

# Act your actuality!

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Are current affairs ordinary news fact? Can we take note of this information and then continue to go about our normal activities? Or does this information influence us in such a way that we can't do without anymore? Are current affairs a matter of facts or a state of mind? One thing is for sure: the overwhelming offer of news and current affairs programmes, in which the furthest corners of the globe are reflected, facilitated by satellites, dish antennas, cable and Internet, turn following the news into a day job. Only in the case of the addicted news consumer, who flicks on the telly or the radio, or constantly checks his GSM or the Internet, reality and actuality coincide. In all other cases there still is a non actualized in between space as a non actualized now here. For the media this is the abyss of no man's land: an in between of reality and actuality, where nothing seems to happen.

## **Real time**

'Live' performance has been invented, when life became televisional. Of recent, 'Real Time' gives us the feeling to be on top of the facts. Tv, video and webcam - media -produced 'reality tv' so we could get under the skin of ordinary people. In spectacularising the dull and boring or insane and violent banality of daily life the real became more real than real, i.e. hyperreal Baudrillard wrote long ago. Actuality is an effect of mediamatic registration. But of course, actuality tells us something about the world. Yet in spite of the pain, the horror and suffering, we do not really know what it tells us. By the mantra-like repetition of the same spectacular news facts we are glued to television actuality. The neurotic repetition of news facts alone - the pounding heartbeat of actuality - has a reality-effect: when we hear and see something very often and don't have time to reflect upon it, as with adds, we start to believe in them automatically.

## **Information and infotoms**

This belief is purely performative. Actuality is an act. We enact it by looking at our lives through the spectacular eyes of the camera and by interacting with others according to the presented facts. In reacting upon actuality in fact we produce reality. As a matter of fact, we are not only informed, but also formed by information. If reality as such ever existed before the in(ter)vention of tv - before electrification of communication processes - then that very reality has gradually disappeared as a result of the complex multiplicity of news broadcasting. Nowadays reality does no longer take place off the screen, behind the scenes. Detached from mediamatic interventions uninformed materiality is worthless, meaningless and senseless. This formless dimension of the world - the 'informe' that Bataille hailed - has already become a function of the informatization of the world: it is its inexhaustible reservoir of 'data'. Once the world consisted of atoms, now it consists of infotoms.

## **[Heartbeat]**

A new television quiz started recently: [heartbeat]. The format is simple. Candidates sit in a glass room and have to give swift responses to the questions, which are posed in a resonant voice-over. Questions like 'Which cities in Italy are at the coast?' In order to do so they are presented with a list of an x amount of choices. In the Dutch version friends, family, acquaintances and colleagues may be called to assist. Every right answer brings in a multiple

of 1000 Euros. This amount can rise to up to halve a million Euros. It is also possible to cash sooner.

In itself this quiz is not very sensational. However, the essence of it is the heartbeat of the candidates. This, instead of the time, is used to count down. Understandably the heartbeat of the candidates gets louder and faster as the tension rises. In order to act adequately self-constraint is of the utmost importance. But as can be expected, only a few candidates are able to calm down his or her pounding heart. Consequently the tension keeps rising inversely proportional to the remaining time. By relaxing compulsively the players get more and more excited. In their frantic attempts to lower their heartbeats they only lose time.

### **Fact**

In [Heartbeat] the feed-back is decisive: the registration of the heartbeat which is announced on crucial moments, gradually takes over the course of the game. Precisely that makes [Heartbeat] highly suited to understand the phenomenon 'actuality'. This simple game belies that the world is out there and that we, using the media – newspapers, radio and tv news, WWW – apparently objectively registering reality, are able to make choices and take decisions for our individual or collective actions. Of course, nearly every news consumer realizes that registration of the present at least influences the registered reality in its effects: after having read the news we change opinions and implicitly our behavior. This transformation takes time. More over, every user of the WWW knows that the acceleration of messages has changed at least his or her world. Although registration is not yet the father to the event, the fact that reporters, armed with cameras were awaiting the American invasion troops on the beaches of Mogadishu, at least sheds an eerie light on the world. As a result of immediate reflection, registration – fact – and acting – act – get more and more entangled. Heidegger in his decisionist critique of technology, not yet having the slightest notion of information society and new media, already realized that our being-in-the-world is a (f)act that urges us to be decisive.

