RESEARCH ARTICLE

Aesthetic Post Humanism: The Copies without Original of the Pop Culture Library

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Abstract

The phrase "copy without original" means the denial of an absolute beginning and of an original creative mind. Instead of originator, the postmodern writer passes for scribe, bricoleur, in script or, writing instance. Repetition without difference applies to a precedent which is itself simulacrum. Whereas mannerism multiplied an original into copies that emptied it out of meaning through mechanical repetition, the technologies producing CDs knows nothing about origin. Which of the identical CDs is the original one? The present paper is an attempt to fathom out an answer.

Keywords: *Technology, Repetition, Simulacrum, Post humanism.*

Introduction

Post humanism is characterized by a specific focus on technologies. I often blame myself for my frequent immersion in the virtual world: Who or What am I? A posthuman entity or just a poor student? Consider the following as your body parts: city, house, car, iPhone, laptop, non-carnal surroundings. If 60% of your body is now electronically informed, if you live in a space built on efficiency criteria, you must be careful, because you may be about to lose the little freedom of choice that you still have!

The Post humanism phenomenon is a consequence of profound technological change. Katherine Hayles doesn't see Post humanism as a dead end for humanism, but as a problem for some conceptions regarding humanity, which once claimed that the human being is autonomous and has the freedom to exercise his will through a personal choice.

But living together in a hyper technological environment where the natural life is almost impossible to conceive outside technological developments causes a rethinking of the relationship between man and machine.

Nothing seems harmful in cultivating a permanent progress, a self-transformation, or a more open society defined by a practical optimism. Problems arise when these projects are actually tested their validity on humans, being placed in a social context. Post humans are hunting time in their rush to communicate more, but they live, see and feel less, lacking thus depth. All Post humanist researches are actually a complex process of dis-mediation focused on the contemporary world, which is required to break electronic networks chains which post humanize humans. Similarly to Foucault's proclaimed "end of man", post humanism does not mean "the literal end of man, but the end of a particular image of us" [1]. For these theorists, our biological nature may remain unchanged, but the self-concept of the human changes, particularly when we consider the inclusion of technology in our lives.

In her book *How We Became Post human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999), Hayles alleges that the posthuman is a construction just like the human and that a "biologically unaltered

Homo sapiens counts as posthuman". There again, the "posthuman" does not mean the end of humanity. Instead, it signals:

[…] the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice.

For Hayles the question is not "whether we will become posthuman", because "post humanity is already here". The question is "what kind of post humans we will be." While she has sympathies with the deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject in the technological age, she rejects transhumanist fantasies of unlimited power immortality. At worst we will bring about a culture inhabited by post humans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground for their being. Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future,* responsible for popularising the term, locates the posthuman in a loss of a human *Factor X* that guarantees justice, morality and universal rights, and as such appears to rely primarily on a quality that has indeed been argued to be uniquely human, namely empathy. Empathy, one could extrapolate from Fukuyama's assertions, is supposedly only guaranteed by 'real life' interaction. While 'the cyborg,' as a figure in popular culture and the media, is, on the one hand, welcomed as a superhuman, a cyborg is offering a picture of humanity and artificial intelligence moving in un empathetic, disembodied virtuality, thus removed from authenticity and embodied 'reality' and supposedly incapable of human emotions that form the basis for humanist values of justice, morality and rights.

The pop culture library is like Baudrillard's museum, a space no longer isolated, confined but covering the whole of reality. Baudrillard has developed a theory to make intelligible one of the fascinating aspects of advanced industrial society: the proliferation of communications through the media. This new language practice differs from both face-to-face symbolic exchange and print. The new media employ the montage principle of

film and time- space distancing to structure a unique linguistic reality (Poster: 1) [2].

Baudrillard theorizes from the vantage point of the new media to argue that a new culture has emerged, one that is impervious to the old forms of resistance and impenetrable by theories rooted in traditional metaphysical assumptions. Culture is now dominated by simulations, Baudrillard contends, objects and discourses that have no firm origin, no referent, no ground or foundation. In this sense, what Walter Benjamin had attributed to "the age of mechanical reproduction,"[3] Baudrillard applies to all reaches of everyday life.

