

might ask. Such seems to be the stance of North American officials. If indeed so, the victims' fate is frequently kept from the light of public knowledge.

And the facts of the case's outcome? The 46-year-old deceased woman's formerly active, alert brain was removed and dissected six weeks later by a Brigham and Women's City of Boston Hospital medical student reportedly so moved by her terse toe tag's account of the victim's heartless fate that he confessed to *Moment* a temporary inability to physically wield the power saw of his assigned task.

ALPHABETICAL TALLY OF SÉPARATISTEUR / ANTI-O.N.A.N.
GROUPS WHOSE OPPOSITION
TO INTERDEPENDENCE / RECONFIGURATION IS
DESIGNATED BY R.C.M.P. AND U.S.O.U.S. AS
TERRORIST / EXTORTIONIST IN CHARACTER

(Q=Québécois, E=Environmental, S=Separatist, V=Violent,
VV=Extremely Violent)

- *Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents* (Q, S, VV)
- *Le Bloc Québécois* (Q, S, E)
- *Calgarian Pro-Canadian Phalanx* (E, V)
- *Les Fils de Montcalm* (Q, E)
- *Les Fils de Papineau* (Q, S, V)
- *Le Front de la Libération de la Québec* (Q, S, VV)
- *Le Parti Québécois* (Q, S, E)

WHY — THOUGH IN THE EARLY DAYS OF INTERLACE'S INTERNETTED TELEPUTERS THAT OPERATED OFF LARGELY THE SAME FIBER-DIGITAL GRID AS THE PHONE COMPANIES, THE ADVENT OF VIDEO-TELEPHONING (A.K.A. 'VIDEOPHONY') ENJOYED AN INTERVAL OF HUGE CONSUMER POPULARITY — CALLERS THRILLED AT THE IDEA OF PHONE-INTERFACING BOTH AURALLY AND FACIALLY (THE LITTLE FIRST-GENERATION PHONE-VIDEO CAMERAS BEING TOO CRUDE AND NARROW-APERTURED FOR ANYTHING MUCH MORE THAN FACIAL CLOSE-UPS) ON FIRST-GENERATION TELEPUTERS THAT AT THAT TIME WERE LITTLE MORE THAN HIGH-TECH TV SETS, THOUGH OF COURSE THEY HAD THAT LITTLE 'INTELLIGENT-AGENT' HOMUNCULAR ICON THAT WOULD

David Foster Wallace: Excerpt from *Infinite Jest*
1996

APPEAR AT THE LOWER-RIGHT OF A BROADCAST/CABLE PROGRAM AND TELL YOU THE TIME AND TEMPERATURE OUTSIDE OR REMIND YOU TO TAKE YOUR BLOOD-PRESSURE MEDICATION OR ALERT YOU TO A PARTICULARLY COMPELLING ENTERTAINMENT-OPTION NOW COMING UP ON CHANNEL LIKE 491 OR SOMETHING, OR OF COURSE NOW ALERTING YOU TO AN INCOMING VIDEO-PHONE CALL AND THEN TAP-DANCING WITH A LITTLE ICONIC STRAW BOATER AND CANE JUST UNDER A MENU OF POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE, AND CALLERS DID LOVE THEIR LITTLE HOMUNCULAR ICONS. — BUT WHY, WITHIN LIKE 16 MONTHS OR 5 SALES QUARTERS, THE TUMESCENT DEMAND CURVE FOR 'VIDEOPHONY' SUDDENLY COLLAPSED LIKE A KICKED TENT, SO THAT, BY THE YEAR OF THE DEPEND ADULT UNDERGARMENT, FEWER THAN 10% OF ALL PRIVATE TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS UTILIZED ANY VIDEO-IMAGE-FIBER DATA-TRANSFERS OR COINCIDENT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, THE AVERAGE U.S. PHONE-USER DECIDING THAT S/HE ACTUALLY PREFERRED THE RETROGRADE OLD LOW-TECH BELL-ERA VOICE-ONLY TELEPHONIC INTERFACE AFTER ALL, A PREFERENTIAL ABOUT-FACE THAT COST A GOOD MANY PRECIPITANT VIDEO-TELEPHONY-RELATED ENTREPRENEURS THEIR SHIRTS, PLUS DESTABILIZING TWO HIGHLY RESPECTED MUTUAL FUNDS THAT HAD GROUND-FLOORED HEAVILY IN VIDEO-PHONE TECHNOLOGY, AND VERY NEARLY WIPING OUT THE MARYLAND STATE EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM'S FREDDIE-MAC FUND, A FUND WHOSE ADMINISTRATOR'S MISTRESS'S BROTHER HAD BEEN AN ALMOST MANICALLY PRECIPITANT VIDEO-PHONE-TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEUR ... AND BUT SO WHY THE ABRUPT CONSUMER RETREAT BACK TO GOOD OLD VOICE-ONLY TELEPHONING?