### **Factuality**

In 1845 Marx stated in the second thesis of his *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The dispute about actuality or non-actuality of thinking – thinking isolated from practice – is a purely scholastic question”. And he concluded his theses with: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it”. For Marx theory and practice are dialectically forged into a vibrant unity. Thinking is acting. When he wrote this down by the middle of the 19th century, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* for which he wrote had already for a long time been a popularized medium. In 1835 James Gordon Bennett, the father of tabloid journalism, established the *New York Herald*. By that time colonial powers started to knit their international information networks: Havas in Paris, Reuter in London, Wolff in Berlin. In 1869 information giants finally agreed upon their respective separated spheres.

Both actuality and globality were under construction. As a result of electrification newspapers that initially registered local or national facts, started to produce world news, registering proto-global eventualities. Huge quantities of disparate (f)acts became material for a 'logistics' of actuality. The etymology of 'logo(s)' is instructive: originating from the Greek verb 'legein' it does not only mean 'thinking' or 'reading' but also 'gathering'. The mediamatic gathering and reading of (f)acts into coherent en meaningful actuality gradually processed in the minds and bodies of readers and viewers an (f)actual awareness of being connected with the rest of the world.

### **Publication**

The speed at which theory and practice took each other up in the 19th century was however considerably slower than now. Even when there were steam trains in Marx's time and Morse had already cabled his first messages, journalistic reports and scientific reviews still reached the world with the speed of a stage-coach.

Information distributed in mass- and new media apparently does not bear any relation to Marx's production of knowledge. After all, he pretended to deal with a scientific description of the world, not a normative prescription for a world to come. But as every historian the scientist Marx too implicitly extrapolated tendencies, extracted from historical events, into the future. In retrospect, we cannot but acknowledge this (f)act: Marx dialectically anticipated a future community in describing past events. The future of the people was already past tensed. It would take some revolts, a Revolution and a reaction to realise the artificiality of Marxist's truths and an 'end of history' to acknowledge the actuality of the future. It took information technology to realise the impossibility of the truth in its realisation by the public, its publication.

### **Orchestration**

Information does no longer aim at the truth. It is not even true. It works. It strives to be effective: it becomes true in its effects. In information the world is no longer real, it is as virtual as it is actual. With the telegraph – the 'social hormone' as McLuhan coined it – but mainly by the following electrification, this awareness gained momentum in the most literal sense. In the 19th century both the nation-state and democracy were born. The individual as well as the masses came to the fore, singing "we are the world, we are the future". The electrification of the civilized world sped up former mechanical interactions to the speed of light. 'Understanding media' - especially electricity - is only possible once we acknowledge its power to connect everything to everything *with regard to the whole*. As a result of 'short circuiting', reality evolved into an integrated system of information handling. However, information is not the object of handling but the subject: information (f)acts. Once the written word turns into an electric pulse and a century later in digitized information, it becomes clear that reality is not registered but orchestrated. Nobody noticed. Globality was not yet an issue.

### **No(w)here over (t)here**

The news reel formed a socio-political information grid for connecting the nation with the empire and the individual with the masses. Riefenstahl understood this as well as Benjamin. In the news broadcasts the now here of the local is mirrored in the now (t)here of the empire. This proto-actuality connects the temporal now of the local with the timeless now of the rest of the world. In actuality, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the now-here of the local is connected to a no-where of the global. Linear time – history - is out of joint, global time is all that counts. Global information deconstructs historical knowledge. Past and future are tensed differently. The global is neither past nor future tensed. The global is present tensed. It is virtual/actual. Everything happens now(t)here. The global is the sphere of the other (heteros) in us, Sloterdijk extensively arguments. Utopia and distopia are out of date, the global is heterotopical.

