

Post-Human Pop: From Simulation to Assimilation

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Abstract:

The following chapter discusses the adoption of the robot as a primary representational form by, two music acts, Kraftwerk and Daft Punk. While this process might be interpreted as one of extreme dehumanisation and sacrifice, the paper questions whether this deployment of ‘the post-human’ is presented as the antithesis of the extremities and excesses associated with Debord’s ‘spectacle’. It additionally observes a number of key stages in the careers of both bands to highlight media relations and the impact of technology: development that has been characterised by shifting positions surrounding subservience and authorship. It illustrates how the approaches can linked to Baudrillard’s phases of the simulacra yet it contends an explicit rejection of the spectacle simply through the use of these simulations while additionally identifying how the continuation of these forms have become increasingly incompatible with abstinence.

Keywords:

Cyborg, Music, Robot, Representation, Spectacle.

Introduction

When my colleague Elinor Taylor put forward the call for papers that preceded the Extremity and Excess conference, she suggested that the discussion of these topics “places oneself in a position of implied moderation”. However the similarly inferred notions of temperance (or, in fact, ‘normality’) potentially prove contentious when we attempt to locate what is extreme or excessive within our own activities. Research, by its nature, frequently verges on the obsessive: or what we might instead read as ‘extreme’ or ‘excessive’. Furthermore our immersed engagement in these practices additionally has the ability to lose sight of what we study as being related to these specific concepts. This isn’t the Ballardian Death of Affect: a sudden inability to feel. But rather that close association – something that can prompt us to focus on commonalities or an ‘everydayness’. This can recount Barthes’ warning that the penetration of the object has the power to “liberate it but destroy it” (1957, p. 159) or Foucault’s criticism of mainstream social science for “normalising” and “pacifying” its subjects (Fay, 1996, p. 200). My own work, for example, explores the strategic marketing/positioning of electronic dance music. It is not centred on the grotesque. It is not concerned with mass hysteria. Neither does it deal with terrorism [although I do encounter production guises utilising names such as Hijack and Hostage]. Yet the *proximity to* and *familiarity with* what *are* the more fantastical aspects of the general area had resulted in them initially being overlooked when considering their relationship to the conference theme.

Following a subsequent reconciliation - the recognition of much studied behaviour as actually 'abnormal'- the following chapter focuses on the visual representations adopted by two pivotal electronic bands: Kraftwerk and Daft Punk. It does this while questioning whether the eschewing of both the media and the spectacle by these bands can provide an antidote to excessive media coverage. Debord interrogates these "excesses of the media" when giving consideration to the critique of the spectacle: noting how the nature of this communication "is sometimes driven to extremes" (Debord, 1998, p. 7). It may follow that those individuals that are most reluctant to engage in these media excesses are more likely to be reticent in their engagement with the spectacle. In popular music, the spectacle has become commonplace – placing it firmly within what Debord observes as *The Society of the Spectacle* and often relying on methods of dissemination that can be based around performance. The spectacle can also utilise the fame-oriented 'star system' that, in turn, has the ability to be propagated via the media. However David Buxton makes reference to popular music's "decline of the star" (Buxton, 1990, p. 437): citing the emergence of technology as a root cause and highlighting the destruction of the pop star myth as typified by Kraftwerk's robot as human replacement. This particular rejection of the musician as media-perpetrated celebrity has since become adopted as a model in electronic music with the faceless composer or absent performer positioned as a reputedly subcultural alternative to the excesses of fame. In response, the media (particularly those music publications that have committed to a traditional 'rockist' stance) has been known to define such artists' activities as underground, covert and – while seemingly being opposed to its own ideologies – extreme.

The Man-Made Machine/The Machine Made Man

I call them ‘androids’... sly and cruel entities which smile as they reach out to shake hands. But their handshake is the grip of death, and their smile has the coldness of the grave (Dick, 1975, online).

