

Media

Capital's Global Village

George Bradford (David Watson)

These are tentative, unfinished remarks about the mass media. They should be taken as a series of questions rather than as definitive answers. They do start from the recognition that the media have come to usurp reality, representing the structure and the content of mass society as it spins around its own unstable axis. It is precisely because life itself has become mediatized that any discussion of media and our assumptions about their operation is so problematic.

In a previous article on communications technology, I pointed out this problem, remarking that human communication has come to resemble the model imposed by the standardized transmission and reception of messages between machines. "The discourse has shifted," I wrote, since "all of human intercourse tends to be restructured along the lines of this petrified information and its communication." (See "1984: Worse Than Expected?" FE #316, Spring 1984.)

Jean Baudrillard, after Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, takes as his metaphor for this state of affairs the fable of a map "so detailed that it ends up covering the territory." Whereas with the decline of the Empire comes the deterioration of the map, tattered but still discernible in some remote places, "this fable has come full circle for us," writes Baudrillard, "and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own." (*Simulations*).

I would like to make some observations on the nature of communications technology and media with this fable in mind. These are fragmentary notes, but perhaps they will help to elaborate on some questions raised by the previous articles on technology and mass society. I would also like to make some observations on the media and social control, in particular its alleged potential for resisting social domination when utilized by radicals.

But more importantly, I want to explore the fable raised by Baudrillard, and the sense that it suggests of having come full circle, the notion that media are more than a machine which transmits messages. Rather, a fundamental mutation has taken place or is taking place—in Baudrillard's words, "Everything is obliterated only to begin again." The media are an entire universe which simulates meaning, communication, community. These simulations have covered the real, or have duplicated it so that even a nostalgia for that territory which crumbles into dust beneath the map loses coherence.

The Nature of the Fact

Information is central to this new "hyperreality." The demand for information, the "democratic" distribution of "facts," is the battle cry of the radicals who struggle to capture the machinery of media. "If only we could present people with the facts," goes the refrain. But it is the nature of the fact, and finally of masses of facts transmitted on a mass scale as information, which lies behind the problem of the media. Not that facts have no reality at all, but they have no intrinsic relation to anything. They are weightless.

Modern technological society, of course, sees in the fact something akin to the Holy Ghost: they are repositories of the truth, and it is only by facts, happily provided by communications media, that we can find our way. Indeed, the fact is the stuff of media. True or false, meaningless or significant, it can be reduced to a signal because it arrives already diminished. The fact is a great mystery; in and of itself it is nothing until combined with other facts and presented by media. Yet it is also everything, since truth can only be conveyed by such facts in the eyes of the believer. The fact achieves its ultimate manifestation in trivia and in statistics, to which society is madly addicted. No action can take place without the justification of statistics, while trivia fills every corner of the media.

The fact is a selection, hence an exclusion. Its simplification is a mutilation of a subtle reality which refuses to be efficiently packaged. One set of facts confronts another in different configurations of information employed by competing rackets. Facts are organized to conform to technological necessities, production values, and the principles of media rhetoric. Facts are hoarded, and they are disseminated. They reproduce like cells. Finally, they are orchestrated as propaganda and advertising—the official language of capital which finds itself reproduced miraculously on the lips of the individual.

One would think that this inchoate, exponential growth and availability of facts would have helped people find their way out of the mass totalitarian structures of society. On the contrary, the formation of the individual conscience is more affected by powerful forces of domination than it was in previous periods. As Jacques Ellul wrote in his book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, "Excessive data do not enlighten the reader or listener, they drown him." People are "caught in a web of facts."

Whatever specific message is transmitted by the media, the central code is affirmed: meaning must be designed, packaged, and distributed by technicians and administrators. Truth and meaning can no longer flow from the complex interaction which takes place face to face among human beings—it is delivered by media, and its power and its validity are unquestionable because it is media. "Everywhere," writes Ellul in language evocative of Orwell or Reich, "we find men who pronounce as highly personal truths what they have read in the papers only an hour before..." The result is an amputated being—"nothing except what propaganda has taught him."

A Ballast to Established Power

Even the desire to transform society is itself colonized by becoming one media message, one competing repertory of facts among many, to be consumed alongside of those which support the entrenched powers. Thus, in spite of their intent, alternative media tend to reinforce an artificial sense of plurality (when in reality it is the universal act of media consumption, of channel switching, which is affirmed). They provide a ballast to established power and its media by taking part in its technological discourse.

