

**Techno-Theory:
Critiques of Culture and Technological Being**

Commentary

C. W. Horrocks

PhD

2011

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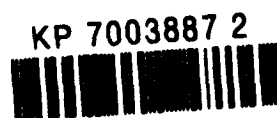
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Abstract

The work comprises a critical commentary and a portfolio of ten published major texts by the author, presented in whole or part. It represents a set of related themes and approaches to the subject of culture, technology and being. The portfolio critiques and develops theories of technology in response to significant examples within cultural contexts, in order to address and interrogate contradictions and assumptions pertaining to technologically led readings of images, objects and environments. The publications range from critical approaches to major theorists of technology and culture, including Baudrillard, McLuhan and Heidegger; artists who have utilised technology within performative contexts (Warhol, Duchamp, Gorgerous); and phenomenological studies of network-based culture. The commentary focuses on dominant theoretical concepts in order to connect the texts. These include Baudrillard's principle of 'reversibility', McLuhan's reading of disembodiment, Heidegger's 'standing reserve' and Jarry's 'pataphysics'. The work concludes with a critical obituary of Jean Baudrillard, and shows how the portfolio of publications (1999-2011) has had an impact within academe and for a more general readership, and how it informs current research and future publications.



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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Forward | 1 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Publications | 13 |
| A. Interrogating Postmodernity and its Parameters | |
| <i>Baudrillard and the Millennium</i> | 13 |
| ‘Introduction’, <i>Postmodernism and Big Science</i> | 16 |
| ‘Between Relativism and Truth: Jean Baudrillard, the Sokal Affair and the Use of Scientific Terminology across Cultural Boundaries’ | 17 |
| B. Art and Embodiment | |
| ‘Andy Warhol and the Strategic Exile of the Self’ | 19 |
| ""You Want to See? Well Take a Look at This!": Ethical Vision, Disembodiment and Light in Duchamp's <i>Étant Donnés</i> | 21 |
| ‘Real Japanese Men Play Crazy Rock ‘n Roll: The Gorgerous Phenomenon’ | 22 |
| C. Techno-culture and Digitality | |
| <i>Marshall McLuhan and Virtuality</i> | 25 |

| | |
|--|----|
| "All Your Base Are Belong To Us!": Meme Culture and Digital Creativity on the Web' | 26 |
| ‘Was Ist Das? Das Ist Der Kultur Kompressor!’ | 27 |
| 'Heidegger’s Pixel: Digital Colour as 'Standing Reserve' | 28 |
| Summary | 30 |
| Bibliography | 32 |

Commentary

Foreword

A PhD by publication involves a different historiographical relation to the conventions of doctoral research in the humanities. It is a reconstruction of a sequence of past events in writing, rather than a text driven and tempered by a central thesis with a plan and a destination in sight. This commentary is a means to describe and account for the development of the publications in this portfolio, in part to convey some sense of the theoretical context and publishing circumstances in which they were written, and to which they responded. This return to previous work, from the present vantage point, is also an attempt to describe the relationship between these texts as they accumulate over the years, their changes of direction, and shifts in thematic emphases. Accordingly, it pinpoints the breaks or contradictions that arise when looking at the body of work in its entirety.

This revisiting necessarily involves a novel temporal hermeneutic: it is a form of retrospective interpretation of a series of works that recognises the problems of imposing on these discontinuities a binding narrative from the purview of what might be conceived as a concluding point (or platform for future research and publishing). It is arguably one that perhaps draws too conveniently on the process of looking back at these fragments of texts to synthesise them, furnish them with a thesis, coherence and purpose.

If we add to this exegesis the interpretation of the published work from the perspective of more recent research in the field of technology and culture, then the task is more complicated still. The tension between replaying the events of writing and setting them against literature published since their publication will be a consideration in this reflexive text. Furthermore, the methodology of such retrospection demands the introduction of ideas which I have encountered or discussed more recently, for these may serve to give a theoretical cohesion to the trajectory these writings chart.

Style and the Reader

The other central preoccupation in these texts, one which is largely implicit and immanent to the material, is readership or audience. Certain chapters and sections, while able to address an academic audience, also gear themselves to the reader who has an interest in the subject, or the student who wishes to explore some aspect of the interrelationship between theory and event (as in *Baudrillard and the Millennium* and *McLuhan and Virtuality*). These writings in some cases test the balance between exposition and critique, and certainly between a style and delivery that sometimes must forego finer theoretical and historical detail in order to capture a broader, contextual or structural sense of the thinker, concept or object in question. Other texts pinpoint and put to the test academic approaches to culture by bringing theory into confrontation with its object (Duchamp's *Étant Donnés*; Andy Warhol's 'machinic identity'), in a set of moves from a critique of dominant readings of these instances to a formulation of other possible critical engagements. Other texts in this portfolio, particularly more recent ones, adopt a more urgent, often polemical tone. These address the problem of providing models that describe the world while capturing it within the model. There is an attempt in these writings to speak from the side of the object, in order to confront these assumptions (*TokyoGlamRock* addresses the assumptions of postmodernism's fetishisation of Japanese culture; 'Kultur Kompressor' confronts the limits of the concept of information overload or more specifically cultural overload). In each case one has adapted the style of the writing both to the character of the phenomenon in question, and with a sense of the kind of readership one intends, and is sometimes asked, to reach.

Introduction

This portfolio covers thirteen years of writing. It presents a sequence of critical engagements with questions concerning culture, technology and 'being' within theoretical, historical and philosophical frameworks. This commentary identifies themes, ideas and objects that persist throughout the texts in different forms to show how theoretically and philosophically their deployment and elaboration have altered and developed over the period of their writing and the periods they write about. The texts in this body of work therefore gather together publications which form a trajectory of thought from, broadly speaking (and not necessarily strictly chronologically), systematic 'postmodern' readings of history, science and culture, to phenomenological approaches to culture and technology. For the purposes of this commentary, the chapters in this body of work present technology, media and intentionality through a series of frames. These comprise the high plateaux of theoretical work on media (most of all Baudrillard's socio-cultural theory and McLuhan's 'probes' into media), to the phenomenology of thinkers on technology (in the lineage from Heidegger's emphasis on Being, Merleau-Ponty on perception and Ihde's post-phenomenological foreground of embodied relations in technology). Their subject matter is art, artworks and artists, (Duchamp, Warhol, Gorgerous); and instances of networked communication technology (web-based imagery, electronic technology). There is some interplay between these areas. For example, the role of technology also figures as metaphorical or materialised content in the work of artists represented; the issue of embodiment appears in relation to the digital technologies discussed; and the focus on theoretical aspects of the key writers presented here is applied both to art and to technology. This commentary is therefore a summation that attempts to unify themes addressing the work of these major thinkers, orientated to a methodology built on attention to phenomena emerging from this general condition of technology and media, in relation to the embodiment relations.

The body of works comprises a book introduction, two short books, three essays in edited books, one essay in a book edited by me, two essays published electronically, an

article from a journal and an obituary from a newspaper. These forms in part determine my approach to the content, particularly where intended readership is concerned.

