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Internet Culture and Random Musings

Internet Culture

The New 'Electronic Tribalism'

We live in a new electronic tribalism (Marshall McLuhan) that diminishes our individuality – by making the individual nothing but an animal surface that reports on its own every move – as it paradoxically pays tribute to an apparent individuality of everyone (through Twitter, Facebook, personalized websites, tv shows that can be watched at any personalized time). On the surface Western individuality is paid heed to but in reality we are devolving into a voyeuristic, global tribe where people are not paper tigers but paper puppets infatuated with the new technological means through which their lives can become transparent for the entire society to see.

Baudrillard

If we are supposed to take Baudrillard seriously – as more than a problem to be casually meditated upon while sipping a glassed-in academic cup of coffee, then we should understand everything as vanquished. Because of God dying, capitalism took the reins, giving the market a full-throttle-ahead driving, leaving no greater transcendental meaning. Until Soviet Communism fell, the West or at least America had held on to the afterglow of Christian morality in order to prove ourselves better than the Marxist other. Yet today, without an ideological rival that we are to prove ourselves better than, there is no self-restraint. In McDonalds and the in an evangelist preacher asking for donations – there is nothing behind immediate reality.

But is this feeling a misguided, intellectual nostalgia for a past that wasn't exactly how we perceive it through contemporaneous Western lens? Or, if the past was something similar to our perception, then was this meaning, ensconced in religious symbols, something to be nostalgic for? Is Baudrillard not a true conservative, afraid of what Theodore Kaczynski feared – the overwhelming aspects of technology and the "disappearance" of human identity as man?....into something that seems to be morphing so brusquely that it's hard to tell in what direction it may go? Surely this conservatism is a healthy wariness of humanity to kill itself through the drowning in a pool and leaving only digitized consciousness alive, in an "image" for all eternity.

Vicious Cycle

We must work more in order to spend more.

We must spend more in order to attain more satisfaction (so it is generally assumed).

We must work more in order to buy various medicines that overworking helps create the need for - through increased stress, not only weakening the immune system but also generating anxiety and sometimes depression (the latter through overworking and feeling jaded about it; wondering, "What is it all for?" Yet these same people take their medicine and go on everyday as if this question didn't profoundly disturb them.)

The Cold War's End Unleashed Advertisements

We must work more in order to spend more.

Surely we must spend for basic sustenance needs but we are bombarded by advertisements everywhere. Today anything is up for grabs in advertisement; for this helps generate money flow (i.e. it helps the economy). A billboard may have a picture of Einstein advertising sneakers reads "The Theory of Movability" or it can have a picture of the elderly looking dreamy-eyed on Celebrex. Even sexual impotence is in the public sphere because money can be made with a pharmaceutical solution. All is allowed.

Virtually Prostitution

Prostitution is legal as long as it is filmed and not participated in, within a shady room.

The pornography is then sold. Otherwise, a sweaty forty year old with a hooker in a hotel room is illegal because it cannot be commoditized. It is nothing other than it is: an unrequited drive for sex with an alluring young woman. Yet when it is commoditized and the porn film is sold, anyone who has twelve dollars is allowed to look through a virtual peekhole, at acts of prostitution and because of mirror neurons firing in the same region of the brain of the viewer as the man who is engaged in the act….so one can have a prostitute through the safety, disease-free and cleanliness of one's own home. This is a symbol not merely how America is a thoroughly consumerist society (and this is nothing new) but rather how through technology we no longer have to act.

A Chuckie Cheese for the Adult Brain

Technology is a clean anesthetizing vehicle through which the experience in the physical world loses its allure because our most rudimentary drive for real experience and contact with the physical world is too often satiated and pacified with what a screen – be it television, computer or video game – can bring us. It is not uncommon to go to a party and text message half the night, nor is it uncommon to bring one's laptop.

In the early 21st century, our technology is beginning to overwhelm us. Assuming that high technology increases (especially if it does exponentially), how will it not overwhelm us in such a way that we won't be able recognize few of the human traits or activities that we've been engaged in for centuries and millennia? Essentially, the Internet and its various websites, subtracting the ones with academic or artistic interests, are boxes built for the brain to play inside – a Chuckie Cheese for the adult brain! One inevitably becomes immersed these boxes and can easily lose interest in true artistic creations; there one's energy is sucked and there are psychological reinforcements to insure that one remains at Chuckie Cheese for a significant duration.

