

"Through the 8-Ball Darkly"
The New Media and the Implosion of Meaning
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(Note: this paper was part of a working Seminar at the American Society for Theatre Research, and as such was handed out with a rather strange citational system. In order to expedite sharing this early presentation, the original text is presented without reformatting of its footnotes.)

In my studio, there is sitting upon my computer desk, a common novelty item called a "Magic 8-Ball". For those of you who are not familiar with this icon of American kitsch, it consists of a roughly five inch diameter plastic sphere decorated with the markings of a billiards 8-Ball. Within this ball is a liquid and a slightly buoyant many-sided shape imprinted with cryptic sayings, such as "yes", "no", "perhaps", and "ask again later". In practice, the interrogator picks up the ball with a mental question to be answered by the resulting message that shows through a clear window in the ball's bottom.

In reflecting upon the concerns and various representational practices of the emergent communications media, such as virtual reality, multimedia, and the Internet, the analogy of the Magic 8-Ball seems oddly fitting. As the user of the 8-Ball views dimly through the boundary of the little window on the bottom of the orb, we likewise peer through the smoky glass of our computer screens, trying to make sense of the often equally cryptic information that bombards us daily from heterotopic spaces (cyber- or otherwise) that technically do not exist in any tangible form. In this attempt to make some cohesion from this deluge of texts, images, and sounds from the digital and televised mediascape, we must look at both the recording of these representational practices as well as the practices themselves. This will be served by the examination of current sites of mediated performance, ranging from the Internet to museum installation, and the proposed 'virtual' event-sites of archival and the recording of experience, such as the Rare Book Project. In viewing these various sites of representation, we will follow the collapse and reconfiguration of spatial, temporal, social, ontological, and epistemological boundaries within the emergence of the new media.

1990's media hyperbole regarding popular conceptions of mediated culture is loaded with 'buzzwords' such as "cyber-" and "virtual". Their ubiquity has all but drained them of meaning (Baudrillard, *Evil*) before the media public has any chance to gain a conceptual grasp of the issues involved in these terms. In fact, the increasing acceleration of our society through the sheer volume of information we are forced to assimilate, when coupled with the implosion of representational (discursive, performative) spaces, progressively "flattens" the space of meaning in the mediated society.

We live in a society in which we are irradiated with the constant media spectacle. In the past, such as the time of the Vietnam War, the coverage of the media, and the dissemination of that information had definite delays from the field from the film crews and photographers. They lacked the luxuries of live, satellite transmission, allowing some brief time for reflection. Now, there is no time for reflection, only for dissemination, as was proven by the Gulf War and the O.J. Simpson trial.

The infoculture's increasing voracity for the spectacular continues to create an inertia for all our media and institutions. In a culture where the only cardinal sin is to be boring, the transmission of all information becomes a supremely performative act, vying to attract the eye of the viewer in an explosive expansion of fast-moving, shallow content. In this "flattening" of content, all meaning is imploded from the event, until all events are rendered indifferent, making the Holocaust no more important than the Gulf War, and Beavis and Buttthead achieve parity with Trotsky and Lenin. This is the effect of the endless interconnection and self-replication of signs through the conventional media and the emergent 'new media' of computer graphics, multimedia and the Internet.

To chart the implosion/reconfiguration of these representational and discursive spaces, a diagram of the progression of this process is necessary to construct a topology of this new terrain. The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard writes of this implosion of the mediated society in *The Transparency of Evil* (1993). In the realization and/or liberation of many of our ideals (sexuality, aesthetics) during the Modern era, the liberated functions of society are then realized, exhausting them of their potential. It is at this point that Baudrillard

documents the implosive irruption into which the multiplicity of electronic existences and discursive spaces must be created.

"The state of utopia realized, of all utopias realized, we must paradoxically continue to live as though they had not been. But since they have, and since we can no longer, therefore, nourish the hope of realizing them, we can only 'hyper-realize' them through indeterminate simulation. We live amid the interminable reproduction of ideals, phantasies, images and dreams which are now behind us, yet which we must continue to reproduce in a sort of inescapable indifference."

