Chapter Three: Discarnate Bodies: Ghosts, Spectres & Phantoms of the Media

German media philosopher Fredreich Kittler has pointed out that the ‘realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture’.\footnote{145} And in today’s digital world, that’s unimaginably vast. As part of this research project I began examining historical examples of optical or visual media - immersive media if you like - in an attempt to uncover patterns and better understand the nature of today’s screen culture. Can virtual media of the past - such as the magic lantern, the zograscope or stereoscopic panorama - shed light on our contemporary digital media landscape, with our disembodied flux of constantly circulating images? What is the drive behind this recurring impulse to externalise our imagination? To turn reality into representation? Why are we so attracted to moving images and light? Is this saturation of images an unprecedented turn in the history of humanity? In the course of the research, it became apparent that the metaphors and tropes relating to the world of ghosts, spirits, effigies, phantoms and apparitions continued to surface in discourses about the illusory-creating powers of various forms of media. They were very prominent in the days of the phantasmagoria shows of the 18th century and the rise of spiritualism in the 19th century. The linkages between communication technology and the supernatural can also be seen in the discourse surrounding the early days of telegraph, radio and television in the 19th and 20th centuries, with electrical signals being seen as allowing for a mechanical association of consciousness and the body. As cultural writer Marina Warner says, communication media, generated by scientific tapping of electricity and other forces such as waves and rays, have ‘wrapped us in spectral contacts with the time before this time, with events that have taken place and their opposite’.\footnote{146} She points out the Greek word \textit{eidolon} - denoting a spectre or simulacrum, denoted something not incarnate or real. ‘Our ‘idols’ are now indeed phantasmic - long dead figures from history, stars and athletes survive in their spectral incarnations on celluloid.’\footnote{147}

The first reference to a projection lantern comes from a description by Italian writer/illustrator Giovanni da Fontana, in 1420. His book \textit{Liber Instrumentorum}, contains a

\footnote{145} {\textit{Freidrich Kittler, Gramophone, Film Typewriter} (Standford, Stanford Uni Press, 1999), 13.}
\footnote{146} {\textit{Warner, Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the 21st Century}, 375.}
\footnote{147} {Ibid, 330.}
This category of image-making has come to be known as a ‘magic lantern’. The first magic lanterns were simply oil lamps that used a lens to project and enlarge glass paintings. Importantly, it was an instrument for the imagination - not simply a projection of something from the existing world. As Warner says, magic lanterns and optical devices did not concentrate solely on extending the faculty of sight as an organ of sense, but developed concurrently as instruments of the imagination.\textsuperscript{149}

But it is not the earliest known example of using animation - or using light and drawings to create the illusion of movement. Earlier this year, new research was published documenting how moving art and animation were believed to be created in prehistoric cave art. French paleolithic researcher Marc Azema has studied the representation of animal movement in cave art for more than 20 years. Crucially, he is also a film-maker, and has recognised what has been overlooked by other researchers in the field. In the latest issue of the journal \textit{Antiquity},\textsuperscript{150} he and fellow researcher, Florent Rivere documented two methods prehistoric people used to create their own animated movies - the use of flickering images and twirling discs. In one 10 metre frieze at Chauvet Cave, horses, bison, lions, mammoths and woolly rhinos were represented in a hunting story, Azema reported. He reported: ‘Paleolithic artists invented the principle of sequential animation, based on the properties of retinal persistence. This was achieved by showing a series of