Reality Television and the Internet

When social outlets are laid, they will usually be driven on. Internet capitalists have well understood this. The advertisement clutter that still populates our television, radios and billboards has moved into the (relatively new, of course) new media: the Internet. Unlike television, where one could argue (perhaps with cartoons it's not applicable) that the drama stage from millennia ago with live audiences had transformed into a box in everyone's living room; and radio, where popular orators have spoken to crowds for centuries has been placed in a box beside everyone's television, the Internet is participatory.

Just as the Internet started to spread throughout Western households like wildfire, television station executives seemed to have understood that they were now competing, in addition to other TV and radio shows, with a form media in which everyone could join in; thus "reality" shows grew exponentially. In such a way, as on the Internet, "reality" is glorified; that is everyday life – but not in a way that illustrates beauty or is sublime as in Millet paintings – is but a warped caricature everyday life!

Just as Baudrillard writes that the news reflects something different than the complexity of what is actually occurring in space-time, reality shows are hardly an accurate reflection of life. They are more a reflection of what television station managers think will appeal to the Jerry Springer fan in us all; the lowest common denominator. In a "reality" setting, the audience's mirror neurons give them the feeling of participation. In this way television can compete for advertising dollars with the Internet and its countless social networking sites. As an Internet species, our dormant potential as human beings is often immediately projected onto a world-wide screen. But the delusion of the entire world being concerned with a when person brushes their teeth is farcical!

Seemingly one projects everything, immediately, as brusque as one can be handed a bag of a Big Mac and fries, even faster! Their life becomes devoted to a sociality devoid of physicality! A sociality based on the emptiness of mere words that often so inaccurately portray us; not words from the depths of humanity, but reactionary words to developments on social networking sites or reflexive reactions to something on the news or in their own "real" life. How will a culture imbibed with this, such as today's youth, ever be able to contain an original thought that has not immediately truncated its potentiation through the typing away of all its possible rudiments on the Internet?

The clutter of extended work days, the bombardment of advertisements, the innumerable choices as consumers we are given in the physical world and cyberspace, through which we overestimate our freedom while simultaneously being as pacified and docile as ever….all this clutter creates a need for escapism. The best escape of responsibility, individuality and freedom, perhaps over and above television, is Internet sociality where reflexivity takes over into a vast, tribal, world-wide stew where one becomes a legend in their own head.

The Illusion of a Piece of Cheese

Unlike television and radio, the Internet has no audience. Essentially, the audience is the Internet. Participation is the mainstay. Though of course since television's birth parents have often complained about their children sitting in front of the TV for hours on end, yet these children have, by and large, still had the need to participate in life outside of the television. But with today's high-definition interactive video games along with countless Internet games comprised of "Second Life" characteristics where one becomes an active participant, there is a real danger of future generations may be bereft of the physicality of life that humans have known for since our break from apes.

Participating in our "hottest" (McLuhan) media includes typing, playing simulated instruments and manipulating a joystick. The prefix 'joy' in joystick can be hardly used to describe the participatory media we've had for the past thirty plus years but seem to have been enhanced exponentially in the past five to ten. Yet because a mouse may seem happy as it tries to find its way through a maze and looks content when eating the cheese at the end, is it? Or is it confined within the walls of a scientist's design so that he may study the effect of new pharmaceuticals? Similarly, is the person engaged in this new media happy while his attention is confined within the walls of capitalist's concoction because he is told he beat his highest score or has over seven hundred "friends"? Or is much of his human, all too human, potential projected into these new media devices all for the illusion of a piece cheese? Upon reaching the cheese – like the mouse – the person is satiated, pacified and ready for another day of ten hours of office work (during which he may "surf" the web, receiving intermittent pieces of cheese throughout the day).

Comparing Media

There are so many avenues through which words can be mediated in order to signify communication. Of course there still exists the letter and telephone (and now cell phone) but these are respectively cold and cooling media. In contemporary America, it is not the choice of young people under thirty to speak to one another on the phone anymore. Still they would engage in the occasional cell phone conversation but seemingly only by default: if one of the two conversationalists forgot to play by the hot media rules and atavistically resorted to calling the other, the recipient of the call may suffer to answer it. "But why couldn't they just send a text message or email?" they may likely be thinking….or, even better, video chat!