-J. Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* (1993)

And so from Baudrillard we see the consequences of the exhaustion of the potentials of the conventional, pre-digital, Modernist reality. In the realization of the capacity of information processing through traditional media and the undivided consciousness of conventional and immersive virtual realities, these constructs can no longer serve the amount and type of information streaming towards us in the data panic site of the postmodern.

If we imagine the discursive/representative space of the mediascape as we are discussing it, imagine that we have just witnessed the implosion of the cube of the Modernist paradigm into the singularity which is the Baudrillardian implosion into the Postmodern mediascape. The acceleration of the information that we are forced to process hold us transfixed; inertial before our screens as our need for physical spaces collapses. As Paul Virilio states, the technologically accelerated individual, exhibits "the similarities that now exist between the equipped invalid and the overequipped 'valid' individual"(1994) As the amount and acceleration of information we are forced to process continues to mount, we are further held in its inertial grip, slowing us both physically and practically as the requirements of our attention likewise skyrocket. Taken to its logical conclusion, we then become immobile telepresent beings servicing our information streams through our various windows of online experience.

This is not however, entirely the case. We are not simply copies of the body telematic, now only able to move in the aether of cyberspace. Through the implosion of the Modern into the digital media, our boundaries between the physical and the digital have not imploded but fractured into a multiplicity of existences and preformative/representational spaces. If we are to believe that each historical event represents its own "micro-implosion" of space and time, then this realization of the reporting of these events through the increasing speed and interconnectedness of multimedia and the Internet, what is created is a shallow, rapidly moving, interconnected space in which we have the potential for infinite movement.

If we return to our diagram of this implosive shift, we will now see that the Modernist space that has imploded into the hyperreality of the Baudrillardian mediascape now expands rapidly, radiating outwardly from its center of implosion like a disk. Comprised of the infinitely interconnected web of events, documents, and multiple consciousnesses, the Postmodern mediascape increasingly accelerates the dissemination of information to mask the inertia caused by the acceleration and sheer volume of that very data. This paradoxical effect of potentially infinite expansion after the collapse was foretold by Baudrillard and Virilio, and the resultant space can be described by Deleuze's concept of the rhizome(1993).

How can we describe this imploded state of the representational space of the new media, and the 'cyber' spaces in general? Gilles Deleuze, in his essay, *Rhizome Versus Trees* (1993), describes the implosion of the hierarchical treelike structure of the book as icon of the Modernist paradigm via his analogy of the rhizome. In the age of the emergent communications technologies of multimedia and the Internet, multiplicity must be made, or created, in order to fill the informational needs of the info-society. Deleuze uses the example of certain organic structures, one of which is the strawberry patch.

In Deleuze's analogy, within a strawberry patch there exists a number of plants, all growing in a shallow space on the ground with a high degree of interconnectedness, establishing the organic structure called the rhizome. And so it is with new media, which lacks constraints of spatial boundary (computer graphics), the highly cross referenced document (multimedia/hypertext), and with the added multiplicity of the self (cyberspace/ Internet).

Through the technologies of the new media, with the limitations of the singular, pre-digital consciousness' ability to cope with its informational load realized, the self must undergo its own self-replication through the creation of multiple channels of existence. The shift may be as straightforward as stating the split that exists across the computer/screen border. Further shifts into the rhizomatic are compounded by the further splitting of our on-line selves through multiple points of entry into spaces such as the Internet via E-mail, on-line chat channels, real-time teleconferencing, and multi-user dungeons.

