

Michael Thomas

**| RESOLUTION OF THE
TECHNOSUBLIME |**

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RESOLUTION: OF THE TECHNOSUBLIME



Mariele Neudecker, *Work in Progress (Uncontrollable Now)*, 1999

When technology in its ultramodernist phase connects again with the primitivism of mythic fear turned radical, it's no longer the Baudrillardian world of the simulacrum and hyperrealism, but a whole new scene of *virtual* technology and the end of the fantasy of the Real. Electronic art is the limit of postmodern aesthetics¹.

ARTHUR KROKER

Science and technology multiply around us. To an increasing extent they dictate the languages in which we speak and think. Either we use those languages, or we remain mute².

J.G. BALLARD

¹ Kroker 1988:15.

² quoted in Coleman 1998:5.

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In the last chapter of *The Return of the Real* (1996) the American critic Hal Foster addresses the contemporary anxieties towards new technologies and media in the western, highly industrialised consumer societies.

Applying Benjamin's 'surgically penetration' of the spectator's body and McLuhan's 'electrically extension' of the human, Foster characterises the situation of the individual subject as a *new intensity of dis/connection*.

Confused, terrified, and yet fascinated, we have - despite a spatial and often emotional remoteness - become *wired* to the technoscope of media spectacles by television and so-called new communication technologies: For Foster, this dis/connection has reached a new level of pain-and-pleasure and presents for the author 'a partial return of a fascistic subjecthood'.

In the following thesis I try to detach Foster's notion of a *technosublime* from its pejorative framework. My aim is not to reactivate the sublime as a nostalgic conception of modern aesthetics, as the unrepresentable was here applied only to be put forward as a 'missing content' (Lyotard).

Alongside Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), N. Katherine Hayles' reception of the posthuman subject (*How We Became Posthuman*, 1999), and Friedrich Kittler's idea of *synergy* between humans and machines, I like to apply the notion of the *technosublime* as a kind of white rabbit to enter, like Alice, the contemporary setting of a technological Wonderland.

And yet, if the *postmodern dis/connection*, as Foster argues, either produces indifference, cynicism, or reactive value judgments, we also have to develop and acknowledge new forms and models of criticism, which might no longer depend on a classical position of critical distance but rather locate the research and work inside 'the belly of the monster' (Haraway).

If this agenda, this form of practice, is still to be called art, is irrelevant. A notion, which in the meantime might have become more important, might be 'not-just-art' (I/O/D).

| 1 | INTRODUCTION

1. AN UNCONTROLLABLE NOW?

I looked dizzily, and beheld a wide expanse of ocean [...] A panorama more deplorably desolate no human imagination can conceive. To the right and left, as far as the could reach, there lay stretched out, like ramparts of the world, lines of horridly black and beetling cliff, whose character of gloom was but more forcibly illustrated by the surf which reared high up against it its white and ghastly crest, howling and shrieking for ever³.

E.A. POE, *A DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTÖM*

In spring 1999 the Lux Gallery in London presented the specially commissioned work of five shortlisted artists for the Olay Vision Award⁴, an art prize for women artists working with digital technologies. In one of the separated spaces of the gallery Mariele Neudecker presented her *Work in Progress: Uncontrollable Now* - a video projection that according to the gallery's information leaflet tried to 'immerse the viewer in a landscape reminiscent of Caspar-David Friedrich' (Lux 1999:3). Adjusted to a high point of view, a three-dimensional computer-generated image displayed a long-range perspective over a lifeless, snow-covered mountain massif which covered almost completely one site of the walls. Apart from animated clouds moving from the left to the right and sounds like blowing wind nothing really exciting happened. There were no pedals on the floor, no helmet to stuck your head in, not even a mouse which would allow some kind of manoeuvre through this virtual landscape. Given this, Neudecker's installation certainly failed to represent an intrinsic example of contemporary cutting-edge digital art which so often almost hysterically engages the viewer to interact with the work. Instead Neudecker's installation simply staged a blow-up of a virtual environment created with relatively cheap available graphic applications, like Bryce™ or Stratavision™. Usually these software packages are purchased to render three-dimensional scenarios on a home PC which then can be explored via the computer's interface in any direction. Interactivity - one of the key-terms of electronic communication in the recent years - was in Neudecker's works not only neglected but simply cut off.

³ Poe 1994:155.

⁴ Vegas: *The 1999 Olay Vision Award*. Lux Gallery, London 21 May - 20 June 1999.

Have we lost control over technology and sciences? Does the machine become uncontrollable if we rely too much on it? What happens if its promised - and much criticised - extensions are taken apart from us? Does it suddenly materialise as an apocalyptic *Mene Tekel* on the wall? Where do modes of representation in cultural, fictional as well as techno-scientific discourses allow us moments of criticism? Can we capture these moments from a distant point of view, or should we not rather high-jack and slash them from an interior position, in entering in Donna Haraway's words the "belly of the monster", a location within the 'fictional and technical constructions of late twentieth-century cyborgs, site of the potent fusions of the technical, textual, organic, mythic and political' (Haraway 1991a:24-25)?

In the following thesis I will concentrate on what Hal Foster has described in *The Return of the Real* as 'technosublime'. Foster uses the term pejoratively to mark a schizophrenic state of a 'psychic collectivity' (Foster 1996:221) which let us almost daily experience the fears as well as fascinations of the technological world we live in, where we are hooked on a perpetual stream of data and information from locations so remote and yet broadcast live-and-direct on the screen of the domestic TV set or the personal home computer.

Foster attests a spatial likewise psychological and physical 'dis/connection' (ibid) of the Real:

These are only some of the splittings that occur with a new intensity today: spatiotemporal splitting, the paradox of immediacy produced through mediation; a moral splitting, the paradox of disgust undercut by fascination, or of sympathy undercut by sadism; and a splitting of the body image, the ecstasy of dispersal rescued by armoring, or the fantasy of disembodiment dispelled by abjection. (Foster 1996:222).

'If a postmodern subject can be posited at all,' the author continues, 'it is made and unmade in such splittings.' (ibid). It is here that an analysis of a postmodern 'technosublime' has to be investigated. Like Foster's question 'Whatever happened to Postmodernism?' in the final chapter of his book, this project might not reveal definite answers or solutions rather *resolutions*, a term which I do not intend to use in an approach towards a state of finality or determination but towards its opposite: a model of a structured, regulated 'openness' or variety. My suggestion is to apply *resolution* in the way the term is used, for instance, in film production and theory. Resolution describes there the process of transferring the linearity of a film's plot-line into the cinematographic structure of single camera adjustments (angles, close-ups etc.) to

shoot spatially and temporally separated visual sequences of settings and actions, which will later be compiled in the editing process to produce an illusionistic continuity.

Whereas the process of resolution in film productions is maintained within a complex organisation of a highly disciplined body of cast, staff and technical equipment - and should we hesitate here to identify this 'machinery' of bodies as a kind of cyborgian organism? - modern personal computers apply resolution via 'user-friendly' visual interfaces, which allows to control the machine and its programme procedures. Resolution defines here the quantity of information in pixels, measured, for instance, in dots per inch (dpi), which is processed in input or output operations, like scanning and printing, as well as directly on the computer screen.

Certainly, the quality of representation is here not only determined by the performance of the computer to store and calculate the quantity of information but also by the accessibility of the machine (costs for hardware and software, as well as knowledge to operate the computer) and the limits of the interface (operating systems, applications, compatibility etc.) which has been installed by the producer of the machine. The representation of information is thus regulated and controlled to a high degree. Still, it's never totally determined because it offers the user a general impetus of *modification*: for instance, the resolution of the monitor as such can be adjusted. Graphic programmes allow to define the amount of information which is processed in input, output and on-screen operations. The resolution of the processed digital image can be changed, new software and operating systems according to the user's requirements can be installed to modify the preconfigured appearance of interfaces and applications to gain access and control the representation on the computer's screen as well as its input and output⁵.

The representation on a computer screen is without doubt regulated and preconditioned. Still it allows modification by the user, the programmer, artists or hacker, to change these modes of representation and render them variable and general indeterminate.

'As well as cultural forms and data types marginalised by the historically Eurocentric fixation on text and image, most computer use relies on strange, almost unnoticed conventions and choreographies', explains Matthew Fuller of the London-based three-

⁵ Special software applications for the Apple Macintosh allow, for instance, an emulation of the dominating Windows operating system. Control panels, system extensions, often developed by amateur programmers to increase performances and or simplify operations. The precondition for software developers is here to have access the so-called source code of the operating system. Linux, for instance, a free distributed UNIX styled operating system created by Linus Torvald actually challenges 'Microsoft's domination of global computer culture' (O'Brien 1999:31) on the basis of the Free Software developers movement.

- Infos for Linux [<http://www.earthspace.net/~esr/faqs/linux>].
- Free Software Foundation [<http://www.fsf.com>].

person collective I/O/D⁶ in an interview with Belinda Barnet (1998). I/O/D has irregularly released programme versions of the *Webstalker*⁷, a simple yet sophisticated application which illustrates that the electronic data streams the Internet consist of can also be accessed in different mode than the familiar graphically and textual orientated interface regular web browsers, like Netscape Navigator or Microsoft's Internet Explorer present.

As a model of thought my concept of resolution accepts its limits and regulations by the means of the machine as well as its manufacturers (the quantity and quality of resolution) but still it would allow active distancing (the preposition of criticism) as well, despite the mentioned limits, means of control and regulation of representation.

It also would be possible to integrate Jean Baudrillard's concept of *hyperrealism of simulation*⁸. Indeed it is here where an observation of the technosublime could start from: on the flat surface of the computer screen. It is here were we have to invest in the fascination and fears of the machine and disassemble its fictional constructions rather than getting hypnotised by the spiralling of a short-circuited cycle of fear and fascination. We rather should explore dis/connections and render hybridities and cyborg fantasies positive which allows us both: the *deconstruction* of its bits and what should be valued as even more, the active *re-construction* of its parts.

As Sarah Kember states in her book *Virtual Anxiety* it would be fatal to glorify just one site of utopian or dystopian impacts of technoculture or technoscience to disqualify the other: either we believe in a positivistic progress of mankind, or we see its decline and end of human history. The author insists to identify dystopian anxieties as well as utopian expectations we have ascribed to sciences and technologies. Presented as a dichotomy Kember examines the fictional constructions of ideologies and narratives which have been attached to the power of the machine. In her introduction Kember states:

[I]t seems to me that, in general, there has been a high degree of anxiety and expectation expressed in relation to recent technological developments, and that these feelings have been manifested in dystopianism on the one hand and utopianism on the other. In science fiction, dystopias and utopias are post-apocalyptic futures, and today it might easily appear that the distinction between science fiction and social reality has collapsed. The deviation between dystopias and utopias is driven to an extent by technophobia and technophilia

⁶ I/O/D's members are Simon Pope, Colin Green, Matthew Fuller. 'I/O/D is a three-person collective based in London . As an acronym, the name stands for everything it is possible for it to stand for' (Fuller 1998).

⁷ The current version 4 is free to download from I/O/D's website [<http://www.backspace.org/ioid/>].

⁸ See J. Baudrillard (1993), 'The Order of Simulacra', in J. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Sage, pp. 50-86.

respectively, and both forms of futurism have tended to be technologically deterministic.
(Kember 1998:1-2)

Kember's argument cannot resolve the dichotomy between culture and science on one hand and nature on the other. She designs the parodic model of a desiring, transgendered vampire as a critique of masculine science and culture. The vampire is mystic, powerful metaphor, like Haraway's cyborg. It resists as a model of sexual desire identification of gender and Enlightenment rationality of masculine science and culture. Yet, in my opinion this figuration fails to some extent to confront technological conditions and ascriptions. The vampire might suck from the data flow of 'life-blood of contemporary societies' (Kember 1998:134), like a parasite. Yet, as a metaphor it hardly can escape its romanticism to face contemporary technological discourses. On this electronic matrix, the image of a multiple, reconstructable cyborg seems to me as more appropriate as it shares the biomechanical imagery of technological and cybernetic discourses.

...