It’s not just Robocop, it is our grandmother with a pacemaker (Gray, Mentor and Figueroa-Sarriera in Gray, 1995, p. 2)

The robot made its Kraftwerkian debut on the reverse of the cover for the *Computer World* album in 1981. Identified by Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) as an extended human and less a futuristic vision than an indicator of man’s current condition, we can view Kraftwerk’s use of this guise as a critique on the role of performer within the mechanics of the music industry. Initially this same idea was touched on through the band’s earlier representation as mannequins or “showroom dummies” – itself a wry comment on the need for the human figure to shift a commodity within the marketplace. In fact Bussy asserts that it was a gruelling tour of America that prompted the Dusseldorf band to question if their reinvention as robots or dummies had already taken place (1993, p. 107). The dummies were actually used for a subsequent album launch and their presence – culminating in the provision of an approximation of attendance - meant that the band felt confident enough to avoid the assembled press until the last five minutes of the event. However radical this may have been, a sole shocked account appears to be from a journalist that demonstrated disdain

for “the Germans who don’t even say ‘Good Evening’” (Bussy, 1993, p. 107) - thus potentially furthering the ‘coldness’ that might be routinely associated with these machines.

With a name meaning ‘power station’, Kraftwerk (albeit in less striking human form) debuted in 1970 and were touted by the UK’s music press as being part of the ‘krautrock’ genre. Although rudimentary recordings from the Dusseldorf band used manipulation and distortion in post-production, the early sound was based around what are observed as traditional rock instruments. The now definitive synthesizer-oriented aesthetic that has come to be associated with the group [an influence that would later contribute to the emergence of the ‘techno’ genre] was not apparent until the band released their third album, *Ralf und Florian*, in 1973. This was additionally a music release that highlighted the tensions between Kraftwerk and the romantic notion of the composer. Whilst the intimate, perhaps ego-driven, *Ralf und Florian* title might suggest the marketing of the performers as ‘personalities’, the music was somewhat distanced from the conventions within popular music. Sonically more mechanical than its functionally-labelled *Kraftwerk 1* (1970) and *Kraftwerk 2* (1972) predecessors, the album features Kraftwerk’s first sacrifice of the supposed warmth of the human voice in favour of the robotic sound of the vocoder. It additionally usurped any freeform arrangements in favour of the metronomic precision of the drum machine to celebrate “its mechanical and repetitive characteristics” (Warner, 2003, p. 47). The subsequent robot form, however, presented a far more contentious metaphor for the pure functionality of the musician as explained by the band’s Florian Schneider:

We always found that many people are robots without knowing it. The interpreters of classical music [...] are like robots, making a reproduction of the music which is always the same. It's automatic, and they do it as if it were natural, which is not true [...] in fact, we have exposed the mechanical and robotic nature of our civilization. (Bussy, 1993, p. 175)

Generally considered to be an automaton made in the shape of man, this “usually pre-programmed or [...] self-adapting and intelligent” being (Johnsen and Corliss in Gray, 1995, p. 89) has its purpose further demonstrated through the etymology of ‘robot’. The origin of the word [something that has alternatively been described as ‘robotnik’] is tied to the Czech ‘worker’ while additionally having origins in wider Slavic languages to describe ‘drudgery’. This appears to be clearly evident to members of Kraftwerk whose *The Robots* (or ‘Die Roboter’) track from 1978 contains the lyric “ja tvoi robotnik” - meaning “I’m your worker”. This, in turn, has been echoed in Kraftwerk’s interviews where the band was quoted as stating: “We are not artists, nor musicians... first of all we are workers” (Bussy, 1993, p. 72). In turn, it was potentially explored through performance where movements had the characteristics of the joyless. They remained mechanical and lacked fluidity; they were angular and repetitive. Film footage of the band may have revealed that lyrics such as “we go to into a club... and there we start to dance” (from 1977’s *Showroom Dummies*) may have been accompanied by more vigorous activity, yet these

