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manner and has always existed. Therefore I can only conceive of speaking of it in terms of simulation, much in the same manner that Borges reconstitutes a lost civilization through the fragments of a library. In other words, I can hardly examine the question of sociological verisimilitude, to which, moreover, I could only answer with the greatest of difficulty; rather I must put myself in the place of an imaginary traveler who stumbles upon these writings as upon a lost manuscript and who, for lack of supporting evidence, would attempt to reconstitute the society they describe.

FROM:

BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. THE ECSTASY OF COMMUNICATION. ED. SLYVIERE LOTRINGER. TRANS. BERNARD AND CAROLINE SCHUTZE. PARIS: EDITIONS GALLÉE, 1987.

THE ECSTASY OF COMMUNICATION

Everything began with objects, yet there is no longer a system of objects. The critique of objects was based on signs saturated with meaning, along with their phantasies and unconscious logic as well as their prestigious differential logic. Behind this dual logic lies the anthropological dream: the dream of the object as existing beyond and above exchange and use, above and beyond equivalence; the dream of a sacrificial logic, of gift, expenditure, potlatch, "devil's share" consumption, symbolic exchange.¹

All this still exists, and simultaneously it is disappearing. The description of this projective imaginary and symbolic universe was still the one of the object as the mirror of the

subject. The opposition of the subject and the object was still significant, as was the profound imaginary of the mirror and the scene.² The scene of history as well as the scene of the everyday emerge in the shadow of history as it is progressively divested of politics. Today the scene and the mirror have given way to a screen and a network. There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication. In the image of television, the most beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very bodies are becoming monitoring screens.

We no longer invest our objects with the same emotions, the same dreams of possession, loss, mourning, jealousy; the psychological dimension has been blurred, even if one can still retrieve it in the particular.

Barthes already foresaw this for the car, where the logic of possession, from the projection inherent in strong subjective relation is substituted by a logic of driving. No more power, speed, appropriation phantasies linked

to the object itself, but a potential tactic linked to its use — mastery, control and command, optimization of the game of possibilities, which the automobile offers as a vector, and no longer as a psychological sanctuary — resulting in the transformation of the subject himself into a driving computer, instead of the demiurge drunk with power. The vehicle thus becomes a bubble, the dashboard a console, and the landscape all around unfolds as a television screen.

However, one can conceive of a subsequent stage to this one, where the car is still a performative instrument, the stage at which it becomes an informing network. That is, the car which speaks to you, which informs you spontaneously of its general state and yours (eventually refusing to function if you are not functioning well), the advising, the deliberating car, a partner in a general negotiation on lifestyles; something (or *someone*, since at this stage there is no more difference) to which you are *wired*, the communication with the car becoming the fundamental stake, a perpetual test of the presence of the subject *vis-à-vis* his

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objects — an uninterrupted interface.

From here on neither speed nor traveling — not even the unconscious projection, competition, or prestige — count any longer. In fact the desacralization of the car has been going on for some time now in the sense that "Speed is out! Drive more and consume less." A kind of ecological ideal is taking over, an ideal of regulation, of moderate functionality, of solidarity between all the elements of one and the same system, of the control and global management of the whole. Each system (including the domestic universe) forms a kind of ecological niche, with a relational decor where all terms must remain in perpetual contact with one another, informed as to their respective strategies and that of the entire system because the failure of one term could lead to catastrophe.

Although this is no doubt only a discourse, one must take note that the analysis of consumption in the sixties and seventies originated in the advertising discourse or in the pseudo-conceptual discourse of professionals.³ "Consumption," the "strategy of desire" were

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at first only a metadiscourse, the analysis of a projective myth whose real consequences were generally unknown.⁴ Actually no more was known about the relation of people to their objects than about the reality of primitive societies. This is what allows one to build the myth, but it is also the reason why it is useless to try and objectively verify these hypotheses through statistics. As we know, the discourse of advertisers is for the use of professionals in the field, and who could say that the present discourse on computer science is not accessible strictly to professionals in computer science and communication (the discourse of intellectuals and sociologists, for that matter, raises the same question).

Private telematics: each individual sees himself promoted to the controls of a hypothetical machine, isolated in a position of perfect sovereignty, at an infinite distance from his original universe; that is to say, in the same position as the astronaut in his bubble, existing in a state of weightlessness which compels the individual to remain in perpetual orbital flight and to maintain sufficient speed in zero gravity

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to avoid crashing into his planet of origin.

The realization of the orbital satellite in the universe of the everyday corresponds to the elevation of the domestic universe to the celestial metaphor, with the orbiting of the two-room/kitchen/bathroom unit in the last lunar model; hence to the satellisation of the real itself. The everydayness of the terrestrial habitat hypostatized in space marks the end of metaphysics, and signals the beginning of the era of hyperreality: that which was previously mentally projected, which was lived as a metaphor in the terrestrial habitat is from now on projected, entirely without metaphor, into the absolute space of simulation.

