SCALE *VS* SOUL

HOW TO WIN IN BUSINESS
WHEN EVERYONE PLAYS
THE AI GAME

SCALE
VS
SOUL

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& JEREMY DENISTY

PELCKMANS

To our kids Romee, Harvey, Noah & Milou
Our beacons of the Alpha Generation
And to our lovely partners, Frauke & Marine

Thanks to all the sharp and SOULful eyes
who helped proofread this work:
Grégoire Charpe-Civatte, Jaan Dekempeneer,
Bart De Waele, Tom De Ruyck, Samuel Eggermont,
Pieter Goetgebuer, Amit Keswani, and Olivier Schietse.

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1.

A BOOK ABOUT
SOUL & SCALE,
WRITTEN AT THE SEA

The starting point of this book is the sudden, staggering rise of artificial intelligence and, curiously, the quiet but unmistakable renaissance of humanity that seems to be rising alongside it as AI is holding up a mirror to us.

As machines become faster, smarter, and more capable, we're being asked the most human questions of all: How do we still make a difference? Will businesses and society become fully autonomous, running without people at all?

And in a world of perfect logic and limitless SCALE because of technology, what does it really mean to have a SOUL? And will it even matter?

This book explores those questions not just through technology or business, but through the lens of something deeper: How we balance SCALE and SOUL in an age where both are accelerating.

We spent a long time wondering where to actually write this book. We didn't want a soulless glass tower or a boring co-working loft, we wanted a place with a certain rhythm and depth. A spot built for creative brainstorming and bringing ideas to life.

The pages of this book were eventually written at the seaside in Ostend, a charming coastal city in Belgium. A place that invites you to wander and get a little lost in thought. And that is exactly what we did.

The ebb and flow of the tide provides a great backdrop where thoughts can be organised. Ostend has long been a magnet for artists, exiles, and daydreamers. Ostend isn't a flashy place, it's a city that doesn't pretend to be more than it is. It carries a lot of history and a strange kind of poetic clarity in its sea breeze.

The city was once called *La Reine des Plages* – Queen of the Beaches – when kings, queens, and artists went there for fresh air and fresh inspiration. It was there that Marvin Gaye – escaping the chaos of his own life – found refuge and wrote his song "Sexual Healing". And it was there that James Ensor, the great surrealist, painted masked faces and inner worlds, channelling the weirdness of the Belgian seaside into cultural legacy.

The coastal city of Ostend provides an ideal setting for confronting challenging questions, struggling with concepts, and envisioning future possibilities.

So, welcome – truly – to this story. Whether you're a leader, a maker, an entrepreneur, an artist, a sceptic, or simply someone

trying to make sense of where the world is headed, we hope these pages will give you a new lens to look through.

Not just at what's happening out there with AI and automation but also at what's happening in here, where meaning and SOUL live. Because we're on a path that will be both high-tech and high-touch. If this book does its job, it won't give you all the answers. But it might give you better questions and hopefully clarity on how to build a future that's not just efficient, but deeply, unmistakably human.

Enjoy,

Dado & Jeremy

PART I:
A WORLD IN TRANSITION

"THE REAL DANGER IS NOT THAT COMPUTERS WILL BEGIN TO THINK LIKE MEN, BUT THAT MEN WILL BEGIN TO THINK LIKE COMPUTERS."

— Sydney J. Harris

2.
THE RISE OF SCALE

HOW WE GOT HERE ·
THE 5 DRIVERS OF SCALING

Human history is – in many ways – the story of SCALE. From the moment early humans figured out how to hunt together and share resources, the drive to do more with less has shaped the trajectory of civilisation. Ultimately, we all want our lives to be easier.

It's the difference between catching one fish with a spear and catching hundreds with a net. Early fishing communities along the coasts of Scandinavia figured this out thousands of years ago. Individual fishermen could catch only so much with their bare hands, but by working together and casting large nets, they could haul in enough fish to feed entire villages. That's SCALE in its earliest form, multiplying output without multiplying effort. And once they figured that out, everything changed. Bigger catches meant more food security, more trade, and more time for things like art, exploration, and invention. SCALE has always been the catalyst for progress, and essentially so in today's business world.