This is why the media radical's notion of "democratic" access and the necessity of "rational" selection is a pathetic wish. The selection of a program implies the acceptance of an entire set of conditions. Imagine, for example, the arrival of television programming to an isolated community. Certainly, the members of that community can select one program over another, a documentary on ecology or a ballet over a cop show or porno tape. But in the process they are changing their way of life to that of television viewers. They have surrendered to the discourse of media—they are silenced. It talks, they listen. When they resume their speech, it will resemble that of the machine. They are also plugged into the information industry, and are suddenly in need of ever greater amounts of information.

It is the same with politics, that degraded, binary discourse of power and its opposition. It is Baudrillard's brilliant insight that universal suffrage is the first mass medium, based on negative/positive, question/response oppositions, and epitomized in the referendum. Here once again "selection" takes place within a series of simulations, of pseudo-choices posed by capital. A and not-A. Politics is an "operational Theatre," a Pavlovian program. One year the citizen, pummeled and prepped by the media, sallies forth to fulfill his duty, voting in favor of Political Reason. At the next cycle, he votes it out. Such a binary model obliterates any genuine human discourse.

In a world dominated by loudspeakers, in which human action is reduced to the pulling of lever A or lever B, the argument is to develop or obtain bigger and better loudspeakers for "our side" in order to "reach the masses," or to get "our cause" represented by one of the levers. Sharply drawn contrasts, flashing lights and melodrama are called upon to move the viewer/citizen already desensitized by the wondrous techniques of media. Profound

beliefs, shaded by intuition, ambivalence and social interaction, must be stereotyped into easily identifiable signals which correspond to the familiar world of everyday, banalized experience—the experience of the laboratory test, of the media.

When the subtle nuances and complex values of a genuinely radical resistance to this epoch are treated by media, nuance is lost and their profound sense is drowned out. Only the media are affirmed. Events happening to real people in the real world are reduced to “good media.” But in the media, what moves the receiver (to passivity and to passive aggression, that is) is not truth, is not nuance, is not ambivalence, but technique. And technique is the domain of Power and of established ideology—the domain of simulated meaning. Real meaning—irreducible to a broadcast—disintegrates under such an onslaught. People who accept this counterfeit as reality will follow the lead of the organization with the biggest and best loudspeakers.

The media appeal to the masses is simply that—an appeal to masses formed by the media. Where they make no such appeal, they remain marginalized and incoherent, unassimilable to the mass society in whose functions they participate. Information is noise, truth becomes a trick done with mirrors. As Nazi leader Goebbels remarked, “We do not talk to say something, but to obtain a certain effect.”

The Loss of Aura

The alienated being who is the target of Goebbels’ machinery can most of all be found in front of a television set—this ubiquitous reality-conjuring apparatus which is the quintessential mass medium and the centerpiece of every household, the emblem of and key to universality from Bali to Brooklyn. Everywhere people receive the simulated meaning generated by television, which everywhere duplicates and undermines, and finally colonizes what was formally human meaning in all its culture-bound and symbolic manifestations. Finally only television contains or generates meaning. Even the old shell of the host is burst for the parasite to emerge in its own image. Television, mass media become culture. The diminished reality spewing from the media reflects and aggravates our own diminished condition.

People and events captured by communications media, and especially by television, have lost what Walter Benjamin referred to as their “aura,” their internal, intersubjective vitality, the specificity and autonomous significance of the experience—in a sense, their spirit. Only the external aspects of the event can be conveyed by communications media, not experiential meaning or context. Jerry Mander’s *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* shows how boring and two-dimensional nature is rendered by television, how incoherent the subtle expressions of emotion become, how the ceremonial mood of a group of primal people is lost when the camera captures it. Such a sense cannot be conveyed by media, and it is rendered absurd by television.

Although television, through its illusion of immediacy and transparency, seems to represent the most destructive, the most glaring example of the media, the same can be said of all other forms. At the cinema, for example, social meaning is generated both in the so-called content of the film (as manipulation), and by the act of film-going itself (as alienation)—a spectacularized social interaction mediated by technology. In a movie theatre, modern isolation is transposed by the passive reception of images into the false collectivity of the theatre audience (which can also be said of modern mass sporting events). As in modern social life itself, like all media, film-going is “a social relation mediated by images” (Debord).