Our private sphere has ceased to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odds with his objects and with his image is played out: we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks. Television is the most direct prefiguration of this, and yet today one's private living space is conceived of as a receiving and operating area, as a monitoring screen endowed with telematic power, that is to say, with the capacity to regu-

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late everything by remote control. Including the work process, within the prospects of telematic work performed at home, as well as consumption, play, social relations, leisure. One could conceive of simulating leisure or vacation situations in the same way that flight is simulated for pilots.

Is this science fiction? Yes, but up until now all environmental mutations derived from an irreversible tendency towards a formal abstraction of elements and functions, to their homogenization into a single process, as well as to the displacement of gestural behaviors: of bodies, of efforts, in electric or electronic commands, to the miniaturization in time and space. These are processes where the stage (which is no longer a stage) becomes that of the infinitesimal memory and the screen.

This is our problem, insofar as this electronic encephalization, this miniaturization of circuits and of energy, this transistorization of the environment condemn to futility, to obsolescence and almost to obscenity, all that which once constituted the stage of our lives. We know that the simple presence of television

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transforms our habitat into a kind of archaic, closed-off cell, into a vestige of human relations whose survival is highly questionable. From the moment that the actors and their phantasies have ceased to haunt this stage, as soon as behavior is focused on certain operational screens or terminals, the rest appears only as some vast useless body, which has been both abandoned and condemned. The real itself appears as a large, futile, body.

The era of miniaturization, of remote control, and of a microprocessing of time, bodies, and pleasure has come. There is no longer an ideal principle of these things on a human scale. All that remains are miniaturized, concentrated and immediately available effects. This change of scale is discernable everywhere: the human body, our body, seems superfluous in its proper expanse, in the complexity and multiplicity of its organs, of its tissue and functions, because today everything is concentrated in the brain and the genetic code, which alone sum up the operational definition of being. The landscape, the immense geographical landscape seems a vast, barren body

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whose very expanse is unnecessary (even off the highway it is boring to cross), from the moment that all events are concentrated in the cities, which are also being reduced to several extremely miniaturized high places. And what about time, this vast leisure time we are left with, and which engulfs us like an empty terrain; an expanse rendered futile in its unfolding from the moment that the instantaneousness of communication miniaturizes our exchanges into a series of instants?

The body as a stage, the landscape as a stage, and time as a stage are slowly disappearing. The same holds true for the public space: the theatre of the social and of politics are progressively being reduced to a shapeless, multi-headed body. Advertising in its new version is no longer the baroque, utopian scenario ecstatic over objects and consumption, but rather the effect of the omnipresent visibility of corporations, trade marks, PR men, social dialogue and the virtues of communication. With the disappearance of the public place, advertising invades everything (the street, the monument, the market, the stage, language). It

determines architecture and the creation of super-objects such as Beaubourg, Les Halles or La Villette⁵ — which are literally advertising monuments (or anti-monuments) — not so much because they are centered on consumption, but because from the outset these monuments were meant to be a demonstration of the operation of culture, of the cultural operation of the commodity and that of the masses in movement. Today our only architecture is just that: huge screens upon which moving atoms, particles and molecules are refracted. The public stage, the public place have been replaced by a gigantic circulation, ventilation, and ephemeral connecting space.

The private space undergoes the same fate. Its disappearance parallels the diminishing of the public space. Both have ceased to be either spectacle or secret. The distinction between an interior and an exterior, which was just what characterized the domestic stage of objects and that of a symbolic space of the object has been blurred in a *double obscenity*. The most intimate operation of your life becomes the potential grazing ground of the me-

dia (non-stop television on the Louds family in the USA,⁶ endless "slice of life" and "psy" shows on French TV). The entire universe also unfolds unnecessarily on your home screen. This is a microscopic pornography, pornographic because it is forced, exaggerated, just like the close-up of sexual acts in a porno film. All this destroys the stage, once preserved through a minimal distance and which was based on a secret ritual known only to its actors.

The private universe was certainly alienating, insofar as it separated one from others, from the world in which it acted as a protective enclosure, as an imaginary protector. Yet it also contained the symbolic benefit of alienation (the fact that the other exists) and that otherness can be played out for better or for worse. Thus the consumer society was lived under the sign of alienation; it was a society of spectacle — but at least there was spectacle, and the spectacle, even if alienated, is never obscene.⁷ Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusion, when every-thing becomes immediately transparent, visible,

exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication.

