

Overview of Part One

This book is an exploration of the three cultural theory concepts of hyper-modernism, hyperreality, and posthumanism. The focus is on how these three notions can illuminate how contemporary digital media technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution – such as Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality – affect society, the economy, and the lives of citizens of late capitalism.²⁸ Contemplating hyper-modernism, I rethink the relation of science fiction to technology and society. Considering hyperreality, I study the ideas of the simulacrum and simulation in the media theory of Jean Baudrillard. Reflecting on posthumanism, I review the scholarly efforts in that field of N. Katherine Hayles, then examine the practical artistic movement of Creative Coding and its impact on the future of informatics or computer science.

The power and originality of SF is that it is a force that formatively influences culture, ideas, technologies, and even “hard sciences” like physics. It has always been that force but has not been acknowledged accordingly. The boundary between SF narratives and the so-called “real world” of digital media technologies has become indistinct. These media and technologies are to be comprehended via the scrutiny of stories and representations. SF should become a worldview and a mode of knowledge for thinking about the hyper-modern world.

The concept of the simulacrum or hyperreality is a point of departure for investigating digital transformation. My project is to update and reinvent the philosophical and cultural theory concept of the simulacrum for the current historical situation of algorithms, virtuality, and post-truth. I seek to develop ideas for resistance to and transfiguration of hyperreality.

In the culture of the digital and the virtual, hyperreality is now performed in minute detail by algorithms and computer programming. I pursue the challenge to the simulacrum in theories and practices of software code. With the background of philosophical posthumanism and the recognition of software development as an expressive activity, I approach the Creative Coding movement. What is on the table is a paradigm shift from the centrality of media to code in cultural studies, and from engineering to a trans-disciplinary and creative informatics.

In Part One, I argue that the contemporary era can be designated by the cultural theory concept of hyper-modernism. Hyper-modernism follows, yet also preserves and

builds on, modernity and postmodernism. There is a vast academic literature on “advanced capitalism” as postmodernism. Thinkers such as Baudrillard, Virilio, McLuhan, Foucault, Kittler, Flusser, and Haraway are the major postmodern media theorists. Lyotard called postmodernism the crisis of the “grand narratives” which prevailed in modernity such as industrialism and Marxism. These “grand narratives” all shared a belief in linear progress in history.²⁹

In postmodernism, narratives and fictions are decisive in power and control relationships. In hyper-modernism, these relations get coded by informatic technologies.

In “Mobility and Science Fiction,” I write about the mobility of the future by looking at the depiction of self-driving cars in SF films and the “real world” technologies of autonomous vehicles. In “Science Fiction Heterotopia: The Economy of the Future,” I write about future post-scarcity economic systems in SF films and the potential for post-capitalism opened by “real world” technologies such as 3D printers, blockchain, and moral algorithms. In “What is Hyper-Modernism?,” I explicate the defining features of hyper-modernism.

SF is a worldview and a way of theorizing and knowing. It is not merely the literature of “cognitive estrangement” under capitalism, as Marxist-oriented SF studies would have it.

Short Definitions of Modernity, Postmodernism, and Hyper-Modernism

The following short definitions of modernity, postmodernism, and hyper-modernism in cultural theory are brief introductions to terms which, in other circumstances, would require more in-depth explanations with all their accompanying references. Many entire books have been written on these concepts. The aim in this section is to dive quickly into familiarity with the three terms, as a way of providing an initial orientation to the reader, or enough of a framework of understanding to support my overall argument. An appreciation of the greater complexities of this terminology is exhibited both in my acknowledgment here that there exists a vast academic literature on this subject which, in my examination of it, I only scratch the surface, and by pointing out that the comprehension of what I mean by modernity, postmodernism, and hyper-modernism will be added to and fleshed out throughout the book.

As elaborated in depth in the third essay “What is Hyper-Modernism?,” the meaning of the modernity paramount in this book is situated in the contexts of history and historiography. It is the sense of history that I associate with modernity. Modernity is the “grand narratives” (Lyotard) of history having a teleological or eschatological sense of a linear movement towards a “happy ending.” The prevalence of modernist historical narratives began with the Enlightenment and the French and American political revolutions in the eighteenth century; continued with the nineteenth century of the industrial revolution, scientific rationality, and the high veneration of knowledge; and extended in the twentieth century to the emergence of the media and consumer culture of the post-World War II prosperous economies of Western societies. Some primary examples of these modernist stories of history structured around quasi-religious faith in “progress” are democracy, industrialization, science, liberal humanism, Hegelianism, utopianism,

socialism, and Communism. In the area of technology, I associate modernity with the notion that technology is a tool for the domination of nature in the service of economic prosperity. Realism abided in art and literature. Sociology studied “the social.”