If you look up the definition of SCALE in the dictionary, you'll likely find something like this:

> **Scale (business term)** • the cost advantages that a business obtains due to expansion, which causes the cost per unit to fall as output increases.

If SOUL is about connection, SCALE is about reach. It's the ability to expand your product, service, or influence without a corresponding increase in effort or cost. SCALE is what turns a local idea into a global phenomenon. It's what allows businesses to grow exponentially, rather than incrementally. SCALE transforms effort into output at a level that no human alone could replicate.

But SCALE isn't just about size; it's about efficiency, consistency, and leverage. True SCALE happens when a business is able to grow without diluting quality or losing control. SCALE allows you to reach more people, create more value, and increase profitability, all while maintaining operational integrity.

SCALE is the ability to increase output, reach, or impact without a corresponding increase in effort, resources, or cost. In business, scaling means producing more products or services with the same (or fewer) inputs. In technology, it's about expanding capacity, processing more data, handling more users, or automating more decisions without breaking down.

True SCALE happens when growth becomes exponential rather than linear, unlocking new levels of efficiency and reach.

And every great leap in human progress has come from mastering a new form of SCALE. Understanding the different drivers and "eras of SCALE" isn't just a history lesson, it's a blueprint for the future. Each wave brought new opportunities, but also new tensions between efficiency and humanity.

① THE PRINTING PRESS ·
SCALE OF IDEAS 15TH CENTURY

Around 1440, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. He combined his skills as a goldsmith with the mechanics of a wine press, creating movable metal type. He also developed a new oil-based ink that stuck better to paper. This allowed him to mass-produce high-quality texts for the first time in history. Suddenly, the human mind had wings.

Gutenberg's first major project was a printing of the Bible, the 42-line Bible, so named because it had 42 lines of text per page. It took him about three years to produce around 180 copies, an astonishing feat compared to the years it took to produce a single handwritten Bible.

Before, knowledge was hand-copied by monks in dimly lit monasteries, a painstaking process that made books rare and expensive. Only the elite had access to written knowledge, and the church and aristocracy controlled the flow of information like a cartel.

Gutenberg's press was the first great democratiser of knowledge. Now, books could be mass-produced, and ideas spread

faster than medieval gossip. **The printing press SCALED human thought.** It made the individual mind a scalable asset. You no longer needed to be in the room to influence people, you could let the words on the page do the talking. Gutenberg turned ideas into a product, and suddenly, influence was no longer a privilege of the elite.

The Catholic Church wasn't thrilled, however. Suddenly, religious texts were no longer under the church's tight control. Regular people could read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Ideas spread faster. Science advanced. Political movements gained momentum. Gutenberg didn't just SCALE printing, he scaled thinking. And once the genie was out of the bottle, there was no putting it back.

Within decades, Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses were printed and circulated, setting Europe on fire with the Reformation. Scientific discoveries could be shared widely, and revolutionary political ideas found their way into the hands of the masses.

A new kind of intellectual community was born, a shared cultural consciousness where ideas could spark movements and revolutions. SCALE was no longer just a logistical feat; it became a force multiplier for human creativity.

② THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION · SCALE OF MACHINES 18TH CENTURY

Fast forward to the 18th century, and humanity took SCALE from the mind to the machine. It started with steam. In 1765 James

Watt perfected the steam engine. Early steam engines, like Thomas Newcomen's, were horribly inefficient, guzzling coal and losing half the energy with each stroke. Watt had a better idea. He realised that the engine was wasting energy by constantly cooling and reheating the cylinder. So, he added a separate condenser, cutting coal consumption by more than half and making steam power scalable.

But Watt wasn't an entrepreneur; he was an engineer. Enter Matthew Boulton, a savvy businessman who saw the potential for industry. Together, they didn't just make a better engine, they created a power source that could drive machines, mills, and factories. **Steam became the beating heart of industry, scaling production from manual labour to mechanical power in a way the world had never seen before.** That's why we measure power in watts today, it's a tribute to his transformative impact.

