

Immersion, connectivity, conviviality

Sean Cubitt

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Connectivity, networks and speed; or, immersion, spectacle and stasis. We appear to dwell in a world in which two great tendencies are at work, and which, while we recognise their connections to one another, at every level from the regulatory and economic to the technological and social, are still aesthetically and phenomenologically distinct. It is as if the great divide between high culture and low culture over which so much ink was spilled in the early twentieth century, and which we postmoderns believe has more or less exhausted itself in the supermarket of cultures, as if that divide between patrician and plebeian were now returned in the form of high-resolution and low-resolution.

Connectivity

On the one hand, consider the proliferation of third screens: mobile phones, iPods, PSPs, PDAs, GPS – the myriad small devices with screens measured in single figures: three, four or five centimetres on the diagonal at best. Colour responses are respectable. The images are often derived direct from television industry sources with no more tailoring for the new format than new compression ratios for sound and image. Compositionally, this means that there is some depth of field: far more, to set up a benchmark, than was available to television's pioneers. Back in the 1950s, two factors thwarted compositional ambition. First, receivers had such poor definition that pragmatic wisdom recommended shooting as much as possible in medium close-up for any kind of emotional reaction to be visible (action sequences could be in long-shot, but the staging had to be shallow to remain in the restricted focal field available to the early tube cameras). And second, the cameras needed powerful illumination to capture an image, illumination which, in flooding the visible space and erasing shadows, flattened out the picture. The remaining elements of the Nigel Kneale / Rudolf Cartier *Quatermass Experiment* of 1953 are a case in point. The devastation of the early television record gives us little to go on. Though Jason Jacobs (2000) makes the case that the theatricality of early television can be overstated, Robin Nelson's overview is nonetheless correct in its broad outlines of the options opened up by high-definition television:

The shift from the studio-based literary/theatrical to the visual/cinematic product is most marked in the historically cherished, authored, single-play

slot. In a gradual process, one-off, authored TV drama has loosened its tap-root in theatre and gravitated towards the visuality of cinema ((Nelson 1997: 19)

Recent hit shows like *Heroes* follow this pattern. The diminishing cost of digital effects (first really noticeable in the boast that twenty minutes of CGI animation were included in every episode of *Babylon 5*) is one key factor. CGI allows for greater resolution in the digital files than can be delivered on terrestrial broadcast, but can also use tricks like digital fog and parallax effects to create illusions of depth on the relatively low resolution screens of domestic receivers. At least since *Inspector Morse* (1987-2000), television producers have been future-proofing their shows by recording to super-16mm and similar high-definition formats, on the principle that classic shows will only retain their market value if they are of sufficient technical quality to be viewed on next generation machines. The continuing relevance of film as a preferred medium for image capture, in wildlife documentaries as much as in drama and action series, is inverse testimony to the actual poverty of the televisual image in comparison with the cinematic. And as Nelson's observation demonstrates, the very word 'cinematic' holds out the promise of highly visual, highly spectacular imaging beyond the reach of domestic screens, and certainly beyond that of the the mobile generation's 'intimate screen' (to retro-engineer Jacobs' term for pioneer television).

Despite the advance in high-definition television by increasing the number of lines and the refresh rate, 35 millimetre resolution is still a Holy Grail even for LCD and plasma screens on digital TV. The critical advances have been made in boosting edges to create the impression of clarity and to accentuate dark greys by contrast to get the impression of black; that is, in increasing the *apparent* resolution of the televisual image. Third screens have benefitted from this technology, as indeed have domestic video recorders. Yet they remain, critically, *small*: as Rob Shields pointed out in a paper at the Ubiquitous Media conference in Tokyo in 2007,

Most mobile phones remain under 2 mega pixels in image resolution. This is sufficient for a 'thumbnail' or even a 2" x 3" image but incomparable with the expectations of either digital photographs viewed on computer screens or camera users who expect snapshots of resolution sufficient to produce a quality image at a minimum size of 4" x 5". They cannot be used for professional imaging. Nor do they capture sufficient detail in a wide enough range of lighting conditions to be used as an adjunct to professional activities, for example to document situations where liability or capital is at stake (for example, architects noting the progress of construction or real estate agents documenting properties for sale) (Shields 2007).