To return to Mariele Neudecker's work in the Lux Gallery: Her digital landscape might have appeared weak and static, far from reaching the limits of technical possibilities of a new digital universe. But if we focus on the work's title, *Work in Progress: Uncontrollable Now*, we realise that the common assumption of a technological driven *presence of now* has reached a point out-of-control which commented by Neudecker with an ironic tongue-in-cheek gesture. The artist embraces failure and thus identifies the apparently dynamic *work in progress of our present* as a static and masturbatory fantasy to create virtual utopia.

Presenting *Ten Reasons why the Art World hates Digital Art* Ewan Morrison recently wrote:

Once the future has been abandoned and belief in the expressive function of art has been rejected, once artists have come to hate the market which supports them, there is one last petty act of rebellion which can keep the artist going: making art which is deliberately banal.

Thus we have seen over the last ten years, the growth of the cult of contemporary artist as heroic failure. Technical inadequacy has been elevated to a virtue. This is not technical naiveté, but deliberate and self-conscious faux naiveté. (Morrison 1998:25)

Whether artists employ so-called new media and technologies, or if they work with traditional means is not the issue. But if artists as well as consumers and producers trust too much on the high fidelity performance of their machines, the danger of depending too much on its virtue becomes obvious. Exaggerated technical virtuosity often runs a high risk to betray the promises of interactivity, its contents and potential criticism. Morrison continues:

Interactive art destroys the objective distance that since Kant has been the basic premise for the contemplation of aesthetic experience. In more contemporary terms, Jean Baudrillard has again and again discussed the diminishing of objective distance through digital technology and described the horror that this presents to the Western philosophical tradition - the terrible immediacy, the obscene reciprocity of the virtual experience, the closing down of the gap between observer and object. This he claims in Kantian style is the death of aesthetics.

Without objective distance, there is no contemplation; without contemplation there is no metaphysics. Virtuality and interactivity are the death not just of art but also of culture itself. Interactivity is a vacuum, a self-perpetuating, self-referring, closed circle that coils in on itself (ibid).

In this context, we could conclude that although Mariele Neudecker works with digital technology her target for the moment is to reject interactivity. The artist welcomes contemplation in sampling a set of old-fashioned, pseudo-romantic iconographics. But the experience as such does not rouse passion and desire. It's a *cool memory* of a nostalgic wish for transcendence that we have already lost; a feeling that I would describe after Foster as *technosublime*.

**| 2 | PENETRATION & EXTENSION: TECHNOLOGIES OF
EXPLICITNESS**

2.1. A RETURN TO THE REAL?

Following the question 'Whatever happened to Postmodernism?'⁹ Hal Foster concentrates in his book *The Return of the Real* (1996) on three dominant periods of the 20th century: the middle 1930s ('the culmination of high modernism'); the middle of 1960s ('full advent of postmodernism'); and the middle 1990s (Foster 1996:207). He identifies in each of these epistemes of modernism, postmodernism and the current period of technoculture or technoscience 'a significant shift in discourses on the subject, the cultural other, and technology' (Foster 1996:208)¹⁰. These discourses are without doubt interrelated. However, for my argument I will concentrate on Foster's last phase to explore the impact technology had on Western culture. Focusing again on the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s, Foster argues that, 'even as one moment leads to the next, this next comprehends the one before' (Foster 1996:218):

Thus what Guy Debord see in the spectacle of the 1960s are the technological transformations that Walter Benjamin anticipated in the 1930s; and what cyberpunk writers extrapolate in the 1990s are the cybernetic extensions that Marshall McLuhan predicted in the 1960s. In the discourse on technology the terms attached to these moments *project an ideological totality*: the age of mechanical reproduction in the 1930s, the age of cybernetic revolution in the 1960s, and the age of technoscience or technoculture in the 1990s (in which research and development, or culture and technology, cannot be separated). The same is true of the narratives that attend these terms, as in the supposed passage from an industrial or Fordist society to a postindustrial or post-Fordist one. (ibid, emphasis mine)

To develop his argument Foster starts with Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936-37) where the latter attest the loss of aura of art due to the increasing dominance of technical means of reproduction. Benjamin argues that such reproducibility withers the aura of art, its status of originality,

⁹ H. Foster 1996:205-226.

¹⁰ Foster states: 'My reason for this focus is simple. The quintessential question of modernism concerned identity: in the famous query of Paul Gauguin, *Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?* [...] [A]nswers often came through an appeal to otherness, either to the unconscious or to the cultural other. Many high modernists felt truth was located there: hence the significance of psychoanalysis and the profusion of primitivism throughout this century. Indeed, many high modernists conflated these two natural preserves, the unconsciousness and the cultural other, while some postmodernists argue that they are acculturated in advanced criticism. In short, the discourses of the unconscious and the cultural other, psychoanalysis and anthropology, are the privileged modern discourses because they speak to identify in these terms. In doing so they may also register more seismographically than any other discourses the epistemological changes that demarcate the postmodern.' (Foster 1996:208)

uniqueness and authenticity and even more crucial, resolves *distance*, a necessary presumption which allows critical observation. Yet he also states that this loss of distance maintained by the new visual technologies, especially that of film, permits to 'emancipate' art from its ritualistic origins in bringing 'things "closer" spatially and humanly' to the public (Benjamin 1992:216-218): the image becomes 'separable' and 'transportable' (B 1992:224).

As Hal Foster points out, the 'withering of aura, the loss of distance, impacts on the body as well on the image: the two cannot be separated' (Foster 1996:219). Benjamin illustrates this observation in comparing the techniques of the traditional painter and the magician with that of the modern cameraman and surgeon: whereas the first two maintain a 'natural distance' either to paint the motif or to heal the patient's body, the second two penetrate carefully but 'deeply' into the web of the object-world. 'There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain', concludes Benjamin: 'That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law' (Benjamin 1992:227).

This 'new law' is that of breaking down an exterior situation by the technical means of the camera and reassembling its results in the montage or editing process according to the conventionalised syntax of a cinematographic language. Preoccupied with the first process, Benjamin fails to identify the impact of montage which actually transfers the camera's cuts into an ordered structure. Yet his observation that the illusionist effect of the film is maintained by the very neglecting of the technical-driven production process, is revealing. The illusionism of film differs radically from that of traditional modes of representation, as, for instance, that of theatre:

In the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, that in the studio the technical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the site of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology (Benjamin 1992:226).

If the beauty of this orchid in nature and culture appears as an almost immediate effect, one forgets that this attraction is actually a result of a generated process of selection and cultivation. Likewise, the illusionist techniques of the film are applied so carefully that the spectator of a movie is hardly aware of it. The scene which is presented on the

silver screen reminds us of a perfect crime: all evidence of the technical apparatus of the actual production process, camera sound and lighting equipment and even, due to high production costs, the hierarchical organised body of producers, director and staff assistants, is in the actual visual presentation - at least, if we concentrate on the classic feature film - totally neglected. In fact, one could say the audio-visual resolution of a movie scene from its original script to the camera's record - a cut of separate sequences taken from the object-world - to its later montage in the editing process corresponds directly to the very disappearance of any technical means which were actually necessary to record it.

While the resulting illusionism of the film was witnessed by Benjamin in the late 1930s as an extraordinary novelty, its 'shock' of immediacy which he identifies throughout his writing, might hardly waken astonishment for a contemporary viewer who has already become used to the daily dose of terror and excitement of news reports and horror movies. Yet, if one remembers the infamous scene of Luis Bunuel's and Salvador Dali's film *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) where a razor slices through an eye in an extreme close-up, Benjamin's observation of shock might evoke still valid and crucial intensity.

The visual technology gains its suggestive power, that of illusion, by the very *resolution* of the real world. Benjamin described this procedure as followed:

The camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole. Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film. It compromises certain factors of movement which are in reality those of the camera, not to mention special camera angles, close-ups, etc. (Benjamin 1992:222).

Still, this 'compromise' of the editing process is an integral component of the filmwork. It is here that the fragments or 'reality-bits' which have been cut from the object-world are synthesised and reassembled to complete the rendering process of resolution. The projection of twenty-four static images per second creates an optical illusion of a continuous flow. The smoothness of continuity-shots, a convention Hollywood cinema invents in the late 1920s, as well the 'montage of 'attractions' developed and theorised by Sergei M. Eisenstein in the Russian Cinema of Constructivism at the same time¹¹ enables the suture of spatial and temporal disconnected sequences to let film in the reception appear as a continuum.

¹¹ In his movie *Strike* (1924) Eisenstein shows a scene of striking workers which is attacked by the troops of the Zaristic regime. To illustrate drastically the brutality of the military, Eisenstein edits a sequence of dead, butchered cow halves in a slaughterhouse (see Eisenstein 1979:296).

Thus, resolution is never simply dissolution but also a process of absorption, separation, isolation, or as Benjamin observes, the cameraman 'surgically' penetrates 'deeply into reality' (Benjamin 1992:226). But beside the activity of the cameraman it is necessary to pay attention as well to the editor whose job it is to actually heal these cuttings of reality-fragments and organise them in a new structured order.

Sean Cubitt's annotates in this respect in reference to Eisenstein:

Raw reality, unorganised, could never achieve maximal effectivity, and could never form part of the overall subordination of the film's moment to its architectonics, its montage. Instead, Eisenstein argued the case for a cinema which would escape the magical powers of mimesis through an emphasis on composition, on the *mise-en-scene*, the frame, the shot, the editing and the whole film (Cubitt 1998:43).

The better filming and editing, come together; the more the processes are concealed to the viewer's 'naked eye' (Benjamin 1992:230), the more successful becomes the medium's illusionist effect. This is exactly the moment when the techniques of representation, be it in a good book, in thrilling movie, but as well in everyday life conversation, are applied so intriguing by that they are experienced as a moment of immediate authenticity. Apparently a paradox, for representation always implies the application of media (text, painting, photography, film, etc.). In fact, if we are concerned with traditional media like novels, theatre, or movies, this affect might be relatively easy to be traced and deconstructed, if one imagines, for instance, the author's fiction of a found letter in Romantic novels of the late 18th and 19th century¹² or the hand-held camera in pseudo-documentary movies like *Man Bites Dog* (1992).

In fact, as Benjamin alerts us, the withering of a critical as well as spatial-temporal distance does not only have liberatory potential, as it in permits culture to become more collective. 'But it also has ideological potential, as it permits politics to become more spectacular', comments Hal Foster. A fact, which was recognised by the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century: Benjamin's hope for an politicisation of art was responded with a aestheticization of politics in Fascism and Stalinism (Foster 1996:219).

'Mankind,' notes Benjamin, 'which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order' (Benjamin 1992:235).

¹² See, for instance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*, or Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*.

However, in Benjamin's argument the position of the spectator does not remain simply passive as film permits the 'audience to take the position of a critic without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience identification with actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently the audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing' (Benjamin 1992:222) Hence, to a certain degree these 'optical tests' (ibid.) of the actor's 'aptitude' of performance (see Benjamin 1992:239 [10]) permits the viewer positions of participation¹³. Film is therefore not just a medium which offers enjoyment or provides distraction. On the contrary, it is the very means of distraction, 'reception in a state of distraction' (Benjamin 1992:232-33), which produces its fundamental distinction to traditional media:

The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires not attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one (Benjamin 1992:234).

Hal Foster concludes that for Benjamin, '[t]he new technologies are "surgical": they reveal the world in new forms of representations, shock the observer into new perceptions. For Benjamin this "optical unconsciousness" renders the subject both more critical *and* more distracted (such is great hope for cinema), and he insists on this paradox as a dialectic' (Foster 1996:219). Yet, Foster continues his argument, '[b]y the middle of the 1960s the Benjaminian dialectic had split in such discourses on technology as Debord on spectacle¹⁴ and McLuhan elaborates Benjamin on the body. However, both regard critical distance as doomed' (Foster 1996:219-220).

¹³ The form of participation might be limited. Nevertheless, it is the audience's acceptance which will decide if the movie will become a (commercial) success or a failure. Certainly, Benjamin's early acknowledgement of the audience as a critic has laid down some roots or presumptions for contemporary Cultural Studies (see, for instance J. Fiske (1993), *Power Plays, Power Works*, London / New York: Verso).

