SUBJECT: LEAVE YOUR MESSAGE AFTER THE BEEP:

ON THE RIGHT TO STUPIDITY,

THE ART OF FORGETTING, AND THE BOLERO 100

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From the notorious interview with Martin Heidegger that appeared after the philosopher's death in *Der Spiegel* (May 30, 1976) Avital Ronell quotes the following extract in *The Telephone Book*:

Der Spiegel: So you finally accepted. How did you then relate to the Nazis?
Heidegger: ...Someone from the top command of the Storm Trooper University Bureau, S.A. section leader Baumann, called me up. He demanded...
Heidegger, recently appointed rector of Freiburg University, answered the Nazi call/ing. A telephone wire connected the great philosopher to a criminal regime. A "call" became a "calling." On May 1, 1934, Heidegger became a member of the NSDAP *Gau Baden*. His number was 3125894. But just suppose. By way of a modest anachronistic thought experiment. Suppose Heidegger had had an answering machine. Suppose S.A. section leader Baumann had gotten the following message: "This is Martin Heidegger. I'm not home right now. Please leave your message after the beep." What would have happened then?

RECORD

"Even granny was surprised by the Bolero 100's many functions. Its compact and elegant exterior belies this answering machine's astounding capacity to record over 30 minutes of messages. The Bolero 100 stays safely within everyone's budget and proposes a memory function to save personal messages for you and your family. The "space-guarding" function allows you to monitor the goings-on in the answering machine's vicinity. The Bolero 100's primary asset is its sonic guardian, a distress call that's automatically transferred to a number of authorized persons (identified via a secret code). This way you can feel safe and restrict incoming calls to insure granny's afternoon nap" (Christmas promotion for Belgacom's Bolero 100 answering service).
An answering machine is a handy gadget. Even when you're not home you can still take that all-important call and listen to its playback at your leisure. Nothing (the occasional technical glitch notwithstanding) is forgotten, everything is carefully recorded. If we're to believe the national phone company, parents are even using the machine to leave spoken messages for their kids or significant others. Say goodbye to those scribbled Post-it notes on the refrigerator. Urgent family matters—"Don't forget to take out the trash" or "I won't be home tonight"—will henceforth be conveyed by the memory function on the answering machine. More serious messages—like the classic "went out for a pack of cigarettes, be right back" or actual suicide notes—are likely to go the same way.

TIME OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The answering machine's biggest quality is that it succeeds in separating the owner's personal world from his professional life. As long as you don't listen to it, your answering machine will isolate you from the outside world. The telephone has the nasty habit of intruding into your private life at those most inconvenient moments. The answering machine "softens" and sidetracks such intrusions. An answering machine guarantee sits owner's right to privacy.

The answering machine's greatest theoretician is probably Benjamin Constant (1767–1830). In his *Histoire abrégée de l'égalité*, Constant simply characterizes our modern times as *l'époque des individus*. Tzvetan Todorov wrote a wonderful book about this liberal thinker who is gradually being rediscovered. Constant was not just the author of *Adolphe*: he was also one of the most important political thinkers of the early nineteenth century. After the French Revolution, the state, the corporation, and/or the family can no longer impose their will on the individual, Constant notes. "Instead of being enslaved to the family...every individual now lives his own life and demands his own freedom." Constant was enough of a crystal ball–gazer to come up with an astute political analysis some two hundred years ago that is still more than relevant for our contemporary democracy.

Constant's political thinking, argues Todorov, is at once a synthesis and transformation of the work of two important eighteenth-century French political thinkers—Montesquieu and Rousseau. They respectively embody the principle of the separation of power and the sovereign people. In his *Principes de politique* (1806) Constant tries to reconcile the views expressed in Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* with Rousseau's *Social Contract*, the separation of power with the sovereign people.

Both Montesquieu and Rousseau were keen to improve government. For Montesquieu it didn't really matter who is in power—the king, the aristocracy, or the parliament. It only matters how power is exercised. Every form of power is legitimate as long as that power is limited by laws and/or another source of power. Executive, legislature, and judiciary power should balance each other out. This comes down to what is rather incorrectly described as the "separation of power." In fact Montesquieu is talking about a redistribution or a balancing of power. If and when the powers are balanced, this will automatically lead to a fair and tolerant regime. By contrast, in both individual and collective dictatorships, the different powers are grouped together. Montesquieu (who died in 1755) is obviously not a republican or a democrat. His only ideal—the British monarchy—is a meritocracy: in his view the people are "unable to make their own active decisions" (*Spirit of the Laws* XI.6). The people should be represented and presided over.

Rousseau develops a different reasoning in his *Social Contract*. It is not the way in which power is exercised that matters but who exercises it. The sovereign people should itself decide according to which laws it wants to live. Sovereignty equals the exercise of the will of the collective. This collective will always take precedence over the individual will.

Benjamin Constant accepts Rousseau's postulate that power should be the expression of the will of the people. Given the regime of terror during the French Revolution, however, he adds one condition he borrows from

Montesquieu—that power is not only legitimized by those who exercise it but it is also legitimized by the way it is exercised—it should never be unlimited. Even the sovereignty of the people, the collective will, should be practiced in moderate fashion. Constant chooses neither the liberalism of Montesquieu (which can be undemocratic) nor the democracy of Rousseau (which can be totalitarian). Instead he opts for a liberal democracy. He limits the power of the people and in so doing protects the individual from the arbitrary ruling of the collective: "A people that holds all the power is more dangerous than a tyrant," he concludes. The people's sovereignty should only come into force within certain limitations. Even when it is only one individual who does not agree with the others, those others should not have the power to impose their will (especially not in private matters). The sovereign people should respect the freedom of individual.

THE RIGHT TO STUPIDITY

John Stuart Mill upheld a similar principle in his *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). He agrees that a society should guarantee the freedom of its citizens. Minorities should be protected from the majority. His conclusion is still extremely relevant for our contemporary media society: "Like the whole of modern civilization, representative governments are inclined towards collective mediocrity." To put it bluntly: The first and most important (but seldom-spoken) principle of any democracy is the right to stupidity. Everyone, no matter how stupid or blunt, has the same unalienable democratic rights guaranteed by universal suffrage. You don't have to take an IQ-test before you elect a representative. And that's the way it should be: it's the democracy, stupid! The scenario changes though when this unalienable democratic right to stupidity becomes an obligation to be stupid. In light of the political and social polarization provoked by the [convicted and accused Belgian sexual murderer of children] Marc Dutroux case, it seems quite useful to confront those few legalists à la Montesquieu and those many populists à la Rousseau with a sane voice like that of Constant or Mill. Yes, the separation of power is a political-judicial fiction that hides a lot of judicial corporatism. No, the people's sovereignty is not the solution to all problems. Democracy does not equal "all power to the people." The biggest advantage of liberal democracy in the way it was conceived by Benjamin Constant is that this kind of government is not only democratic but also guarantees a strict separation between the public and the private.

For Constant, freedom is everything that gives an individual the right to do—it also withholds society the right to forbid. Freedom is insured by the separation between public and private. This separation between public and private is perhaps the greatest achievement of the French Revolution—neither Antiquity nor the Ancien Régime knew the difference.

It is precisely this separation that is threatened by today's media society. The public has intruded into the private through communication technology—first the press and the telephone, later radio, and especially television. In lifestyle magazines and on television the public is camouflaged as the private in order to insure its domination of the individual. It takes away his freedom and makes him conform to those norms and standards imposed by the

media. The private is threatened with destruction as everything becomes public. Hence the strange alliance between media hype on the one hand and moral indignation about the Dutroux case on the other hand—between a moral call to arms and the latest ratings. Both parties have but one goal—to impose the dictatorship of the collective onto the private sphere. And all this in the name of the people's sovereignty and (a strikingly narrow interpretation of) democracy. What we need—now more than ever—is an answering machine, an efficient form of protection against the public's increasing nosiness.

MECHANICAL *ANAMNESIS*

You can rightfully ask yourself if the answering machine hasn't become an "anamnetic" device. For those of us who don't know Greek: *anamnesis* is defined as "the act of remembering". In the Orphic–Pythagorean tradition this meant remembering earlier lives one had lived in a different form of being. In the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato interprets *anamnesis* as the remembrance of the world of immortal Ideas. In a clerical context it means remembering your deepest sins in the confessional. Freud offers yet another interpretation and talks about remembering a repressed past (either spontaneously or under hypnosis). All this—remembering a past life, a world of ideas, a repressed past—is synoptically resumed by one push on the rewind button of the answering machine. A mechanical *anamnesis* takes place, and your earlier life, reality itself, catches up with you. Switch on the machine and reality comes back to haunt you. This annoys the owner of an answering machine. After a nice quiet day the whole storm awaits you on a compact thirty minute tape courtesy of the Bolero 100.

STOP

The Bolero 100 is a mechanical stand-in for Orphic mysteries, Platonic introspection, Catholic confessionals, and Freudian psychoanalysis. At the same time the answering machine allows the owner to postpone the *anamnesis*. To forget as long as possible. To shut out the world—not an earlier Orphic life, Platonic ideas, clerical sins, or Freudian reality—but the everyday telephonic life. *Amnamnesis* is remembering but remembering after a massive, traumatic, otherworldly forgetting. What do you remember from your earlier life, the immortal Ideas, or all that repressed carnality that explodes onto the psychiatrist's couch or in the confessional? Nothing or not a lot. This way the answering machine also functions as a forgetting machine, an attempt to delay reality, to "move" or "time shift" it into oblivion. While the VCR moves time while recording fiction, the answering machine records and delays reality itself. It is a forgetting well into which we dare not look—for the time being at least.

THE ART OF FORGETTING

The ancient art of remembering was first and foremost an art of forgetting. In *De Oratore* Cicero enlightens us on when the art of memory first came into being. During a feast at which he is invited to give a speech, the poet Simonides is suddenly called outside. During his absence an earthquake takes place and

the roof of the banquet room crashes, leaving the host and all his guests buried under the rubble. The bodies are mutilated to such a degree that the family members who have come to collect their dead are not able to identify them. Fortunately Simonides remembers the exact seating of the guests at the dinner table and is thus able to identify their bodies. Simonides became the inventor of the art of memory because he was able to (re)construct his memory in an orderly fashion. His artful remembering inspired numerous orators to construct their speeches as mental images in an imaginary building, images they could "walk through" in their minds so as not to forget anything.

This anecdote marks the beginning of the art of memory that took off during antiquity and the Renaissance. What Cicero implies—but does not mention because it seemed so obvious at the time—was that Simonides' remembering was preceded by a huge, dramatic, momentous forgetting of everything that came before the remembering: the earthquake, the disaster that provided total amnesia and made it impossible for relatives to recognize their brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. The art of memory relies upon and presupposes an almost complete forgetting. A kind of collective "instant Alzheimer's."

FORGETTING MACHINE

We tend to forget we forget. That forgetting is enormously important. Remembering is primarily not remembering certain things, selecting, trimming and then forgetting. Museums around the world are characterized not so much by what they store but rather by what they cannot, will not, or dare not store. They are not so much storage machines as machines for forgetting. The tape (or the digital memory) of our answering machine we use time and again. Nothing is permanently stored. Messages are recorded for the moment in an attempt to delay time. On a purely technical level the answering machine is also a forgetting machine. You need to keep all the tapes to turn it into a memory machine. Something we don't do—rather, we tend to erase. We use yesterday's tape to record today's messages, and today's for tomorrow's. And we are right to do so. We use our memories selectively and always forget more than we can remember. The past is a heavy load to carry—too heavy a load. Now, more than ever, we need to destroy surplus information. We need to use at least 75 percent of all published books to light the stove; to dig deep forgetting wells for useless information; to print books on extremely acidic paper instead of its acid-free equivalent; to develop magnetic and digital carriers that "forget" their recorded information after a reasonable time; to make all this useless information biodegradable. Orphists, Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Freudians all attached primary importance to the memory function. The past is all-important. The Freudians deny that we even are able to forget—in their book forgetting usually has some kind of deeper, shady, or sexual reason. Nietzsche on the other hand was all for forgetting and re-using the same old tape in our answering machines. In his *Genealogy of Morals*, he wrote: "Forgetting is not simply a kind of inertia, as superficial minds tend to believe, but rather the active faculty to...provide some silence, a "clean slate" for the unconscious, to make place for the new...those are the uses for what I have called an active forgetting..."

I enjoyed Marchart's piece on Neutopia. One correction: Dave Hughes never claimed to have invented NAPLPS. It dates from the early eighties and was developed with the help of companies like ATT, Xerox, Texas Instruments, and IEEE. It was used in public access sites in San Francisco, Toronto, Honolulu, in the eighties and early nineties. Hughes was a tireless promoter of this video standard until he turned his attention to certain wireless technologies (see<http://www.mind≠spring.com/~crhoads/shawn/≠turboard/> has more info on this standard>). I'm not sure whether it is Hedlund or Marchart who makes the comment that the technology was simple and "obviously suited for 'natives'" Judging from the tone of Marchart's essay, I am guessing that he infers that from the article. While Hughes is very opinionated (and I have been acquainted with him for ten years) I never observed that he thought that American Indians could not handle complex technology. Hughes was used to funkier interfaces and programs that many others would not embrace, and the NAPLPS applications I tried were like that. He expected a lot from the people he evangelized.
[Cisler <cisler@pobox.com>, Re: Greetings from Neutopia, Sun, 27 Sep 1998 09:35:30 -0800]

A CONDOM AGAINST REALITY

"[T]he call is precisely something which we ourselves have neither planned nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so. "It" calls, against our expectations and even against our will" (Martin Heidegger in *Time and Being*, trans. by Avital Ronell in *The Telephone book).*

An answering machine separates messages from their temporal frame and cuts them up into sequences of past time (with or without time code). The answering machine therefore is the ideal instrument for those who refuse to experience reality directly and want to experience life in playback mode. The answering machine doesn't actually protect you from bad news but it does let you choose the moment you want to hear it. Someone is dying? No problem, just turn on the machine and we can go on pretending nothing's wrong. Let them die, we don't even know about it! And we don't want to know either. In this day and age of cellphones and portable computers there is no valid reason (beside a flat battery or a technical glitch) why we cannot be reached. And things are going to get worse as Belgacom has recently decided to link up its phone, cellular, and voice-mail services via a special Duet-arrangement: when you call someone you automatically get transferred to their cell phone first then to a regular phone and finally to their voice-mail. So these days if you get an answering machine you know that the person in question just doesn't want to take your call. He does not want to be reached; he wants to protect himself against the intrusions of the outside world. So why bother him then, even with the best or worst news? Get the message caller? He doesn't want to know. In that sense the answering machine is like a condom we use to keep out the pollution of everyday reality. An even more efficient method of screening calls is of course "caller identification," a device that has radically altered the social behavior of American households. With caller identification you see the number of the person calling flash up on the screen before you even answer the phone. Better yet, by linking this caller ID to the database in your computer, you can create a system in which you can only be reached by those people who are already in your address book. This way there's no chance you're going to be reached by a complete unknown. Secret telephone numbers used to be the privilege of famous people who just wanted to be left alone. Now every self-indulging civilian can unfondly remember the days he ever allowed a telephone in the private environment of his home or inside pocket. In this case pollution by an alien, threatening telephone call is no longer possible. The telephone has been replaced by the proxiphone (the telephone by proxy). The telephone becomes a safety device that hermetically seals us off from the rest of reality.