were no less controlled and stilted by what were suggested as involuntary predefined processes. The facial expressions of the four band members continued to be emotionless - devoid of the pleasure or 'release' more usually associated with dance. However, the depiction is still clearly based around physical agitation - and seemingly in contrast to the initial representation of Kraftwerk's robots via photography. However, whether it was the still image on *Computer World* or other, more iconic, imagery composed in homage to Russian designer Ed Lissitzky, official depictions still appeared to favour the Futurist's interests in kinesis: something potentially at odds with that static nature of photography. The Futurists had actually accused photography of "stopping time"; even "destroying the energetic dimension of the act, thus consigning the vital moment to an immutable and immobile representation of something that no longer is" (Lista, 2001, p. 10) – a concept that could have the potential to curtail the modernist stance of a contemporary electronic pop band. Kraftwerk's approach to the still image then appears to try and convey movement – or 'the moment' - through the dynamism of the diagonal line and what is most often an image of the worker actually *at work*. The suggested activity, or mobility, of Kraftwerk has remained an important component – favouring an expression of energy, however routine and doleful the described task may have been.

However, returning to Kraftwerk's ode to 'The Robots' we also find the line "ja tvoi sluga": translated as "I'm your slave" and echoing Baudrillard's same "slave" approximation of the robot (2005, p. 131). How this concept has affected the musician that will use the imagery of the machine in place

of persona has impact within its place as part of the spectacle. Still arguing a case for the ‘non-spectacle’, the definition of these forms by Kraftwerk (and more recently by Paris’ Daft Punk) may communicate to an audience a message of “we serve you”. Certainly, this performance through enslavement avoids an immediate connection between performance and financially-driven fame to assist with the notion that “artistic pursuits and financial gain are often regarded as mutually exclusive” (Warner, 2003, p. 13). Yet the subjugation that is connected to these seemingly ‘functional’ manifestations also helps to erode the superiority or ego associated with the creation of art and, in turn, the depiction of the artist as a god-like creator [that said, the aforementioned creation of the machine in man’s image does have its own potentially blasphemous overtones]. It then provides “a reversal of the received dictum that art should elevate us above our surroundings and transcend functionalism” (Toop, 1995, p. 204): then celebrating “the obvious artificiality of the machine” while additionally reacting against “the bourgeois theatre of illusion” (Raunig, 2010, p. 41). These are traits seemingly integral to the imagery of Daft Punk – a band that can be viewed as furthering Kraftwerk’s post-human pop agenda – as highlighted by the band’s Thomas Bangalter:

We don't believe in the star system. We want the focus to be on the music. If we have to create an image, it must be an artificial image. That combination hides our physicality and also shows our view of the star system. It is not a compromise.
(Grant, 1997, online)

Far from being a compromise, the robot was a perfect vessel for this rejection of celebrity and illusion in its state as a mechanical and unemotional apparatus that is created to solely perform a specific function. It “embodied a critique of the auteur; that is, the domination of artistic practice by a single originating vision” (Gronholm in Albiez and Pattie, 2011, p. 69). But this reification of the artist as anthropomorphic robot is additionally noted as an “expression of and a powerful motive force in industrialized mass society” (Von Bertalanffy, 1973, p. 28). However, the Marxian view of the machine assumes that humans who interact with these technologies – those that are complicit in its labour – are “cast merely as its conscious linkages” (Marx, quoted in Raunig, 2010, p. 18). Kraftwerk may have insisted that “one day, the robots will be the ones that will answer your questions” (Bussy, 1993, p. 114) - thereby suggesting a wish for their more mundane tasks to be delegated. However this utopian vision - where machines would undertake hard toil to allow for more leisure time for human counterparts – is in opposition to Marx’s view. Instead there is a glorification of the machine for its ability to exploit and produce “surplus-value” labour (Raunig, 2010, p. 21). So, when operating as “an external agent which is supposed to be both a replacement for ‘man’ and ‘his’ perfect simulation” (Zylinska, 2002, p. 3), the robot is arguably no less than man: and man no less the slave.

