ARTICLE 6

A Description Without an Object

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In every house, there used to be objects that were of almost no use. A stopped watch, a letter folded in four, a stone picked up on a beach. They did nothing. They warned of nothing. They stayed there, and one came back to them. They carried information, like a memory, but information at rest: it did not circulate, it did not update, it said the same thing every time. They lasted, and they steadied our lives.

These objects were not destroyed. They were replaced. By information that never rests.

I. What information does to objects

Today, what functions is information. We no longer ask whether a thing is true, or whether it took place: we ask whether it works. Even to say yes, we say “that works”. It is enough to give anything a description, a price and a name for it to circulate. The thing itself does not matter.

For fifteen years, one institute put this to the test: CHEZBelette.

It sold a T-shirt “with a right sleeve and a left sleeve”, that is, an ordinary T-shirt to which nothing had been added but information. A stranger bought it: he had paid for the description, not the garment.

It sold a “redundancy” tie: nothing had changed in the fabric, but it could no longer be worn innocently.

It sold Nothing, with a product sheet and a price. Nothing was bought, then taxed.

These sales establish a simple law: information added to an object does not add to it; it covers it. The more the description says, the less the object weighs. Nothing is the point where the operation goes all the way: the description has entirely replaced the thing, and it works just as well.

II. A description without an object

What the Institut CHEZBelette did by hand, a machine now does without limit. An artificial intelligence writes, in a second, the account of a journey that never took place. It produces the photograph of an object that does not exist, the letter of a person who never wrote it, the minutes of a meeting no one attended. All of it is accurate in form. None of it took place.

This is not a complaint. The machine does very well what it is asked to do, and what it is asked to do is in keeping with the age: a description without an object, produced without effort, without duration, without a body. It is the culmination of a movement that did not begin with it. The Nothing sold by CHEZBelette was a handmade version of it.

The consequence is quiet, but it is total. When everything can be described, description no longer proves anything. It becomes impossible to tell, by reading, what was lived from what was generated. Only one thing remains that no machine can produce: the fact that an act took place.

III. What a machine cannot do in your place

The Bureau des Protocoles also acts in the place of others. A matter is referred to it with a click, the way one queries a machine. But the resemblance ends there.

An artificial intelligence can write that a cobblestone was thrown into a pond. It cannot throw it. The Bureau throws it: a body travels, a cobblestone is lifted, the surface of the water is troubled, then closes again. Delegation does not remove the act. It moves it to someone who carries it entirely.

The Bureau does not receive intentions. It does not ask why. It strips from the request everything that would describe, and keeps only what designates: which act, in whose name, when. What remains is an instruction. The Bureau passes it through a body. At the end, a lead cube is cast: 1.3 kilograms, in the mandator's name. Only two pieces of information are struck into it: the name of the protocol and the time of the act. They describe nothing. They say only which act took place, and when.

It is information at rest, like that of the objects people used to keep. It does not circulate. It does not update. It waits for someone to come for it.

IV. What remains of rituals

Objects did not disappear alone. Rituals have gone the same way. A birthday has become a notification, condolences a message, applause a thumbs-up. We light a candle on a screen. All of this works. But a ritual that demands no body, no duration, no effort is no more than information about a ritual.

A ritual is a form one carries out without having to explain it, and which holds time steady the way an object holds space steady. That is precisely what the Bureau des Protocoles does: it does not ask why, it executes, and it leaves a trace that lasts. It does not restore the rituals of the past. It administers new ones.

The Bureau does not fight information. It sets a counterweight against it. In a world where everything can be described, it produces the one thing that cannot be generated: what took place. It weighs 1.3 kilograms.

Objects held space steady; rituals held time steady. Information has replaced both. The Bureau des Protocoles is making them again, one act after another.

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