The commentary begins by presenting chapters on postmodernism, science and culture (often termed the 'two cultures' debate). 'Introduction: Postmodernism and Big Science' and *Baudrillard and the Millennium*, before proceeding to a critique of the two cultures debate in the chapter 'Between Relativism and Truth', in which I critique Sokal and Bricmont's response to Baudrillard's use of scientific terminology. Section two presents chapters on a 'critical' phenomenology of art in 'You Want to See? Well take a look at this!' (the work of Duchamp), and 'Andy Warhol and the Strategic Exile of the Self'. Issues of otherness and postmodern discourse are then raised in 'Real Japanese Men Play Crazy Rock n' Roll'.

The final section focuses on culture and technology from the perspective of systems of information and communication, media and technology and the construction of discourses on virtual culture. It is grounded in aspects of McLuhan's relevance to social networks and virtual discourse, discussed in the book *Marshall McLuhan and Virtuality*. The succeeding essays analyse and describe networked technologically led phenomena: 'All Your Base are Belong to Us!', 'Heidegger's Pixel' and 'Kultur Kompressor'. In the course of the portfolio there is a progression from analysis of discourses (postmodernism, posthumanism, science) through a shift issues of embodiment, situated encounter, specific experience; and later a move to a re-enactment of 'pataphysics' and 'fatal' theory from the side of the object of technology, I explain pataphysics and fatal theory in more detail and in context below.

Theoretical Grounding

The theoretical foundations of the publications refer to the writing of Jean Baudrillard in the mid- to late-1970s and the translations of his work into English from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. Key concepts are discussed in *Baudrillard and the Millennium*¹ and make

¹ It also refers to conversations I had with Jean Baudrillard before its publication. My previous engagement with his writing and life dates back to 1986, when I wrote an unpublished dissertation entitled 'Relationships

themselves felt in subsequent publications. What figures in many texts, implicitly or otherwise, is his principle of reversibility. This challenges the primacy, authority and sovereignty of the subject (reason, class consciousness, patriarchy, power) from the position of the object (seduction, the masses, the 'event'). This dynamic repeatedly appears in his early essays, books and later fragments; and its presence, even when not explicitly restated in my texts, is one guiding factor in these approaches to questions of the lived world and the world of objects. The principle at the core of these works is therefore the character of the encounter between subject and object, where the object exceeds, evades or supplants the will of the subject; where the subject is unable to represent the object or control it.² This collection of texts places this encounter in the context of technology, and the interpretation of technology in the media and fine arts: the techno-culture.

The methodology leads from the initial identification of the historical and theoretical context of these readings of technology, and the relationships they assume arise between subject and object (or in post-phenomenology the contract between subject and environment/intersubjectivity, technologically mediated). It addresses these relationships to critique these readings and competing interpretations.

Many of these published texts work through this tension between subject and object to reverse or conflate the classical properties defining each. Thus, in these works I suggest the object may exhibit characteristics of the subject, and vice versa. For example, objects may behave as subjects, in their mode of intentionality. Essays such as 'All Your Base Are Belong to Us' attempt to attribute such intentionality (rather than agency) to digital and networked images that reproduce, circulate and mutate on the web. In the chapter on the encounter between a viewer and an object of art (Duchamp's *Étant Donnés*), I argue for a

between Jean Baudrillard and US Contemporary Art Writing' (Bath Academy of Art, 1986). It was an attempt to understand the reception and deployment of his ideas in the US art press, at a period that was arguably the height of postmodernist theory's dominance in the visual arts. The work would later result in the published introduction to Baudrillard's work, *Baudrillard for Beginners* (1996), later reissued as *Introducing Baudrillard* (2001), for a market of readers interested in ideas but not having a detailed understanding of his work. The book involved working with Baudrillard on the factual and theoretical aspects of his writing.

²The subject-object relation here refers to Baudrillard's elaboration, where 'subject' stands for example as the subject of history, the class subject, the West, global corporate capitalism, human sciences (sociology) and patriarchy. The 'object' (conceived of in other models as the 'other') variously presents itself as the East (or South), the masses, technology (in its unruly form), marginalised or oppressed groups and information systems. Baudrillard refuses to side with the term 'Other' for its tendency to generate value: the 'age of the production of the Other'. (2002:51)

mode of engagement that wrests from the viewer his position of authority (the 'gaze') and, from the object, its seductiveness, to find a phenomenology of seduction that annuls or short-circuits desire. I describe instead the moment of the staged, experienced, sensed and perceived encounter. This exchange or cancellation of the possibility of exchange also appears in the essay on Andy Warhol, and the attempts to 'frame' him within media and academe. It also informs the discussion of Japanese performance art's deflation of postmodernist theory's desire to treat Japan as most advanced form of (Western) postmodern culture ('Real Japanese Men Play Crazy Rock n' Roll'). It also informs the later writing on the phenomenology of the computer screen in relation to the work of Heidegger, where both the object (colour) and the subject (the viewer) become dislocated in the discursive and perceptual imbroglios of 'digital' visual technology. The tension between subject and object in a sense duplicates itself in the dynamic between those writings that employ phenomenological description to foreground the centrality of embodiment relations, particularly those incorporating material artefacts and technologies taken into bodily experience, and those which attend to the behaviour of objects beyond embodiment, in what I term the extra-subjective world. The latter include the study of technology and media.

In summary this portfolio of texts presents a line of thought that develops from the 'irrational' or non-systematic aspects of postmodern thought of the 1980s and 1990s (Baudrillard's pataphysics) through the millennial discourse of 'posthumanism' (which permitted the spectre of McLuhan's medium-as-message to return) to the later phenomenological description of the generative encounter between subject and object. The purpose of phenomenological enquiry in the later publications presented here is to interrogate this construction of self and technology, in the many variations of intentionality that describe the emergence of the self through technology (as a discourse, as a condition, as an encounter). Technology, here is a definition built variously from its roots in Greek (*techne* as making, or craft) and its later instrumental aspect (where ourselves and the world are both objects and subjects of technology) through the self, in embodiment relations that are present in the assumptions and descriptions of these thinkers, even where they are not explicit. Perhaps the path demonstrates an interrogation of the status of knowledge as it moves from system building to eccentric theory, while seeking a way out in phenomenological description.

Unifying Themes and Trajectory

1. Discursive Tension

Perhaps less a theme than a dynamic exchange, the published works share a concern with a confrontation between science and the arts, and between technology and society. These twin axes provide the coordinates for many of the debates that ensue within these texts, most of them taking on the discursive rather than political or social dimensions of the debate. Thus, many of the positions these works adopt are often ones where an aspect of technology challenges or reconstructs a definition of the social or human, or where a literary employment of science (for example, in the use of scientific terminology in postmodern theory, or in pataphysics, discussed below) challenges its positivist assumptions. The gap between two world views is further explored in the introduction to *Postmodernism and Big Science*. The two cultures debate comes to the fore in the chapter 'Between Relativism and Truth', which depicts the tensions between art (literature) and science in the historical context of C. P. Snow's influential 1959 lecture and subsequent publication *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. His title drew attention to the widening gap between scientists and "literary intellectuals". The resurgence of the debate following the Sokal hoax (see below) ignited a debate over the academic credentials of postmodern and poststructuralist theory.