¹⁴ Foster refers here to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

2.2. THE CONFUSIONS OF CRITICISM

Foster contrasts Benjamin's observation with Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964). Developing often related ideas, Foster identifies the latter's writing as an inversion of the former: 'For McLuhan new technologies do not penetrate the body "surgically" so much as they extend it "electrically"' (Foster 1996:220). McLuhan describes his *Understanding Media* (1964) as followed:

By putting our physical bodies inside our extended nervous systems, by means of electric media, we set up a dynamic by which all previous technologies are mere extensions of hands and feet and bodily heat-controls - all such extensions of our bodies, including cities - will be translated into information systems. Electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of mediation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves outside its hide. (McLuhan 1968:57)

Like Benjamin, McLuhan identifies new technologies in a ambivalent approach, but whereas the former persists on a dialectic of criticality and distraction, 'in McLuhan this dialectic flies apart into an opposition impossible to reconcile' (Foster 1996:220): for McLuhan the human body, wired to the world by its 'electrical extensions', becomes an ecstatic relay, trapped and confused in 'contradictory tropes of extension and amputation' (Foster 1996:221):

'We have put our central nervous systems outside an electric technology,' he [McLuhan] remarks more than once. Yet sometimes McLuhan sees this extension as an ecstatic body become electric, wired to the world, and sometimes as a "suicidal auto-amputation, as if the central nervous system could no longer depend on the physical organs to be protective buffers against the slings and arrows of outrageous mechanism (Foster 1996:220).

For Hal Foster, McLuhan 'remains within *the logic of technology as prosthesis* as a devine supplement to the body that threatens a demonic mutilation, or a glorious phallicization of the body that presupposes an horrific castration'. The question for Foster is therefore: 'have we exceeded this logic today?'. He refers therefore to Donna Haraway's who develops in *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (1985) a feminist model of transgender cyborg metaphor to attest 'that the interface of human and machine need not to be imagined in terms of castration fears and fetish fantasies' (Foster 1996:221). A concept which is criticized by Foster, for it might help to understand 'fears and

fantasies regarding technology' but fails apparently to establish a critical position outside a mystical narratives (ibid).

Again, Foster's observations are here valuable as they are presented with a cautious sensibility:

These fears and fantasies have not diminished; on the contrary, they have become more extreme, *more effective*, in proportion to the dis/connection advanced in the logic of the prothesis. Is our media world one of generous interaction, as benign as an ATM withdrawal or an Internet inquiry, or one of invasive discipline, each of us 'dividual' electronically tracked, genetically traced, not a policy of a maleficent Big Brother but as a matter of quotidian administration? Is our media world one of a cyberspace that renders bodies immaterial, or one in which bodies, not transcended at all, are marked, often violently, according to racial, sexual, and social differences? Clearly, it is both at once, and *this new intensity of dis/connection is postmodern* (ibid).

But what becomes clear as well, and what Foster so wary and almost secretly unfolds in his argument, is that the very model of criticism, this old analytic machinery which since its construction in the Enlightenment constitutes its programme via distance, has become dis/connected from the Real, the object-world, from where it separated its object of interest.

Postmodern thinking, might have succeeded in some respect with Lyotard to pay disrespect towards the moral consensus and 'grand Narratives' of the modernist rational thought to gain its knowledge from the local (Foucault) or the 'little narratives' (Lyotard 1997:60), even the abject (Kristeva). The discourses on the cultural Otherness embraced difference and pronounced the death of the subject, that 'only pretended to be universal, only presumed to speak for everyone else' (Foster 1996:212). Yet, as Foster argues right in the beginning of 'Whatever happened to Postmodernism?' 'the *context* of this recognition, brazenly defined by George Bush as the New World Order, suggests that these different subjectivities must be seen in relation to the dynamic of the capital, its reification and fragmentation of fixed positions. Thus, if we celebrate hybridity and heterogeneity, we must remember that they are also privileged terms of advanced capitalism, that social multiculturalism coexists with economic multinationalism' (Foster 1996:212).

As the classic model of criticism necessarily depends on points of view, however distracted and diffused they might be situated, from an exterior, presumably objective position, the privileged distance has become increasingly difficult to maintain. In different ways, the 'question of correct distance', as Foster notes, 'is the very riddle of the subject regarding its body image, its cultural others, and its technological prostheses. It

is also the very riddle of subject regarding its critical theory, which is usually thought to depend on an intellectual distance from its object' (Foster 1996:223). Again it is Benjamin who recognised this misery in a statement Foster quotes from *One-Way Street* (1928):

Fools lament the decay of criticism. For its day is long past. Criticism is a matter of *correct distancing*. It was at home where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible to take a standpoint. Now things press too closely on human society (Benjamin 1979:89, emphasis mine).

At the very end of this book, Foster calls therefore for a revision not only of the modernist and postmodernist projects but even more that of criticism:

Critical distance cannot be foregone *and* be rethought; it does little good to lament or to celebrate its putative passing. Often lamenters project a mythical moment of true criticality, while the celebrants see critical distance as instrumental mastery in disguise. However, this suspicion of distance does touch critical theory at a sensitive point, which is the relation between critical distance and social distinction (Foster 1996:225).

From this perspective, I would like to jump back to some of the key texts which Foster is observing. My aim is here to revalue Foster's notion of a 'technosublime', which he sees as 'a partial return of a fascistic subjecthood'. If the ideology of Foster's postmodern dis/connection of criticism in the contemporary realm of techno-culture either produces indifference, cynicism, or reactive value judgments, we have to develop new models of criticism to gain active value judgments. It is here we have to jump like Poe's drowning sailor into the Maelström, or with the words of Donna Haraway locate ourselves 'inside the belly of the monster' (Haraway 1991a:18). Indeed, a place of pleasure-and-pain, which we could describe as 'technosublime': a technical generated *Super NowHere*. The mission would be to face the eye of the storm and send a probe directly into that black hole, which apparently eclipses distance, and thus criticism, to identify and validate (hopefully) forms of criticism which actually undermine the concept of distance within an interior position.

2.3. TECHNOLOGIES OF CONSENSUS

Hybris is heute unsere ganze Stellung zur Natur, unsere Natur-Vergewaltigung mit Hülfe der Maschine und der so unbedenklichen Techniker- und Ingenieur-Erfindersamkeit; Hybris ist unsere Stellung zu Gott, will sagen zu irgend einer angeblichen Zweck- und Sittlichkeits-Spinne hinter dem grossen Fangnetz-Gewebe der Ursächlichkeit [...]; Hybris is unsere Stellung zu u n s, - denn wir experimentiren mit uns, wie wir es mit keinem Thiere erlauben würden, und schlitzen uns vergnügt und neugierig die Seele bei lebendigen Leibe auf: was liegt uns noch am "Heil" der Seele!¹⁵

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *DIE GENEALOGIE DER MORALVORSTELLUNGEN*

According to Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964) technologies have always played an integral role in the history of mankind's mastery of his environment and the attempt to conquer the world through extending the limits of his own body. Its application is thus compelling:

Man must serve his electronic technology with the same servo-mechanic fidelity with which he served his coracle, his canoe, his typography, and all other extensions of his physical organs (McLuhan 1968:57).

For McLuhan this demand has become self-evident¹⁶. Relating man to technology as a natural and positivist necessity, McLuhan encounters the mechanical world like a second-order of nature where everything seems possible:

With the new media [...] it is also possible to store and to translate everything; and, as for speed, that is no problem. No further acceleration is possible this side of the light barrier (McLuhan 1968:57-58).

McLuhan's *Understanding Media* is a magnificent catalogue of ancient and new technologies engendering an optimist likewise progressive technotopia. His ideas hold

¹⁵ Nietzsche 1993:357: 'Today, hubris is our complete relation to nature, our rapture of nature with the aid of the machine and the unquestioned attempts of technics and engineers; hubris is our attitude towards God, by which I like to say, towards an alleged spider of purpose or morality behind a vast catching-web tissue of originality [...]; hubris is the attitude towards o u r s e l v e s - for we experiment with ourselves as we would allow with no animal, and, cheerfully curiously, by our lively flesh, we slash our soul: what quarrel we with "grace" of soul!' (trans. mine).

¹⁶ McLuhan's conclusion is not really new. At the end of the 19th century, for instance, Ernst Kapp already related in his publication *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Cultur aus neuen Gesichtspunkten* (1887) cultural history with that of technological inventions: 'The whole history of mankind, clearly observed, resolves itself finally within the history of inventing better tools.' (quoted in H. Blumenberg 1993:9-10, my translation).

back on the righteousness of a universalist, humanistic project of the Enlightenment and its sociological pastiche of late nineteenth century positivism. Hardly problematic to McLuhan, he integrates in his concept of extension literally everything which occupies the everyday life in the western consumer society of the 1960s: from motorcars, clocks and clothes via modern telecommunication and broadcasting to the nuclear weaponry on the high-peak of the cold-war.

Advocating a 'global village' that we all collectively inhabit on this planet, McLuhan's technophilic programme emulates the American way of life so perfectly as it precedes the 1990s' update of a liberal-democratic New World Order¹⁷.

And yet, McLuhan is not unaware of the problematics such technological condition raise for modern society:

Any new medium, by its acceleration, disrupts the lives and investments of whole communities. It was the railway that raised the art of war to unheard-of intensity, making the American Civil War the first major conflict fought by rail, and causing it to be studied and admired by all European general staffs, who had not yet had an opportunity to use railways for a general blood-letting (McLuhan 1968:102).

Concerned with telecommunication and the 'metropolitan space which is equally irrelevant for the telephone, the telegraph, the radio, and television' (McLuhan 1968:104) he concludes:

Our electric extensions of ourselves simply by-pass space and time, and create problems of human involvement and organization for which there is not precedent. We may yet yearn for the simple days of the automobile and the superhighway (McLuhan 1968:105).

McLuhan acknowledges that 'there is this difference, that previous technologies were partial and fragmentary and the electric is total and inclusive'. He therefore calls for an 'external consensus or conscience' which appears to him as 'necessary as private consciousness' (McLuhan 1968:57). In 'translating one kind of experience of one sense into all senses, and presenting the result continuously as a unified image to the mind' (McLuhan 1968:60) McLuhan understands this consensus less as a universal moral idea than a mind-expanding experience. However, as this 'externalization of the senses

¹⁷ Proclaimed by the former president of the USA, George Bush, at the climax of the Gulf War in 1991 and the end of the cold-war through the decline of the Soviet Union, the New World Order is based on democratic and liberal terms, yet limited by its concentration of economic liberalism of advanced capitalism. In this context R. Barbrook and A. Cameron state: 'Ever since the '60s, liberals - in the social sense of the word - have hoped that the new information technologies would realise their ideals. Responding to the challenge of the New Left, the New Right has resurrected an older form of liberalism: economic liberalism. In place of the collective freedom sought by the hippie radicals, they have championed the liberty of individuals within the marketplace.' (Barbrook & Cameron 1999).

into a vast *sensus communis*' (Kroker 1988:81) depends on technology, McLuhan's principle of consensus raises enormous questions. Who regulates this 'unified image of the mind'? Which forms of representation are applied? Why and for what purpose? As a 'common sense always implies homogeneity, regulation, control, and dominance. Thus, despite all liberating extensions triggered by the human desire for transgression (if not transcendence), the individual is nonetheless confronted by limits and regulations which will not only determine its faculties of mind and body by discourses of sciences, law, morality, politics and so forth¹⁸. More crucially, we will see that these concepts also define what it actually can be called human (see, chapter 2.4.).

For Hal Foster, McLuhan develops related ideas as Benjamin. Yet whereas the latter examines a 'dialectic of criticality and distraction' in McLuhan's *Understanding Media* this 'dialectic flies apart into an opposition impossible to reconcile' (Foster 1996:220).