Siegfried Kracauer, in his books *Theory of Film* and *From Caligari to Hitler; A Psychological History of the German Film*, discussed in great detail the fragmented consciousness which simultaneously seeks community and escape, fleeing social atomization not in practical collective activity (which could only have revolutionary implications) but in isolated voyeurism. He quotes a student: “Some days a sort of ‘hunger for people’...drives me into the cinema.” Kracauer adds, “He misses ‘life’. And he is attracted to the cinema because it gives him the illusion of vicariously partaking of life in its fullness.”

Even the latest technological fad among anarchists—pirate radio—may serve as an example. People using such technology have two choices: to become like the mass media by relying more on techniques of propaganda, by packaging their “message”; or to liquidate technique for genuine communication, to become unlike radio, more local and communitarian.

But such forms can never compete with technology—there is nothing more boring than radio or television trying to be human, trying to deny technique. People turn it off and turn to disco-mojo with lasers. If technological principles are not obeyed, no listener will be reached; but following such technological demands undermines reality, substituting a flattened propaganda. Unmediated, face-to-face dialogue can only take place locally—in people’s houses or in the street, where it is still possible to transgress the code of the media.

Media and Meaning Cannot Long Coexist

What I am suggesting flies in the face of the logic of technology and the pervasiveness of the model of meaning which it has imposed. To most people, the utter volume of artistic, intellectual, and scientific production—of films, recordings, books, magazines, gadgets, scientific discoveries, art, all of it—seems to imply that subtle human values and plenitude of meaning and well-being are accumulating at a tremendous rate, that we can now experience life more rapidly, in greater depth, and at a greater range.

We can know more, thanks to the phenomenal growth of information, and we can feel and experience more, with the boom in the arts. As one reviewer wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*, “If the average person can have access to information that would fill the Library of Congress or can control as much computing power as a university has today, why should he be shallower than before?” (Paul Delany, “Socrates, Faust, Univac, *New York Times Book Review*, March 18, 1984) [1]

Linked with this notion is the sense that computers and the media simply aren’t meant for communicating subtle meaning, but that nevertheless they have a place, and information has its role. The human values generated by family, community and culture still can remain while at the same time electronic communications can link us with others. In fact, the two enhance one another, according to this argument. McLuhan: “Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.” (*The Medium is the Message*). Human beings can autonomously generate meaning, and transmit this meaning (or minimally make appointments to share it with others) by way of the radio, video, camera and computer available to everyone.

I do not want to repeat what I wrote in my previous article—that such computer power is not available in any significant way to most people. Let us assume that people do have equal access to the media. This in no way alters the fact that, quite simply, two realities—human meaning and mediatization, the territory and the map—cannot long coexist, a truth which daily becomes more obvious. There is a certain incommensurability between them which cannot be bridged. The media undermine and destroy meaning by simulating it. The fact that everywhere people accept this simulation as genuine, that they seem to lack that sense of loss necessary to keep the diminishing world outside of capital alive, brings to mind the metaphor of the completed circle.

What happens when there cannot be said to be any sense of loss, or when nostalgia is simulated, perhaps, as a sense of loss of some other mode of technology itself? [2] Then we can no longer be said to be victims of a powerful, centralized media (which could be subverted, captured, made to “serve the masses”). We are no longer free to resist the messages of the media or autonomously create our own; we are becoming the media, or it has collapsed into the mass, what Baudrillard calls the collapse of two poles and their merging.

“We are no longer in the society of spectacle which the situationists talked about,” he writes in *Simulations*, “nor in the specific types of alienation and repression which this implied. The medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the merging of the medium and the message (McLuhan) is the first great formula of this new age. There is no longer any medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffuse and diffracted in the real, and it can no longer even be said that the latter is distorted by it.

“Such immixture, such a viral, endemic, chronic, alarming presence of the medium, without our being able to isolate its effects—spectralized, like those publicity holograms sculptured in empty space with laser beams, the event filtered by the medium—the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV—an indiscernible chemical solution: we are all doomed not to invasion, to pressure, to violence and to blackmail by the media and the models, but to their induction, to their infiltration, to their illegible violence.”

How can authentic discourse take place when our own language and our being has become so dependent on, molded by this centralized and yet also diffused, molecular apparatus and its code? It is no longer a question of the loss of aura in artistic images. What happens when human beings begin to be denuded of their aura? What happens when the problem is no longer one of representation, but rather that duplication has turned both what is real and the spectacle into indistinguishable modes of a simulation?