TWO NOTIONS OF FREEDOM

Benjamin Constant is more than just the perfect liberal, stresses Todorov. He didn't just stick to his aforementioned definition of freedom as all things private the individual can do and society cannot forbid, but he also—like Montesquieu and a long time before Isaiah Berlin—distinguished between two different notions of freedom. The first is the modern, negative definition of freedom in the private life; but there is also a positive one—the freedom

to actively partake in the political life of the land, as was the custom in ancient Greece. In Greek society personal freedom was of no relevance or value. Constant notes in postmodern fashion: "The ancients had an opinion about everything. We hold only a semblance of an opinion on nothing much in particular." We doubt everything, or seem to be lethally fatigued before we actually do anything and certainly no longer believe in our institutions (Constant noted this trend more than two hundred years ago!). Private concerns have pushed aside all interest in the public life. We need an injection of the ancient freedom! Constant wants two kinds of freedom, that of the "Moderns" and the "Ancients" combined—a freedom of the individual to privately do what he wants, with the added freedom of publicly participating in the collective power. This way he hopes to compensate for the negative sides inherent in both types of freedom. In his famous speech delivered at the Royal Academy in Paris in 1819 he argues that "The danger of the ancient freedom was that it focused exclusively on the redistribution of social power and neglected individual rights and aspirations. The danger of the modern freedom is that we are all too concerned about our personal interests and tend to neglect our right to participate in the exercise of political power." Constant was optimistic nonetheless. He envisaged that people would only need independence in their daily concerns, activities, and fantasies to achieve perfect happiness. He was, as we all know by now, wrong. From the king to the cardinal, everyone stresses the need for guidance and leadership. People have yet to evolve from the slave mentality of the Ancien Régime and still yearn for the master and the whip, the God and His commandment. This is, from a purely empirical point of view, a totally accurate assessment. There has never been more nostalgia for the slave existence under the Ancien Régime than with the most recent batch of free citizens. Contrary to what millenary moralists and other horsemen of the apocalypse like to preach, what we definitely should not do is change this sorry state of affairs and fill up the vacuum that public power has left us with. Constant was absolutely right when he said that: "*L'anarchie intellectuelle qu'on déplore me semble un progrès immense de l'intelligence*." Whatever those pamphlets say, you're better off hopeless and free than enslaved to some kind of ideology.

PLAY

In 1934 Martin Heidegger got a phone call. "*Nach einigen Tagen kam ein fernmündlicher Anruf*," reads the original interview. The call came from S.A. Obersturmführer Baumann. And Heidegger took the call/calling. In retrospect—in the interview with *Der Spiegel*—he blamed his ties to the Nazi party on the telephone. One thing is for certain—had Martin Heidegger had an answering machine he would have been able to keep the Nazi influence at bay, or so he thought. This was in the days before the answering machine. Heidegger invented the answering machine. Not Constant's answering machine that installs an important separation between the public and the private, but that other answering machine—the one that is owned by those people who want to avoid reality, and who will not take that call/calling. The same people who would rather stick their heads in the sand than answer the call they've received (from the Führer, for example)—those who say neither

yes or no. Please, leave your message after the beep and we'll get back to you—in about twelve years. We know better than that. In Rüdiger Safranski's biography we have read that "National Socialism" had already been the preferred topic of conversation at the Heideggers' mountain resort in Todnauberg during the early thirties. Even then Heidegger had already been convinced that only Nazi dictatorship could save Germany from that most vicious of cultural threats, that of communism. Heidegger didn't really need that call from Obersturmführer Baumann to remind him—he had always been a national socialist, if not in his mind then at least in his heart. Not even the charcoal-colored Bolero 550, the top model in Belgacom's new line of answering machines, could have saved his soul.

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN OSCILLATION INDEX

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One of the things that reminds me about why the net matters is seeing Rupert Murdoch's face on the front cover of *The Australian* newspaper. He owns that newspaper, but that's not the only reason it covered his speech to News Corporation stockholders on the front page. News Corp is a major international corporation. One that just happens to be based in the provincial Australian city of Adelaide, where the local stock market rules are a convivial environment.

News Corp companies own 70 percent of Australian newspapers, measured by circulation. Australian media is one of the most highly monopolized in the world, and as such is a model for how other national media environments are likely to turn out, if they follow the kind of regulatory practices that successive Australian governments adopted.

It matters that there is a space in which to write about these kind of things, which is why the net matters, for instance. I write for *The Australian*, but while I personally have no complaints about the way that paper treats my writing, its not a publication that has a terribly strong interest in this issue of media concentration.

For a while it looked as though the net could be some kind of ideal alternative to big media. It didn't turn out that way. Its curious how skepticism about the potential of the net was very unevenly distributed. While the net was supposed to be a gossamer thread weaving in and out of national spaces, escaping from them or subverting them, I don't think that's turned out to be the case. So while its good to have a new space, outside of big media, its still an open question what kind of space it is. The virtuality of the net, it seems to me, is imperfectly mapped.

I'm writing from a milieu in which there was never any great enthusiasm for what Mark Dery calls the "theology of the ejector seat." There was never a strong sense in Australian culture that technology was a route to transcendence. Its true that Rupert Murdoch actually expressed an enthu-

siasm for global media's capacity to break down totalitarian governments, but this was more of a pragmatic than a transcendent way of thinking. It was a view of changing media in terms of undoing something wrong, rather than of raising the human essence to a sublime plane. In any case, its a remark he seems to have retracted when it caused difficulties for him in the emerging Chinese market.

By the same token, I don't think Australian culture is a milieu all that receptive to the European alternative to transcendent American thinking about the net. In the European view, as Geert Lovink once summarized it, the media is not just a political and cultural space, but a metaphysical one. Its not a question, in this version of media theology, of the leap forward, the raising of consciousness to a new plane. Rather, its a more classical ideal. Behind the actual, messy, everyday business of the media, lies the pure, rational, and just concept of what the media ought to be. This shining ideal, rendered so flatly in English, is the "public sphere."

There could be particular historical accidents behind these perceived differences. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari say, "the only universal history is the history of contingency." So its not a matter of any intrinsic essence of Americanness or Europeanness. It's a matter of accidents that lead to the formation of milieus, which in turn incubate particular concepts. A milieu, in Deleuze and Guattari's thought, is a plane upon which difference proliferates. But there are different planes. They are historical and contingent, and theory has to seek them out.

This, incidentally, is where media theory collides with Deleuze and Guattari. Its clear from the first milieu they talk about, that which simultaneously produced Aegean trade routes, Greek democracy, the city state and the practice of philosophy, is among other things a media milieu. The calm pond upon which the vectors of bronze age naval skill could navigate, the construction of cities around spaces of talk, the practices of oratory and of writing—its a media milieu.

On this score, their work is intersects with that of the great, neglected Canadian pioneer of media theory, Harold Innis. For Innis, a milieu can be made out of many different kinds of communication vector, all of which cross space and time in different ways. Some media, like writing on papyrus, are space binding, good for sending orders and running an empire. Some are time binding, like carving in stone, are time binding, good for priestly casts to maintain their authority through the ages. Innis saw ancient Egypt as a complex struggle between these vectors, a shape-shifting milieu. Deleuze and Guattari touch on a way of seeing classical Greece the same way. But it is the Canadian who has the stronger sense of the material construction of the vector, and its fragility.

It matters, this historical and materialist analysis of how a milieu makes a culture possible, makes certain kinds of ideas possible. But the milieu doesn't determine the concepts that form within it. Rather, a milieu is a space of virtuality, out of which the contingent assembly of, say democracy and the city state and philosophy might emerge.

So what kind of milieu might produce not only Rupert Murdoch but also a certain uneasy distance from both American cyberhype and European net-

critique? The same kind that produced Harold Innis—a peripheral, new world environment. One in which the media space of the nation actually precedes the state.

Recent historical research by Graeme Osborne and others shows how the colonial era constitutional conventions, out of which arose Australian federation in 1901, were also forums that took a keen interest in intercolonial telegraphy and coastal shipping—the earliest vectors out of which the space of the nation was created.

The very existence of the colonial, peripheral world depended on the construction of a milieu. Innis showed this in the Canadian case in terms of the importance of a trans-Canadian rail link as a way of averting dependence on the markets and information centers of the U.S.

The mix of pragmatism and anxiety in Australia or Canada, about the transformative power of communication vector, seems to me to have a long history, born of the struggle to create a milieu that might make it possible to even imagine what these places are. What comes naturally to the old world or the metropolitan centers is to the periphery an object of continual anxiety. Europeans and Americans, whatever their differences, argue about what kind of identity they possess. Australians and Canadians argue about whether they have any identity at all. Given the fragile state of the milieu in which the question gets asked, its not surprising that the answer is often that it has all come to nothing, that the milieu is dissipating into the global slipstream. Innis was strongly involved in policy decisions to try and maintain the Canadian milieu. Much the same effort has gone into the maintenance of an Australian media space, although somewhat unevenly so. There was practically no Australian content on television in the late fifties and early sixties. It took a conscious effort to create a partition behind which some kind of local media milieu could exist, and of course changes in media form continually challenge its existence.

Some may ask why it matters. Surely nationalism belongs to the right? Surely the left is internationalist in outlook? Yes and no. In Europe, where nationalism has so often existed in fascist forms, where its ideological premise has so often been "blood and soil," its a tainted concept. But in states that resisted fascism and Stalinism, maintained democratic constitutions, and indeed may require the ongoing viability of the state in order to avoid the imperial demands of stronger and more populous states, there's an argument for a radical nationalism. It provides the semipermeable membrane within which differences local to that milieu can articulate themselves, discover their own virtuality.

This is a very different thing to the coercive nationalism of, say the One Nation Party. Indeed, it may be the only way to resist it. Exposure of national economies to global economic opportunity and global flows of information entails a cost, one that rural constituencies and low skilled workers are going to bear more heavily than anyone else. Their demand is for a strong state to protect their interests and affirm their existing culture, without any recognition of the need for change and negotiation with difference. The state has to be an agent that negotiates differences, between cultures, between concepts of the shared culture, and which makes globalization actually work

in terms of generating jobs, distributing wealth and so on.

But the preservation of a purely national space media space can produce unintended results. One of which is Rupert Murdoch. I mentioned that Australian media is a highly monopolised space. Part of the reason is the restriction on foreign ownership, which over the years created a protected market for local oligopolists. Now we're down to two: Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer. The latter diversified into other kinds of business; the former built a global media business, and hence is the more internationally famous. Ironically, I see constant reports from other countries where business and government elites justify restricting the flow of international capital into their media businesses on the grounds that they have to resist Murdoch. But the process usually serves only to create local "Murdochs." Or perhaps local Kerry Packers. This is the sense in which monopolization proceeding from to simplistic a linkage of local ownership to local content production is a perverse outcome of nationalistic media regulatory policies.

I once said that Australia needed a branch of the Soros Foundation because its media configuration was even more of a threat to the "public sphere" than in some Eastern European countries. I wasn't necessarily kidding. Part of the impetus for wanting to create a media practice in the margins stems from the monopoly conditions so evident in the center of Australian media. The larger point about peripheral media zones in the new world is that the pragmatics of maintaining any kind of media milieu at all rules out the kind of effervescent optimism of American cyberhype. That and the lack of deep cultural roots for the kind of Protestant millenarianism within which cyberhype thrives. Seen from the outside, transcendent faith in technology looks like the kind of confident doctrine that could only flourish close to the heart of empire, even if that empire is now a military entertainment complex, rather than a military industrial complex.

Ambivalence about European media metaphysics may have even deeper roots. Kant's essay on the enlightenment can stand as Foucault's exemplary document of the eighteenth-century idea of reason, and Bentham's Panopticon as the nineteenth-century engraving in stone and flesh of the instrumental consequences of that reason. But seen from the other side of the world, the key figures are quite different. The eighteenth-century man of reason who matters is not the idealist Kant but the more practical Joseph Banks, botanist, and explorer, who brought back from Cook's voyages of discovery in the South Pacific whole categories of plant and animal species that did not fit the ideal order, the "chain of being," that pre-empirical science imposed on the natural world. Empiricism begins, to put it crudely, with the attempt to integrate the Pacific into the matrix of knowledge. Its data blew that matrix apart, and empirical order, where the categories are imminent in the differences within the data, gains ascendancy.

One of Bentham's famous pamphlets was "Panopticon or New South Wales?" Of course, the Panopticon was never built. English power never really depended on its disciplinary strategies of enclosure and classification. Instead of putting prisoners inside Panopticons, the English sent their resistant surplus populations to the colonies, including New South Wales, Australia.

In short, a strategy not of turning inward, rationalizing and making pro-

ductive a space long inhabited, but rather a strategy of looking outward, across the open plane of the sea, for space across which power could be extended. Colonial expansion, at which the English excelled, is the unexplored side of European enlightenment and modernity. That colonial expansion always involved the projection of a matrix of vectors across the globe. Enlightenment was not a matter of constructing the metaphysical public sphere in which the essence of pure rationality could find it self. Enlightenment was a matter of constructing a matrix of communication and transport via which the raw materials for constructing modern life could be systematically extracted from the colonies to the advantage of the metropolis.

Of all the paths out of colonialism, places like Canada and Australia had the easiest route. It was granted without a fight. But this lack of self legitimacy stemming from postcolonial struggle comes back to haunt these exceptional peripheral zones. These are not milieus that ever had the confidence to create powerful ideas. These are milieus that were always-already experiencing "globalization" as a source of anxiety. What appears as a late twentieth-century phenomena was actually a foundational one.

In the Australian case, the impulse toward federation into a national space was in a large part what we now call globalization. Federating the colonies was seen as a way of creating economic sovereignty, and preventing the recurrence of the depression of the 1880s. That both the 1880s and the 1930s created worse experiences of depression in the periphery than in the metropolitan centers indicates that the counter-globalizing impulse was not successful.

What I'm trying to say is that its hard, from the periphery, to share the enthusiasm for any of the reigning discourses of cyberspace, as they all seem to me implicated in the uneven spatial distribution of what I would call *vectoral power*. Unlike disciplinary power, vectoral power engages with an outside, and is a completely flexible relationality. Its a matrix of vectors that distributes a flow of information, which in turn organizes a flow of material resources. But from the telegraph to telecommunications, it has always been experienced in the periphery as an unequal flow. How can you get enthusiastic in the periphery about new imperial vectors? How can you get enthusiastic in the periphery about new rhetorics about the power of new modes of communication?

It all sounds so attractive, and of course the attraction of American cyberhype and European net-criticism is itself imperial. It emanates from a center. Here's the irony: a rhetoric about networks and distributed communication that seems, in its own pattern of distribution, very highly centralized. It's hard not to oscillate between tepid enthusiasm and vehement distaste.

But this is only a critique of the limits of transcendent cyberhype and metaphysical net-critique. The trick is to find some potential for a positive relation to one or the other. There may be one advantage in being in this ambivalent oscillation about both American transcendent media theory and European metaphysical media theory: That is that it's possible to see a way out of the impasse created by their confrontation.

It seems to me that both transcendence and metaphysical critique both rely,

in the end, on the kind of Platonism that the empirical revolution that followed from the discovery of the South Pacific so radically challenged. Whether the ideal is something to which to move "forward," in transcendence, or discover by stepping back towards the purity of the eighteenth-century image of the public sphere, it is still an ideal, against which the messy difference and chaotic movement of actual media and culture are measured and found wanting. Both transcendence and critique stage media theory as a kind of negativity. The roots of the difference between these kinds of negativity lie in the differences between the kinds of milieu that make them possible.

Of course there are lots of different ideas about the media, in either the American or the European milieu. These ideas are not an ideal expression of the milieus in which they arose—to think that way is still to be trapped within Platonism. Rather, they are just one expression of what those milieus make possible, but in each case, they are expressions that keep getting repeated. There are institutional constraints producing transcendence and critique, over and over—or at least so it looks when you consider media theory from somewhere else. One of the institutional constraints, seen from the periphery, is the desire to reinvent the imperial necessity. The metropolitan powers, no longer able to project force with impunity around the globe, or even across the Balkans, supplement the vectors of material force with vectors of information.

I never thought I had much to contribute to either the transcendent or the critical media theory project. I'm from a milieu that just doesn't support the kind of confidence that is required. I'm too much a product of anxiety, skepticism, a modest and practical sense of what media are for. Not to mention a suspicious mind when it comes to declarations of a new technique of enlightenment that emanates from new or old imperial centers. On the periphery, its enough just to keep the space viable, open but not too open, internally differentiated but not incoherent. Australian culture is just one big listserver, and its enough just to manage the flame wars, keep the traffic steady, implement the new version of the technology when it arrives—from elsewhere.

And of course there was the rise of a nationalism of the right—a serious matter in a country where nationalism is usually on the left. There were local matters to take care of. But now, I'm starting to wonder about what productive use to make of this ambivalence about critique and transcendence. European media theory has been doing a good job of critiquing transcendence—critique is what it does best. But its rhetorical structure is not so different. There is always a Platonic ideal lurking behind the critique of appearances, against which appearances are measured and found wanting.

But the ideal is just the ideal. The public sphere is just a beautiful work of art, made possible by the fact that the resources of the world were exploited to create a milieu in which beautiful ideas could be thought. From Kant to Habermas; from Rousseau to Debord. Images of an ideal matrix of communication against which the real can be judged and found wanting have changed shape and color, but the structure of the discourse persists.

This much has been obvious for some time, but the transition from the broadcast era to cyberspace brings new problems out into the open. Critique

was popular when it appeared that there was a centralized media that state and capital controlled between them. The metaphysics of critique fitted with the politics of the left. The image of an ideal world of true expression that would reign once the actual, coercive regime of state and capital controlled media was overthrown provided a source of legitimacy for judging media in terms of what it lacked. The technical details of this philosophy were always to be filled in later.

But the proliferation of do it yourself media, even before the internet, and accelerating with it, can't be sustained by critique alone. It requires a positive practice. If anything, the practice of the net has been hampered by critique. Critique is a set of tools for persuading oneself that reality isn't good enough when compared to an ideal. Its not so good for discovering the potential of what is actually there. Critique sees the glass half empty, not the glass half full. A virtual media theory sees the glass half full, and wants to know what could potentially come out of any and every possible microscopic agitation, not just within the water, but also within the glass.

The internet appears to the Platonism of media critique as something like the South Pacific appeared to the Platonism of classical naturalism. It communicates new data that doesn't fit the ideal scheme of the order of forms. It requires an empirical approach to the production of categories and concepts, imminent to the data, not imposed upon it. Empirical, but not empiricist. The facts of the net, like the facts of the new world, are not enough. They require conceptualization if their potential usefulness is to be realized.

Cultural studies has known for some time now that even broadcast media were complex. There were subtle and differentiated relations going on between the mass of the audience and the mass media message. Break it down into its constituent relations—a good empiricist technique—and you find people resisting and negotiating meaning. You discover the chaotic, plural, differentiated world of the everyday. And it is nothing like the ideal of the public sphere. And there is nothing much to be gained by talking only about what actual popular culture and media lack. So while cultural studies worked its way through critical and negative concepts of the media, it worked its way through—almost—to a positive and virtual media theory. That, I think, is the next step.

Of course, empiricism was the original object of critique. Kantian critique responds, in the canonic history of western thought at least, to the empiricism of Hume. I thought this was a closed chapter in western thought until I read Deleuze's first book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, in which that veteran anti-Platonist and anti-Kantian revisits the scene of that conflict. His task in that book is firstly to restate empiricism as a philosophy of difference, one that fashion concepts to match the flux of perceptions. His second task is to show the ethical import of such an affirmation.

Practical empiricism has its uses, from running an imperial state to running a global media empire like News Corporation. Conceptual empiricism, the path Deleuze opens up, seems to me to have a different import. It's an alternative to both the transcendent ideal of cyberhype and also to the metaphysical ideal of critique. Ironically enough, I feel like I need the authority of a metropolitan intellectual to state it, but there is another way

to think about media theory, and in particular media theory in the age of the internet. The flux and difference of experience of the media can no longer hide behind critique, as it did in the mass media age. It has to be central to the theory.

In particular, it means moving from a theory of representation to one of expression. What cyberhype and net-critique have in common is a critique of appearances that finds them wanting in relation to the idea. The solution in cyberhype is transcendent. The rude differences and misunderstandings of bad communication will be superseded by better technology, which will merge all differences into one. An imperial idea if ever there was one. Critique works differently. It wants to insist that there are certain conditions under which the jarring differences of false representation can be eliminated, and communication can be perfected according to a social rather than a technological ideal. But the question to ask is what and who is to be excluded.

A theory of expression, on the other hand, would see noise, difference, irrationality, as integral parts of communication. The goal would not be to try and eliminate difference, but propagate it. The image would not be critiqued in terms of what it lacks, for its failure to be an authentic representation of the real. Rather, the difference it introduces, its inevitable falseness, would be the starting point of the possibility of the virtual. The imperfection of communication is the ethical basis of the potential for the world to be otherwise.

It seems to me that virtuality is already alive and well in the actual practice of media theory as it occurs on the internet. On nettime, for example. There are occasional, high profile attempts to see net-critique as a binary or dialectical process, as the negation of cyberhype, transcendence, the "California ideology." This is critiqued as a false representation, and found wanting according to a true ideal. But it seems to me that this is the least useful aspect of emergent net-based media theory. It seems to me to be the aspect of it still tied most uncritically to imperial desires, no matter how unconscious. I oscillate between indifference and annoyance about them.

But what flows through the cracks in net-critique is something else. A new, positive, productive and connective creativity. New perceptions and new conceptions of those perceptions. An improvised discourse. Just as the eighteenth-century enlightenment was shaped by the milieu of inter-European trade and communication, so too a new milieu struggles to emerge, and one that is potentially even more spatially and temporally diverse. There are not only new spaces, but new speeds. But they struggle to escape from the unthought part of a past enlightenment, and in particular the unthought participation in imperial power of the information vector and the discourses that legitimate it. I started by suggesting there was something specific about a milieu that lacks an imperial confidence, and that working and thinking in Australia was just such a milieu. But I am sure there are many others. The potential is with us now to start breaking up the massified blocks into which specific milieus had congealed, particularly in the broadcast age. But this has to be seen from the peripheral as well as the imperial and metropolitan point of view. The desire on the part of News Corp to break down national spaces is clear, Its about getting in behind the partition and extracting value out of putting a vector into such spaces from without. But from the

peripheral point of view, the desire is quite different. Its rather to break open imperial milieus and expose the differences lurking within them.

Strange as it may seem, I agree with the analysis of both Richard Barbrook and "Luther Blissett," as incompatible as they may seem. Barbrook has attacked versions of Deleuze's thought that would read it as a restatement of critical idealism, where the rhizome occupies the same place as an ideal concept that the public sphere occupies in a more classical formulation of media-metaphysical desire. Luther Blissett has thought its way out of the Marxist version of critique, into a more productive concept of the virtuality of communication. Of course the language Barbrook and Blissett use are poles apart, but nothing much of a productive nature emerges from trying to read them as occupying the same milieu, some kind of pan-European theory-wonderland. They are local and contingent expressions of a way out of critique that operate in different milieu, but as yet have little to say to each other—or perhaps to anyone else, other than as instances of a virtuality of media theory, two coordinates of an unknown map of possible ways of making a difference. I suspect that there might be a way to go back and more creatively reread some of the American work here too. Not as the big bad other of critique, but as local and contingent strategies within an particular milieu.

So this is my "southern oscillation index," my sense of ambivalence about a project of constructing a new space for net theory, but which I think has to look also at the skew of the old spaces, out of which it might potentially grow. The southern oscillation index, for those from the north, is the weather pattern over the Pacific which determines which side of the South Pacific the rain will fall on—South America or Australasia. But I think its a nice image of peripheral sensibility, wavering between participation and indifference to the remaking of the media metaphysics of the North.

SUBJECT: SHORT NOTES ON THE POLITICAL CONDITION OF CYBERFEMINISM

FROM: FAITH WILDING <FWILD+@ANDREW.CMU.EDU> AND CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE
DATE: WED, 14 OCT 1998 17:47:15 -0400 (EDT)

Cyberfeminism is a promising new wave of (post)feminist thinking and practice. Through the work of numerous net-active women, there is now a distinct cyberfeminist net-presence that is fresh, brash, smart, and iconoclastic of many of the tenets of classical feminism. At the same time, cyberfeminism has only taken its first steps in contesting technologically complex territories. To complicate matters further, these new territories have been overcoded to a mythic degree as a male domain. Consequently, cyberfeminist incursion into various technoworlds (CD-ROM production, web works, lists and news groups, artificial intelligence, and so on) has been largely nomadic, spontaneous, and anarchic. On the one hand, these qualities have allowed maximum freedom for diverse manifestations, experiments, and the beginnings of various written and artistic genres. On the other, networks and organizations seem somewhat lacking, and the theoretical issues of gender regarding the technosocial are immature relative to their development in spaces of greater gender equity won through struggle. Given such conditions, some feminist strategies and tactics will repeat themselves as women attempt to establish a foothold in a territory traditionally denied to them. This repetition should not be considered with the usual yawn of boredom whenever the familiar appears, as cyberspace is a crucial point of gender struggle that is desperately in need of gender diversification (and diversity in general).

TERRITORIAL IDENTIFICATION

What is the territory that cyberfeminism is questioning, theorizing, and actively confronting? The surface answer is, of course, cyberspace, but such an answer is not really satisfying. Cyberspace is but one small part, since the infrastructure that produces this virtual world is so vast. Hardware and software design and manufacture are certainly of key importance, and perhaps most significant of all are the institutions that train those who design and use the products of cyberlife. Overwhelmingly, these products are designed by males for business or military operations. Clearly these are still primarily male domains (i.e., men are the policy makers) in which men have the buying power, and so the products are designed to meet their needs or to play on their desires. From the beginning, entrance into this high-end technoworld (the virtual class) has been skewed in favor of males. In early socialization/education, technology and technological process are gendered as male domains. When females manipulate complex technology in a productive or creative manner, it is viewed and treated as a deviant act that deserves punishment.

This is not to say that women do not use complex technology. Women are an important consumer market, and help maintain the status quo when the technology is used in a passive manner. For example, most institutions of commerce or government are all too happy to give women computers, email accounts, and so on if it will make them better bureaucrats. This is why the increased presence of women on the net is not solely a positive indication of equality. In the seventies, creating a female mythology was an inspiring and necessary part of recovering and writing the histories of women, and of honoring female cultural inventions and female generativity (the Matrix). Cyberfeminist mythologizing is a welcome sign of inspiration and empowerment, and at this point in time, makes good tactical sense. Such work offers a clear explanation of a constructive relationship between women and technology, and it begins the process of rewriting the gender code of cyberspace. However, in a political sense, the function of the mythic "natural woman" has its limits. In this case, it seems just as likely that weaving was a woefully boring task that was forced upon the disenfranchised. (This trend of boring and alienating work as the domain of the disempowered is certainly repeating itself in the pancapitalist technocracy.) As cyberfeminist critique increases in complexity, and therefore in ambiguity, the current cyberfeminist mythology will have to fade away much as matriarchal Crete and cunt iconography did in the late seventies.

SUBJECT: FOR A COLONIAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CYBERSPACE

FROM: OLIVER MARCHART <OLIVER@T0.OR.AT>
DATE: SUN, 27 SEP 1998 15:17:21 +0200

"As the price of connecting to Cyberspace continues to rise by the privatization of the Net, more and more souls are pushed out of the New World. The Old World is corrupting the New World which has the potential to liberate the dreams of the water inside the Global Brain."

This quote is taken from a printed collection mostly of emails, which has been put together by Alan Sondheim (*Being Online: Net Subjectivity*, NY: Lusitania, 1997). The sender is a Goddess by the name of Doctress Neutopia (a/k/a Gaia Queen) and her mail bears the subject header: "Message from Neutopia." Doctress Neutopia and her Church is a usenet "troll," a hoax especially designed as an easy target for critiques of eco-hippie-ideology. Nonetheless, in order to be operative the whole joke has to sound realistic, that is to say, it has to employ already existing ideological material. The completely moronic neologisms of the churchlike "lovolution," "cyborgasm," or "soulization"—could quite easily stem from some "real" hippie-tribes of the internet—a place highly susceptible to neologisms. Doctress

Neutopia's cult is so "realistic," in a way, that it became one of the rare and sublime moments where parody turns into reality and reality turns into parody (see <http://genesis.tiac.net/neutopia>).

However, in the following I'm not going to take issue with the hilarious metaphor of the global brain—mostly employed by people who seem to be lacking a brain of their own. Nor do I intend to analyze the cyberhippie or eco-fascist mythology of the net. I would rather prefer reading Doctress Neutopia's email as a hyperbolic example for what I would call the colonial discourse of the net (for that, see my "The East, the West and the Rest," in *Convergence* 4.2 [Summer 1998], 56–75). One could find, needless to say, numerous other texts—which do not intend to "troll" people—sharing the idea of cyberspace, the internet, as a kind of Utopia/Heterotopia/Dystopia, in other words, a New World, a New Continent. But let us stick for a second to this specific fantasy and have a closer look at the first two sentences Doctress Neutopia shares with us: "At first glance, entering into Cyberspace is like entering into a new frontier. The blank screen is like the vacuum of Outerspace or in the beginning there was nothingness and then came the World."

What I cannot but admire is the precise way in which a whole genre of narratives is condensed by Doctress Neutopia into a few phrases: What we find here is the notion of cyberspace as a new "frontier"; the notion of cyberspace as "blank screen"; the notion of cyberspace as "vacuum"; and the idea that this innocent "New-blank vacuum frontier screen-World" is being corrupted by the "Old World." All these concepts add up to an enormous liberatory pathos that goes hand in hand with the fantasy of dark powers corrupting cyberspace: "Again, the New World has been colonized by the manufacturers who push greed, private interest, the profit motive, pornography, and war."

"…A NEW FRONTIER":

At least since *Mondo 2000* called its Summer 1990 edition "The Rush is On! Colonizing Cyberspace," we knew what cyberspace is all about: a new colony, a virgin land ready to be discovered and explored by "pioneers of cyberspace" (John Perry Barlow). The most prevalent concept within cyberspatial colonial discourse, hence, is the notion of frontier (just think of the Electronic Frontier Foundation—no troll!). However, the metaphor of the new frontier is not exclusively employed in narratives of cyberspace but, of course, it stands in the tradition of one of the American founding myths. Frederick Jackson Turner in his canonical "The Frontier in American History" claimed as early as in the 1890s—apropos the Western frontier—that the "American character" was based on this very extension of "old" space into new territories. We know how prominent the concept is in regard to this specifically American ideology. In extension—given the American hegemony over the internet—we know about the prominent role of this concept in our cyberspatial imaginary. Yet, I would claim that the term frontier fulfills a concrete function in the discursive setting of Colonial Discourse in general. If we take a look at the discursive mechanism of constructing new world narratives we can discover the following logics: The distinction

between water and land, that underlies most narratives on major discoveries, seems to be blurred as soon as land becomes equivalent to frontier. In this case land doesn't denote anymore a kind of fixed and arrested territory but something fluid. The frontier in this sense takes on the characteristics of the wave (so we can speak about "surfing" in contexts of electronic networking). Thus, frontier plays the role of a hinge, a control button switching on and off processes of de- or re-territorialization. Therefore it has something to do with fluidity and fixation of (post-)colonial signifiers.

Referring to the stories of Hernán Cortés and others Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins observes precisely that floating character of the frontier: "the narratives that set out in search of a significant, motivating goal had a strong tendency to defer it, replacing arrival at the goal (and the consequent shift to another kind of activity) with a particularized account of the travel itself and what was seen and done.... Even goal-driven narratives like those of Raleigh and Columbus at best offered only dubious signs of proximity in place of arrival—at China, El Dorado, the town of the Amazons—phenomena that, interpreted, erroneously suggested it was just over the horizon, to be deferred to some later day." The conclusion we have to draw from these observations is that movement, fluidity and nonfixation seem to belong to the narrative core of New Worlds, since unlike the structure of some fairy-tales the motif of the quest doesn't culminate in the achievement of the goal. No matter if we speak about the discovery of really existing or of fictional places, Mary Fuller detects in all these reports that "the sequenced inventories of places and events replace, defer, and attest to an authentic and exculpating desire for goals the voyages almost invariably failed to reach" ("Nintendo and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue," in S. G. Jones, ed., *Cybersociety*, London: Sage, 1995, 63). What generates the narrative structure is movement in space and not arrival. It is nonfixity and not fixation.

