

excerpts from THE FUTURE by Marc Augé

THE FUTURE

“The future, even when it concerns the individual, always has a social dimension: it depends on others. Any episode seen as a ‘stage’ in an individual’s life (an “examination, a competition, a job, a marriage) depends to a large extent on people other than himself and fixes him more firmly in the web of collective obligations. It is sometimes said that the individual ‘constructs’ his future, but others participate in that enterprise which is primarily a manifestation of social life.” p 15

“So, both senses of the ‘future’ are expressions of the essential solidarity between the individual and society. An absolutely solitary individual is unimaginable, just as one sort of future without the other would be unbearable.” p 16

“An acceptable future for all would be one in which everyone could manage their own time and give meaning to the future by individualizing their personal futures.

The real problems with democratic life today stem from the fact that technological innovations exploited by financial capitalism have replaced yesterday’s myths in the definition of happiness for all, and are promoting an ideology of the present, an ideology of the future now, which in turn paralyses all thought about the future.” p 17

“When we think of the future, a number of mental attitudes are put in place corresponding to different points of view. We are situated in relation to the future as mortal individuals, affective individuals with personal attachments, as seekers or as militants: many other positions are conceivable, and each person may occupy several simultaneously. We are also situated, and this is important, as beings already engaged with time, young or old: expectation, hope, impatience, desire and fear, none are the same at different ages in life.” p 40

“We are currently witnessing, with globalization and the extension of the capitalist market to the whole planet, a series of unprecedented convergences creating a radically new situation that the public only perceives in fragmentary fashion, owing to the speed with which it has appeared and the power of the language that presents it as self-evident, natural and indisputable. To characterize this situation briefly, I would say that we are no longer capable of addressing our relation to space and time – the basis of the symbolic activity that defines the essence of man and humanity – except by means of artefacts elaborated by industry and available on the market.” p 99

“We need meaning, insofar as we need to think through our relation to others (no identity is constructed without reference to otherness). But when all relations are prescribed, freedom and identity can no longer exist: the excess of meaning kills both.” p 128

“the only sector of human activity in which the notion of progress, in the sense of an accumulation of knowledge, is borne out by the reality is also the one in which notions of certainty, truth and totality are incessantly questioned and re-examined. For this reason alone, the scientific approach may be considered the model of what any initiative in the political or social field ought to be. Not to rule in the name of science (there is no absolute original knowledge), but with science in view.” p 130

“knowledge is unending, but we might perhaps focus on the fact that our most spectacular cities, the ones where new cathedrals of mercantile capitalism are clustered, increasingly resemble spaceships out of science fiction or the sort of buildings that man on some still-remote day will construct on other planets. As if we were already busy setting up the background scenery of our future encounters... “Nature is no longer either a refuge or a help, but a challenge. A challenge to human societies to give priority to the only thing that can give them mastery of the future, and the only thing that can give meaning to a singular individual human life by universalizing it: the quest for the true, the real. Perhaps it is at the centre of the most vertiginous ambitions of science that the secret of the innermost wisdom of individuals is to be found. And perhaps it is awareness of the common future that can give each individual the strength to live through this shifting present which we call the future. p 166-67

RITUAL

“**Ritual**, as we know, addresses two types of event: specific events which arise at moments when they are not necessarily expected, but also recurrent events, like the changing seasons; in the latter case ritual is undertaken not to banish the event but to ensure that it takes place. Once again, people want to act on the future, but a future conceived and desired as identical to the past. ” p 25

“There are two dimensions to **ritual** when it is carried out properly: it has its rules; from this angle, it is rooted in the past; it is executed with rigorous fidelity to the rite established by the ancestors; at the same time it is focused on the future, and the emotion attached to its celebration is born of the feeling that it has succeeded in bringing something into being, that it has produced a beginning. ” p 43

ART

“Art offers to one and all the opportunity to live through a commencement. What belongs to the principle of all creation also belongs to that of all perception and all reception (I avoid use of the economic term ‘consumption’)... “Art must express society (which today means the whole world), but it must do so purposely. It cannot simply be a passive expression, a mere aspect of the situation. It has to be expressive and reflexive to show us anything beyond what we see every day in the supermarket or on TV. The vocation of art is to be disturbing. The forms of contemporary art unsettle us by transforming familiar objects into objects of reflection; in doing so, far from sublimating reality, they subvert it.” p 60 & 94

SOCIAL MEDIA AND INNOVATION

“The development of what (for some time now) we have called ‘social media’ is presented as having an eminent role within that ‘collective dimension’ of innovation, ever since instantaneous communication started to facilitate reactions, replies and exchanges... ” “In the final analysis it bears only on the production of consumer goods and In the final analysis [co-design] bears only on the production of consumer goods and any ability the consumers may have to modify them in marginal ways.”

“Hence the two glaring paradoxes that surface in the literature on innovation. The first is the wide disparity of the examples cited in its favour: at one end of the scale, biodegradable supermarket bags, an improved kayak or ice-axe, and at the other IT, the web and 3D scannable medical imaging... “So it seems very much as if the term ‘innovation’, used on its own, embodies above all the ideology of the neoliberal economy, a symbol of initiative, dynamism and perpetual renewal, applicable to techniques, to those who invent and deploy them, to all those who make use of them and to society in general.” p 111

“Globalization is more perverse than colonization in that its actors are less easily identifiable even though it is imposed on everyone. We all have the feeling that we are colonized but we do not know who by, if not by apparently abstract entities with terribly concrete effects: Market, Stock Exchange, Crisis, Growth, Employment, Investors and Economic Agents. ” p 117