Version 2.0

Cyborgs do not stay still. Already in the few decades that they have existed, they have mutated, in fact and fiction, into second-order entities like genomic and electronic databases and the other denizens of the zone called cyberspace. (Haraway in Gray, 1995, p. xix)

Refuting William Morris' belief that machines were "useful" but "incompatible with true aesthetic production" (Frith and Horne, 1987, p. 173), Kraftwerk's approach supports Timothy Warner's argument that "certain technologies channel the energy of artists to give rise to particular kinds of artefact" (Warner, 2003, p. 12). But while producer Trevor Horn insisted that "technology has affected the music since people built cathedrals" (Warner, 2003, Appendix 1), the technology that influenced a series of musical artefacts from this particular band appeared to be located firmly in the 20th century. The autobahn, the pocket calculator, the computer and the robot were themes explored through appropriately industrial-like processes. In both the making of music and in giving voice to the banalities of industrialization, Kraftwerk then allowed "machines to speak for themselves" (Toop, 1995, p. 201) with that relationship between musical narrative and production reaching what is assumed to be its logical conclusion when Kraftwerk's members transformed into a Fritz Lang-evoking cyborg form. This process completed what the band described as "The Man-Machine": a retro-futuristic automaton that was as mechanical as the trans-continental locomotive or racing bicycles that had additionally

found their way into the Kraftwerk repertoire. But there was an additional weight to this mechanized imagery that comes from the complete history of robots in popular culture: from von Kempelen's Turkish chess player (circa 1770) to The Wizard of Oz's Tin Man right through to B-Movies and the sci-fi blockbusters of the late 20th century. In tandem with Benjamin's discussion of what was transmissible from the moment of a work's production through each and every interpretation, it is possible to perceive the robot's "aura" in the same way: as an object with a cumulative value where its development through a legacy of mechanical fantasy replaces the Benjaminian mechanical reproduction of a single work of art. The concept of the robot is then shaped via all of its uses (through film, toys, industry, etc.) just as the understanding of The Mona Lisa includes its reinterpretation through every subsequent print (Benjamin, 1936, p. 38). To understand the role of the robot in popular culture further, and specifically with regards to its use by Kraftwerk and Daft Punk, it can be examined using Baudrillard's following four phases of the simulacra (Poster, 1988, p. 167):

Phase 1: The reflection of a basic reality.

Phase 2: Masking and perverting a basic reality.

Phase 3: Masking the absence of a basic reality.

Phase 4: Bearing no relation to any reality whatever - it is its own pure simulacrum.

While all of these phases can be highlighted when discussing the simulacra mobilized by both bands, it is the second and third phases that are

particularly interesting. Here the robot is but a disguise that has the potential to redefine, yet at the same time completely clarify, what is functional, dance-oriented music. That “absence of a basic reality” is additionally prominent in that clarification of the machine-built and automated as the antithesis to the ‘authentic’: particularly in relationship to revered music concepts such as ‘the virtuoso’ or even ‘soul’. Additionally, the robots are able to provide a visual referent for what is an invisible form of communication – with the absence of reality then potentially applicable to any musician that represents their aural output through what is visible. While that “reflection of a basic reality” is situated in a further alignment with technology: a suggestion that the machines are, in fact, behind the music. In the final phase - as its own pure simulacrum - there are those representations actually *as* Kraftwerk and Daft Punk: now recognisable by audiences as music entities intertwined with the purportedly ‘non-spectacle’ spectacle that are free to further their own mythologies through often extreme technology-related musical narratives.

However, that “reflection” has, in recent years, come to mirror a new reality and could be interpreted to be as prophetic as McLuhan’s writings on electronic communication. In tandem with cyborg theory’s shift through the android as space traveller and the biomechanical/trans-human experiments of Stelarc and Orlan towards what are now seen as conventional aspects of everyday Web-based life, post-human pop is commonplace; routinely wired into our entertainment networks. And while the internet may have altered the whole music industry (particularly reshaping distribution and, in turn,

power dynamics), it is artists that were already defined through technology-based aesthetics that have additionally explored its creative capabilities.