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{giovanni_d_fontana_liber_instrumentorum_circa_1420.jpg}
\caption{Giovanni da Fontana, \textit{Liber Instrumentorum}, circa 1420.}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{149} Warner, \textit{Phantasmagoria}, 14.
\footnotetext{150} Azema Marc and Rivere Florent "Animation in Palaeolithic Art: A Pre-Echo of Cinema" \textit{Antiquity} 86, no 332 (2012).
\end{footnotes}
juxtaposed or superimposed images of the same animal.'\textsuperscript{151} Contours of the animals were sketched multiple times, including legs or heads or tails moving. The full impact of the graphic illusion is achieved when light from a grease lamp or a torch is moved along the length of the wall.\textsuperscript{152} They also discovered a second method of creating the illusion of movement using spinning discs made from bone. These round discs were previously thought to be buttons or pendants, but Azema and Rivere made the link that they were in fact the earliest version of the thaumatrope - later re-invented in the 1820s. A leather thong or string is threaded through and rotates the disc, creating an animated effect of movement. Azema states: ‘Paleolithic thaumatropes can be claimed as the earliest of the attempts to represent movement that culminated in the invention of the cinematic camera.’\textsuperscript{153} Thaumatropes were based on the belief that an image is briefly retained by the brain - this has been called the ‘persistence of vision’, and it allows us to see movement in cinema as continuous. Thaumatropes were part of a broader period of scientific experimentation during the 19th century, where a plethora of scientific and optical toys emerged that played with vision, illusion and movement. These gizmos and gadgets were given names with Greek derivatives that ended in the word scope or trope - the Greek for viewer. One of the most famous thaumatropes was a bird in the cage. On one side a bird is painted, on the other a cage. When the viewer twirls the card and keeps looking the bird appears in the cage. In the 1830s, came the phenakistoscope (or the deceptive viewer) and a similar device called the stroboscope (whirling viewer). They have also been called fantascopes. The zoetrope was similar to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 323. \\
\textsuperscript{152} See the animation video accompanying Azema and Florent’s article “Animation in Palaeolithic Art: A Pre-echo of Cinema,” Antiquity, \url{http://antiquity.ac.uk/ant/086/ant0860316.htm}. \\
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.}
the phenakistoscope, but now several people could watch what the toy did simultaneously and the new design did away with the mirror. At the time, these devices were called philosophical toys, and had been originally invented to demonstrate scientific principles, then became children’s toys. Also in the panoply of imaginary media devices was the kaleidoscope, the panorama, the diorama and the zograscope, which enhanced the sense of depth from a flat picture. What is the impulse driving these attempts to alter our perceptions of reality? According to media scholar Erik Kluitenberg, media machines down the ages become ‘sites onto which various types of irrational desires are projected’. He goes on to argue that a central theme in the early development of moving pictures was the paradox of the undead and the becoming.

Looking back on the fantascope and other instruments and technology used to move or project images in the 18th and 19th centuries we may also discover traces... of a genealogy for contemporary, immersive, hybrid multi-media culture.

Frequently these devices serve to animate the inanimate. Kluitenberg’s point is that media technology is not neutral - the way we conceptualise it influences the meaning of what we see or hear. This ties in to my argument that many of these machines or devices were underpinned by a metaphysical desire - a drive to find some other, unattainable reality.

155 Ibid, 188.
156 Ibid.
The first description of a magic lantern dates back to Jesuit priest and scholar Athanasius Kircher’s description of a ‘catotrophic lamp’ and its operating mechanism to project the glass slide images on the walls of a darkened room in his 1671 book *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*. He chose devils and supernatural subjects to experiment with. He used smoking lamps, various lenses and slides, heated compound crystals and chemicals and sprinkled water on them to produce reactions, and create a play of colours on the walls. During the 18th century many improvements were made with mirrors and lenses and magic lantern shows became popularised as devices for telling stories. By the end of the 17th century, travelling lanternists were putting on small-scale shows in inns and castles, using a lantern lit with a feeble candle. Often these shows featured devils and supernatural themes - hence the name the ‘magic lantern’. After the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror of the 1790s, the showman Etienne Gaspard Robertson developed the idea further by setting the image on an opaque black background instead of clear glass, enabling the image (a head or figure) to appear to float free in the air if projected on smoke or a screen. Thus began the ‘phantasmagoria’ ghost shows, which became immensely popular and also travelled over to England. They used spooky glass harmonica music and many other theatrical effects. Ghosts were made to increase and decrease in size, hover and appear and vanish unexpectedly. They created the illusion of life-like animation. Supposedly held as a mock exercise in scientific inquiry, as a quest to demystify ghosts in the Age of Reason, these shows were actually designed to heighten the supernatural effects and terrify the audience. The term phantasmagoria then took on the general meaning in the English language of a shifting series of phantasms or imaginary figures, as though seen in a dream or fevered condition. Author and Stanford University academic Terry Castle provides a strong argument.