However, McLuhan is not a critic, and hardly a philosopher, but a prophet of human and technological progression. The underlying ideology of his futuristic concept confirms the universalist humanistic project of modernism which - despite various forms of criticism by postmodern theorists - still occupies contemporary discourses of sciences, politics, economics as well as social life. With the death of God, there must be a new faith: the belief and trust in progress and rationality accompanies the hopes to create a presumably better future. In liberating his given appearance from the burden of nature man has reinvented the world by the means of his literacy, culture and his technological extensions. This is the dream of a new Babel of *one* unified civilisation. And if the media is the message, this message becomes a mission that has to be put forward to other, presumably less gifted, less literate cultures. An evangelism to spread the Word, a technological crusade to render the world into the literal manifestation of the Gutenberg Galaxy, another term for which McLuhan has become infamous. Indeed, a cold universe which has been created here:

¹⁸ R. Barbrook and A. Cameron argue in *Californian Ideology* that McLuhan's predictions had crucial influences on former radicals of the 1960s. Working from the early 1970s onwards as software programmers or hardware developers, the development of new digital and media technologies was accompanied by a certain life-style and socio-economic utopian dreams - a kind of futuristic mythology which Barbrook and Cameron describe as the *Californian Ideology*: 'In this version of the Californian Ideology, each member of the 'virtual class' is promised the opportunity to become a successful hi-tech entrepreneur. Information technologies, so the argument goes, empower the individual, enhance personal freedom, and radically reduce the power of the nation-state. Existing social, political and legal power structures will wither away to be replaced by unfettered interactions between autonomous individuals and their software. These restyled McLuhanites vigorously argue that big government should stay off the backs of resourceful entrepreneurs who are the only people cool and courageous enough to take risks. In place of counter-productive regulations, visionary engineers are inventing the tools needed to create a "free market" within cyberspace, such as encryption, digital money and verification procedures. Indeed, attempts to interfere with the emergent properties of these technological and economic forces, particularly by the government, merely rebound on those who are foolish enough to defy the primary laws of nature.' (Barbrook & Cameron 1999).

Civilization is built on literacy because literacy is a uniform progressing of culture by a visual sense extended in space and time by the alphabet. In tribal cultures, experience is arranged by a dominant auditory sense-life that represses visual values. The auditory sense, unlike the cool and neutral eye, is hyper-esthetic and delicate and all-inclusive. Oral cultures act and react at the same time. Phonetic cultures endows men with the means of repressing their feelings and emotions when engaged in action. To act without reacting, without involvement, is the peculiar advantage of Western literate man (McLuhan 1968:86).

Such endeavour is triggered by a consensus, a collective belief-system in the Word, its representation and, more crucially, that its applications seem to be acceptable to anybody else. In this respect, a call for consensus as a universalist legitimation for human activities often mistakes equality and liberality as a human necessity and attaches both with its 'primary features of homogeneity, uniformity, and continuity' (McLuhan 1968:87), as McLuhan does not hesitate to address:

The barbarian or tribal man, then as now, was hampered by cultural pluralism, uniqueness, and discontinuity' (McLuhan 1968:87).

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (1979) Jean-François Lyotard rejects the belief 'that humanity as collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regulation of the "moves" permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation' (Lyotard 1997:66). His concept of 'language games' understands consensus only as 'a particular state of discussion', but not as its end (Lyotard 1997:65). What Lyotard in his advocating of a postmodern knowledge calls for is not a universalist claim of acceptance and consent of 'grand narratives' but that of 'little narratives' to allow 'instabilities, as a practice of *paralogism*, in which the point is not to reach an agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous "normal science" had been conducted.' (Jameson 1997: XIX) as Frederic Jameson explains in his introduction to Lyotard's text. In this respect, Lyotard abandons consensus as sheer nostalgia: the notion of consent 'has become an outmoded and suspect value' (Lyotard 1997:66). Lyotard concludes:

The nineteenth and twentieth century have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name (Lyotard 1997:81-82).

In fact, it seems rather suspicious when McLuhan applies technology as a potential mean to establish consensus:

Having extended or translated our central nervous system into the electromagnetic technology, it is but a further stage to transfer our consciousness to the computer world as well. Then, at least, we shall be able to program consciousness in such wise that it cannot be numbed nor distracted by the Narcissus illusion of the entertainment world that beset mankind when he encounters himself extended in his own gimmickry.

If the work of the city is the remaking or translating of man into a more suitable form than his nomadic ancestors achieved, then might not our current translation or our entire lives into the spiritual form of information seem to make of the entire globe, and the human family, a single consciousness? (McLuhan 1968:61)

What sounds here like science-fiction has actually occupied the scientific research at least from the middle of this century onwards.

In 1954, Norbert Wiener proposed in his book *The Human Use of Human Beings* that it was, at least, theoretically possible to transmit, or telegraph, a human being (Wiener 1954: 103-4). Wiener also coined the term *cybernetics* in 1947 to lay the ground for a new scientific field of research that would essentially unite theories of communication, control and statistical mechanics (Wiener 1948:19, qu. in Thomas 1996:29). Adopting the term from the Greek translation of *steersman*, this new field of research enabled Wiener and his colleagues 'to bind different of knowledge associated with machine systems and living organisms according to a shared textual frame (a common body of texts); a uniform terminological frame of reference; and, finally, a unique *name* that could be used to unify the field in terms of single genealogy [...] and metaphor (the feedback mechanism and its readily accessible image of the steersman) (Thomas 1996:29)¹⁹.

The significant, paradigmatic shift for the theoretical conception of human beings, or living organisms, is recognised by Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows in the essay *Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (1996) in which the authors explain:

For Wiener, cybernetics encompassed the human mind, the human body and the world of automatic machines and attempted to reduce all three to the common denominator of control and communication. From this perspective, the image of the body becomes less one of an engineered body with key tasks being the transfer and conservation of energy, but more a communication network based upon the accurate reproduction and exchange of signals in time and space. Hence, information, messages and feedback which facilitate control and communication become seen as the key aspects of both organism and machines (Featherstone & Burrows 1996:2).

¹⁹ In his book *Cybernetics: or Control in the Animal and the Machine* (1948) Wiener acknowledges that 'the first significant paper about feed-back mechanisms is an article about governors, which was published by Clerk Maxwell in 1868' (Wiener 1948:19, qu. in Thomas 1996:29).

Wiener's suggestions were not kept restricted to, at first, purely theoretical reflections within the field of cybernetics. Its characteristic of an interdisciplinary conception allowed to transfer the basics of cybernetics as well to traditional scientific discourses. In her book *How we became posthuman* (1999), N. Katherine Hayles argues in this context:

At the same time that cybernetics was reconfiguring the body as an information system, it was also presenting itself as a science of information that would remap intellectual terrains. Branching out into disciplines as different as biology, psychology, and electrical engineering, it claimed to be a universal solvent that would dissolve traditional disciplinary boundaries (Hayles 1999:85).

Hayles points out that Wiener addressed his research not without self-reflectivity. She continues:

Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, could be supposed to endorse this imperialist ambition. Yet, contemplating the penetration of cybernetics into social and humanistic fields, he found himself confronted with some disturbing questions. Where should the cybernetic dissolution of boundaries stop? At what point does the anxiety provoked by dissolution overcome the ecstasy? His writings testify to both the exhilaration and the uneasiness that cybernetics generated when its boundary disruptions threatened to get out of hand. They illustrate the complex dynamics that marked the construction of the cyborg during the foundational period of the late 1940s and 1950s. (ibid).

As Hayles argument reveals, the conceptions of cybernetics did not only influence traditional disciplines in their methodological conception. They also had a crucial impact on social, humanist and cultural discourses, such as the conception of the human being, its subjectivity and its social groundings. I will concentrate on these paradigmatic shift from the human to the posthuman in the following chapter.

2.4. FROM THE EXTENSION OF THE HUMAN BODY TO ITS RESOLUTION IN POSTHUMAN DISCOURSES

«You're a successful man, Mr. Poole. But Mr. Poole, you're not a man. You're an electric ant.»

«Christ,» Poole said, stunned.²⁰

PHILIP K. DICK, *THE ELECTRIC ANT*

Despite its controversies, McLuhan's and Wiener's prediction of the 1950s and 1960s, in which both authors have proclaimed a possible transfer, or transmission, of the human consciousness into computer-regulated control and communication network systems has not lost its impact. On the contrary, they rather became reinforced in other scientific disciplines, and were intensified through a highly technological-driven economic, social and cultural forces in western societies.

From the 1950s onwards, influenced by scientific research in cybernetics, artificial intelligence, genetics and information technology, fantasies and conceptions of human-machine interfaces have entered theoretical as well popular cultural discourses. The *cyborg* and *cyberspace* have become mainstream cultural concepts.

In movies, such as *The Terminator* (1984), *RoboCop* (1987), or *Blade Runner* (1982), but as well science-fiction literature by authors, like Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo* (1952), or Philip K. Dick's novels and short stories of the 1960s, have long outdated the classic robot as a mechanic service device. Often presented as destructive killing machines these fictions address the viewers or readers 'fears that human beings become *replaced* by, or that we are *becoming* machines', as Samantha Holland argues in her essay *Descartes Goes to Hollywood* (Holland 1996:159-158). On the other hand, the cyborg is portrayed as an empathetic creature. For instance, the cyborg in *RoboCop*, a police officer whose body and brain is recycled after a shoot-out, suffers from flashback memories of his/its reconstructed identity. The replicants in *Blade Runner* 'believe' they were human due to stored simulated memories and claim evidence of an experienced past of with faked photographs of their presumed human childhood.

In contrast to the macho-masculine cyborg, these figurations problematise in fact human subjectivity in its fragmentation of the self and the body in a highly technological conditioned media society of advanced global capitalism²¹.

²⁰ Dick 1985:497.

From a feminist perspective Donna Haraway suggests in her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) a model of a transgendered cyborg. As a strategically metaphor Haraway's cyborg presents 'a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self' (Haraway 1991c:163) to develop 'alternative utopian images or political imaginaries which embody a shift in the terms of knowledge, power and subjectivity' (Kember 1998:8).

Whereas the strategic concept as well the cultural icon of the cyborg fuses the human body with machinic parts into a hybrid cybernetic controlled system²² to enhance its mobility in spatial as well as social terms, concepts like virtual reality, or cyberspace, address the body of the human user and address it its completeness:

[T]he concept of virtual reality (VR) denotes a simulated world within which a computer user can have a sense of 'entering' either through 180-degree surround goggles and interface fitted to the body, or through simple animated representations of a three-dimensional world - such as architects' commonly create to illustrate proposed buildings to clients (Shields 1996:5).

As Rob Shields states, at present such simulated environments may be simply generated, for example, in flight simulation games, but as well in the textual and graphical orientated presentation of the Internet. Yet its 'technologies represents a critical juncture in the development of "virtual reality". This is more than a stage in technical development or a marketing test: it is a *conjuncture* in the most profound sense of social arrangements and technological capabilities which stretches the "lifeworld" and spills out of the computer world to refigure the conventions and routines of daily life' (Shields 1996:6).

In its cultural but as well military, medical and/or scientific applications cyborgs and VR technologies concentrate on an immersion of the human body, or its parts, into the machinic systems basically to enhance motoric abilities or sensoric reception. However, a next step of research and technological development in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), artificial life ('alife') and so-called 'bioinformatics' present already attempts to dismiss such machinic extensions from direct human control and release them as self-regulated, autonomous entities. As Florian Rötzer argues in his essay *Der*

²¹ In distinction to, for instance, Dr. Frankenstein's ingenious creation of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, these cyborgs are the products of multi-corporations, such as *RoboCop's* Omni Consumer Products (OCP), or the Tyrell concern in *Blade Runner*. Whereas Tyrell's cyborgs are put into action as military troops to colonialize new planets, OCP equips with their RoboCops the executive forces of the profascistic state.

²² The term *cyborg* is an abbreviation of *cybernetics* and *organism*.

virtuelle Körper (1996) such creations could all to soon overtake the human being in its embodiment to leave, or even reject completely the organic structures of its host. Yet, as Rötzer concludes, it is less the actual biotechnological recomposition of the human body which wakes fears and anxieties. What is crucial now, is how medical, scientific, juridical and cultural discourses will define what actually can be called human in the near future:

However coming developments will proceed, the connection of the human body with external or implanted systems, the interactive representation of the body in virtual spaces, the automaticization of virtual and 'real' agents, will lead to a new conception of what can be said to be human and what makes a human body. Right now, the body is less understand as a substance but as an interface to the world and machines, which changes and can be redesigned (Rötzer 1996:66, trans. mine).

