

Letter to a wanderer through the city of the instant

Dear Wanderer,

If you choose to believe me, good. Now I will tell you how Octavia, the spider web city, is made. There is a precipice between two steep mountains: the city is over the void, bound to two crests with ropes and chains and catwalks. You walk on the little wooden ties, careful not to set your foot in the open spaces, or you cling to the hempen strands. Below, there is nothing for hundreds and hundreds of feet: a few clouds glide past, farther down you can glimpse the chasm's bed.

This is the foundation of the city: a net which serves as a passage and a support. All the rest, instead of rising up, is hung below: rope ladders, hammocks, houses made like sacks, clothes hangers, terraces like gondolas, skins of water, gas jets, spits, baskets on strings, dumb-waiters, showers, trapezes and rings for children's games, cable cars, chandeliers, pots with trailing plants.

Suspended over the abyss, the life of Octavia's inhabitants is less uncertain than in other cities. They know the net will only last so long.

—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*¹

From now on, you will wear your city, it will travel with you. The city, as Hemingway once wrote in another more lamely romantic manner, will be a moveable feast. The question will then become, what sort of traveling feast is one caught within? If you find yourself reading this communiqué, it should perhaps be noted that it is written for this novel city-world within which we all find ourselves, caught within the daily wanderings of satellitic flows of the cybernetic theatre of cruelty. If we accept our position within a globalized flow of synchronized affect, of the social network and communicative sphere, we also must re-evaluate what a newspaper would be for a nomadic city-world where subjectivity and objectivity give way to what the French essayist and urbanist philosopher, Paul Virilio, has called *trajectivity*: Identity constructed no longer through concrete notions of subjective or objective positions, but via the capture of one's movement in various material and immaterial trajectories. While identity has and will continue to be stamped and produced within territories, it is now done within the digitized real-time city-world, where from Vancouver to Berlin, from Bogotá to Paris and Dakar, screen temporality reigns and must be reigned in. This city-world, then, is one where news or media become part of the ecstasy of communication, where everything is said, heard, and then forgotten. We have become telemorphized (Baudrillard). But today, with the emergence of this *pharmakon*, this liberatory position of tele-existence, moving from tele-vision as unilateral reception of media, we find ourselves within networks upon networks, as active producers and filterers of the code chatter across the back of our retinal and auditory apparatuses.

"Poets go on voyages, but the adventure of the voyage does not possess them."

—Henri Michaux²

It's a strange non-place. A strange cybernetic theatre indeed. A print artifact for such a real-time city-world would be one where, within this excess of accelerated immediate information overflow, one would have to reflect and take back into account the sensible field one was speaking to. To truly be informative, to provide an update

or upgrade to the transformative relation to this city-world would precisely be an attempt of modulating various screen resonances.

Put more simply, within the city-world of the networks, within the convenient immediacy of information acquisition, there is a *pharmakon* nature, a cure and a poison for the all-out retrieval of information (memory) and the all-out obliteration of memory as such. The city-world is never closed, the closed circle (of time) is always open. In the city of the instant, open and closed no longer take precedence.

When the city of lights began to construct itself in the 1800s in Paris, a novel position of moving and existing emerged. When the Parisian cobblestone became illuminated without end, what we call nightlife would take shape: a whole new relation to the sensible world of consumption and relation. But today, where the illuminated screen becomes the cornerstone upon which the city of the instant is founded, within the socially networked city-world of shared molecular media transmission and reception, we find ourselves within a new city of lights. This time, the city is the backlit illumination of the cybernetic theatre of cruelty, a city of the instant whose ecology also needs to be taken into account. Is there a new position of cyber-flaneury or tele-flaneurs today? Ask those whose poetic spittle graces the noise factories of Twitter and Facebook. In the city of the instant, not only has the temporality of light changed, but it has allowed for a reconfiguration of the space of light. The city of the instant reaches from São Paulo to St. Louis. The café of one location becomes transcribed in another. The city is worn as clothing. It is a moveable feast.

And so here, within the city of the instant, we have to ask ourselves: What kinds of cultural artifacts could convey our orientations? Which is what news truly strives to do: to orient. If digital illumination (or screen-based relations to information) is merely one of code chatter and information excess and ecstasy, then we must see our relation or uni-lation to it as comparable to the streetlights of Baudelaire's Paris. Here we have a new relation to revealing and concealing.

Baudelaire: "Tense as in a delirium, I drank / From her eyes, pale sky where tempests germinate / the sweetness that enralls and the pleasure that kills."³

We have drunk from the "pale sky" of the digital cybernetic theatres of communicative and algorithmic excess. They have cured us of madness and yet made us crazed and frenetic via ubiquitous instant updating and auto-surveillance, "where tempests germinate." Tempests of nanobot algorithms and apparatuses of attentional capture. Our screens, our lovers, our avatars, our shared imaginaries and hopes... But can we take up the task as painters of the artificial life, of cybernetic theatres and technical objects?

Can we become the passer-by of us all within the affective algorithmic acceleration of this novel light source and cobblestone of temporal immediacy? Baudelaire continues: "A lightning flash...then night! By whose glance I was suddenly reborn," from the lightning flash of Parisian city electric to the magnetic flash of the sensible fields of real-time.