A Surfeit of Information and Experience

The surfeit of information corresponds to an equal excess of experiences or emotions in the media. Modes of being are expanded and imploded by their constant surveillance. One can today experience emotions and drama every day for the price of a ticket (one is reminded of the “feelie movies” in Huxley’s *Brave New World*). But how can these emotions and human values resist being trivialized when they are not grounded in anything but the mechanical transmissions of images which are themselves exchanged as a commodity? When we imitate those models—noble or reprehensible as the case may be—we are recreating, or rather duplicating, a simulation. We surveil ourselves, luridly, as on a screen.

Yet isn’t it also true that the media are much more appropriate to the duplication of high contrast, rapid, and superficial modes, which is precisely why the new cultural milieu is infused not with the silences of meditation or of the gardener who slowly places seeds in the ground along a freshly dug furrow, but rather of the speed of machines, of violence and weapons, of that hard-edged, indifferent nihilism of a degraded, artificial environment? The fascination with machines, the techno-fascist style so prevalent today, carries well on the media, until there is no separation between brutalization by Power and the brutalization we carry within.

Even where other values creep through, we see people judging their own experiences by that of the media. “Pretty as a picture”—a sky reminds us of a film, the death of a human being finds meaning in a media episode. Hence, an irreal experience becomes our measure of the real: the circle is completed. The real experience is called into question; there is only duplication, only a hyperreality (Baudrillard). [3]

The very formation of the subject, once the result of a complex interaction of human beings participating in a symbolic order, has been replaced by the media. Modernists argue that by replacing the symbolic order with the nihilism of machines, we become free to create our own reality—a naive appraisal of our transformations. Instead, we are becoming machine-like rather than animal-like, and what we are is more and more determined by a technological roulette. We now make our covenant with commodities, demand miracles of computers, see our world through a manufactured lens rather than the mind’s eye. One eye blinds the other—they are incommensurable, absolutely incompatible. I think of a photograph I saw recently, of a New Guinea tribesman in traditional dress taking a photograph with an instamatic camera. What is he becoming, if not exactly another duplication, another clone of what we are all becoming?

The fact that everyone has “access” to media, that we have all to some degree or another become carriers of media, is far from being a defense against centralized power. In actuality it is perhaps the final logic of centralization as it spins out of orbit, the final reduction of the prisoner, when the realization occurs that, yes, he truly does love Big Brother. Or the realization that nature does not exist but is only what we arbitrarily decide to organize or that you do not experience a place until you have the photograph. The age of the genuine imitation.

The paleolithic cave walls are redone to protect the originals which are themselves shut off forever—these imitations are “authentic,” of course, but the spirit of the cave has fled; this is “art,” do you have your ticket, sir? “Take a photograph, it lasts longer.” You are capturing what is already only a frozen picture, devoid of symbolic and spiritual meaning—an “aesthetic hallucination,” in Baudrillard’s words. There is no aura. For a primitive, the mountain speaks, and a communication is established. For the tourist, it is tamed, desiccated. It is a dead image before the camera is aimed.

Reading the Newspapers

I will not exempt print media and newspapers from my criticism, though I tend to think that they are being eclipsed by television and computers. Nevertheless, they function similarly. The greater the scope, the more frequent the publication, the more the newspapers impose their model of fragmented, ideologized reality. Their spurious claim to “objectivity,” their mutilating process of selection and editing, their automatic reinforcement of the status quo (or their official manipulation if they serve as propaganda tools for competing rackets who are contesting only the present alignment of power), their banalization of real events happening to real human beings, all parallel television.

On the one hand, they are instruments of a vast, centralized lying machine. On the other, they distort even the information they transmit both in the way they present it and in the context they provide. The daily affair of the news is impossible to integrate even when one sets out to become informed by careful reading of the newspapers. Only extensive research would present any kind of reliable picture, but most people do not have the time or inclination to conduct such a project. Indeed, very few people read newspapers to be informed. Most people glance at the little news they might encounter, then head for so-called “features”—the actual reason people buy newspapers. They would be just as well off illiterate—they are just as much the creatures of rumor, manipulation and advertising as they were over a hundred years ago, when universal education and literacy were being touted as the foundations for an informed and free populace. In fact, as the techniques and scope of media have developed, people have become more manipulated than ever. [4]

I recognize the contradictions in publishing this essay in the *Fifth Estate*, which is media—alternative, not necessarily assimilable to the larger media discourse, perhaps, but nevertheless media. I am not sure how to move beyond the code; I am raising the possibility of doing so, and suggesting how far we have to go. I am not writing this to convince people of the truth of these feelings, but to put my own thoughts in order, and to invite response. From a discussion in a marginalized media operation about the nature of the media, to actually overthrowing the form of life which we have adopted, is a leap that won't be made here. But I would like to undermine the official religion of technology and media, and in order to do so, with tremendous ambivalence and doubt, I partake in it in a small, awkward, conditional way. Quite frankly, it is an act of desperation.

