

Scarcity leads to ... affection!

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While I've met a lot of people through Teams, Zoom, and Blackboard Collaborate this year, those very rare 'real' contacts stand out. During our move, one of the movers, Frank, a young man in his twenties, came across my wife Victorine's collection of Nintendo games. In search of old Nintendo games, Victorine visits the fairs every year, just like Frank does. Both are especially fond of the '90s console games because they are so much fun to collect.

I understand. I used to build up a collection of LPs and later CDs, but the fun died away when everyone started illegally reprinting albums on CDs. However, some enthusiasts went back to "vinyl". I also bought every book that really changed me. Then the (illegal) downloading of books on a computer and later e-reader / tablet became so easy that in just 15 minutes you would have enough to read continuously for the rest of your life. Unlimited access to games, music or books (stories and knowledge) has ultimately made the media cheaper not only literally, but also figuratively. And that in turn has an effect on the average presentation of media. How?

Take the average sound system in a 2020 living room: worthless! Where in the 90s everyone had a hi-fi stereo sound system to play their favourite records or CDs, now we hardly have any favourite music, let alone a decent installation to play it on. Although we can hear everything ever made through Spotify or iTunes, we usually listen through a speaker on the smartphone or tablet. Gone is both the pleasure in music and the pleasure of building a personal music collection and thus identity. The same goes for books (for example Kobo plus). The presentation of text - fonts, paragraphs, and images - in eBooks cannot be compared to the beautiful formatting of printed books. The easier we communicate textually, the less we read. SMS and WhatsApp are wonderful examples of "garbled" textual communication. The more news channels, the less followed, creating one dominant 'news' feed. A dictatorship of "truth": official news versus fake news (any other reading). The more perfectly educated policymakers, the easier a certain president can simply tweet his "policies" in keywords... As if the total amount of noise is a constant, something like wooden ships : iron men are like iron ships : softies ...

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Copy-paste became the norm, making something that can't be scaled up right away doesn't matter. But the things that are relatively difficult to scale up seem to really matter. Of course books and records are also mass productions. A storyteller or live musicians can have even more impact. To be impressive, art must be as perfect as possible, but never stripped of authenticity and individuality (of frayed edges). With our current image and sound techniques we can make audio and video so perfect that I fear that in the long run no one will look up to it or even be surprised by it.

So we lose sight of the relationship with wonder, art and life and get lost in a virtual copy-paste reality so fake that we may even forget to long for real contact. It seems like a law, the more the medium is diluted, the less impact the content has. At this point, we have started to scale up communication with colleagues significantly. When working online, we constantly watch our own image. This makes us both first and second person and will undoubtedly bring many new “conditions”. Maybe we start presenting ourselves as Avatars, or we'll exchange our own or each other's voices with deep-fake techniques so that I speak in the voice of ... Mr. Trump? Back to reality in the first person, I still hear Frank (the mover) whisper to his colleague "Playing games, it's great here, am I too old to be adopted by Victorine?"