers we can recognize any computing device as an *externally passive entity* which internal activity is based on the activities of some finite number of externally passive components with predefined message passing possibilities. Thank to the internal activities of these components and their addressed communication possibilities the whole system transforms some inputs provided to it from certain environment into some required outputs. If some well-specified requirements are satisfied, such transformation is a computation in the traditional sense developed during the modern history of computing and computation which started in 30ties of the past century with definition and first studies of (abstract devices equivalent with) the Turing machine.

Important from the traditional point of view is that considering a Turing machine working in an environment, it gets its input in advance at a beginning of its work, and outputs the result to the environment at the end of its activity. During the computation, the environment is – from the perspective of the Turing machine – completely passive. Computing and computation are understood, applying this traditional paradigmatic view to the systems understood as computing devices, as specific processes corresponding to mathematically defined functions. While the function *declares* a specific relation between variables and values in a set theoretic sense (to definition of a function coincides with a defining a suitable subset of the Cartesian product of its domain of variables and domain of its values), the traditional view of a computation (of a function) is *procedural* one: a computation define a function by means of specifying a step-by-step process of

elementary computable transformation steps which transform the given input variable to a corresponding output value (of the corresponding function).

The central problems of (theoretical) computer science originated from the point of view of the just described traditional paradigm of computing are related with the possibility, description, execution, and the effectiveness of an idealized rule governed *algorithmic* transformation of input data into the desired outputs.

Inside the above sketched overall picture of the traditional understanding of computation, the property of computability – or in other words the (partial) recursiveness (of mathematically defined functions) – is derived from the computing power of the Turing machine. This is the core idea of the so-called Church-Turing thesis, which, in a more precise formulation, states Turing machines, logics, lambda calculus, algorithmic computing, and the generative capacity of centralized rule-based systems (Chomsky-type formal grammars) as equivalent mechanisms for solving problems; cf. (Wegner, Goldin, 2003).

4. Hyper-Computation and Interacting Embodied Agents

However, in present there are strong efforts to prove that the notion of computation might be enlarged beyond the traditional boundaries defined by Turing computability². In (Burgin, Klinger, 2004) it is proposed to call algorithms and automata that are more powerful than Turing machines as *super-recursive*, and computations that cannot be realized or simulated by Turing machines as *hyper-computations*. In our following consideration on the possible views of computation we will respect this proposal.

Another possibility of viewing systems as computing devices consists in considering a computing device as an *externally active entity* perceiving its dynamic (might be hardly predictable, noisy, or completely unpredictable) outer environment, and acting in it continuously according the perceived stimuli and the own inner rules governing the behavior of the system in order to complete given tasks. This is the core idea of the third period of the history of modern computing when the more or less freely cooperating and communicating interacting processors individual behaviors result in a behavior interpretable as a solution of a given problem. The interactivity, as stated in (Copeland, 2004) in connection with the analysis of the computational power of the Turing machine *coupled* with its environment, or with the same device appearing as the *interactive* Turing machine in (Wegner, 1997) leads to the hyper-computational power of the interacting in the Turing sense computationally universal devices.

² For more details on the effort see e.g. (Eberbach, Wegner, 2003) or the monothematic issue of *the Theoretical Computer Science* **317**, No. 1-3 (2004) 1-269.

The activity of the above mentioned type of systems is based on their own coupling of sensed data with appropriate acts performed in their environment, or on the activities of individually autonomous components forming these systems, and communicating (directly or indirectly) with other components forming them. Systems of this type are usually called *agents*, and the structures formed by these agents are called *multi-agent systems*; cf. e.g. (Ferber, 1999). In (Kelemen, 2003) we called the emerging new paradigm of considering computing systems as emerging from considering such kind of autonomous “open” systems as computing devices instead of the isolated ones as the *agent paradigm* of computing.

Interactions of agents with other agents and with their (dynamically changing, unpredictable, noisy, etc.) external environment during their activities in that environment are a real promise how to enlarge computational power of agents and multi-agent systems in comparison with the computational power of the Turing machine; cf. e.g. (Wagner, 1997). In general, interactions inside a multi-agent system involve the external world and the activities of individual agents into the behavior (interpreted as a computation) of the whole system *during* the computation (rather than *before* and *after*, as it is in the case of the traditional algorithms) which may lead to the computations that cannot be carried out by a Turing machine, as stated in (Eberbach, Wegner, 2003). So, agents and multi-agent systems might be considered as very powerful computational devices and may contribute with many innovative concepts to our traditional picture of the (theoretical) computer science and engineering.