*Figure 26. Figurine of travelling*

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158 Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 143.
theoretical and psychological analysis of the cultural development of these phantasmagoria shows, and this also helps provide a partial explanation for the continuing attraction that images hold over us today. She is a literary critic, so her argument comes out of her research into romantic and gothic fiction, such as *Wuthering Heights* or the *Mysteries of Udolpho*. In the development of gothic fiction, dating from the late 18th century, during the period of the Enlightenment, it is possible to observe a growing sense of the ghostliness of other people, she argues. ‘The corporeality of the other - his or her actual life in the world, became strangely insubstantial and indistinct. What mattered was the mental picture, the ghost, the haunting image.’¹⁵⁹ One saw one’s beloved in the mind’s eye. In the Radcliffe novel, old-fashioned ghosts have disappeared, as befits a new rational world view. But a new kind of super-naturalization of everyday life takes its place. Sensory experience gives way to an obsessional concentration or nostalgia for images of the dead, which turn out to be more real and palpable-seeming than any object of sense, Castle argues.¹⁶⁰ With the onset of the Enlightenment, and the rejection of old superstitions and beliefs about ghosts, people began to view ghosts as ‘phantoms of the mind’, produced by an overwrought or fevered mind:

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160 Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 143.
The supernatural is ... re-routed so to speak into the realm of the everyday. In the moment of romantic self-absorption, the other was indeed reduced to a phantom, a purely mental effect, an image as it were, on the screen of consciousness itself.  

Castle argues that the phantasmagoria became a master trope in 19th century romantic writing. The spectres of the phantasmagoria shows floated before the eyes like actual objects in the material world; in other words, they were perceived by the eyes as real light and shadow images - they were not just effects of the imagination. The subliminal power of the phantasmagoria lay in the fact it produced in the audience an irrational and maddening perception: 'one might believe ghosts to be illusions, present 'in the mind’s eye’ alone, but one experienced them here as real entities, existing outside the boundary of the psyche.’ The magic lantern was the obvious mechanical analogue of the human brain, in that it made illusionary forms and projected them outward. After the Enlightenment in Western Europe, ancient beliefs in ghosts and spirits were now seen as coming from within, ‘internalized and reinterpreted as hallucinatory thoughts’. In Sigmund Freud’s much quoted description of this historical process in his essay The Uncanny (1919), he proposed that Western civilization had surmounted animistic modes of thought, which were characterized by the idea of a world peopled with human spirits, a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic to deal with this world. But despite passing through this phase of thinking, we were still left with residual traces of animistic mental activity, which manifested as ‘uncanny’ - unheimlich - a conversion of a repression, to a fear:

Today we no longer believe in them, having surmounted such modes of thought. Yet we do not feel entirely secure in these new convictions; the old ones live on in us, on the look-out for confirmation. Now, as soon as something happens in our lives that seems to confirm these old, discarded beliefs, we experience a sense of the uncanny...  

161 Ibid, 125.  
162 Ibid, 133.  
163 Ibid, 124.  
164 Ibid, 159-60.  
165 Ibid, 143.  
Interestingly, in elaborating on this animistic mode of thinking in another essay, *(Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts)*\(^{167}\) Freud puts forward the view that spirits and demons are projections of our emotional impulses and we turn these emotional cathexes (in psychodynamics cathexis is defined as the process of investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea)\(^{168}\) into persons, we people the world with them and we then meet our internal mental processes again *outside* ourselves. This is a very important and relevant point to the underlying theme of this thesis. The psychological paradigm re-created the world of the imagination as haunted. The mind itself could be subject to phantoms and apparitions, an alienating force within subjectivity itself.

