

Correspondence By Screen

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RESUMO

Há 30 anos vemos uma invasão progressiva de utilidades-domésticas na França através de "Máquinas de Comunicação" (expressão usada por Pierre Schaeffer). Os anos 60 e 70 viram, na França a chegada massiva de objetos de comunicação ligados à redes públicas - rádios de alta qualidade, televisores e telefones. Durante os anos 80 foram difundidos objetos para computadores e periféricos às redes já tradicionais das décadas passadas.

Palavras chave: Máquinas de comunicação; Redes Públicas; Difusão

ABSTRACT

For 30 years we have seen a progressive invasion of house holds in France by "Communication Machines" (the expression of Pierre Schaeffer). The 60's and 70's saw the massive arrival in french homes of communication objects hooked into public networks - hifi radios, televisions and telephones. During the 80's computer oriented objects and peripherals to the networks already traditional from past decades saw their diffusion.

Key Words: Communication Machines; Public Networks; Diffusion

RESUMEN

Hace treinta años que estamos viendo una invasión progresiva de aparatos domésticos en Francia a través de las "Máquinas de Comunicación" (expresión de Pierre Schaeffer). Los años 60 y 70 han visto la llegada masiva en las casas francesas de objetos de comunicación mantenidos por las redes públicas - "hifi" radios, televisiones y teléfonos.

Durante los años 80, objetos orientados por computadores y redes periféricas ya tradicionales de las décadas pasadas, han visto su difusión.

Palavras clave: Máquinas de Comunicación; Redes Públicas; Difusión

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For 30 years we have seen a progressive invasion of households in France by "communication machines" (the expression of Pierre Schaeffer). The 60's and 70's saw the massive arrival in French homes of communication objects hooked into public networks – hifi radios, televisions and telephones. During the 80's computer oriented objects and peripherals to the networks already traditional from past decades saw their diffusion.

As with television and the telephone, more quickly than personal computers, and with more success than cable, telematique has seen a massive diffusion in France due to a willingness on the political and business levels.¹ A new medium, it has found its "niche" in homes in stimulating new uses, the most renowned (or infamous) being the "minitel rose"², which intensifies and reconstructs the traditional distinction between public space and private space.³

One can think of the notion of public space as a space configuration and social order according to the model of the street or that of conversation.⁴ Now, telematique permits the communication with the institutions and services of the public space as well as with private persons, known or unknown (anonymous), from this private domestic territory according to the new mode of writing on a screen through a keyboard. It thus offers to the observer a privileged terrain to analyze the questions that the integration of technologies to the domestic space pose and the changes in the frontiers between the public space and private space that they imply. All the new technologies couldn't, in effect, emerge and diffuse except in integrating with the practices and perceptions of the users, and more globally with the forms of contemporary social nature.

From Informed Citizen to Playful Messenger

In referring back to the previous 15 years, the projects, according to the logic of the Nora Minc report, of the engineers and promoters of telematique in France had the ambition to overturn the spaces, in wiring the home into a

1 More than six million terminals have been distributed by the end of 1991, *La lettre de Teletel*, n° hors série, May 1991.

2 The "minitel rose" is the French term for a more or less pornographic message service using the minitel, a dedicated small computer monitor-like object with screen and keyboard, only used connected to the telephone circuitry.

3 Jacques Periault, *La logique de l'usage*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989; Patrice Flichy retraces the history of the rapports between technical innovation and social innovation in *Une histoire de la communication moderne. Espace public et vie privée*, Paris, La Découverte, 1991..

4 "The bourgeois ideal considers that a public literary sphere comes from the solidly grounded intimate sphere of the correlative subjectivity of a public. In place of which the public literary sphere is today the open door through which certain social forms sustained by this public sphere of mass culture consisting of the media is rushing through to invade the intimate familial domain." J. Habermas, *L'espace public*, translated Payot, 1988, p 38. On the shifting of the notion of public space according to Habermas see: M. Hunyadi, "La souveraineté de la procédure. A propos de la pensée politique de Jürgen Habermas?", *Lignes*, n°7, September 1989, pp. 11-27.

new network, modifying the division between workplace and home, and thusly transforming the mode of life by "tele-education", "tele-work", etc. The system conceived as a vast ensemble of data banks, should permit the furnishing to the interiors of homes of all the information that the users were surveyed to normally want and normally had to go outside their home to obtain and that a responsible citizen could have need for, thus modifying his practices of moving about within the public space.