The impersonal nature of the two hottest (McLuhan) forms – texting and via Internet – of communication is warming in a society striving to reach the mediocrity of mechanized, machinated communication. Hearing someone's voice affectations and intonations on the phone – that goes right to sense perception, causing one to perceive the other less abstractly and more holistically – is lost in today's hot communication forms. It seems as if the hottest form of communication in America is that which is de-privatized on social networking sites like Twitter, Gather, Myspace, Myyearbook.com, and Facebook…to name only a few. There, all one's supposed "friends" can see it, or if the profile is not made "private", then any Internet user can view it.

Why this seemingly subconscious collective adjustment to wanting absolutely no privacy anymore? Are we preparing for the draconian high tech intrusion of "Big Brother" in the form of governmental or corporation nature? Or is it simply because the social avenues have been manufactured by capitalist-funded techies that we blindly project our social natures and interactions for all to see in the vast corral of the Internet?

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Yet, one may argue, that text message is simply the modern equivalent to the telegraphic message and an email the equivalent to a letter. On the surface these equations make some sense: the telegraph was short, sometimes urgent as can be a text message, albeit the latter is rarely urgent, and the email, while not as formalistic as we were taught to write letters in grade school, has the same basic outline. The difference, inherent in both comparisons, is the speed at which they can be sent, retrieved, and sent back; a communicative pinball machine.

First of all, one doesn't have to go to a telegraph switchboard operator to send one. One merely has to reach into their pocket or pocketbook and take out their cell phone; this allows people to send text messages with a petulant frequency as opposed to sending a telegraph where the relative infrequency of sending one implicitly demanded that something important usually needed to be conveyed. The addiction to text messaging may be more perhaps the addiction to the toy itself rather than simply being hyper-social……But all in all, the text message seems to evoke unnecessary conversation much of the time, words that need not have been formed, sentences or quasi sentences (quasi words and overuse of acronyms as well!) created to sheath the vacuum modern day work and

basic daily life in order to prevent any authentic reflection (thought that requires more than a reflex). Of course using modern day text messaging, one could debate Kant and Hegel, but unless I'm drastically wrong, this rarely happens.

Because of the velocity in which one can send an email, the recipient can retrieve it and send one back in a couple minutes. Emails need not say as much as a letter because of the comparatively slowness of the physical travel and mail service system through which the latter traversed. Writing a letter required reflection on what one wrote rather than, as emails so often do, reflexive, knee-jerk correspondence. Hence the necessity for depth in an email is nonexistent (of course that is not the same thing as saying it doesn't happen or is impossible).

Because our technology allows communication to travel so brusquely, it often devolves into knee-jerk nature. Text messages rarely have entire sentences. They are linguistic pinballs trapped in a pinball machine. In the process, the language is bastardized, not in the vernacular that great authors have used to give the masses a greater understanding of the human condition or vernacular developed by a particular ethnic, geographic or social group. Instead, this perversion of language reflects a minimization of thought.

As a pinball is battered around inside the pinball machine in the dimly lit, anemic local bowladrome, there is no cessation or relaxation from reflexive communication for any contemplation; resulting in communication becoming little more than a cheap whore, revealing only the façade of man. It also mutates into the village idiot dancing around in the public square like a court jester (think of Facebook status updates). In such an environment, the trivialization of everything seems to have arrived at the threshold of modern American life. Unhinged capitalism may have destroyed America's national morals, what we believe in now is the necessity for consciousness to be occupied by a dancing hyena sterilized behind a screen. This is endearing and makes us feel bad for the hyena…..tomorrow we become the hyena!

Social Networks – The Surface and its Double

Facebook: define yourself before others define you. There has always been an undeniable urge to control how others perceive you. Now, one can stake one's place on a page or pages of the Internet and expose all of themselves that they wish to expose. Rather than having the intended effect, this creates a person and their double. The person who one hangs around with, is one's co-worker, classmate, cousin, etc paste their individuated stake on the Internet, allowing others to see the part of their personality that they want the world to see. How one acts in public, at the office, in school or with friends, is their initial surface layer, there is now an electronic layer atop this. Essentially this is the surface and its double.

