

sycamore lite reading and Make Total Distro presents



66 reviews ★★★★★

Reviews for this item 6

Reviews for this shop 66

Sort by: Recor

 [robert_ambrosini](#) Nov 19, 2020
★★★★☆
did not work for me i recomend having a pro do this type of conjuration i recomend lindsey cascell you can find her in etsy i got my djinn from her

Purchased item:

 [Djinn Summoning](#)

👍 3 Helpful

 [Duane](#) May 7, 2021
★★★★★
the ring for astrol time travel is so powerful i close m,yes i see while light then blue then cross starwitchh opens up into a portel then im in past so now bed time will be fun to travel

THE EVIL GENIE

excerpts from
The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena
by Jean Baudrillard
translated by James Benedict

In the sphere of rights the irresistible trend is towards a situation where, if something can be taken for granted, all rights are otiose, whereas if a right must be demanded, it means that the battle is already lost; thus the very call for rights to water, air and space indicates that these things are already on the way out. Similarly the evocation of a right to reply signals the absence of any dialogue, and so on.

The rights of an individual lose their meaning as soon as the individual is no longer an alienated being, deprived of his own being, a stranger to himself, as has long been the case in societies of exploitation and scarcity. In his postmodern avatar, however, the individual is a self-referential and self-operating unit. Under such circumstances the human-rights system becomes totally inadequate and illusory: the flexible, mobile individual of variable geometric form is no longer a subject with rights but has become, rather, a tactician and promoter of his own existence whose point of reference is not some agency of law but merely the efficiency of his own functioning or performance.

editors note	3
from Prophylaxis and Virulence	6
from The Fate of Energy	17
from Xerox and Infinity	19
from Whatever Happened to Evil?	29

Yet it is precisely now that the rights of man are acquiring a worldwide resonance. They constitute the only ideology that is currently available--which is as much as to say that human rights are the zero point of ideology, the sole outstanding balance of history. Human rights and ecology are the two teats of the consensus. The current world charter is that of the New Political Ecology.

Ought we to view this apotheosis of human rights as the irresistible rise of stupidity, as a masterpiece which, though imperiled, is liable to light up the coming *fin de siecle* in the full glare of the consensus?

For after all, dying (and living too) is a destiny, a fate--be it happy or unhappy--and certainly not a right.

No one can stop me from claiming the right to move my knight in a straight line on the chessboard, but where does it get me? Rights in such matters are idiotic.

The right to work: yes, we have reached that point, thanks to a savage irony. The right to unemployment! The right to strike! No one can even see the surreal humour of such things anymore. Occasionally, though, a certain black humour does burst out here, as when an American condemned to death claims the right to be executed despite the efforts of umpteen human-rights organizations to obtain a stay of execution. This is where things get interesting. The list of rights turns out to include not a few bizarre varieties: the Israelis, for example, claim as a sort of right the fact that there are criminals among their number--whereas from time immemorial, Jews were 'only victims'. Now at last they can enjoy the officially endorsed luxury of criminality!

There can be no doubt either that the USSR, with Chernobyl, the Armenian earthquake and the foundering of a nuclear submarine, has taken a giant step towards the extension of the rights of man (indeed, beyond the accords of Helsinki or elsewhere), for the Soviets have clearly laid claim to the *right to catastrophe* It is indeed your most fundamental and essential right--your right to accidents, to crime, to error, to Evil, to the worst as well as to the best...

editors note

"Everything is ambiguous and reversible."

Baudrillard is somewhat unpopular in general, and this book is one of the most unlikely to find popularity in our current time.

He is considered by many to be the consummate pomo asshole who refuses to engage on the level of *meaning* in political history especially. Many of his axioms (e.g., "the Gulf War did not take place") are considered "offensive" by leftists in how they undersell the regime of meaning, especially historical meaning. To many readers, especially on the left, this can only be a kind of snobby evasion of the still-important questions of justice and futurity, and constitute an irresponsible abandonment of *social* justice in particular. Thus, from the left, Baudrillard's work has been labeled reactionary, accelerationist, misogynist, anti-collective, pro-capitalist, or transphobic.

I think these things are quite easily found in his work, at least thematically--but intellectual promiscuity is important to me, and it is a power that renders visible even amidst all those impolite thematic froths the presence one of the most important principles he delineates: the principle of *reversibility*. Reversibility is *the* defining quality of what he calls here "Evil".

In modernity, the modern subject or entity is now unwilling to "speak Evil"; I think he correctly identifies the fatal flaw of this drive to universal whitewashing and elimination of nonmoral and nongood visions. If nothing else, refusing to "speak Evil", insisting on an infinite field of positivity and moral goodness, is to leave Evil and its power to one's enemies, be they the right wing or the "terrorists".

I find that right now, people broadly cease to believe in reversibility, people lose touch with it, nevermind that it lives forever in all forms of language. Ever since Trump was elected (or even before that), a huge swath of America who felt impacted one way or the other by this stark change in the painted backdrop has retreated to a kind of obsessive belief in materially-bounded *meanings*. To both peers and enemies right now, everything is *unambiguous*, and *nothing* is reversible, least of all in what anything "means". I think doubling down on this perspective is a major mistake.

It is astonishing to me how literal-minded people seem to be in this moment, especially on the left. Much argument seems to take place all the time about "policing language"; even those who don't like this neurotic intensity tend only to respond by policing the policing of language and issuing tickets. No one simply strikes back; all play with the *surfaces of things* is resented in relation to their (even just potential) *disloyalty to what is behind or beneath the surface*; instead, people try to climb to the top of the frenzied pile so that they will get to make the rules for another few breaths.

Meanwhile, slippery language, metaphor itself and any other ambiguity of meaning or imagery is suspect, assumed to be reactionary until proven "liberatory," and where metaphor does manage to appear it is urgently subject to moral dissection. Because "Evil" has hurt us, we too will not "speak Evil" or "platform" anyone who seems willing to do so. Because metaphor is mutable, indeterminate, and reversible, people increasingly avoid it altogether unless it can be convincingly argued to have a primarily "good" application which can redeem and legitimize it. Imagery and language needs to be legitimized now, because there is widespread fear of the uncontrollable virulence of Evil images and language.

From this perspective, Baudrillard's work, especially this book with its fast and loose mixing of dimensions and ambiguously dynamic images, will certainly be intolerable and unintelligible.

His work is important to me because he has illuminated a way of looking at the universe in which objects, *all of them*, stare back at you--provoking, seducing, and fooling the observer. A universe in which language of course has a life of its own and will slide off the road and betray you without hesitation and with a laugh. A world in which we do not have to be united by and dissolved in *love*, but bound and entangled only circumstantially with each other through the power of the *pact* and the dual form of seduction.

We may be losing the war, every war, but the power and consequence of "the last laugh" is undetermined til the end. *Meanings* betray their makers and carriers all the time, constantly. I find this phenomenon of Evil not only 'encouraging' but vital to life, and particularly to life steeped in conflict.

His work could be described as "homo" phobic in the sense that he delves, negatively, into what the world of *same on same* is or could be like, and excavates the holographic potentiality of the "*hell of the same*"; I find it a big leap to conflate this with some sort of actual concrete or moral argument against gay relationality or really "against" anything specific whatever. But many people have found it to be a small leap.

As it is "essays on extreme phenomena," this particular book is loaded with specific inflammatory topics, and many people I know just simply would not like reading his takes. Terrorism, viruses (both physical and digital), computers and virtuality, cosmetic elimination of all forms of negativity, whitewashing of history and of present violence, televised rituals of brutality, nuclear energy, not mere "trans"sexuality but "trans" *everything* -- all these things through his lens of seduction and fatality, infinite reversibility and the evil genie of fate.

If you do read this book in its entirety, I would bear in mind that "transphobia" as it currently exists was not the same entity in 1990, although of course there will be lines of historical continuity. The first several chapters, including the chapter "Transeconomics," could rightly be described as "trans" phobic in the larger sense of constituting a negative exploration of

from **Whatever Happened to Evil?**

We can no longer speak evil.

All we can do is discourse on the rights of man--a discourse which is pious, weak, useless and hypocritical, its supposed value deriving from the Enlightenment belief in a natural attraction of the Good, from an idealized view of human relationships (whereas Evil can manifestly be dealt with only by means of Evil.)

What is more, even this Good *qua* ideal value is invariably deployed in a self-defensive, austerity-loving, negative and reactive mode. All the talk of the minimizing of Evil, the prevention of violence: nothing but *security*. This is the condescending and depressive power of good intentions, a power that can dream of nothing except rectitude in the world, that refuses even to consider a bending of Evil, or an intelligence of Evil.

There can be a 'right' to speech only if speech is defined as the 'free' expression of an individual. Where speech is conceived of as a form implying reciprocity, collusion, antagonism or seduction, the notion of right can have no possible meaning.

Is there such a thing as a right to desire, a right to the unconscious, or a right to pleasure? The idea is absurd. This is what makes the sexual liberation movement ridiculous when it talks about rights, and what makes our 'commemoration' of the Revolution ridiculous when the rights of man are evoked.

The 'right to live' is an idea that sets all pious souls atremble, but when this idea evolves into the right to die, the absurdity of the whole business becomes obvious. what it means when conceptual and physical entities acceleratngly "transcend" previously existing limitations.

puzzle of its relationship to the world. Surely the success of all these technologies is a result of the way in which they make it impossible to even raise the timeless question of liberty. What a relief! Thanks to the machinery of the virtual, all your problems are over! You are no longer either subject or object, no longer either free or alienated--and no longer either one or the other: you are *the same*, and enraptured by the commutations of that sameness.

We have left the hell of other people for the ecstasy of the same, the purgatory of otherness for the artificial paradises of identity. Some might call this an even worse servitude, but Telecomputer Man, having no will of his own, knows nothing of serfdom. Alienation of man by man is a thing of the past: now man is plunged into homeostasis by machines.

what it means when conceptual and physical entities acceleratively "transcend" previously existing limitations.

To some readers, this is obviously distinct from a sort of transphobia based on a moral argument about perversion or "unnatural" qualities specific to transitioning gender categories. To others, the distinction will be unimportant because there is a damning thematic parallel. In either case I feel it is important to note that in no way does Baudrillard argue that we should, or even ever could, *undo* any of these processes of transcendence. Nor could his texts be easily used with malice to "undo" things like specific rights for transgender individuals or gay marriage. Baudrillard is *not* nostalgic for the "good old days" when men were men, etc.; he relentlessly ridicules this perspective. More than anything he points out that those days were *not good*, but are definitely *over*, and we now live in something completely different, which he examines. Like it or not, the era (in the West) of untranscendable limits in general is solidly *over*.