In transforming the information field, telematique addresses itself to a rational consumer-citizen who, by the all-powerful informatique, could and should participate in the public debate since it brings "the town to the home". It thus offers him the possibility of never again having to submit to the bother of trips within the urban space to be informed, to communicate or to act and participate in the life of the city. This hope was for a time shared by local groups who launched municipal telematique projects into the fray. Housing transformed into a junction of multiple leads could become the place of all activities and the receptacle of all information and liveliness. The telematique – necessity or option according to the viewpoint of the era – valued above all technical performances supposing that the users would automatically flock to rationalize their practices of information gathering and communication.

Evidently this messianique vision revealed itself erroneous.⁵ The users have integrated the minitel into their own way of life: they have made it a play tool of communication, exchanges, and of interpersonal meetings. Or better yet, they have appropriated it in a manner more restricted than previewed, using few of the services offered. It has thus been diffused by the model of contagion rather than one of irradiation.⁶ The first model belongs to the interpersonal, interactive exchange, like the telephone, the second to the media of information-television or radio—which reaches the population from a central base. Message passing thus belongs to a medium which authorizes an exchange of "conversation", in view of an eventual rendezvous, as is the goal in most cases with message services.

Public usage of telematique really started in 1980 with the experiments in Velizy (Ile-et-Vilaine) and Strasbourg for services and in the Ile-de-France (the region with Paris more or less at its center) for the electronic telephone directory. If the latter rapidly found a success in usage, it was clearly less evident for the two former experiments which didn't know how to attract their potential users: the services furnished were essentially informative and utilitarian as idolized by its conceptors but not accepted by the public. This it couldn't be generalized. France Telecom (D.G.T. at the time) however knew how to draw conclusions from its setbacks, and quickly proposed the

5 On the failure of the municipal telematique see: *Videotex and RNIS*, n°680, November 1991, pp 35-40; and for local communication see: *Territories*, n°313, December 1990 and n°314, January 1991.

6 M. Guillaume, *La contagion des passions*, Plon, 1989, p. 113 and following.

free distribution of the Minitel, creating thusly the basic conditions for communication via a network. Then, their second judicious initiative was the creation of the "kiosk", a system for gaining access to the network and the manner of billing for the access.⁷ This permitted the economic actors – in particular the press -- to invest in this new sector, envisioning the possibilities of quick profits. Finally, the D.G.T. knew that it should tolerate the expansion of these message services even though it didn't really initiate them.

At this time, even though there are more than 15,000 services available, the great majority of minitel possessors utilize either only the telephone directory service or a maximum of three or four services. It's this process of choice that we want to inquire into here. Be it functional (consultation in view of obtaining a service, concluding a transaction, obtaining specific information, etc.), or be it personal or playful, the restricted and selective usage aims to protect itself from a public space whose structure is disintegrating or at least perceived to be. "At first whose structure is disintegrating or at least perceived to be. "At first when I had the minitel I looked at everything there was, now there's too much, it's not possible anymore, I content myself with what I know."⁸ This condenses the feelings of the majority of users. Faced with the large growth in the number of services, they feared losing themselves, like in a jungle. To find their way again they chose two or three routes, two or three services which they took to themselves and which wouldn't hold too many surprises for them acquainting themselves with them and thusly avoiding losing themselves again.⁹ From then on, having found them, they confined themselves, reestablishing thusly an order in the public space of which the traditional boundaries had been bumped into by its intrusion into the private space of the home. The users were used to a public space organized around familiar institutions (post office, train station, school...) or shopping and entertainment places which they linked together by their urban trips. Telematique users their way, like in a city, in constructing itineraries which they travelled as they wished. It's here at the heart of the matter a process of domestication of the technique and reconciles the usefulness of the tool and justifies that one doesn't put in the closet and the maintaining of the integrity of the private space which would be menaced by the intrusion of solicitations of services belonging to the public space. Through this profusion of offers of services, the machine in the home crystalizes the

