SECTION 3: Simulacra

Chapter Five: Nightingales & Seeing Machines: Living with Baudrillard’s Pact With The Devil

This chapter will examine the idea of technological mediation - or conducting our everyday lives through the medium of technology - within the framework of theoretical discussions of the notion of the simulacra, or the replacement of the real with the artificial. I will provide an historical overview, then look at some examples in our present-day lives, as highlighted by media scholar and author Roger Silverstone and then probe deeper behind this drive. I am concerned particularly with the effects upon the human body, on our psyche, and our consciousness. These are not new concerns, but, as I’ll explain, the transformative changes impacting upon society, from the compression of time/space discussed in Chapter Four, to the surveillance loop of consciousness and feedback in our digital media, have greatly amplified these tendencies. It is my contention that changes in perceptions of time and space - driven by what could be described as the industrialisation of personal relations, of our culture and our bodily senses - has as yet many unforeseen consequences. I am not making an argument against the use of technology, but I am arguing we have to be awake to what its effects may be.

To provide an historical context, in order to illustrate some of the great transformative effects communication technologies have had upon society and individuals, I’d like to point to a study of the period between 1880 and the First World War, by academic and author Stephen Kern. He examined the upheavals following the introduction of a number of inventions of that period, such as the bicycle, the telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, the car and airplane. Not only did these inventions change people’s lives with their functions, he explains, but they also created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space. He traces a detailed path among the Cubist painters, to stream-of-consciousness novels, theories of relativity and World War 1. The role of the telephone is particularly instructive. It broke down not only horizontal barriers - those of distance - but crucially, vertically, across social

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276 Ibid, 1.
barriers, according to Kern. He paints a vivid image of the rigid hierarchical world of the aristocrats of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to World War 1. To be an aristocrat, one had to have 16 noble quarterings. They lived secluded lives in castles throughout the empire. They had all the positions of power and jobs at the time. Before the telephone, one had to go through an ‘elaborate protocol of introductions, calling cards, and the protective function of doors, waiting rooms, servants and guards’ just to make contact with someone from this world. The Emperor Francis Joseph - the father of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand (whose assassination sparked War War 1), was one of the most rigid and socially isolated of anyone. Recognizing the threat of the new gadgets, the Kaiser wouldn’t allow electric lights in the palace. He shunned the use of typewriters, automobiles and refused to install a telephone. As Kern says, he was the embodiment of the old world of European aristocracy. ‘The telephone in particular was incompatible with the aristocratic principle that certain persons, by virtue of their position in society ... have special importance.’ Its introduction levelled the hierarchies and made all places equidistant from the seat of power. Not only that, but Kern writes of how the events in the months leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914 would have been unfathomable to anyone who had lived before the age of electronic communication. The technology had contributed to an accelerated sense of time and the speed of communication confounded the traditional diplomatic corp, who were more used to slow, deliberate negotiative accretions, and instead led to rash decisions by governments to enter war. As Kern notes, in the summer of 1914, the men in power lost their bearings in the hectic rush ‘paced by flurries of telegrams, telephone conversations, memos and press releases’. By war’s end, the Austro-Hungary Empire had collapsed. That point about all places being equidistant from the seat of power is also made by Marshall McLuhan in his discussion of the decentralizing effects of electronic technology. ‘The nature of the satellite surround is that it has no center and no margin. ‘Centers’ exist everywhere.’ He argued that prior to the Renaissance, Europe had no national borders as such, but simply centres of thought and influence. He says the prime characteristic of the satellite is that it decentralizes the user, like the telegraph

277 Ibid, 315.
278 Ibid, 316.
279 Ibid, 315.
280 Ibid, 260.
281 McLuhan, The Global Village, 118.
and the telephone. And he made the prediction that as the satellite process finally connects up all regions of the globe, software will dictate a shift from the visual to the acoustic. ‘In world affairs, decentralization will highlight diversity and fragmentation.’

This aspect of synesthesia was also part of what I wished to explore in my work Face Time, (figs. 52, 53 & 54). I was consciously thinking about the role of the telephone in the development of the Internet age, and the mix-up of the senses. To McLuhan, the telephone not only increased the speed of the private voice, it ‘retrieved telepathy’ and also created a sense within people of ‘being everywhere at once’. He says: ‘When people are on the telephone or on the air, they have no physical bodies but one translated into abstract images.’

This 19th century invention is a precursor to many of the qualities of the internet. To create the work, I hand-built a human torso from clay, then bisque fired it. I gave it a bronze patina from an acrylic paint and the use of chemicals. I used the dial of an old telephone instead of a mouth on the face. I also built an iPad form out of clay and fired it with a black glaze. I then placed a photograph of

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283 Ibid, 118.
284 Ibid, 147.
the character’s face on the iPad and used two-part epoxy resins to seal the image into the simulacra of the iPad. I then used an iPad connecting wire and spliced it together with the curling wire of an old Bakelite telephone I had purchased from a second-hand goods store. Finally, I placed the installation on an old telephone table. By being placed on the wooden table, the character becomes separated from the ground. Her senses are all mixed up: she is listening to what appears what appears to be, a visual device, the iPad, which developed from the iPhone and ultimately, the telephone. There is a thread connecting all three. Yet, as McLuhan argues, ‘media tend to isolate one or another sense from the others. The result is hypnosis. Tactility is not a sense but an interplay of all senses.’

The shift to the acoustic began with the telephone and continues rapidly with the internet. In my construction of the piece, I was also thinking about the idea of being off-kilter, and the asymmetry of senses that creates an imbalance. She is listening intently, but perhaps not hearing. The mouth-piece of the character, which has been transformed into the dial of the telephone, is slightly askew in the face.

