Killing Time

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The possibilities created by the telephone, radio, and television are made to seem insignificant by the current access to telecommunications and the computer generated internet.

Not very long ago the distance between remote points of communication was marked by sufficient time delay to effectively represent the ìrealî space between them. Now even as the revolution in mass transportation has shortened the sense of linear distance, the interactive technology of computers has collapsed the notion altogether.

A traveler buys an airline ticket in Manila and the agent has fed the information via modem to Frankfurt before the Lufthansa office has even opened. Maybe there is no travel agent involved at all as the traveler uses a portable computer and internet services to place the order himself without leaving the hotel room.

What is striking here is that time and space have been changed by the manipulation of signs, that is, by treating the information as a thing in itself with no regard for or interaction with the subject matter.

In this way events themselves become a chain of compressed data easily removed from their temporal and physical context. Their historical and cultural ground is eroded beneath them by severing the link to time and space.

Until quite recently, all acts of communication entailed some displacement, an effort at crossing a gap, an anticipation of reply. In short, all communication was mediated as an act in time and space. Now the elimination of this mediation has become the realizable goal of technology. The result is a global promiscuity of messages accompanied by a motoric inertia: why leave the hotel room?

Tele-shopping,-marketing,-travel,-charge,-command,-surveillance, -conference. The proximity and distance of objects cannot be thought about in terms of the elapsed time it takes to cover the territory that separates them. Units of information circulate in a network that is outside the reality of time and space. Objects crystallize on the surface of screens that sustain their presence by virtue of being connected.

Things donít move anymore, they circulate and appear. They donít stop anymore, they situate themselves, simulated in a virtual materiality and then disappear. There is no longer even the elapsed time of making a connection, since storage in electronic memory can mean instantaneous displacement along the entire surface of the network. Information is saved everywhere immediately.

Time is saved. It is reduced, suppressed, locked up, closed in upon itself and denied. Instantaneity gives the machine the right to impose its rhythm on to time. Technological artifacts mix up distances by multiplying the roads, displacing the center, and re-centering the margins.

Along with the abolition of distance and the elimination of time, the software revolution would extinguish thought about time and give rise to a new proximity: digitalization.

Digitalization inhabits the message with an omnipresence that renders the sign itself insignificant. The thing arrives before being thought, preceded by its simulacrum, trapped in its loop, and deprived of its origins. Thought can only then run after the thing, borrow from its traces, insinuate itself into the loop in order to be founded. The object is trapped within a circular process of input/output in which the offer immediately sparks demand and thus the maintenance of a cycle [offer-demand] that operates within a drastically reduced field of signifiers. The distinctive function of language is replaced by a binarism of signs where offer and demand test one anotherís presence without ever posing questions.

The conditions of exchange thereby take over the object of communication. The medium is the message again to the point of a utilitarian logic that excludes the object in service of the feasibility of transmission.

In all thinking networks the effort seems devoid of future and distance itself becomes a simulacrum. The network is an architecture structured in such a way as to link only identical entities. All variable polymorphous features are banned along with the identity of the communicating agent. The breach of this rule is a risk to the model by hindering the architecture of standardization.

Without its ambiguous mediating function language becomes nothing more than an obstacle to be discarded from the operational functioning of the code. Eventually language becomes interference in the specular reception of the object of demand.

Therefore not only time and space but the very essence of human communication is thrust into a paradoxical situation. This is a result not only of the technological artifacts and the conditions of their use but also of the hyper-production of signs and their vertiginous circulation.