We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene. Obscene is that which eliminates the gaze, the image and every representation. Obscenity is not confined to sexuality, because today there is a pornography of information and communication, a pornography of circuits and networks, of functions and objects in their legibility, availability, regulation, forced signification, capacity to perform, connection, polyvalence, their free expression...

It is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more-visible-than-visible; it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication.

Marx already denounced the obscenity of the commodity, which is linked to the principle of its equivalence, to the abject principle of free circulation. The obscenity of the commodity derives from the fact that it is abstract,

formal and light in comparison with the weight, opacity and substance of the object. The commodity is legible, as opposed to the object, which never quite reveals its secret, and it manifests its visible essence — its price. It is the locus of transcription of all possible objects: through it, objects communicate — the merchant form is the first great medium of the modern world. But the message which the objects deliver is radically simplified and is always the same — their exchange value. And so, deep down the message has already ceased to exist, it is the medium which imposes itself in its pure circulation. Let us call this ecstasy: the market is an ecstatic form of the circulation of goods, as prostitution and pornography are ecstatic forms of the circulation of sex.

One need only carry this analysis to its full potential to grasp what has happened to transparency and the obscenity of the universe of communication, which have long surpassed the obscenities still relative to the universe of the commodity.

Ecstasy is all functions abolished into one dimension, the dimension of communica-

tion. All events, all spaces, all memories are abolished in the sole dimension of information: this is obscene.

Hot, sexual obscenity is followed by cool communicational obscenity. The former implied a form of promiscuity, a clutter of objects accumulated in the private universe, or everything that remains unspoken and teeming in the silence of repression. However, this promiscuity is organic, visceral, carnal, while the promiscuity which reigns over the communication networks is one of a superficial saturation, an endless harassment, an extermination of interstitial space. When I pick up my telephone the marginal network hooks me up and keeps harping at me with the unbearable good will of that which seeks and claims to communicate. Deregulated radio speaks, sings, expresses itself.⁸ All very well, but in terms of the medium the result is a space — that of the FM frequency — which is saturated with overlapping stations, so that what was once free by virtue of there having been space is no longer so. The word is free, but I am not; the space is so saturated, the pressure of all which wants to

be heard so strong that I am no longer capable of knowing what I want. I plunge into the negative ecstasy of radio.

There is a state particular to fascination and giddiness. It is a singular form of pleasure, perhaps, but it is aleatory and dizzying. If one goes along with Roger Caillois' classification of games — mimicking, *agôn*, *alea*, *ilinx*: games of expression, games of competition, games of chance, games of giddiness⁹ — then the movement of our entire culture will lead from a disappearance of the forms of expression and competition towards an extension of the forms of chance (*alea*) and giddiness.

These no longer imply any game of the scene, the mirror, challenge or otherness; they are rather, ecstatic, solitary, and narcissistic. Pleasure is no longer that of the scenic or aesthetic manifestation (*seductio*) but that of pure fascination, aleatory and psychotropic (*subductio*). This does not necessarily imply a negative judgement, since the forms of pleasure and perception undoubtedly undergo a profound and original mutation. We can hardly assess the consequences of such a transformation. In

applying our old criteria and the reflexes of a "scenic" sensibility, we run the risk of misconstruing the irruption of this new ecstatic and obscene form in our sensorial sphere.

One thing is for certain: if the scene seduced us, the obscene fascinates us. However, ecstasy is the opposite of passion. Desire, passion, seduction, or again, according to Caillois, expression and competition, are the games of the hot universe. Ecstasy, fascination, obscenity (Caillois' chance and giddiness), are games of the cold and cool universe (even giddiness is cold, especially the giddiness of drugs).

In any case we will suffer from this forced extraversion of all interiority, from this forced introjection of all exteriority which is implied by the categorical imperative of communication. Perhaps in this case one should apply metaphors drawn from pathology. If hysteria was the pathology of the exacerbated staging of the subject — of the theatrical and operational conversion of the body — and if paranoia was the pathology of organization — of the structuring of a rigid and jealous world — then today we have entered into a new form

of schizophrenia — with the emergence of an immanent promiscuity and the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks. No more hysteria, or projective paranoia as such, but a state of terror which is characteristic of the schizophrenic, an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate him, meeting with no resistance, and no halo, no aura, not even the aura of his own body protects him. In spite of himself the schizophrenic is open to everything and lives in the most extreme confusion. He is the obscene victim of the world's obscenity. The schizophrenic is not, as generally claimed, characterized by his loss of touch with reality, but by the absolute proximity to and total instantaneousness with things, this overexposure to the transparency of the world. Stripped of a stage and crossed over without the least obstacle, the schizophrenic cannot produce the limits of his very being, he can no longer produce himself as a mirror. He becomes a pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks.