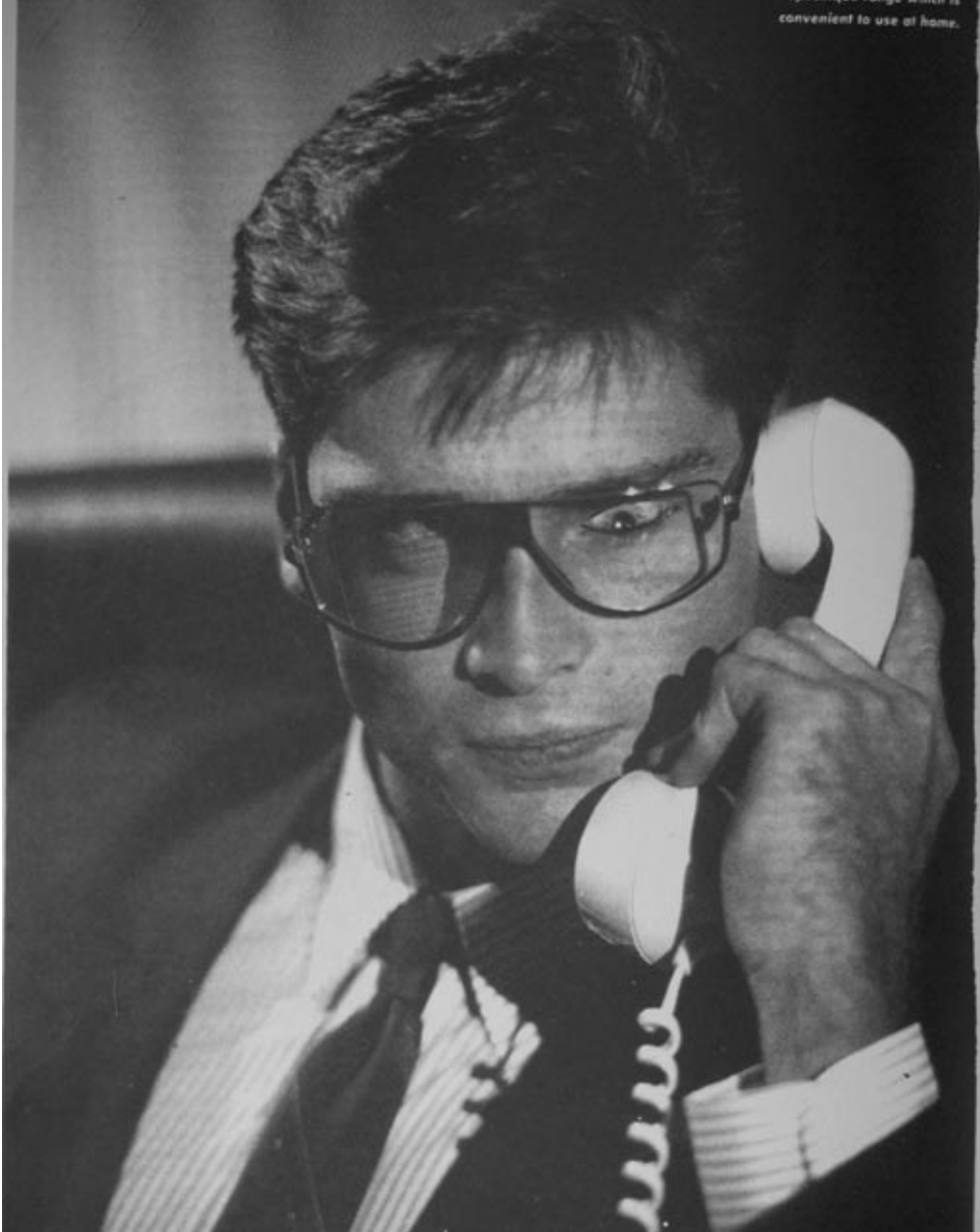


Suit by Christian Dior. Shirt and tie
by Givenchy. Glasses by Gianfranco
Ferre. Hair by Stephen Solecich of
Stout's using the Kérastase
Spécifique range which is
convenient to use at home.