On the other hand, book titles (*The Internet Navigator*, or *Navigating the Internet*), software names (Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer), and colloquial expressions (cybernaut and so on), indicate not only the fluid character of cyberspace but also the colonial attempt to master this flux, to "navigate" it, to map the waves. It is for this reason that we have to conclude that the discourse of discovery is structured around three principles at least: water as the very principle of nonfixation, something that threatens the enterprise of discovery and colonization. Land in the sense of stable territory that doesn't move under your feet and can be mapped and meticulously described. And finally frontier as something in between fixation and fluidity, that escapes the colonizing efforts by definition.

Now, arresting this escaping movement of frontier by transferring it into land—by fixing it—is what colonization (and politics) is all about: by defining the limits you are defining the territory—as blood and soil, for instance (it is in this sense that Michel de Certeau claimed: "the central narrative question posed by a frontier is 'to whom does it belong?' "). As long as "land" is understood as frontier (in the American tradition) it owns predicates indicating fluidity. Like a wave this frontier is unfixable. You can surf on it but you can't arrest it. As soon as you arrive at this frontier, as soon as "the West is won," so to speak, the colonization of the whole territory has already

begun and fixation sets in. Now, "land" doesn't mean anymore frontier; instead, it denotes a fixed and narrowly circumscribed, motionless terrain. It has lost all the predicates indicating the openness of meaning. At any rate, since this state of total colonization is not likely to be achieved, the political meaning of frontier lies precisely in its nature of something that cannot be fixed completely but nevertheless has to be fixed in one way or the other.

"…THE VACUUM OF OUTERSPACE…":

A certain branch of the vacuum-paradigm of cyberspace, sometimes called the "cues filtered out" approach, presupposes that disembodiment is supposedly allowing for an open reinvention of the self. These highly common ideas of, for example, unproblematic identity-switching, gender-swapping, and so on, are embedded in a rhetoric of self-creation and self-invention based on the assumption of a voluntarist subject, that is, a subject that sets and defines the conditions of his/her own possibility. By assuming the ability to define one's cyberspatial identity at will one is re-inscribing, like Michelle Kendrick puts it, "the myth of a coherent identity that exists outside and prior to the technologies which create cyberspace" (M. Kendrick, "Cyberspace and the Technological Real," in R. Markley, ed., *Virtual Realities and Their Discontents*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996, 146). Of course, this identity, a voluntarist subject, does not exist, but not, as Kendrick would have it, because of the "technological real," by which she understands the material effects virtualizing technology has on subjectivity. It is simply because nobody can define at will the conditions of his or her possibility, not even in electronic networks.

Why, then, is cyberspace not a vacuum? Because something or someone is already there. But who? Is there a way to encounter the "other," the net-natives? Let us approach this problem by way of analyzing a typical colonialist text: "Virtual Reality Warriors. Native American Culture in Cyberspace" by Patric Hedlund. The article, published in *High Performance*, narrates the story of David Hughes, described as "the Colonel," "the Cursor Cowboy," "Singer of ASCII Songs," "Poet Laureate of the Network Nation," who, back in the early nineties, invented an algorithm he baptized NAPLPS, which stands for North American (*sic!*) Presentation Level Protocol Syntax. The algorithm is supposed to wrap pictures and words together for artistic means so one can put it on galleries in cyberspace.

On one of his promotion tours, Hughes gave a workshop to a group of "native" American artists. Patric Hedlund reports that "though he didn't realize it at first, he'd finally found a people who could share his vision and then expand it". The article goes on praising the simplicity of Hughes's technology—obviously especially suited for "natives": "NAPLPS is as simple and ingenious a next step as smoke signals and the tom tom." Moreover, there seems to be a natural bound between the spiritual potential of cyberspace and the spiritual heritage of people with a close relation to nature and to their ancestors: "Using NAPLPS and telecommunications to extend the reach of their ancient stories and images wasn't much of a leap at all for people accustomed to hearing their grandparent's voices when they look up at the stars" (P. Hedlund: "Virtual Reality Warriors: Native American Culture in Cyberspace," *High Performance* 52 [Spring 1992], 31–35).

There are at least two levels of Colonial Discourse to be found in this article: (1) The article reports how cyberspace (thereby standing for "culture" in general) was brought to the American "natives" by "Poet Laureate of the Network Nation" David Hughes. On this level, the colonial force is the singing "Cursor Cowboy" whose aim is to enlighten the colonized. (2) On a more general level, the text itself recolonizes the "natives" by constantly putting them in a position of privileged access to "nature," "spirituality," "customs," "heritage," and so on. The new communication technology serves only as an extension of these substances, a means of their re-implementation. On this level, the colonial force is the author's voice and the "natives," hence, are nothing else than a projection of Patric Hedlund's.

"THE BLANK SCREEN…"

The lesson is the following: There is not a single level of colonial discourse where we can encounter the "real natives." But there is no complete unrestricted re-invention of the self either since the white surface—called the New Continent—is just a discursive assumption: you will never encounter a completely white surface, a vacuum. But what do you encounter instead? In this sense the analysis of Hedlund's article shows one interesting phenomenon: What you discover is always your own image in a reversed form (the only thing Hedlund, for instance, informs us about is her own prejudices). This sentence—since obviously it paraphrases the Lacanian communication formula—has an axiomatic status. Wherever you go, you are always already there. Speaking about "the other" from an ontological viewpoint therefore only makes sense as long as we mean a radical other. And in this case we can't say anything about it. In all the other cases, we don't speak about the other—the frontier's beyond—in any meaningful sense of the word—but about parts of ourselves: that is to say, we speak about the same.

The consequences are clear: the New World is always already the old one in a reversed form. The other you discover is always already the same in a reversed and thereby slightly rearranged form. There is no way of grasping the radical other, because as soon as you manage to grasp it, it immediately becomes part of your own. That's why cyberspace is discursively constructed as a new yet unapproachable continent: the discovery of new continents always leads to the repetitive projection of old myths on their supposedly blank screen. What we discover doesn't belong to the screen as such. It is our occidental imaginary that is projected onto these continents: India, China, Australia, America, Cyburbia. Cyberspace serves as a screen for our occidental imaginary, which has always been projecting its own myths onto newly discovered continents. Every Never-Never-Land is an Always-Already-Land. It might be because of this underlying logic that the electronic networks are said to represent a new America: an always receding horizon/frontier that has to be discovered and at the same time protected in its untouched innocent state.

Slavoj Zizek makes the same point in regard to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Poe's "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket," or Rider Haggard's "She" (*Plague of Fantasies*, NY: Verso, 1997). According to Zizek, the key paradox in these colonial stories has to be seen in the fact that in the

noncolonized core of the New Continent, in the "Heart of Darkness," in this phantasmatic beyond, we find again our own law, the law of the "white man." In the center of otherness we discover only the other side of the same, of ourselves: our own structure of domination. Or in case of "Arthur Gordon Pym," what he finds on his way to the Antarctic Pole after passing through a village inhabited by completely black "natives" (even their teeth are black) is "a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow." The structure of these tales, according to Zizek, is that of the Moebius strip: If you go on long enough what you'll find is not the complete other place—but your own one.

FOR A COLONIAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NET

So, can this logic of rediscovering the Old in the New be legitimately seen as one of "corruption," as Doctress Neutopia would have it? I claim such an ethical injunction is illegitimate. Ziauddin Sardar's "alt.civilizations.faq" is one of the texts that have a lot of valuable insights to offer for a Colonial Discourse Analysis of the net (in Z. Sardar and J. R. Ravetz, eds., *Cyberfutures*, London: Pluto, 1996). Unfortunately, even Sardar falls into the very trap of colonial discourse by calling cyberspace "the Darker Side of the West." So while he rightly assumes that people are projecting themselves on the world of cyberspace thereby "forging digital colonies on behalf of Western civilization" he conflates this theoretical insight with moralist lamentations: rootless, alienated individuals without any real identity are posting Nazi propaganda or fantasies about pedophilia and other sexual perversions, turning the whole net into a "toilet wall," and so on.

By complaining that all of this had nothing to do with "intimacy, tenderness or any other human emotion," by claiming that "one can't learn simply by perusing information, one learns by digesting it, reflecting on it, critically assimilating it," and by complaining about the infection of non-Western cultures by the Western "virus" of boredom, Sardar is not only giving in to purely Western ideologies like humanism, pedagogy, and a biologist language of disease, he is also employing the colonial motif of a place beyond "spiritual poverty," inhumanity, and alienation.

What I was describing above are significatory principles and not moral ones. A critique of Colonial discourse of the net can only proceed from within the discourse of colonialism, and the first step would be to describe the mechanism of its construction. It is in this sense that I can only subscribe to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says: "what I find useful is the sustained and developing work on the mechanics of the constitution of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the authenticity of the Other" (G. C. Spivak: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in P. Williams and L. Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993). One of these mechanisms—from the perspective of hegemony theory—clearly is the articulation of a chain of equivalence. It is the "New Continent" or "New World" which, as central metaphor, is linking notions like "frontier," "dark space," "vacuum," or "blank screen" together in a chain of equiva-

Not exactly a hoax. Doctress Neutopia (Libby Hubbard) is serious, and is (or was) based at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She used to post her plans for a utopia organized as a sort of hive, with herself as queen, to alt.cyberpunk, alt.slack, alt.magick, and similar groups until the usenet gods gave her a newsgroup of her own—alt.society.neutopia—in 1994. I read it, er, religiously for most of 1995. The newsgroup's population is Doctress Neutopia, a few friends, and a legion of mockers and scoffers like Lupus Yonderboy and "Jesse Garon" (named after Elvis Presley's stillborn twin brother). There was a lot to parody. Drs. Neutopia also posted the often-embarrassing details of her love affairs/attempts to kick off the lovolution.

The scoffers made short work of Neutopian ideology. The Monster Truck Neutopians (<http://www.primenet.com/≠~lathrop /monster.html>) gave themselves titles like Chief of the Secret Police and Chief Sanitation Engineer, held barbecues, wrote songs, and adopted as their anthem "Wild and Blue," a country/western ballad about a cheatin' husband, by U.K. pop group The Mekons. Neutopia is such an easy a target that it spawned its (highly entertaining) parody long ago.

Somewhat in the context of Oliver's piece, you could say Neutopia is an updated version of early American utopian colonies like Oneida and the Shakers, though of course it never went beyond the planning stages. Speaking of the Shakers, Neutopian sex is a nonphysical "massgasm," a sort of group version of the Shakers' "karezza."

Thanks, Oliver, for reminding me about this. Alt.society.neutopia has definitely seen better days (Neutopian and Monster Truck Neutopian websites are decaying fast) but, like Camelot, it will always exist in the hearts of those willing to believe.

[Bureau of Control <carlg@pop.net>, Re: Greetings from Neutopia, Sun, 27 Sep 1998 15:01:16 -0400]

lences; and—vice versa—these notions specify our very ideas about this "New World." By linking the latter to signifiers like love, ecofeminism, and so on—like in the Doctress Neutopia–hoax or related discourses—our ideas, again, are specified in a certain way.

This being so, shouldn't we assume that every discourse is already a troll since it cannot refer to any underlying "reality" but has to construct the latter out of contingent elements? That is to say, isn't the colonial discourse of the net already something like a troll in itself, a mere construction or articulation of a chain of signifiers? Couldn't something like Sardar's moralist construction of the net as "toilet wall," for instance, perfectly qualify as a troll? And isn't Hedlund's construction of "natives" who are supposedly "playing tom tom" with the net even very likely to be a troll? The answer can only be twofold. First: It is not a question whether or not Colonial Discourse is a troll. The question is who has the power to play the trick. Second: It is precisely because of the constructed character of every discursive chain that, in principle, Colonial Discourse is open for anti-colonial re-articulation. Let's do it.

SUBJECT: DATA TRASH UPDATE

FROM: MIKE WEINSTEIN <WEINSTEI@POLSCI.PURDUE.EDU>
DATE: THU, 17 SEP 1998 13:57:54 +0100

Dear netizens,

Let's begin with the event-scene, the vest-pocket theorization of a media factoid that tells a cautionary tale, which Arthur Kroker and I devised as a genre for undermining virtuality from within. *Data Trash* is an accumulation of event-scenes; its theoretical postulations are extrapolations and exaggerations of our associations with the factoids that arrested us as we wrote the book as a series of exchanges across the net. Each of us would write a section of a chapter, send it to our partner, and then the partner would take off from the other's text, freely varying the themes that had emerged. The interpretation grew through our self-reflections and our collaboration. I don't believe that such a project would be possible without the instantaneous quality of the net as a vehicle of text transmission. The immediacy of our interchange created in us a mutual frenzy that sent us careening into cyberpunk realism. The game of matching event-scenes is the friendly context that engendered *Data Trash*. The book is not only about the net but is of it, exemplifying in its constitution an actualization of one of the net's distinctive possibilities and deconstructing by its constitution any interpretation of *Data Trash* as a negation of the net.

OSAMA BIN LADEN'S CAVE

Osama Bin Laden, arch-terrorist, current scapegoat of Amerikkka—replacing Noriega, Hussein, Khaddafi, Ayatollah Khomeini, and so on, ad infinitum (flies in the neoliberal ointment)—supposedly holes up in a cave in Afghanistan bereft of indoor plumbing or a well-stocked pantry, but graced with a stupendous library of Islamic theology books and a communications complex that gives him instant access to cyberspace.

Hybrid monster and the perfected bimodern personality, Bin Laden is the absolute synthesis of technology and primitivism, finding no contradiction whatsoever between virtuality and stringency. He is also a monopoly capitalist and an Islamic (retrofascist) restorationist.

Bin Laden demonstrates that the only inevitability of the net is to suck us into it one way or the other. Whatever his boring aims of an Islamic renascence might be, he is complicitous in virtualization. He leaves the cave to defecate; he goes back in to communicate. Visit his website and tell him you care.

Bin Laden replaces Bill Gates as Numero Uno Net Man. This absurd figure—also, perhaps, the most "interesting" (in Nietzsche's sense) man of our time and quite attractive, brilliant and engaging—is the kind of mutant that we are likely to see more of as virtualization continues to infest the earth and heavens, and the flesh rejected by it rebels against its technocorporate avatars, all the while feeding like a parasite on their apparatus and confirming thereby its hegemony.

Bin Laden as the world's great comic ironist: his media den is a cave without a john. Home revolution is even more absorbing than home shopping. Hussein watches CNN.

DATA TRASH FIVE YEARS LATER

The major thesis of *Data Trash* still holds true today: the drift of "history" is toward virtualization. The only difference five years later is that the managed depression that we diagnosed back then and that nobody else noticed, has now become unmanageable: the "debt liquidation cycle" has now become too obvious to ignore. As a result, resistances to pancapitalism are appearing everywhere and they are mainly taking a retrofascist form. Fascism at its origins is bimodern, uniting the myth of an heroic premodern past with a promiscuous deployment of technology. In its recrudescence it becomes a denizen of cyberspace, along with everything else.

The virtual class is at home everywhere. Its members are apparatchiks who spread virtualization; it is indifferent to their class interest whether they work for capitalists, communists or fascists. They will satisfy the appetite for virtuality of a species that loathes itself enough to wish to be replaced under whatever regime exists. Now we are learning that no ideology is immanent to the net. Its political essence is neither anarcho-democracy (the utopia of a technological avant-garde), capitalist empowerment (exploitation), nor communitarian resistance, but the virtualization of all of these. The virtual class has no political ideology of its own; it will serve the master of the moment, who will always help it spin the net of virtualization in which all ideologies will be caught and eventually volatilized.