But even given the relatively poor resolution of third screens, their share of screen viewing time is growing. Mobcasting and video podcasts are gimmicky at present, but are being integrated into prime time shows like *Lost*, where the fan base is hungry for clues to the complex, enigmatic and arcane plotlines. The popularity of YouTube is another indicator. Though the quality of these flash-streamed movies is muddy and indistinct,

According to Greg Sterling of the *Search Engine Journal*, YouTube presently contains 6.1 million videos with 1.73 billion total views taking up an estimated 45 terabytes of storage. Almost 70% of the online population has watched online video and the average consumer watches 73 minutes of online video a month. (cited in Harley 2007)

When YouTube is one of the only places where it is possible to see any of Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, or Hollis Frampton's *Snowblind*, the paucity of the image is less of an issue. Indeed, as Ross Harley goes on to argue, it can be a strength, permitting tasters of work, engaging new audiences, and encouraging the archiving and distribution of high-resolution copies.

But YouTube is low resolution. It takes a certain kind of inventiveness to use its capacities: something like the infographics video produced by French house H5 for the Norwegian old-school techno band Röyskopp's single *Remind Me*. Other services are coming on-stream with higher resolution, and broadband internet is quite capable of delivering DVD-quality for those with the patience to download it and storage to save it to assemble it for burning. YouTube's poor imagery instead promotes a DIY culture which to some extent devolves back on an older documentary aesthetic: if the image quality is too good, it can't be real. Therefore the degraded video derived from mobile phones and webcams attracts positive valuation as the evidence of the presence of the camera at the real event. This is as true of news footage – of the London bombings, of the Sumatra-Andaman tsunami, of the Burmese protests of 2007 – as it is of the more distressing beatings and sex crimes posted by youth gangs. At the same time, as Nick Gowing of [BBC World Service television](#) averred [in a talk given in Melbourne in 2006](#), the apparent realism of mobile phone footage has become a nightmare for 24/7 news services. Without the luxury of print and schedule deadlines, the amount of time that can be devoted to ratifying the veracity of citizen reporter footage has shrunk to minutes – between forty and twenty minutes by Gowing's reckoning – before other services grab the headline. Gowing demonstrated with bogus footage of a supposed Palestinian car bomb, whose staging for camera was only exposed because a watchful editor recognised that the Tel Aviv street pictured was not the site of the actual bombing. Such appropriations of documentary technique exhibit a quality of formal innovation which Bazin (1971: 26-7) had already expected when he articulated the necessary illusion integral to cinematic realism,

and the generative contradiction which that produces: no technique is free of the temptation, indeed the internal necessity, of producing illusion, and when pursued for its own perfection, loses the reality it sought to grasp. In an essay comparing mobile phone usage during the SARS outbreak, the Sumatra-Andaman tsunami and the London Bombings, Janey Gordon notes

The original hypothesis of this article was that the mobile phone may be challenging conventional and official sources of information, that the use of mobile phone technology in critical situations would be beneficial to the public sphere and that mobile phone usage might influence the primary definitions of news, news agendas and news gatekeepers. There was some indication of this but less than might be expected. (Gordon 2007: 316)

National bureaucracies responded in different ways: the Communist Party of the People's Republic closed down discussion of the epidemic in the interests of news management; Irish, Swedish and Italian governments used mobiles registered as 'roaming' in the region to ascertain the status of nationals at risk from the tsunami; and in the London case, antiterror legislation allowed emergency services to take over cellnet wavebands. News agendas remained predominantly in the hands of major corporate suppliers, only bolstered by the images gathered by citizen reporters. Low-resolution does not guarantee realism any more than high-resolution; and the appearance of immediacy may cloak dishonesty. At the same time the multi-functional nature of many third-screen devices opens them to a managerial approach which is antipathetic to the utopian yearnings of the public sphere thesis.