Splitting our gaze across many windows behind the screen as well as events occurring concurrently in conventional reality further accelerates our perception of reality by now requiring us to transmit information into these multiple channels of existence, as well as receive. This signals the further fracturing of our existential and discursive space toward the shallow, distributed realm of cyberspace (the Internet). We will trace this shift through the move from computer graphics, to multimedia, and then to the Internet and the World Wide Web through the examination of archival and performative sites both extant and proposed. As we explore this postmodern terrain, these new media as representational practice that causes a profound shift in numerous cultural boundaries, and yet reinforces just as many,

However, a discussion of the implications of the digital media would not be complete without a brief foray into the world of virtual reality. In fact, the impetus for this essay was a conversation about the implications of the concept of the 'virtual'. The use of this word and depiction is epidemic within American popular culture. From movies like *Brainstorm*, *Tron*, and *Strange Days*, to series like *VR5*, *Mad About You*, and endless commercial promotions, the media is awash with excapes into the perfect mimesis of fictional virtual reality. The realities behind the concepts of the virtual are further obfuscated by claims of historical events as illusory, such as the revisionist tactic of claiming the Holocaust was a 'virtual' event, when clearly this event had absolutely no basis in digital mediation. The entire idea of the virtual has been linked to a wide range of subjects, from psychedelic altered states, drug addiction, possibilities of bunker existences, and post-symbolic communication by such visionaries as Timothy Leary and Jaron Lanier. Clearly, there are other terms from the digital culture that offer similar inconsistencies and lack of clarity, but few have seemed to spark the public imagination like the term 'virtual'. We would like to first clarify some misconceptions of the word 'virtual', and elaborate on the limitations of this medium as it relates to our discussion.

The technological uses of the term 'virtual' implies the fulfilling of a physical requirement (usually computer-related) through the use of digital, or computer-generated constructs to allow or simulate events that were not possible by conventional physical means. Virtual computers, disks, memory, and even virtual reality fit under the rubric of this concept. The common denominator that is necessary for our understanding of virtual technology, and what is 'virtual' is that the intervention of a digital medium must be present to facilitate any virtual event.

The necessity that a virtual event requires the intercession of some form of electronic digital medium is why claims to the 'virtuality' of certain events and spaces before the existence of these technologies are, in our opinion, invalid. It is also our opinion that events after this point that did not unfold through the various digital communications media are merely implied, and not virtual. Following from this in the most banal terms, the Saturday morning commercial with Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble touting 'Fruity Pebbles' breakfast cereal as 'virtually delicious' is entirely untrue. This may not seem like a particularly rigorous example, but we believe that illustrates the clear differences between pre-digital propaganda, and CNN's mediated imagery of the Gulf War.

As our discussion has posited the implosion of the boundaries of the Modernist representational spaces, VR remains the most like the hegemonic structure of conventional reality in the way that one interacts with it. The ritual of virtual reality existence is typified by the donning the minimum of a head-mounted display or some other visually immersive device, along with some form of headphone. The crucial point in a successful virtual reality is the illusion of total immersion, or the total relocation of the consciousness, if not all the senses within the existential space in which it believes it to occupy. We will see that VR, of all the new media, exhibits the fewest differences with the conventional, Modernist, pre-digital reality when viewed through the work of Deleuze and Virilio.

In his essay, *Nomad Art: Space* (1993), Deleuze writes on various practices of spatial representation in art which he describes as the "smooth" and the "striated". In the case of the smooth space, the viewer is relegated to the view of the close range, much as that of the computer monitor. The terrain of the smooth space breaks with traditional boundaries of concepts of horizons, locality, or 'nearness'. Conversely, the striated space is one of long-distance vision, of frames, horizons, and the hegemony of conventional perceptions of reality that present themselves in virtual reality, but are absent in the close, smooth vision of the computer screen. Deleuze writes:

"It seems to us that the smooth is both the object of a close vision...and the element of the [smooth] haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). The striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space..."