An important dimension of the agent paradigm consists in considering agents not only as products of the development of computer programming techniques and as innovative tools for computer use, but also as products of development of electro-, mechanical-, and computer-engineering, as electro-mechanical (usually computer guided) devices for automation of different physical processes – as real autonomous machines which do physical (mechanical) work. From such a point of view, as we have mentioned already, there exists an important difference between real computers and the abstract Turing machine.

In (Sloman, 2002) is stated, for instance, that computers, as built and used, are the result of a convergence of the development of the machine- and electro-engineering, and the progress in understanding computations as processes of performing actions on symbols as the Turing machine do that. In our terminology, real computers as well as the real agents – (artificially) intelligent systems, esp. the cognitive robots – are entities which cannot be divided into their hardware and software parts without missing something fundamental (might be something which emerges) from the functioning of both of their parts. According (Sloman, 2002), this difference makes computers useful, but Turing machines irrelevant for research in Artificial Intelligence, for instance. These two dimensions of agents – interaction with dynamically changing environment and

embodiment – converge into a new understanding of machines as embodied, autonomously sensing, acting and deliberating agents – into the form of *robots*. Looking to the Figure 2 we easily realize the substantial difference between the abstract universal computing devices equivalent with the Turing machine with respect of their computational power in over-simplified environment of symbols written on a tape, and the real robots equipped with computers programmed in order to control the behavior of these robots in the real dynamically changing physical environments.

The mentioned above difference, the properties like the autonomy and continuity of machines behavior, the relevance of embodiment, and other physical constrains and limitations (esp. the problematic concept of infinity with respect their behavior), the importance of communication between individually independent, autonomous computational units in order to achieve common goals (intentionally or as an emergent effect of their co-existence in a shared environment), etc. seems to be crucial for embodied systems like robots; cf. e.g. (Parker, 2003). Many computational processes in robots processors run continuously and autonomously in different types of environments. Good examples are computing processes running in autonomous mobile robots. When – for instance – a collision avoidance module is programmed, its role is to process the input sensory data continuously during the robot mission into the data manipulating with robots actuators in order to avoid obstacles in robots environments. Of course, all the program equipment of the robot may be decomposed into the set of interrelated programs of traditional type. However, this type of reduction does not contribute to the solution of the problem of collision avoidance at all! Instead of particular programs considered as translation of mathematical functions into some more procedural languages we must think in terms of autonomy and continuity of functioning of systems based on their ability to sense the environment and act in it.