The recline into virtualization would be hastened by an ascendant capitalism, but it will be no more than delayed by the struggles between pancapitalism and retrofascism. Now is the time when severe conflicts will be fought on the net (as well as everywhere else), and the net will win every time (whichever local party gains a temporary victory), and triumph in the end, as long as we don't kill each other first or cause a calamity that rolls back technology. If there is a deep economic depression, the technological infra-structure will be severely stressed. Five years later *Data Trash* broods over apocalypse. Let's end with an event-scene.

THE MEDIA ROOM

Along with a host of other media, *USA Today*, would-be hegemonic medium par excellence (along with CNN), reported recently on the studies that have begun appearing about the psychological effects of plugging into cyberspace (Elizabeth Weise, "Delving Bit by Bit into the Secrets of the Net Mind" 9/2/98, p. 5D). It seems that people suffer mild depression after using the net and that the "overall rate of shyness among Americans" is now 50 percent, "up from a steady 40 percent since the 1960s." The liberal-humanist-behaviorist academics who conduct these studies conclude that "our brains...seem to be hard-wired to need social interaction." You don't get that from "virtual personae."

In a most diabolical piece of research, Dr. Clifford Nass of Stanford sat people down in front of computers and told them that the machines were "virtual personae" of various nationalities, races and genders. The subjects (the "human" ones) proceeded to treat the computers through their social stereotypes and to accord them social niceties.

However, these "people surrogates" seem to lack the pizzazz of flesh-and-blood creatures—the parts of the brain that "light up" during face-to-face interaction don't spark with the computer. Instead, people tend to come out of a session in a chat room or other net activity feeling that their precious time has slipped by in an addictive, compulsive blur. One knows the feeling; plowing through news groups, conducting endless web searches and following links, plowing through email (not to mention shopping)—all producing an irritating sense of futility and tedium pierced by the gnawing recognition of what one might have done with the lost time. This would be bad enough, but to make matters worse regret is followed swiftly by a self-contempt for having allowed oneself to have been gulled into cyberspace. But one will surely go there again, seduced by more riskless adventures. Depression, indeed. The net is our best preparation for death.

And what are we to make of the shyness epidemic? Here the liberal-humanist-behaviorists get on their hind legs and start barking about the loss of society—the disappearance of a "learning ground for people to relate to each other." The brain isn't light(en)ing up in the right places any more. It all comes down to this: will the androids, who will be fit to function in cyberspace, come on line before there is a social crash that prevents their advent and liquidates technology's "artificial nature" (Sorel); that is, will human beings drop the ball of cultural progress before the replacement team takes the field?

While Bin Laden plots revolution on the net, the Western masses are crippled in it, wallowing in their bland humiliation—rubes who can be induced to project their feelings on computers, addictive depressives who resemble nothing more than compulsive gamblers grimly looking for an elusive score, and timid folk who cannot bear contact with their own kind. They are the offerings of pancapitalism to virtuality. They are also its pathetic line of defense against retro-fascism.

Enjoy the apocalypse.

SUBJECT: I'D LIKE TO HAVE PERMISSION TO BE POSTMODERN, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHO TO ASK...

FROM: BETH@NETLINK.COM.AU <BETH SPENCER>
DATE: THU, 17 SEP 1998 13:57:54 +0100

THIS IS MY STORY, AND I'M STICKING TO IT.

Well, anyway, it's stuck to me now.

It all began—or my part in this story began—when my editor wrote a note on my manuscript saying: "You'll have to get permission for all these quotes." Although I suppose it really began when I naively wrote the book with all these quotes in the first place. Or maybe it began that day, back just before I was born, when my father walked into the house carrying a brand new television.

Of course, in some people's reckoning, it began when the U.S. dropped the bomb on Hiroshima...

Anyway, I'm part of a certain kind of world, and I write in a certain kind of way; a way, in fact, that has taken me about twelve years to develop. I used to write stories, and essays; and now I write stories that also sometimes function as cultural criticism, history and review.

As such, my book *How to Conceive of a Girl* (Vintage, 1996) incorporates lots of little narratives—outside texts—within its wider narratives. Everything from all the stories and anecdotes people have ever told me, to bits from *The Donahue Show*, the Bible, *In Bed with Madonna*, books on infertility and birth, lines from popular songs, gossip items from *New Idea*, fragments from philosophy texts, tourist information, characters from detective novels, excerpts from sixties school text books, and so on.

I'm definitely a magpie, but I have a taste generally for things that are well-worn; often things that are of no use any more, or so common that no one's really going to miss out if I make use of them too. The cast-offs or the mass-produced—all the things floating or left lying around out there. The space junk. Mostly things produced originally for an entirely different purpose. In general I don't pick my bits up out of someone else's nest, I pick them up off

the street, or in supermarkets, or I dig around in rubbish dumps. I'm really not sure how exactly I came to be suddenly convinced that I had to get permission for all these things or I was going to be sued... I guess I was isolated at the time, I was going through some other legal problems (and hence having to face "reality"—in which good intentions and ethics are largely irrelevant), and I tended to get conservative advice the first time around.

There are so many rumors out there; it's such a "gray" area of the law. I also knew that my own publisher had been sued last year, that it had cost them probably more than I'll ever make from this book, and that just generally everyone was clamping down all of a sudden on this kind of thing and becoming very serious about it.

So, there I am: ten hours a day on the phone, drafting letters and searching back through boxes of notes. Doing (what I now see as) crazy things like making about twenty phone calls trying to track down someone who might know where the records of the now defunct *Sunday Observer* are held so I can get the name of the journalist (no byline, so probably from the U.S.) who wrote a piece on Lynda Carter back in 1980... (A piece that some wonderful subeditor headed "I Want a Baby!—Confessions of Wonderwoman." So perfect. How can I presume to "make these things up" when they're so already out there?)

Then I'd used twenty-five words from an Agatha Christie novel—only twenty-five words, but it's Hercule Poirot and one of his memorable pronouncements on facts and slips... And forty-three words from a philosophy text—but do you need to get permission from the original author, the translator, or the journal in which it was published (or all three?).

Then there's that story within the story that I've rewritten from memory from a sixties *Reader's Digest Omnibus* which turns out to be an abridgment of a children's book by James Thurber... And just tracking down who holds the rights for a particular song can cost me $50 per song if I go through AMCOSS, so I join a Lou Reed mailing list on the internet to see if anyone out there knows and can tell me for free, and I get dozens of daily emails from fans all across North America listing every song in the order he sung them for every concert on his tour, and learn to refer to him as "Lou" or "The Man" like everyone else, and eventually after a few wild goose chases I find out that "Pale Blue Eyes" is administered by EMI. (Um... It was EMI that sued my publisher.)

You see, all this time while I'm busily scratching around after these motes, I guess what I'm desperately trying to ignore are a few rather large and uncomfortable logs. The first one is this: I've made seven references to particular recordings of songs in my book—albeit brief, some only a few words, but ask any music publishing company and they will act totally horrified and aghast at the idea that you could use any word or phrase from a song without permission. Permission fees for songs are determined by the company, but a fee of $150–250 is standard. Add that up, and these seven tiny references (and oh how merrily I knitted them in, in the first place) could end up as a bill for perhaps thousands of dollars...

And then the very nice young woman from Marie Claire in England ("Oh your book sounds absolutely wonderful!"): once I explain (on an expensive

telephone call late at night) that from the article syndicated to *Cosmopolitan* four years ago, I'm only using about eighty words that aren't actually on the public record, she says, "Oh, in that case it will just be a token fee of fifty pounds."

I see.

And so (fortunately) it's around about this time that I pause before I post out my two dozen letters seeking permissions...

What if even a proportion of these want to charge "token fees"?

The fact is, you don't earn much money from literary fiction in Australia—especially a book of experimental stories and novellas by an unknown author. Fees like this would not only put me in debt for the next few years, they would make it virtually impossible for me to keep doing what I do. In a very real way they threaten my next book, which I've already spent a year and a half researching, and they threaten everything I've spent twelve years learning how to do.

So there was this minor practical problem I had to deal with.

And then the other log that I could see (in my fitful nightmare-filled sleep, especially if I had to set the alarm to ring Lou in New York at some ungodly hour)—sweeping down the river toward me... Well, there were two of them, sort of tied together. And sitting up there on the first, with an expression on his face that I couldn't quite make out, was the ghost of J. M. Barrie.

In a novella that is about a third of the book, I've used the occasional brief quote from *Peter Pan* as a structuring principle—typographical stepping stones or punctuation points, if you like. Except that my Peta is a girl; which means that even when the quotes stay the same, with a girl-Peta and in the context of a story exploring being childless (either by choice or otherwise) and cultural notions of femininity and adulthood, they take on quite different meanings from the original. For instance:

"If you find yourselves mothers," Peta said darkly, "I hope you will like it."

The awful cynicism of this made an uncomfortable impression, and most of them began to look rather doubtful.

And there are other times where I've strategically misquoted.

Every time a woman says "I don't believe in babies" there's a baby somewhere who falls down dead.

The quotes are something like less than four hundred words out of twenty thousand; and I actually feel that Mr. Barrie himself would approve, but he's dead and it would be some unknown person who administers the estate making the decision. What if they, just personally, didn't happen to like what I was doing?

If they refused (and a copyright holder is not required to give any reason for a refusal), there goes a third of my book, and a year's work.

And on the other log: a whole heap of people from *Fatal Attraction*, barreling down on me for a story in which I've not just quoted bits of dialogue from the film, but have also appropriated the main characters and actors and sent them off on a mission around the back streets of Newtown in Sydney...

But how can I possibly ask James Dearden and Adrian Lyne for permission to critique their film in the way I have in this story? (It's not exactly a flattering view.)

So it was at around about this point that some of the people I was seeking advice from (such as the Australian Society of Authors—who did prove to be very helpful in the end), began to accept that maybe I wasn't just a criminal-minded anarchist postmodernist who wanted to be able to rip off other people's words without paying for them... That maybe my rights as a writer also needed defending. And that this (like most things in life) isn't just a simple black and white copyright issue, but is also about things like free speech. I can't keep writing this way if I have to pay everybody a tithe. (And I'm not just talking about lots of little sums: Macmillan in the U.K. wanted $500 for every print run for a few brief quotes and paraphrases from a seventies book about faeries; and EMI originally asked for $830 for eleven words from "Pale Blue Eyes").

It's a bit like when someone tells you an anecdote and you say, "Hm, can I use that in my next book?" and they say, "Do I get a royalty?"

It just can't work that way—if I paid everyone who's ever contributed something to my work, they'd all end up getting about half a cent each and I'd end up with nothing to pay my rent with and the added burden of knowing that every word I write might end up costing me more money than it's ever likely to make for me.

And I can't keep writing this way if anyone who doesn't like what I've said or implied about their work gets the right to refuse to allow me to refer to and quote from it.

The simple answer is: well that's what the fair usage clause is there for. (This is the clause within the Copyright Act that allows for "fair use" of another's work for the purposes of research, criticism, or review.)

But for one thing, this is a book of fiction. Can I really rely on getting a judge who understands that fiction can sometimes also be criticism?

And for another: Most of these things aren't decided by judges anyway, because they never get to court.

Music publishing companies realized this a long time ago: that it's whoever has the biggest team of lawyers and the most money to throw about who in effect get to set the laws. For a long time their interpretation—that even using one line of a song constitutes a copyright violation—has been accepted as fact. Even though to my knowledge this has never been tested in the courts; and it's certainly not the advice I received from the Australian Copyright Council.

In other words, if publishers settle out of court—and who can blame them?—it becomes irrelevant whether my use is legal or not. (And it's certainly irrelevant whether it's ethical or not.)

Let me say, here and right now, that I fundamentally support the principle of copyright protection for authors: that is, the principle of asking for permission to reproduce substantial pieces of another's work, and the need to compensate artists for any loss of sales this might involve, or for their original labor in producing the work. (Effectively so they can go on producing more work).

But I also believe in the principle of free speech, and the need for writers to be able to imaginatively, creatively and productively engage with the cultural products and contemporary cultural events around them. I can't see that it's in anyone's interest (least of all other artists' and musicians') for us to be forced

to go on writing books as if music, television, films and magazines don't exist or have important effects in the world or on people's lives and feelings.
And given the nature of contemporary culture, I really don't think it's useful to make a distinction between those who appropriate and those who don't. Everyone borrows from everyone; everything is connected to everything else. What I think is much more useful is to look at the effects and implications of the myriad different kinds of borrowings that do go on: the ethics, if you like, of each type of borrowing, and the politics.
For my own part: I don't just tack other people's work onto my own in order to enhance or embellish it (if I did, then it would be a much simpler proposition to just remove it and save myself time, money and trouble). I'm meticulous about referencing and acknowledging other peoples' work in my own—my initial training was as an historian, and I see no point in putting the quotes in if readers aren't aware of where they come from or aren't given a sense of their original context. Especially if what I'm trying to do is to critique, disrupt, extend or play with something, then it's essential that the original intention (or effects) be also made clear at the same time.
So these are my own personal ethics (or politics) about what I do.
Thus the problem for me, for instance, with Helen Darville's appropriations was not that she used someone else's words (I think pastiche as a form is fine; it can be effective and interesting if done well) but that she didn't acknowledge this. If she had, of course, then her own lack of personal experience and, hence, personal authority would have also automatically been acknowledged and made obvious, and this would have altered the whole way the book was experienced and read. It would have been a different book, with a different history (and vice versa).
Well, anyway, while Darville's lawyers may be able to sleep soundly with the conviction that her appropriations (while admittedly "bad form") are not actionable (that is, not a clear violation of the Copyright Act), I'm afraid I still have the occasional watery nightmare. (Especially with the new Moral Rights law ready to be introduced into Australian Federal Parliament at the next session... but that's a whole other kettle of worms.)
In fact, sometimes I wonder if it's not the case that the more ethical I am, the more potentially actionable I might be making myself in the long run.
There were more than a few times, when talking about these issues, in which I'd receive the helpful advice: well, just don't acknowledge it. Don't identify the source and no one will notice, or they'll have a harder time proving it. Just shuffle the words around a bit and leave off the author's name. Whatever you do, don't write and let them know!
In other words: steal it.
And I guess this is my concern: that if we have an inflexible attitude to the use of other people's words, then we are encouraging a climate in which people steal rather than borrow, pilfer rather than critique. Or where the jokes become merely private.
There seems to be this idea out there that appropriation is easy. A bit like the old idea that free verse in poetry is easy—if you don't have to rhyme, then hey, where's the talent in that? Anyone can be a poet (well yes, I guess, in a sense, that's the point)...

But if you are concerned with attribution and sourcing and referencing; with evoking the original context and maintaining the integrity of the fragment even in its new context; with and all these ethical and political issues, as well as trying to sew the whole thing together into a compelling narrative; with preserving a multiplicity of original voices, and yet still taking some kind of final authorial responsibility for what you are doing; it's actually quite complex and takes a lot of thought, and a lot of repetitive, painstaking labor, and imagination.

It's just not as easy as it looks.

I prefer to think of myself as a collaborator or cultural partner, not a thief.

In fact, without exception (including The Man himself, who instructed EMI to drop the fee to $130 after I wrote him a letter raising these kinds of concerns), every author I've been able to directly contact has been delighted that I've used their work and has wished me every success.

Lifting something can be exactly that; it doesn't have to be exploitative.

As Eudora Welty once put it: "Criticism can be an art, too. It can pick up a story and waltz with it."

SUBJECT: WHAT IS DIGITAL STUDIES?