Kurt Brereton

IMAGE DELIRIA

To go against reason is to go off (de) the rails (lira): to jump the furrow of redundancy and cease to quote (lire - read - currency). Images of delirium are indifferent to morals or aesthetics: these categories become trivial, futile, false alibis for the conceit of pastiche. Every artist begins with pastiche (pasticcio - to mix together into a pasta), in a preoccupation with surfaces rather than depths. Delirium seeks out the profound differences between superficial resemblances and breaks away from the imitation or mimicry of past styles that equates ideologically to the wearing of masks through which is spoken the speech of dead languages.

The more 'I' try to resist delirium, the more fascination takes hold of 'me'. Delirium lays oneself open to an infinite passivity that can not be resisted or even described: since everything immediately becomes, without any mediation, an image, out of one's control. *One's self* turns inside out into multiple roles all intent on destroying the logic of the 'self'. 'I am this image becomes a 'me image'.

It is through and by delirium that we are transported across the ragged edges of perception, beneath the surface of objects and against the gravity of our dumb bodies. By alternatively melting and freezing the real, delirium forces us to explore the gaps in matter - to take a molecular excursion that enters the solidity of concrete objects and explores the "holes in sounds, in forms and even in water."¹ Delirium, like water, exposes the rawness of matter, the materiality of things such as "the hideousness of bourgeois bodies beneath their clothes, just as it now reveals the softness and strength of a loved one's body."²

Images produced in delirium are literal, never metaphorical or transcendental.

If delirious images do have a currency in our Western capitalist culture, then these images are exchanged not as things or bodies, but as experienced or lived paradoxes of spacial and temporal conjunctures.

In order to trace these paradoxes of time and space, these images without

shadows, we must return to Plato's Cave, that formative conceptual site with its everlasting flame casting shadowy images that can only be experienced as reflections, reflections and simulacras (unreal semblances) of a real always out of reach.

For Freud on his couch, an image is the reliving of a sensation in the absence of an original stimulus. We are led to believe that it is the perception of images which determines the processes of the imagination. The images that we imagine are formed by combining fragments of a perceived world into images which become the memory of our experienced reality.

In order to be blessed with 'a fertile imagination', one must have seen a great deal and 'seen it well'. This advice to 'see well' not only implies a 'right education' with an ability to code and decode (evaluate) what is seen, but also tends to overshadow and relegate the power of deliria and also dreaming to mould the imagination and shape memory. Instead, deliria are labelled as the "excesses of perception" and typecast as the deviant, distorted products of consciousness to be 'cured' (fixed, cooked) in isolation.

What does give imagination a sort of 'life', a power and a sense of being 'fertile' is the *profound invisibility of our unconscious drives*. These drives mark out the solitude of our conscious images - hence the disquiet of our dreams. As Gabriele d'Annunzio suggests in relation to the power of the unseen: "When we begin to open our eyes to the visible, we have long since committed ourselves to the invisible."³ And once committed, how does the invisible inform the visible? Does for instance, the delirious image come before the real, sanctioned image, just as the nightmare precedes the tragedy?

Delirium is commonly described as a fever, a *dementia* of the mind: a fever without any symbolic relationship to the world. To be struck by an image fever, a *tremens* caused by the toxic shock of *inanition* - the numbing emptiness and obscene banality of violent images - or say, the wasting *aesthetic delirium* of T.V. junkies, fixed by the internal repetitive smack of advertising images that have no beginning or end and slowly but surely absorb the libido. Within the delirium of certain advertising images for instance, there is a collapse of any distance between the consumer and product. How then are we to read and 'make sense' of delirious images without 'going mad' ourselves? What happens to the notion of a 'critical distance' crucial to any analysis?

Susan Sontag, in writing on Artaud, suggests that the task of the reader should not be to react with distance when confronted by a delirious text. It is an error to think that madness and sanity can communicate with each other only on sanity's ground, in the language of reason. Sontag reminds us that "the values of

sanity are not eternal or 'natural' any more than there is a self-evident, common-sense meaning to the condition of being insane."⁴ If the reader is called upon to not dismiss 'insane' productions out of hand or from afar, then the reader/consumer must constantly call into question the power of images to deliriate language and sign systems as a constructive subversive force within textual productions. What characterises, motivates and sustains delirium is *intimacy, immediacy and proximity*. There is no chance of mediating images of delirium as they exhibit an absolute presence which undermines and overturns everything.