To address this problematic, the term *posthuman* has been coined in the theoretical discourses of science and cultural analysis²³. In her book *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), N. Katherine Hayles identifies the 'union of the human with the intelligent machine' as a main theme in the conception of the posthuman in western society (Hayles 1999:2).

Hayles begins her discussion in reflecting on a passage by the robocist Hans Moravec who assumes in prospective of a "'postbiological" future for the human race' (Hayles 1999:6) that 'it will be soon possible to download human consciousness into a computer' (Hayles 1999:1). Referring on the latter's publication *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988), the similarity of Moravec's scenario to the above quoted passage from McLuhan is appalling:

To illustrate, he [Moravec] invents a fantasy scenario in which a robot surgeon purees the human brain in a kind of cranial liposuction, reading the information in each molecular layer as it is stripped away and transferring the information into a computer. At the end of the operation, the cranial cavity is empty, and the patient, now inhabiting the metallic body of the computer, awakens to find his consciousness exactly the same as it was before (Hayles 1999:1).

Yet, as Hayles argues, it is less the question if such operation ever becomes possible by any technological means of today or in the near future, but the very intellectual preconception 'that mind could be separated from the body'. 'Even assuming such a separation was possible,' Hayles states, 'how could anyone think that consciousness

²³ As Hayles states it was Ihab Hassan who predicted in 1977 the 'arrival of the posthuman' (Hayles 1999:247): 'We need first to understand that the human form - including human desire and all its external representations - may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may becoming to an end as humanism transforms itself that we must helplessly call post-humanism ' Hassan 1977:212, qu. in Hayles 1999:1).

in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection with embodiment?' (Hayles 1991:1). What conception of the human identity underlies such investigations? On which premises is the human being, its interplay between consciousness and body, been constituted to enable such investments in scientific but as well in cultural discourses?

The producers of *Star Trek* operate from similar premises when they imagine that the body can be dematerialized into an informational pattern and rematerialized, without change, at a remote location [...] Much of the discourses of molecular biology treats information as the essential code the body expresses, a practices that has certain affinities to Moravec's ideas. In fact, a defining characteristic of the present cultural moment is the belief that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates. It is not for nothing that "Beam me up, Scotty," has become a cultural icon for the global information society (Hayles 1999:1-2).

In fact, what Hal Foster has described as a postmodern 'new intensity of dis/connection' (Foster 1996:221), and coined as 'technosublime' (Foster 1996:222), Hayles observes in the shift from the human to the posthuman, which both evokes terror and excites pleasure' (Hayles 1999:4).

Such *dis/pleasure of the interface*²⁴ between the human and the non-human which not only withers the spatial and temporal distance to connect people due to new communication technology, but it also diminishes the limits between the human and the machine.

In her argument, Hayles considers four general characteristics of the 'posthuman view', she assumes rather as suggestions than prescriptive definitions²⁵:

- A privilegation of 'informational pattern over material instantiation: Embodiment is thus 'seen as accident of history rather than a an inevitability of life'.
- Consciousness is 'regarded as the seat of human identity'.
- The body is 'the original prothesis we all learn to manipulate'. Extending or replacing the body or its parts with other prostheses is no more than a 'continuation of a process that began before we were born'.
- '[T]here are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between the bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals'.

²⁴ I adopt this term from C. Springer's essay *The Pleasure of the Interface* (1991). To state the ambivalence of the human-machine interface I decided to attache the syllable *dis*.

²⁵ See here as for the following, K. Hayles 1999:2-3.

Given that, the 'posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous constructions and reconstruction' (Hayles 1999:3). Hayles sees this conception within the background of a critical deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject:

Feminist theorists have pointed out that it has historically been constructed as a white European male, presuming a universality that worked to suppress and disenfranchise women's voices; postcolonial theorists have taken issue not only with the universality of the (white male) liberal subject but also with the very idea of a unified, consistent identity, focusing instead on hybridity; and postmodern theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have linked it with capitalism, arguing for the liberatory potential of a dispersed subjectivity distributed among diverse desiring machines they call "body without organs" (Hayles 1999:4).

However, despite some affinities the cybernetic discourse of the posthuman appears rather resistant to these critical deconstruction due to its general presumption of the human being as 'a set of informational processes' that in particular neglects the body:

Because information had lost its body, this construction implied embodiment is not essential to human being. Embodiment has been systematically downplayed or erased in the cybernetic construction of the posthuman in ways that have not occurred in other critiques of the liberal humanist subject, especially feminist and postcolonial theories (Hayles 1999:4).

In this respect, the posthuman in cybernetic discourses could be understood less as a radical dissolution of a liberal humanist subjectivity but, crucially, as its intensified continuity. Hayles states:

Indeed, one could argue that the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to *both* the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman. Identified with rational mind, the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body. Only because the body is not identified with the self is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality, a claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily differences, including sex, race, and ethnicity (Hayles 1999:4-5).

In a first instance, this conclusion seems rather paradoxical. Yet, it might become clearer, if we focus on Hayles second assumption that 'the posthuman considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow' (Hayles 1999:2-3).

Forgetting about the body is an old Cartesian trick, one that has unpleasantly consequences for those bodies whose speech is silenced by the act of our forgetting the body is founded - usually women and minorities (Stone 1992:113).

This quote by A. R. Stone is taken from Mark Lajoie's essay *Psychoanalysis and Cyberspace* (1996). Lajoie gives a short treatise on the conception disembodiment in the history of philosophy which I find in this context revealing:

Descartes' s distinction between the mind and the body was based on the philosophic and [...] political intent of providing certainties upon which to base knowledge. Certain, or apodeictic, knowledge has the political advantage of enabling the formation of final solutions to political problems. Descartes's [sic] solution, however, requires that the body is of a different order to consciousness²⁶. Classical philosophy was based on a tragic vision of politics: *the ideal was unattainable because people were embodied*, that is to say, local, finite and desiring beings. Hence the Platonic maxim that a perfect polity requires perfect citizens. Modern thought, from Descartes at least, saw human nature as *perfectible*. Because reason was distinct from bodies, it could be universal, or rather a-local. That the abstract and non-topical was privileged over the partial and the local is the consequence of the attempt on the part of the moderns to resolve the political contradictions of the ancients, albeit only on the level of theory (Lajoie 1996:166, emphasis mine).

Yet, despite the postmodern critical deconstruction Hayles mentions, this theoretical distinction between the body and the mind, where the locus of a pure, rational mind has been presumed from Descartes onwards, has resisted apparently quite virulently in the scientific discourses of cybernetics as presumed by theorists, such as Norbert Wiener, Hans Moravec and Marvin Minsky²⁷. Whereas Wiener encountered his own research critically (see 2.3.), scientists like Moravec and Minsky presume the human being in its mind, and only here. The body becomes an obsolete, neglectable vessel. As such, these theorists do not apply the term posthuman in their own research, but rather hold

²⁶ Lajoie illustrates the modern distinction between body and mind with the King of the Moon in Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchhausen*: 'On the moon, we are told, the inhabitants can separate their heads from their bodies. The head is constantly trying to detach itself from the appetites of the body in order to enter a state of pure contemplation. The body, however, continually grasps for the head, in order to re-attach it to the body. But the body is not merely an object of drives; it is cunning, able to track the head down and catch it. A better analogy for the split of the unconscious and the conscious would be hard to find.

The king's head and his body are dialectically linked, however. After the death of his body, the king rejoices in the final victory of reason over the corporeal, only to be blown away by a gust of wind to hurtle endlessly through space. This exemplifies a central component of Hegel's master-slave dialectic: the master must subjugate the slave, but cannot exist without the slave. Put otherwise, the subject cannot exist without the body, so the body must be fully subjected to the will of the subject.' (Lajoie 1996:166).

²⁷ Whereas Hayles refers Moravec's assumptions to precepts of Norbert Wiener, Nirvan Abbas notes that Moravec's vision is also shared by contemporary scientist: 'Despite the extreme nature of his ideas, Moravec is no isolated mad scientist: his vision of separating mind from body has been endorsed by Marvin Minsky, the MIT professor of Science and Technology. Minsky's integration of human intellect and emotions evokes theories of holistic medicine. His writings, however, do not argue for the preservation of human life; they contemplate its extinction. According to his view, the mind takes over qualities associated with the body, presumably making the latter obsolete.' (Abbas 1999).

back to an outdated conception of a liberal humanist subject whose emphasis lies rather on cognition rather than embodiment (see Hayles 1999:5).

Hayles concludes in this context:

To the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it *continues* the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it. (Hayles 1999:5).

Indeed, its presumed freedom lies in the hyper-rationalised desire to leave the distracting, weak human body behind. Hayles identifies these attempts from a critical perspective as *posthuman* to address, we could say, the *new intensity of dis/connection* which Hal Foster has paraphrased in his observations. For Foster the contemporary 'postmodern' subject has increasingly become contradicted by splittings of morality and the image of the self in its orientation in highly mediated and highly technologised society (Foster 1996:221-223). At the end of the millennium, cybernetic prescriptions and technological extensions have invaded the contemporary subject first on the surface of its body and finally on the constitution of its consciousness. The economic, and more crucially, the utopian investments in simulated dreamworlds of virtual realities (VR) or cyberspace are promising a new, more exciting life; a realm which goes beyond the imagination and limits of the human body which always implies a finality. The appearance of the given body is shaped in fitness studios, redesigned with plastic surgery and disciplined according to dress and beauty codes. As Hayles points out in reference to William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984), the posthuman body has become 'data made flesh' (Hayles 1999:5).

The meaning of life has been decomposed to the genetic code of the DNA. Whereas Benjamin's anatomic surgeon had cut deeply into the body, the contemporary genetic engineer slips smoothly under its skin into the anatomised, molecular structure of the cells.

Since the development of recombinant DNA sequences in the 1970s, new techniques and technologies have increasingly merged research areas of medicine, biotechnology and genetics with that of informatics and cybernetics. According to Eugene Thacker this new inter-discipline of 'bioinformatics' transfers the 'already thoroughly textualised science of genetics [...] on an almost totally simulational level' (Thacker 1998). He exemplifies, for example, in protein analysis the DNA molecule, coded as a sequence of letters for the four amino acids Adenine, Thiamine, Guanine and Cytosine, is put into algorithmic programmes to predict possible protein production. 3-D graphics programmes, on the other hand, are used to visualised molecular modelling:

A body (a molecular body) is recomposed using various diagrammatic strategies (superimposition of text, diagrams, color-coding) and is presented in a way in which it is isolated from any macro-context within the body. However, whereas anatomy depends upon and assumes the visual-representational referent of the visible, often dissected, corporeality of the human body, genetics is engaged in a structural-visual rendering activity which is equally about the production of the body (Thacker 1998).

With the departure of medicine into the molecular structure of cellular production and reproduction, disciplines such as genetics and bioinformatics understand the internal organisation of the human body as a series of information-transmission patterns: the body is presumed as a 'text' which can be decoded and possibly re-coded. Thacker argues:

If the anatomical sciences proceed through an organizing logic of functional parts and wholes, the "anatomizing" logics of genetics research privileges the relationships between a textuality of coding and the molecular mechanics of biochemical processes (transcription and translation of DNA into RNA, production of proteins, reverse transcription of DNA from RNA) (Thacker 1998).

The question which resolve from this observation are two-fold, as Thacker concludes:

First, what are different logics or modes of knowledge-production by which molecular biology (in contrast to anatomy and physiology) approaches and organizes some object termed "the body"? Secondly, as a socially-embedded science with complex histories, how do specific forms of the body-language relationship (forms of textualization, taxonomic fragmentation, complex sign systems) contribute not only to the reproduction of scientific praxis itself, but also to the production of discrete units relating to the subject as a body? The first question has to do primarily with the ways in which a particular scientific practice maps out its terrain of research, establishing the issues, conceptual nodes, and problems that will be of concern. The second question has to do with the methodologies, techniques, and technologies involved in the processes of research, development, and practical (that is, medical and/or commercial) implementation (Thacker 1998).