Machines of Deceit

But how do we confront the centralized machines of deceit? Am I suggesting that people stop producing media which expose the lies of the mass media on Central America, the Middle East, the nuclear threat, and the rest? Not necessarily. We are in desperate straits. But the “facts” aren't going to make the difference. What will be people's capacity to resist capital and the structures of domination—for their own reasons. Do people need to know the horrible facts about Central America in order to resist the coming war? Can we possibly beat the Power in this penny-ante game of facts when a single pronouncement by that media image called a “President”—that Nicaragua is destabilizing, terrorist, and all the rest, for example—drowns out the truth? If people were willing to turn off the media they might have fewer facts to win arguments, but they might not accept media-manufactured images of “strength,” “security,” and “well being”—all delivered through the advertising techniques of propagandists—as reality. Real well being, real peace, could not be reduced to a commodity sign to be consumed along with other signs. If only media can move people to resist domination, and they can only be signaled to resist as they are now to obey, what can this portend for human freedom?

Perhaps to some degree it is a question of balance; it is fair to say that there is a difference between using old technical means to communicate, and uncritically cheering on the latest technological developments and even volunteering for the regiments which will bring them about. I am writing this on a typewriter (with help from a pencil) because they are at hand; I am not shopping around for a word processor simply because it is available and is touted as the wave of the future. I am trying to figure out how to become less dependent on these machines, less linked to “world communications,” not more. The “global village” is capital's village; it is antithetical to any genuine village or community. [5]

Finally, I cannot help but suspect that people who promote communications technology for its potential community applications are much more fascinated by technology than they are by community.

Thus, they affirm the technolatriy which is the ideological linchpin of modern technological civilization. I think that for many such people, only a major technological catastrophe that affected them directly could change their minds. They are not predisposed to relinquish their illusions, which stem not only from a mystical faith in the salvation promised by technological development, but also from an utter fatalism which views the technological runaway as inevitable. This essentially religious viewpoint is shared by anarchist and authoritarian, scientific rationalist and religious fundamentalist. Bound to this is a complete surrender to media, in which even rebellion becomes mediatized and hence recuperated to the functional operation of technology—a self-operating feedback.

An “Epistemological Luddism”

Even where people are critical of the blatantly negative effects of mass technics and media, they tend to argue that technology does not have to be as it is; in a different, more perfect world, it could be different. This hypothetical justification of some mystical potentiality for technology refuses to face reality. Certainly, if human beings were radically different, if society had built-in defenses against technological runaway, if everyone had the superhuman ability to learn every specialization in order to make decisions, if this were a different planet with a different history, if, if, if...Meanwhile, what is legitimized is the material reality of a technological system which demands social stratification and compartmentalization, technological hierarchy and domination, runaway development, deadening labor, passivity, stupefaction and the ever-present risk—or certainty?—of disaster.

Contrary to McLuhanesque fantasies, the wheel is not an extension of the foot, but a simulation which destroys the original. Media do not extend meaning, but duplicate it, rendering any contrast between authenticity and inauthenticity, between a genuine experience rooted in human symbolic activity and a simulated meaning manufactured by technology, both absurd and deadly. The emerging hyperreality is completing the circle, replacing the symbolic integration of human beings in autonomously generated culture, with a functional integration within the technological universe. Little of the original territory now remains.

Abolishing mass media means abolishing a way of life, of learning to live in a different way. I don't know where to begin, or if there is an “anywhere” (or nowhere) from which we can begin, if only catastrophe—a word which I ponder and which evades me—awaits us. [6]

And so in desperation, I look for “solutions,” for “strategies” towards a way out. In his book *Autonomous Technology*, Langdon Winner suggests that a possible beginning to stopping this decaying juggernaut would be to begin dismantling the problematic technological structures and to refuse to repair those systems that are breaking down. This would also imply refusing to accept newly devised technological systems meant to fix or replace the old.