Subsequently bridging early experiments such as Future Sound of London's *ISDN* broadcasts [collected on 1994's *ISDN* album] with more recent label/artist subscription tariffs, Daft Punk championed the use of 'bonus material' download links in 2001 with the launch of *Daft Club*. In the exact same year that iTunes was introduced, early copies of Daft Punk's sophomore album, *Discovery*, included a 'Daft Card': a credit card complete with a membership number that gave the holder access to additional monthly downloads from *Daft Club*. This stream of MP3s – remixes, unreleased tracks and instrumentals – began with 'Ouverture': a short piece of music [completely unrelated to the band's later 'Overture'] that seemed indebted to the kind of pulsating electronics found on John Carpenter's soundtracks. What was particularly notable about this track was its intro: a cacophonous fanfare constructed from the beeps and discordant white noise of a dial-up connection; a testament to the modes of communication then required to facilitate the *Daft Club* project. [*Daft Club* was eventually given a separate label release on CD following the closure of the microsite in 2003. It is also available for download via iTunes under the title *Daft Club – The Remixes* yet it appears to be the same versions originally distributed as *Discovery* bonus material.] Daft Punk's rejection of human physicality was suddenly coupled with the ability to produce music without physical product: touching on Stelarc's statement that what was significant in the information age was "no longer freedom of ideas but rather freedom of form - freedom to modify" (quoted in Dery, 1996, p.

303). However, the band continued to release albums on vinyl and compact disc whilst further augmenting their relationship with the tangible ‘product’ via advertising campaigns for Adidas and Gap and, more peculiarly, taking on the role of ‘celebrity’ designers to create a coffee table for, furniture store, Habitat. However, where Stelarc’s quote has particular resonance for Daft Punk is less in the “freedom of form”, and more in the “freedom to modify”.

Already hinted at through the multifarious versions or interpretations of their music available through *Daft Club*, 2005’s ‘Technologic’ single was an unmatched pop paean to modification. Following the band’s earlier use of repetitive vocals, Daft Punk’s intonation within ‘Technologic’ was solely a series of vocodered commands predominantly describing methods of digital manipulation. Beginning with “Buy it, use it, break it, fix it / Trash it, change it, mail - upgrade it / Charge it, point it, zoom it, press it / Snap it, work it, quick - erase it”, the lyrics may be lent to a number of processes – including those involving analogue technology - yet other instructions (such as “surf”, “scan” and “scroll”) were more explicit in locating these tasks within the capabilities of the modern computer. Somewhat fulfilling the lyrics’ objective for further manipulation, ‘Technologic’ would later be used as the basis of Busta Rhymes’ ‘Touch It’ (2006) and Zomby’s ‘Daft Punk Rave’ (2008). Additionally while evocative of Apple’s iMac “Rip. Mix. Burn.” advertisement and with the track actually used in a 2005 iPod campaign, the lyrics could be assessed as an optimistic view of the flexibility afforded by emergent technology. Despite this, the accompanying promotional video for the single was a more dystopian

interpretation: a three minute pop promo that reacted against an idealist's view of what has been described as "post-industrial light and magic" (Ross in Penley and Ross, 1991, p. 127).

Following Daft Punk's commissioning of videos by directors including Spike Jonze and Michel Gondry, 'Technologic' was the third self-directed promo by the band. Beginning with the kind of graphics associated with vintage video games or a movie such as 1982's *Tron* [Daft Punk would go on to soundtrack its 2010-released *Tron: Legacy* sequel], a television monitor flashed the lyrics as text in a darkened room. There was a direct relationship here between the communication of lyrics and Daft Punk's 'Television Rules the Nation': a track recorded as part of the same studio sessions as 'Technologic'; it's dominance a reminder that "the screen is the most important political body, gradually eclipsing the national logo as the sign of the postmodern terrain of power" (Gray and Mentor, in Gray, 1995, p. 457). The on-screen doctrine was then revealed as demands issued by a skeletal mechanical figure seemingly with lifelike teeth and eyes that had first been glimpsed observing the screen in the darkened room. Perhaps even more grotesque than the monster from Shelley's *Frankenstein* [a character that's often referenced as the robot's forbear], this unnamed figure was created by Tony Gardner of special effects specialists Alterian Inc. Additionally, it appears to have similarities to, another Gardner creation, the antagonist Chucky that was first made famous in, 1988 horror film, *Child's Play*. For 'Technologic', the de-fleshed 'Droid of Chucky' is often revealed in such extreme close-up that it seems to be additionally dismembered. The unsettling reciting of the lyrics – that, while automated in this way,