Terry Castle’s central premise is that the historic Enlightenment internalization of the spectral - ‘the gradual reinterpretation of ghosts and apparitions as hallucinations or projections of the mind - introduced a new uncanniness into human consciousness itself’\(^{169}\) and it is allegorized in the literature of the time. In the romantic literature, old-fashioned ghosts had disappeared, but the hero or heroine became ‘haunted’ by spectral images of the one they loved. There emerged an historic spectralization of the ‘other’, a growing sense of the ‘ghostliness’ of other people, ‘a new obsession with the internalized images of other people’. Castle makes the analogy that: ‘One could now be ‘possessed by the phantoms of one’s own thought - terrorized, entranced, taken over by mental images, just as in earlier centuries people had suffered the visitations of real spirits and demons.’\(^{170}\) Adding to this disassociation from corporeal reality has been a repressive shift in attitudes towards death, traced by the historian Phillipe Aries, from the late 18th century onwards. He also references *Wuthering Heights* as emblematic of a cultural change that marks a transition period where the spirit of the other, of the loved one, lives on despite death and becomes overwhelming in its intensity. He argues that in this extraordinary classic novel, when Heathcliff starts digging at the grave of the dead Cathy, to be near her, that is ‘the communication of a spirit: a new phenomenon, different from the appearance of a ghost. Formerly the return of a soul was a sign of misfortune or distress that had to be prevented by satisfying its demands by means of a

\(^{167}\) Ibid, 147.  
\(^{168}\) Ibid, 154.  
\(^{170}\) Ibid, 92.
black or white magic. But here it is the spirit of the deceased returning to the one she loved, who is calling her’.\textsuperscript{171} During the 17th to the 19th centuries there was a rising belief in the autonomy of the disincarnate spirit, a conviction that the spirit was the only immortal part of the human being. Aries goes on to describe how death has now been banished from modern life, has become improper, hidden and unspeakable. A number of changes have led to this, including the breakdown of communal social life, changes in affective patterns, and the increasingly secular and individual nature of society. The transfer of death to hospitals in modern times has also (Castle, Terry 1995) kept it out of sight.

\textit{(in the past) people paid attention to death. Death was a serious matter, not to be taken lightly, a dramatic moment in life, grave and formidable, but not so formidable that they were tempted to push it out of sight, run away from it, act as if it did not exist or falsify its appearances.}\textsuperscript{172}

But it was during the start of the 18th century, Aries argues, that affectivity became concentrated on a select, smaller group of individuals, who became ‘exceptional, irreplaceable and inseparable’. The nuclear family replaced the extended tribe:

\textit{The sense of the other now takes on a new primacy. The history of literature has long recognized this quality of romanticism and made it commonplace. Today there is a tendency to regard romanticism as an aesthetic and bourgeois mode, without depth. We now know that it is a major objective fact of daily life, a profound transformation of man as a social being.}\textsuperscript{173}

But a ‘growing cultural anxiety regarding the fate of the body after death conditioned an unprecedented flight into fantastic ideation’.\textsuperscript{174} With the romantic absorption of the other, the emotional attachment to images of other people becoming an \textit{idee fixe}, actual human relations are also changed. Terry Castle argues that the direct corporeal experience of other people, the messy touching, smelling, tasting, seeing and so on, has started to become emotionally intolerable, thanks to the new and overwhelming fear of loss and separation:

\textsuperscript{171} Castle, \textit{The Female Thermometer}, 17.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, 174-75.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 405.
Real people, needless to say, change, decay and ultimately die before our eyes. The successful denial of mortality thus requires a new spectralized mode of perception, in which one sees through the real person, as it were, towards a perfect and unchanging spiritual essence. Safely subsumed in this ghostly form, the other can be appropriated, held close and cherished forever in the ecstatic confines of the imagination.¹⁷⁵

This has continued on to the 21st century, where, Castle argues, we have privileged the mind over life, and sought to deny our own corporeality. This has manifest in a number of ways, from the longing for simulacra and nostalgic fantasy to the antipathy towards the body and its contingencies. It can also be seen in the technological embodiment of this drive: a ‘compulsive need’ to invent machines that ‘mimic and reinforce the image-producing powers of consciousness’.¹⁷⁶ Ghosts and spectres retain their ambiguous grip on the human imagination, they simply migrate into the space of the mind, says Castle. And this is projected outwards with our media devices.