-*Nomad Art: space* (1993)

So taken from our interpretation of Deleuze, we may surmise that the functions of virtual and conventional reality both serve the same purpose. Regardless of the physical apparatus required for the experience of virtual realities, typically there are the enforced boundaries of the reality-space being occupied, of horizons, walls, and long-range vision, those of near total immersion. For the needs of our argument, we would like to suggest that in both conventional and virtual reality there is an "existential commitment" to the environment that the participant is operating within. And so follows this ritualized practice of the commitment of the consciousness to the reality being occupied, whether conventional or synthetic, this range of experience is qualified as striated and hegemonic. We can then assume, there is, in practice, little ontological difference between conventional and virtual realities, locating it at the periphery, but not outside, of our discussion regarding the implosive nature of the new media, (computer graphics, multimedia, and the Internet).

Computer graphics, in this instance, have become commonplace in cinematic standards. Their use has opened up new possibilities of experience in media such as *Babylon 5* and *Toy Story*. The use of this medium as critical venue is just beginning to be tapped by artists such as Nam June Paik, and groups such as Emergency Broadcast Network and Haymarket Riot.

In *Megatron* (1995), Nam June Paik's installation at the Guggenheim SoHo's Mediascape exhibition, the display consists of a wall of monitors roughly 40 feet tall and 100 feet wide. The content consists of relatively simple two-dimensional computer animations of flying birds, national flags, snowmen, and so on. But composited within the graphic elements of these animations are images from the televised media of the country represented, traditional European fine art, and quasi-pornographic footage of nude women. The contrasting imagery tends to offset itself, portraying a media blur of indifference and visual excess, a mediated society that is the emphasis of Haymarket Riot's *MACHINE* trilogy.

Haymarket Riot's *MACHINE* video trilogy represents a fundamental shift towards the implosion represented of the postmodern digital culture move into the mediascape. Conceived as an experiment in sociological Symbolic Interactionism, it consists of three music videos set to an original Industrial Rock soundtrack with a running time of around 16 minutes. As the nearly hostile machinic beat drones on, incongruous sound clips from the popular culture (*Star Trek*, Martin Luther King, Nixon) to create a kind of lyric. The imagery combines slick computer graphics with visions from Cold War propaganda films and American television to form a critical narrative of the media culture. Much of the digital imagery lacks a ground plane, signifying the implosion of the striated realities, either virtual or conventional. The shift into the rhizomatic space of the digital media has clearly begun in *MACHINE*, which is slated to become a multimedia title in 1997.

In both the cases of HMR and Paik, the use of the event-scenes of the televised media reconfigured in original patterns suggests a performative quality of the computer graphic medium. In the case of Paik, the implication of the collapse of international boundaries by communications technology is suggested. For HMR, the boundaries between MTV and the academy are rethought. In each case, the spectacles of the mediascape are reassembled collages that take Laurie Anderson's "record of the time" as narrative, and institutionalizes it through the museum (Paik) and the entertainment media (HMR). However, our interaction is merely that of spectator; the reality behind the screen begins to fragment, but ours remains relatively whole. The next move towards the fragmentation of our selves and the spaces in which our representative spaces resides lies with multimedia.

Multimedia often consists of a given set of referents, consisting of sound, text, and visual information, most often stored on a CD-ROM. A program that stores the interrelations of these media, often called a 'player' defines the master narrative for the ROM's information. The structure consists of the arrangement of text and graphics in various configurations on the computer screen, which are interactively cross-referenced to other media in other configurations on the disk.

The key point here is that although there are still few entry points (sites of implosion) into the multimedia representational space, the potential for the media contained to be infinitely cross-linked is now realized. The multimedia space is then singularly rhizomatic, this interconnection creates an environment in which we can move between any number of interconnections and self referents, but only from one location or window. The document then expands under multimedia, often with far less depth than traditional printed material, following the trajectory into our projections for these representational spaces. Multimedia begins to accelerate the informational stream challenging us to accept numerous sights and sounds as well as text. This is taken to further extremes by the use of the much larger storage capacities of distributed networks, like the Internet.