The other tensions over discourse lie in the interpretive methods involved when applying bodies of theory to visual culture. In the case of my publications on art, theory and artists, my engagement is with psychoanalytical readings of artists (namely Duchamp and Warhol) that promote an interpretation which pathologises the works or figures in question. I seek to counter this with a phenomenological emphasis to reinstate the work's presence beyond the 'textual' (non-visual, non-situated) readings that such approaches adopt.

2. Technological Field, Technological Condition

A central concern here, and one phrased most urgently in the chapter 'Kultur Kompressor', is the exacting presence of technology in the human life world, in that engagement of the human with what Borgmann called 'hyper-intelligent' technology: the encounter between information technologies delivering and augmenting social practices (communication) and those replacing or eradicating those lived practices: "A state of mobilization where the richness and variety of social and cultural pursuits, and the natural pace of daily life, have been suspended to serve a higher, urgent cause."³

The central theme is the theoretical elaboration of the relationship of technology to the body. Technology presents itself in the works along a spectrum from a transcendental, or general, focus on technology as a reified or coextensive collection or condition, to specific or praxical experience of technology: technology in concrete (empirical) contexts of use, phenomenological engagement, or embodiment through technology. The first definition generally applies to those writings addressing as their object the construction of the technology as a field in which and by dint of which society takes itself as subjected to technology or constituted through technology. This is the case in the discussions of work by Baudrillard and McLuhan. It will be seen that technology plays a different role the construction of its setting within their viewpoints, and operates under different modes of definition and resolution. I will return to this point when discussing the books in more detail below. For now, however, one can say that for Baudrillard, technology is isomorphous with the 'logic of the system'⁴ and 'information and communications systems'⁵. Technology, understood here, is the 'irradiation by the media, by images, signs, programmes and networks.'⁶ McLuhan's view of technology connects invention and innovation to social and cultural upheavals and transformations. The printing press, the radio, the newspaper, spurs and wheels introduce new modes of interaction between organism and environment, with

³ Borgmann, A. (1995:4)

⁴ Baudrillard, J. (2002:6)

⁵ *ibid.* 13

⁶ *ibid.* 14

the increasing historical extension of human's perceptual and sensory qualities into the world, and, with each new technology a reordering, restructuring or de-structuring of mind, body and social space.

This technological condition also connects to the primacy of the object over the subject, or the eradication of the subject by, in or through the object, the latter being instrumental technology. For example we see how technology in some cases facilitates the theoretical elaboration of the promotion of human action through extension and amplification of senses (in McLuhan), or stages the assault on the human through technology ('Kultur Kompressor'). There are degrees of differentiation between these two well-travelled themes in the philosophy of technology and divergence in the definitions of technology employed. For Baudrillard, technology is an effect loosely described under the rubric of media and communication, and based on systems of control (of meaning, information, reality) and expressed as the dominant operational principle of circulating signs (his rather abstract notion of the 'code'). In *Baudrillard and the Millennium* the field of technology is instrumental: it is defined through the 'code', 'media', 'simulation'. Its effects are omnipresent, and it has collapsed the distinction between technology and the life-world,

The third model of technology relevant to these publications appears in the philosophy of Heidegger.⁷ For Heidegger, technological being stems from the ontological side of phenomenological thought, in the revealing or concealment of technology's essence (a language poles apart from Baudrillard's view, in which, for the former, technology reveals itself as 'ready-to-hand' except when it breaks and traumatically intrudes – see 'Heidegger's Pixel'). I suggest that they share in some ways a concern with technology's claim to totality (over the social reality, or over nature). Yet the terms of its analysis and symptomatisation are different: for Baudrillard symbolic relations are sundered by the dominance of the code, whereas for Heidegger the 'standing reserve' is technology's transformation of nature into a manageable resource.

Elsewhere, and in the later writings, the theme of technology is more concrete, and at the same time, proximate to praxical, lived or embodied subjects or objects. Furthermore, at this stage the approach is empirical and focused on cases. This is the case in the chapter

⁷ see Heidegger, M. (1982)

'Heidegger's Pixel', which takes computer science and a post-phenomenology of perception to develop a reading of contemporary visual digital experience.

3. Technology, Disembodiment, Augmentation

It is at the interface of the human and 'nonhuman'⁸ or the subject and object in their different relations that the overarching themes of the human and posthuman inform much of this writing; whether it is the human performing the posthuman (Warhol), or the image behaving with intentionality ('All Your Base'). This advances narratives of the human-machine dynamic, and dwells on the cultural and social ramifications of the synthesis, hybridity, mutability of the human and machine, most particularly founded on the fields of communication technology, biology and cybernetics:

From the classical (and even the cybernetic) viewpoint, technology is an extension of the body. It is the evolved functional capacity of a human organism which allows it both to rival Nature and to triumphantly remold it in its own image. From Marx to McLuhan, one sees the same instrumentalist vision of machines and of language: relays, extensions, media-mediators of a Nature destined ideally to become the organic body. In this "rational" view, the body itself is only a medium.⁹

Posthumanist themes in the portfolio range in scope from transcendental (the general condition of the posthuman) to the specifically embodied (the lived encounter with a technology). In one case, at least, (the book *McLuhan and Virtuality*) the renewed interest in a writer's work since the arrival of the networked computer technology (re-invoking McLuhan's famous 'global village') connects with a 'metaphysics' of virtual reality, in which discourse the dystopian or utopian figures of escape from the corporeal, or the completion of the human by the supplement of the artificial life-form or intelligence, loom large. This grand theme of the subsumption of the human in technology, phrased as a disappearance of the human, its extinction, or its escape, dominate current epistemology and

⁸ This refers to Bruno Latour's definition of the non-human, which addresses the 'intentionality' of non-human entities or objects in the field of actor-network theory. While not explicit in my publications, aspects of Latour's Actor-Network theory are relevant. See Latour (2005).

⁹ Baudrillard, J. (1991a)

ontology. The works in this portfolio work across this plane, but do so in the constant return to the modalities of the encounters between subject and object within the frame, setting, system or, simply, technological world ('Heidegger's Pixel').

3. Reversibility, Ambivalence, Ambiguity

The game of the world is the game of reversibility. It is no longer the desire of the subject, but the destiny of the object, which is the centre of the world.¹⁰

The theme of reversal, or the emphasis on the behaviour of the seductive object rather than the desire of the subject, appears in many of these writings. These are not objects (or subjects adopting objective dynamics) which banally resist the will of the subject, but ones that fatally outwit it through some other 'law' of an object which defines itself qua object without reference to the subject attempting to objectify it. The object may be an artefact, an image or a person. This theme refers to Baudrillard's thought on the metaphysics of the object, in his critique of the dominance of the power-production model that oriented his earlier work¹¹ in order to emphasise the increasing importance of the object, seduction and illusion, in relation to the illusions of the subject.¹²

This later work critiqued the centrality and dominance of the subject, its productivist ethos (productive of value and meaning) in favour of the artifice, appearance, ruse and challenge of the object.

A corollary of the principle of reversibility is the presence in the portfolio of publications of themes of recalcitrance, ambiguity and ambivalence, insofar as the engagements between subjects and objects constitute in many of the cases a degree of

¹⁰ Baudrillard (1988:80)

¹¹ See Baudrillard J. *The System of Objects* (1996 [1968]); *The Mirror of Production* (1975 [1973]); *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1973]) and *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993).