In the work *Phonograph, Video, iPod* (figs 28, 29, 30 & 31) I have assembled my own machine/figure, which is isolated in its own internal loop. The music device, the *iPod*, is one of those machines Castle speaks of that work to reinforce that image-producing power of consciousness. The artwork is concerned with a number of things, but firstly the power of the gaze - that is, the gaze in the sense used in film theory. As Martin Jay says, in his survey of visuality in Western culture: ‘The cinema could thus be called an artificial hallucinatory psychosis in which perceptions and representations were confusingly intertwined.’¹⁷⁷ German media philosopher Friedrich Kittler says that film was the first of the media devices to store ‘mobile doubles’ that humans, unlike other primates, were able to ‘misperceive as their own body’.¹⁷⁸ I built a ceramic figure from earthenware grogged paperclay clay, bisque fired it, and gave it a second firing with a dry blue/grey glaze. The choice of surface treatment related to the aspect of the conceptual idea of the figure enduring over time. It is the link between the various historical manifestations of media technologies. I photographed the head of the figure and used a photographic editing program to join this image to an image of an iPod. This

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¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 472.
¹⁷⁶ Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 134.
¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 136.
¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 137.
was silk-screened onto the left hand of the ceramic figure. In the space of the right hand, I attached an antique Super 8 video camera as a replacement for the hand. So ultimately, the figure is in the position of filming herself. The character is both filming and being filmed - both watching and being watched, an infernal loop that traps consciousness.

The voice is made manifest in the phonograph. The work also references the history of media apparatuses - the interconnectedness and lineage of them - through the use of the antique radio/record player that she emerges from. I have tried to create a Jack-in-the-box type feeling - a surprising manifestation. The figure has also surprised itself. She has metamorphosed. The origins of the iPod lie within the history of the invention of media devices, starting in the late 19th century. As Kittler remarks, cinema and the phonograph are Thomas Edison’s two great achievements that ‘ushered in the present’. The essence of man escapes into apparatuses, according to Kittler, once the technological differentiation of optics, acoustics and writing exploded Gutenberg’s writing monopoly around 1880. The phonograph, the earlier precursor to the record player, cannot deny its telegraphic origin, he says. My feeling in building the

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179 Jay, Downcast Eyes, 478.
180 Kittler, Gramophone, Film, Typewriter, 16.
Figure 29. Clarissa Regan. *Phonograph, Video, iPod*, (detail), 2012. Ceramic, phonograph, film camera. 118 x 112 x 56cm.
Figure 30. Clarissa Regan. *Phonograph, Video, iPod*, 2012. Ceramic, phonograph, film camera. 118 x 112 x 56cm.
sculpture was the sense that history builds upon itself; that our media technologies have
not sprung upon us, disconnected from their historical antecedents, but are part of an
enormous lineage.

Other media scholars have noted parallels with modern communication technologies
and the disembodied presences of other people. The preservation of our images, our
voices, in our recording devices creates ‘less an experience of immortality than a
phantom, a bodiless transparent, or even invisible double, who haunts our imagination
rather than reassuring us’, argues Professor of Film Studies Tom Gunning.182

Essentially, the 20th century naturalised the shift to the phantasmic. Communication
Professor John Durham Peters speaks of how the great communication revolution of the
19th century - the invention of the telephone, wireless telegraph, phonograph and so on,
created a media world of spectral beings. ‘By preserving people’s apparitions in sight
and sound, media of recording helped re-populate the spirit world. Every new medium
is a machine for the production of ghosts.’183 Old dreams of angelic communication
were revived by these inventions. ‘The closest analogue to the strange, ontological
status of a phonograph is the realm of spirits, who possess continuing intelligence
without corporeality.’184 In his study of communication theory down the ages, Peters, a
professor in communication studies at the University of Iowa, highlights the linkages
between metaphysical metaphors and communication.185 He points out that angels (from
the Greek angelos or messenger186) ‘are unhindered by distance’ and ‘exempt from the
supposed limits of embodiment’ as ‘they are pure bodies of meaning’.187 They became
the ideal of perfect communication:

Ghosts and angels haunt modern media, with their common ability to spirit
voice, image and word across vast distances without death or decay.188

182 David Thorburn, Rethinking Media Change, The Aesthetics of Transition (Cambridge, MIT Press,
2003).
183 John Durham Peters, Speaking into the Air, A History of the Idea of Communication, 139..
184 Ibid, 164.
185 Ibid, 75.
187 Peters, Speaking into the Air, 75.
188 Ibid.
Figure 31. Clarissa Regan. *Phonograph, Video, iPod* (detail), 2012. Ceramic, phonograph, film camera. 118 x 112 x 56cm.
Prof Peters traces a history of the introduction of the electric telegraph and discourses surrounding mesmerism and spiritualism of the 19th century. Spiritualism - talking to the deceased - directly modelled itself on the ability of the telegraph to receive remote messages, Peters argues:\textsuperscript{189}

\begin{quote}
To many, the electrical telegraph seemed the latest in a long tradition of angels and divinities spiriting intelligence across vast distances....the spiritualist haunting of the new medium decisively shaped the popular reception of the technology.\textsuperscript{190}
\end{quote}

Radio - which drew upon the newly analysed electromagnetic spectrum (a word that had once simply meant ghost), reactivated dreams of angels and mesmerism, Peters argues, without being able to satisfy them. We have had over a century to become used to what people of the late 19th century viewed as ‘phantasms of the living’ -materialisations of spectral bodies appearing in various media.\textsuperscript{191}

And John David Ebert also notes these connections, commenting that the communications revolution of the 20th & 21st centuries made people ‘telepresent’, so that ‘phantoms’ were beamed around the world, in the form of detached voices and liquid crystal ‘ghosts’.\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{quote}
Shades and revenants were, for the first time, made tangible by the media. These were not physical humans, but ghostly excrescences of their physical selves made of electrons and photons rather than atoms and molecules.\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

To pull these complex philosophical threads together, I would argue that:

a) the history of image-creating media goes back essentially as far as human-kind itself,

b) it is such a strong drive that numerous technologies keep getting invented and reinvented, in order to fulfil this function,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid, 94.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid, 141.
\textsuperscript{192} Edbert, The New Media Invasion, 138.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
c) the media technologies appear to have a number of roles: not only do they play with our perceptions, and work to turn reality into representation, they also act to project our imagination outwards,

d) there has long been an association with spirits and ghosts, either as the subject matter of these projections, or manifesting as a metaphysical impulse in communication devices to connect with some other world or entity.

That last point, the metaphysical impulse, was behind the series of angel figures I built (figs 32, 33, 34 & 35) during 2010/2013. My thinking during the construction of these figures was as a way of apprehending the idea of the ‘discarnate angel’ - a term used by McLuhan whilst describing the process of electronic media. According to McLuhan, our electric information media have made us discarnate. When information is sent over the telephone or the radio, the person’s voice or image is sent - minus a physical body.

Figure 32. Clarissa Regan, Angel Figure, 2011-12. Ceramic, TV aerial. 80 x 50 x 50cm.

Figure 33. Clarissa Regan, *Discarnate Angel*, 2011-12. Ceramic, TV aerial. 80 x 50 x 50cm.
Figure 34. Clarissa Regan, *Discarnate Angel*, (detail), 2011-12. Ceramic, TV aerial. 80 x 50 x 50cm.
As McLuhan says: ‘The sender goes on the air and is instantaneously everywhere without a body.’195 When I began building these figures, I was thinking about reception as well. How we have become receptive beings. It only became apparent to me, after I made the works, the contrary logic of our metaphysical desires. We wish to extend our powers, to become angelic, but we are rooted to the earth. The clay figures are quite heavy and dense, weighted to the ground. I used a copper red glaze on the figures, a strong colour with references to blood and the materiality of a human being. Yet, paradoxically, the glaze also gives a strong shine to the figures. They are symbolic and figurative, not real. I was aiming to capture a certain other-worldly quality about them. Light reflects off the glaze and gives a certain strength to the pieces. There is a yearning aspect to the beings. With the use of television aerials, I wanted to create a ‘rusted on’ aspect, that the wings we are trying to grow will rust away and decay over time. They are not substantial. Our technological media will come and go. We are growing these extensions, but they will not necessarily give us flight. We are embodied beings, with solid bodies and with an extended, enlarged consciousness. Working with ceramic sculpture and discarded items of communication devices (radios, aerials, gramophones and so on) has been a way of providing a counter-point to the ephemera of digital information for my practice. Anna Fritz, a contemporary sound and radio artist from Canada, in discussing her methods of intervention and subversion of existing radio norms, makes the comment that a number of artists are acting to ‘de-industrialise communication’.196 She says:

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195 Ibid.
...the emphasis on home-made or modified technology proposes a kind of anarchitectural intervention to the fixed structures of industrial communication. Transmission as craft - exercising skill to make something, with the implication of making it by hand - dispels the heady modernist fantasies of mastery over space and time, and retrieves transmission as a mediated but embodied machinic practice within the dimension of the human.197

The point about being within the ‘dimension of the human’, will be raised again in a discussion of the carnivale philosophies of Mikhail Bakhtin in Chapter Five. It relates to my way of bringing industrial/commercial objects into the human domain. Fritz goes on to describe ‘transmission artists’ as artists experimenting with sound and communication, whose practices include working with old technologies such as crystal receivers, or appropriating new technologies to invent new hybrid networks. My work has elements of this practice, particularly in the deliberate drawing of attention to the hand-made elements of old communication devices. This quality has also been described in the work of people engaged in the so-called Steam Punk movement. Bruce Sterling (who was the co-author along with William Gibson of a seminal first generation steam-punk novel), in describing the qualities of this aesthetic, points out that by playing with archaic and eclipsed technologies, ‘we are secretly preparing ourselves for the death of our own technology’.198

The same clear impulse to humanize and personalize technology found in the projects of prominent makers can also be found in steampunk art...it often fuses the organic and the mechanical as if trying to reconcile two opposing impulses.199

To go back to the earlier points I raised about the historical drive to manufacture image-creating media, (points A and B), my research into the why of this phenomena led me to consider a number of questions: Why do we now carry with us, at all times in our hands, these mobile devices with their flickering colourful play of light? Why do our heads turn automatically to a television screen whenever we enter a room? Why has my butcher put two giant television screens above his shop counter of lamp chops? Is it a physiological drive, hard-wired into us, to seek out motion and light? In the course of my historical investigation into the magic lanterns and phantasmagoria shows, I came across their mid 20th century offspring: the psychedelic light-shows of the 1960s. Issues

197 Ibid 48.
199 Ibid, 112.
of sensory perception and awareness were a core concern of the psychedelic movements that sprang up in those times. I began examining psychedelic art, which, contemporary digital media scholar Dr Andrew Syder, was designed to privilege performative, spontaneous experiences of sensory stimulation and visual pleasure. Vision and visuality were central topics of discourse in the psychedelic movement. ‘Indeed, there are few periods in recent history when investigations into the phenomenology of perception have so permeated Western society’, Dr Syder says. ‘Psychedelic perception was characterised in terms of the liberation of the observer from the prison of normative modes of vision and consciousness.’ The light shows of this period, which became a world-wide phenomenon, and were embraced by rock musicians such as Jefferson Airplane, were an attempt to break down the hegemony of the linear, narrative movie, with its square frame. They began with San Francisco art professor Seymour Locks in 1952, who had wanted to revive the European Futurist theatre experiments of the 1920s and 1930s, who had used projected images on scrims with live dancers and performers. Locks used the tool of the teacher - the Viewgraph overhead projector - to startlingly new effect. In a direct echo of the coloured light experiments of Kircher from 1640s, Locks found that paints could be stirred, swirled and otherwise manipulated in a glass dish with slightly raised edges to keep the liquid from spilling. Dr Syder comments:

*Psychedelic happenings tried to disperse vision rather than focus it; they tried to engage the body as much as the eye; they tried to individualize visual experience rather than homogenize it; they tried to produce spontaneous mixed-media environments rather than prepackaged single-media texts.*