7 The furnishers of the service needed a number from the joint press commission; access to the Transpac network was made by dialing 36 13, 36 14, and 36 15; the billing is done by France Telecom who turnover a third of receipts to the telematique provider and a third the service provider. For more information on these experiments one can consult: *Les cahiers du Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes de l'Île de France*, n°89, November 1984. The history of telematique is related in M. Marchand's, *La grande aventure du minitel*, Paris Larousse, 1987. See also: Réseaux, n°37, "10 ans de Vidéotex", November 1989.

8 Ph. Mallein and Y. Toussaint, *La Place sociale du Minitel*, Cerat/Iris, reedition 1991.

9 There's an analogy here with the appropriation of the neighborhood and of the city analyzed by Pierre Mayol in *L'invention du quotidien. Habiter et vivre ensemble* by Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, volume 2 UGE coll.10/18, 1979.

disorder of a public space that is not in hierarchical order. So that it can be understandable, France Telecom had to print a new directory of services permitting people to organize and to master their order. The phenomenon of message services/bulletin boards, in becoming a mode of relationship exchanges in view of meetings later, will not but amplify the perturbations linked to changes in the frontier between public space and private space. It reveals again that the inscription of the technique into the social sphere operates on uncharted turf, that of socialibility, according to a scheme dear to Michel De Certeau.

A Technological Trojan Horse?

If the legitimacy of the minitel for the public at large rests with the electronic telephone and other directories and the consultation of some privileged services, the financial and media success of the telematique is due to the prodigious abundance of convivial message services or "*messengeries roses*". The daily newspaper "Liberation" recognizes that the receipts from its "roses" classified ads permits it to cover its financial losses, just as for the weekly magazine "le Nouvel Observateur" and many other organs of the press. However the testimony to this success does not render it less ambiguous. A public network, it is not accessible except from a private place, home or workplace. It channels intimate communications available to all to the point that morality leagues and families do not cease denouncing them for their pornographic and obscenity aspects.¹⁰ government intervene as the protector of public morals as if the message services belonged to the domain of classic information and to the public space when in fact it consists of correspondence and interpersonal exchanges between willing individuals within their homes. Above these moral debates, rumor is spread: the minitel harbors networks of prostitution, prostitutes and pedophiles solicit their clients or liaisons, all sorts of deprave and fanatic people blatantly and without shame display their messages – and all this has suddenly appeared within the walls of what had been considered the sacrosanct home. This technological Trojan Horse is going to disintegrate the family and pervert our pure children and populace. Is it obscene, this scene that no one knows very well where to stand and that no spectator can approach if he isn't also an actor in the scene?

Hypnotized Users?

Are the message services separate or are the users really, in fact, compelled/hypnotised to participate? From which arises the spectre that children will become involuntary actors and unconscious victims. On top of

10 See the supplement in "Liberation" of 20 November 1991, *Moi, le Minitel*. For a denunciation of the minitel "rose", see D. Perier Davilele, *Le dossier noir du Minitel rose*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1990; and for its defense, *Maintenant*, n° 1, 1991.

the actual facts, these reactions express and extend the worried perception of a movement between the public space and the private space, associated with a tension between the aspiration to be "with it" or "modern" and the fears that this incites. The traditional confrontation between the public space, a place open to meetings of anonymous individuals, and the closed space of the home becomes progressively blurred with the general diffusion of new networks and new tools of communication. The walkman illustrates in its manner this slippage of frontiers: individuals appropriate the collective space which is the city in making their own urban sound universe in their trips. Inversely, with the minitel the bad places of the city penetrate into the home, loose women, pedophiles suddenly appear within the family space. From which has come a demand for minitel keys/codes which would control the access to certain services or to the minitel itself, like was the case earlier for television. Television was full of all the fantasmes of violence belonging to the public space, the "war in the living room". Telematique carries with it that of solicitation: the rue St. Denis (infamous "rose" street in the center of Paris where sex shops and prostitutes abound) in the living room.¹¹