But what does this say about society? A society comprised of people who not only worry about how they are perceived when they are amidst some element of the public – whether with friends, working, at school, etc. – but also when they are ostensibly alone (but tapped into the social

web). The funny thing is that now with IPhones, the immediacy of creating a perception of an event – a party, lecture, dinner, or just hanging with friends – can simultaneously be pictorially defined and congealed as a representation of what socially is (or has just) occurring. Perhaps with only some hyperbole, one could say that this media is so hot in McLuhan's sense of the term, that the aristocratic ball of the 18th century which Facebook and other social networks have transformed out lives into (those of us from teenage years to early to mid-forties, in at least America), is an ever occurring event. Even work, where if one has the access and freedom to use their IPhone camera, can be part of the aristocratic gabbing ball where everyone can comment on, "like" it, or "share" with others.

Gregor Samsa's Smile

If Gregor Samsa, the large awkward beetle from Kafka's short novella, The Metamorphosis, were alive today and unable to make work for some time, even if he didn't have access to an IPhone, he would surely have access to a camera. He could take pictures of himself in the mirror, email them to his parents (who otherwise would ceaselessly be banging on the door), his friends and boss. Before they could make fun of him, he could post his innermost thoughts on Facebook or Twitter and even make fun of self-deprecating jokes about himself before they could. If they did make fun of him, he if he lived in Massachusetts or New Jersey, he could have them prosecuted. What's more, he could send pictures to the welfare agency and immediately get disability payments. Essentially he could vegetate in indolence between the Internet and television for potentially years (which depending on the kind of beetle could range between weeks and years).

In short, today's Gregor Samsa would have no existential dilemma….. because today's Gregor wouldn't remember how he lived fifteen years ago as a person who dealt with a myriad of problems rather than reflecting them onto a social network and practically negating them. Finding a meaning to existence that has no inherent one is a joke: reflexive sociality and voyeuristic reality (from Second Life to omnipresent "reality" television). If not this, just as most people become hyper-social through this medium, some become its antithesis – alienated in the extreme. This exists in the West but especially in countries peering in, not necessarily ones that are rich in their own culture but rather ones that have aspired to like the West (Slavoj Zizek suspects this is a major impetus for religious fundamentalism in Muslim countries) but failed due mainly to internal corruption and autocratic rule….the fall back is religious fundamentalism and jealousy of the West's perceived Heaven on earth.

Karaoke Culture

Akaraoke culture has fallen upon us. We have inherited the earth and its innumerable technological components; through this we have sublimated our instincts in a way in which they can be satiated through communication and displays of purported individuality onto a screen. In this way we feel whole. In this way our endless hours at the office or of physical toil make everything worthwhile.

A karaoke bar is comprised of a crestfallen bunch. There are college students with Budweisers in hand wearing eternally gluttonous smiles, obese people who have come to prove to their friends that they can sing and old alcoholics who delight in singing a song from their younger years. They are all aiming to achieve the most mundane of accomplishments: taking someone else's song and temporally giving themselves the illusion that they're making it their own. In this decade of individuation, the individual can create his very own space in the universe. He can broadcast himself across the universe. The most sawing-the-brain-slowly dullard, who is devoid of personality, now becomes a true individual simply because he can post on Facebook that he is now drinking coffee! And if he likes chess, he can join one of the many chess groups of the Internet, play chess online, discuss various moves, gloat about his victories or whine about his defeats.

Communication between individuals in the West has interlocked people more tightly than ever – or this an illusion because it is only through the screen that they're so tightly bound? It seems people have become hyper-social in a way that has deteriorated individual personalities on a broad level. It almost seems as if one does something only so they can write what they are actually doing on a social network website. Such comfort level one must derive from letting everyone know what they are doing at all times. It's as if they were back in the womb; but the womb is the delusional idea that the world has one vast warm tribal soup and sociality is the God to whom everyone must pay tribute. It is an illusion of grandeur to think that in the Age of the Internet, individuality is ripe and thriving when in fact we are amidst a karaoke culture.

One of the first music acts to play karaoke so flagrantly with another music group's recordings and then go platinum with it was Run DMC's "Walk This Way". Vanilla Ice robbed Queen's "Under Pressure". More recently and more subtly Kate Perry purloined The Pointer Sister's "I'm So Excited" with her "I Kissed a Girl". There also is talk of having books online – classics – which a reader can manipulate the novel to their own ends…For instance, Anna Karina chooses not to throw herself under a train and lives a long and happy life thereafter. Or the main character in *Nausea* is saved by Jesus and becomes an evangelical preacher.