But as Ernst Bloch (1986) was at pains to point out, even the most escapist daydream has, in its utopian fantasy, an element of revolutionary motivation. However hardnosed we become about the prevailing conditions of cellnet communications, the utopian dimension returns. Thus for example it is easy enough to dismiss the work undertaken by Proboscis in their *Urban Tapestries* project as an enactment for a digital generation of the kind of nostalgia for home and place which dissolved in the remaking of urban space in the wake of Bretton-Woods and the coming of globalisation. Yet it is also true, as a team member in *Urban Tapestries* writes, that

The context *Urban Tapestries* aims for is one in which a community organically records layers of histories, experiences and events that are linked to familiar locations and accessible to everyone. As the name suggests, it aims to knit together many layers of narrative and discourse over the topography of the city. *Urban Tapestries* seeks to provide a forum for ordinary people to write and remember their stories and share them with others, enabling an alternative to the single authored storytelling in our

museums, history books and media. By collecting these stories a community's memory may grow on many levels with a hierarchy defined only by a user accessing what is of interest to them. (Jungnickel 2004)

The technologies employed in this locative media initiative are personal and ubiquitous, even more so than internet connectivity. Being portable, they arrive at the place where memories are stored, returning data storage to memory and architecture in the physical rather than the virtual sense. In other respects like the internet, the portability of the interface brings this to a very different aesthetic position, one that concerns the deracination of populations, and the depopulating of cities, where we have become more 'users' and 'clients' than locals and citizens. Utopian and nostalgic at the same time, the project hinges on the present as a space between memory and aspiration. The tools of surveillance are being turned here towards a different kind of economy, one based on open and equal exchange unmediated by the cash economy. Its technical geography is interstitial, sewn into the fabric of surveillant and corporate networks, but deployed otherwise. While intricately dependent on the good graces of service providers and government, and so vulnerable, *Urban Tapestries* is also a shadow of the system, absolutely connected to it, but of a quite different order. As shadow, *Urban Tapestries* proposes, from within the belly of the network, another model of network interdependence.

Eric Kluitenberg is one of many to note the central problem with wireless telephony:

The phrase "Where are you?" is first and foremost the expression of an existential anxiety, but it also already implies its immediate resolution, not in the future meeting that puts the fear of absolute or relative solitude at bay, but already in the very moment of its utterance. The call being answered, even in the absence of a reply, the confirmation of contact established with the designated addressee, instantaneously infuses the mind with relief. Privation of contact had instilled the fear of solitude, and the removal of this privation of contact through the telephone connection produces an intense and immediate sensation of delight. The threat of the fear of solitude, a fear imbued with scarcely less terror than the idea of death itself, is relinquished at the click of a few buttons, real-time consolation - a highly addictive apparatus! (Kluitenberg 2005)

Isolation relinquished and consoled: cellnet communication is premised on the actuality of isolation together with the illusion of community, but specifically a communion with only a single other communicator at any one moment. Voice and SMS are still fundamentally person-to-person media.

To find extensions of them we would need to look beyond mobile platforms, towards Web 2.0 applications like Facebook. Facebook is not strictly speaking a web application at all. From the phenomenological perspective, it does not add functionality to the web. Nor is it a surrogate for "real" friendships and communities. It is not an extension of the human, in MacLuhan's sense of prosthetics. It is rather a prosthetic outgrowth of two convergent technologies with little otherwise in common at their births, internet relay chat and SMS. I have not been able to find figures on the relation between IRC/instant messaging traffic and the rise of Facebook but I suspect there will be a correlation, and one that is fundamentally economic, in terms of both hard money and the economy of attention.

There is of course an economics to every aesthetic. This is the weakness with Ben Russell's *Headmap Manifesto* assertion that

Most of these [mobile] devices are struggling to fit in with the web model when clearly the screens are too small and the tiny keypads inadequate for traditional web surfing. The web is already in some sense an exchange, a way to get information from one entity or person to another. The problem is to build a more efficient exchange. (Russell 2004: 9)