The explosive expansion—today stabilized—of message services gave rise to all sorts of reactions which were the same as those raised by the street: well-bred children shouldn't play or hang about since they would meet loose women, promiscuity couldn't be mastered or controlled. On the message services fantasies, rich or poor, display themselves without any sense of modesty or propriety whatever, if not that of anonymity. With the difference from the beach where, under the summer sun bodies expose themselves and give themselves to be seen without shame, within the immaterial space of the telematique fantasies give themselves to be read, give themselves free rein, with neither more nor less shame than the multiplication of bodies exposed to the heat of the summer sun. Bare bodies don't shock anymore, "vulgar" fantasy does. It's a matter here of a transformation of the concept of "l'intime et l'intimité".

In fact, many of the parents interviewed¹² forbid their children from using the minitel, convinced of the risk of seeing them succumb to prostitution, drugs, etc.... That everyone can connect himself to the exterior with telematique was nevertheless the hope of the engineers who conceived it. But they hadn't thought that with this exterior communication would be associated the same representations of danger that the public space holds. Family restrictions at the beginning of television weren't any different—remember the white, blank squares, the "Good night children's" which indicated on the screen that the children should remove themselves from viewing

11 cf *Les Temps Modernes*, february 1991, pp. 99-114.

12 cf *La Place sociale du Minitel*, opus cité. According to a Louis Harris-France survey of October 1991, 2% only of French people want the banning of the minitel "rose" and 4% the banning of erotic films on T.V. This gap between the reality of a phenomenon and its perception illustrates the power of fantasmes, which give an imaginary force to that which can be important symbolically but limited quantitatively.

distance—but they responded also to the concerns and uncertainties of families faced with the intrusion into the home of exterior norms different from those usually practiced by the home. If the telematique, an interactive medium, diverges from the prior scheme of the manipulation of a passive public by the televised show, it's with its capacities of anonymous and very individualized communication. This raised concerned reactions proportional to the infatuation of a segment of users for the message services. Anyone could be anyone else.

A Spoken Writing

In observing exchanged messages, one could state that electronic writing breaks with conventional rules of identification belonging to traditional exchanges. A hybrid of the telephone and of mail, electronic mail, as long as it's the written form which arrives at home and appears on a screen, favors a mode of communication distinct from the conversation of the public space. It's close to the familiarity of ordinary exchange like you can have on the telephone since you also use the telephone at home. This form of writing is similar to "spoken writing". This hybridization is undoubtedly one of the keys to the success of telematique. Beyond their anecdotal and sulfurous sides, the "*messengeries rose*" have shown themselves to be a revealer and an experiment or real importance of the possibilities offered by telematique communication, giving a glimpse of the wide field of applications possible based on the hybridizations of uses.

Electronic mail and the minitel to which it is associated present similarities with postal mail. Firstly it borrows the same communicational vector—writing. Then the term "mail" is itself borrowed from the postal universe. Its promotion is tied to the strategy of the public operator while the private servers have chosen straightaway the lien with the telephone. The fact of calling it "electronic mail" gives rise to the difficulty of finding a statute for it to operate under since it makes reference to the post and the electronic but forgets the telephone to which the minitel is a peripheral. As with letters, electronic mail arrives at the home and can thus be consulted at one's leisure daily. Also the same term, "mail box", designates the support of both the departure and arrival for the mail. However in the epistolary exchange one can distinguish three moments which correspond to three specific places: composition, which takes place in a private place; emission, which takes place from a public place; and finally reception, which takes place in a private place. The success encountered by this original form of exchange comes from traits, borrowed from the two universes of post and telephone, which make up this hybridization. To identify them a comparison with postal mail and telephone conversation is in order at many levels—writing, reading and transmitting.

The first characteristic of electronic exchange is the rapidity of it all. the three moments—the composition, the transmission, and the placement of the message into the mailbox of the addressee—become almost instantaneous.