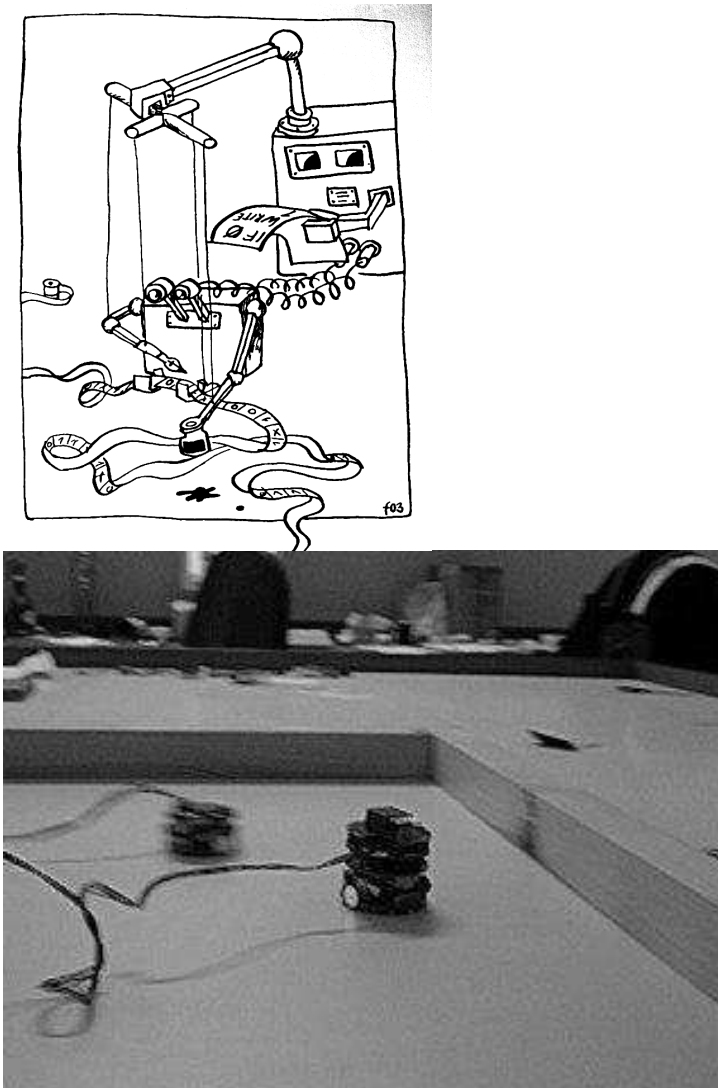


Fig. 2: Compare a particular “abstract” computing device (equivalent with the Turing machine) in its “abstract” environment from (Markoš, Kelemen, 2004), and two real embodied robots in a real dynamic environment (in Robotic Lab, Institute of Computer Science, Silesian University at Opava).

While the principal subject of the study of computation from the position of the traditional paradigm is to consider them as defined in the form of finite sequence of basic transformations executed (sequentially or in parallel) on appropriate data structures, the position of the agent paradigm might be characterize by viewing computation as the result of communication of collections of individually autonomous agents, and vice versa – viewing communication of collections of individually autonomous agents as *computation*.

In order to apply this new paradigm in modeling complicated systems (e.g. in economics, sociology, biology, robotics, etc.), the following methodological experience seems to be important: Instead of the necessity to aggregate specific particular data on individual objects as the base for (mathematical) modeling, the agent paradigm provides a tool for model each individual behavior separately and then study the emerging behavior of the society of these individuals. This methodology is present in many nowadays experiments with biological, ecological, economic, machine (robotic) or conceptual societies of agents.

5. Hyper-Computation – A Grammar-Theoretic Model

From computational point of view an appropriate sub-problem of the above described problem of embodiment is that one which consists in rigorous specification of the computational character of results of interaction of the rule governed algorithmic symbol-manipulating processes which run inside of the agents which interact massively with their computationally complicated behaving dynamic environments. Usually we are interested in as precise as possible knowledge of the behavior of an agent or a multi-agent system in its environment despite of the fact that we have no complete knowledge of the behavior of the environment. The solution of this problem is twofold: We may study the *possibility* of performing such and such behavior under such and such conditions put to the behavior of the environment. To solve this type of problem is in certain extent the traditional role of theoretical computer science. Another possibility is to concentrate to *feasibility* (of course, it will be necessary to define rigorously what we mean by feasibility in our considerations).

For instance, an *eco-grammar* (or an *EG*) *system* (Csuhaaj-Varjú et al., 1997) consists of fixed number (say n) of agents with internal states described by strings of symbols w_1, w_2, \dots, w_n , and evolving according set of rules P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n applied in a parallel way as it is usual in L systems (Rozenberg, Salomaa, 1980). The rules of agents depend, in general, on the state of the environment. The agents act in commonly shared environment (the states of the environment is described by strings of symbols w_E) by sets of sequential rewriting rules R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n . The environment itself evolves according a set P_E of rewriting rules applied in parallel as in L systems. The model is schematically depicted in the figure Fig. 3.

The evolution rules of the environment are independent on agents' states and of the state of the environment itself. The agents' actions have priority over the evolution rules of the environment. In a given time unit, exactly those symbols of the environment that are not affected by the action of any agent are rewritten.

In the EG systems we assume the existence of the so called *universal clock* that marks time units, the same for all agents and for the environment, and according to which the evolution of the agents and of the environment is considered.