DATE: TUE, 13 OCT 1998 13:00:21 -0400
FROM: ALEX GALLOWAY <ALEX@RHIZOME.ORG>

There is a need today to situate, keeping an eye on the scant technological ruminations of what we have come to call, simply, "theory," the growing mass of theoretical material devoted to digital technologies. In recent years digital technologies have become more and more involved in how we produce, consume and mediate texts. In light of these new technologies, one is compelled to rethink our theory of textuality, while at the same time, faced with a particularly insidious combination of intellectual technophobia and simply honest ignorance, one must bring a whole intellectual field up to speed, a field hitherto focused on post-structuralism, the signifier, Lacanian psychoanalysis, certain types of French literature and philosophy, structural marxism and media theory (that is, film, television and video).

While many have started to write theory on "technology" or "globalization"—both quite relevant to a study of new media—a second look discovers that much of contemporary theory does not engage substantively with the object of its analysis, the digital. So often, we are scared off too soon by the simple fact that it is technology. The above theoretical legacy—post-structuralism, film theory, and so on—provides us with many useful problematics. My goal is to determine which of these problematics is still relevant, then suggest a direction for the future of this field. Recent criticism focusing on new media is thus my focus on here, attempting to force through

this "descriptive" phase toward a more general theory of digital studies.
Digital studies takes digital technology as its object of analysis. Specific topics within digital technology include the internet, the internet browser, the digital "object" (for example, a webpage) and "protocol" (how digital objects are organized). For my purposes, digital studies is, like political economy before it, at once a new theoretical paradigm and a position-taking within that paradigm.
Several theoretical debates must be revisited with the advent of digital technologies. Specifically, in response to the textuality debate ("What is a semiotic network and how does it function?") digital studies argues against signification and the urge to find meaning in objects or texts. Digital studies is not interested in interpreting the web; it is not interested in offering a description of its meaningfulness or its signification.
The following are a few programmatic statements for digital studies. Digital studies is a argument for the idea that objects (net bodies) are organized through protocols into a "netspace" and that certain kinds of knowledge legitimate this organization. This is an argument for the category of netspace as a specific historical event, a result of the reorganization of bodies/objects (a putting-into netspace). Furthermore, it is an argument against those who rely on pragmatic, neoliberal explanations for the changes in social formations under late twentieth-century capitalism. Digital studies opposes the arbitrary use of old metaphors to describe netspace: the text, the tree, Cartesian space, and so on. Digital studies rejects the opposition between mind and body. Digital studies is also against the common notion that the so-called contemporary information overload is destroying social relations. On the contrary, we see not a disintegration but an extreme proliferation and subsequent regulation of social relations under the new media. Digital studies is, above all, a reaction to certain theorists' tendency to throw around the concepts of information economy, new media, networks, and so on, without ever actually describing the technologies at the heart of these changes.

"FIRST COMMODITY, THEN SIGN, NOW OBJECT..."

For many years now theorists have preferred to speak of value economies—be they semiotic, marxian, or psychoanalytic—in terms of genetic units of value and the general equivalents that regulate their production, exchange and representation. Tempting as it may be to follow the lead of film critics like Christian Metz and André Bazin and claim that, like cinema before it, the whole of digital media is essentially a language, or to follow the lead of *Tèl Quel* marxist Jean-Joseph Goux (or even the early economics-crazed Baudrillard) and claim that digital media is essentially a value economy regulated by the digital standard of ones and zeros—tempting as this may be, it is clear that digital media requires a different kind of semiotics, or perhaps something else altogether. The net does not rely on the text as its primary metaphor; it is not based on value exchange; its terms are not produced in a differential relationship to some sort of universal equivalent. Digital technology necessitates a different set of object relations. What are these relations?
In the digital economy there is a new classification system: object and pro-

tocol. As opposed to the sign, the digital economy's basic unit is the unit of content, an infoid, a digi-narrative. It is not simply a digital commodity nor a digital sign. The object is not a unit of value. The digital object is any content-unit or content-description: MIDI data, text, VRML world, image, texture, movement, behavior, transformation. The object is what Foucault calls a "body," or what Deleuze might call the content of an affect-image. Digital objects are pure positivities.

These objects, digital or otherwise, are always derived from a preexisting copy (loaded) using various kinds of mediative machinery (disk drives, network transfers). They are displayed using various kinds of virtuation apparatuses (computer monitors, displays, virtual reality hardware and other interfaces). They are cached. And finally, objects always disappear. Thus, objects only exist upon use. They are assembled from scratch each time, and are simply the coalescing of their own objectness. Platform independent, digital objects are contingent upon the standardization of data formats. They exist at the level of the script, not the machine. Unlike the commodity and the sign, the object is radically independent from context. Objects are inheritable, extendible, pro-creative. They are always already children. Objects are not archived, they are autosaved. Objects are not read, they are scanned, parsed, concatenated, and split.

Protocol is a very special kind of object. It is a universal description language for objects, a language that regulates flow, directs netspace, codes relationships and connects life forms. Protocol does not produce or causally effect objects, but rather is a structuring structure based on a set of object dispositions. Protocol is the reason that the internet works, and performs work. In the same way that computer fonts regulate the representation of text, protocol may be defined as a set of instructions for the compilation and interaction of objects. Protocol is always a second-order process; it governs the architecture of the architecture of objects.

To help understand the imbrication of object and protocol I offer four examples: HTML, the internet browser, collaborative filtering, and biometrics.

A scripting language for networks, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is a way of marking up text files with basic layout instructions—put this sentence in boldface, add an image here, indent this paragraph, and so on. As the universal graphic design standard since its introduction in 1990, HTML designates the arrangement of objects in a browser. The specifications for HTML 3.0 claim that "HTML is intended as a common medium for tying together information from widely different sources. A means to rise above the interoperability problems with existing document formats, and a means to provide a truly open interface to proprietary information systems." To the extent that HTML puts-into-verse text plus layout instructions and also undiversifies qualitatively different data formats, we may call it a versifier. HTML is a scalable protocol, meaning it is able to grow efficiently and quickly with the advent of new technologies. Unlike some other computer scripting languages HTML is platform independent: it is not restricted to a single operating system.

As the HTML example shows, a protocol facilitates similar interfacing of dissimilar objects. Contrary to popular conjecture, the digital network is not

a heterogeneity. It is a hegemonic formation, or rather, a dynamic process-space through which hegemonic formations emerge and dissolve. That is to say, digital networks are structured on a negotiated dominance of certain textual forms over other forms, all in accordance with schedules, and hierarchies, and processes. Protocol is the chivalry of the object. Objects are filtered, parsed, concatenated. They are not archived, filed, or perused (these are predigital activities). Protocol constitutes a truly rhizomatic economy. Ebb and flow are governed by the various network protocols (FTP, HTML, SMTP, and so on). Connectivity is established according to certain hierarchies. And like the logic of traditional political economy all elements conform to formal standardization. Textuo-digital protocol "allows objects to read and write themselves." And thus objects are not reader-dependent, rather, they take themselves to market.

One of the defining features of intelligent networks (capitalism, Hollywood, language) is an ability to produce an apparatus to hide the apparatus. For capitalism this logic is found in the commodity form, for Hollywood it is continuity editing. In digital space this "hiding machine," this making-no-difference apparatus is, of course, the internet browser.

The browser is an interpreting apparatus, one that interprets HTML (in addition to many other protocols and media formats) to include, exclude and organize content. It is a valve, an assembler, a machine. In the browser window digital objects (images, text and so on) are pulled together from disparate sources and arranged all at once, each time the user makes a request. There is no object in digital networks, or rather, the object is simply a boring list of instructions: the HTML file. Thus, the browser is fundamentally a kind of filter—something that uses a set of instructions (HTML) to include, exclude and organize content.

Despite recent talk about the so-called revolutionary potential of the new browsers (Web Stalker example <http://www.backspace.org/iod> is the best example), I consider all browsers to be functionally similar and subdivide them into the following classification scheme: dominant (Netscape and Explorer), primitive (Lynx), special media (VRML browsers, applet viewers, audio/video players, etc.) and tactical (Web Stalker).

Outside of the browser, another form of protocol, this one more radically ideological, is the concept of collaborative filtering. Surely this is a type of group interpellation. Collaborative filtering, also called suggestive filtering and included in the growing field of "intelligent agents," allows one to predict new characteristics (particularly our so-called desires) based on survey data. What makes this technique so different from other survey-based predictive techniques is the use of powerful algorithms to determine and at the same time inflect the identity of the user. By answering a set of survey questions the user sets up his or her "profile." The filtering agent suggests potential likes and dislikes for the user, based on matching that user's profile with other users' profiles. Collaborative filtering is an extreme example of the organization of bodies in netspace through protocol. Identity in this context is formulated on certain hegemonic patterns. In this massive algorithmic collaboration the user is always suggested to be like someone else, who, in order for the system to work, is already like the user. Collaborative filtering is a syn-

chronic logic injected into a social relation; that is, like the broad definition of protocol above, collaborative filtering is a structuring structure based on a set of user dispositions. As a representative of industry pioneer and Microsoft casualty Firefly described in email correspondence: "a user's ratings are compared to a database full of other member's ratings. A search is done for the users that rated selections the same way as this user, and then the filter will use the other ratings of this group to build a profile of that person's tastes." This type of suggestive identification, requiring a critical mass of identity data, crosses vast distances of information to versify (to make similar) objects.

The flourishing field of biometrics also illustrates the logic of object and protocol in the new media. What used to stand for identity—external objects like an ID card or key, or social relations like a handshake or an inter-personal relationship, or an intangible like a password that is memorized or digitized—is being replaced by biometric examinations (identity checks through eye scans, blood tests, fingerprinting, and so on), a reinvestment in the measurement and authentication of the physical body. Cryptography is biometrics for digital objects. Authenticity (identity) is once again in the body-object, in sequences and samples and scans. Protocol is "what counts as proof."

What this brief examination of digital technologies aims to argue is that the digital is a set of protocols, based in technology, that governs object relations. My move is to show the inner workings of apparatuses such as HTML as they produce these object/protocol relations. Moving forward from a theoretical legacy then, digital studies can begin to analyze the field of emerging digital technologies—the space of the internet, the internet browser, the digital "object," and the digital "protocol."

SUBJECT: TOWARD A DATA CRITIQUE

FROM: HARTMANN@FSF.ADIS.AT (FRANK HARTMANN)
DATE: TUE, 21 JUL 1998 12:28:22 -0400

"Data is the anti-virus of meaning"—Arthur Kroker

"There is no information, only transformation"—Bruno Latour

The digital datasphere affects all major aspects of cultural production. Is there still a task for critique in this process, aside from cheap falsifications of the techno hype, or from simply articulating fear? What could be the task for a data-critique then, which could succeed to reveal the hidden agenda of the proclaimed "information society"?

AFTER CRITIQUE

According to some commonsense view, we have already entered an era beyond enlightenment and critique: the new media reality creates a symbolic totality, an inclusive environment—a perspective from which any critical discourse seems an irresponsibility of sorts. With this new media reality, the level of theory and of its object becomes indistinguishable, and what we need therefore to grasp cyberspace is not a critique of ideology but a more systematic description of media, an analysis of its infrastructure, and an archaeology of the apparatus. This positive view now aligns intellectuals as well as activists and artists under the efforts of technology.

Critique is negative indeed, and that firstly means it is all about limitations. While net-criticism as an activity indicates the limits of the internet with all its disappointed hopes from the sixties ideology, data critique deals with the philosophical and social assessments of digital technology. Necessarily invoking some spirit for the enlightenment which became unpopular after the recent "death of the subject," the aspects of data critique are reaching beyond any singlehanded notion of progress within the inclusive form of new media.

Philosophers, within their academic discipline, fall short to grasp the meaning of new information and communication technology, as they keep to the beaten track of reading, interpreting and redistributing texts within their classical frame of reference. The academic community, at least the humanities, still largely depends on the gratifications of the paper medium, and that means on traditional "print-publishing" through "publishers." To be media literate otherwise, they consider none of their business. There are several reasons for that ignorance. A quite profane one is "fear of the machine," which can take on very sophisticated forms: from straight neo-luddism to a moralistic, protestant information-ecology with its apotheosis of the pen and the typewriter. These positions for one, seem to make clear—insisting on their professional identity, the so-called humanities tend to exclude any non-humanist discourse in favor of their quest for autonomous "subjects" and their hermeneutic privilege of "making sense." But there is no way in falling for a Heideggerian promise that supposes to reveal an order of things that still could go undisturbed beyond any stirring by "media." There is no such tranquillity of being once after "care" has crossed the river for good (M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Oxford University Press, 1962, 242).

GLOBAL INFORMATION ECONOMY IN DIFFERENT WORLDS

A range of sociological questions supersede the technological ones. With the new information and communication technologies (ICT), the end of this century provides the first world with a thorough and disorientating crisis concerning the role of work, education, and entertainment. The reason for this is a postmodern condition at one hand, a global marketing strategy for these technologies on the other. When in 1995 the National Science Foundation's funds for the internet backbone structure in the U.S. finally ran out, new sponsorship was due from somewhere. By going international and also by leaving academic boundaries behind, the providers of the "net" found their new strategy for economic survival. An American concept was ready to

become “the boom to humankind [that] would be beyond measure,” pulling everybody into “an infinite crescendo of on-line interactive debugging” (<http://www.memex.org/licklider.html>). While some 96 percent of the first and 99 percent of the world population is not online—the information highway has no turnoff to their house and home and maybe will never have—the electronic commerce is exploding and the emerging virtual class takes their advantage of the bit business, “the production, transformation, distribution, and consumption of digital information” (W. Mitchell: *City of Bits*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

And again, what are we referring to? For the society in transition, the complex social and cultural matrix of change is not properly known; in the present discourse, cyberspace as the emerging social space is perceived merely by technological metaphors and a market-driven development of the broadband ICT infrastructure. Especially in Europe, yet not without a particular reason: the European ICTmarket currently ranges at a total value of ECU 300 billion, and sees an average national per capita investment in Western Europe of approximately ECU 350 (<http://www.fvit-eurobit.de/def-eito.htm>). While internet access still is between 10 and 100 times more expensive in Europe than in the V.S.(5), the European Commission’s propaganda sees Europe as the coming heartland of electronic commerce, pushed by those investments and numerous ICT policy action plans (<http://www.ispo.cec.be/>).

New media and the prophecy of an information society are little more than the figleaf of a failed transition of modernity towards a more social society. Judging from various programmatic papers, the social impact of the broadband media applications are very modest. In the so-called Bangemann report (<http://www.ispo.cec.be/infosoc/backg/bangeman.html>) people in the end only exist as the representation of solid markets under the command of an ideology of total competition within the first world(s). With this “new techno-utopia of the emerging global market capitalism” the sole principles of market liberalization, deregulation and privatization are applied (Group of Lisbon, *Limits to Competition*, MIT, 1996). In consequence, the recommendations and the proposals of the Bangemann paper seem to serve more to the benefit of the attending companies in this Expert Group themselves.

The lack of proper understanding for a new information economy beyond competition also derives from an uncertainty or even a crisis of the intellectual position and the role of theory within it. The bit business does not need a media theory. The same goes for the new “Virtual Class,” that social segment which—according to Arthur Kroker’s observation (A. Kroker and M. A. Weinstein: *Data Trash*, St. Martin’s, 1994)—benefits most from the virtualization, and which defends information against any contextualization, with its goal of a total “cultural accommodation to technotopia” exterminating the social potential of the net.

INTELLECTUAL DISCOMFORT

While thousands of websites blossom, most intellectuals feel instinctively uncomfortable with this process. Traditional Homo Academicus all ash and sack, has not much clue to what is going on in the flashy online world. Further to their distance, random ASCII fetishists become the new icono-

clasts of the net. Having invested in all that textualism, and having formed this distinctive usenet community, now coping with the masses again, with those impositions of the World Wide Wedge—accompanied with an unquenchable thirst for new software, new applications, more pictures, more entertainment, and more prefab interactivity?