He is *very* clear that we can't, we physically can't, ever put the genie back in the bottle.

I maintain that due to the present force and volume of transphobia specifically directed at transgender people, and the paranoid violence and scapegoating to which transpeople have become subject to as visibility has shifted, most people in the present are disinclined to engage in any form of negative exploration of what the Utopian ethos of "transcending limitations" actually entails, lest they accidentally contribute to transphobia and related violence. Therefore, anything resembling these conceptual explorations of the *negative* shapes in transcendence-of-limits-as-an-ethic have been left to the TERFs and the religious right, to those for whom the existence of transgender people in particular is a *problem* as such, who really do want to return to the "good old days" and believe that's actually possible.

But so much of the left is also nostalgically and uncritically reaching back for simpler times when mere "liberation" from repressive imperatives really and simply seemed like a good goal. (On the subject of these sorts of hungry orientations toward history, Baudrillard stands out; see the chapter "Necrospective".) And now, "after the orgy," after so many "liberations" really have been enacted, after "trans"-everything really has become both imaginable and material, the malicious parallax of meaning under reversibility is starting to become visible to us. The evil genie is everywhere, and cannot be reasoned with or recaptured.

One more note--If you do read this book, I would skip "part II" and all chapters in it. There are some good bits but the majority of it really doesn't hold up nor live up to the contributions of "part I".

Part I

Since the world is on a delusional course, we must adopt a delusional standpoint towards the world. Better to die from extremes than starting from the extremities.

from **Prophylaxis and Virulence**

It is not absurd to suppose that the extermination of man begins with the extermination of man's germs. One has only to consider the human being himself, complete with his emotions, his passions, his laughter, his sex and his secretions, to conclude that man is nothing but a dirty little germ--an irrational virus marring a universe of transparency. Once he has been purged, once everything has been cleaned up and all infection--whether of a social or a bacillary kind--has been driven out, then only the virus of sadness will remain in a mortally clean and mortally sophisticated world.

Thought, itself a sort of network of antibodies and natural immune defences, is also highly vulnerable. It is in acute danger of being conveniently replaced by an electronic cerebrospinal bubble from which any animal or metaphysical reflex has been expunged.

Even without all the technological advantages of the Boy in the Bubble, we are already living in the bubble ourselves--already, like those characters in Bosch paintings, enclosed in a crystal sphere: a transparent envelope in which we have taken refuge and where we remain, bereft of everything yet overprotected, doomed to artificial immunity, continual transfusions and, at the slightest contact with the world outside, instant death.

This is why we are all losing our defences -- why we are all potentially immunodeficient.

Am I a man or a machine? This anthropological question no longer has an answer. We are in some sense witness to the end of anthropology, now being conjured away by the most recent machines and technologies. The uncertainty here is born of the perfecting of machine networks, just as sexual uncertainty (Am I a man or a woman? What has the difference between the sexes become?) is born of increasingly sophisticated manipulation of the unconscious and of the body, and just as science's uncertainty about the status of its object is born of the sophistication of analysis in the microsciences.

Am I a man or a machine? There is no ambiguity in the traditional relationship between man and machine: the worker is always, in a way, a stranger to the machine he operates, and alienated by it. But at least he retains the precious status of alienated man. The new technologies, with their new machines, new images and interactive screens, do *not* alienate me. Rather, they form an integrated circuit with me. Video screens, televisions, computers and [face time] resemble nothing so much as contact lenses in that they are so many transparent prostheses, integrated into the body to the point of being almost part of its genetic make-up: they are like pacemakers--or like Philip K. Dick's 'papula', a tiny implant, grafted onto the body at birth as a 'free gift', which serves the organism as an alarm signal. All our relationships with networks and screens, whether willed or not, are of this order. Their structure is one of subordination, not of alienation--the structure of the integrated circuit. Man or machine? Impossible to tell.

Surely the extraordinary success of artificial intelligence is attributable to the fact that it frees us from real intelligence, that by hypertrophying thought as an operational process it frees us from thought's ambiguity and from the insoluble

fact, is to exhaust all the virtualities of such analogues of the genetic code: this is one of artificial intelligence's most fundamental aspects.) What this means on a more concrete level is that there is no longer any such thing as an act or an event which is not refracted into a technical image or onto a screen, any such thing as an action which does not in some sense *want* to be photographed, filmed or tape-recorded, does not desire to be stored in memory so as to become reproducible for all eternity. No such thing as an action which does not aspire to self-transcendence into a virtual eternity--not, now, the durable eternity which follows death, but rather the ephemeral eternity of ever-ramifying artificial memory.

The compulsion of the virtual is the compulsion to exist *in potentia* on all screens, to be embedded in all programs, and it acquires a magical force: the Siren call of the black box.

Where is the freedom in all this? Nowhere! There is no choice here, no final decision. All decisions concerning networks, screens, information or communication are serial in character, partial, fragmentary, fractal. A mere succession of partial decisions, a microscopic series of partial sequences and objectives, constitute as much as the photographer's way of proceeding as that of Telecomputer Man in general, or even that called for by our own most trivial television viewing. All such behavior is structured in quantum fashion, composed of haphazard sequences of discrete decisions. The fascination derives from the pull of the black box, the appeal of an uncertainty which puts paid to our freedom.