A strange silence envelops the subject, striking dumb all protestations - there is only the 'here and now' and no chance to cry out, "*heh! I'm hallucinating this image.*" The only voice that can be heard is the voice of delirium. Yet it is from inside this bubble of existence that the subject fathoms the mortal movements of identity in all their horrific and euphoric reverie. Deep inside delirium's invisible theatre is glimpsed the faceless secret of an egoless self.

The *passion* of a delirious image draws all other images towards it, exciting all that it touches. This intensity of expression is the mobilisation of desire as it acts upon the body, charging its passive principles like an electric current. *Passio* - is to suffer like the martyrs - by taking part in a play, by acting out a discharge of extreme attractions (as in the passion plays of Oberammergau with their dramas and pictorial story-boards of Christ's sufferings). To be passionate about anything is to leave the confines of morals and to abandon oneself to the depths of one's own or another's body. Passion is what shifts and moulds the ego in the activities of the self. Can it be the delirancy, the measure of delinquency (morally abject) that expels (turns inside out) the 'obvious', 'given' and 'silently transparent' within images? What is it in delirium that leaves the 'medium' trembling with that quaking febrile feeling? Perhaps it is the fear of knowing that it is impossible to contain or fully control (that is, make sense of) an image's consistency. The 'medium' becomes caught in a projection of an image or voice that continually returns to haunt, not as a dream, but as the real ever present; doubling and redoubling its demands upon the subject. The image is now master.

To discover the depths of an image is to move below its highly reflective surface, to read beyond the appearance of objects. Delirium makes no distinction between a container and its contents. The delirious body becomes a part of the image. What occurs in this fusion of image and body, this similitude of image and identity? The subject is 'carried off' in a *rush* of moving images

"One feels as if one is inside a gaseous wave which emits an incessant crackling from all sides. Things are released as from what was your spleen, your liver, your heart, or your lungs; they escape untiringly, and burst in this atmosphere which hesitates between gas and water, but which seems to call things to itself."⁵

Hence parts of the body are stripped away, replaced or lost altogether in an attempt to release desire from the repressive and reductive ordered 'lines of flight' along which it is forced to flow. The 'body without organs' acts as a fantasised body conceived as a locus of inscription, as Leclaire describes it. From here, the 'subject' takes flight to leave in its place a singularity, a temporal unstable collocation of desires upon unstructured lines. Thus Artaud's need to live without organs (the motors driving his sufferings) so that he might bring to the surface the pain he felt.

The full body without organs, Deleuze and Guattari state, is the "unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumerable. Antonin Artaud discovered this one day, finding himself with no shape or form whatsoever, right there where he was at that moment."⁶ The moment of the body without organs is a point of catastasis; it is a body without an image; it is the place where our desires become realised, felt as pleasure or pain.

"The deep truth is imageless,"⁷ declares Shelley. Here truth lies below or beyond meaning which inhabits the surface of texts, images or bodies. 'Deep truth' is dark, the Other of shallow truth. Yet 'deep truth' is still to arrive or even to be conceived of in images. It can not be prearranged as it has never been allowed to appear within the confines of a culture which anchors images in a foreclosure of meaning. Held in an exiled suspension, to be feared like Napoleon's return to France, 'deep truth' is the constant anxiety of language. That is, language can not represent the real. Roland Barthes, after Jacques Lacan, articulates this inability of language to reach the darkest depths of reality as being because the real is the impossible; that which arises from the "fundamental inadequation of language and the real".⁸ This gap between language and the real pushes logicians to employ "verbal expedients" in an attempt to "reduce, tame, deny, or, on the contrary, to assume what is always delirium."⁹ This delirium is the grating, slipping, screaming outbursts of energy caused by the incommensurability of a unidimensional order (language) and a pluri-dimensional order (the real). A kind of delirium arises too from the incongruency of these orders in that images (photographs) are as Barthes notes,

messages without a code; ana-logisms of the real and therefore outside language.

An image is not known as a 'fact', but as a phantom; a shadow or refraction that is felt in a fleeting sensuality that glides swiftly away from or towards certainty with a silent elusiveness. Gautier recounts after seeing one such vision:

"I saw blue, green and red musical phrases which smelled of vanilla... the ceiling opened to admit a heel, fresh, pink and smooth, the heel of an angel or sylph, which has ever walked only on blue sky and clouds."¹⁰

The vision Gautier's desire has fabricated is real. (Deleuze and Guattari declare that in reality, everything becomes possible - this is a positive pagan conception of reality.)