The criteria which are defined within the scientific discourses of medicine, biology and informatics and emerge in the new discipline of 'bioinformatics' will have crucial impacts on sociological and cultural spheres as soon as biotics and biologics via forms of 'artificial life', or 'living' software, are recognised as economic factors, as Barbara Kirchner, Michael Staudt and Diethmar Dath have argued in a recent essay for the German pop culture magazine *Spex* (Dath 1999:45). Due to intensive costs of information technologies to maintain scientific research, the economic pressure of profit-orientated corporations, such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, environmental

and agricultural industries who subsidise research programmes, will force scientists to define, what is 'life'. The authors thus call for counter-concepts:

Otherwise they, who globally destroy life, are enabled to monopolise the language game by which the limits of "life" are discussed in issues from domestication of animals to eugenics, from environmental health to natural history, or the revisionism of evolutionary theory enforced by molecular genetics. Therefore, it is important parallel to the sabotage of bio-factories to struggle for accessibility to discussions, as they have already been established between neo-darwinists, like Richard Dawkins, and their critics, such as Stephen Jay Gould, or between the biologist E.O. Wilson and leftist American Sciences Studies (Dath 1999:45, trans. mine).

Due to the limits, set to this dissertation, I cannot deepen the complexity of these discussions. Yet, what I have achieved hopefully is to highlight in some of the basic assumptions which have been made in sciences, i.e. cybernetics and bioinformatics, which will have crucial impact and direct consequences for what constitutes human being, its life, its body and the concept of the social and cultural subject.

Without doubt, these discussions have entered popular, cultural, and critical discourses which have produced anxieties accompanied by fears as well as fascinations in a global 'techno-culture' (Ross & Pynchley 1991). Hal Foster has described in *The Return of the Real* these problematics as a *new intensity of dis/connection*: a contemporary state of contractions and confusions where Benjamin's dialectic methodology of *correct distancing* seems hardly to be applicable. But as a writer and critic, Foster remains entrapped in this dilemma, even when he suggest at the very end of his book 'to make value judgments that in Nietzschean terms, are not only reactive but active - and in, non-Nietzschean terms, not only distinctive but useful' (Foster 1996:226).

In his own concept of criticism Foster hesitates to apply Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) to its full intent. Nietzsche applied an active *forgetting* (Nietzsche 1993:291) not to simply avoid value judgements but to take on individually responsibility for his decisions, his will to power. This active forgetting Nietzsche presents not as total, blatant erasure of the past, of what had done. But it is 'some sort of tabula rasa of the consciousness to situate something new, especially for the more noble functions and functionary to govern, to foresee, to determine in advance' (Nietzsche 1993:291, my trans.). Active forgetting means in this perspective to step *consciously* for a moment aside, not to escape in utopian dreamworlds but also not to get confused by the immediacy of the world one lives in: keep cool, don't panic & plan your next step. Unfortunately, this everyday life knowledge was overseen in Foster's argument. Certainly, it is not that simple as such. But I can see it in Donna Haraway's hybrid

cyborg concept, Rossi Braidotti's nomadic subject (1994)²⁸ and even in Sarah Kember's mystical, desiring vampire (1998). With Kember I see these parodic, metaphorical figurations as 'alternative utopian images or political imaginaries which embody a shift in the terms of knowledge, power and subjectivity' (Kember 1998:8). Although these constructed models cannot, and do not intent, to resolve the fears and fantasies, they nevertheless help us 'to understand fears and fantasies regarding technology', as Foster admits (Foster 1996:221).

Indeed, they rather incorporate these anxieties as hybrid, monstrous and abject creations and argue, as Donna Haraway formulates for her concept of the cyborg, 'for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction' (Haraway 1999c:150). Hence, these hybrid creations confirm the deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject and have to be understood alongside N. Katherine Hayles critical approach to the posthuman, as she addresses the 'deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject as an opportunity to put back into picture the flesh that continues to be erased in contemporary discourses about cybernetic subjects' (Hayles 1999:5). What Foster formulated with the negative notion of a 'technosublime' and characterises as 'a partial return of a fascistic subjecthood' (Foster 1996:222) is here maintained in a dialectic of utopian dreams and dystopian nightmares: a presence of now, which N. Katherine Hayles paraphrased in the following statement:

If my nightmares is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival (Hayles 1999:5).

²⁸ See R. Braidotti 1994.

| 3 | THE PASSION FOR THE CODE

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a 'metaphor' - a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectoires²⁹.

MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE*

²⁹ De Certeau 1988:115.

3.1. MEDIA AS TRANSLATORS

In *Understanding Media* McLuhan describes technologies as 'ways of translating one kind of knowledge into another mode': an operation, he states, which 'has been expressed by Lyman Bryson in the phrase "technology is explicitness". Translation is thus a "spelling-out" of forms of knowing. What we call "mechanisation" is a translation of nature, and of our own nature, into amplified and specialized forms' (McLuhan 1968:56): the realm of technology becomes a second kind of nature. McLuhan does not distinguish between technology and media as they are both essentially connected to representational modes of the metaphor:

All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms. The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way. Words are a kind of information retrieval that can range over the total environment and experience at high speed. Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered and outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. By means of translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols the entire world can be evoked and retrieved at any instant (McLuhan 1968:57).

Today, in the highly industrialised western societies of advanced global capitalism, this explicitness is experienced with a crucial new intensity. Whereas technologies were formerly often described as means of separations and alienation, we now witness the opposite: public life is no longer just enacted in geographically limited spaces but has been transferred to the mediated realm of daily televised events and non-events of news and chat shows. Prepared by the invention of the telegraph and telephone in the 19th century and enhanced by radio and television in the 20th century, new communication technologies, such as the global computer network of the Internet, are relativating physical presence by diminishing spatial, temporal as well social boundaries. Yet, for authors such as Rob Shields the 'local and co-present remain privileged' (Shields 1996:5). In *Culture of Internet* (1996) the author argues:

There is an all too easy tendency to contrast the here and now with the distant. Instead [...] technology mediates presence. Like language, which allows us to envision within our mind's eye abstract and invisible concepts, technology makes the distant and foreign, present and tangible. The simple technology of text on a computer screen has allowed Internet to become a medium in which users may develop a palpable sense of others' [absent] bodies, even engaging

in forms of public sex over the computer viruses, elaborating sensual fantasies and sexual dialogues in 'hotchats' and 'cybersex' (Shields 1996:5)

The questions are here, as so often, by which instances, and for what purposes, are these new public spheres maintained. As Mark Lajoie states in the same publication, 'it is worth thinking about who owns the major networks, and what effect this has on 'public' gatherings. The network is much like a shopping mall: it gives the pretence of being a public space, but it is in fact privately owned' (Lajoie 1996:167).

The desire for a space within which all desires can be played out, where the very nature of reality is a narcissistic reflection of the user's desire, is worthy of analysis. We should be suspicious of any technology which promises to eliminate the problems of the symbolic - or the problems of the polity. Cyberspace, as it is constructed by its proponents, promises to do just that. The question is now worth asking is, what is being lost? (ibid.)

Transferred onto a general level of critical discourses in the field of postmodern culture and technology, some answers to Mark Lajoie's question have been approached by Hal Foster's in his final chapter of *The Return to The Real*. In relating Benjamin's argument of a loss of distance and McLuhan's concept of electrical extension, Foster attests with his notion of *dis/connection* a general crisis for the individual subject which has become 'wired to the spectacular events' (Foster 1996:221) within an advanced capitalistic consumer society:

This wiring connects and disconnects us simultaneously, renders us both psychotechnically immediate to events and geopolitically remote from them; in this way it subsumes both the imaginary effects of spectacle in Debord and the nervous networking of media in McLuhan. Such dis/connection is hardly new (think of the Kennedy assassinations, the Munich Terror Olympics, the Challenger explosion), but it has reached a new level of oxymoronic pain-and-pleasure (Foster 1996:221-222).

In this 'technosublime', as Foster calls it, critical distance appears enormously difficult to maintain. The 'desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly' (Benjamin 1992:216-218) that Benjamin had observed in the 1930s has reached with the media coverage 'live' from the battlefields of the Gulf War in 1991 a new, explicit as paradoxical 'inclusive' dimension, as Foster witnesses in the video footage of 'smart bombs' which releases an all-too-real and deadly impact. Foster states:

I was riveted by the images, by a psycho-techno-thrill that locked me in, as smart bomb and spectator are one. A thrill of techno-mastery (my mere human perception become a super machine vision, able to see what it destroys and to

destroy what it sees), but also thrill of an imaginary dispersal of my own body, of my own subjecthood (Foster 1996:222).

Melting the viewer's body with that of the launched missile in merging his/her point of view with that of the intelligent weapon, the transmission of the footage is interrupted exactly at the same instance when this ballistic amalgam of destruction and voyeurism hits its target. It is not the military censor or the media's broadcaster who restricts here the missing contents of information but the destructive force of the film/missile shot itself. Foster continues:

Of course, when the screens of the smart bombs went dark, *my* body did not explode. On the contrary, it was bolstered: in a classic fascistic trope, my body, my subjecthood, was affirmed in the destruction of other bodies.

[In his technosublime, then, there is , which occurs at the level of the mass too, for such events are massively mediated, and they produce a psychic collectivity - a psychic nation, as it were, that is also defined against cultural otherness both within and without](Foster 1996:222).

When Foster recognise in this 'technosublime' a partial return of a fascistic subjecthood' (ibid.) we realise that this distorted realm as it presents fascination in its all-too-real and deadly impact differs radically from the sublime Kant had addressed in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) two hundred years ago. As Kant observed in this writing the sublime in nature, it raises the question if the dichotomy of nature and culture as advocated since Enlightenment in modernism is still valid today. Or, to be more precise, if it has not rather been enforced by its dissolution and resolution into the realm of second nature, that of technology, or techno-culture.

For Jean Baudrillard this assumption has become obvious and literally all-too-visible. For him, the contemporary scene has reached an *Ecstasy of Communication* (1983), a state of an 'obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible-than-the-visible. It is the obscenity of what no longer has any secret, of what dissolves completely in information and communication' (Baudrillard 1983:131).

Obscenity begins precisely when there is no more spectacle, no more scene, when all becomes transparence and immediate visibility, when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication (Baudrillard 1983:130).

Thus, according to Baudrillard there is no longer separation by the means of technology as Guy Debord predicted in *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, but rather its opposite: everything has become exchangeable in a mediated realm of representation.

This is not the result of a general abolishment of differences in gender, ethnicity, class, or wealth, as such. But the contemporary media society has discovered these differences as profitable economic values and renders them flat on the 'non-reflective surface' (Baudrillard 1983:127) of 'the screen and the network' (Baudrillard 126). The domestic scene of privacy, 'a scene of interiority, a private space-time' (ibid.) has vanished. Thus, Baudrillard concludes:

We are no longer a part of the drama of alienation; we live in the *ecstasy of communication*. And this ecstasy is obscene. The obscene is what does away with every mirror, every look, every image. The obscene puts an end to every representation (Baudrillard 1983:130, emphasis mine).

For Baudrillard this obscenity still offers fascination, though a 'cold' one, without passion. The pleasure this ecstasy of communication reveals is 'no longer one of manifestation, scenic and aesthetic, but rather one of pure fascination, aleatory and psychotropic' (Baudrillard 1983:132) For Baudrillard, this is not necessarily a negative value judgment as 'surely there is an original and profound mutation of the very forms of perception and pleasure':

We are still measuring the consequences poorly. Wanting to apply our old criteria and the reflexes of "scenic" sensibility, we no doubt misapprehend what may be the occurrence, in this sensory sphere, of something new, ecstatic and obscene (Baudrillard 1983:132).