Avital Ronell, who has written a thoughtful book about the technological and cultural history of the telephone, poses the question: ‘Does the one who picks up the call of a

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286 McLuhan, Counterblast, 22-23.
Figure 54. Clarissa Regan, *Face Time*, (detail), 2012. Ceramic, telephone, table. 100 x 84 x 50cm.
telephone become an extension of the apparatus, or is the converse conceivable; is one speaking through a severed limb or organ, as Freud will suggest and Marshall McLuhan after him? As 20th century historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford, has pointed out, machines themselves are ambivalent - ‘it is both an instrument of liberation and one of repression’. It has both ‘economised human energy, and misdirected it’. Writing in the early 1930s, his use of the word machine would be more commonly described today as technology. He makes the useful distinction that the difference between a tool and a machine lies in the independence of the operator. A tool lends itself to manipulation, whereas a machine has a more automatic operation. Mumford traces a path of how machines displaced humanistic values in society, how civilisation is weighted in favour of the use of mechanical instruments and their characteristics of uniformity, standardization and repeatability, as against human values.

It was Mumford who pointed out that the mechanical clock was the key machine of the modern industrial age, not the steam engine. Mechanical clocks, developed by Monks during the Middle Ages, gave human enterprise the ‘regular collective beat and rhythm of the machine’. Time became a movement through space. Its product was seconds and minutes. I quote: ‘...by its essential nature it dissociated time from human events and helped create the belief in an independent world of

Figure 55. Picnic with an Amberola phonograph - near Victoria, British Columbia, 1920.

mathematically measured sequences: the special world of science’. Yet, as he points out, this belief is not backed by common-sense in other cultures - days are of uneven duration, the relation of night and day constantly change, and in terms of the human

288 Ibid, 39.
290 Ibid, 14.
291 Ibid.
292 Ibid, 15.
organism, mechanical time is foreign. While human life has regularities of its own, the ‘beat of the pulse, the breathing of the lungs’ change from hour to hour, along with one’s mood, actions and in the longer span of days, time is measured not by the calendar but by the events that occupy it. He argues that in sex, play and recreation, the impulse is pulsating, rather than evenly recurrent. He argued that to utilise the accidental, unpredictable and fitful is as necessary as to utilise the regular: ‘activities which exclude the operations of chance impulses forfeit some of the advantages of regularity’.293 Machines began to reproduce the organic properties of eye and ear, and humans who employed machines as a mode of escape became more passive and mechanical, he argued.

*One of the blessings of invention, among the naive advocates of the machine, is that it does away with the need for the imagination...If stirred by an emotion, instead of singing a song or writing a poem, one may turn on a phonograph record. Unsure of their own voices, unable to hold a tune, they carry a phonograph or a radio set with them even on a picnic.*294

Mumford wrote those words in 1934! He continues this line of argument:

*In so far as the phonograph and the radio do away with the impulse to sing, and in so far as the camera does away with the impulse to see, in so far as the automobile does away with () the impulse to walk, the machine leads to a lapse in function which is one step away from paralysis.*295

Strong words, one might think, but such concerns are also raised by contemporary thinkers such as Paul Virilio, Nicholas Carr, John David Edbert and Neil Postman. This replacement of the human sense and abilities with technology can be usefully discussed and illuminated with the notion raised by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard of the *simulacrum*. It emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s following on from his concern with consumerism. Originally he applied a Marxist critique to consumer behaviour: fashion, shopping, leisure, culture and the media. By analysing the commodification of everyday life, as well as applying a semiotic approach of deconstructing how objects are interpreted as signs, he came to the view that our society is organised around symbolic

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293 Ibid, 271.
294 Ibid, 274-75.
295 Ibid, 343-44.
His argument is that the era of production has ended and developed nations had begun a new era in which the production and proliferation of signs had replaced that of objects. New technologies: the media, computers, entertainment and knowledge had become the organising principles of a postmodern society. Baudrillard stated television conveys a world that is endlessly visualizable and endlessly segmentable and readable in images. In this world, the images, spectacles and play of signs have replaced the logic of production and class conflict:

> It is the generation by models, of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it.

The distinction between reality and its representation implodes, Baudrillard argues, and the signs and codes become the ‘real’. It is where Guy Debord’s spectacle has in itself become the reality. There are references, but no referents. Plato used the word simulacrum to describe an identical copy for which no original has ever existed. Baudrillard famously points to Disneyland as the epitome of a simulacrum of American culture. In Europe, he also cites the caves at Lascaux, which had been shut to the public with an exact replica built 200m away. Television and the mass media isolate and privatise individuals, he argued, ‘trapping them in a universe of simulacra in which it is impossible to distinguish between the spectacle and the real’. He raises the case of a reality television show - dating back to 1971 no less! - which causes the ‘dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV’. The collapsing of two traditional poles into one is where the simulation, or hyper-reality, begins. His critique has since been subject to criticism for applying his theories in a rather sweeping and generalised way, and for his use of it to events such as the Gulf War, by stating it did not exist, but much of his analysis of popular culture remains pertinent to my thesis.

The idea of the simulacra is also taken up by French cultural theorist Paul Virilio, but in a modified form, which I prefer to use. Virilio lived through the German invasion of
France during World War 2 as a youngster, and is particularly concerned with the impact of war technologies. Again, he too has been criticised for making sweeping judgements against technology, but it is useful to examine some of his ideas for their insights. His version of the simulacrum is more that of substitution. It is not an obliteration of reality, but it is displaced. Vision has been effectively *doubled* by the new technologies. I quote:

> *We face a duplication of reality. The virtual reality and the ‘real’ reality double the relationship to the real... We now have a possibility of seeing at a distance, of hearing at a distance, and of acting at a distance and this results in a process of de-localization, of the unrooting of the being. ‘To be’ used to mean somewhere, to be situated, in the here and now, but the ‘situation’ of the essence of being is undermined by the instantaneity, the immediacy and the ubiquity which are characteristic of our epoch...*\(^{303}\)

Virilio is disturbed by what he terms the ‘invasion of the human body’ by technology and the substitution of the technological for the human and lived experience. He says indirect information is supplanting direct information in all domains.\(^{304}\) The ‘hallucinatory utopia’ of communication technologies is both disorientating and disembodying, he argues.\(^{305}\) The sheer speed of modern communications - now instantaneous - inundates human scales of perception. Virilio argues first-hand experience is subsumed under the onslaught of the ‘motorization of appearances’ that endlessly bombard us.\(^{306}\)

> ...the technologies of real time ... are killing ‘present’ time by isolation from its here and now, in favour of a communicative elsewhere that no longer has anything to do with our ‘concrete presence’ in the world, but is the elsewhere of a discrete telepresence that remains a complete mystery.\(^{307}\)

His argument is that our unprecedented combination of new technologies - the merging of communication and computer technologies, is taking us out of this world, ‘beyond the limits of space and time, outside of nature and the matter world’ into a new world

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305 Kellner, “Virilio, War and Technology”, 111.
307 Ibid, 10.
with its own temporality, spatiality and modes of being’. In this disembodied cyber-space, with no fixed co-ordinates, we are like astronauts, Virilio maintains - cut off and disorientated and may experience an intense vertigo. The fact that communication and interaction takes place instantaneously on the internet removes the usual anchorage to one’s own body, nature and social community. Virilio also argues we are being confronted by a ‘pathology of immediate perception’ due to the proliferation of what he terms ‘seeing-machines’ or ‘vision-machines’ - photo-cinematographic and video-infographic apparatures. These machines are increasingly seeing for us, but ultimately they constrain our vision. ‘Machines that by mediatizing ordinary everyday representations end up destroying their credibility.’

In the past, our vision was limited by the rhythms of the seasons and night and day. Now, however, rapid transport and transmission technologies have worked to ‘mobilize’ our field of vision non-stop. ‘How can we resist this deluge of visual and audiovisual sequences, the sudden motorization of appearances that endlessly bombard our imagination?’ he asks.

This computer-generated image of traffic (fig. 56) came from a news item during 2012 about a new ‘driverless’ car registered to the Internet search agency Google, in Nevada, USA. The authorities in that city issued the world’s first autonomous drivers license. The automatic car’s computer will process a combination of data from maps, radar, laser sensors and video feeds to drive in traffic. The image is how the computer ‘sees’ the traffic. Virilio’s quote that ‘the perceptual faculties of the individual’s body are being transferred one by one to machines - to captors, sensors and other microprocessor detectors’ would surely apply to this car. And what is wrong with that? His contention is that instantaneous information - technologies that deal in real time - inundate us, creating mental confusion. He points out that he used to drive a

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310 Ibid., 96.
311 Ibid.
Jaguar, and he realised when he went past 200km per hour, that physical speed freezes you. The faster you go, the farther you have to look and as a result you lose lateral vision. The driver becomes fascinated with the vision ahead. ‘Why do animals have eyes on the side? There are very few that have eyes in the front like us. It is because real danger comes from the side or from behind. Speed flattens the vision, like a screen.’

During 2012 I built a series of heads from clay and experimented with using camera parts and lenses in place of the eyes. I was thinking out loud how much a prosthetic piece of machinery works as vision versus acting as impairment. I used a white tin glaze to give a ghostly aspect to the head in Death Stare (fig. 57). I was thinking also of Barthes’s discussion of the idea (described in Chapter One) of how photography conceives of the present as an object of future memory - so one is looking into death. I was thinking about how the physical being of the person has become far more closely entwined with photography, with our profusion of devices enabling recording. Is this a kind of death stare for us? US academic Robert Romanyshyn, in his study of the history of linear perspective and technology, points out that while a living eye roams all over the world, caressing what it looks at, a camera eye is an eye which belongs to a ‘cyclops who is paralyzed’.

‘Camera vision is monocular, fixed and disembodied. It is the vision of a single staring eye whose body has been left behind.’

On theme of driving, and harnessing technology, I built the work A Hard Drive (fig. 58, 59, 60 & 61). I hand-coiled a ceramic figure from the waist up using a stoneware type clay. I wanted to give an aspect of being isolated, of ungrounded. She has no feet placed firmly upon the earth. The form was multiple fired to achieve an aged, somewhat weathered aspect. I reduced it in a gas kiln, in order to provide flashes of copper red in part (again to signify the blood and materiality of the human) and iron breaking through

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314 Ibid.
the surface of the glaze to work in combination with this surface treatment, in order to ground the character in more earthy tones and hues. I was after a sense of stress and distress; a figure that is enduring - in both senses of the word. Her hands were cut off and instead, I have inserted in the lengths of the open ceramic arm a thread of multiple wires I retrieved from discarded computer cables. At the end I attached a pair of life-like plaster hands placed upon a car steering wheel. They have a silver paint applied to them. I weaved these electrical computer wires to refer to both the idea of the wiring of the human nervous system and how are arms are an extension of the body and the car is an further extension of this. The hands are placed upon a car steering wheel, which has embedded within it a hard-drive of a computer within a piece of mirror. I was reflecting upon technology racing away from us, and our attempt to both create these extensions and simultaneously trying to hang on for a bumpy drive. I used an iron framework to house the body, which hints at both a carriage (in the old charioteer sense) and a harness, an instrument of capture and containment. We are simultaneously the agents of our fate, as the precipitators of our push for extended powers, yet unable to truly control what we have unleashed. I painted the hands silver, to bring it into alignment with the mirror and the metallic surface of machinery, and also to reference the silver hands in

Figure 58. Clarissa Regan, A Hard Drive (2012). Ceramic, wires, tripod, steering wheel, metal, plaster, computer hard drive, mirror.)
the fairy tale *The Handless Maiden*. Yet the silver is painted on: I still wanted traces of veins and the materiality of the flesh present. It is in a liminal zone; neither one nor the other. The hands have become disconnected from the body and are on the way to becoming part of the machinery. The mirror embedded in the steering wheel is part of my overall artistic experimentation with mirrors and creating self-reflective installations. Instead of seeing clearly ahead, the ceramic figure is busy watching itself.

Think of a satellite navigation system in your car, or using Google maps. Our experience with the landscape is more and more being mediated by devices. The direct first-hand experience, using our body and all its senses, is being increasingly subsumed by a more narrow, vision-based perception via technologically-mediated experiences. There is a split vision. Concerns about technological mediation have been around a long time. When the doctor’s stethoscope was first introduced in the 19th century, physicians complained that interposing an instrument between patient and doctor would mean doctors would lose the ability to conduct skillful examinations and rely more on machinery than their own experience. The instrument ended up contributing to the rise of the objective and detached physician, someone able to make a diagnosis from sounds emanating from the body, free of the bias of the patient’s complaints. Where medical practice had previously been characterised by direct communication with the patient’s experience - based on their reporting, and the doctor’s questions and observations, by the 1940s, medical technology was such that the doctor had relinquished his unsatisfactory attachment to subjective evidence - to what ‘the patient said - only to substitute a devotion to technological evidence - what the machine

![Figure 59. Clarissa Regan, *A Hard Drive*, 2012. Ceramic, wires, tripod, steering wheel, metal, plaster, computer hard drive, mirror.](image)
critics have argued.\textsuperscript{315} It is hard to dismiss the value of medical technologies, as they have undoubtedly saved an enormous number of lives, but a case can be made that general physicians have become estranged from the patient and their own subjective judgement, particularly when economic forces are increasingly pushing for teleconferencing consultations with patients.

Technological mediation, and particularly mediation in everyday life is a recurring theme of British media scholar Roger Silverstone. He followed on from media theorist Raymond Williams’ proposition that television arose in response to an industrial economy that had uprooted much of its population, that had divided work from home, and isolated people in privatised forms of living.\textsuperscript{316} Television became part of the compensating ordering of daily life, as it created a sense of stability and control and connected home life to public and global space by ‘forging a sense of being linked to others’. I argue the internet now does this on a global scale. Silverstone contends a

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Figure 60. Clarissa Regan, \textit{A Hard Drive} (detail), 2012. Ceramic, wires, tripod, steering wheel, metal, plaster, computer hard drive, mirror.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{316} Margaret Morse, \textit{Virtualities, Television, Media Art and Cyberculture}, Theories of Contemporary culture (Bloomington, Indiana Uni Press, 1998), 5.
Figure 61. Clarissa Regan, *A Hard Drive* (detail), 2012. Ceramic, wires, tripod, steering wheel, metal, plaster, computer hard drive, mirror.
progressive technological incursion has taken place in the everyday life, most significantly by the new media technologies. Yet everyday life is grounded in a bodily life; it is gendered and ages, it is both enabled and limited by material resources, by fate and circumstance, and most importantly, it is situated in the nitty-gritty of the physical world. He points out: ‘The everyday has its own smells, desires and in its refusals of the antiseptic ordering of high culture ... and in its refusal of Cartesian dualism...’ For Silverstone, the vividness of everyday life is found in bodily experience and especially ‘face to face’ relations. But our broadcast media, our internet, our mobile phones - have arisen to provide an alternative to that experience of everyday life. Our electronic media is based on the idea of connection, but that is an illusion. It appears to us as though there is the constant presence of the ‘other’, these voices and images of mediated representation. But Silverstone calls it a masquerade, because it is based on the refusal of otherness. It is based on the private masquerading as public, separate as shared, different as same, unequal as equal and distant as close at hand. Relationships need to be premised on the recognition of difference. The vividness of everyday life - grounded in bodily experiences - is, he argues, being reduced by the ‘technological intrusion into the conduct of everyday life’.

In the palpable dematerialization of the body, our own but crucially that of the other, the media have created a space in which the lack of physical contact destroys a sense of meaningful difference between bodies.

Austrian contemporary artist Judith Fegerl’s practice deals with the interface of human and machine (fig. 62). Her work *The Chinese Nightingale* examines Hans Christian Andersen’s 1843 classic fairy tale *The Nightingale*, originally titled *Nattergalen*. She states: ‘The power of reproduction and mass production is in direct proportion to the intensity of the auratic experience of the natural phenomenon.’ For those not familiar with the tale, the Emperor takes a nightingale from the forest into his palace and enjoys its exquisite song. It is kept trapped in the palace. Then the Emperor is sent a mechanical bird from Japan that not only sings, but is dressed in colourful finery.

318 Ibid, 764.
319 Ibid.: 761.
Everyone is amazed with the new bird and the original Nightingale is banished. However, the emperor sickens and is about to die, and the mechanical bird cannot help him. Finally, the original bird returns and its song revives the Emperor. This tale also has connections with Aesop’s fable *The Farmer and the Nightingale.*\(^{322}\) A farmer sets a trap for a Nightingale and captures it after hearing it sing. He tells the bird it should sing for him every night. ‘But we nightingales never sing in a cage,’ replies the bird. ‘If you imprison me I shall sicken and die and you shall never hear my song again.’\(^{323}\) What is particularly pertinent in Fegerl’s work, is how the machine does not let up. It lacks the organic rhythm, the rise and fall, the pulsing and irregular breathing of a living organism. In my work *The Nightingale* (figs. 63 & 64) I was thinking about how my great grandmother used to sing at the piano. I used to visit her house and wonder in amazement at the pianola rolls stacked up on top of the piano. The markings on the rolls - evocative tunes from the 1920s sung by a variety of artists including Rudolph Valentino - had a magical otherworldly quality about them. Many years later I found some of those rolls under the laundry of my grandmother’s house and kept them. The indecipherable markings on them had the marvellous ability to translate paper to sound. They were one of the first ways music could be mechanised for ordinary people. These days no one in my immediate family

\(^{322}\) *Aesop, Aesop’s Fables* (New York, Penguin, 2004).

\(^{323}\) Ibid, 69.
sings. Yet every member of my family owns an iPod. My children sit silently when their earphones are plugged in. With the installation, I wanted to reverse the usual arrangement of a trapped bird being contained in an iron cage and think about the human voice. I hand-built my head and glazed him yellow, thinking about the classic depiction of a canary being bright yellow. The head cracked during the multiple firings and I felt it was the pressure of the inability to speak could be metaphorically reflected in that cracking up. The iPod is a simulacrum of the human voice, of the tongue. Here, in our own lives, it is possible to find this drive in everyday objects and practices, in the professionalisation and commodification of culture, whereby individuals no longer take part in activities, but appreciate them. This is also evident in sport, where games have become a commercial spectacle, staged and broadcast by corporations. Think of video games, with children and adults interacting with electronic games devised as a simulacrum of a physical activity. The imaginary play space has also been constructed and commodified. And so too, the physical activity. The Nintendo Wii games that provide simulation of sports such as tennis or bowling, complete with physical actions by the player, miming the physical actions of playing with a racquet or ball.

This brings me to an examination of the drive behind creating simulacrums, behind the utopia of technological mediation. British sociologist Anthony Giddens has described the phenomena of what he calls ‘the sequestration of experience’ that is, the placing of death, sickness, criminality, madness, sexuality and nature, off to the institutional margins of our regular lives. He points out that in ‘pre-modern societies chronic sickness was part of many people's lives and contact with death was a more or less commonplace feature of everyone's experience’. It is a point made by a number of scholars. It is also part of the phenomenon I described earlier, Ernest Becker’s ‘denial of death’. As he says:

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\text{It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and have to live with. It is only if you let the full weight of this paradox sink down on your mind and feelings that you can realize what an impossible situation it is for an animal to be in.}\]

325 Ibid, 161.
326 Becker, The Denial of Death.
327 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 403.
Figure 64. Clarissa Regan. *The Nightingale*. 2012. Ceramic, glaze, iPod, cage. 75 x 35 x 35cm.
He believes everything we do in our symbolic world is an attempt to deny and overcome this grotesque fate. This leads me to my argument: in the construction of the endless flux of the imaginary symbolic world, in the forging of connections via mediated technologies, in the replacement of the real with the artificial, we seek to escape our corporeal reality, to repress the messy, the abject, the body subject to decay and death. The clearest exposition I can find of these qualities lies in the work of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who was describing medieval carnivale culture, in the context of a literary discussion of the work of Rabelais, and his elaboration of what he termed the ‘material bodily principle’. It is in the work of grotesque realism, in the literature and art - that this principle is actually celebrated, not repressed. What is this material bodily principle? It can be found in exaggerated depictions of the body continually growing and being renewed, in qualities such as fertility, growth and degradation. Abstract idealism is brought down to the material level. In the world of grotesque realism, degradation means coming down to earth - to what he describes as the lower stratum of the body, - acts of defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth. It is not simply negative - but regenerating. Degradation means contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. ‘To degrade is to bury, to sow and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better.’ He says the sculptures of this medieval period remain ambivalent and contradictory - from a classical point of view they are monstrous and hideous. The classical aesthetic is ready-made and completed. Yet life is the epitome of incompleteness. It is a reflection of the idea of unfinished metamorphosis, of the act of becoming. They are neither one nor the other. The open body is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries, it blends into the abundant earth. My ceramic figures frequently have openings, or cavities, or interactions with the world around

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328 Ibid, 21.
them. They are not stand-alone objects on plinths up high. Nor are they solid, as is the case for bronze or marble works. As Bakhtin argues:

_The Renaissance saw the body in quite a different light than the Middle Ages, in a different aspect of its life, and a different relation to the exterior non-bodily world. As conceived by these canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; its protuberances and offshoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new spouts and buds), smoothed out, its apertures closed._

For Baudrillard, where commodity logic has taken over our human relations, where everything is specularized, and provoked and orchestrated into images, signs and consumable models - for him, the myth of the _Pact With The Devil_, shows the nature of the bargain we strike with our goods. Mumford echoes this with his concluding point that, I quote: ‘... there must be the direct and immediate experience of living itself; we must directly see, feel, touch, manipulate, sing, dance, communicate before we can extract from the machine any further sustenance for life.’ According to Romanyszyn, the body is central in technology and the ‘shared cultural dream’ which frames building our technological world is in fact, a ‘record of our continuing debate with the fact of our incarnation and the limits it imposes, not the least of which, of course, is the fact of death’.

One of the final works I created for the PhD was _Lantern Dreaming_ (fig. 66 & 67), a hand-built female figure, with the mid-section of the work cut out to accommodate an original turn-of-the century electric Magic Lantern I had discovered in an antique shop in the Blue Mountains, NSW. The lantern’s electrical powerpoint does not work anymore, but I inserted lights into the machine as well as into the figure’s head. I wanted to capture the aspect of hallucinating, of dreaming, of projecting upwards to the heavens. I was thinking about the idea of externalising the imagination. The figure has stars in her eyes. The figure was also built with the idea of the lantern being hugged close to her chest - she is trying to find her way into the openings of the apparatus. But

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330 Ibid, 415.
331 Mumford, _Technics and Civilisation_.
332 Romanyszyn, _Technology as Symptom and Dream_, 11.
Figure 66. Clarissa Regan, *Lantern Dreaming*, 2013. Ceramic, lights, antique magic lantern. 55 x 70 x 40cm.
she also eerily empty herself, with the void of the internal space apparent through the
gap between the lantern and ceramic figure, see (fig 66). As a glaze, I used a breaking
white earthenware emulsion recipe, which added a luminescent and ghostly quality to

Figure 67. Clarissa Regan, *Lantern Dreaming*, 2013. Ceramic,
lights, antique magic lantern. 55 x 70 x 40cm.

the figure. The use of the lighting from inside the hollow head was also designed to hint
at a source of interior light and add to the other-worldly quality of the piece. In the
studio exhibition, the figure was placed on a bed of iron railings. This created a sharp
contrast with the ceramic figure, but elevated it slightly from the floor of the SCA
gallery. Part of the feeling of the work was an evocation of sufferance, of the difficult nature of the bed we have made for ourselves.

And finally, one last artwork was created in the weeks leading up to the final exhibition of the body of work. This work, *On The Line*, (fig 68, 69 & 70) was an exploration of how we travel with our minds on the telephone. How we enter another person’s consciousness, without being physically present. As anchor points, I pulled apart an early 20th century analogue telephone, a wind-up apparatus. I attached the dial-up handset on one wall, then extended the wires from that telephone to meet up with the wire from which I hung a ceramic figure. This figure was essentially a torso, and was missing the left arm. The wire went through the figure to emerge on the other side of the wall, where a handset was hanging down. The statue held another handset in its right hand, but she was not holding it close to the ear. She was suspended in space, hung out on the wire. I was thinking about the literal embodiment of being *on the line*. Yet my figure was also in a state of distracted attention. She was not actually paying attention to her live-wire act. And she had lost parts of the body. Does being elsewhere in mind mean being nowhere? Is it just the head separated from the body? What happens to the body when we are not aware of it? Is it still there? This state of disembodiment hangs suspended, not easily answerable one way or the other.

In summary, this chapter has examined the ideas around technological mediation and simulacra, and raised Bakhtin’s material bodily principle. The works of Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio and Lewis Mumford were discussed, to help understand the phenomena of replacing the real with a symbolic world. Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivale theories emerged as a productive framework within which to argue that the desire to replace the real with the artificial is born of a desire to retreat from the messy, the abject and a body subject to decay.
Figure 68. Clarissa Regan, *On The Line*, 2013. Ceramic, wire, telephone. Variable dimensions.
Conclusion

Creating art is not a simple process of controlled planing and execution. It is an ongoing interaction between the artist, the materials and the ideas. As UK artist Grayson Perry points out: 'It's not simply that I have an idea and then proceed to make it; there's more of a symbiotic relationship between making and thinking. Art is not just a calculated thought process but a relationship between you and the material.'

Through the course of my candidacy I sought to allow ideas to come freely, to manifest their form and shape by serendipitous discovery of objects, by glaze experiments, by reading widely and reflecting on the ideas discussed through this thesis. When constructing my pieces, I discarded many works in progress. This is the way I work; through multiple selections, firings and then a period of contemplation and assessment. The studio work gave me new insights into theoretical concepts, at a poetical and metaphoric level. Professor of Creative Arts at James Cook University, Professor Peter Murphy argues that the imagination at its peak is syn-antonymous. 'It interpolates opposites. It forges connections and analogies, bonds and metaphors between things that seem on face value so far apart.' My studio work forged unlikely combinations at many levels; between the weight of my glazed figurative sculptures and the lighter materials of wire and light, between enduring fired ceramic and rusting iron, between hand-made and machine made, between light and dark, between the grounded materiality of the earth and the yearning for abstract ideals, between three-dimensional and two-dimensional, between the old and the new.

In Section 1, where self and subjectivity are discussed, the proliferation of images in our contemporary society is described as stemming from a drive to externalise ourselves - essentially our consciousness and the images contained within our consciousness. I came to this conclusion while building my sculptural series *Lost in Facebook*, (figs. 5 & 6) as it was these sculptural forms that helped me see this pattern. I came to the conclusion that one of the factors behind this proliferation of screen culture was a drive to extend our range - to become an extended being. In the discussion of Lacan and film theory, thesis raised the idea that humans required an/other, or a mirror or camera, to provide a foil for consciousness to witness itself. I speculated this was not just an infant

Figure 70. Clarissa Regan, *On The Line*, 2013. Ceramic, wire, telephone. Variable dimensions.
stage (Lacan’s mirror stage) but, as film theorists speculate, an on-going process through adulthood. I believe this is a continuing process, as consciousness seeks to understand itself. Death is closely connected to this process, as highlighted by a number of theorists - from Barthes’s argument that photography produces a kind of death while trying to preserve life, to Castle’s supposition that the modern banishment of death has disconnected us from corporeal reality and led to the ‘spectralizing habit’ of modern times. My work *Oscillation* (figs. 7 & 8) then gave me an opportunity to explore the idea of consciousness caught in a loop - seeking to go outside of oneself but trapped in a feed-back loop, an oscillating motion. Reading Sconce and Peters on the cultural history of electronic communication and the on-going link with the supernatural (as Peters argues: ‘The chief challenge to communication in the twentieth century is contact with beings that lack mortal form.’335), allowed me to see that this is a cultural phenomenon - a projection onto the technology - an investment of metaphysical powers onto our communication devices.