suddenly feel endless and particularly futile when punctuated by the “erase it” command - touches on the observations of the early automata: particularly one attraction – Professor Faber’s ‘Euphonis’ talking machine of 1830. Hillier, discussing Faber’s invention, writes that “during the performance, the audience saw only a girl’s head with long ringlets but the mechanism and operator were hidden behind a curtained framework which made the mysterious voice more eerie” (1976, p. 52). In the video for ‘Technologic’ the camera eventually pans away to reveal more of the Gardner’s creation and the full scale of the horror is clearly visible. The figure is miniature – seemingly as small as a human baby – yet cut off at the waist and flanked on both sides by Daft Punk in their now typical robot guises. The use of robots of two sizes may depict a hierarchy within the described post-human society: one where models can be constructed for either physical strength or cerebral prowess; where there is a requirement for detached brains and brawn. The fact that the smaller robot is vocal yet immobile while the more imposing figures remain physically imposing yet silent and compliant also fits with a number of nightmarish science-fiction conquest narratives. The scene is particularly compatible with the feared but “ultimate progression of a robot capable of assembling robots” (Hillier, 1976, p. 192). The power hierarchy between the two forms is further highlighted when the smaller is filmed again in the darkened room watching itself on the TV screen: an act of narcissism that may lend itself to the diabolical genius. This, however, contrasts with the position of Kraftwerk whose preoccupation was one involving being watched by others. Within ‘Showroom Dummies’, lyrics state “we are standing here, exposing ourselves” and “we’re being watched, and we feel our pulse” suggesting a

more passive role. On the other hand, it is still validation through the practice of being observed.

Daft Punk [who were amongst the audience for Kraftwerk's performance at the UK's Tribal Gathering festival in 1997] also explored their cyborgs' ambitions to be made flesh. In 2007 their largely silent *Electroma* movie documents their two robot alter egos as they undergo the surgical application of rather comedic human-like latex faces. The story is reminiscent, in part, of that of Pinocchio, however the reaction from other robots to the cyborgs' attempts at 'realness' is hostile. Resigned to their fate as representation solely as electronic beings, the pair drive to the desert and self-destruct. Baudrillard stated that it is tempting to define such an act as one that indicates "a moral denunciation of the diabolical nature of science" (2005, p. 132): especially as this is indeed a theme that had arisen in the latter part of the 20th Century. Graphic designer Ian Anderson, for example, described the era's culture as being "drunk on science" with the following years tipped as likely to be "its antithesis where we use technology creatively to rediscover our humanity" (Pesch & Weisbeck, 1999, p. 7). But the relationship between man and robot could also recount Berger's description of the roles of the conqueror and the colonized. Here, the omnipotent and the "less than human" are interrelated and ultimately affect the way that each sees itself (Berger, 1972, p. 90): a notion that can affect the way that we view Daft Punk's android manifestation in particular. Especially if giving consideration to the naming of the band's third album: *Human After All*.

In any case, the tendencies for groups such as Kraftwerk and Daft Punk to have avoided more conventional approaches associated with the dominant American ‘pop’ and ‘rock’ aesthetics of Western music could, of course, be considered as reflecting their own origins: respectively German and French. And it *has* been argued that European countries like Germany and France haven’t had “their own supply of indigenous rock groups” (Bussy, 1993, p. 14). In Kraftwerk’s case there is a more compelling argument regarding the reasons behind an unconventional approach that centres on a “fatherless” break with tradition (Cunningham in Albiez and Pattie, 2011, p.45): a post-war response to defining a new Germanic culture in “die Stunde Null” or “the hour zero” (Bussy, 1993, p. 29). The latter concept is discussed in greater detail within the Sean Albiez and David Pattie edited *Kraftwerk: Music Non-Stop* with its relevant chapters highlighting how part of this new national identity is in tandem with notions of Teutonic efficiency. However, while notably assembling an image of themselves as robots, Kraftwerk have a more intrinsic association to that post-war period via an affair with the future that existed well beyond Germany. In *Retromania* (2011), Simon Reynolds argues that it is the era that peaked in the late 1960’s (just ahead of the formation of Kraftwerk) and is tied to the utopian visions of tomorrow that can be associated with key events such as The Space Race, the creation of the Futurist-centred Musique Concrète and the (often literal) rise of modern social housing. Alongside a slowdown in these irrefutably contemporary developments (due to budget constraints placed on the former or the problems that became associated with the latter) we find the ascendance of Kraftwerk and Daft Punk. However, despite being seemingly

futuristic, both actually appear to recount yesterday's tomorrow with the plunder of science-fiction past for both imagery and ethos.

