

All but war is simulation: The military-entertainment complex.

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All but War Is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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The box office smash from spring 1999, *The Matrix*, projects a vision of a world in which "real" world objects are actually simulations emerging from streams of bits. Finding himself pursued on a rooftop with no escape except a helicopter, the movie's hero asks his guide, "Can you fly that thing?" "Not yet," she says, as she calls their home base systems administrator for software that uploads just in time.

In a similar vein, one of Intel's 1999 ads for the Pentium II processor articulates the consumer's desire for ever-faster uploads, and ultimately for fusing the digital and the real. As a skydiver plummets to earth alternating anxious glances between the camera and his chute, which appears on the screen one agonizing row of pixels at a time, the voiceover asks: "Time for a Pentium II Processor?"

Such images are amusing fantasies. They are also reminders that we are becoming immersed in a growing repertoire of computer-based media for creating, distributing, and interacting with digitized versions of the world. In numerous areas of our daily activities, we are witnessing a drive toward the fusion of digital and physical reality: not the replacement of the real by a hyperreal—the obliteration of a referent and its replacement by a model without origin or reality—as Baudrillard predicted, but a new country of ubiquitous computing in which wearable computers, independent computational agent-artifacts, and material objects are all part of the landscape.

To paraphrase the description of the matrix by William Gibson in *Neuromancer*, data are being made flesh.¹ These new media are reshaping **[End Page 289]** the channels of our experience, transforming our conception of the "real," redefining what we mean by "community" and, some would maintain, what we mean by our "selves."² As we come to entrust more of our lives to Internet communications, and as we spend more time in virtual, electronic space, our notions of materiality and reality will inevitably change.

I am intrigued by the notion that we are on the verge of a new renaissance, that, like the Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is deeply connected with a revolution in information technology. That most celebrated Renaissance is frequently heralded as the birth of humanism. I sympathize with several contemporary theorists who characterize our renaissance as heralding a posthuman era in which the human being becomes seamlessly articulated with the intelligent machine. In the posthuman state, there are no demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, between cybernetic mechanism and biological organism.³

A minimal condition for a new, "post"-human state would certainly be a fundamental shift in our notions of material reality. By exploring the recent history of what I am calling the military-entertainment complex, I hope to suggest some of the pathways through which a so-called posthuman future might emerge. Our experience of materiality is deeply tied to technologies that affect how we experience space and time and how we use our bodies. Changes in these technologies have a profound impact on our sense of the real. **[End Page 290]**

A sign of these posthuman times is the rapid fusion of the digital and the real going on around us, taking place in personal digital assistants, cell phones, and Palm Pilots™ (about to become wearable servers) that accompany us throughout the day. The sign is more clearly perceptible, perhaps, in technologies such

as web-based personal shopping assistants that learn our preferences and then crawl the Web in search of software upgrades, information, and commodities that define us as consumers of information.

The Fusion of the Digital and the Real

No less important for effecting these changes in our notions and experience of material reality will be the implementation of research and development efforts to embed information technologies in the world around us, in objects other than communications devices. For a generation we have been used to thinking of the computer as the symbol...

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1. William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), p. 51.



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