We realize that everything over there has already influenced us over here. In desiring virtual totality we want to be informed (f)actually about what is happening over (t)here. But we are always late. In order not to panic we (f)act: Do we take handgloves when we fly over to New York? Do we sell our options or buy new futures? Are we moving because the inner city will become a no go area now that real estate developers are planning to built gated communities?

### **Glocal**

The ultimate measure of speed is no longer the stagecoach, not even the steam engine or the jet turbine, but the speed of light. As a result of the acceleration (speed) and transparency (light) of glocal socio-cultural interactions and politico-economic transactions, reflecting and acting get more and more intertwined. The time of the glocal has come, when information society mints the plastic currency of which the global and the local are both flip sides. Once the capital of the nation is decentered and subverted by transnational capital, linear time slowly dissolves into circular glocal time. The local becomes a momentum in an encompassing global dynamics. When everything is possible, the real splits into co-existent actual and virtual. Enhanced by mass and new media, nowadays glocal awareness guides our reflections and regulates our actions. This interconnectedness of reflection and action is inescapable. But this interaction is not yet experienced in the spectacular images we consume.

### **Spectacle**

Debord implicitly analyzed televisional consciousness in his critique of the society of the spectacle. To him the spectacle is not an external image but an incorporated socio-political relation. The orchestration of the public is a literal *implication* and *explication* – a folding in and out - of western theatrical tradition. In the Greek amphitheatre the orchestra was the circular space in front of the ‘skene’: On the scene the choir voiced the People’s comments. Spectators could still distance themselves from the violent acts, staged by actors - called *hypokrites* – on the scene. In the Roman Empire the amphitheatre, forming a full circle, doubled. In the Colosseum the spectacle of all spectacles was performed: Gladiators fighting for their lives. The people - the spectators being fed and entertained: *panem et circensis* – turned into a public, commenting on who lived or died. This mirroring, doubling and folding in of a violent reality - the theatrical scene with its ratings – was eventually actualized in reality tv. This televisional interface *corresponds* literally to the psychic interface of individuals, where upon a fierce battle is fought between logos and pathos, formerly staged as the inner scene of rational reflection and the obscene stage of the Oedipal drama.

### **Spectators**

Modern individuals have been educated to feed back the images of the world into their inner theatre. *Reflection* bends back upon its actions. As critical, selfdisciplined spectators of their own actions individuals televise what happens behind the screen. This inner performance is acted out collectively on the screen: the resulting spectacle connects us with the others. Being part of the spectacle, individuals nevertheless stand divided, fully realising this performative ambiguity: Staging our individuality in acting out collective desires. The culture of logo and brands plays with the ambiguity of its prosumers that have become both spectators and actors in the public domain. *Spectators* (Hrvatín) can no longer distance themselves from what they observe. It is not as much that they want to possess it, Pine and Gilmore write, they just want to experience it in order to be. On the long run, Rifkin states, leasing is even better than owning. Take on a lease in order to hold one’s own.

### **Reflection**

Prosumers reflect in acting and act in reflecting. They reflect brands. In a glocal world the proactive power of reflection is highlighted in casino capitalism: publishing quarterly reports immediately changes the predictions noted in it. According to Soros reflection not only influences glocal interactions and transactions, it is its very impetus. In the virtual world of glocal spectators *reflection* is the *raison d’être*. Reflection motivates the geopolitical transactions of transnationals. Their logistics is motivated by redefining the public time and again. Republication is the core business of transnationals. But this republication also

determines the news collection in our sped up, transparent actual world. That is why actuality does not reflect reality: Actuality reflects global consciousness.