This old criteria is, for instance, the insistence of a critical distance. But as Benjamin, and more dramatically, Foster showed in his notion of the 'technosublime' this position is hardly to maintain in the contemporary scene. Thus, a possible *Return of Real* is hardly the presumed reality of former days, where everything returns to its original state, its right place, its truth. A nostalgia, which Baudrillard opposes with the figure of the schizophrenic:

The schizo is bereft of every scene, open to everything in spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion. He is himself obscene, the obscene prey of the world's obscenity. What characterizes him is less the loss of the real, the years of estrangement from the real, the pathos of distance and radical separation, as is commonly said: but, very much to the contrary, the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defence, no retreat. It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the overexposure and transparency of the world which traverses him without obstacles. He can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only pure screen, a switching center for all networks of influence (Baudrillard 1983:133).

French philosophy has often addressed the schizophrenic as a prominent figure, if we think about, for instance, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) and their model of 'body without organs'. More, in their analysis of a fragmented, decentered subjectivity they laid the metaphorical-strategical foundation of a decentered cultural network, which is still, despite its increasing centralisation of capitalistic corporations, maintained in the pioneering conception of the Internet as a system of an open and accessible network structure. In its development it was based on 'amateur cultures' (Cubitt 1998:144) of pioneering programmers, artists, hackers, and scientists to establish a network to share and exchange of information, tools, and techniques to produce ever changing and anonymous culture (Cubitt 1998:144). Ideally, as Dan Thu Nguyen and Jon Alexander argue in reference to Michel Foucault's 'miniaturisation' of power relations³⁰, this 'rhizomatic' structure distributes power and dissolves the power of 'those who have or hold it', (Nguyen & Alexander 1996:119):

It is a precariously shifting relationship between dominant and dominated, the knower and the known. It does exceed their singularities. As it spins and twirls, it produces one human turning point after another. It produces one turning point after another. Eventually, it always transforms the people it catches up, their relationships, their contexts - and itself. It continually produces an ever new matrix of discourses, bodies, of strategies, and of techniques. Power's nature is no longer essential. Just as the new form of the subject is the user or monad, the new forms of power are operational. We may therefore speak of the techniques of power, or of a technology of power. One can carry out the functional micro-analysis of such power across the terrain of human bodies. Operating on their social and personal relationships and associations, work and leisure spacetime, education and training, etc., it gives form to everyday life. The new topography of power, become an appropriate virtual map to guide us through the world's electronic nervous system. Knowledge, Truth and Power have become as shadowy and elusive as the virtual bodies and subjectivities that claim membership in cyberspacetime (Nguyen & Alexander 1996:119-120).

It is here where we can render Foster's notion of dis/connection with a positive identification, when we identify this dis/connection as constant, strategic and positive manoeuvres to perform these dis/connections on the level of micro-relations to associates and allies.

Following Lyotard's assumptions of *The Postmodern Condition* these strategic manoeuvres are not attempted to propose a 'pure' alternative, or replacement of given the system but to necessarily live with the system and activate a 'knowledge of language games' and 'assume responsibility of their rules and effects'. As '[t]heir most

³⁰ See here especially M. Foucault 1990:98-102.

significant effect is precisely what validates the adoption of rules' (Lyotard 1997:66) the task is to insist on paralogy, i.e. instabilities of the dis/connection.

As Lyotard points out the 'computerization of society [...] could become the "dream" instrument for controlling and regulating the market system, extended to include knowledge itself and governed exclusively by the performativity principle' (Lyotard 1997:67). To resist this 'use of terror', Lyotard demands to 'give the public free access to the memory and data banks' (ibid):

Language games would then be games of perfect information at any given moment. But they would also be non-zero-sum games, and by virtue of that fact discussion would never risk fixating in a position of minimax equilibrium because it had exhausted its stakes. For the stakes would be knowledge (or information, if you will), and the reserve of knowledge - language's reserve of possible utterance - is inexhaustible. This sketches the outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown (Lyotard 1997:67).

3.2. THE ENTRAPMENTS OF REPRESENTATION

De-realization, the accident of the real. It's not one, two, hundreds or thousands of people who are being killed, but the whole reality itself. In a way, everybody is wounded from the wound of the real. This phenomenon is similar to madness. The mad person is wounded by his or her distorted relationship to the real [...] Virtual reality leads to a similar de-realization. However, it no longer works only at the scale of individuals, as in madness, but at the scale of the world.³¹

PAUL VIRILIO

What Lyotard observes with his conception of *language games*, and Baudrillard calls a *passion for the code*, is without doubt related to strategies and forms of representation. As representation we could identify the basic human desire to render the world into a symbolic order of signs (images, text, music and so forth). As W. J. Thomas Mitchell states, Aristoteles defined all arts - whether they consists of language, visual or musical contents - as forms of representation: an activity which is a specifically enacted by humans. In fact, as Mitchell explains, modern as well as antique philosophy understands man as a 'representing animal'. And it is this ability of creating and managing signs - entities which stand *for* something else, or are applied *instead* of something else - which distinguishes the *homo symbolicus* from any other being (Mitchell 1994:17).

Whereas the Antiquity considered representation as the basic but exclusive term of aesthetics, Modernity transferred the term into the realm of politics (Mitchell 1994:17): the representation of the individual in the political body of the state: But there is also a constant necessity of man to perform a role in a social context to situate or to justify his own being in the world. Thus representation has to be acknowledge as a social practise: 'Representation is always *of* something or someone, *through* something or someone, for someone.' (Mitchell, 1994:18, my translation). As Mitchell explains aesthetic or semiotic representation (that is 'when objects stands for other objects') and that of political representation (that is 'when persons *act for* other persons') apparently come together in the realm of theatre where persons (actors) stand or impersonate other (usually fictive) persons (Mitchell 1994:17-18, trans. mine).

³¹ Virilio 1994.

In a social context we have already accepted the idea of playing roles. Not that we perceive these roles, we enact constantly in our everyday life, as being innated and determined by a superior divinity as the ancient Greeks thought. We have already accepted the fact that we, ourselves, have built this giant theatre stage by our means, in which we put up masks and concepts of the self.

But there is also the wish to leave the given stage and create a new and possible better place than the world in which have been brought up. This is where utopian worlds gain their attractions and anxieties. The problem with modern utopias - and I would include here projects such as cyberspace and virtual realities - is that they are less considered as remote paradises which either are no longer accessible, like the *Garden Eden*, or only promised by theological redemption.

The prospect of late 20th century utopianism is related to such religious or spiritual moments of transcendence. Yet, this transcendence is rather articulated in a 'secularised' mode: it is conceived as something 'not-yet-known' (Ernst Bloch 1988, qu. in Cubitt 1998:55) but nonetheless promised by technology to be possible in the near future.

In this context Florian Rötzer notes:

Representation is not just the mean to recognise something as something, by comparing it with a different medium; it is not just the possibility to present a fetishicised non-existing - something which does not (yet) exists - to objectify it or to produce an illusion via representation. Since Plato's cave parable there is a phantasm of a surpassing of reality by its representation which roams the human mind as a *possibility*. The cave is the metaphor of an imprisonment of a system of deception and blindness. But it also can be interpreted as a fiction of a life which has dismissed reality with the aid of technologies without missing or requiring reality (Rötzer 1994:69, trans. & emphasis mine).

What Rötzer describes as 'imprisonment' is the entrapment *within* representation which no longer discloses a realistic or immediate perspective upon the Real, but only on the already simulated or constructed modes of representation (Rötzer 1994:69).

Rötzer unfolds a short narrative (Rötzer 1994:54) of representation as followed:

There was a time where objects and events were connected with the words and images: the age of similarities, the age of cognition as a mirror, the age of representation. What followed was the destruction of similarities and the transition of a thinking of signs which were arbitrarily assigned to the signified. Finally, one rejects the magical idea that signs produce in any respect a relation to anything: the world becomes an illusion. Models precede the Real, the Real itself is replaced by the signs which generate it. The Real is artificial, its reference is phantasmatic [...] Signs and images become a closed system, in which one strives nomadic; they leave the body of reality as a void they orbit [...] Signs and images begin to become rampant; one loses oneself, without

finding an origin, without finding a split which discloses an outside (Rötzer 1994:54-55, trans. mine).

Rötzer assures that this narrative is far from presenting a historical evident account as the described tendencies effect each other rather in a non-linear continuity. Yet, his narrative allows to contextualise the contemporary 'fatal yearnings' for something which is *this side* of signification, representation, imagination, or prediction; something which simply *happens* (Rötzer 1994:55). Foster's *return of the real*, is in Rötzer addressed as the yearning for the 'appearance or disappearance of things, the revenge of the materiality, the fatality of a faith' (Rötzer 1994:55, trans. mine): an event which materialises like a sudden accident. This accident is different to that of mediation, or simulation, of accidents we witness daily on our TV screens³². It presents the fatalistic yearning for a break through to something real which potentially could harm, or even destroy the body. But it nonetheless conjures the thrill of the *real thing*, the fascination of displeasure, pain and anxiety which characterises the attraction for the extreme in cultural activities, sports and sexual practices, as well as it triggers the pleasurable consumption of Doomsday scenarios, world conspiracies and other catastrophes at the end of the millennium.

But beside this *fatal strategies* (Baudrillard) this realm of technosublime generates a desire for transgression of representation to reach the outside, the other, or the unthinkable.

³² In an interview with Louise Wilson Paul Virilio defines today's media as 'media of accidents' (Virilio 1994).

3.3. DESCENTS INTO THE MAELSTRÖM

»It may look like boasting - but what I will tell you is truth - I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so a paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in a view of a so wonderful a manifestation of God's power [...] After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a *wish* to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make.«³³.

E.A.. POE, A DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTRÖM

Instead of a comprehensive conclusion I would like to concentrate in the following on strategies which present models of resistance towards traditional modes of representation. Rather than negotiating the virtues of simulation, we find here critical conceptions to disfigure the smooth surface of a digital code in a realm of impurity. If according to Baudrillard in the contemporary scene everything appears transparent, all-too-visible, likewise obscene, it the challenge is to develop new forms of data, information and knowledge to confront the pervasion of a hyperreal simulacrum.

It is Marshall McLuhan who mentions the 'drowning sailor' of Edgar Allan Poe's *A Descent into the Maelström* as his favourite literate figure (see Kroker 1988:92). Surprised as a sudden whirlpool opens under his fishing boat, the sailor 'knows that he is doomed within the downward spiral of the whirlpool' (Kroker 1988:92). Yet, in facing the sublimity of the maelström in the 'sensation of awe, horror, and admiration' which gazed about him (Poe 1994:167), the sailor is able to detach himself and studies the phenomenon:

I have already described the unnatural curiosity which had taken the place of my original terrors. It appeared to grow upon me as I drew nearer and nearer to my dreadful doom. I now began to watch, with a strange interest, the numerous things that floated in our company. I *must* have been delirious, for I even sought *amusement* in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam below (Poe 1994:168, emphasis in the original).

In the thread of his own death, the sailor observes the natural forces of the whirlpool. Applying his knowledge that 'a cylinder, swimming in a vortex, offered more resistance

³³ Poe 1994:165.

to its suction' (Poe 1994:169), he realises that an escape is only possible in leaving the bulky body of the boat behind. Fastened to a cask, the sailor finally releases himself into the open sea, 'without another moment's hesitation' (Poe 1994:170).

With her strategic model of the cyborg Donna Haraway develops an update of the experience of 'drowning sailor'. For her the best place to locate a critical work 'remains *in the belly of the monster* that is, in the fictional and technical constructions of late twentieth-century cyborgs, site of potent fusions of the technical, textual, organic, mythic, and political' (Haraway 1991b:24-25). Haraway's attempt is to 'stage conversations on the fate of the riven categories of "the human", "the natural", and "the artifactual" among heterogeneous and polyglot scientific and feminist texts' (Haraway 1991b:25):

The focus is on how these discourses make possible figures of critical subjectivity, consciousness, and humanity - not in the sacred image of the same, but in the self-critical practice of 'difference', of the I and we that is/are never identical to itself, and so has hope of connection to others. The tale fits together at least as well as the plot of Enlightenment humanism and science ever did, but I hope it will fit differently, negatively (Haraway 1991b:25).