For examples of how multimedia is being used as performative space, we return once again to the Mediascape exhibit at the Guggenheim SoHo. Bill Seaman's *Passage sets/ One Pulls Pivots at the Tip of My Tongue*(1996) consists of three projected screens which are linked to a computer pointing device on a lit pedestal in the middle of the darkened room. The content is constructed from combinations of a set of 800 words and phrases. Projected on the center screen is a grid of 150 still photographs which the participant can select or combine a phrase from passage sets' vocabulary, resulting in an impromptu poem. Conversely the screens located on the right and left provide automated counterpoints, only the right screen relating to the context of the selections by the participant.

By interacting with passage sets, the participant quickly traverses a terrain of pictorial, gestural, and linguistic spaces. Through this gesture, context is dynamically generated, allowing a wide variety, albeit not infinite number, of combinations. In this installation, we have the fracturing of the performative space, as we noticed that others in the exhibit space often looked to the operator of the pointer as performer, waiting to see what combinations they would construct. The machine, in its random machinations itself becomes performer, Seaman himself performs through his video clips, and the operator becomes performer for the room audience. However, there is no cohesive narrative except for the large matrices of information within the program. The fluid construction of meaning as the operator went along foretells the coming of the further interconnectedness of media on large networks, like the Internet.

passage sets follows the progression of implosion and rhizomatic expansion as was discussed in our visualized diagram. In multimedia, we see the Baudrillardian implosion, or flattening of the depth of the representational space as the speed of information increases along with the interconnectedness of the document. As the space's depth implodes in the move into the new media, its interconnectedness causes the radical horizontal expansion in all directions to cover its own inertia, adopting the Deleuzian rhizomatic form. Given the state of communications technology at the fin de millennium, the space that most aptly depicts this shift is the Internet.

The Internet is our last stop on our journey into the implosion of culture and discursive spaces. Within it are a multitude of avenues to replicate our (tele-)presence through the use of IRC's (Internet Relay Chats), CU-SeeMe (videoconferencing), Internet phone, E-Mail, and the World Wide Web. In this way, we can now engage a number of people, subjects, or media all at once, while also simultaneously maintaining partial immersion in conventional reality (the physical side of the screen). Our consciousnesses are then multiplied through these numerous points of entry to cyberspace, requiring us to further distribute our gaze across more and shorter slices of time for each fragmented existence. The net's multiplicity of existence stretches our analogy of mediated society's rhizomatic expansion to its current state at the end of the millennium. The Internet is the Disneyland of the media generation, with the World Wide Web being its cornerstone.

The World Wide Web is a subset of the Internet, consisting of any number of cross referenced, 'hypertext' documents which can incorporate any number of media, including text, sound, and video. Through the use

of this hypertextual linkage, in which any word or graphic can be referenced to any word in any other document anywhere on the global network. The Internet holds the promise of being the ultimate archival and cross-referencing system.

In reality, although there are many sites emerging as archives and representational spaces, the data stored in these archives lack any real depth, and resemble soundbites when compared to the more traditional textbooks they occasionally claim to replace. An analogy that fits this phenomenon is that of a ship moving through the ocean. As the speed of the vessel increases, so decreases the depth of which the ship settles into the ocean. And so it is with the Web, as we skip across the pages of information, rarely staying for long on any one subject. In this space, we navigate in rapid, shallow movements across the informational domain, with little chance for any depth of content or reflection on that content until the next click of the mouse.

The shallowness of the WWW is shown not only in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative and ergonomic terms. Simply put, the use of a laptop, or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), does not compete favorably against the tactile quality of pages between the fingers, or the mobility of a simple book. Rarely are the accounts of a person curling up on the sofa for the night with their favorite laptop, or the advent of the "Coffeetable CD". Furthermore, we have yet to hear of the laptop as a prime source of bathroom reading material.

From our own personal experience and conversations with colleagues through the Academy (Epstein, 95-96, Smith, 96), the use of interactive texts as a substitute representational practice for the conventional text is questionable at best. The structure of the Web, with its profusion of opportunities to branch and digress allow for endless excursions into the plurality of subjects inherent to the Internet, once again causes an inertial effect in regard to the focus and direction to the course of study. Furthermore, from previously mentioned conversations, the student, and often the administrator, tires after the perusal of a few scant pages. Perhaps this may be a generational effect, but only time will reveal whether the screen will prove to become an effective replacement for the printed page.