One can do what they want today. And why not? Is there anything better one can do? Can one create anymore? With the clutter from ceaseless advertisements, unhinged after the Cold War, and the cyclones of information being vomited at one every day, one no longer has a stomach for digestion. Therefore one becomes a reflexive being, a mere knee that the doctor hits. Instead of writing a real song after digesting a century of

modern music, one hears Neko Case and rewrites his song in a slightly varied form or else goes to a karaoke bar to sing it…in this way it becomes one's own.

In truth, there are very few individuals anymore. So many people wear their soul on their sleeve; their soul is an outer layer facade. I had someone tell me a week ago after talking to me for less than a half minute that he was a fan of Aleister Crowley and that he was a Satanist. Is it possible his brain chemistry was altered to such a degree that communication via a social website has taken over social situations in actual living space. Did he see me as someone viewing his Facebook or Myspace profile and therefore feel obliged to tell me of his beliefs? It seems one has turned oneself into the most banal of all legends; the only problem is no one else really cares about anyone else's.

Again, picture the singer at a karaoke bar: she walks up to the microphone, alcohol has deluged the brain enough for decent inebriation, she gets closer, takes a deep breath, and now her minute of fame. Meanwhile, elsewhere around the bar people are talking, drinking and will hardly pay much attention to this girl; many of them are eagerly awaiting their name to be called so they can sing and have a minute in the spotlight. Everyone is reduced to being temporally famous; the outlet is an immediacy that is available (just as capitalism's results have found an immediate outlet for one's material needs, the Internet does this for the soul). The immediacy of the availability, not for mere physical needs but social as well, deters introspection, rumination, and loneliness which are the precursors to real creativity. A karaoke culture has fallen upon us. All one can do is sing karaoke, pretend the song is theirs or more likely not care, and wait for death.

'Scare Factor'

The television show "The Scare Factor" is categorically analogous to filming someone's face as I cock a magnum handgun at their temple and have my finger on the trigger ready to shoot…..the difference is the former is an actual show that massages America's increasingly voyeuristic tendencies in order for profit.

Actors Acting in Theatricalized Reality

It's a shame that the Romans, who often treated their slaves as dispensable, weren't as enraptured by theater as were the Greeks. For instead of turning slaves into gladiators fighting to the death, plays like Bacchae and Antigone could have been performed in which actors truly became their characters using the same disposable (to the Romans) gladiator slaves. In this way the raucous Roman audience, comparable largely to the post-Cold War American television audience – where there is no longer reason to prove moral high ground to the Soviets and where capitalism virtually subjugates a country's morality – could be transformed into an Artaudian audience sitting on the edge of their seats, inevitably empathizing with characters whose lives were doubly on the line (in fiction and in actuality). By viewing and experiencing directly through the tragedy unfolding, they could perhaps evade some of the unnecessary tragedies in their own life.

Essentially, the idea of actor-become-character would work well in early 21st century America, where the relationship between fiction and nonfiction is heavily blurred, with "reality tv". Even if those in ostensibly "real" situations weren't goaded into becoming hyperboles of themselves and their emotions (the latter of which are encouraged to erupt, for entertainment purposes), there would still be the public eye (television camera) on them, implicitly seeking entertainment, demanding drama, and consequently causing them to act differently than if cameras were not there.

If not for today's sensibility, which would rather see people perish for country than for art, this actor transforming into the play's character – nothing simulated – not sex, death, fighting, etc. – would go over well with the voyeuristic sensibility and Roman tastes of today's American audience. But such is the nature of today's mores and thus it seems Rome would have been the ideal place for an actual theater and its double that would have delighted Antoin Artaud.

Contemporary Intelligence, in Human Form

Intelligent people today – not those of wisdom – in the up and coming generation, are information spitters and perhaps little more. They regurgitate all the readily available information from the Internet and spit it back when the said topic emerges or when they want a specific topic to emerge so as to masticate on their own perceived intelligence. They talk brusquely, informatively, and robotically in a way that does not enlighten but merely informs that which is now easily accessible to all…..Essentially they are competing with the mediating technology which can store exorbitant amounts of information and lays it out on a screen in a fraction of a second.