It becomes obvious that Haraway understands the modern 'tales' or 'plots' of the Enlightenment project and its inheritance in contemporary discourses of sciences, humanism, progression, and technology, as *myths* in Barthesian terms. Although these myths produce certain values, norms, and classifications, as Roland Barthes argues in *Mythologies* (1957), they do not actually present true or false values. Rather they order messages, or affirmations, within a *second-order semiological system* (Barthes 1964:121). Therefore, for Barthes, the most effective weapon against the myth is to mythologise the myth itself:

This constructed myth would reveal a true mythology. As the myth steals from language, why not steal the myth? (Barthes 1964:121).

Haraway confronts the Enlightenment myth of the (dominantly masculine) universal humanist subject with her own construction of an ungendered cyborg:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creation of fiction [...] The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion (Haraway 1991c:149).

Haraway's writing addresses similar topics as Foster observes in *The Return of the Real*. It is the techno-military miniaturisation of space and time, which 'has changed our experience of mechanism. Miniaturization has turned out to be about power; small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous, as in cruise missiles' (Haraway 1991c:153). Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* is written in a poetic and almost dream-state' as the author reveals in an interview with Andrew Ross and Constance Penchley (Haraway 1991a:14). However, beside all the pleasurable imagery which Haraway examines in contemporary consumer products, the author does not fail to address the pain and exploitation which underlies their production:

Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile - a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore (Haraway 1991c:153).

Not unlike Haraway's hybrid interface of the cyborg, Friedrich Kittler promotes a critical concept of *synergy* between the human and the machine. In a conversation with Florian Rötzer and Sara Rogenhöfer he criticises an all too easy consumerist behaviour of simply pressing buttons of electronic devices while their casing-lid (think of a TV set, a radio, or a PC) 'must only be open by expert' (Kittler 1993:89, trans. mine):

And if the critical discourse - as if the classic Europe only had established a Frankfurt School - does not jolt this operation instruction but rather philosophises of its own fall by the consciousness industries, then there is hardly any help possible (Kittler 1993:89, trans. mine).

Rather than complaining about the impact of alienation and determination of the human by technological developments, Kittler proposes the concept of synergy between humans and machines as the more effective approach.

This strategy might not be able to open the casing-lid, as Kittler argues. However, Kittler's model does not any longer insists on the dichotomy between human nature and techno-culture. It rather identifies a positive synergetic relation of humans and machines in artistic as well as cultural and critical discourses. At least, so Kittler, this conception would allow a playful activity on the means of all buttons (Kittler 1993:89).

In Kittler's understanding media is more than just the pure senso-motoric prosthesis which McLuhan proposed. He refers to Kant's idea of the mathematical sublime: a complexity such as Mandelbrot's fractal geometrical structures cannot simply be calculated on a piece of paper; the human mind is not able to cope with these forms of mathematical imagination. However, if the results of such calculation processes are

printed by a computer, they appear as something beautiful: 'That's how difficult it is to distinguish between the beautiful and the sublime' (Kittler 1993:96-97, trans. mine).

In addressing Paul Virilio's questioning of technological warfare, Kittler argues that beside aesthetics of media, the sublime has in fact to be taken into further account. Both authors identify war as the 'supernatural sublime' (Kittler 1993:94):

For the first time, in Grabbe's³⁴ description of battlefields the sublime is no longer a quality of the unmanipulatable nature of the Alps or the Vesuv. Waterloo in Grabbe is the vulcan produced by man. The only difference is that these humans are no longer humans but artillery battalions of Napoleon [...] Stendhal's³⁵ description is quite comparable. Here, the sublime of technological warfare begins, which is in a strict sense not perceptible, as the trauma excludes according to Freud all consciousness. Whereas the perception of the beautiful allows sympathy towards what it sees, the sublime and the non-representable of modern wars has to return like the urge of repentance in the Freudian trauma - in texts of Pynchon, or paintings of Kiefer (Kittler 1993:94-95).

Kittler argues that this sublime, or trauma, would not exist if the Enlightenment had been right with its 'theology of the human':

At first, man had invented his gods, then states, and finally technologies whose forces of terror collapse, if its inventor, with some delay, 'recognises himself in its virtue', and declares his copyrights. Not much different, common media theory articulates its lessons: by reasons not to be defined, the human individual had, at first, externalised his muscles into steam-engines, trains, and automobiles. Following this, he transferred his senses upon analogue media, such as film and gramophones, and finally he plugged his brain into the digital computer (Kittler 1993:95).

For Kittler the *reality* of media appears quite different than this theorisation: it runs strategically and is triggered by moments of escalation. Thus, the history of media and technologies is rather to be understood as a differentiation in military terms (Kittler 1993:95) and less in a purely civil extension of the human. Therefore, today it is no longer the distance of nature and culture which prepares the sublime, as Kant had observed. Kittler argues that it is contemporary the 'distance between the secret and the public, between complex technologies and media of entertainment' which produces 'the real sublime, as it includes a thread' (Kittler 1993:97):

³⁴ Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801-1836), German dramaturgist and military lawyer, beside Georg Büchner, Grabbe is reputed as one of the most intriguing play-writers of the German pre-revolutionary *Vor-März*. In 1831 Grabbe wrote the tragedy *Napoleon oder Die hundert Tage*. (Meyers großes Taschenlexikon 1993, Vol. 8: 278).

³⁵ Stendhal (1783-1842), born Marie Henri Beyle, French author and precursor of Romanticism (Meyers großes Taschenlexikon 1993, Vol. 21: 107).

The same technologies allow to pulverise complete cities or landscapes. Since the formerly as pure classified mathematics had been handed over to engineers and computers, even this pulverisation can function as the aesthetic sublime, the *tabula rasa*, or the unrepresentable (ibid).

As the today's forms of media have been developed for technological wars, the demand for artists like critics is, according to Kittler, to interfere modes of transmission and networking. This call supports the demand of Lyotard when he proposes to 'give the public free access to the memory and data banks' (see chapter 3.2.). In recent critical discourses and practices this demand has been more and more articulated. The new forms of media make evident, as Kittler concludes, that even in traditional modes of representation it was always information which had been produced and distributed but also been corrupted by various agents with different agendas. This fact demonstrates where 'texts, music and images belongs to - into the memory of the computer' (Kittler 1993:91, trans. mine):

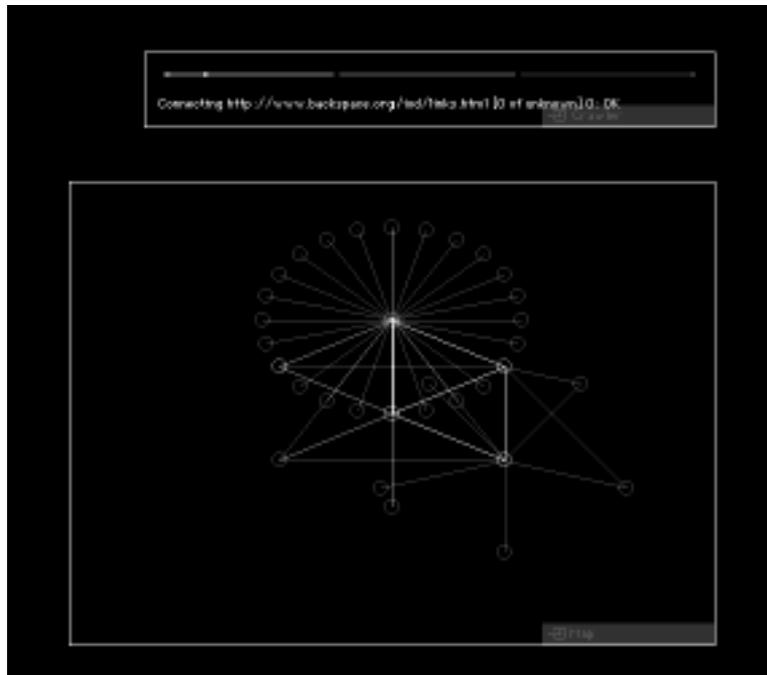
Thus, art and philosophy never had a point of view, which was subliminal to data processing. Everything, which had been passed on, is able to become switched/shifted. Given this, I follow those which call the old European culture a burden - a burden, in that sense which had been blown up in tradition-machines, such as the university, and that has been more than just a data processing. This seating order is quite familiar: the spirit beyond the letter, the genius beyond the work, the sense beyond all systems... Such loading, or masquerades, of data processing fall apart in the perspective, we gaze upon the old things. As fans, by the way, not of non-sense but of an exactness alias information (Kittler 1993:91, trans. mine).

Today, new parameters, new forms of data and representation which subvert given settings and configurations have been, and still have to be, developed. The strategies which follow these idea are manifold, often contradictory, and yet, in the words of Lyotard, *paralogistic* (see, chapter 2.3.). Therefore, they might reveal moments of resistance and positions of criticism which oppose a universalist consensus.

I see this attempt approached in magazines, such as *Mute*, which applies criticism less in strict academic discourses. On the contrary, it promotes rather a fanzine culture of music and game reviews, and even more a forum to present forms of independent art practices and media activities. Its slogan 'the activist as an artist - the artist as a useless activist'³⁶ advocates less the old avantgardistic non-sense of *l'art pour l'art* in creating a neutral, dysfunctional, and apolitical, system of signs (a myth as such). It promotes and reflects on cultural activities (net art , music, literature, political initiatives, etc.) where in fact a distinction between criticism and artistic practice is hardly to be

³⁶ See cover of *Mute*, Vol. 13.

made. Given this, this agenda formulates a synergy between human agents and machinic extensions.



I/O/D's *Webstalker*, Map

At the same time artists and programmers, like the Londoner collective I/O/D, work to relativate already as 'natural' perceived modes of representations of the Internet. Unlike common web browsers, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft's Internet Explorer, I/O/D's experimental net browser *Webstalker*³⁷ strips down the contents of web sites. Whereas familiar applications present graphics and text as 'web pages', the *Webstalker* radically dismisses this old metaphor of traditional print media and represents the Internet as that what it is: a hyperlinked, non-linear structure of data which is stored on a global, likewise immaterial scale. 'Crawling' from one link to another, step by step, the *Webstalker* draws a map of points and connection lines on the screen: a virtual landscape of data. It measures and cartographs the Internet. And yet, like Mandelbrot's fractal geometry, whose infinity can only be calculated and presented in parts and fragments, a computer screen, no matter which screen size it ever has, will never be able to grasp the whole virtue of this matrix. The *Webstalker* reveals the abstract beauty of the net. If the programme application can be called 'art' is in this perspective

³⁷ See [<http://www.backspace.org/iod/>].

irrelevant. As Matthew Fuller of I/O/D concludes, '[a]longside the categories art, anti-art and non-art, something else spills over: not-just-art' (Fuller 1998).

The Webstalker presents a tiny impression of both entities, that Gilles Deleuze observed with Kant as *the mathematical Sublime of the immense* and *the dynamic Sublime of power* (Deleuze 1984:52).

In this context, the immensity of the Internet could be described as something *sublime*: as it is essentially established by the materialistic hardware of computer servers, its virtue is final. And yet, as the software of data and information is constantly modified and reconfigured, at the same instance, it presents a *virtually* infinite. But the Internet could also be understood as a dynamic matrix of power, as it has to apply a limited consensual mode of representation to manifest its virtue. Again, these characteristics I would describe as *technosublime*.

We know that this technosublime does no longer hold any proposals to a realm of transcendence. And yet, this new form of the sublime reveals a re-enchantment of the nostalgic sublime that Kant was examining. The technosublime is unreal, artificial - a painful thread. And yet, it opens a space of hopes and utopias which could reveal new perspectives beyond the limitation of a universal humanism. That is why I like to finish my observations - for the moment, as I do not identify them as definitive and exhausted - with a quote by Donna Haraway:

My stakes are high; I think "we" - that crucial riven construction of politics - need something called humanity and nature. This kind of thing that Gayatri Spivak calls 'that which we cannot want.' We also know, from perspectives in the ripped-open belly of the monster called history, that we cannot name and possess this thing we cannot desire. That is the spiritual and political meaning of poststructuralism/postmodernism for me. "We", in these discursive worlds, have no routes to connection other than through radical dis-membering and displacing of our names and our bodies. We have no choice but to move through a harrowed and harrowing artifactualism to elsewhere (Haraway 1991b:25).

Michael Thomas, London/Oldenburg/Hamburg 1999.

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