The answer, in a kind of trivalent nutshell, is: (1) emotional stress, (2) physical vanity, (3) a certain queer kind of self-obliterating logic in the micro-economics of consumer high-tech.

(1) It turned out that there was something terribly stressful about visual telephone interfaces that hadn't been stressful at all about voice-only interfaces. Videophone consumers seemed suddenly to realize that they'd been subject to an insidious but wholly marvelous delusion about conventional voice-only telephony. They'd never noticed it before, the delusion — it's like it was so emotionally complex that it could be countenanced only in the context of its loss. Good old traditional audio-only phone conversations

allowed you to presume that the person on the other end was paying complete attention to you while also permitting you not to have to pay anything even close to complete attention to her. A traditional aural-only conversation — utilizing a hand-held phone whose earpiece contained only 6 little pinholes but whose mouthpiece (rather significantly, it later seemed) contained (62) or 36 little pinholes — let you enter a kind of highway-hypnotic semi-attentive fugue: while conversing, you could look around the room, doodle, fine-groom, peel tiny bits of dead skin away from your cuticles, compose phone-pad haiku, stir things on the stove; you could even carry on a whole separate additional sign-language-and-exaggerated-facial-expression type of conversation with people right there in the room with you, all while seeming to be right there attending closely to the voice on the phone. And yet — and this was the retrospectively marvelous part — even as you were dividing your attention between the phone call and all sorts of other idle little fuguelike activities, you were somehow never haunted by the suspicion that the person on the other end's attention might be similarly divided. During a traditional call, e.g., as you let's say performed a close tactile blemish-scan of your chin, you were in no way oppressed by the thought that your phonemate was perhaps also devoting a good percentage of her attention to a close tactile blemish-scan. It was an illusion and the illusion was aural and aurally supported: the phone-line's other end's voice was dense, tightly compressed, and vectored right into your ear, enabling you to imagine that the voice's owner's attention was similarly compressed and focused . . . even though your own attention was *not*, was the thing. This bilateral illusion of unilateral attention was almost infantilely gratifying from an emotional standpoint: you got to believe you were receiving somebody's complete attention without having to return it. Regarded with the objectivity of hindsight, the illusion appears arational, almost literally fantastic: it would be like being able both to lie and to trust other people at the same time.

Video telephony rendered the fantasy insupportable. Callers now found they had to compose the same sort of earnest, slightly overintense listener's expression they had to compose for in-person exchanges. Those callers who out of unconscious habit succumbed to fuguelike doodling or pants-crease adjustment now came off looking rude, absentminded, or childishly self-absorbed. Callers who even more unconsciously blemish-scanned or nostril-explored looked up to find horrified expressions on the video-faces at the other end. All of which resulted in videophonic stress.

Even worse, of course, was the traumatic expulsion-from-Eden feeling of looking up from tracing your thumb's outline on the Reminder Pad or adjusting the old Unit's angle of repose in your shorts and actually seeing your videophonic interfacee idly strip a shoelace of its gumlet as she talked to you, and suddenly realizing your whole infantile fantasy of commanding

your partner's attention while you yourself got to fugue-doodle and make little genital-adjustments was deluded and insupportable and that you were actually commanding not one bit more attention than you were paying, here. The whole attention business was monstrously stressful, video callers found.