Before this, everything was crafted by hand – clothes, tools, even furniture. If you wanted it, someone had to sit down and make it. The industrialists flipped that script. Machines could now produce goods at a SCALE and speed that made craftsmanship look like a quaint pastime. Factories exploded and cities swelled as people traded rural life for the promise of paid labour.

For the first time, SCALE was physical. Products were no longer limited by human endurance or skill, they were limited only by how fast the machines were running. This was the birth of consumer culture, where the line between scarcity and abundance started to blur. Henry Ford's assembly line took it even further, churning out cars that ordinary people could afford.

But it came at a cost. Machines scaled production, but they also scaled alienation. Factory workers became cogs in a machine, valued more for their output than their humanity. SCALE brought progress, but it also planted the seeds of SOULlessness, a theme that would haunt every future chapter of advancement.

③ GLOBALISATION •
SCALE OF PRODUCTS 20TH CENTURY

Just as we were getting used to mass production, the 20th century introduced a new layer of SCALE: Globalisation. Suddenly, products weren't just made for local consumption; they were made for the world.

Globalisation made the world smaller, but also faster. Take the shipping container, for instance: Before it came along, loading a cargo ship was painfully slow and expensive. Dockers had to manually load goods, box by box, bag by bag. In 1956, an American trucker named Malcolm McLean had a radical idea: Why not load goods into uniform metal boxes that could be lifted directly from a truck onto a ship? It seems obvious now, but at the time, it was revolutionary. McLean's shipping container cut loading times from days to hours and slashed costs by over 90 per cent. Overnight, global trade exploded. Suddenly, products could be made wherever labour was cheapest and shipped worldwide at minimal cost.

Container ships, commercial aviation, and telecommunications shattered geographical barriers. A product designed in Tokyo could be manufactured in China and sold in New York within

weeks. Supply chains grew into vast, intricate networks, optimised for speed and cost.

And once products could move easily, businesses scaled globally at an astonishing pace. Take McDonald's for example. The first McDonald's outside the U.S. opened in Canada in 1967. But the real test came in Moscow in 1990, just months before the Soviet Union would collapse. Thousands of Russians lined up for hours to get their hands on a Big Mac – a taste of Western capitalism. The golden arches became a global symbol not only of fast food, but also of the new world order. McDonald's became a global cultural force. Not because it made the best burger, but because it figured out how to replicate the same experience from Kansas to Kuala Lumpur. Coca-Cola's logo became a universal language. Nike's swoosh wasn't just a brand, it was a symbol of SCALE's new reach.

But globalisation didn't stop at products. Cultural SCALE followed. American movies, Japanese anime, Italian fashion – it all got mixed in a global stew of shared influence. Music videos on MTV. Fast food in Moscow. K-pop in Los Angeles. In 1983, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* became the highest-selling album of all time, not only in the U.S., but also in Japan, Brazil, and beyond. MTV turned music videos into a global cultural language.

Globalisation scaled not just products but identity.

Of course, globalisation wasn't all golden arches and pop music. Jobs were outsourced. Local cultures were diluted. SCALE made the world smaller but also more homogenous. The rise of global brands often came at the expense of local identity. Walk down

the street in Beijing, Paris, or São Paulo, and you'll pass the same Starbucks, Zara, and Sephora. Local traditions and flavours got flattened into a global monoculture. Efficiency came at the cost of uniqueness, a trade-off that would come back to haunt us.

④ THE INTERNET •
SCALE OF CONNECTIONS 21ST CENTURY

And then... the internet.

In 1991, Tim Berners-Lee gave us the World Wide Web, and suddenly anyone with a computer and a phone line could publish, share, and communicate globally. It started innocently – email, chat rooms, basic websites. By 1995, there were approximately 23,500 websites; today there are more than 1.8 billion. Within a decade, social media turned every person into a broadcaster.

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube made influence scalable. A teenager in Minnesota could now amass more followers than a multinational corporation. Viral content became the new currency, and algorithms fine-tuned what we saw and shared.