All integrated and hyperintegrated systems -- the technological system, the social system, even thought itself in artificial intelligence and its derivatives--tend towards the extreme constituted by immunodeficiency. Seeking to eliminate all external aggression, they secrete their own internal virulence, their own malignant reversibility. When a certain saturation point is reached, such systems effect this reversal and undergo this alteration willy-nilly--and thus tend to self-destruct. Their very transparency becomes a threat to them, and the crystal has its revenge.

In a hyperprotected space the body loses all its defences. So sterile are operating rooms that no germ or bacterium can survive there. Yet this is the very place where mysterious, anomalous viral diseases make their appearance. The fact is that viruses proliferate as soon as they find a free space. A world purged of the old forms of infection, a world 'ideal' from the clinical point of view, offers a perfect field of operations for the impalpable and implacable pathology which arises from the sterilization itself.

This is a third-level pathology. Just as our societies are confronting a new kind of violence, born of the paradoxical fact that they are simultaneously both permissive and pacified, so too we face new illnesses, those illnesses which beset bodies overprotected by their artificial, medical or computer-generated shield. This pathology is produced not by accident, nor by anomie, but rather by *anomaly*. The very same thing happens with the social body, where the same cause brings about the same perverse effects, the same unforeseeable dysfunctions--a situation comparable to the genetic disorder that occurs at the cellular level, again occasioned by overprotection, overcoding, overmanagement. The social system, just like the biological body, loses its defences in precise proportion to the growing sophistication of its prostheses. Moreover, this unprecedented pathology is unlikely to be effectively conjured away by medicine, because medicine is itself part of the system of overprotection, and contributes to the fanatical protective and preventative measures lavished upon the body. Just as there seems to be no

political solution to the problem of terrorism, so there seems to be no biological solution at present to the problems of cancer. Indeed, the causes are identical: anomalous symptoms generated at the most fundamental level by the system itself represent a reactive virulence designed to counter, in the first case, a political overmanagement of the social body, and in the second case, a biological overmanagement of the body *tout court*.

At an early stage the evil genie of otherness takes the forms of accident, breakdown, failure. Only later does the viral, epidemic form make its appearance: a virulence that ravages the entire system, and against which the system is defenceless precisely because its very integrity paradoxically engenders this alteration.

Virulence takes hold of a body, a network or other system when that system **rejects all its negative components** and resolves itself into a combinatorial system of simple elements. It is because a circuit or a network has thus become a *virtual* being, a non-body, that viruses can run riot with it; hence too the much greater vulnerability of 'immaterial' machines as compared with traditional mechanical devices. Virtual and viral go hand in hand. It is because the body itself has become a non-body, a virtual machine, that viruses are taking it over.

It is logical that AIDS (and cancer) should have become the prototypes of our modern pathology, as of all lethal viral onslaughts. Saddling the body with replacement parts and abandoning it to genetic whims inevitably dislocates its systems of defence. A fractal body whose external functions are fated to multiply is, by the same token, fated to suffer internal proliferation at the cellular level. Metastasis occurs -- and internal and biological metastases are paralleled by the extreme metastases constituted by prostheses, networks and ramiform systems.

answer, event and image, and so on. The form is inevitably that of a twisted ring reminiscent of the mathematical symbol for infinity.

The same may be said of our relationship with our 'virtual' machines. Telecomputer Man is assigned to an apparatus, just as the apparatus is assigned to him, by virtue of an involution of each into the other, a refraction of each by the other. The machine does what the human wants it to do, but by the same token the human puts into execution only what the machine has been programmed to do. The operator is working with virtuality: only apparently is the aim to obtain information or to communicate; the real purpose is to explore all the possibilities of a program, rather as a gambler seeks to exhaust the permutations in a game of chance.

Consider the way the camera is used now. Its possibilities are no longer those of a subject who 'reflects' the world according to his personal vision; rather, they are the possibilities of the lens, as exploited by the object. The camera is thus a machine that vitiates all will, erases all intentionality and leaves nothing but the pure reflex needed to take pictures. Looking itself disappears without trace, replaced by a lens now in collusion with the object--and hence with an inversion of vision. The magic lies precisely in the subject's retroversion to a camera obscura--the reduction of his vision to the impersonal vision of a mechanical device. In a mirror, it is the subject who gives free reign to the realm of the imaginary. In the camera lens, and on-screen in general, it is the object, potentially, that unburdens itself--to the benefit of all media and telecommunications techniques.

This is why images of *anything* are now a possibility. This is why everything is translatable into computer terms, commutable into digital form, just as each individual is commutable into his own particular genetic code. (The whole object, in

That we fall so easily into the screen's coma of the imagination is due to the fact that the screen presents a perpetual void that we are invited to fill. Proxemics of images: promiscuity of images: tactile pornography of images. Yet the image is always light years away. It is invariably a tele-image--an image located at a very special kind of distance which can only be described as *unbridgeable by the body*. The body can cross the distance that separates it from language, from the stage, or from the mirror--this is what keeps it human and allows it to partake in exchange. But the screen is merely virtual--and hence unbridgeable. This is why it partakes only of that abstract--definitively abstract--form known as *communication*.