However, the shallowness of the WWW and its predilection to the soundbites, is also its greatest strength. Artists like Jenny Holzer have exploited the ephemeral qualities of hypertext to erect a number of Web installations, her latest (please change beliefs -1995) being sponsored by AdaWeb. She exploits the 'hit and run' nature of the Web as the participant weaves their way through the interconnected jungle of truisms, with no pretense of depth or reflection. This interconnection brings the explorer into differing configurations of meaning, depending on the sequence of links chosen. This series of shallow movements establishes the performative nature of the representational space of the Web from the standpoint of the artist and observer.

The previously stated hazards of the WWW as representational space create special challenges for the use of this discursive field for pedagogical endeavors. Regardless, the academy appears to be embracing the emergent communications technologies with open arms with little regard for the potential ramifications from using the New Media that must be accounted for. For example, starting Fall 1996, Wake Forest University, as part of its Wake 2000 plan is giving each new freshman their own ThinkPad laptop computer and a corresponding Internet account. Taking into account that at the announcement of the program (1995), Wake had a single fibre-optic data pathway which often experienced bottlenecks with the existing network load, the added traffic could further tax an already overloaded system. Such an instance is only one of the artifacts of the implosive gesture of the digital age, and does not seem to deter the Academy in its movement into the cyberspatial terrain.

In fact, there are a number of ambitious projects proposed for academic and archival uses of the Web and the Internet. Taken into account are three examples of the uses of this technology, all ranging from the creation of 'new texts', augmentation of more traditional pedagogical techniques. The first is extant, the others are in progress. .

Dr. Jonathon Epstein, a cultural sociologist at Kent State University dealing in Deviance, Youth, and Rock cultures utilizes the media laden nature of the Web to augment his Sociology of Rock curriculum. Available on the WWW is a 'cyber-syllabus' (Epstein, 1996), which describes briefly the required assignments for each

week, but more concisely than the one given out at the beginning of the lecture. Dr. Epstein's syllabus, however, also contains links to documents generated by fans and the music industry that contain sound, visual, and biographical information about the subject of that week's lecture.

The 'cyber-syllabus' is constructed with no pretense to replace the required reading, as most of the pages contain small, quickly accessible amounts of information that can be quickly bought up using the readily available library Web viewers. In so doing, the conciseness of the material keeps the assumption of technical literacy, and access to costly digital equipment at a minimum. And due to the highly volatile nature of the functionality of links on the Web, the syllabus' small structure facilitates rapid configuration to new sources of information and restoration of data in the even of temporary network failure. In this way, Epstein's document maintains the rapidly configurable, fluid requirements of Web representational structures.

The next proposed project at a Virginia learning institution (believed to be Virginia Tech) regarding issues pertaining to archival of the library's Rare Book collection. As stated, the Rare Book Project is proposed to allow ready access to the library through viewing of digitized images of the books and pertinent documents contained therein. Despite the inherent problems of access, technical proficiency, and equipment failure, the Rare Book Project could offer students much more widespread access to these records. And, since typically only a few pages will be accessed at a time, the depth of content required is no more than that of archives of the scanned pages. With careful, structural organization of the documents, the Rare Book Project could potentially offer more rapid and widespread viewing of the information in small lots, thus fitting our criteria of the imploded rhizomatic space discussed earlier.

Lastly, upon reflecting upon the archival/pedagogical uses of the Internet/WWW, one cannot help not to think of Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, and his massive digitizing projects of art works and texts. His purchases of rare art works and documents are now legendary, the most famous of which are a collection of manuscripts Leonardo DaVinci. His practice of the digitization of culture has furthered our implosive progression of meaning by positing Microsoft's archival products, such as Encarta, as Pope William's new codices and encyclicals of the multimedia age.