To take a step back in order to orient ourselves within the sensible field, to provide the proper filter for the light of instantaneity would require a re-calibration of our sensible field to materiality and memory retention. If the city of the instant is about a synchronized satellitic

immediacy across the networks, which allows for immediate remembering and the obliteration of the immediacy of creating memory as such, then the required poetics in this tele-environment would be one of striving to inject back into our daily routines an orientation for acquiring modes of experience of the material world. It would be a question of conjuring new forms of active durations within various temporal algorithms and stereoreal modulations of the sensible regimes of active struggle and transcoding them back within the satellitic feeds of the updates of us all.

In order to be read properly, the poetics I refer to would need to be consumed as information in a material form. Is there a materialism of the immaterial? If the immaterial can transform the wanderer's path, then it has done something.

It would be a relation within the city of the instant that one would retain. It would require the formation of memory.

A material upgrade of the sensible field.

A shock to the networked nervous system of us all. It would be a print material, i.e. it would leave an impression, a trace that one could take inside and outside of the moveable feast. And it would be shared by material bodies and not merely those of the telesphere. For if there is even such a thing as the city of the instant, the city-world I have described, then perhaps it is merely as media as such, an imaginary illusion that we all get to participate in via our Facebook updates and Twitter feeds. We now find ourselves in the rubble of all-out information, or what Virilio has called the information bomb. In its aftermath, up against and with our relation to digital info in material form, outside the real-time satellitic enclosure within screens, the proper medium of cultural and poetic exchange is becoming.

An artifact for the Bergsonian duration of memory within the instant.

There are things that you will see and things that see. As you wander within the satellitic city, there will be rumors of drone cameras streaming images from the ether. Within this moveable feast of the city of the instant, a drone that looks like a replica of a small Australian babbler bird can perch down on your café table. One becomes ensnared in a doubled-up digital stare-down within one's portable device of digital capture.

Strange encounters here. When we have nanobot drone insects and hummingbirds, we require cybernetic poetic ornithologists.

So wanderer, take your notebooks, ink pens, digital networks, and narrate, poeticize, draw pictures, take photos, construct and collect multi-mediated musical tablatures of the city's cybernetic ecology, teeming with digital flora and fauna of the strangest and perhaps deadliest sort.

Is the cybernetic pen mightier than the sword? Can one imagine a stare down between a drone humming bird and a cybernetic poet, hacking fervently into its satellitic nervous system, redirecting the digital electro-magnetic impulse of the bird's cybernetically flapping wings towards the stratosphere?

Or can one tame such a future-creature? Perhaps this future landscape of nanobot insect swarms will take the place of the millions of dying bees and other species. As our pesticides kill earth's organically made creatures, the robotic ones will take over their tasks of pollination and surveillance.

A cybernetic-flaneur colleague J.H. mentions the necessity of micro-EMP jammers. They certainly can't hurt, after all...

For as one wanders upon the cobblestones of hope, desperation, despair, and communion within the city of the instant, one can perhaps begin to see the emergence of a

new writing of the cybernetic, satellitic body, a new stereo-real literature (Virilio), a novel writing of disaster (Blanchot). The new poetics demands we take into account the various cybernetic, satellitic temporalities and virtual/actual regimes of the sensible, the non-linear and uni-linear variations in the age of the pataphysical future-present.

Artaud once spoke of his hope for a theatre of cruelty that would "break language" in order to grasp at touching life. His painful bodily utterances would exist where art and life were not distinguishable. He would speak of a crowned anarchy, of the crowned anarchist, Heliogabulous, born in sperm and blood, like us all. But here, in the moveable feast, within perhaps what Fernand Deligny will call the network as a mode of being, a webbing of the spun narratives outside of the Self—an auto-organizing network outside the violence of wanting—here, dear wanderer, as Deligny says, we merely map our a-conscious wander lines.

There is no GPS for the cobblestone of the city of the instant. But there are perhaps other human locating devices, such as the acting without object or subject that Deligny strived to articulate via the mapping of the cartographic wander lines of autistic children in the early 70s—not an acting-out, but a creative expressive network of common weaving, spinning, and tracing of shared existence.

We have theories of self-organizing systems, of stochastic auto-poetic processes of seeing and being seen, an algorithmic psychoanalysis of seeing oneself see, an upgraded self-deception—the dialectics of the thousands of cycloptic eyes, of the stereoreal-delirious visions of the network as mode of sight. Is it a blindsight? An oedipal seeing? If only we see it as a cybernetic anti-narcissus (Viveiros De Castro), a givenness that would call Antigone Freud's theatrical director and Freud, a great comic detective of the psychic theatre of individuation, of the false consciousness of self-seeing and the fake wall between analyst and analysand.

This is the territory of the city of the instant as well. The human's dealings with the liminal space between the imaginary and the so-called symbolic, the markings or tracings of animal and man, and vegetal again.

Dear Wanderer, the city of the instant is a photo-synthetic process of reproduction reliant on water and light, oxygen and illumination.

1

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 75

2

Henri Michaux, *Passages* (Paris: Gallimard, Collection Imaginaire, 1998). My translation.

3

Charles Baudelaire, "À une passante" (To a passer-by), <http://fleursdumal.org/poem/224>