Amazon scaled retail. Google scaled knowledge. Netflix scaled entertainment. Suddenly, everything was just a click away. The internet evened the playing field; if you had Wi-Fi and something to say, you had access to the whole world.

But here's the twist: While the internet connected us, it also rewired us. Attention spans shortened. Outrage was monetised. Algorithms created echo chambers where everyone believes

their version of the truth is the right one. **Connection at SCALE came with a dark side, an erosion of nuance, intimacy, and trust.**

We are more connected than ever, but also more isolated in many ways. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness a public health epidemic, warning that the health risks of chronic loneliness were as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Connection became transactional. Friendships are partly reduced to likes and comments. The same platforms designed to unite us left us scrolling alone at 2 am, wondering why we still feel empty.

The internet scaled connection, but also disconnection in a way.

⑤ THE RISE OF AI AND ROBOTICS •
SCALE OF AUTOMATION 21ST CENTURY AND BEYOND

And now we stand at the very beginning of the most transformative chapter of SCALE: Artificial intelligence.

AI's roots go back to 1956, when a group of scientists, including John McCarthy and Marvin Minsky, coined the term 'artificial intelligence' at the Dartmouth Conference in the U.S. Their goal? To create machines that could "think" like humans. In 1997, IBM's Deep Blue made headlines when it beat world chess champion Garry Kasparov, proving that machines could outthink humans in certain domains.

The real breakthrough behind AI's scaling power is machine learning, the ability for machines to improve themselves without direct programming. Early AI was rigid – it followed fixed rules and

struggled with complexity. That changed with machine learning. In the early 2010s, researchers at Google trained an AI to recognise images by feeding it millions of pictures from the internet. The defining moment came when, without being explicitly told, the AI began to recognise cats, a pattern it discovered entirely on its own.

AI isn't just scaling output, it's scaling learning itself.

In 2016, Google's DeepMind shocked the world when its AI, AlphaGo, beat the world champion in the ancient board game Go, considered far more complex than chess. The real surprise wasn't that AlphaGo won, it was how it won. It made a move that no human would have considered logical, still known today as "move 37", showing that AI wasn't just learning, it was starting to think differently. It automated the thinking process by itself.

But the real tipping point came in 2022 with the launch of ChatGPT, the first AI model to generate human-like text at SCALE, putting the power of AI into the hands of millions overnight. In that same year, an AI-generated painting won first prize at the Colorado State Fair's art competition, triggering debates about whether AI could truly *create.*

AI isn't scaling physical output; it's scaling the cognitive processes that once felt distinctly human and it's happening faster than most of us had foreseen. In previous eras, scaling meant producing more goods faster and cheaper. AI, however, is scaling decision-making, creativity, and even intuition, things we once considered uniquely human. AI can now write a business plan, debug code, compose music, and diagnose a rare disease simultaneously, all while improving itself through machine learning.

And we're still in AI kindergarten right now. The technology is still in its very early stages; we've barely scratched the surface of what it can do. AI's reach isn't limited to code and algorithms; it's also reshaping the physical world through robotics. Factories are already filled with AI-driven robotic arms that assemble products with micron-level precision, but the real leap is happening in autonomous movement and decision-making. In Japan, robots are assisting the elderly, while in Silicon Valley, delivery robots are rolling down pavements while passing self-driving cars. AI isn't just living in the cloud anymore, it's gaining hands, feet, and the ability to act on the world around it.

Just like the printing press didn't reveal its full power overnight, AI's real impact will unfold over decades. The question is no longer how much we can SCALE, but who decides on the direction: us or the algorithms we've created?

5 DRIVERS OF SCALE

	Scaling of	
Printing press	**IDEAS**	15th century
Industrial Revolution	Scaling of **MACHINES**	18th century
Globalisation	Scaling of **PRODUCTS**	20th century
The internet	Scaling of **CONNECTIONS**	21st century
AI & robotics	Scaling of **AUTOMATION**	21st century & beyond