I associate the term postmodernism, *first*: with the crisis of the self-confident feel of history and progress provoked by the advent of mid-twentieth century media and consumer culture; *second*: with the cultural and media theory concepts of the leading postmodern thinkers McLuhan, Baudrillard, Virilio, Haraway, Foucault, Kittler, and Flusser; and *third*: with questions raised about the relation between what both modernist science and widespread “common sense” call “reality” and the counterparts of “reality” such as fiction, media, virtuality, hyperreality, simulation, “the fake,” and software code. The Hollywood culture of cinematic historiography paradoxically weakens access to “the real” of the historical past.

In the humanities, postmodernism has been analyzed via semiotics, communication studies, and the cultural and everyday life reproduction of power/control relations. In the hyperreality described by Baudrillard, semiotic signs or rhetorical signifiers (visual images and linguistic discourse) become increasingly independent from the signifieds (facts and “referents”) of which they were previously the representations. Simulation supersedes representation.

In literary postmodernism, there is the “stream of consciousness” of Virginia Woolf and the absurdism of Franz Kafka. SF overtakes realism. In art, there are the ready-mades of Duchamp and the serial reproductions of Warhol. Regarding the object of inquiry of collective “we” existence which was the province of sociology, “the social” now gets steadily more simulated by models and codes. The focus on media beyond “the social” is emblematic of the postmodern humanities and cultural studies. I will also discuss the alternative definitions of postmodernism of key authors Fredric Jameson, Sonja Yeh, and Donna Haraway.

Hyper-modernism is associated with informatics, new media, and new technologies. The key concepts of the postmodern media theorists – such as Baudrillard’s hyperreality, Virilio’s speed, McLuhan’s “the media is the message,” and Foucault’s surveillance – were originally formulated in the circumstance of analog technologies. With the universal technology of computing, the crises of space and time which these thinkers diagnosed are intensified in the transition from post- to hyper-modernism. There is a growing determining role of narratives and fictions in the exercise of power and control. There is a heightening of “reality” in advanced graphics. Images and discourses institute their own “reality.”

Hyper-modernism is associated with the technologies of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution: AI and Deep Learning algorithms; VR and AR; Brain-Computer Interface; Internet of Things; autonomous vehicles; robots, cyborgs, androids, and virtual companions; 3D Printers and Additive Manufacturing; blockchain; and advanced biotechnologies. Hyper-modernism is the multimedia technologization of experience and memory. The narcissistic self of postmodernism gets programmed by the targeted advertising and “smart home” of big corporations. I associate hyper-modernism with post-truth in politics. Utterances decoupled from facts are OK so long as they are expressed with an aura of passionate self-assurance. True or false does not matter.

Advanced technologies such as algorithms grant more power to rhetoric to sway minds inside the echo chambers of the fragmented or polarized body politic.

Prior to hyper-modernism, SF can be located as a specific narrative genre of novels, short stories, and films. In hyper-modernism, the relationship between science fiction and the “real world” digital media technologies of business, consumerism, and everyday life changes. The two become nearly indistinguishable. SF becomes a worldview, an epistemological mode, a way of seeing or theorizing the world that stands on its own. Science fiction becomes a powerful force molding technology and society. Technologies are to be understood through stories and framing narrations. The power and control brought to bear via these narratives are now executed via codes and digital-virtual technologies. Beyond the knowledge-paradigm of the social of modernity, beyond the postmodernist paradigm of media, there is the hyper-modernist paradigm of informatics and code: for art and design, and for cultural studies and the humanities. I will also discuss the alternative definitions of hyper-modernism of the highly regarded contributors to the debate John Armitage, Albert Borgmann, and Gilles Lipovetsky.