The problem with information spitters is that the content that they store in their brains seems all too similar to a how a computer stores copious amounts of information – it stores it, computes it and displays it on the screen. They do not absorb or reflect. Because they do neither of these, it does not create. And as Andrey Vyshedskiy writes in On the Origin of the Human Mind, what distinguishes Homo sapiens from other species is that they can imagine something wholly new and enact its realization. Those who've grown up, ensconced in the speed and readily available access to nearly any information, now seem to reflexively compete with that same information technology and in doing so they inevitably become more robotic and are effectively, information spitters.

9/11 "Truthers"- Archetypal Internet Culture

Conspiracy theories and information that is lesser known to the pubic often have a gray area, sometimes making the two almost indistinguishable. Yet that should not discourage us from differentiating the two. The former is generally based on half-truths while lesser known information, though sometimes being perceived as conspiratorial, is based on grounded evidence.It is no coincidence that those purporting these beliefs do so with such fervor and brusqueness, as if just having imbibed Jesus Ritalin, that they rarely breathe and even more rarely let the listener speak. In such fashion, the Great Awakening's George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards have emerged and like their illiterate followers have applied the 'copy' and 'paste' button from the Internet and cemented it onto their brains….hence when their followers speak, it is with religious frenzy so that they either won't forget their creed or be shaken from myopia.

The Pentagon

One of the most popular of these alternative churches adhering to Internet gospel is 9/11 as an insider or Israeli job. The element of this conspiracy that is most telling of our internet culture is that a missile hit the Pentagon rather than a Boeing aircraft packed with people. Without explaining where the people who were aboard American Airlines Flight 77 may have gone, the air traffic controllers who were observing the flight course of this plane and saw it turn over West Virginia and go off radar in Washington D.C, and the many other information that points to this plane hitting the Pentagon, they largely rely on a low-grade real-time security camera at least 200 yards away.

Additionally relied upon are the after-shots of the Pentagon from which the argument is that there is no way the hole in the building was large enough for a plane to have struck it and thus must have been a missile. Yet, arguably the most conspiratorial weight is given to the low-grade, real-time video of something hitting the Pentagon at about 500 hundred mph. This security camera captures about 50 yards in front of the building from which an 'object' struck the building. The implicit expectation of conspiracy theorists in this regard is that if there were a plane, the low-grade real-time security camera from a distant side view should have accurately captured it. Is seeing believing? Have we grown so accustomed to real-time media images, especially of disasters, that when we are not spoon fed them, we discount logic and scream at the top of our blithe lungs, "Conspiracy!!!" Can we imagine Werner Heisenberg taking this 'evidence' of conspiracy seriously after his discovery of the uncertainty principle about a eighty years ago?

Twin Towers

When we witness an event through a medium or in person, we reflexively relate it to any other similar experiences that we have either witnessed directly or through a medium. In the case of the Twin Towers collapsing, some people reported they heard loud explosions, and arrive at the conclusion that it must've been lined with explosives beforehand. Because people are more accustomed to building demolition than a plane crashing into a building and its resultant burning jet fuel, steel weakening and finally enough for floors to collapse upon themselves, the theory of explosives panders to people's reflexive reliance on explanations derived from the past, which they are familiar with, rather than understanding a new circumstance through logic. Also, how often, before 9/11, did we see a plane going full speed into a building that was specifically built to withstand an attack as is the Pentagon? Instead, we remember watching the First Gulf War and the American Cruise missiles pummeling Baghdad.

"The First Gulf War Did Not Exist" – Jean Baudrillard

We are increasingly addicted to real-time, high quality media video. If we don't get fed it, the event didn't exist. Baudrillard's "The First Gulf War Did Not Exist" applies in full to Flight 77 hitting the Pentagon. The real time image was low quality and grainy enough to only see that something hit the Pentagon and then consequential immediate cloud of thick fire and smoke rising. Because the real time footage was not high quality enough and not in a position to accurately view the 'object' hitting the Pentagon, it did not exist. And thus the 9/11 conspiracy gains persuasive power because our increasing addiction to high-grade real time image that has become more important than the event itself….to some, it helps obfuscate the event entirely.

An alarm to jolt Internet Culture from its somnolence!