(2) And the videophonic stress was even worse if you were at all vain. I.e. if you worried at all about how you looked. As in to other people. Which all kidding aside who doesn't. Good old aural telephone calls could be fielded without makeup, toupee, surgical prostheses, etc. Even without clothes, if that sort of thing rattled your saber. But for the image-conscious, there was of course no such answer-as-you-are informality about visual-video telephone calls, which consumers began to see were less like having the good old phone ring than having the doorbell ring and having to throw on clothes and attach prostheses and do hair-checks in the foyer mirror before answering the door.

But the real coffin-nail for videophony involved the way callers' faces looked on their TP screen, during calls. Not their callers' faces, but their own, when they saw them on video. It was a three-button affair, after all, to use the TP's cartridge-card's Video-Record option to record both pulses in a two-way visual call and play the call back and see how your face had actually looked to the other person during the call. This sort of appearance-check was no more resistible than a mirror. But the experience proved almost universally horrifying. People were horrified at how their own faces appeared on a TP screen. It wasn't just 'Anchorman's Bloat,' that well-known impression of extra weight that video inflicts on the face. It was worse. Even with high-end TPs' high-def viewer-screens, consumers perceived something essentially blurred and moist-looking about their phone-faces, a shiny pallid *indefiniteness* that struck them as not just unflattering but somehow evasive, furtive, untrustworthy, *unlikable*. In an early and ominous InterLace/G.T.E. focus-group survey that was all but ignored in a storm of entrepreneurial sci-fi-tech enthusiasm, almost 60% of respondents who received visual access to their own faces during videophonic calls specifically used the terms *untrustworthy*, *unlikable*, or *hard to like* in describing their own visage's appearance, with a phenomenally ominous 71% of senior-citizen respondents specifically comparing their video-faces to that of Richard Nixon during the Nixon-Kennedy debates of B.S. 1960.

The proposed solution to what the telecommunications industry's psychological consultants termed *Video-Physiognomic Dysphoria* (or VPD) was, of course, the advent of High-Definition Masking; and in fact it was those entrepreneurs who gravitated toward the production of high-definition videophonic imaging and then outright masks who got in and out of the short-lived videophonic era with their shirts plus solid additional nets.

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Mask-wise, the initial option of High-Definition Photographic Imaging — i.e. taking the most flattering elements of a variety of flattering multi-angle photos of a given phone-consumer and — thanks to existing image-configuration equipment already pioneered by the cosmetics and law-enforcement industries — combining them into a wildly attractive high-def broadcastable composite of a face wearing an earnest, slightly overintense expression of complete attention — was quickly supplanted by the more inexpensive and byte-economical option of (using the exact same cosmetic-and-FBI software) actually casting the enhanced facial image in a form-fitting polybutylene-resin mask, and consumers soon found that the high up-front cost of a permanent wearable mask was more than worth it, considering the stress- and VPD-reduction benefits, and the convenient Velcro straps for the back of the mask and caller's head cost peanuts; and for a couple fiscal quarters phone/cable companies were able to rally VPD-afflicted consumers' confidence by working out a horizontally integrated deal where free composite-and-masking services came with a videophone hookup. The high-def masks, when not in use, simply hung on a small hook on the side of a TP's phone-console, admittedly looking maybe a bit surreal and discomfiting when detached and hanging there empty and wrinkled, and sometimes there were potentially awkward mistaken-identity snafus involving multi-user family or company phones and the hurried selection and attachment of the wrong mask taken from some long row of empty hanging masks — but all in all the masks seemed initially like a viable industry response to the vanity, stress, and Nixonian-facial-image problem.