The Three Essays of Part One

In the first essay of Part One, entitled “Mobility and Science Fiction,” I pursue answers to the major research questions of this book as they have been defined in the Introduction. I also provide support to my argument that SF has become an autonomous worldview and an epistemological mode. More specifically, I study the depiction of the future of mobility and autonomous vehicles in science fiction films and in the practical technologies of self-driving cars. Self-driving cars are an emblematic technology of the cultural imagination of the future of advanced digital technologies. My thesis is that self-driving cars will not automatically – in the sense of “technological determinism” – be a good thing for humanity. Whether they contribute to utopia or dystopia depends on their design. I understand design in the broad sense of a practice that is informed by historical knowledge – in this case, knowledge of the cultural history of mobility. We do not live in a society where mobility is encouraged. Do we, without reflection, continue this history, or are autonomous vehicles as an opportunity to change in a positive way? A post-humanist perspective that rethinks the ecological crisis is needed, systems of power, our attitude towards robots and androids, and how some non-humans as potentially being “self-owning” is to be understood.

I write about early twentieth century paintings about self-driving cars by Henri Matisse, portrayals in advertising during the 1950s to 1970s of the futuristic vision of self-driving cars, and media theorist Paul Virilio’s concept of the “vision machine.”³⁰ I make commentaries on the SF films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, *Minority Report*, *The Fifth Element*, *Back to the Future*, and *Total Recall*. I conclude with an exegesis of the SF novel *Ubik* by the great science fiction writer Philip K. Dick.³¹ *Blade Runner* and *Minority Report* were Hollywood films based on Dick stories. I argue that *Ubik* is explicitly about science fiction as an epistemological mode.

In the second essay of Part One, entitled “Science Fiction Heterotopia: The Economy of the Future,” I continue to pursue answers to the major research questions of this book

as they have been defined in the Introduction. I also provide further support to my argument that SF has become an autonomous worldview and an epistemological mode. More specifically, I study visions of future post-scarcity, post-capitalist economic systems in SF films and in the practical technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I argue for the potential of actual technologies to become part of the vision of post-capitalism, provided they are designed in alternative ways. I focus on the examples of 3D printers and Additive Manufacturing, blockchain, virtual companions, and moral algorithms. I comment on the ideas about post-capitalism of Murray Bookchin, Yanis Varoufakis, André Gorz, and Paul Mason.

With Bookchin, one sees that the imagination of a post-scarcity post-capitalist economy and society founded on the intelligent and creative design and deployment of technologies was already a major idea during the New Left counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s. With Varoufakis, one witnesses a contemporary attempt by an economist to rethink the organization of the future pragmatic-utopian society by combining some socialist and capitalist principles. The emphasis in the intellectual work of André Gorz is on the question of how technology designed with human intelligence can lead to new definitions of the meaning of life beyond work and the production economy. Paul Mason provides a recent expression of the renewal of the post-capitalist vision in the context of today's digital transformation.

The concept of heterotopia of Michel Foucault plays a major role in my vision of post-capitalism. I look at W.G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, which is in dialogue with Foucault's heterotopia notion. I elaborate my idea of Technological Anarchism. I write about *Star Trek* economics and the *Star Trek* Replicator technology. A more mainstream version of the economy of the future, enacted within the framework of hyper-modernism, and deploying Augmented Reality and the Brain-Computer Interface, is the "technologizing of memory" in the episode "The Entire History of You" of the amazing SF TV series *Black Mirror*.

In the third essay "What is Hyper-Modernism?", I lay out various meanings of hyper-modernism. Hyper-modernism is coeval with digitalization. I comment on digitalization from a cultural/media theory perspective, meaning that a necessary concept like hyper-modernism is considered in relation to the well-established terms modernity and post-modernism in speaking about cultural-historical paradigms or *épistèmes*. In hyper-modernism, power and control exercised via narratives and fictions are implemented in a detailed way via digital and other advanced technologies. How does hyper-modernism problematize the concepts of history, science fiction, and reality (which all need to be rethought)? I examine the border between postmodernism and hyper-modernism in politics (Trump), art (Warhol), literature (Flaubert), and SF (*2001: A Space Odyssey*). I ask what happens to the body, self, and code in hyper-modernism. I write about this in the context of the *Black Mirror* episode "White Christmas." This touches on feminist theory and the topic of sincerity and authenticity.