The dance cannot be finished. It was pulverized by the dawn slashing your forehead clear of all skin. It outlasted devastation, as the Minotaur blithely surrounded our perimeter, Medusa followed, encircling our headaches turned to stone.

And here we are, back in the cave fire in pre-historical Gabon, praying to ancestors in whispered crackling breath. Here we are, in a nonsensical world construed and then physically created to make sense.

Atop the primeval gravy, we've mixed the organic soup – surely we knew some of its compounds and created a world of our ancestors' dreams….We've sheathed nature with concrete, factories, factory-farmed animals, oil rigs….a devastation – complete genocide of uncountable life forms.

And now the dreams we've turned into reality are too much so that all we have is escapism and simulation of the actual. But escapism cannot last forever and simulation will lose its novelty before long and what then?

Like an amnesiac patient who suddenly regains his memory and realizes that he massacred his family years ago – how does he hide this or come to terms with this when he awakens? Will he feign loss of memory again? Will he self-destruct or will he destroy others so that the out-of-control dream of the ancestors can be finished once and for all?

How can we come to terms with this dream? There are too many Hegelian dialectical problems going on. The perpetual quick-time adding up of thesis and antithesis become so entwined in life and what we have created that amnesiac will either continue blindly or destroy entirely. In the former scenario, a whole new unrecognizable world will be created and in the latter he will give earth back to its elements.

Random Musings

Destroy-the-World Potential

Global warming, while being a veritable objective phenomenon, may well be galvanized by a Promethean fear that man has set fire to the earth, and much like ancient soothsaying prognosticating Isaiah, rapid change is necessary to ward off irreparable, drastic consequences. Or perhaps, within the exponential rate of technological development that's changing the way we live at such a seemingly brusque pace, we want to remind ourselves that we're still worthy enough – still human, all too human – to have the destroy-the-world potential.

Serving Five Life Sentences?

What does a court mean when they sentence a convicted criminal for accumulated counts of crimes that amount to hundreds of years behind bars? Are they worried about Kurzweil's singularity and its treasure chest of corollaries that may expand human lifespan far beyond todays mid 70's average (in the West)? Or, more likely, are they not using hyperbole to highlight the egregiousness of the crime committed, the irreducible damage it has done society and, especially, specific individuals within it?

Retaliation on cats and dogs

Domesticating *canis* and *cattus* over ten thousand years ago may have been a kind of psychological payment to our ancestors, maybe even one of the earliest forms of ancestor worship (that was most likely the first form of religion)! Not merely were our four foot tall, Australopithecine ancestors, prey to big cats of the panther genus that evolved 5 million years ago, but all our ancestors since have been their prey to their descendants. Yet roughly twelve thousand years ago, all our ancestors who became the meal of a pack of wolves or a big cat…the day of retribution has arrived! We devolved their distant heirs into cute, small cats that we treat like our props, give them catnip, rolling balls around to play with….and if they're lucky a bowl of tuna!.....And the wolf's heir constantly begs for our attention and has become our both proverbial and actual lapdog! What retribution!

Duty Free!

Ever fly an airplane from the United States to the British Isles and repeatedly hear that 'duty free' merchandise is being sold? What are we, colonists? They're using our history against us and not without a hint of irony! "Duty free! Duty free watches! Duty free jewelry!" . . . ridiculously overpriced and shoddy quality but 'duty free'! It almost seems like "naïve, stupid American bastards" is implicit in this!

Proclivity for Fascism

A populace's proclivity for a Fascist-like political mentality when a depression or recession hits is analogous to a depressive's allure to suicide when crestfallen waters hit their banks. Perhaps, in essence, the canaille now displays a Baudrillardian uncaring for the conduct of the state and the conditions in which they live: instead they forfeit or perhaps defer all power to the simplicity of beliefs – God, honor, and nation – as if these ideals held the potential convalescence to a myriad of social, economic and political problems in a post-modern world. Not entirely dissimilar to this drive is that for complete state socialism (which often is interlinked to fascism) and manifests under similar aforementioned conditions.

A Leader Deferring Power

It must be difficult for a leader to give up power….especially for an authoritarian ruler who rose to power through a coup! In fact, such an occurrence, I think, is certainly a rarity. For this Pervez Musharaff must be commended!