Within the space of communication, words, gestures, looks are in a continual state of contiguity, yet they never touch. The fact is that distance and proximity here are simply not relationships obtaining between the body and its surroundings. The screen of our images, the interactive screen, the telecomputing screen, are at once too close and too far away: too close to be true (to have the dramatic intensity of a stage)--and too far away to be false (to embody the collusive distance of artifice). They thus create a dimension that is no longer quite human, an excentric dimension corresponding to the depolarization of space and the indistinctness of bodily forms of expression.

There is no better model of the way in which the computer screen and the mental screen of our own brain are interwoven than Moebius's topology, with its peculiar contiguity of near and far, inside and outside, object and subject within the same spiral. It is in accordance with this same model that information and communication are constantly turning round upon themselves in an incestuous circumvolution, a superficial conflation of subject and object, within and without, question and

Under the reign of the virus you are destroyed by your own antibodies. This is the leukaemia of an organism devouring its own defences, precisely because all threat, all adversity, has disappeared. Total prophylaxis is lethal. We are confronted by a third-level pathology, one that is inaccessible to the pharmacopoeia of an earlier period (characterized by visible causes and mechanically produced effects). Suddenly all afflictions seem to originate in immunodeficiency -- rather as all violence now seems to have its roots in terrorism. The onslaught of viruses and their strategies have in a sense taken over the work of the unconscious.

Just as human beings, conceived of as digital machines, have become the preferred field of operations of viral illnesses, so have software networks become the preferred field of operations of electronic viruses. Here too there is no effective prevention or cure: metastasis affects entire networks, and desymbolized machine languages offer no more resistance to viral infection than do desymbolized bodies. The familiar breakdowns and mechanical accidents of earlier times responded to good old-fashioned reparative medicine, but for these sudden weakenings, sudden anomalies, sudden 'stabs in the back' by antibodies, we have no remedy. We knew how to cure illnesses of forms; against pathologies of formulas we are without defences. Having everywhere sacrificed the balance of forms in favour of an artificial concordance between code and formula, we have unleashed the threat of a far graver disorder, of a destabilization without precedent. Having turned the body and language into artificial systems in thrall to artificial intelligence, we have abandoned them not only to artificial stupidity but also to all the viral aberrations generated by this irreversible artificiality.

Viral attack is the pathology of the closed circuit, of the integrated circuit, of promiscuity and of the chain reaction--in a broad and metaphorical sense, a pathology of incest. He who lives by the same shall die by the same. The absence of otherness secretes another, intangible otherness: the absolute other of the virus.

Even the strange sickness that affected cypress trees for so long turned out to be a sort of virus attributable to a lessening of the temperature difference between winter and summer--to a promiscuity, so to speak, of the seasons. The spectre of the Same had struck again. In every compulsion to resemblance, every extradition of difference, in all contiguity of things and their own image, all conflation of beings and their own code, lies the threat of an incestuous virulence, a diabolical otherness boding the breakdown of all this humming machinery.

This is the reappearance of the principle of Evil in a new guise. No morality or guilt is implied, however: the principle of Evil is simply synonymous with the principle of reversal, with the turns of fate. **In systems undergoing total positivization**--and hence desymbolization--evil is equivalent, in all its forms, to the fundamental rule of reversibility.

Still, there is an ambiguity in this very virulence. AIDS serves to justify a new prohibition on sex--no longer a moral prohibition but a functional one, one directed not at sex *per se* but merely at its unhindered circulation. The current is to be interrupted, the flow stopped. But this runs counter to all the commandments of modernity, according to which sex, money and information must circulate freely. Everything is supposed to be fluid, everything should accelerate inexorably. The

design filigreed onto life. A new Plato's retreat whence to observe shadow-forms of bodily pleasure filing past. Why speak to one another, when it is so simple to communicate?

We lived once in a world where the realm of the imaginary was governed by the mirror, by dividing one into two, by theatre, by otherness and alienation. Today that realm is the realm of the screen, of interfaces and duplication, of contiguity and networks. All our machines are screens, and the interactivity of humans has been replaced by the interactivity of screens. Nothing inscribed on these screens is ever intended to be deciphered in any depth: rather, it is supposed to be explored instantaneously, in an abreaction immediate to meaning, a short-circuiting of the poles of representation.

Reading a screenful of information is quite a different thing from *looking*. It is a digital form of exploration in which the eye moves along an endless broken line. The relationship to the interlocutor in communication, like the relationship to knowledge and data-handling, is similar: tactile and exploratory. A computer-generated voice, even a voice over the telephone, is a tactile voice, neutral and functional. It is no longer in fact exactly like a voice, any more than looking at a screen is exactly looking. The whole paradigm of the sensory has changed. The tactility here is not the organic sense of touch: it implies merely an epidermal contiguity of eye and image, the collapse of the aesthetic distance involved in looking. We draw ever closer to the surface of the screen; our gaze is, as it were, strewn across the image. We no longer have the spectator's distance from the stage--all theatrical conventions are gone.

Alas for the machine, it can never transcend its own operation--which, perhaps, explains the profound melancholy of the computer. All machines are celibate.

(All the same, the recent epidemic of computer viruses does embody a striking anomaly: it is almost as though machines were able to obtain a sly pleasure by producing perverse effects. This is an ironic and fascinating turn of events. Could it be that artificial intelligence, by manifesting this viral pathology, is engaging in self-parody--and thus acceding to some sort of genuine intelligence?)