¹² See J. Baudrillard *Seduction* (1991) and *Fatal Strategies* (1983). In *Fatal Strategies* Baudrillard's object dominates or undoes the subject. In contrast to the 'banal strategy', in which the subject supposedly controls the object, the 'fatal' one assumes the object's superiority and surrenders to its rules: "the subject believes itself to always be more clever than the object, whereas in the other the object is always supposed to be more shrewd, more cynical, more brilliant than the subject" (1983: 259-260).

contingency. In other words, the object either fails to be captured or framed by the epistemological, perceptual or social frame of the subject, or behaves according to another script. The difficulty in reading and thus controlling the meaning of objects such as *Étant Donnés*, the presence of Warhol, the images under discussion in 'All Your Base', Gorgerous and indeed the Baudrillard of my obituary, remains present in these writings.

Another theme is that of abandonment or flight. It is present in the study of artists and art, and is captured in the critical appraisal of key ideas in the work of Marshall McLuhan. It emerges in pataphysical form in the later writing on networked technology. It encompasses many of the key contentions or assumptions of postmodern theory, for example, the notion of leaving history, meaning or reality. It also draws on the 'posthumanist' discourse to address the efficacy and sense of ideas of virtual disembodiment or the departure from the 'real'. This connects with the role of the body and the senses in the same discourse. The body which is taken beyond itself, either in the pataphysical approach of Baudrillard, the 'sociology' of Andy Warhol, the contradictory humanism of McLuhan, or the phenomenological encounter with Duchamp's work, is also a main focus for the discussion of this theme.

From the perspective of phenomenological enquiry, which places embodiment as central, 'lived' relation between subject and object, or rather, concretely in the relation between organism and environment, the dynamic is one of distance and detachment. Here, bodies exist in situated and concrete dimensions and constitute means to detach themselves firstly from the controlling or sovereign gaze, or symbolic order of the subject, and secondly from the lived environment or 'frame'. This relative alienation is mediated through technology, ranging from the object domain of technology (the machinery, including software and hardware) to the linguistic and more specifically metaphorical/metaphysical dimensions (from Warhol's "I want to be a machine", to McLuhan's 'electronic global consciousness').

Publications

A. Interrogating Postmodernity and its Parameters

This section presents the core themes informing these publications. They foreground the role of technology and media in extending or replacing the symbolic and lived relation. They chart a move to critique readings of Baudrillard which emerged after the ‘Sokal Affair’, which reignited the ‘two cultures’ debate on the supposed encroachment of literature on science. They show the pataphysical dimension, a literary form of engagement emerges in the context of the discussion of postmodern appropriation of scientific discourse.

Jean Baudrillard and the Millennium

This book was a commissioned project which attempted to delineate the strategies that Baudrillard employed in his writings generally, and the subject of the millennium in particular. It is the first time that I place emphasis on his literary credentials, most explicitly in his reference to pataphysics: to the ‘science of imaginary solutions’ which I discuss at length in ‘Between Relativism and Truth’ (see below). This publication adopts the position that only the careful mobilisation of literary strategies, and a knowledge of their tradition, can enable a reading of Baudrillard’s departure from critical theory, and recognise the shift in his thought to the side of the object, abandoning the subject to labour under its banal illusion of power, control and autonomy.

The book focuses on Baudrillard’s concept of illusion, in the context of his writing on the technological domination of the world. It discusses the effects of simulation and the instrumentalisation of technology. It describes his contention of the ‘ecstasy of communication’ in which ‘everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication’¹³. The book also highlights another of Baudrillard’s ‘reversals’, in which our ‘objective illusion’ of technological

¹³ Baudrillard, J. (1988:21-22)

dominance perhaps conceals the more subtle and 'radical' illusion that the world itself (as object) stages its own disappearance by dint of technology. This move by the world deceives us into making technology the bearer of the instrumental crime.

The publication also contextualises Baudrillard's thought in terms of discourses on the 'end of history', famously posed by Fukuyama's book of 1983.¹⁴ It attempts to establish this language of 'endism' in relation to the writings of Marx, Hegel and Nietzsche, and to the critical texts of the 1960s, such as Daniel Bell's book on the subject¹⁵, and the critical theory of Marcuse. It then leads to a consideration of Nietzsche's 'vital illusion', and Baudrillard's discussion of the link between truth, reason and illusion. Unlike other theorists of technology, Baudrillard refuses to mourn this situation from the viewpoint of a lost object, be it an alienated or reified one, or a dominating subject. The subject (capitalism, bourgeois possessive individualism, neo-liberalism, the industrial-military complex, etc.), even when given a name, lacks an origin, a purpose and indeed a target. The same describes his object. By that fact, his construction of the subject-object dynamic does not, in the later works at least, promote the notion of a resistant, compliant or alienated subject. Equally, he refuses the notion that the subject awaits its liberation, or indeed bothers about its condition. Thus, he is critical of post-war theory that adopts such philosophical and political positions to counter the technological condition emerging after World War II (for example, Heidegger's 'The Question Concerning Technology'; Ellul's *The Technological Society* and others suspicious of the encroachment of technology as systematised environment or metaphysics of technique).¹⁶

It is at this stage in Baudrillard's work that he moves away from 'postmodernist' themes of simulation, hyperreality and the code towards an approach to cultural and social phenomena more rooted in a literary tradition than in critical theory. This position is, I argue, one built broadly on the pataphysical forebears of Alfred Jarry, and is more fully

¹⁴ Fukuyama, F. (1993) Harper Perennial (February 1, 1993)

¹⁵ Bell, D. (2000 [1960]), Marcuse, H. (1991[1964])

¹⁶ Ellul, J. (1964)

elaborated in the chapter on Baudrillard's role in the Sokal affair (see 'Between Relativism and Truth', in portfolio).¹⁷

The critical approach to Baudrillard's work in *Baudrillard and the Millennium* locates him in a tradition stretching back to Baudelaire¹⁸ but radically altered in terms of what I suggested was Baudrillard's refusal to perpetuate the heroic resistances or recuperations of the modern world some 100 years later. Briefly, Baudrillard's contention that the year 2000 will not take place is not simply a conclusion based on his claim that history is at an end on account of our recycling of history, our internment in information systems and new technologies, but also because the end itself is an illusion, a final fantasy, which itself will not appear: an end without, paradoxically, an ending. The pataphysical dimension of Jean Baudrillard's writing, while comprising only a brief section of the exposition on Baudrillard's writing on the millennium, would later on provide a more central position in presenting his writing as a hermeneutical challenge. The key text here is 'Pataphysics of the Year 2000', derived from Alfred Jarry's novel proposal for a 'science of imaginary solutions' as a response and challenge to science and its laws (see below for a full definition). His theory of 'objective irony' is both his tactic to reconstruct or deconstruct history from the perspective of the object and a strategy he says is the object's ruse: to give the subject the illusion of control. 'Like Nietzsche's veil, technology hides the radical illusion and maintains the secret: the world playfully allows us to act out our dreams of control.'¹⁹

The purpose of this book was to foreground the literary aspects of Baudrillard's thought in an academic field which had tended to read him as an eccentric, controversial and ultimately reactionary brand of postmodern theory.