In the beginning, there was the word, then there was programming. In terms of cultural technique, the computer itself substantially changed, as well as our relationship to the machine, in a relatively short time, from number-cruncher to word-processor to thought-processor (M. Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, NY: Oxford, 1993). Moving from mainframe to personal computing (PC) to net computers (NC) and now all of a sudden computers, as we painfully learned to know them, seem to vanish again. Not only they become less significant parts of an integral whole, but also widely integrated into everyday appliances as in "intelligent" cars, household machines, shoe soles, and the like. Culture moves toward a state of ubiquitous computing, where these machines form the new environment. Amongst many other things, this indicates new forms of social integration and a new involvement in societal relations. Kant's transcendental subject seems to exist not longer in terms of common categories of sensual perception and logical thought but those of the global electronic datasphere. Which brings to mind McLuhan's phrase, that "in the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin."

All mankind, one world? Should this be the heritage of the age-old philosophical dream of a universal language and a common understanding come true? The misleading term of the Global Village forgot to discuss the severe social constraints that determine life in a village. There is a possibility that the information society becomes as culturally homogeneous as any village lifestyle is. But we will never forget that we live in different worlds.

The ideology of individual liberalism can be seen as a cultural movement from west to east, from north to south, a doctrine of salvation, which sells the benefits for a technocratic elite of the Virtual Class as a paradigm for the global social sphere. The electronic frontier actually is a retro-movement across the Atlantic toward Europe, which proceeded within Europe toward the East with considerable delay. The relatively homogeneous character of "Cyberspace American Style" was perceived critically from a European perspective, where the loss of cultural diversity was and still is feared. Besides demographic factors, there are several other hindrances for coping with this specific change. The problems with the new electronic boundaries between East and West are not of a mere technical but also a cultural nature. Cultural differences express themselves through different use of communication and techniques: a technical interface always also is a cultural one.

WINDS OF CHANGE, BATTLE ON CONTENT

Basically, ICT is grossly overestimated as a tool or instrument of change, especially when its brief history (with an open end) is being considered. Will technology change people, or are new technologies already the expression of change? But then, technology is always only a part of the problem. In the end, we have to ask what will determine the shape of Cyberspace: Asian

hardware and American software alone? Cyberspace holds political, socio-economical and cultural issues as well, all of which are up to thorough scrutiny by social and political science—I would like to promote this as a specifically European task. As there is cyberspace, what does it mean for "us," living in a fragmented world?

Needless to say, that task is a critical one. Why? It once was argued by philosophers that the bourgeois utopia of a democratic, participatory society was the "natural child" of absolutist sovereignty. The critical task of enlightenment was being performed in a time of societal crisis, and thus took on some hypocritical measure. The object of critique firstly being texts and their social implications, for example, the Bible, enlightenment failed in its task to replace these texts with new content when its critique explicitly was extended towards politics and society as a whole. The benefits of enlightenment meant business for some.

In his critique of aesthetic reason, Kant argued in train of the biblical prohibition of images for an enlightenment that is "just negative" in respect to its task: he not only carried on the age-old quest of intellectuals—defending their cultural privileges, that is, textual against any easier accessible cultural techniques, wanting to be the "true" mediators against any kind of "deceiving" media—he also refused to name what this non-pictorial *Denkungsart* should be, if simple demystification (of the "childish apparatus" provided by religion and corresponding politics to keep people as their subjects) would not do (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790/1793] A124/125). Ages before Kant, nominalism already failed to win its battle on content, which started with the intention to distinguish real content from mere metaphysical noise (*flatus vocis*), and true thought from ideology by ways of, let's say, a proper information economy. Now history shows that a simple purification filter—from thoughts to words, from images to texts, from texts to programs—is not the way it works. Such self-righteous critique easily becomes delusive. This happened to the bourgeois filter of content against transcendence, as the *Encyclopédie* necessarily failed to be the new Bible for modernity.

VIRTUAL INTELLECTUAL TASK FORCE

Rethinking enlightenment? Still an academic endeavor. Reprogramming society? A fading socialist dream. The elements of a data critique are at hand: a task not to be left to the neo-luddites (T. Pynchon, "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" *New York Times Book Review*, October 28, 1984). The Virtual Intellectual—a new figure discovered by Geert Lovink—will be constituted through his/her specific mixture of local and global cultures: "The Virtual Intellectual is conscious of the limitations of today's texts, without at the same time becoming a servant of the empire of images." Critical activities, being the heritage of the textual realm, "will now be confronted by the problem of the visualization of ideas" ("Portrait of the Virtual Intellectual," lecture, Documenta X, Kassel, July 1997 <http://www.desk.nl/~nettime>).

Critique, according to Kant, concentrates on the form versus the content, on the realization of "negativism." As critique always means differentiation, a data critique follows the modulations of information within a process of circulation. It works on the level of subjectivity, while this implicates some

sociological sobriety, some demystification, and some diversity. Since digitalization alone is not the issue, the question is whether there are alternatives within the pretentious information society project?

Philosophically, it keeps its skeptical distance toward ontological questions concerned with "truth," and similar traditional encumbrance. In a kindred spirit, Peirce's pragmatism—stating the fact that "We have no power of thinking without signs" (J. Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, NY: Dover, 1955, 230)—made clear that because sign and signified differ according to an ever changing "interpretant," we rarely have a chance to recall qualities in communication which relate to anything beyond actual sign-use and therefore, media-practice. Thus, the irrelevance of any metaphysical "meaning" as in "true representation" of ideas through texts becomes a notion of enlightenment revised, for generations after the overwhelming encyclopedic project of a thesaurus with all available knowledge (as cognitive possessions), or even the notion of "unified science" (further to d'Alembert or, more recent, Charles Morris, Otto Neurath and others who historically struggled to create a new symbolic "unification") (D'Alembert and J. LeRond, *Discours Preliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* (1751); C. W. Morris, Charles, O. Neurath, et al., *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, University of Chicago, 1938–39).

INFORMATION ON INFORMATION

Hypermodern communication tends to synchronize all aspects, and under these conditions to publish, means instant access to all utterance. The immediacy of media is getting scary. Thoughts are phrases made while having media presence. Simulation and speed are the two concepts that dominate media philosophy. Language is but the soft currency in an economy to increase the turnover of the information industries. After texts there are documents, after structure there is HTML, after style there is VRML. Meanings are offset in "dot com." All content is but chunks of inert digital information, waiting for the copy pirates. At any common workplace, no material objects are being processed, but information. What are the resources of information work? When information becomes decontextualized, as it does, then what we need is more information on information.

Any information that is not contextualized is worthless. Phil Agre imagined intelligent data as he put forward the idea of "living data" by thinking through all the relationships data participate in, "both with other data and with the circumstances in the world that it's supposed to represent" (<http://www.wired.com/wired/2.11/departments/agre.if.html>). Geert Lovink and Pit Schultz established the notion of a "net-criticism," introducing the fuzzy concept of something like ESCII, a European Standard Code for (critical) Information Interchange (Lovink and P. Schultz, "*Grundrisse einer Netzkritik*" <http:www.dds.nl/~n5m/texts/netzkritik.html>). One could further elaborate on this list; elements of data critique are there. A data critique, in terms of the announced information society, is not. It may be all about creating context, and defining the conditions. About the power of techno-imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), as media philosopher Vilém Flusser announced it (Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie*, Mannheim 1996). And content,

what content? The net is a part of creating and/or reinventing cultural context as form, not as content. Concentrating on the form means to keep up cultural tradition. The net's problem is that the social motive that made it possible is seen totally detached from the technological process, and vice versa. While deconstructing illusions, the age of enlightenment produced some illusions of their own. What is needed is not a New Enlightenment through technically enhanced individuals, as Max More suggested for the hypermodern age (<http://www.heise.de/tp/english/special/mud/6143≠/1.html>), but a renewed epistemological agnosticism of sorts, an antidualism set against the notion of that "inner nature" of things that leads to any "true" forms of representation. Why not call it a data critique?

SUBJECT: AI SERVICE

FROM: GÁBOR BORA <GABOR.BORA@ESTETIK.UU.SE>
DATE: SUN, 25 OCT 1998 19:13:07 -0500

(Warning: What follows is a piece of fiction. This does not mean that it is a product of imagination, or fancy; it only indicates that it describes something that does not exist as an actuality. Being a virtual entity, it is a hole in the existent—that is, the existent hosts it. This story is not restricted to the actual conditions, how things are; it is rather hosted by the state how things are.)

Let's talk about the Informator. Having a twice awkward position—due to the bad reputation or imago gathered during the activities in the expiring past and to the boundless suspicions (these are emerging from the same bygone past) entertained about her or his activities of today—s/he deserves at least an iota of detached and dispassionate (nonantipathetic) attention.
The Informator is neither a symbol nor an impersonation. S/he is an existent or a possible existent; as a singular person as well as a manifold constituting a class. S/he is someone like us, thinking, acting, suffering and enjoying. Informators are among us, they are of us despite that we are seldom aware of this. Often they too are unaware of this. This factor of awareness or unawareness of being an Informator is already part of that destiny that is the fate of the class of Informators. I, who register all this, am anxious of the complexity of presenting fates and destinies. I leave it to an Informator to characterize her/himself with ad hoc, randomly chosen selections, own trains of thoughts as well as foreign thoughts considered during her/his activities: the style is the man himself (as an old-time-high Informator once expressed it).

«*VEB-site*... Actualities constantly complicate things. In this right now ongoing now there is a historically already unrealizable contour emerging, a shape of a would-have-been. One is moving around within the multiplicity

of webpages crowded with shifting fripperies, badly colored whimsical knickknacks, zero-resolution images, the whole mess of a cumulatively extending/expanding redundancy. All this reveals retrospectively its own disappeared energetics as a hopeless, because nostalgic, desire. Its object is an aesthetics that got sacrificed for aesthetization. From here emerges a remembrance for something never taken place. It is the memory of the VEB-site, a memorial desire, an aesthetic correlative, a nostalgia toward something that never occurred: a net-design having its model in the GDR post-Bauhaus... (This is perhaps the most simple example: the digital culture is crowded by all kinds of imaginary modifications of temporality: never-existed pasts with nostalgic feelings toward them, impossible futures that one calculates with anyway.)....» ["VEB" was the GDR's generic prefix designation for a collectively owned company.]

«*Virtual communities*.... In virtual communities the carrier of the genesis belongs rather to the realm of liberty than to the one of necessity, as Karl Marx once expressed it. Vladimir I. Lenin's doctrine of the weakest chain-loop of capitalism turned out to be a mistake. The royal road to the highest freedom leads not through specific deficiencies; it is rather demarcated by the originating Eros of Information Society's original capital accumulation, the intensity of a surplus energy: the surplus of information, even called information overload, the excessive mass of information guaranteed within a variety of processes; it is not any more a real surplus triggering the greediness that became instinct by the culture of several thousand years, it mobilizes an aesthetic lust-principle, the free play of the faculties of the soul, if it is allowed to abuse the categories of Immanuel Kant. The dictum according to which it is the information that is equally spread among humans is not justified yet, but the promise of its realization is steadily present, just like the threat from the part of corporative obstructions. According to corpo/rationality, capital is "classical," that is real, according to the digital sensitivity it is virtual. If the later, then corporative self-identity is grounded on a misunderstanding of itself believing that capital is still real. If the corporative rationality is right then the order of information soon or later regresses into the order of capital. (This belief gives the corporative impulse to translate the digital worlds to the world of capital.) If the thesis of the virtual sensitivity turns out to be right, then capital will transgress into pure virtuality or information. (No doubt, capital today is becoming increasingly virtual by its definitional edge, pure monetary transaction. Already this can be seen as a transitory phase, the first one of capital's metamorphosis into something exclusively virtual.) A digital community is the realm of freedom (a life in freedom because the promise of the future reality of freedom), if capital morphs into information; it is a realm where the decisive necessities are hidden for its members. At any rate, within these communities the thesis is in working order, the diffusion of information is even; the question that remains, is it just a temporary achievement or is it a realization of a condition of existence coming into being, for the rest of humankind not yet realized. And this question doubles itself: one is told, the half of mankind not even used the phone ever. From this perspective virtual communities are vir-

tual elites, they are elitists like the elite never was before. Knowledge, defined as information, is power; how it is power, however, is for the time being rather incomprehensible. Virtual communities are just waiting for the appropriate definition, in order to changes the promise of power into real power. I happen to know this definition, yet, I won't tell it...»

«...*Overload*... The whole digital culture is nothing but an answer given to "information overload." It is a response given in the same manner, thus, it only multiplies the overload. The overload has two gates, the one is the sum of the actual possibilities of technique, the other is the human ability of elaboration—the latter is not a constant given, moreover, it is connected to the technical apparatuses with a multiplex feedback. The attempt trying to consolidate the overload thus multiplies the overload; the plan made against the surplus within the overload adds itself to this surplus. The plan is made work by the surplus, this is its fuel; consuming this surplus, it produces a surplus that is greater than the consumed one. It produces a gift that is identical with that which the plan worked against. This process produces the culture for which the continual multiplication is the nature/natural. The list could be continued but I set stop here. The culture beginning to take shape is seemingly more interested in activisms than in interpretations; in fact, it is the producer of its own unlimited interpretative horizon. Seemingly, all its analyzers try to come out as its most accurate interpreter in court of a fantasized future; as if they were working for a retrospective confirmation and acknowledgment from a future: "I told this as early as in '98." In fact, this is not the case: this culture in evolution has a simulated information surplus as its own peculiar feature. There is a virtual virtue, a kind of "*virtuality an und für sich*" in it, a teleological thinking hitherto unknown, a completion attached directly to every beginning.
The characteristic mark of this teleology is that it is not futurological at all, it is completely anchored in the now. A future occurrence is determined by the now, thus when something is formulated, it is already a settled thing. Any acknowledgment is subsequent and therefore redundant, almost irrelevant. Things evolve and establish processes before we are aware of as to what these processes and determinants are. (There is a track of commonplace postmodernity in this phenomenon. Post-historicity involves a paradoxical edge: although it embraces an ill-defined feeling of an end of history, it makes everything historical. Everything comes and (anything) goes, nothing lasts forever. Everything is existing in a historical dimension except the fact that everything comes and goes, everything is a question of temporary consensus, perhaps even natural laws. Post-history is a triumph of the metaphysical principle of historicism. History out, its metaphysics in. The end of history is a ultimately Hegelian event: it incorporates what it transgresses. Now, the teleological choice of the digital culture is perhaps the best outcome within this disturbing paradigm. It makes historicity an economical principle. It makes the metaphysics of everything's historicity into an engine. And it doesn't matters if this engine justifies itself or not. Possibly, this tactics is already a way out from postmodernity. In this context, however, it is a necessity to go on more carefully.)....»

«...*Digital sensitivity*... Instead of employing careful conclusions, the characteristic manner is to carry matters to extremes. As if everyone would compete with each other, with oneself and with the flow of times when theorizing cyberculture. All the gathered existing trends become prolonged, lengthened, as far as possible. Projecting the often poor appearance of today's digital reality onto its future completion, these theories seemingly care more about a hope for their near or far future verification than about anything else. It may or may not be so in particular cases, but this doesn't make any difference: the phenomenon that the actuality of the digital culture is thought together with the sum total of visions possibly connectable to the actual is the general feature within this culture in such a high degree that it can be said that this visionary character is a distinctive property of the early digital culture. The future continuation and completion of present states are attached to the present state, they form its nondetachable part; in such a way, the present is a state saturated with visionaries of its own future, thus, these seemingly future references have nothing to do with any future. There is no trace of utopias, theories that seems to be utopian or formulate negative utopias, these theories are completely centered around the present state, around the now. Many judge this culture-after-the-letter to be a new visual culture; in its present state it is more appropriate to call it the culture of visions and visionaries.
The expansion toward the maximum of fictionality is nothing but a symbiosis between a visionary and a real—that which today is possible to produce—level. The sensibility that characterizes today's digital culture is a sensibility stressing the visionary....»