This suggests the possibility of a reading in real almost instantaneous. This suggests the possibility of a reading in real time by the addressee, even if it's not actually done until later. All the more so since the same object, the terminal/minitel, linked to the communication network is used for all the sequences of the operation. This quasi-instantaneity results from the interactive capacities of the minitel and of the telematique which reduces, even almost abolishes, the time of transmission between the emission and the reception. But one can not confine oneself to a simple explanation of the technical function or the ideology of communication. That the public housing authorities, for example, use this tool to get closer to their customers/tenants by going through the guardians of the buildings shows clearly that the relational imaginaire is well linked to a concrete objective of management or of security operations.¹³ In this case, to get closer is to better guard, or, said in another way: security "live" and in real time. If the technical system doesn't necessarily permit a "live" exchange, the immediacy of the response is always present in spirit. It's the permanence of the relationship that's in play here, as with mobile telephones. The individual everywhere is hooked into his environment, in real time or deferred according to necessity.

We find the advantages of relational interactive exchange brought to the fore by the success of the message services: rapidity and/or immediacy of the exchange, ubiquity, characteristics which until today were the prerogative of the telephone, telex, and now the fax. However telematique exchange presents inconveniences or particular constraints as opposed to physical exchanges. So that the emission of messages can keep the interest and thusly the sense, it must be assured that they are read? Also the users put rules in place, rites, to assure that the correspondant regularly consults his mail box: thus they agree, for example, to consult their mailboxes x times per week, in general at the same hour.¹⁴ Mail on the minitel is largely inspired from the services offered by the post office-registered letters, poste restante, etc. If the sender of a letter is pretty much assured that it will be read (with the exception of advertisements) on condition that it reaches its addressee, he ne l'est plus avec le electronic mail. The immateriality of the exchange doesn't cause doubts about the transmission as could be the case with the post-technique is more reliable than man—the importance is that it is read by the addressee.

The second specificity of electronic mail is linked to the permanent availability which it authorizes. There's no more mailman who comes at a certain time of day to deliver the mail. The minitels permit a system of exchange of messages where the reception can happen at any hour of the day or night, which cancels out the notion of waiting itself which is part and parcel of postal mail. One can consult one's messages on the terminal screen at any

13 Ph. Dard, C. Laumonier, Ph. Mallein, Y. Toussaint, *Minitel et Gestion de l'Habitat*, CSTB, 1991.

14 Jouet, Y. Toussaint, *La telematique interpersonnelle, étude du courrier électronique privé*, 1991, CNET-UST.

moment, when and where one wants. The major specificity of this means of communication is thus immediate of telecommunications—creating thusly a hybrid of these two means of communication. Il s'y échange de "spoken writing", of which the content borrows from and mixes with the characteristics which were particular to these two forms of distinct exchange. The telephone and the telematique bring about a very big flexibility in reception. The electronic address adds to the advantages of the pre-recorded interactivity that of the permanent accessibility.

A Written Speech

Electronic exchange resembles spoken mail and written speech, functioning on these two registers. Following the example of the written form, the physical absence of the other person is felt also like a protection. As with speech the co-presence and the oral take partial precedence over form. But while all telephone conversations impose a certain number of inherent constraints tied to the presence of the interlocutor, with the minitel the other person isn't there nor does he have need to be there. Nevertheless he can be reached in an instant without being disturbed in his family or professional life. Ordinarily it's the sender who is resumed to disturb the receiver, if he hasn't forewarned him.¹⁵ With the minitel he can send a quick message without worry. The screen here fully plays its role of obstacle and interface. These are the same functions of electronic mail which juggle the classic rules of interpersonal exchange: the possibility to do without traditional codes is offered here through performance and saving of time, at the expense of politeness and style.

Thanks to this flexibility, electronic mail is used like a telephone answering machine which permits being linked to other without being tied down to one place all the time. The mediation of the screen and the immediacy of the transmission bring about a new type of written exchange. Writing has already been modified with the generalization of the telephone, leading to a drop in the practice of private correspondence. Telematique writing itself is marked by the same speed of the oral which means it escapes the constraints of style and orthography. Technology liberates individuals from epistolary conventions and permits them to write in a style which brings almost as much pleasure as the voice itself when one reads the text on the screen. Technically it's writing, but substantially it's spoken language.