¹⁷ Other writers have made this claim, although they are less willing to place Baudrillard squarely in this tradition, choosing instead to locate him more in the field of science-fiction, 'theory-fiction' or 'panic-theory'. This is evident in the publications of Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's C-theory (www.ctheory.com)

¹⁸ Baudrillard alluded to the latter's importance in a playful answer to the prosaic question of where he would spend New Year's Eve 1999: 'Anywhere out of the world!' See Baudelaire, C. (1970 [1869]:99): 'This life is a hospital where every patient is possessed with the desire to change beds; one man would like to suffer in front of the stove, and another believes that he would recover his health beside the window. It always seems to me that I should feel well in the place where I am not, and this question of removal is one which I discuss incessantly with my soul. [. . .] At last my soul explodes, and wisely cries out to me: 'No matter where! No matter where! As long as it's out of the world!'

¹⁹ Horrocks, C. (1999:64)

'Introduction', *Postmodernism and Big Science*

In the Introduction to *Postmodernism and Big Science* I identify in studies of science, its discipline, practice and discourse, an interpretive and praxical dimension, as its entry into mass media further interrogates its status as a universally valid and privileged mode of knowledge. It introduces postmodern debates on the status and implications of science in a period of the socio-linguistic turn, where the study of cultural and social factors have unsettled science's standing as a positivist, neutral and inevitable unfurling of laws, states and processes. The 'science wars' (see 'Between Relativism and Truth, below) are an aspect of this conflict between two types of enquiry.

The introduction addresses why might be called the postmodernist understanding of science. It introduces to the frame the notion of 'post-normal' science, beyond Thomas Kuhn's claim that science is primarily a socially constructed activity, with rivalry, arbitrariness, moments of crisis and 'paradigm shifts' as its key features.²⁰ Further, as Ziauddin Sardar argues in the same book, science is not the province simply of the scientific community, but of social groups in general, who witness the effects of scientific endeavour, its benefits and costs, in ethical and political dimensions. Postmodernist theories of knowledge and power tend to emphasise encoded, discursive, textual processes and tend to critique or deconstruct essentialist or metaphysical claims of truth, meaning and reality. This publication also addresses the exclusionary aspect of 'Big Science', written as it generally has been from a partial perspective that seeks to universalise itself against competing paradigms: knowledge as power. Yet these features are secondary in importance to the concluding point of the Introduction: science is constructed not merely discursively, as a set of language games, conventions or codes, but in relation to a public and a mass market, in which people will buy a Stephen Hawking book and read it without necessarily understanding it. 'The saturation of popular culture by science' may lead to misunderstanding or exaggeration, or misinformation, or to the promotion of spectacular science at the cost of 'normal' science. The key here, as with certain texts within this

²⁰ Kuhn, T. (1996)

portfolio, is the populist reception of difficult ideas. The Introduction to *Postmodernism and Big Science* also sets up the debate along another axis, where the reception or use of scientific theory and terminology becomes used by cultural studies or humanities writers.

‘Between Relativism and Truth: Jean Baudrillard, the Sokal Affair and the Use of Scientific Terminology across Cultural Boundaries’

The text on the Sokal affair was written for a book on language and society called *Relative Points of View*, at the invitation of the editor, Magda Stroinska.

The Sokal Affair is not simply an attack by scientists on the misuse of their disciplines by the literati or the negative employment of ‘postmodern theory’, but also an example of the distinction between the understanding of science as a theory-building, testable, positivistic and objective endeavour, and science as grounded in history and discourse. It is a ‘war’ over ‘whether science is to be understood as cultural, ahistorical, universal, and absolute in its knowledge, or whether it is embedded in human history and culture and inclusive of the usual human fallibilities of other practices.’²¹

The chapter ‘The Sokal Affair and the Use of Scientific Terminology across Cultural Boundaries’ addresses the case of the hoax *Sokal Text* essay, which was submitted to the journal by two physicists, Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont. The chapter is based on a paper I was invited to give at de Geuzen Institute in Amsterdam, in which I discussed misinterpretation of theory and misrepresentation of theorists in three areas: scientific hoaxes, postmodern metaphors and popular cinema (in particular *The Matrix*).²² My critique of Sokal and Bricmont’s attack on Baudrillard, Lacan, Kristeva and others was conducted from the standpoint of the literary tradition which was clearly marked out in Baudrillard’s book *The Illusion of the End*, specifically the chapter ‘Pataphysics of the Year 2000’²³. As I noted in reference to the work by Shattuck and Watson Taylor, ‘pataphysics systematically

²¹ Ihde, D. (2010:6)

²² Horrocks, C. (1999:75): This was the first published essay to critique the misreading of Baudrillard’s theories in the film *The Matrix* (dir. Laurence and Andrew Wachowski, 1999).

²³ Baudrillard, J. (1994:1-9)

played with the arrangement of concepts and their significance until the improbable or impossible hypothesis becomes 'real'.²⁴

For its inventor Alfred Jarry, pataphysics lies beyond metaphysics:

Pataphysics is the science of the realm beyond metaphysics ... It will study the laws which govern exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, it will describe a universe which one can see — must see perhaps — instead of the traditional one ...

Definition: pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.²⁵

The importance of pataphysical thought to this body of work, as Zurbrugg puts it, is not as dogma or doctrine, but as present alongside physics 'in terms of the game as a whole'.²⁶

Pataphysics, I suggest, is not simply a challenge to traditional distinctions between modes of scientific discourse, and is not merely a form of cultural relativism, but is also a riposte to models of truth through which science attempts to reconcile itself with reality. Pataphysics is on the side of illusion and fiction, including revealing science's illusion that it is wed wholly to a reality principle. For Baudrillard, 'the pataphysic mind is the nail in the tire'.²⁷ Gerry Coulter wrote of Baudrillard's distaste for writing that 'aims at making truth and meaning (in art and elsewhere), and our tiresome subservience to the concept of the real. The latter being, in my mind, the conspiracy of academe.'²⁸

²⁴ Horrocks, C. (1999:64). See Jarry, A. (1965:192-93).

²⁵ Jarry, A. (1963:131)

²⁶ Horrocks, C. (2001:115)

²⁷ Baudrillard, J. (2005a: 213). My claim for pataphysics' centrality to Baudrillard's thought, in response to criticisms of his work, was in advance of his publication of an unknown essay he wrote aged 21, entitled 'Pataphysics' (2005b).

²⁸ Coulter, G. (2007)

B. Art and Embodiment

Embodied Distances, Distanced Bodies

The three publications 'You Want to See, Well Take a Look at This!'; 'Andy Warhol and the Strategic Exile of the Self'; 'Real Japanese Men Play Crazy Rock 'n Roll' are three related readings of the encounter between viewer and artist/work of art. They interrogate the body as a site of performance, specifically detachment, seductive distance and techno-human excess. The first attempts this in reaction to the psychoanalytic approach to Duchamp's final work, before describing the installation's construction, particularly the technology of light, using phenomenology. The second approaches the artist, his body, hexis and performance using a historically led and sociologically orientated phenomenology, with reference to ethno-methodology. The third places the body within a discourse on the other, which the body resists, amplifies (technologically and discursively) and 'acts out', in relation to discourses of postmodern theory that construe culture (here, national culture) as emblematic of the dynamics of eclecticism, quotation and hybridity.