In Chapter Two the growth of surveillance cameras are discussed, as well as other hand-held devices where digital images circulate. That chapter dealt further with the idea of subjectivity and what happens when it is projected outside oneself. I pared back the essentials of how digital images essentially dematerialise objects and disconnect them from the physical world they come from. As Ebert notes, digital photography purges all the noise and ‘steps up the visual sense and divorces it from the other senses, resulting in images that are purely a creation of the mechanics of the eye’.336 Through the work of Marshall McLuhan, I was able to conceptualise this in a number of ways. His elaboration of the idea of tools as extensions of humans, and hence conceiving of the nervous system as being manifested in the world of electrical communication (and the numbing effect of this) was particularly useful. I also came to explore autoscopy - a clinical term for the cultural idea of the doppelganger, as a productive metaphor for thinking about the process of externalising one’s image, or projecting it outwards. My work *Narcissus/Gradient Mark Zero* (figs 11, 12 & 13) enabled me to think out loud about the depthless nature of screen culture. McLuhan’s theories about sense ratios and the notion of common sense was a useful insight into how our senses are in a kind of

ratio, and hence affect one another. How extending one sense - for example vision - can throw others off kilter. Objectification theory was a useful framework with which to examine the general thrust towards externalisation and self-consciousness. In building my work *In Your Face* (figs. 15 & 16) I was experimenting with using the self-monitoring nature of the television set on the sculpture to see how to play with this externalisation. By referencing the field of surveillance/self-reflexivity with the use of the surveillance camera inserted in the arm of the sculpture, but in a disjointed and slightly comical manner, the work inverted the usual parameters of the debate. Using the old television set as the head was both a reference to the idea of humans being the vision machine, but also a nod to Picasso’s humorous car head sculpture (*Bull’s Head*, 1943). Looking back, I can conclude that in my sculpture *In Your Face* the feedback intervention sought to dispel the sinister Big Brother implications of surveillance security and place it within the realm of parody and Bakhtin’s world of reversals, turnarounds and the material body principle. In his explanation of the carnivale, Bakhtin points out it was a time of reversals; where men dressed as women, kitchen objects were turned into musical instruments, buckets pierced with holes and so on.337 His point is that cosmic fear and gloomy seriousness are defeated by laughter.338 Bakhtin’s philosophy about how carnivale operates (to take away the terror of death and the fear of the great cosmic unknown by bringing it down to the body), were extremely useful to my thinking about our digital lives. The body is forever becoming, it is not severed from the world around it. I concluded in that section of my thesis that a full embodied presence, a directly lived experience and engagement of the body is essential to human nature. The tendency to objectify oneself based on appearance is a distraction from that. I discussed the fairy tale *The Handless Maiden*, and found the motif of the severed hands to be a commonly repeating motif in my own work. This was a very strong theme, and Robert Johnson’s analysis of it as a signifier of Western society’s industrial culture was insightful. I believe that analysis of cultural stories and artworks can be extraordinarily useful in shedding light on our own circumstances. My work *Plugged In* (figs 18 19, 20, 21 & 22) also gave me insight into the ‘plugged in’ nature of our lives. The split nature of consciousness whilst interacting with certain technologies, and the

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337 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 410-411.
338 Ibid, 376.
loss of the direct feeling function of making music, as distinct from listening to it, is a theme that I found recurring in other works such as The Nightingale (figs. 63 & 624).

Chapter Three looked at the history of the phantasmagoria, as well as historical optical and visual media such as the magic lantern and cave art. I found these phenomena demonstrated the persistence of humankind’s desire to project our imagination outward. It brought up the connection with the metaphysical again, with the strong recurrence of discourses about ghosts and apparitions connected with the phantasmagoria shows, and continuing onto the early days of telegraph, radio and television. I pondered that not only was it a desire to project our imagination outwards, but also a desire for altered perceptions of reality? Castle provided a cultural and psychological insight with her examination of the development of the phantasmagoria ghost shows of the 17th and 18th centuries, seeing them as an outcome of the Enlightenment. She proposed that superstitions about ghosts were transmuted into the mind, and regarded as mental effects, or the products of fevered minds. She used Freud’s theory of the uncanny to explain that spirits and ghosts were ‘internalized and reinterpreted as hallucinatory thoughts’. She traced a thoughtful, and complex path to explain how the human mind itself could be subject to phantoms and apparitions, as an alienating force within subjectivity. With the gradual repression of death in modern life, humans sought refuge in a denial of the fact of death which ‘requires a new spectralized mode of perception ... the other can be appropriated and cherished forever ... in the imagination’. Our media devices are the technological embodiment of this drive - so much so that we have compulsively invented machines that mimic and reinforce the image-producing powers of consciousness, Castle contends and I agree. The work Phonograph, Video, iPod, (figs. 24, 25, 26 & 27) was an examination of someone filming and watching themselves. The doppelganger image of oneself casts a hypnotising spell. It was also another way of thinking about the lineage of sound and image machines, and the metamorphosis and connectedness of such devices down the ages. My sculptures in the Angel series gave me a new understanding of the desire to transcend one’s own earthly body. Our mechanical prostheses are a simultaneous attempt to channel the great unknown, and to achieve flight, or a transcendental journey to another realm. Through