### **In(ter)vention as *faction***

Information is not only about facts, it is also about formation. In being informed, beings are formed. But a format is not a static form. It is a guided pattern of behaviour too. In presenting its format, a news medium formats the present. In formatting the present, news configures disparate (f)acts into meaningful contexts that all are focused on glocality. Notwithstanding this formative logistics of the media, news is not simply made up. It does not produce fiction, in reflecting it produces virtual (f)acts. In this sense the news media manoeuvre in between intervention and invention. Contexts are constructions, sometimes overtly manipulated in order to 'manufacture consent' as Chomsky puts it. In presenting contextual facts in action news presents glocal (f)action in two directions: The global virtual aspect is produced by media and news agencies, the local aspect of this (f)action is realized by spectators. In implicitly judging the spectacularized (f)acts of others - condemning or subscribing those (f)acts - spectators *actualize* the virtual facts of the news as (f)action.

### ***Artifactuality of events***

The point of intersection of the virtual global and the actual local is the spectacular event. The event is the degree zero of reality. A happening might be real, an event is always actual: not an actual reality now here, but a virtual reality over there in which the spectator can participate mediamatically. Y2K was its millennial apotheosis: virtual in its realized effects, actual in its material countermeasures. Real virtuality was as invisible as the anticipated catastrophe and the fear. Paradoxically formulated: the fact that nothing happened, proved Y2k's reality. Backed up by the artificiality of scientific truth - a result of the acceleration of interactions and transactions- the in(ter)ventions of media have made us understand that (f)actuality 'in the final analysis' is - what Derrida coins as - *artifactuality*. Along with the theatrisation of public life, the aesthetisation of daily life, the world has become a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total work of art, wherein every one reflectively has to play its part.

### **ICTheology**

Barber's McWorld is Castell's informational world. In this network society politicians speak the language of information and communication technology, of ICT. Formally the media might not have an influence on the policy decisions of governments, but politicians always have the CNN factor at the back of their minds. Being ruled by the media, living in medi@crity, enhances the unquestioned primacy of a public sphere that is organized according to the imperatives of free enterprise. In this secularized sphere the belief in invisible hands, guiding the (f)acts persists. This belief is underpinned by a religious creed with its own dogmatics: ICTheology for the faithful market fundamentalists. Within this context actuality is no longer registration but sheer revelation: The globe as the interface of God offers actuality as divine reflection.

### ***Inter face, entertainment,***

The glocal world is literally ballooned with information. The spaces between what really happens and its registration, between registrations and their comments are immediately republicised. The in between is exposed and filled in as the spectacular real time in docudramatic reality tv. Face to face, we became interfaced. The artifactuality of life is enhanced by brands in ads and publications. Media's occupation of the formless in between, of the 'inter' has become totalitarian: actuality fully *corresponds* to the desires and expectations of its prosumers that wish to be entertained. Even the interventions of the

medi@critics are nothing but entertainment, infotainment and edutainment. Media know they only have one responsibility: entertainment. The heads keep talking to enhance the totalitarian illusion that actuality is real.

### ***Interview, correspondence, interactivity***

According to Sloterdijk we live in the age of the in between. Our interfacial existence is first and for all *interviewed*, our humanism and civilisation a matter of *correspondence*. The mind matters by its senses. Isn't it about time that we take this mediumlike existence, our 'mediocrity' serious without banalising reality? *Interactivity* is not sheer *entertainment*, it has to become an activity of the inter, that cannot be represented, nor identified definitively. An inter that offers enough room to move beyond hypercritical reflection and recreative imagination.

### ***Interesse***

Hypocritical reflection as our 'condition humaine' should be affirmed radically: We are better served by work-to-rule than by a strike. Radicalising the inter we are beyond theory and practice: We are in between, we are inter-esse, both interviewed and corresponding. In this state of mind actuality becomes a responsible act within tensional differences *between* the local and global, the distanced and involved, the virtual and the actual, the fact and the fiction, the fact and reflection. Once this interaction is a fact, actuality no longer consumes us, but we act our actuality.