Which leads me to the novelist Aldous Huxley. Dr Syder calls him ‘arguably the single most influential figure on the 1960s psychedelic movement’. It was his book, *The Doors of Perception*, that influenced a generation - including having a pop group named after it. But it was in the reading of his philosophies about altered states of perception

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201 Ibid, 6.
202 Ibid, 37.
203 Ibid, 213.
that I was able to extract useful material in my quest to uncover the drive behind our enduring attraction to light, colour, patterns, movement and imagery. A novelist, already well-known for his dystopian work about the dehumanizing aspect of technology, *Brave New World*, Huxley was living in LA in the 1950s, when he volunteered to take mescaline as part of a research study being conducted by Dr. Humphry Osmond, a noted psychologist. In fact the word psychedelic - meaning mind-manifesting - was coined by Huxley and his doctor. Huxley had already spent years exploring world religions, mystical experiences, world art and mythology. He was thus able to contextualise his experience in a framework of mystical traditions from around the world. Essentially, he argued that what he calls ‘prenatural brilliant light and colour’ are common to all visionary experiences and we all seek after intense light and colour, and that the urge to ‘escape from selfhood and the environment’ is almost always present for everyone. It is why humankind has tried to replicate this in stained glass, fireworks, theatrical spectacle, Christmas-tree lights, to name a few - and why we are attracted to rainbows, sunlight and jewels - things ‘most nearly resemble the things that people see in the visionary world’.

It is a vision of the world outside of conceptual thought, before we verbalize or turn things into abstractions. He calls this part of the brain the ‘antipodes’, a region we have not explored. As Dr Syder comments:

...through his discussion of language as a system of signs that inhibit our perception of reality, Huxley drew upon understandings from semiotics and phenomenology, and tapped into the concerns about subjectivity and a loss of the Real that have been at the core of definitions of the modern observer. In saying that we are all too apt to take

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concepts for data and words for actual things, Huxley explored the idea that the Real has been supplanted by the Sign — building on the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and C. S. Peirce, and anticipating the subsequent expansion of this notion in postmodernism, poststructuralism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis.\textsuperscript{206}

Huxley argued we ordinarily look at the world as though through a muddy window pane, that in fact human perceptual apparatuses screen out large portions of reality, so as not to be overwhelmed by an excess of sensory information. And that language systems condition the observer to think that this reduced awareness is the only awareness.\textsuperscript{207} When he took the mescaline, Huxley reported that: ‘Visual impressions are greatly intensified and the eye recovers some of the perceptual innocence of childhood’.\textsuperscript{208} The colour of objects shined forth with a brilliance, having bypassed the body’s normal processing ability - ‘entirely natural in the sense of being entirely unsophisticated by language or the scientific, philosophical and utilitarian notions by means of which we ordinarily recreate the given world in our own drearily human image.\textsuperscript{209} Great literature around the world and accounts from visionaries have documented this experience of light that seems to shine from within, from the Garden of Hesperides and the Elysian Plains of the Greco-Roman tradition, the Indian’s Ramayana, the Avalon of the Celts, or the Buddhist paradises. Descriptions of paradise are bright with gems.\textsuperscript{210} It is this urge to transcend self-conscious self-hood, that is, Huxley argues, a ‘principal appetite of the soul’.\textsuperscript{211}

\textit{Men have spent enormous amounts of time, energy and money on the finding, mining and cutting of coloured pebble. Why? The utilitarian can offer no explanation for such fantastic behaviour. But as soon as we take into account the facts of visionary experience, everything becomes clear....these things are self-luminous, exhibit a praeter-natural brilliance of colour and possess a praeter-natural significance. The material objects

\textsuperscript{206}Syder, "Shaken out of the Ruts of Ordinary Perception", 43.
\textsuperscript{207}Huxley, \textit{Doors of Perception}, 6.
\textsuperscript{208}Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{209}Ibid, 76.
\textsuperscript{210}Ibid, 82.
\textsuperscript{211}Ibid, 49.