339 Castle, The Female Thermometer, 143.
the course of building these sculptures, the paradoxical quality of that quest became apparent. The contradiction of these efforts - the sheer contrast between the heavy, dense weighty substance of the figure and the rusting decaying nature of the aerial/prosthetics was revealed in the final works. We cannot deny the gravity of our embodied lives, nor our mortality. Also in Chapter Three, I traced the path of the phantasmagoria shows right through to the 20th century psychedelic light shows, and brought in the observations of Huxley about the hypnotizing effects of objects being lit by light appearing to come from behind - such as jewels, Christmas lights, stained glass windows, fireworks and so on. His theory that this quality has been mentioned in great literature by visionaries - the experience of a light shining from within - was very illuminating, to say the least. His explanation that the human perceptual apparatus screens out large portions of reality, in order to avoid being overwhelmed by an overload of sensory information, was plausible, I found. Interestingly enough, McLuhan had also pondered over the attraction of the ‘light through’ quality of television sets - and linked it to stained glass windows. Levinson says: ‘... McLuhan came to an astonishing conclusion about television; it draws and commands our attention with an almost hypnotic religious intensity because that is the way our senses and our brain respond to a ‘light-through’ invitation.' Computer screens also have this quality. I think this is a key point to understanding the continuing hold screens and light have for us.

In Section 2, Chapter Four, the idea of prolepsis was outlined, and the way in which the expectation of creating a future memory - an archive fever for the future - comes into play in social media and other instances of recording one’s life. Essentially, this anticipation becomes another form of self-consciousness. I also discussed the use of mirrors in my studio work and how the dematerialising and distorting quality of mirrors was a productive way of thinking about digital screens, such as in the work of Talking Heads (figs 34, 35 & 36). My research into the time/space compression brought forth the idea put forward by Crocker of how we ‘begin to experience the present as little more than the means to the realisation of an expected future event which already

appears to be real’.\textsuperscript{342} He then argued that the present starts to become conceived as valueless, as it is a period of being kept waiting. Virilio’s work into the acceleration process provided an insight into the baffling effects that time/speed compression places upon the human sensibility. My studio work sought to understand this via the mechanism of the classical myth of Orpheus. My work, \textit{Rear View Orpheus} (fig. 37 & 38) showed how seeking to make the intangible tangible is an ever-impossible illusion. In my installed work, \textit{A Stitch In Time}, (fig. 43, 44 & 45) the attempt to seek control one’s life, (as per Crocker’s observation that the opaque nature of the causes of our actions and the feeling of a loss of control),\textsuperscript{343} through the cutting and splicing of film as a way of symbolically thinking about the frenzied archiving and presenting one’s image via social media.

In Chapter Five, I explored the idea of technological mediation and simulacra. I concluded that this phenomenon has grown through the course of the 20th century and into this current century. I went back to the work of Mumford in outlining the path Western society has taken since the Industrial Age in this process. I argued that the drive to construct an imaginary symbolic world, to replace the real with the artificial is born of a desire to repress the messy, the abject and the body subject to decay and death. Bakhtin’s theories were also a fruitful framework in which to conceptualise this process, with his explanation of how the open-ended body interacts with the world around it, and his elaboration of the grotesque principle - depicting how individuals deal with an overwhelming world by \textit{humanising} the world around them. How idealised sculptures with their impenetrable bodies and smooth, closed natures demonstrated the closed, inaccessible principle.\textsuperscript{344} My studio work \textit{The Nightingale} (figs 55 & 56) was a way of thinking of the replacement of the real with the simulacra. The human head in the cage has been subjected to one of Bakhtin’s turn-arounds, by being placed inside the bird-cage. In the construction of this work more subtle concerns also emerged - such as the cracking up quality of being placed within a confinement, and the muting quality of technology interfacing with the human voice. The installation \textit{Face Time} (figs. 50, 51, 52 & 53) explored the idea of synesthesia. Media tend to isolate one sense from the

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\item \textsuperscript{342} Crocker, “Prolepsis: On Speed and Time’s Interval”, 486.
\item \textsuperscript{343} Ibid, 485-86.
\item \textsuperscript{344} Ibid., 317.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
others, and McLuhan has pointed out that the telephone not only increased the speed of
the private voice, it ‘retrieved telepathy’ and created a sense within people of ‘being
everywhere at once’. This work also touched upon the lineage apparent in the role of
the iPad as a communication device. And in my work Hard Drive (figs. 56, 57, 58 &
59), ideas emerged that we are pushing for extended powers, yet unable to control what
we have unleashed. It found that when our hands are disconnected from our direct body
that we lose control. Mediation can end up prompting a feeling of a loss of control.
Paul Levinson argues that the more information we receive - the ‘more we need of
physical reality’ , which again goes to why I have chosen to build my figures in the
ceramic form. To encapsulate my findings, I would argue the drive to externalise our
consciousness and our imagination is a potent force and has antecedents throughout
history, that there is a metaphysical quest to both extend our powers, expand our
consciousness, and this seeking of something other can be witnessed in the close
connection between the supernatural and the uncanny with many of these
communication devices. Our modern day electrical communication devices and virtual
world also, in part, reflect an unconscious desire to deny our mortality and the desire to
replace the real with the artificial. This is born of a desire to repress the messy, the
abject and the body subject to decay and death. A key characteristic of the nature and
impact of the internet and digitisation is that it becomes about a state of feedback, of
resonance, as a consequence of its instantaneous nature. My work explores these
concerns and in doing so revealed the breakdowns, the awkwardness of the material
body and the hand-made life as distinct from the idealised, industrialised, virtual life.

345 McLuhan, The Global Village, 147.
346 Levinson, Digital McLuhan, 5.
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Appendix:
Photographic Documentation of Postgraduate Exhibition
Sydney College of the Arts, December 2013