This celibacy of the machine entails the celibacy of Telecomputer Man. Thanks to his computer or word processor, Telecomputer Man offers himself the spectacle of his own brain, his own intelligence, at work. Similarly, through his chat line or his [cell phone], he can offer himself the spectacle of his own phantasies, of a strictly virtual pleasure. He exorcizes both intelligence and pleasure at the interface with the machine. The Other, the interlocutor, is never really involved: the screen works much like a mirror, for the screen itself as a locus of the interface is the prime concern. An interactive screen transforms the process of relating into a process of commutation between One and the Same. The secret of the interface is that the Other here is virtually the Same: otherness is surreptitiously conjured away by the machine.

The most probable scenario of communication here is that [facetime] users gravitate from the screen to telephone conversations, thence to face-to-face meetings, and...then what? Well, it's 'let's phone each other,' and, finally, back to the [facetime]--which is, after all, more erotic because it is at once both esoteric and transparent. This is communication in its purest form, for there is no intimacy here except with the screen, and with an electronic text that is no more than a

placing of strictures upon sexuality on the grounds of viral risk seems as absurd as halting foreign-exchange dealings because they foster speculation or wild fluctuations in the value of the dollar. Unthinkable! And yet, all of a sudden, there it is: no more sex. Is there a contradiction in the system here?

Could it be that this suspension has a paradoxical aim, one bound up with the equally paradoxical aim of sexual liberation? We are acquainted with that spontaneous self-regulation of systems whereby they themselves produce accidents or slowdowns in order to survive. No society can live without in a sense opposing its own value system: it has to have such a system, yet it must at the same time define itself in contradistinction to it. At present we live according to at least two principles: that of sexual liberation and that of communication and information. And everything suggests that the [society] itself, via the threat of AIDS, is generating an antidote to its principle of sexual liberation; that by means of cancer, which is a breakdown of the genetic code, it is setting up a resistance to the all-powerful principle of cybernetic control; and that the viral onslaught in general signals its sabotaging of the universal principle of communication.

What if all this betokened **a refusal of the obligatory flows** of sperm, sex and words, a refusal of forced communication, programmed information and sexual promiscuity? What if it heralded a vital resistance to the spread of flows, circuits and networks--at the cost, it is true, of a new and lethal pathology, but one, nevertheless, that would protect us from something even worse? If so, then AIDS and cancer would be the price we are paying for our own system: an attempt to cure its *banal* virulence by recourse to a *fatal* form.

Nobody can predict the effectiveness of such an exorcism, but the question has to be asked: What is cancer a resistance to, what even worse eventuality is it saving us from? (Could it be the total hegemony of genetic coding?) What is AIDS a resistance to, what even worse eventuality is it saving us from? (Could it be a sexual epidemic, a sort of total promiscuity?) The same goes for drugs: all melodramatics aside, what exactly do they protect us from, from what even worse scourge do they offer us an avenue of escape? (Could it be the brutalizing effects of rationality, normative socialization and universal conditioning?) As for terrorism, does not its secondary, reactive violence shield us from an *epidemic of consensus*, from an ever-increasing political leukaemia and degeneration and from the imperceptible transparency of the State? All things are ambiguous and reversible. After all, it is neurosis that offers human beings their most effective protection against madness. AIDS may thus be seen not as a divine punishment, but as quite the opposite--as a defensive abreaction on the part of the [society] against the danger of a total promiscuity, a total loss of identity through the proliferation and speed-up of networks.

The high degree to which AIDS, terrorism, crack cocaine or computer viruses mobilize the popular imagination should tell us that they are more than anecdotal occurrences in an irrational world. The fact is that they contain within them the whole logic of our system: these events are merely the spectacular expression of that system. They all hew to the same agenda of virulence and radiation, an agenda whose very power over the imagination is of a viral character: a single terrorist act obliges a reconsideration of politics as a whole in the light of terrorism's claims; an outbreak of AIDS, even a statistically insignificant one, forces us to view the whole spectrum of disease in the light of the immunodeficiency thesis; and the mildest of computer viruses, whether it vitiates the Pentagon's memory banks or merely erases a shower of on-line Christmas messages, has the potential to destabilize all data contained in information systems.

Artifice is the power of illusion. These machines have the artlessness of pure calculation, and the games they offer are based solely on commutations and combinations. In this sense they may be said to be virtuous, as well as virtual: they can never succumb to their own object; they are immune even to the seduction of their own knowledge. Their virtue resides in their transparency, their functionality, their absence of passion and artifice. Artificial Intelligence is a celibate machine.

What must always distinguish the way humans function from the way machines function, even the most intelligent of machines, is the intoxication, the sheer pleasure, that humans get from functioning. The invention of a machine that can feel pleasure is something--happily--that is still beyond human capacity. All kinds of spare parts are available to humans to help them achieve gratification, but none yet has been devised that could take pleasure in their stead. There are prostheses that can work better than humans, 'think' or move around better than humans (or in place of humans), but there is no such thing, from the point of view of technology, or in terms of the media, as a replacement for human pleasure, or for the pleasure of being human. For that to exist, machines would have to have an idea of man, have to be able to invent man--but inasmuch as man has already invented *them*, it is too late for that.