Toop asked “when do we give up our humanness and simply accept the machines?” (Shapiro, 2000, p. viii). It could be argued that musicians like Kraftwerk and Daft Punk have already sacrificed their humanness in their embracement of the machines. That moment might be assumed to be when both adopted the robot form. Or else it could be defined as when they began making music while eschewing what might be described as traditional instruments. The visible manifestation of that act – the deployment of the simulacra – could have been little more than an affirmation. However, the move from ‘traditional instruments’ to the technological has been all pervasive. Deleuze and Guattari stated that human and tool are now “machine parts on the full body of the respective society” (Deleuze and Guattari, quoted in Raunig, 2010, p. 18): then further suggesting equality between man and machine due to their places within a larger system or network. In contemporary practice, this has been exploited by musicians that subscribed to the same ideologies of which Kraftwerk and Daft Punk appeared to profess. Artists such as Burial, Zomby, SBTRKT, Various Production, Claptone and Akkord have used the screen as both a gateway and a barrier in which to simultaneously distribute their music and protect their identities. Their technological masks, in turn, have invoked the phases of the simulacrum yet these have largely been non-literal representations of music as made by machines. However, the reorganisation that has come to facilitate the dissemination of music (with control over what information is

made public and what remains private) has allowed for each to reject the excesses of Debord's spectacle.

Conversely, while this restructuring of modern communication has taken place, Kraftwerk and Daft Punk's activities have increasingly been located within the high-profile spectacle. In the exact moment when anonymity has been available, they have rejected its allure in favour of the kind of representations more commonly associated with extremity and excess. Still, while seemingly navigating the problematic nature of 'The World Tour' and other excess-based spectacles, both bands, it is argued, have shifted from stances of "we serve you" to "we *are* you". Kraftwerk's Ralf Hutter, for example, discussed a gig at an arts centre where the band was using a drum machine. "At a certain moment," he recounted, "we had it going with some echo loops and some feedback and we just left the stage and joined the dancers" (Toop, 1995, p. 201). This may seem like an modest approach however "there is a fascination, among artists and audiences of popular culture, with the narrative potential of the situations that such machines are able to create [...] In this instance the performer becomes superhuman, and the machine enables them to transcend their actual performing capabilities" (Warner, 2003, p. 43). This demonstrated a contradiction where the artist can simultaneously be superhuman and subhuman, spectacle and non-spectacle, celebrity and non-persona. The argument for the robot – and especially its mask – seems to be that it offered a rejection of the spectacle and all of its excesses in its ability to allow for anonymity, modesty and the reclusive. Especially with the understanding that arena dates are far more

profitable than selling music in the digital age, there has been a complete disconnect between that original ethos and the spectacle.

Daft Punk seemingly attempted to address this disconnect and forge links between the observer and the observed in a video for a version of their 'Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger'. Constructed from the footage captured by 250 cameras located within the audience at 2007's live-based *Alive* project, this official video simultaneously played on the fame-based spectacle of excess. Directed by Olivier Gondry (with a version of the track that additionally utilises elements from other Daft Punk songs including 'Around the World' and 'Television Rules the Nation'), there was a clear association with the dynamics of the rock concert such as the performers elevated above the audience. However it was purposefully delivered through a grainy 'amateur' process (but then uploaded whilst perversely tagged as 'HD') to suggest a spectacle as defined by the audience rather than mediated by the music industry. Subsequently it attempted to focus on the inclusivity of participatory web 2.0 technology [in this case, it is distinctly defined by YouTube's aesthetic] alongside the robot's inherent humility, functionality and servitude. Like Kraftwerk taking residency at the Museum of Modern Art and issuing lavish box set releases, it was firmly located within the spectacle: exhibiting and epitomising the conflicted machine.

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