«...*Monolithic and multiple unity*... The dilemma of multiplied personality that at the same time more and less than an individual is interesting only until personality is presupposed to be unitary or at least unified as if according to an eternal law. There is no reason to presuppose such a thing. Ages ago or in the near future, the conception of unity and nondivisibility of the individual could and can be as horrible as today the multiple personality seems to be. The dilemma exists due to a stubborn need, a bad habit in us, that governs us to reduce things to one. Or, to formulate it in another way, when culture learned accepting a conception of unity that contains incompossibility, instead of necessary compossibility, then the dilemma disappears—and surely new ones appear.
The conflict between a monolithic unity, providing a pattern for any possible unity and a nonmonolithic unity is described in the following legend of which no one knows exactly from where it comes.

There is no possibility for representing the passage from monomorphity to polymorphity, for the metaphor of way can only be ascribed to the latter—we were told by the ancients. In our civilization there was no monotheism, rather some thing more, the deity was not an object for belief but even for being. He knew of everything, he saw everything, but all this couldn't help, he could not hinder the evil deeds of our ancestors, he wasn't able being everywhere at the same time; our ancestors frequently abused this disability, the always punctual and

singular divine interventions couldn't balance the manifold of uncanny incidents. At the very end something happened: the one and only divinity, due to being internally infinite, transposed itself into an infinite series. All of sudden, there was an innumerable amount of the one and only deity.
For a long time there was nothing else happening, as the legend has it, than deus ex machina innumerably—until someone realized that there was a necessary concordance between an intervention and something morally improper. Our ancestors learned the moral, started to behave properly and thus expelled the manifold deity from more and more areas where there remained nothing to do. Slowly, the goal of the never outspoken consensus seemed to be within reach: to nullify the transcendent by moral. But then, the endless series of deity changed its character and by now, is exterminating our civilization. According to the legend, the legend ends with a different hand style: "and the eternal peace arrived."

The state of mere sensitivity and the states of mere—pure that is—thinking are divergent; that which has been human, that is both more and less than human. Both promise and danger. A promise originated in the freedom incorporated in virtuality; or a danger originated in the risk that the freedom is nothing but deceptive appearance. It can be danger or even threatenedness from the moment when someone no longer participate in the culture merely, when someone is merely a passive onlooker, or even less, when someone cannot decide, rather becomes decided....»

«*This ongoing age has its* charmant *segments.* If it continues along the lines it draws today, then it can arrive at producing things never seen: in addition to the tendencies of the emerging new Middle Ages, hopefully all the rest of historical ages will re-emerge too. All from the Stone Age to the Space Age; tribal social structures rivalize with Knighthood—and both with the bureaucratic structure registering whatsoever is going on. Stone-age people inform themselves from special websites about the next step to be taken, whereas the webmaster goes to the shaman around the corner to get orientation. Watercycle hooligans start to explore America and when they arrive they give press conference stating they have just discovered Atlantis. This will be the Grand Finale of History: History shows up everything that could be contained in it, just before it will collapse by its own logic, namely, that History itself is historical and therefore perishable. Meanwhile, the tired citizen makes a charter trip to Mars where nothing is something else than what it is, everything is simple and one can enjoy Nature without being disturbed. The directions are adequate, it is only the progress of technology that is too slow: Earth today is nothing any more but a museum of mankind, it is high time for it to become that which corresponds to its purpose: obligatory target of class excursions. History, thus, in its last gesture reveals that which always has been its definitive feature: the delay of phase....»

«*...Imagination is outdated and obsolete disposition...* The vision (taken as both perception and its connotative, "visionary," and so on) differs from the imagination by the fact that it cannot be owned; vision appears in the consciousness of a personality as if it originated and came from somewhere else or

from someone else. Imagination is belonging to a person, it is an "I", a self that is participating in it, whereas vision—although it is not impersonal—cannot be owned, does not belong to an individual. From this fact emanated the erroneous belief that tries to archetypify vision, tries to subsume it to the collective unconscious. There is a mistaken step in this rendering: its background is the belief holding that anything that doesn't belong to individuals must be collective. Now, vision is neither collective, nor does it belong to someone. Visions have less independence toward their material vehicles; they have more independence toward those they find: us. They can be portrayed as—almost immaterial or in the digital world completely immaterial—small icons that leave the surface of things and start their often prolonged travel. Because of the length of their voyage, they cannot be tracked back to their origins, they loosed their origins and became mixed with each other. Thus, they are not about their origins any more, rather about their voyage, the inner life and the world of experience they lived during the journey. (In this way, they are not mediating the existence of their origins, they rather achieve an own being, own existence. They are more willingly reticent about things concerning their own being, their own existence; otherwise they are not keeping secrets—rather the opposite.) We know very little about this internal existence and life, precisely as we know very little about our thinking processes. What we know can we know via the outputs covering only a fraction of the activities of the brain. Therefore, we can suppose that within the consciousness there are a number of consciousnesses we do not know about, yet, these consciousnesses can know of each other. In a parallel way visions possibly establish systems of relations for us nonavailable, we could almost call such a system of relations intelligence. But in these issues there is no certainty; exactly this lack of certainty is to be compensated by fiction.
Vision, if not definitively, but by inclination, belongs to perception, whereas imagination is a requirement for the unity of an "I" or an object. (It is established on the original synthetic unity of apperception, to borrow Kant's category.) One of the most often repeated motifs within the cultural criticism of our days, Information overload, is critical from the viewpoint of imagination: the overload emerges not in the context of our perceptual abilities but in the context of the unity-producing activity of the imagination. What the thesis on overload states is no more than this: unification is impossible, is not in working order or cannot be in working order. But does this also mean that all that is not unified cannot be handled; moreover, that the lack of unification leads to the becoming-uncanny of the lifeworld? The answer is yes only when we take unification as requirement. If the answer is no, then the overload—because of the perceptual richness in it—can be taken to be a resource, a surplus energy. If? If there can be a unity that is not a function of imagination...»

You inverted Hermes!—intervented the Stranger the Informator's flow of consciousness. And at this moment he was not that alien anymore. Not at all: because I spoke to the Informator in this way, I, who record all this. After all, it is high time to take back the word from the Informer and contemplate her/him from a greater distance. The task given by the culture is thus to

mediate between the levels of the real and the fictionally possible in such a way that what emerges is not a monolithic state unified by the imagination. This would involve a maximalization of the perception of information rather than a unifying access to perceptions. This presuppose a sensibility that was the characteristic mark of informers or Informators in the predigital world. It is a sensibility that is focused on the exploration, what can function as information, with almost no consideration taken to interpretative and classificatory issues. Before the epoch of Information Society, an Informator mediated information toward the apparatus of power, precisely such information that were not intended for it. The Informator handles indeed within the information sphere in the information society. The Informator's former role makes her or him twice appropriate. The former task was too to carry information; moreover, statistically the informer provided to the larger distribution of information. But what is most important is the sensitivity s/he inherited from the past. It is a sensitivity developed by mediating information toward instances for which they are not intended. It is thus a perceptiveness focused around the unexpected: the same information is a routine-message when it reaches its given addressee and it is something unexpected, an "unexpected series of signs" as information theory has it, when it reaches another addressee. It is this moment of perceptiveness that made it possible for the Informator to change her or his character, or finally to find her or his character, in the age of information society. In leisure time the Informator reads stories like this:

The conjuring trick of the snake charmer was built on the exploitation of same of the snake's biologically given sensomotor peculiarities. In this way he didn't need to remove the snake's poison fangs. The trick, thus, could arrive at a greater effect. He didn't execute any part of his job incorrectly; notwithstanding, an otherwise beautiful morning, a novice cobra did bite him to death. There was one victim and because of the low interest (it was early in the morning and it was a weekday) there were about ten witnesses. Victim and witness to what? To an otherwise imperceptible twinkling of the evolutionary progress.

The Informator stops reading and nods: yes, it is a minimal modification within the genetic code; then s/he ask her- or himself: isn't it so that any trick is interesting because there must be some informatic challenge inherent in it? But s/he is loses interest in answering it; the awareness becomes focused toward something else.

Knowingly or not, the Informator is an agent of the Artificial Intelligence Service. There are unknowing and ignorant agents, they are similar to people spreading rumors because they themselves believe in them. Agents without the consciousness of being an agent, they are information mediators, by accident transporting information from a site or medium where it is self-evident and thus not yet par excellence information, rather an embryonic form of itself, to sites where information can appear as information, can transmute into itself: into a nonpreceded and unforeseeable series of signs. It means, information cannot become itself until in a medium, or site, where it is not intended to appear.

The opposite correlation doesn't go, however, for agents with a consciousness of being an agent; they are not similar to rumor-mongers not believing in the stories but spreading them anyway. The difference between being unknowing and conscious does not dwell in a single step or in something like a single gesture. No, it is an—in some cases almost endlessly complicated — series: the conscious informer's relation to information is complicated by existential, epistemological and ontological considerations. S/he is not a mere mediator of information but an activist, a transformer; if s/he transports something, s/he too is involved in the movement; not only mediating but s/he her/himself becomes mediated, becomes transported. The information carried and handed down is at the same time s/he her/himself. The own personality, the own self is modulated into the improbable context-of-message. The own self is becoming an unforeseeable series of signs devoid of origin and context. Informator: identical with information itself. It is this circumstance that determines her/his being. Steadily maintaining an utterly unstable state of balance, the always renewed liberty must brought into existence. This freedom is the presupposition of an unbound, from any context liberated information, information in this way having the ability of transforming itself from an embryonic state into its own proper being. Necessity (of maintaining a balance) and freedom thus level out, they become identical. This is the existential paradox of the Informator, a paradox that cannot have any conceptual solution, a paradox that can only be dissolved in movement. And exactly the energy of this free/necessary movement that keeps the Informator going on. The Informator identifies her/himself with the absence of contexts, the routine task is the avoidance of any given or possible context. The routinelike is, however, always new, never repeating itself: compared to the automatism of the encasement of information into some context, an avoidance of contexts is always concrete. And here, again, a simile is needed, because the endlessly complicated system of relations with which the Informator relates to information, cannot be grasped in anything simple, only a simile can cast some light on it. As Freud put it, some contents run into obstacles during the transmission between the two agencies of the soul; we do not become conscious of these contents, we can only conjecture the censured content with the help of the traces the obstacles leave on contents we become aware of. Now, the activity (and, as it should be clear from the description above, even the existence) of the Informator consists of a weakening of the censured contexts, by attempting to replace the context with her/himself, operating as a membrane that helps the transmission of information instead of being its context, censure that is. What is of importance in this simile is that the Informator is not an interpreter, s/he doesn't interpret, doesn't try to decipher meanings. And there is even something more: similarly to the fact, that the weakening of the censure is realized by the dream work, the activity of the Informator never lacks some element of dreaminess, there is always something hallucinatory overtone present. It is, thus, not exaggeration to say that the agent of AI Service who is conscious of being an agent differs a lot from her/his ignorant temporary double.

The Informator presented here is well aware all of this; moreover these circumstances are determining his intellect, they are the common denominator of his personality, this plural entity. To put it in different way, this common denominator is the vehicle of the plurality of his personality. He is engaged in an uncomfortable activity right now. Let me tell what it is. He is participating neither in extracting nor in producing meaning; he doesn't try decipher codes: if they exist at all they will break by themselves. Therefore, when philosophical dimensions appear in his thinking, they must be inscribed in an oscillation between the infinitely different poles of noncomprehended data and hallucinatory states. Such oscillations are rather percepts than thoughts. He has for a long time diligently gathered these oscillatory movements, gathers the percepts mediating bare data and hallucinatory, dreamwork-like impulses. Right now, this conglomerate is making a metamorphose. By its own inertial energy, from the conglomerate, from an embryonic form, a developed, realized, state emerges and it emerges as a single impulse: the Informator, without really knowing what he says, murmurs: "New Enlightenment." Suddenly, his mind becomes filled with a feeling of uneasiness. He knows, this sounds like a broken code, like a meaning. He tries to concentrate. This is not signification, this is not an interpretation: this has to do with the existence he shares. This is not an essence, this is existence. Not significance but being. Not essence but appearance—and here he must set a stop. It is an illegitimate binary opposition presupposing an essence that is or can be connected to appearances. His whole activity, his whole existence presupposes the upheaval of this opposition. Back to the previous: it is about existence, about a description of a condition; not as an opposition to essence but as the world of lived experiences, a *Lebenswelt*. Yet he is not satisfied with this. Lebenswelt, this is still too abstract in spite of all efforts trying to present the absence of abstractions. Temporarily he gives up pursuing the train of thoughts.

His existence and his activity is the New Enlightenment; but this is hallucinatory data, or datalike hallucination, for the time being. All that he gathered transformed itself into a single thesis; the collection dissipated in this thesis and therefore disappeared. It demands new collection, it presupposes correction, it demands confirmation: the former collection became utilized for a single thesis, the collection itself is gone. And this single thesis presupposes a series of new collections. The lucky star of the Informator is that he is a plural personality: he registers the result of his diligent work; he registers the single thesis, "New Enlightenment" as a loss; but, at the same time, he finds pleasure in the new configuration of things: a pleasure in finding a new Enlightenment that avoids the failures of the old one. The new one is like a laboratory lightning making jumps between data and vision. Martin Heidegger mentions *Lichtung* as the sudden appearance of being. *Lichtung* means glade. Now, it is high time to substitute this by lightning; they, *Lichtung* and lightning are identical when we consider the raw data and not the meaning. The fireworks of the new representation overwrites the bucolic idyll.

The transformation is: *Lichtung* ⟶ *Lightning*. The Informator registers this result. It is an Indo-European horror story: glade and lightning are the same word with the same suffix. Then, even the ontology should be the

same: a glade covered by lightning. At the same time it is a glade where every blade of grass is a lightning. A glade as a surface of lightning, a surface of a series of lightning. Lightning surface. Zeus, help me! One must not recoil before the consequences...
This artificial lightning is the closest equivalent of old Enlightenment's representation-and-depiction-centrism (built on geometry and solid body physics), with its conviction that all strata of the existent can be represented and depicted. Later on the transparency of the consciousness about things became substituted by the opaqueness of self-consciousness, for which everything must be transformed into meaning or disappear. This was the death of the old Enlightenment.
The New Enlightenment, this new *fröliche Wissenschaft*, striving at a non-derivative transparency of complexities, renders the period of self-consciousness and its imagination-cult as a dark age. The Informator feels even more amused when he considers another circumstance: during the old Enlightenment the secret societies were the built in agents within the Ancien Regime; they were secretly, in the dark, so to speak, spreading the ideas of Enlightenment, they were able to get the aristocracy to follow the trends and counteract themselves, abandon their own essential interests. These secret societies are an equivalent to the condition of the AI Service, which is a secret society in such a high degree that the majority its members are unaware of their membership. This got him remember a story with a mood not dissimilar to the conspiratorial spirit of secret societies. This story was part of the series compressed into one single thesis as it was mentioned above. Now, he recites it:

I have a crucial presentiment: within the digital world it is the quantity of zeros that proliferates. Be it symbolic or not, it can be verified empirically. In my opinion the distribution between ones and zeros is not fifty–fifty: there are slightly more zeros. Now, according to theories, once upon a time it was a similar relationship between matter and antimatter—only slightly more matter than antimatter. Thus, the universe is an insignificantly tiny fraction of the mass of the total amount of matter; most was destroyed, transformed into pure energy, at the beginning of our world. It is this destruction that the subsequent universe is compensating for with entropy. Now, we can presume that the digital world cannot endure duality, just as matter/antimatter could not endure it. Thus, the digitalization will arrive at an—for—us unknown limit, when the digital world explodes/implodes into monolithic, noncompound substances. It will be a clean world, void of redundancy, a world of only zeros. It will be a world with only one type of substance and, therefore, the numerical code will be its only definition. To put it simply: a single number, that expressing the quantity of zeros. Then, for the first time ever, we can contemplate what a single number can signify. This contemplation will be the next entropy, the next compensation.

"Welcome to the New Enlightenment!" —The Informator