“This I would propose not as a solution in itself,” he writes, “but as a method of inquiry.” In this way we could investigate where our dependency lies and how we can find our way to autonomy and self-sufficiency. Such an “epistemological Luddism,” in Winner's words, could help us break up the structures of daily life and make it possible for us to discover new ways to live. Perhaps then we could take meaning back from the meaning-manufacturing apparatus of the mass media, stop talking its speech, and create our own speech and meaning which are rooted in community life.

A primary decision would be to refuse the “sacred communion” of technolatriy, to give up our illusions about technology and the false promise of mass communications, to begin to turn off the media and start thinking, creating, seeing for ourselves. I think it is all possible—paradise lies just beyond these walls.

Is there enough courage and imagination left in us to topple them?

Footnotes

1. And another writer, in the *Village Voice*, discusses the increasingly rapid breakdown of visual narrative by television, now exploded by the simultaneous use of several video screens. “Why not be cheerful about it for a change,

and view it as an increase of the speed at which information is taken in?” says Julie Talen (in “Beyond Monovision,” *Village Voice*, March 27, 1984). “How long do you have to watch Mrs. Olson [a character in a television commercial]...before you know what she’ll say? We couldn’t keep operating at a slower pace, we’d never keep up with the amount of information we’re expected to choose and process. [“Choice”—as in mechanized testing or voting; and “to process,” as meat is eviscerated, as “raw materials” are processed for distribution—two fundamental components of modern capital.] That’s what multiplier effects are all about: attention spans, increasing information.” The Pavlovian implications are clear, apart from the inevitable anxiety about what is happening to attention spans. Ellul writes in *Propaganda*, “...Though it is true that after a certain time the individual becomes indifferent to the propaganda content, that does not mean that he has become insensitive to propaganda, that he turns from it, that he is immune. It means exactly the opposite. He continues to obey the catchwords of propaganda, though he no longer listens to it. His reflexes still function...He no longer needs to see and read the poster; the simple splash of color is enough to awaken the desired reflexes in him. In reality, though he is [rendered immune] to ideological content, he is sensitized to propaganda itself.”

2. As in gentrification of cities, the mania for collection, reconstruction of historical sites, and folklore tamed and televised to be consumed as entertainment.

3. The completion of the circle can be seen in modern music. At one time, synthesizers and electronic music were used experimentally to imitate acoustic instruments and the human voice. More recently, however, modern composers have used completely acoustic ensembles and choirs to imitate electronic sounds, so that the two are indistinguishable: there is no longer any distinction between the “real” and the simulacrum.

4. Ellul writes, “Let us not say: ‘If one gave them good things to read...if these people received a better education...’ Such an argument has no validity because things just are not that way. Let us not say, either: ‘This is only the first stage; in France, the first stage was reached half a century ago, and we still are very far from attaining the second. There is more, unfortunately. This first stage has placed man at the disposal of propaganda. Before he can pass to the second stage, he will find himself in a universe of propaganda. Actually, the most obvious result of primary education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to make the individual susceptible to propaganda.’”

5. Which is why the argument that an increasingly complex world renders computers necessary is so fallacious; computerization can only make things even more complicated and intangible, and us more dependent on computers.

6. Baudrillard writes, “We all live by a fanatical idealism of meaning and communication, by an idealism of communication through meaning, and, in this perspective, it is very much a catastrophe of meaning which lies in wait for us.

But it must be seen that the term ‘catastrophe’ has this ‘catastrophic’ meaning of the end and annihilation only in a linear vision of accumulation and productive finality that the system imposes on us. Etymologically, the term only signifies the curvature, the winding down to the bottom of a cycle leading to what can be called the ‘horizon of the event,’ to the horizon of meaning, beyond which we cannot go. Beyond it, nothing takes place that has meaning for us.—but it suffices to exceed this ultimatum of meaning in order that catastrophe no longer appear as the last nihilistic day of reckoning, such as it functions in our current collective fantasy.” And elsewhere: “Are the mass media on the side of power in the manipulation of the masses, or are they on the side of the masses in the liquidation of meaning, in the violence done to meaning and in the fascination that results? Is it the media which induce fascination in the masses, or is the masses which divert the media into spectacle?...The media carry meaning and non-sense; they manipulate in every sense simultaneously. The process cannot be controlled, for the media convey the simulation internal to the system and the simulation destructive of the system according to a logic that is absolutely Moebian and circular—and this is exactly what it is like. There is no alternative to it, no logical resolution, Only a logical exacerbation and a catastrophic resolution.” (“The Implosion of Meaning in the Media,” in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*).

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