This is indeed a problem, As the internet continues its technical evolution through convergence with high-bandwidth applications like television and DVD-quality audiovisual files, the gap between the domestic media and the intimate third screen grows. In the kind of business model advanced in the BSkyB-Google accords of late 2006, a combine offering personal video recording, cable and satellite digital high-definition television and on-demand services, internet service provision, digital landline telephony and the possibility of a move into mobile teams up with a firm whose suite of applications, services and widgets now makes it appear, in this assemblage, in the guise of a major portal. Google brings with it YouTube and the social networking capabilities of Web 2.0. And of course its AdSense proprietary micro-targeted advertising software. BSkyB, a UK operation majority owned by News Corporation, has its own stake in the social web in the form of MySpace. There can be little doubt that among the developments in the UK catalysed by the Google-Murdoch alliance, we should look forward to a Facebook interface for mobile devices. much as YouTube already offers m.youtube for mobiles. True, they do warn potential users that "YouTube Mobile is a data intensive application. We highly recommend that you upgrade to an unlimited data plan with your mobile service provider to avoid additional charges" (<http://m.youtube.com/warning>). While I was en route for this meeting, the *Financial Times* announced (in a front cover story (6 November 2006) that Google have launched Android, an open-source operating system and applications suite for mobile, potentially threatening the 'walled garden' business model prevalent among

manufacturers and service providers. In this kind of context, does Russell's call for a 'more efficient exchange' between mobile and internet technologies mean anything more than the extension of web 2.0, and its economics of expropriating the unpaid labour of users for the profits of increasingly integrated corporate capital (see Rossiter 2006)?

Immersion

The move from a capitalist media based on attention (Smythe 1977) to one based on self-exploitation is not the only change afoot in the world. We will need a little more analysis to frame the problem I am trying to sketch, the problem opposing low-resolution to high-resolution. Lo-res offers the actuality of isolation with the illusion of community. Hi-res brings the actuality of community but the illusion of isolation. The immersive spectacle, whose type remains the Hollywood spectacular, but which ranges from theme park rides to immersive installations, offers the diametrically opposed experience, in which groups, even masses of people co-locate in order to experience a show to which, however, they are subjected as if they were unique and isolated individuals: cloaked in darkness, disciplined into silence, arranged so their communication is with the stage or screen rather than one another. The kind of neo-baroque spectacle investigated by Angela Ndalians (2004) is immersive, playful, involving, and in great part, in her powerful analysis, joyous. At the risk of appearing like the ghost at the banquet, I would like to argue, with Norman Klein (2004), that the neo-baroque has other and darker parallels with the era of the Counter-reformation.

The first baroque was an age of conspicuous waste. It invented modern maritime empires. It perfected the archetypal media of modernity: the map, the filing-cabinet and double-entry book-keeping. It invented propaganda. It was the age of the Inquisition's institutionalised torture. The baroque was also immensely playful: a play of liquid and fluid shapes, of the irruption of the natural into the artificial, the play of fountains and trompe-l'oeuil, the play of practical jokes, an era of great comedies. But that comedy, in Jonson, Molière and Calderón, plays endlessly on the risk of failure and the exposure of frauds: the baroque was 'like postmodernism today, at once a technique of power of a dominant class in a period of reaction and a figuration of the limits of that power' (Beverly 1993: 64). Our era likewise is dominated by displays of power and wealth, by an apparently insatiable cruelty, and by an immense, anxious playfulness. Like the older epoch, the neo-baroque's central concern appears to be with the approximation to absolute power, and the anxiety which that approximation conjures up as its dialectical counterpart: absolute disorder.

Like the old baroque, the new devotes itself to a perpetual chase after moral and intellectual truth which at length escapes it. In this pursuit, it piles sign upon sign, in a desperate attempt to control the flood of connections and proliferation of externalities which characterise a culture without centre, a society without norms, a politics without authority and a system of meaning-making that has broken the boundaries of consensus. The neo-baroque blockbuster, for example, increases its speed of editing, and its use of graphical matches that both emphasise and counteract the instability of the frame. The rise of steadicam, cablecam and the perfecting of crane technologies encourage fluid navigation through scenes rather than decoupage. Multi-layered soundtracks enabled by digital recording, Dolby noise reduction and theatrical systems like Lucasfilm's THX encourage both extreme separation of sound and the use of wall-of-sound effects. Composition in depth, once the preserve of Bazinian realism, allows filmmakers to stack interest across the field of vision through faster film stocks and digital compositing. Here the isolation of elements in space and their combination into symbolic chains fleeing outward from the central action form a new kind of dialectical image. In some extreme examples (such as the surface of the asteroid in *Armageddon* [1998]), visual space becomes indecipherable, inducing the kind of disorientation previously reserved for the horror genre. To control such chaos, characters gifted with a kind of spatial omnivoyance or extended proprioception populate narratives from *Desperado* (1995) to *Daredevil* (2003). Plots surrounded by an uncontrolled accumulation of signifiers result in a pattern-making aesthetic characterised by modularisation and spatialisation, particularly apparent in the closing scenes of *The Usual Suspects* (1995). A recurrent motif in the construction of central characters is their deep isolation, bordering on narcissism: the examples of *Gladiator* and *The Matrix* (1999) are far from unique.