There can be no authors in delirium as the agency 'author' has no meaning in delirious productions. The self becomes a cypher to forces far greater than it. Since the imaginary is the privileged axis of signification there is nothing to stop a voice or image from entering one's flesh, and draining the marrow from the bones, till they are as brittle as a stick. The voice turns a 'socially responsible individual' into a 'medium'; an organ of communication. Relentlessly, this repressive social order becomes too constraining and the authoritarian agent from the external world becomes internalised as a monster ever present:

"While you're still catching your breath, a man with the skin of a shark walks casually over to the couch and puts his tail across the arm-rest while he calmly informs you that he will be visible and audible only to you. Fixing his single cold glassy fish eye upon you, he warns that if you try to reveal his presence, he will kill you silently and instantly."¹¹

Delirium shapes the breath, squeezing and collapsing words into bits, then

twists them between locked jaws, contorting syllables into strange syntactical arrangements. From a rapid attack to an uneasy sustain, speech is pushed to new registers beyond translation. That is, these new 'words' escape the laws of 'good diction' (elocution). Registered as '*gobbledegook*' (the grotesque coinage of crunching words), delirious speech is projected as already returned digested products of the gut. Blended in a 'wiz' of passion, the voice grows into a high pitched alarm that screams out "*feed me, answer me, now, now, now!*" - no longer a means of designation but of action.

*"Kill me you basturds"*¹², - here the delirium of *portmanteau* words telescopes in a disjunctive synthesis, two words (converging of bastard and turd) in an economy that displays the ambiguity of language rather than the vertigo of the body with its deep crevices, pools and currents that swirl and erode both verbal and non-verbal terms and gestures. These 'words' form a 'speech' termed glossolalia. The images they incite, cause chaos in meaning by attacking the surface rendering of a text as a pure event. As Gilles Deleuze states: "the mother tongue is emptied of its meaning at the same time that its phonetic elements gain an uncommon power to inflict pain. Words cease to express attributes of the state of things. Their fragments mix with unbearable sonorous qualities and break into parts where they form a mixture, a new state of things, as if they themselves were noisy."¹³ The word *basturds* too, hesitates between bastard and turd, and as it does, it releases its organs of meaning from the body of language into a cackling atmosphere of delirious effects. The portmanteau word is finally a detour, another way of trying to control language from its surface.

Language creates its own truths; it brackets the reader in meaning, in the act of 'saying true'. Delirious speech is not 'being true' in the sense that utterance rests upon socially embodied frames of reference. Rather, transforming 'saying true' (the private epistemology of deliria) into 'being true' (consequently based knowledge) involves fixing reference points, adopting key words and images as 'true indicators' of meaning. The delirious image, like glossolalia, resists correction (being whited out); it protests, usually without success, against being seen as a defect.

The delirious text, if given currency, would be produced as a collage (bricolage) with each word, gesture, sound or image being pasted in juxtaposition to a surface. While this operation is sensible in itself as an interior monologue, the delirious text appears deranged to anyone outside the sealed environment of

production. The gravity of logic in the real world leaves the 'spaced out' delirious text floating in zero gravity, as a seemingly aimless collection of random parts.

Although delirium should not be considered as a *montage*, that is, as a systematic arrangement of parts into a synthesis from which a syntax may be formulated, there is a parallel between certain delirious effects, and Eisenstein's *involved montage* or "free montage". Here Eisenstein advocated the arbitrary selection of independent "attractions" which developed into an organic open-ended theory of manipulating various filmic "shocks". He defined an "attraction" as an aggressive moment, an element "that brings to light in the spectator those senses or that psychology that influence his experience".¹⁴ These moments are "calculated to produce certain emotional shocks" in the reader in order to make "the final ideological conclusion perceptible."¹⁵ The ideological conclusion, as a third meaning arising from the dialectical process of joining different images together, has a similar action upon the viewer to the portmanteau word (or super-imposition/double exposure in film). The association falls apart when the notion of a "proper order within the totality",¹⁶ as a *structure*, is raised

"Psychoanalysis, when confronted with a dream, a fragment of desire, always reduces it by asking the question, "what does it mean?" But does it have to *mean* anything? Schizo-analysis adopts the point of view of production and asks another question which does not dissolve desire: how does it work? What is the use of it?"¹⁷ While the important question here is how delirium is produced, how is it that we can arrive at the concept of a "fragment of delire"? How can a delirious text become fragmented? What 'use' is it, to what end and in whose name?