That is why man can always be more than what he is, whereas machines can never be more than what they are--except, perhaps, when accidents or failures occur, events which might conceivably be attributed to some obscure desire on the part of the machine. Nor do machines manifest that ironical surplus or excess functioning which contributes the pleasure, or suffering, thanks to which human beings transcend their determinations--and thus come closer to their *raison d'etre*.

It is not for nothing that they are described as 'virtual', for they put thought on hold indefinitely, tying its emergence to the achievement of a complete knowledge. The act of thinking itself is thus put off for ever. Indeed, the question of thought can no more be raised than the question of the freedom of future generations, who will pass through life as we travel through the air, strapped into their seats. These Men of Artificial Intelligence will traverse their own mental space bound hand and foot to their computers. Immobile in front of his computer, Virtual Man makes love via the screen and gives lessons by means of the teleconference. He is a physical--and no doubt also a mental--cripple. That is the price he pays for being *operational*. Just as eyeglasses and contact lenses will arguably one day evolve into implanted prostheses for a species that has lost its sight, it is similarly to be feared that artificial intelligence and the hardware that supports it will become a mental prosthesis for a species without the capacity for thought.

Artificial intelligence is devoid of intelligence because it is devoid of artifice. True artifice is the artifice of the body in the throes of passion, the artifice of the sign in seduction, the artifice of ambivalence in gesture, the artifice of ellipsis in language, the artifice of the mask before the face, the artifice of the pithy remark that completely alters meaning. So-called intelligent machines deploy artifice only in the feeblest sense of the word, breaking linguistic, sexual or cognitive acts down into their simplest elements and digitizing them so that they can be resynthesized according to models. They can generate all the possibilities of a program or of a potential object.

But artifice is in no way concerned with what *generates*, merely with what *alters*, reality.

Whence the special status of such extreme phenomena--and of catastrophe in general, understood as an anomalous turn of events. The secret order of catastrophe reside in the affinity between all these processes, as in their homology within a system as a whole. Order within disorder: all extreme phenomena are consistent both with respect to each other and with respect to the whole that they constitute. This means that it is useless to appeal to some supposed rationality of the system against that system's outgrowths. The vanity of seeking to abolish these extreme phenomena is absolute.

Moreover, they are destined to become more extreme still as our systems grow more sophisticated. And this is in fact a good thing--for they are the leading edge of therapy here. In these transparent, homeostatic or homeofluid systems there is no longer any such thing as a strategy of Good against Evil, there is only the pitting of Evil against Evil--a strategy of last resort. Indeed, we really have no choice in the matter: we simply watch as the lesser evil--homeopathic virulence--deploys its forces. AIDS, crack and computer viruses are merely outcroppings of the catastrophe; nine-tenths of it remain buried in the virtual.

The full-blown, the absolute catastrophe would be a true omnipresence of all networks, a total transparency of all data--something from which, for now, computer viruses preserve us. Thanks to them, we shall not be going straight to the culminating point of the development of information and communications, which is to say: death. These viruses are both the first sign of this **lethal transparency** and its alarm signal. One is put in mind of a fluid traveling at increasing speed, forming eddies and anomalous countercurrents which arrest or dissipate its flow. Chaos imposes a limit upon what would otherwise hurtle into an

absolute void. The secret disorder of extreme phenomena, then, plays a prophylactic role by opposing its chaos to any escalation of order and transparency to their extremes.

But these phenomena notwithstanding, we are already witness to the beginning of the end of a certain way of thinking. Similarly, in the case of sexual liberation, we are already witness to the beginning of the end of a certain type of gratification. If total sexual promiscuity were ever achieved, however, sex itself would self-destruct in the resulting asexual flood. Much the same may be said of economic exchange. Financial speculation, as turbulence, makes the boundless extension of real transactions impossible. By precipitating an instantaneous circulation of value--by, as it were, electrocuting the economic model--it also short-circuits the catastrophe of a free and universal commutability--such a total liberation being the true catastrophic tendency of value.

In the face of the threats of a total weightlessness, an unbearable lightness of being, a universal promiscuity and a linearity of processes liable to plunge us into the void, the sudden whirlpool that we dub catastrophes are really the thing that saves us from catastrophe. Anomalies and aberrations of this kind re-create zones of gravity and density that counter dispersion. It may be hazarded that this is how our societies secrete their own peculiar version of an accursed share.

So the actual catastrophe may turn out to be a carefully modulated strategy of our [society]--or, more precisely, our viruses, our extreme phenomena, which are most definitively real, albeing localized, may be what allow us to preserve the energy of

other. It thus becomes the locus not only of a chain of causes but also of an unhindered flood of effects.

Energy thus enters a state of superfusion. The whole system of world-transformation enters a state of superfusion. Formerly a material and productive variable, energy has now become a vertiginous process feeding upon itself (which is, incidentally, why there is no danger that we shall run out of it).

from **Xerox and Infinity**

If men create intelligent machines, or fantasize about them, it is either because they secretly despair of their own intelligence or because they are in danger of succumbing to the weight of a monstrous and useless intelligence which they seek to exorcize by transferring it to machines, where they can play with it and make fun of it. By entrusting this burdensome intelligence to machines we are released from any responsibility to knowledge, much as entrusting power to politicians allows us to disdain any aspiration of our own power.