'Andy Warhol and the Strategic Exile of the Self'

The text on Andy Warhol arose from a paper I was invited to deliver at the *'Exile and Displacement'* colloquium at Herstmonceux Castle, Sussex in May 2001, in which I argued for a new reading of Warhol as if he were a type of sociologist of everyday life, inhabiting an environment of performance and encounter, in which the role of contingency, reversibility and seduction generated both the context for Warhol's 'lived' aestheticisation of his contacts with the media (in interviews) and contained the key to understanding the manner of his engagements in the world.

The Warhol-object is a 'cool medium', which by definition requires the viewer/subject to fill in the points of absence. In this publication on Warhol, the focus is also on the historical context of the Warhol 'method'. Building on his 'philosophy', I

suggested that while emerging studies in queer theory²⁹ situated him within a discourse and indeed a world that marginalised or repressed gay identity, they were themselves reductionist. By playing the identity-card, and reducing Warhol to his sexuality, other readings of his 'otherness' were too quickly ignored, or relegated. While such a bodily hermeneutic (reading him as a queer subject in his performance) provided a corrective to the arguably homophobic approaches to him and his work (Kuspit is the main culprit in my view)³⁰ there is another history, itself not excluding queer-theoretical approaches, that provides another sense of both Warhol's historical context in the New York in the 1950s and 1960s. This relates to the distinction Ihde makes in his attempt to move beyond the subjectivist critique of phenomenology (accused in its Husserlian mode as being based on a subject-object dualism while favouring subjectivism) to a more pragmatic, material relationship between organism and (technological) environment, and between agents in an inter-subjective world. I initially phrased this in terms of Warhol's little known interest in sociology, or what he called 'the sociological kind of thing'.³¹ The purpose here was to put forward the growing importance of both organizational and corporate structures in sociological studies and popular variants (such as W. H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*³²), and appearance of studies of business and professional classes and individuals in terms of the performative strategies and tactics of the workplace. The literature on this context was well established by the late 1960s, as were some of the social studies researches that drew on ethnomethodological and existential methods to understand social interaction and the generation of meaning and sense in lived and negotiated real contexts.

While Warhol's simulation of the world of business and production is well known (the Factory being the stage and scene of his output, itself presented as a lifestyle for many of its participants), the main area of study here was his relationship to his mediation, or 'face', and enframing. Here I applied the work of Erving Goffman, in the knowledge that while some of the terms are now superseded in social theory and research it connected historically to the world in which Warhol operated in the 1950s and 1960s. 'Stigma', 'stage' and 'front' were all useful means to understand Warhol's tactics as though he had read

²⁹ See Doyle, J. et al (1996).

³⁰ See Kuspit, D. (1996).

³¹ Warhol A. (1975)

³² Whyte W. H. (2002)

Goffman. Furthermore, the celebrated interview in which Warhol randomly gives affirmative or negative answers closely echoes the social 'experiments' of Harold Garfinkel (see my chapter).

""You Want to See? Well Take a Look at This!" Ethical Vision, Disembodiment and Light in Duchamp's *Étant Donnés*'

The text on Duchamp's final artwork originally took the form of a paper which I was invited to give at the 'Secret Spaces, Forbidden Places' colloquium at Herstmonceux in 1998. It developed into a chapter that presented a phenomenological approach to problems of psychoanalytic interpretation of works of art.

The break point in these texts is between the technologically-driven other and the other constituted by and through embodiment. The earlier work on McLuhan and Baudrillard adumbrated in different ways the human existing within and through technology and media. The later texts move towards direct description of phenomenological encounters between bodies and objects, in terms of artists, viewers and works of art. This move arrives with the chapter on Marcel Duchamp's final and secret work of art *Étant Donnés* (*Given*), which he constructed between 1946 and 1966 (Horrocks, 2000: 201). Now housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it is an installation depicting a naked female body in a natural setting. The viewer sees through two small peepholes drilled through two farm doors.

The critique is directed towards interpretations of the work that tend to perpetuate the link between vision, desire and pathology. These are mainly construed through Freudian or post-Freudian and in some cases feminist approaches to the subject. The lure of the piece – a woman, naked – invites these writers to discuss the psychobiography of Duchamp himself (based on quite flimsy evidence and a high degree of in-filling using basic Freudian concepts) or the general operation of voyeurism, guilt, desire within the Lacanian triad of the imaginary, the symbolic and the Real. The emphasis on passive-aggression, on narcissism and a general narrative of violence intended or repressed circulates through these

texts, as does the tendency to analyse the artwork as a text or some expression of a discursive anomaly.

I argue that a close phenomenological account might serve to clarify and describe critically the moment of the encounter between viewer and art and suggest a reversal of the classical power relation between voyeur and the viewed, in which the viewer's position as a unified and dominant one is disrupted or downgraded in the removal of the primacy of the look of desire. The text uses Lacan to support this position, and argues against readings of his work that tend to promote a quite rigid approach to issues of gaze and desire in the arts.

'Real Japanese Men Play Crazy Rock 'n Roll: The Gorgerous Phenomenon'

The chapter is taken from the book *Tokyo GlamRock*, which collected together essays from leading figures in the Japanese art world and academe to analyse relationships between art and mass culture in Japan in the 1990s. The book also accompanied the exhibition of Matsukage and Ujino's art in London and Bath in 2002, as well as staged performances. In 'Real Japanese Men Play Crazy Rock 'N Roll', technological dimensions of such an escape appear most obviously in the more extreme performative art of Matsukage and Ujino (known as Gorgerous), and focus on their use of technological excess (their famous 'Love Arm' musical instruments). This is lodged within the critique of the theoretical construction of Japanese culture and aesthetics in the 1980s as emblematic of the thorough-going postmodernist condition. I asserted that, in that period, Japanese culture appeared in Western, and mainly US and French theoretical writing, as the epitome of the metropolitan 'empire of signs', in which modes of mass culture and consumption exhibited advanced features of the practices and principles of postmodern praxis and representation, including eclecticism, quotation, hybridity, fragmented identity. I sought to question these categories, and their applicability to Japanese cultures. Indeed, I suggested that the tendency to reduce the complexities of Japanese society to the simple categories of what appears a rather homogenised version of postmodernism ran the risk of a revised orientalism.

In addition I attempted to move away from the central theme of hybridity by drawing on a more cautious and possibly more accurate notion called syncretism or

syncretism, which was taken from more recent work in social studies and sociology. This, I claimed was able better to describe the particularities of types of engagement between forms of Japanese culture, where the relationships between western and Japanese values were not necessarily dialectically resolved according to an 'identikit' theory of socio-cultural integration, but to what one could call the negative dialectic of un-resolvable difference.

In order to discuss this further, the work turned both to the historical context of the growth of politicised and later aestheticised artistic reactions to the changing relationship between Japan and the west economically and politically, and between sectors of the art market and culture industry in reaction to recession and a boom and bust cycle. By focusing on the work of a group of performers, in particular the work of Matsukage and Ujino, I was concerned to foreground the forging of a syncretic identity which harnessed gender, sex and age under the mantle of a performative act that tested the limits of such identity post-postmodernity and with a globalised sensibility, without reversion to a hybrid model. In this work, and the chapter on Andy Warhol, the performed body lies at the centre of the study, but also operates 'off to one side', in that encounter with a subject (audience, interviewer, theorist) which it 'outdoes'. Following McLuhan's distinction between hot and cold media, the two objects, Gorgerous and Warhol, display quite opposed traits in the construction of their object-hood. On the one side, Gorgerous are the hot, sexual, and raucous media of accelerated or supercharged sexuality, transforming from "'small", middle-aged guys, to sexual personae of giant proportions'. The subject (viewer, audience) is assailed, and overcome: assaulted by noise and extremity. On the other, the Warhol object is cool and inert, disarming or diverting the subject's investment in the encounter, in its attempts to wrest from this engagement meaning and value.