(2 and maybe also 3) But combine the natural entrepreneurial instinct to satisfy all sufficiently high consumer demand, on the one hand, with what appears to be an almost equally natural distortion in the way persons tend to see themselves, and it becomes possible to account historically for the speed with which the whole high-def-videophonic-mask thing spiralled totally out of control. Not only is it weirdly hard to evaluate what you yourself look like, like whether you're good-looking or not — e.g. try looking in the mirror and determining where you stand in the attractiveness-hierarchy with anything like the objective ease you can determine whether just about anyone else you know is good-looking or not — but it turned out that consumers' instinctively skewed self-perception, plus vanity-related stress meant that they began preferring and then outright demanding videophone masks that were really quite a lot better-looking than they themselves were in person. High-def mask-entrepreneurs ready and willing to supply not just verisimilitude but aesthetic enhancement — stronger chins, smaller eye bags, air-brushed scars and wrinkles — soon pushed the original mimetic mask-entrepreneurs right out of the market. In a gradually unsublizing progression, within a couple more sales-quarters most consumers were now using masks so undeniably better-looking on videophones than their real faces were in person, transmitting to one another such horrendously skewed

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and enhanced masked images of themselves, that enormous psychosocial stress began to result, large numbers of phone-users suddenly reluctant to leave home and interface personally with people who, they feared, were now habituated to seeing their far-better-looking masked selves on the phone and would on seeing them in person suffer (so went the callers' phobia) the same illusion-shattering aesthetic disappointment that, e.g., certain women who always wear makeup give people the first time they ever see them without makeup.

The social anxieties surrounding the phenomenon psych-consultants termed *Optimistically Misrepresentational Masking* (or OMM) intensified steadily as the tiny crude first-generation videophone cameras' technology improved to where the aperture wasn't as narrow, and now the higher-end tiny cameras could countenance and transmit more or less full-body images. Certain psychologically unscrupulous entrepreneurs began marketing full-body polybutylene and -urethane 2-D cutouts — sort of like the headless muscleman and bathing-beauty cutouts you could stand behind and position your chin on the cardboard neck-stump of for cheap photos at the beach, only these full-body videophone-masks were vastly more high-tech and convincing-looking. Once you added variable 2-D wardrobe, hair- and eye-color options, various aesthetic enlargements and reductions, etc., costs started to press the envelope of mass-market affordability, even though there was at the same time horrific social pressure to be able to afford the very best possible masked 2-D body-image, to keep from feeling comparatively hideous-looking on the phone. How long, then, could one expect it to have been before the relentless entrepreneurial drive toward an ever-better mousetrap conceived of the *Transmittable Tableau* (a.k.a. TT), which in retrospect was probably the really sharp business-end of the videophonic coffin-nail. With TTs, facial and bodily masking could now be dispensed with altogether and replaced with the video-transmitted image of what was essentially a heavily doctored still-photograph, one of an incredibly fit and attractive and well-turned-out human being, someone who actually resembled you the caller only in such limited respects as like race and limb-number, the photo's face focused attentively in the direction of the videophonic camera from amid the sumptuous but not ostentatious appointments of the sort of room that best reflected the image of yourself you wanted to transmit, etc.

The Tableaux were simply high-quality transmission-ready photographs, scaled down to diorama-like proportions and fitted with a plastic holder over the videophone camera, not unlike a lens-cap. Extremely good-looking but not terrifically successful entertainment-celebrities — the same sort who in decades past would have swelled the cast-lists of infomercials — found themselves in demand as models for various high-end videophone Tableaux. Because they involved simple transmission-ready photography instead of

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computer imaging and enhancement, the Tableaux could be mass-produced and commensurately priced, and for a brief time they helped ease the tension between the high cost of enhanced body-masking and the monstrous aesthetic pressures videophony exerted on callers, not to mention also providing employment for set-designers, photographers, airbrushers, and infomercial-level celebrities hard-pressed by the declining fortunes of broadcast television advertising.