These technical features – graphical composition and graphical matches, navigation, soundscaping, depth of field and staging in depth, disorientation, proprioception, pattern-based narration and isolation – suggest that the neo-baroque is a fundamentally spatial aesthetic. Time presents itself as the process of deriving order from the assembled elements, in a process in which, however, the goal is a spatial one, so that time appears only as the deferral of a spatial conclusion, the solved puzzle. In an aesthetic in which neither the single image nor the chain of substitutions can contain the proliferation of connections, such solutions, for example in the noticeboard that spatialises the clues deployed in the narrative of *The Usual Suspects*, can only demonstrate the continuing absence of a concluding truth. In its stead, neo-baroque space offers itself for the immersion of the spectator in the spectacle, much as the old baroque drew the faithful into rapt contemplation of immense trompe l'oeuil ceilings. This immersion is itself an allegory: in the old baroque an allegory of

redemption; in the new, of a satisfaction that comes from bathing in the apogee of consumerism, the lifestyle.

The allegory of immersion reduces the narrative conviction of familiar cause-effect structures, limiting them to pattern-making functions, or disregarding them entirely. In classical causality the past causes changes in the present. In the neo-baroque, it is the future which causes the present through the power of predestination, from Neo learning that he is the One to Frodo's resignation to his fate in *The Return of the King* (2003). A characteristic of this narrative in which nothing occurs (the character merely discovers what has always been the case) is its problematic construction of good. While we might surmise that early 21st century audiences are too sophisticated for white-hat morality, evidence to the contrary comes in the formal properties of protagonists who, in a surprising number of instances, are portrayed as innocents: hobbits, Captain Jack Sparrow, Harry Potter. Kant notes somewhere that innocence is a splendid thing, but doesn't keep well, and tends to be misled. Such is no longer the belief of Hollywood, where innocence is a state that, for example in the figure of *X-men's* (2000) Wolverine, forgives a great deal of sin. Yet innocence is in a certain sense always given, rather than achieved. It is a weak form of good. The good, in fact, has abdicated its place in the centre of Hollywood morality. Innocence is too weak to build an ethics upon. Instead, the ethical universe of the neo-baroque is grounded in the fight against absolute evil. In a fundamentally manichaeic universe, evil has a far more solid existence than the good in contemporary Hollywood (Bather 2004): the satanic Dark Lords, Dark Sides, and He-who-must-not-be-named; the gallery of snarling, depraved villains from *Die Hard* (1988) to *300's* Xerxes. In neo-baroque Hollywood, evil needs no backstory, no explanation, not even the cod-Freudianism of the 1950s. It can be assumed: it simply is. The absolute existence of evil deprives antagonists of character arcs: they cannot change. It also indicates a deep-seated anxiety in US popular culture concerning the nature of power. If innocence is the only good (as in 'innocent victims'), and evil is absolute, who is to fight the evil? Who indeed is going to look into the pit?

And here we confront the most difficult part of the analysis. What kind of world is it that recognises Evil but cannot name the Good? other than as a passive state of military, political inaction and domesticity? Foucault's diagnosis of biopolitics seems deeply relevant to digital media for almost every serious commentator in Europe and Australia, and many even in North America. Power has moved historically from sovereignty, based on the power over life and death, through discipline, the self-organising individual, to a version of power which is no longer concerned with individuals but with the management of populations. This is a world in which data is the central currency (and indeed currency has itself become data in electronic flows of finance capital).