C. Techno-culture and Digitality

These three texts view technology as an encounter between the human, technology and the 'non-human'. They discuss networked phenomena and the technological integration of culture, human and machine in order to collapse distinctions between discourse, technology and meaning. They critique or imagine the languages of disappearance, escape or augmentation of the human in the emerging era of networked digital technology since the early 1990s.

The McLuhan text is a critique of his publications in the context of his critics and his media representation, when his work became known again to a new audience in the 1990s. It assesses the problems of reintroducing a 1960s personality-model of media and communication to the current period of social networking systems. It is one of the first critical engagements with the discourse of virtual reality. 'All Your Base' employs de Certeau's social theory as a critical introduction to new networks of technology and the language of 'memetics'.

'Kultur Kompressor' draws in part on the stylised polemics of the 'panic' writing characterised by writers such as Arthur Kroker and many of the post-McLuhanites, as well as science-fiction writer Bruce Sterling³³ and others on the editorial board of the e-journal C-Theory. It has other roots in the technology critique ranging from Baudrillard to Borgmann.³⁴ While they do not adopt identical critical positions, they identify a common feature: the rise of technological (rather than natural or cultural³⁵) information.

³³ Sterling is also creator of the now-archived website The Dead Media Project, a defunct database for obsolete technologies, mostly in the communication and information recording, transmission and recovery systems, machines and networks: <http://www.deadmedia.org/>

³⁴ Borgmann (1999:4): "Supernatural brilliance, limitless variety, and unreal availability constitute the normative identity and charm of virtual activity."

³⁵ As Pieter Tijmes explains, technological information for Borgmann is independent of reality; cultural information is a recipe for reality and natural information is about reality (Achterhuis, 2001:32).

Postmodern Encounters: Marshall McLuhan and Virtuality

This publication problematises the desire in some of the more utopian and optimistic publications on web technology and electronic social networks (for example, the journal *Wired*) to canonize him as the patron saint of the internet. It establishes a more cautious and critical relation between McLuhan's writing of the 1960s and 1970s and the arrival of the home computer in the 1980s and the internet in the 1990s. The aim of the book was to connect McLuhan to the discourse on virtual technology and its philosophy in the 1990s. The analysis of McLuhan's construction of 'disincarnate man' or the human being who extends herself through technology and medium into the world, and who 'autoamputates' herself in the process, is prefaced by a critical appraisal of his model from the socio-political perspective. As critics observed, McLuhan incorporated the political from the launch-pad of technological change and media evolution. Thus, social unrest or revolt would occur only owing to the switch, say, between the wireless and the television in a certain culture, thereby altering the sense-ratios and, arguably vaguely, inducing some sort of psycho-aesthetic upheaval (my words). Taken with allegations of a 'backwards really is superior'³⁶ primitivism, and a naïve grasp of the power of government and business to coerce or control the media, I suggested that McLuhan's credentials were in doubt during his final years. The academic landscape had changed and the US embrace of continental theory (including poststructuralism and deconstruction, as well as psychoanalysis) and had, to use McLuhan's term, 'reversed' his radical style and approach into a dated and reactionary media-speak. This was my caveat to the re-introduction of Saint McLuhan, and provided a cautionary tone in contrast to his reception as a prophet of networked society.

This critique of McLuhan is balanced by the scepticism toward the millennial discourses of 'posthumanism' which arose in the humanities in the late 1990s.³⁷ Posthumanism, the culture of humans after the human, and posthumanity, the social conditions of the flight from the human, take on the negative critique of writers discussed in the earlier Baudrillard book, where writers on the end of history, or the end of the idea of the end (Cioran, Calinescu) reverse the technologically deterministic reading of the end of humanity. Rather

³⁶ Horrocks, C. (2000:9)

³⁷ See for example Heim, M. (1998) and Coyne, R. (1999).

than proposing that machines driving us to our extinction they provide a thesis on moral and cultural decay, in which the human subject (as a race) 'was already on his way there; he sought means, auxiliaries to attain it faster and more effectively'.³⁸

"All Your Base Are Belong To Us!": Meme Culture and Digital Creativity on the Web'

This chapter draws together meme theory and a version of de Certeau's approach to the practice of everyday life, which offers a reading of the ways in which users re-appropriate culture by working on it and changing it. It examines these procedures or tactics of consumption, however, from the perspective of the objects, or here, images, changed rather than the user's intentions per se. Thus it characterises a set of tactics that the images embody: one that allows them to rapidly disseminate, mutate and proliferate in networked environments. The chapter discusses three main examples of types of tactic from the early social networked environments of the 1990s in order to provide an initial typology, or indeed persona, for images. Following de Certeau, the chapter argues that these images have a logic that makes them eminently workable or changeable, in the radical or accelerated version of montage within an emerging technological environment. It employs three main case studies to examine the mechanisms by which a cluster and family of images operate through and in the early social network environment, and argues that the concentration of accessible tools, hardware and software, along with the instantaneity of image reception, adoption, creation and alteration in the environment invites the coming into being of a new type of image, one in which transference and time is as important as place and context. I also suggest that the (serious) role of wit and absurdity, as well as the ability to exploit trauma and historical ruptures, enables these images to shift and then 'stick' culturally with great rapidity, while often existing as relatively temporarily cultural crazes.

³⁸Cioran, (1964:149)

‘Was Ist Das? Das Ist Der Kultur Kompressor!’

The 'Kultur Kompressor' draws on the concepts of Jean Baudrillard described in his book *The Ecstasy of Communication*, the work by McLuhan in *Understanding Media*, and more recent thought on the relationship of noise and meaning in technologies of mass media, particular in the philosophy of Michel Serres.³⁹ It develops a line of argument which attempts to challenge prevailing notions of information and sensory overload persisting from late-19th and early 20th-century socio-psychological approaches (here, Marx, Freud and Simmel). It does so by putting forward a concept that draws from theories of technology (particularly noise-to-signal ratios) and communication theory (sender-receiver reciprocation models) such as Enzensberger's work in 1970.⁴⁰ My thesis is that if one adopts the position that within culture and technology the traditional readings of overload as a traumatic psychological and neurological are irrelevant or non-operational, then a new concept is required. This is one developed by assuming a model of informational overload which operates without a threshold at which overload occurs. The text takes a familiar technique in sound engineering, known as 'compression', in order to represent it beyond its technological manifestation as a law of culture today. It can also be read as an absurdist resumé of postmodern theory, although one which is intended as an imaginary solution to a culture of intensities, constant highs and degraded experiences. The Kompressor text is a technological manual, technological metaphor and a metaphysical principle of present technological being.

³⁹ Baudrillard, J. (1988); McLuhan, M. (1963); Serres, M. (1982).