(3) But there's some sort of revealing lesson here in the beyond-short-term viability-curve of advances in consumer technology. The career of videophony conforms nearly to this curve's classically annular shape: First there's some sort of terrific, sci-fi-like advance in consumer tech — like from aural to video phoning — which advance always, however, has certain unforeseen disadvantages for the consumer; and then but the market-niches created by those disadvantages — like people's stressfully vain repulsion at their own videophonic appearance — are ingeniously filled via sheer entrepreneurial verve; and yet the very advantages of these ingenious disadvantage-compensations seem all too often to undercut the original high-tech advance, resulting in consumer-recidivism and curve-closure and massive shirt-loss for precipitant investors. In the present case, the stress-and-vanity-compensations' own evolution saw video-callers rejecting first their own faces and then even their own heavily masked and enhanced physical likenesses and finally covering the video-cameras altogether and transmitting attractively stylized static Tableaux to one another's TPs. And behind these lens-cap dioramas and transmitted Tableaux, callers of course found that they were once again stresslessly invisible, unvainly makeup- and toupeeless and baggy-eyed behind their celebrity-dioramas, once again free — since once again unseen — to doodle, blemish-scan, manicure, crease-check — while on their screen, the attractive, intensely attentive face of the well-appointed celebrity on the other end's Tableau reassured them that they were the objects of a concentrated attention they themselves didn't have to exert.

And of course but these advantages were nothing other than the once-lost and now-appreciated advantages of good old Bell-era blind aural-only telephoning, with its 6 and (62) pinholes. The only difference was that now these expensive silly unreal stylized Tableaux were being transmitted between TPs on high-priced video-fiber lines. How much time, after this realization sank in and spread among consumers (mostly via phone interestingly), would any micro-econometrist expect to need to pass before high-tech visual videophony was mostly abandoned, then, a return to good old telephoning not only dictated by common consumer sense but actually after a while culturally approved as a kind of chic integrity, not Luddism but a kind of retrograde transcendence of sci-fi-ish high-tech for its own sake, a transcendence of the vanity and the slavery to high-tech fashion that

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people view as so unattractive in one another. In other words a return to aural-only telephony became, at the closed curve's end, a kind of status-symbol of anti-vanity, such that only callers utterly lacking in self-awareness continued to use videophony and Tableaux, to say nothing of masks, and these tacky facsimile-using people became ironic cultural symbols of tacky vain slavery to corporate PR and high-tech novelty, became the Subsidized Era's tacky equivalents of people with leisure suits, black velvet paintings, sweater-vests for their poodles, electric zirconium jewelry, NoCoat LinguaScrapers, and c. Most communications consumers put their Tableaux-dioramas at the back of a knick-knack shelf and covered their cameras with standard black lens-caps and now used their phone consoles' little mask-hooks to hang these new little plasticene address-and-phone diaries specially made with a little receptacle at the top of the binding for convenient hanging from former mask-hooks. Even then, of course, the bulk of U.S. consumers remained verifiably reluctant to leave home and teleputer and to interface personally, though this phenomenon's endurance can't be attributed to the videophony-fad per se, and anyway the new panagoraphobia served to open huge new entrepreneurial teleputerized markets for home-shopping and -delivery, and didn't cause much industry concern.

Four times per annum, in these chemically troubled times, the Organization of North American Nations Tennis Association's Juniors Division sends a young toxicologist with cornsilk hair and a smooth wide button of a nose and a blue O.N.A.N.T.A. blazer to collect urine samples from any student at any accredited tennis academy ranked higher than #64 continentally in his or her age-division. Competitive junior tennis is meant to be good clean fun. It's October in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment. An impressive percentage of the kids at E.T.A. are in their divisions' top 64. On urine-sample day, the juniors form two long lines that trail out of the locker rooms and up the stairs and then run agnate and coed across the E.T.A. Comm.-Ad. Bldg. lobby with its royal-blue shag and hardwood paneling and great glass cases of trophies and plaques. It takes about an hour to get from the middle of the line to your sex's locker room's stall-area, where either the blond young toxicologist or on the girls' side a nurse whose severe widow's peak tops her square face with a sort of bisected forehead dispenses a plastic cup with a pale-green lid and a strip of white medical tape with a name and a monthly ranking and 10-15-Y.D.A.U. and *Enf.T.A.* neatly printed in a six-pt. font.