To summarise all too swiftly, societies require meaning in order to function. But meaning in our epoch has become centrifugal. In its place, we have data. I believe that this has brought about a crisis in meaning. But what do we mean by meaning? I suggest that it is the once-natural sequence of being, knowing, interpreting, judging, willing and acting and that this assemblage no longer operates as it did in earlier times. The nature of being is de-natured in the expansion of the commodity form into every nook of life, most recently into creativity. Knowing is no longer definite but probabilistic. Interpretation depends on knowledge, but when knowledge is subsumed into data, it is no longer known but, like data, processed. True judgement occurs when I take responsibility for my action but that responsibility is removed when my every action has been modelled for its statistical likelihood. Willing requires individual agency, but that agency dissolves in the mass-modelling of scenarios and the management of lifestyles. Action is in crisis as a result of the sheer scale of the tasks facing us in a globalised network. And probability and complexity disrupt the foresight on which we can plan the effects of acting. The immersive spectacle of the early 21st century is a response to these changes. So too is the development of the lo-res solution, in which the illusion of individuality and individual agency is imposed through the isolation of the individualised interface. Like Reality TV, whose selection of idiosyncratic and eccentric contestants is there to demonstrate that after all we are all individuals, mobile media divide in the interests of maintaining the individual as the basic unit of consumption and social aggregation. Our fragile, ephemeral communities of contact lists are meant to substitute for the complex networks of kinship and locality that we have lost, and the disciplinary world that has passed, taking with it the senses of guilt, shame and obligation.

In this monstrous reorganisation of society as population management and knowledge as data flow, we face an impossible choice. We may succumb to the slack-jawed immersion in spectacle, from Vegas to the Sydney Olympics., or accede to the fragmented and ephemeral world of connectivity. I characterise these two positions, respectively the hi-res and lo-res paths, as the impossible choice between the sublime and despair. To paraphrase Adorno, despair and the sublime are the two torn halves of a single oppression: the removal of the object of contemplation from the realm of what can be communicated. In the immersive sublime, what we gaze upon is other, wordless and worldless, beyond history or debate. In the connective despair, what we seek to communicate, the very content of cellular networks, is ourselves, but that is the one thing that cannot be communicated in a world of hyperindividuation. Choose, we seem to be told, between the cinematic spectacle of 9/11 or the connective mobile images from Abu Ghraib. Choose between the unspeakable, sublime icon created by Islamists whose faith does not allow icons. Or pick the

degraded and degrading mobile images from Abu Ghraib, where connectivity becomes an extension of the humiliation which is the goal of torturers. The binarism of hi-res and lo-res takes us to the sick heart of the contemporary world.

Conviviality

I want to try to suggest some alternatives to the impossible dialectic of despair and the sublime which, it seems to me are at the heart of the contemporary condition. I use the term 'conviviality' because it suggests to me the grounds on which communication, properly speaking, must be reconceptualised if we are to regain the capacity for making meaning. The term is indelibly associated with Illich, for whom

Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his vision. Industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectations of others. Most tools today cannot be used in a convivial fashion (Illich 1973, 21).

The secret lies in the tools. In the talk so far, I have tried to argue that an acute attention to the details of technological development, political economy and changing modes of use and integration at the micro as well as the macro level is an essential task of media critics today. It is nice to be in Vienna to say: Wittgenstein was wrong. The world is not all that is the case. What is important about the world is not what it is *actually*, but what it is *potentially*: what else it has the capacity to become. How then can we reconceptualise our communicative tools? Here I want to sketch four possible strategies, each based on existing tools, but not on their actual states.

1) Category 'e'

Back in the 1970s, Comolli and Narboni (1977) in *Cahiers du Cinema* tried to build a political taxonomy of cinema. Among their types they list category 'e', films which set out to support the dominant ideology but for one reason or another generate internal contradictions which stop them reinforcing the dominant, and instead to generate critique and difference. Technologies are, like films, complex assemblages of people and machinery in time and space. They too have their contradictions, as the emerging practice of software critique is beginning to show us. If MacLuhan was in any sense correct, then small-scale interventions in technologies are capable of bringing about social change.