⁴⁰ Enzensberger, H. M. (1970:13–38), no publisher name given.

'Heidegger's Pixel: Digital Colour as 'Standing Reserve'

This text examines the pixel by adopting a Heideggerian approach to its being beyond its mathematical existence. It draws on the aspects of Ihde's post-phenomenology to make a case that the pixel should be understood as a complex form that operates as a particular cultural construct, as a unit of interpretation as well as sensation and embodied relations. The argument therefore harnesses the 'mathematical, technological and cultural modalities' of the pixel, but does this in order to expose the necessary ambiguities of its existence and, moreover, the implication of these ambiguities for the type of uses or existences towards which the 'culturalised' pixel is put: as an index of anonymity, secrecy, or as a symbol of posthuman representation. It foregrounds, above all, its cultural construction, to highlight the paradox of the pixel. In order to do this, the text also draws on the distinctions made in discourse on digital media between the histories of digital and analogue colour, and constructs for this history a possible version based itself on the assumptions and interpretations brought to, and become constitutive of, the pixel. The chapter refers back to a history of a pixel world beginning with mosaic, taking modern form in the development of pointillism and then connecting to the later phase of the pixel as linked to the rise of new technologies of colour and screen. This is a partial history, in the sense that it attempts to take one line through a possible narrative of the appearance of digital colour as cultural and embodied construction.

Research Impact

The publications *Baudrillard and the Millennium* and *Marshall McLuhan and Virtuality* have been translated into several foreign languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Japanese.⁴¹ The books have also led to invitations to speak about these two writers in conferences, on radio and at other public events. These include a discussion with Colin McCabe on McLuhan on BBC Radio 3's 'Nightwaves' programme in 1994, an interview with Lorraine Kelly on the work of Jean Baudrillard, and a panel discussion with Giles Brandreth on Baudrillard. They have led to invitations to speak on my publications as an invited speaker at international conferences or on MA programmes (eg. University of Lisbon Social Sciences Department; de Geuzen Institute, Amsterdam; Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht) as well as universities and colleges across Britain.⁴² This portfolio of works includes my obituary for Jean Baudrillard⁴³, which was later published by the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*.⁴⁴ I have also been involved in presenting the ideas of Baudrillard and McLuhan to schools and to a general public outside university contexts.⁴⁵ I was also responsible for bringing the work of Gorgerous to a wider audience, both through organising performances of their work in Bath and London, and through

⁴¹ *Postmodern Encounters: Marshall McLuhan and Virtuality*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten Publishers (2005); *Marshall McLuhan y la realidad virtual*, Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa S.A. (2004); *Postmodern Encounters: Baudrillard y el milenio*, Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa S.A. (2004); *Postmodern Encounters: Baudrillard and the Millennium*, Taiwan: Cite Publishing (2002); *Postmodern Encounters: Marshall McLuhan and Virtuality*, Taiwan: Cite Publishing (2002).

⁴² See Horrocks, C. (2003)

⁴³ See Horrocks, C. (2007)

⁴⁴ *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, *Special Issue – Remembering Baudrillard*, Volume Four, Number Three (October 2007) http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol4_3/v4-3-article16-horrocks.html. Gerry Coulter remarks on the tendency for newspapers to write and store obituaries well before their subject has died: 'One wonders how many other living thinkers already lay dead and eulogized in the private files of the Times. It is a kind of modelling approach to obituaries that I really don't think Baudrillard would be very comfortable with! Still, Gane's obituary (matched only by Chris Horrocks for the Independent), was exceptional among the English news obituaries for its knowledge of Baudrillard and his work.' *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Volume 4, Number 3 (October, 2007) http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol4_3/v4-3-article2-editorial-coulter.html

⁴⁵ Who is the most fashionable sociologist? Tues 28th Sept 2010. Foyles Bookshop, London. *Baudrillard: The Graphic Guide*, London: Icon Books will be published in March 2011.

lectures in exhibition spaces. My publications are cited in many texts on Baudrillard and McLuhan.⁴⁶

Summary

This portfolio comprises a collection that is formed as an accumulation of approaches to research and knowledge, to epistemology, in which investigation, exploration and critique guide the way from bodies of theory to close engagements with technological phenomena. The tension in the works when viewed over the time of their writing and publication becomes clearer when they are presented in the form of a commentary such as this, where perhaps the required duty to give a sense of what in some cases are quite diverse approaches itself constitutes something of a pataphysical undertaking: a humanities version of an imaginary solution.

The summation of this commentary is also an opportunity to point the reader and writer forward to the next phase of research, which draws greatly from some of the main assertions and findings of the chapters presented here. The extant project is a book called *Genteel Perversions: The Films of Gilbert and George*⁴⁷, which draws together aspects of corporeality, detachment and embodied object-hood in film and performance made by or about these artists. Those issues of resistance, seduction and object-hood align with a new engagement with the moving image, with time and technology: the projected or screen performance film. The monograph focuses on the films or video sculptures made by Gilbert and George, and films made about Gilbert and George. It seeks to address the context of early video filmmaking and its connection to art performance and documentation in the late 1960s and 1970s. In films such as *Gordon's Gin Makes Us Drunk* (1972), *Bend It* (1974), *The World of Gilbert and George* (1981), *A Portrait of the Artists as Young Men* (1972), the artists stage a repetitive set of actions and statements within environments ranging from pastoral idylls to urban degeneration, evincing a visual language drawn from structuralist

⁴⁶ See for example:

http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?cites=399097758106326036&as_sdt=2005&sciodt=0,5&hl=en and

http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?cites=5737734052890021790&as_sdt=2005&sciodt=0,5&hl=en

⁴⁷ Solar Books, Washington DC, forthcoming, 2011-12.

film and chiming with the mannered conceptualism of contemporaneous performance artists who used their bodies as media (eg Bruce McLean, Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman). Gilbert & George's perversity lies in the films' refusals of the dominant aesthetic principles they encountered as young men in the late 1960s, and the artists' embrace of a mode of address that combined gentility with staged degeneracy: a genteel perversion that marks out their relationship to their environments.

The second project is a book on the television as object. This research will present themes of overload within the phenomenological context but introduce a cultural-historical dimension in order to relate these themes to the development not simply of television equipment but of TV's cultural imaginary, through fine art, film, popular music and literature. The book presents the pre-history of the actual artefact, in the literature and imagery of the late 19th century when the idea of television is given a form for the first time. The book will show how the television object emerges from its early incarnation as veneered and camouflaged wooden cabinet to begin its journey through the black box aesthetic of the 1980s to its gradual disappearance into the digital world of the computerised domestic environment. It incorporates sections on the use of the television in iconic artworks (Nam June Paik), the representation of the television in horror, sci-fi movies and advertising.

The third development is a chapter for Ashgate, entitled 'Archaeology of the Future; Disinterment of the Present', which examines the role of the damaged artefact or object within science-fiction or speculative fiction. This connects to my interest in the themes of the end of history, of recycling and of knowledge and the archive. It is an opportunity to interrogate the visual and literary representations of abandoned or rediscovered archives within science fiction film and writing. The chapter focuses on the moments in literature and cinema when objects, artefacts, images and texts are discovered in a future world of apocalypse and interpreted according to the culture in which they now exist.

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