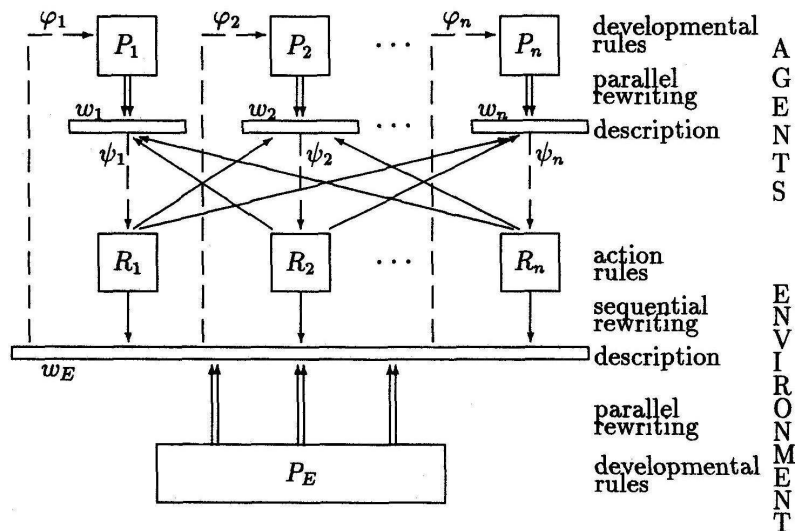


Fig. 3: A schematic view of a traditional EG system.

In (Csuha-j-varjú, Kelemenová, 1998) a special variant of EG systems have been proposed in which the agents are grouped into subsets of the set of all agents – into the so-called *teams* – and the generative power of such type of EG systems have been studied. In (Wätjen, 2003) the fixed teams are replaced by dynamically changing teams of agents. As the mechanism of reconfiguration, a function, say f , is defined on the set of integers with values in the same set in order to define teams. For the i -th step of the work of the given EG system, the function f relates a number $f(i)$. The subset of the set of all agents of thus EG system of the cardinality $f(i)$ is the selected for executing the next derivation step of the EG system working with Wätjen-type teams. Wätjen proved, roughly speaking, that there exists an EG systems such that if f is in the Turing sense non-recursive function, then this EG system generates a non-recursive language. In other words, we can imagine EG systems in which subsequently changing groups of active agents interact with the dynamic environment such that the result of interaction result in the non-recursive behavior of this EG system. So, we have a grammatical model of non-recursive behavior based, similarly as in the case of the interacting Turing machines, on the interactions. This proves the hyper-computational power of interactions. The requirement of strict isolation of teams from each other, as well as the style of changes of teams during the run of the derivation process we can – at least metaphorically – interpret as the requirement of some kind of embodiment (or “embodiment”). So, a system of some simple (finite) derivative units – agents – created in some complicated (non-computable) way which interact with a specific shared dynamic environment provide the hyper-computational power of the behavior of the whole system set up from the agents and their environment.

The range of question (with certain relevance to Artificial Life or to the computational studies of evolution, for instance) we can ask about an EG system contains e.g. the following items:

- ◆ Is the evolution of a system bounded in time or not? In other words: Enters the system a deadlock? When, under what conditions?
- ◆ In the case of the infinite evolution, are non-cyclic evolution chains possible?
- ◆ What is the effect of „small changes” either in the initial configuration or in the evolution/action rules of agents and of the evolution rules of the environment?
- ◆ What is the effect of introducing further life-like features (the Wätjen-type teams are naturally interpretable in the frame of Artificial Life) into the model to the answers to the previous questions?
- ◆ What is the influence of the number of agents on the system properties?

The role of the body – at least in the case when we discuss it from computational point of view – consists first of all in generating the behavior of the embodied system with respect the situation appearing in its environment. In order to study the conditions and the power of the generation of behaviors of this type formally we require at least the following:

- to have an opportunity to study the system with respect of its constituent parts and their interactions, and
- to have an opportunity to study the interaction of the whole system or its parts with their environments.

In such a situation, we may ask the following questions, for instance:

- What is the computational power of the EG system working on the environment generated by a super-recursive device?
- Are EG systems “regulate the super-computable behavior of their environment into the form of a computable one? Under what kind of circumstances?

Let we suppose now that we are able construct on the base of our knowledge in theoretical computer science and with respect the Turing hypothesis only devices with behaviors computable in the sense of the traditional Turing-computability. Suppose that a good theoretical framework for describing this type of devices is the framework of some variant of EG systems. Suppose that the behavior of the environment of EG systems might be very unconventional, exotic ones. Suppose it might be un-computable in the sense of the traditional Turing-computability; for other alternatives see e.g. (Eberbach, Wegner, 2003). Why not? Technically it means that instead of an L system supposed as the generative base for autonomous changes of the environment in a given EG system we suppose that the environment may change in some non-computable in the sense of Turing

computability manners. What can we say concerning the behavior of such type of EG systems? More technically: What type of the behavior of an EG system we may expect when this system works in a non-computably changing environment?

Concerning the study of feasibility, we may be interested not only in the exact knowledge of the behavior of an EG system, but also in the (importance of) difference between the behavior of an EG system and the required behavior of it.

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