2) the pre-individual bodily impulse

Citing Georges Simondon, Paolo Virno writes

By participating in a collective, the subject, far from surrendering the most unique individual traits, has the opportunity to individuate, at least in part, the share of pre-individual reality which all individuals carry within themselves . . . Only within the collective, certainly not within the isolated subject, can perception, language and productive forces take on the shape of an individuated experience' (Virno 2004: 79)

The individual capable of action requires the mediation of others to be able to speak, judge and act. To do so, Simondon argues, we require the kind of technological assemblages which constitute the socialisation of the collective: language, broadcast, datanets. Adorno offers a further argument:

what is needed for a willed act or for practice in general is the coincidence of two antagonistic elements that do not become completely fused. On one hand there is the intellect, reason, which presupposes the idea of the unrestricted, highly progressive theoretical consciousness. On the other the bodily impulse that cannot be reduced to reason (Adorno 2006: 239)

Here is the specific place where action might occur: the pre-individual bodily impulse. This is not the same as the anti-rational irrationalism of Nietzsche and Bataille, which is merely the obverse of the instrumental rationality of triumphant capital in its bio-political moment. That is merely a reversal of the polarity of oppression: rather than humans oppressing nature, nature in the form of instinct oppresses humans. Instead, a dialectic of embodied experience and socialisation on the grounds of a mediated world.

3) the database unconscious

As the apotheosis of bureaucracy, the database merely regulates, without will or desire. Thus will and desire become components of its unconsciousness. But such will and desire are no longer individual. Will and desire have already been mapped into public behaviours of voting and shopping, and ascribed to the vestigial individual as beliefs and choices, identities and lifestyles. Here the inner life addressed by auratic art has revealed itself a sham, albeit one still vital in the reproduction of control and capital. The logic of control has at last cured humanity of personal unconsciousness. The database unconscious is external, not internal: the microscopic reality and macroscopic unrationality of crowds. As the unconscious of mnemotechnic machines, the crowd is structured by what excludes it. ~~In the art of the future, it will be vital to restructure that relationship by assuming the crowd as the unit of consciousness. As we know, however, there is no 'unit' of consciousness: consciousness is not thinkable in less than the face-to-face relation (Levinas), and more properly still in less than social relations.~~ The art of the immediate future, the transient media that are most fascinating in their ambitions, are those that create the grounds not for web 2.0 social

networking of vestigial individuals, but for the dialogue between crowds.

4) autonomous technology

We have learnt bitterly from the history of the last century, let alone our own, that change for its own sake produces that pile of wreckage that mounts at the feet of Benjamin's angel of history. In an era in which democratisation has become a matter of data management, our only hope is to unlock the potential of biopolitical control, to discover what else is possible in the toolbox, Marx's 'dead labour', that our ancestors have bequeathed us. The task is to find what is unknown in the ocean of the actual, to discover the virtual that lies coiled up in it. We can enter into dialogue with the ancestors whose work lies embedded and imprisoned in our technologies. To do so will mean concentrating not on our own lost freedom, but on theirs: on the autonomy of technology. Freeing technology from its slavery to human design is the first step towards a dialogue in which we might see ourselves again in a new and unexpected light. The stakes are high, as high as those we play for in our dialogue with nature, where they already include the possibility of species extinction. The result will be as radical a rewriting of humanity as that achieved by ecological awareness. Now that we are a statistically aggregate population, we must find an Other to confront us. The conviviality of the 21st century will encompass the green and technical worlds as well as the human, or it will not be.

Mobility and spectacle: the impossible conjuncture is of course technically resolvable. They will undoubtedly meet, probably in domestic resolution that privatises spectacle. Such false resolutions risk nothing, and change nothing. Real dialogues with nature and technology will be unequal and dangerous. When Adorno wrote of high and low culture as the broken halves of an integral freedom to which, however, they do not add up, the 'integral freedom' remained undefined. It involved, for him, a relation between human agency and the laws of physics. Where else do we look for that relationship but in technology? If we understand that what we have is not given ('data') nor even simply potential but virtual, we may have some idea of where we might act: between embodiment as instinct and embodiment as the repressed of the database, between re-conceptualising the human as crowd and the machine as the living presence of the ancestors, in the common ground between the crowd, the laws of nature and the mediations of technology. Illich went on to argue that 'A convivial society is a social context in which only one resource is universally distributed: personal energy under personal control' (1973, 12). I have come to distrust the construct 'person' and the concept of 'control'. Contingency is integral to a probabilistic world: we have to reach out to the post-personal if we are to lose control, which we must do if we are to free the future to be otherwise than the present. But I want to retain the central idea of conviviality as the

organising principle through which, in proliferating difference human, natural and technical, we can usher in a future which is profoundly different to the controlled and individualised present.

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