The practice of this spoken writing permits the lifting of apprehension and allows the feelings of writing freely as if the style without form liberates to the core, as opposed to manuscript writing or machine typed writing which can be an ordeal or test, what with the worry of writing badly which inhibits the writing process itself. Formal constraints can be cleared up by technical

¹⁵ According to the Dondoux report, *Communiquer, un droit pour tous*, IREST, 1991, 20% of the French aren't well accustomed to the telephone and are intimidated from using it.

capacities. The quickness of electronic mail implies writing quickly, thus spontaneously. Linked to this urgency, the absence of layout lifts the distress associated with the sense, supposedly important, of epistolary mail. Could it be the materialness of the paper support which confers an importance to the written thing and correlatively to that which it transmits? The weight of the written thing isn't found on the minitel which generates a light writing and relegates postal letters to a universe of long term, of seriousness, of officialness.¹⁶

A telephonique exchange establishes a lien between two persons who, by the materialness of their voices, give thickness, body, to their conversation. "In this realm of false meetings, here again the telephone line can bridge the void between us: it makes us flesh and blood, it gives us memory, by the reciprocity of an exchange with another person, not necessarily known but who at least recognizes us and who speaks to us knowing at least a bit of our personal history and speaks of his own at the same time".¹⁷

The feedback of another underlines here the physical aspect of the oralexchange carried by telephone. The "other" is an individual, known or to be known, partner of a dialogue which takes different forms, of course according to the degree of intimacy, but also according to what one takes from the voice. The voice gives substance to the body of the "other"; it informs us as to his/her identity and in part as to his/her intentions. Falsification in the message is thusly more complex than with the minitel. The voice on the telephone is the presence of someone who disturbs, reassures, commands, begs, but also paralyzes. On the minitel the presence of the interlocutor evidently isn't physical and doesn't give itself away except by the appearance of a text, by the rhythm of its appearance. Exchanges of texts, even confrontations, happens without any corporal presence, if we don't include the fantasized or imagined presence. Known or unknown the connectee is in some sort put between parenthesis, he is the person who will read, without any power to interrupt, the message that one wants to address to him. On the minitel one doesn't cut or interrupt speech. The politeness of the screen means the respect, inherent in the technique, of the other's turn to speak. To succeed to communicate by telephone you must sometimes have courage since the excess of identity of the interlocutor or the tension of the situation can be formidable. The physical absence of the interlocutor generally gives rise to a fantasy presence which permits avoiding the confrontation, the sentiment of vertige, that one can experience before launching oneself towards the "other" for an important exchange. The technical insufficiencies set up relational advantages.

Electronic mail thus also finds a place amongst the means of interpersonal communication as a complement, when to communicate is a test putting in cause in a certain fashion its own existence. Since if it abolishes

16 With the exception of the postcard, a veritable message on a postal "screen".

17 Françoise Bornot, Anne Cordesse, *Le Téléphone dans tous ses états*, Actes Sud, 1982, p.33.

the physical presence of the communicators, the telephone maintains the corporality, the sensuality, which can be bothersome. don't they say, "to touch someone by telephone" or "it's impossible to reach him"? On the other hand, with the minitel one cannot "reach" except by the written content of the message, and also when one swants to. The interlocutor can be known but he's not perceived as being radically different than oneself. for the addicts of the message services he's a twin of himself.¹⁸

One can thus think that certain of the codes or rules which ordinnarity govern (or perhaps governed) speech in the presence of others or a telephonic exchange, or also an epistolery writinng, are turned, forgotten, or even destroyed with the minitel.