If people were asked to describe how they represent consumerism to themselves, they would probably define it as the site of an encounter between busy bodies in movement and objects on such an elaborate display as to give the onlooker the impression that they too are instinct with a life of their own. The consumer's gaze is not an innocent one; it meets the object half way, it is, to quote Wordsworth, "half created", or rather half encoded by the object of a desire induced by the fashion industry and advertising. Stuart Elden is quite correct in his appreciation of space critic Henri Lefebvre as the most insightful thinker of the new ontological status of our everyday life:

Instead of matter being seen as the embodiment of mental constructs, or mind as the reaction to matter, Lefebvre saw both material and mental together. It is the fusion of the idealist and materialist notions that enables an *idealist and materialist* approach to questions of life and lived experience [4].

The industrial society has been definitely replaced by the urban one. A proof in this matter is the historical relationship which exists between a town and the countryside, the shift being played by industrialization and the advance of technology. Marx failed to understand that the rise of the city was the end of the meaning of the industrial production because the phenomenon was still new in his time. During his research in the 1968's, Lefebvre suggested that "the great event of the last few years is that the

effects of industrialisation on a superficially modified capitalist society of production and property have produced their results: a programmed *everyday life* in its appropriate *urban setting*.

Such a process was favoured by the disintegration of the traditional town and the expansion of urbanism" [5]. Lefebvre discovered that capitalism influenced the notion of everyday life, by expanding its control over the private life and over people's leisure time more specifically. This was achieved by a more accurate organization of space.

In one of his masterpiece *Simulacra and Simulations*, J Baudrillard thinks that the term "hypermarket" can help us understand what the notion of consumerist spaces and late modernity is about. Major cities saw it being born in about a century (1850-1950), a new generation of modern department stores undergoing a radical modernization that confused the urban structure. Cities of old used to remain cities under urban improvements, while new cities are satellized around hypermarkets or shopping centres, served by a scheduled transit network. A new morphology has emerged, of the cyber type whose shape is nuclear and satellite. The hypermarket is the core. Not even modern cities can absorb it. The hypermarket is the one which establishes an orbit on which crowds move. It serves as an assembly plant, automated, with remote control.

In his book, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, Richard Robbins says that for consumerism to triumph in the "developed world", buying habits had to be transformed and luxuries to replace necessities. With these types of transformations, the postmodern society has evolved in such a way, that consumption and consumerism (for good and mainly for bad) are identified as being at the core of a modern culture and society.

Connor acknowledges that "in the case of postmodernist culture, no means seem to be available to separate culture from everything else and there is greatly reduced scope for claiming that within culture there may be ways of thwarting the inexorable

rhythms of appropriation and alienation of consumer capitalism" [6]. Further on, Connor provides a very contradictory explication because, on the one hand, he admits that the postmodern consumer capitalism represents the climactic point in a logic of reification, while, on the other hand, the cultural realm becomes identical with the socio-economic one, which ought to have had a dematerialization effect upon the latter. Consumerism, as well as postmodernism, is complex fields because they imply multiplication of meanings and dissolution of essence.

The issue of the relationship between the mass media and the popular culture has always been a controversial one in social sciences. While political economists insist on the role of the media industry in the creation of this phenomenon of the twentieth century, its advocates such as John Fiske, in *Understanding Popular Culture* argue that popular culture is actually the creation of the *populus* and is independent of the capitalist production process or the communication sector. Basing his argument on the immense interpretive power of the people, Fiske believes that the audience is able to break all the intended meanings within a media message, and by giving new meanings to that specific message they can oppose the power bloc that is trying to impose its ideology on the public. Consequently, this anarchistic activity of the audience creates the popular culture as a defence mechanism.

Even when we accept Fiske's ideas, we cannot disregard the manipulative power of the media and its effects on cultural and social life. Everyday we are exposed to millions of different visual messages which tell us what to eat, what to wear, what to listen and what to watch. No matter how hard we try to avoid being influenced by these circumstances, only up to a certain point can we protect ourselves after which no interpretive power can help. The media lead us to a path that ends up in the same department store with our neighbour, with whom we have probably never talked before, but holding the same pair of socks or CDs, and we might never want to recall the TV commercial that had opened the gates of this path [7-14].

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