Though the following may serve as a crass, superficial analogy, but please indulge me: Picture how hard it would be for a father to give up being the head of his family in a full-fledged patriarchal society. It is as though the father not only understands it to be the way of things that he should be in charge of his family and to some degree he may relish in this power, but also, he may feel some sort of responsibility for his wife and children. He may think, rightly or wrongly, that if he was no longer the patriarch that his family would crumble. Perhaps this is merely the will to power donning the pretense of care; or maybe it is a sincere fear.

Either way, to some degree, this is in the mind of leaders who gained power through extralegal means…..the same reluctance to concede power is likely at work in democracies (and businesses as well!) where presidents and prime ministers are usually temporal nation state heads. It is for these reasons that Vladmir Putin, Jimmy Carter, Dick Cheney, Bill Clinton wish to continue to have a prominent role in world affairs; almost like a deposed biological father tries to exert more influence over his child's life than the stepfather, though the latter usually sees the child more often.

The degree to which the former rulers throw themselves into world affairs highlights their necessity to remind themselves that they're not inconsequential – whether it is a sincere belief that they will have a benevolent effect on their country's and world's affairs or because they are

addicted to the role of national or world prominence. But as for Pervez Musharaff, after being cajoled to step down from power through largely peaceful democratic means……I wonder what he is doing and thinking right now in Karachi, where he resides, virtually banished from proverbial family influence…..if only Mugabe, Assad and Ayatollah Khamenei and many others could follow his footsteps!

A 'good' intellectual conversation

It is when one can masticate upon one's ego in the realm of knowledge and blow the occasional bubble. Each conversant has the opportunity to explicate pieces of information or an amalgamation of intuition and original thinking backed by fact they believe the average person on the street is not privy to. The conversation goes smoothly with few if any pauses and each conversant is pleased with the fact that they were not overwhelmed by the other person's knowledge or babble.

No Exit

Standing in the center of a crowded elevator is akin to a hermit crab pulled from its shell, bereft of its protective layer. Just as a hermit crab desperately tries to go back into its shell at the first opportunity, so also does the person in the center of an elevator by brusquely shooting towards its peripheral wall when some people leave or whenever possible.

Humanitarian acts done to yield an expression of gratitude

It was thought that, like a Pavlovian social scientist, one could elicit a certain response from a specific person or people. This response was to be an expression of appreciation. When there was no or little gratitude expressed, the 'humanitarian' became crestfallen for being unable to create a situation where the hypothesized response was not attained. The failed social scientist did not get their speciously philanthropic ego rubbed!

Clique Formation

Where is the lineation of when a once-casual group of acquaintances morphs into something that can only vaguely be described as a sort of cultish clique? It is hard to say when this forms or what exactly it comprises of, but certain elements nonexistent before now illuminate: a new language forms involving somewhat repetitious subjects spoken about and a casualness and ease with which they are spoken.

Additionally, there exists a new level of artificiality that ends up strengthening the ties within the circle and extricating or weakening the ties outside. This can be seen in reciprocal compliments that now become

not necessarily given when the other feels that they are deserved but rather that they are now obliged to give; otherwise they are not within the group.

Also there is now a peculiar concern with the dynamics within the group; in other words, it becomes a sewing club of gossip. Those on the periphery of this group will either choose to subordinate themselves to the new group mores, or else, be *de facto* shut out from hanging with the same people in the same setting, for there now exists a cultish, tribal feel – that can be very provincial and diminutive to individuality.

Another crucial aspect to this nascent, voluntary cultish tribe is that they had better not miss specific ritual events without having a very good reason! Or else they will be branded a Joan of Arc heretic and may soon be excommunicated!

The Group: on the inside and out

From the periphery, the inside was a fatuous joke built around gross falsehoods. There was no freedom; people were play-acting automatons of their peers' expectations.

From the inside, one was enmeshed in amiable sociality that had its own idiosyncratic peculiarities. When together and seen as a communitarian seamless whole, they were not acting like beings severed from the pre-frontal cortex of the brain but simply enjoying one another's company.

A good bartender

A good bartender is accustomed to talking to loudly to match the stridence of his customer's inebriation.

Locked within one's own pre-fontal cortex?

How often does one answer what they had expected or wanted to hear rather than what was asked?

In an election

In an election when your side is losing, allege fraud, there's always someone who will take you seriously…most likely your followers!