Its flexibility of use permits not having to be obliged, thus not being obliged, to any person nor to any epistolary rule or protocol. That's why subjects which are often difficult to talk about—money, sex, pain—can be brought up without worry or embarrassment neither of the subjects themselves nor of "correct" written forms, nor of the response of the interlocutor. The minitel—an intimate medium and one for confessions. At least whas with the absence of the "other", a mockery of communication wouldn't be favored since there is an absence of exchange and of confrontation, as Baudrillard thinks.¹⁹ The individual is no longer confronted, except with himself without alterity. The presence of the other having been abolished, one dares writing that which he cannot speak in words; one dares writing without "form". This is easier since technical and economic specificities encourage a writingboth abridged and rapid. The size of the screen is so reduced that it doesn't authorize lengthy developments, and the logic of the meter,²⁰ where any slowness must pay for itself financially, incites one not to make any corrections nor formulas of politeness. Interpersonal communication by videotext has entered into a new phase where the rationing of usage is foremost, ahead of a usage resting on fantasies.

After a phase of impulsive and playful connections to the convivial message services, linked to pleasure and to the discovery of new forms of exchange, users rationalize henceforth their practices and discover the utilitarian potentialities of electronic mail. from a phase of addiction one passes to mastering the practice with a rationalization of the electronic relation and a profitability of this form of exchange. In the first case one addresses onself to a small number of correspondents who one cannot contact more eaasily, be the reasons geographic, temporal (night/day) or more

18 Y. Toussaint, "Voile et simulacre sur les messageries", *Rezeaux*, n°38, December 1989. See also: M. Relieu and A. Fontaine, "Les messageries telematiques, mauvaises herbes du "vide social", *Societés*, n°22, March 1989, pp.32-34.

19 J. Baudrillard, *Simulacre et simulation*, Paris, Gallillée, 1988. The uncertainty of the destinator is tied to the anonymity which brings up the desire to discover the identity which the psedonym hides, but also to ferret out the presence of "masters of ceremony" ie. of false partners, on the message services.

20 B. Miège, *La société conquise par la communication*, Grenoble, PUG, 1989.

personal and confidential. The minitels become a means of controlling meetings and relationships. This rationalization of usage is confirmed by the preponderant utilization of the servers who do the most, well, —those who offer the most functions: checking of one's mail box, acknowledgement of the receipt of messages sent, etc... in the second case it means financial rationalization, the users wanting to minimize the costs of connection. These aren't neophytes of telematique, but, quite opposite, they are very accustomed and familiar with the minitel. They can thus permit themselves to evaluate the different services proposed and according to their costs and advantages rationalize their usage of telematique. Their practices aren't short-lived but regular, their messages are finalized, using utility preoccupations. These rational uses, succeeding the playful and convivial practices of the learning phase of the tool, are proof of a mastering of technology.²¹

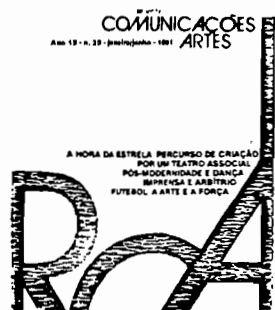
The diffusion of telematique has thus accompanied more than provoked a movement of the recomposition of relations between public and private space. Today we find ourselves neither in the initial model of the centralization of the exterior public space to individuals, nor in the opposite model of the exhibition of intimacy. As for television. The diffused model of the communicational public space where the metaphor of epidemic, contagion, expresses well the manner of its construction and functioning. As a support of interpersonal communication and exchange, the minitel belongs to a general movement where anonymity is no longer the sole property of the public space but has generalized into all homes.

Other technologies also are coming to diffuse themselves, for example the visualphone.²² An interpersonal communication object, it will also necessarily obey the model of diffusion by contagion. But with an image it reintroduces identity, the body, into the interpersonal exchange. It allows facial expressions of the "other" to penetrate into the home while in the case of the telephone and even more so that of the telematique, it's the absence of the "other" which permits the original forms of communication to develop to which the users seem to be so attached. It's not certain that the sudden appearance of the interlocutor into the private space will be welcomed. Thus the "*intimité*" will set the boundaries between public and private space—except if once again the users find a way to utilize this object in ways not planned by the inventors, and thus again appropriate a new tool for their own uses and profit.

21 J. Jouet. Y. Toussaint, La telematique interpersonnelle, étude du courrier électronique privé, CNET-UST, 1991.

22 M. Guillaume. M. Rivas, Y. Toussaint, La voix et son visage, étude sur le visiophone, IRIS, DEC, 1989.

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