If men dream of machines that are unique, that are endowed with genius, it is because they despair of their own uniqueness, or because they prefer to do without it--to enjoy it by proxy, so to speak, thanks to machines. What such machines offer is the spectacle of thought, and in manipulating them people devote themselves more to the spectacle of thought than to thought itself.

The catastrophe that lies in wait for us is not connected to a depletion of resources. Energy itself, in all its forms, will become more and more abundant (at any rate, within the broadest time frame that could conceivably concern us as humans). Nuclear energy is inexhaustible, as are solar energy, the forces of the tides, of the great fluxes of nature, and indeed of natural catastrophes, earthquakes and volcanoes (and technological imagination may be relied on to find ways and means to harness them). What is alarming, by contrast, is the dynamics of disequilibrium, the uncontrollability of the energy system itself, which is capable of getting out of hand in a deadly fashion in very short order. We have already had a few spectacular demonstrations of the consequences of the liberation of nuclear energy (Hiroshima, Chernobyl), but it must be remembered that any chain reaction at all, viral or radioactive, has catastrophic potential.

Our degree of protection from pandemics is epitomized by the utterly useless glacis that often surrounds nuclear power stations. It is not impossible that the whole system of world-transformation through energy has already entered a virulent and epidemic stage corresponding to the most essential character of energy itself: a fall, a differential, an imbalance--a catastrophe in miniature which to begin with has positive effects but which, once overtaken by its own impetus, assumes the dimensions of a global catastrophe.

Energy may be looked upon as a cause which produces effects, but it is also an effect which is self-reproducing, and can thus cease to obey any law of causality. The paradox of energy is that it implies a revolution on the level of causes and a revolution on the level of effects--each, practically speaking, independent of the

that *virtual* catastrophe which is the motor of all our processes, whether economic or political, artistic or historical.

To epidemic, contagion, chain reaction and proliferation we owe at once the worst and the best. The worst is metastasis in cancer, fanaticism in politics, virulence in the biological sphere and rumor in the sphere of information. Fundamentally, though, all these also partake of the best, for the process of chain reaction is an immoral process, beyond good and evil, and hence reversible. It must be said, moreover, that we greet both worst and best with the same fascination.

That it should be possible for certain processes--economic, political, linguistic, cultural, sexual, even theoretical and scientific--to *set aside the limitations of meaning and proceed by immediate contagion*, according to the laws of the pure reciprocal immanencies of things among themselves rather than the laws of their transcendence or their referentiality--that this is possible poses an enigma to reason while offering a marvelous alternative to the imagination.

One has but to consider the phenomenon of fashion, which has never been satisfactorily explained. Fashion is the despair of sociology and aesthetics: a prodigious contagion of forms in which chain reactions struggle for supremacy over the logic of distinctions. The pleasure of fashion is undeniably cultural in origin, but does it not stem even more clearly from a flaring, unmediated consensus generated by the interplay of signs? Moreover, fashions fade away like epidemics once they have ravaged the imagination, once the virus has run its course. The price to be paid in terms of waste is always exorbitant, yet everyone consents. 15

The marvellous in our societies resides in this ultra-rapid circulation of signs at a surface level (as opposed to the ultra-slow circulation of meanings). We love being contaminated by this process, and not having to think about it. This is a viral onslaught as noxious as the plague, yet no moral sociology, no philosophical reason, will ever extirpate it. Fashion is an irreducible phenomenon because it partakes of a crazy, viral, mediationless form of communication which operates so fast for the sole reason that it never passes via the mediation of meaning.

Anything that bypasses mediation is a source of pleasure. In seduction there is a movement from the one to the other which does not pass via the same. (In cloning, it is the opposite: the movement is from the same to the same, without passage to the other; and cloning holds great fascination for us.) In metamorphosis, the shift is from one sign to another without passing via the reference.

The collapsing of distances, of intervening spaces, always produces a kind of intoxication. What does speed itself mean to us if not the fact of going from one place to another without traversing time, from one moment to another without passing via duration and movement? Speed is marvellous: time alone is wearisome.

from **The Fate of Energy**

All the events described here are susceptible to two kinds of diagnosis: physical and metaphysical. From the physical point of view, we are apparently dealing with a sort of massive phase transition in a human system in disequilibrium. As with physical systems proper, this phase transition remains largely mysterious for us, but the catastrophic development in question is in itself neither beneficial nor malignant: it is simply catastrophic, in the literal sense of the word.

The prototype of this chaotic declination, of this hypersensitivity to initial conditions, is the fate of energy. Our culture has seen the development of the *liberation of energy* as an irreversible process. All previous cultures have depended on a reversible pact with the world, on a stable ordering of things in which energy release certainly played a role, but never on the liberation of energy as a basic principle. For us, energy is the first thing to be 'liberated', and all subsequent forms of liberation are founded on this model. Man himself is liberated as an energy source, so becoming the motor of a history and of a speeding-up of that history.

Energy is a sort of phantasy projection which nourishes all modernity's industrial and technical dreams; energy is also what tends to give our conceptions of man the sense of a dynamics of the will.

We know, however, thanks to the most recent findings of modern physics on the phenomena of turbulence, chaos and catastrophe, that any flow--indeed, any linear process--when it is speeded up is inflected in a curious way, a way that produces catastrophe.