And from the indications of analyses of Gates by the print media are any indication, Gates, and his contemporaries will institutionalize the dominance of the on-line-only text, along with the very way we deal with information electronically. Let's face it, Microsoft's redefinition of the information culture's very epistemology through the creation of the Windows operating system. With the addition of Gates' ambitions for Internet dominance, and ads about "Cyber-Washington (1996)", he is poised to redefine an entire society's reality with the power of a medieval pope, thus my previous analogy.

The ramifications of this shift are so profound that it is not too farfetched to see parallels between the centralized consolidation and easy manipulation of data within on-line sources to the visions of Lang (Metropolis), Orwell (1984), and Scott (Blade Runner). The social implications are clear; the assumption of access and technical facility is further stratifying American culture along economic, educational, and age boundaries. The ones who will have access to the 'new texts' and information of the digital age will be the ones rich enough and enculturated within this new social structure. But whose information, that of the established institutions, like the Academy, the government, or corporate concerns such as Microsoft? As our discussed expansion of the on-line media increases in volume and speed, this is a question that becomes increasingly unclear.

Given this as the case, however hypothetical, how does this relate to the peril of the on-line society shuddering in yet another implosive shift when the technology itself fails? In August of 1996, the on-line service provider America Online experienced system-wide failure for nineteen hours. Six million people of the digital culture were now left transfixed in front of their monitors with part of their existences neatly severed off like so many limbs. What happens to the information society, its history and culture, once the power is turned off? Perhaps this is the implosive strategy of the digital mediascape, when taken to its ultimate conclusion.

One last issue that we would like to address concerning the technological dangers of the digital realm is that of advances in technological media. Only less than couple decades ago, did we use cumbersome eight-inch floppy disks that were prone to damage and data loss. Hard disks were rarely over fifteen megabytes, and a megabyte of system RAM was really something. In the last decade, we have witnessed the expansion of digital storage using a number of standards, the latest being the CD-ROM.

Within each one of these silvery disks lies the capacity to contain 650 megabytes of information, nearly enough to hold the textual contents of an encyclopedia. So, from perusing the shelves of the local computer shows and trade periodicals such as Computer Shopper, we can assume that the amount of information being stored is several times that of the Library of Congress. Once again, we are confronted with the issues of access along with the flood of information. And then, in 1995, the announcement of the DVD CD-ROM standard was announced, the harbinger of obsolescence for the prior hardware standard.

What is lost then, in each of these technological expansions? With each successively larger pool of information, the ability to transfer it to the next generation of data succumbs to the inertia of the sea of data, and we are forced to forget part of ourselves, further collapsing any possibility of depth or memory? This may not seem to be an issue when the data in question is a video game, but when the information pertains to a governmental archive or other cultural referent, the import of the tactic takes on greater significance. Archives of entire regimes, genocides and aesthetic movements could be eliminated merely through the simplest of sins of omission.

From this examination, it is clear that we are confronted with the necessity to process greater and greater volumes of information while further fragmenting our consciousnesses through the multiplicity of existences via the digital media. As this acceleration continues, we will be forced to deal with expanding social and cultural spaces in less time than ever before. What is not clear is the result that the shifts in our representational practices will have on our institutions and society. The progressive implosion of these spaces through the utilization of these technologies is obvious when viewed through the work of Baudrillard, Deleuze and Virilio. And the resultant societal and discursive inertia caused by working with the vast seas of and increasing speed of information is also evident when looking at these issues.

As we push further into the ever-increasing complexity of the Digital Revolution, will we be able to provide new solutions for the issues we have discussed, or will be gripped motionless, unable to change direction on the Information Superhighway from our endless acceleration? Whether these possibilities presented by the digital medium present new and real solutions or whether we are only furthering the tired Modernist conception that technology will eventually save us from ourselves will remain to be seen. When trying to ascertain the answers to these questions, the monitor screen appears as dark and hazy as the transparent portal on the bottom of my silent, baleful Magic 8-Ball. And when asked for its opinion regarding these matters, it silently replies, "Ask again...later."