A fragment is usually referred to as a part broken off or detached from a larger body; an odd piece that breaks down the norms of thought, behaviour or a social order. While a delirious image can fragment a body or text, it is itself radically unquotable. The delirium of an image as a fragment, is that it causes fragmentation (a *fragor*) by eroding, snapping, tearing and flaking away at the edges of codes and values that speak of 'unity' and 'wholeness'. The delirious image also checks or restrains (as in *fraenum*, the small membrane that binds the underside of the tongue) and halts the motion of other images or voices in relation to a logical sequence of events in a narrative order. A delirious text itself can not be said to be a fragment, it is rather all that there is and doesn't owe allegiance to any greater unity.

Delirious images wear out the real by consuming its facts. Reality guards

against this wear and tear by categorizing and framing all images to the point where everything is made known (named) including that which is still unknown.

This economy of framing and cataloguing (a type of conceptual recycling of redundant images), leads to what Rem Koolhaas refers to in discussing the work of Salvador Dali, as the "Paranoid Critical Method". A methodology which advocated the "conscious exploitation of the unconscious."¹⁸ This amusing yet belated attempt to release the radical forces of deliria upon redundant images was set out by Dali as being "the spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectifications of delirious associations and interpretations."¹⁹ Dali sought to motivate and give credibility to "the conquest of the irrational" by rendering undeniable and objective, speculations on deliria as 'facts' that would in time scramble (make indigestible) all images of the real circulating in society. The Paranoid Critical Method acted to propel unproven delirious "*snapshots*" or "*souvenirs*" into the real world as 'facts' that would operate as spies, as Dali explains: "the more unconventional and unnoted their existence, the better they can devote themselves to that society's destruction."²⁰ These unprovable speculations were to be produced by *tourists of sanity* who returned with evidence not of the real but of the imaginary.

When confronted by a delirious image, there is a fascination with detail. The delirious subject proceeds item by item, "blowing up" a mark - grain, hair, dust spot or gesture in a fetishism that is characterised by the mobility of enlargements. For Barthes, fascination takes over where meaning stops. And the fascination of photographs for instance lies in their perfection of analogy. We can examine Barthes' term "punctum" as one possible way of analysing photo-deliria. Simply, a "punctum" is that which grabs our attention (pinches our psyche) in a photograph. Out of a banal analogy there suddenly leaps an extraordinary detail; a signifier that turns the field of meaning rugged, that is, the detail interrupts the surface of meaning with fugitive, persistent, smooth and elusive actions. It is at this moment that Barthes locates what he describes as the "obtuse third meaning" - that which "extends outside culture, knowledge, information: analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through as limited in the eyes of analytical reason; it belongs to the family of pun, buffoonery, useless expenditure."²¹ This third meaning provokes a delirium by forcing the reader to scan, doubt, back-up and repeat to the point of assertion, the collapse of signifieds into a signifier (the photo *is* the real, the photo *is* me!). In a perverse act, the reader refuses to let any detail pass by without first placing, clearing and connecting it to a narrative that breaks apart as soon as it is fixed inside the frame.

What happens when an image becomes *deliquescent*, turned into an *image-pool* of sensations; a sea of non-sense? It becomes muddied, reduced to a paste of effects, watered-down, turned into a 'slip'. Delirium can be seen to act as a type of '*liquid perception*'. "What can be more subjective than a delirium, a dream, an hallucination?"²² In water (as in delirium) gravity (ego) is decentred and is extremely sensitive to vibrations from rigid or solid bodies. "One dreams of water when taking advantage of the docility of clay,"²³ states Bachelard. In order to perceive an image, one must first of all meet it as a rebellious paste (a passionate matter). For in delirium nothing is clear or pure: delirium amasses in its opaque depths all the ambivalences of reality and who can tell for certain what the consistency of mud is - what monsters lurk beneath the mirrored subterfuge of an image's surface.

Kurt Brereton