

## Dan O'Hara

### Machinic Fictions: a genealogy of machines in twentieth-century prose and art.

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## Summary

### **I: Introduction.**

Thematic statement, methodology, and chapter summary. The wide variation in literary usages of the word 'machine' is demonstrated. The necessity for a theoretical approach to this study of the machine is explained, and Gilles Deleuze's 'machinic' philosophy is introduced as providing the method most appropriate to the subject of the thesis. The selection of sources and materials of study, as well as the exclusion of others, is explained and justified.

### **II: A brief explanation of some of the philosophical terms employed in the thesis, with specific reference to Gilles Deleuze and his precursors.**

Definitions of the senses in which Deleuze and Guattari's terms are to be understood when encountered in this thesis. The difference between 'mechanism' and the 'machinic' is explained. I examine two of Deleuze's principal predecessors and influences - the Enlightenment mechanist philosopher La Mettrie, and the nineteenth-century theorist of mechanical engineering Reuleaux - and propose that Deleuze's philosophy is most clearly and correctly understood not as part of postmodernism, but as part of a tradition of rationalist thinking. Deleuze suggests a more rigorous materialist theory of relation than has hitherto been proposed (by for example Leibniz, Whitehead & Russell, or Ogden & Richards) in order to describe the mechanical processes guiding the genesis of form. His concept of relation is exemplified by one physical instantiation of this form-making process, and one literary example (from DeLillo's *White Noise*.)

### **III: The relation of mechanism and vitalism in the 1910s and '20s, with reference primarily to the aesthetic theories of T. E. Hulme.**

Introduces the first artistic movement of the twentieth century which has significance for machinism. T. E. Hulme's theory of a machine aesthetic, founded on a new classical geometricism in art, is focused upon the question of the distinction between mechanism and vitalism, and attempts to reconcile the two. It is proposed both that Hulme, owing to his examination of this question, has had a greater influence than is widely assumed, and that his writings have considerable relevance for the technological art of the late twentieth century. I suggest that his own influences include Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles*, and that his development of the ideas found in Diderot prefigures a return, in the second half of the twentieth century, to a widespread interest in materialism in art, literature, and philosophy.

### **IV: The mechanism/vitalism debate, as part of a wider historical division between animism and materialism, as it affects vitalists from 1899 to 1960.**

Looks at the various usages of the term 'machine' as vitalist authors have employed it. Its use as an animistic locution is examined in Conrad, Fletcher, Lawrence, Tolkien, Leavis, Ogden and Richards, and the difference between their attitudes and that of Eliot regarding the effect of the machine upon sensory life and literature is explored. A representative selection of the fictions of the first half of the century is surveyed, from Forster's revision of Butler and Wells, to Charles Williams' metaphysical images and Graham Greene's depictions of mechanically-isomorphic institutions. These authors' metonymic, metaphorical and representational uses of images of machinery are examined, and the various political attitudes and philosophical stances which are revealed by these depictions are explained.

### **V: The depiction in paintings made by psychotics of machinic systems and bodies, with original translations of case study material from *L'Art Brut*.**

Examines the link between machines and madness, a connexion that has long been prominent in gothic and science fiction. Rather than reviewing such fictions, upon which there already exists an abundance of critical studies, I examine the borderline between fiction and reality as it is expressed in the delusory epistemic systems of the insane. Schizophrenics in particular are often obsessed with machinery. A selection of the most significant examples of their paintings of imaginary machines is examined, accompanied by translations of case studies and articles from Jean Dubuffet's *Cahiers de L'Art Brut*, all of which have hitherto been unavailable in English; these artworks are then compared with the modern tradition of mechanistic art and sculpture which is a part of the legacy of T. E. Hulme's geometricism.

[ - The second half of the thesis focuses upon the various ways in which these approaches towards the machine have shaped postmodern fictions. ]

#### **VI: The employment of the machine as a structuring device in fiction, with particular reference to Philip K. Dick and Samuel Beckett.**

Examines some ways in which the machine has served as a structural model or conceit in fiction. It inspects the 1960s fiction of Philip K. Dick, a science fiction writer who was himself a diagnosed schizophrenic, and whose writing concentrates upon the obsession with machines engendered by his own psychosis. It investigates how Dick's formal experimentation with narrative structure emerges from his focus upon the machine, and traces the provenance of his ideas. In particular, it looks at his version of the man-machine trope, and explains how he inserts the science-fictional idea of the android into the context of existentialism. Set against this reading is an examination of Samuel Beckett's short prose piece, *Ping*. Beckett, writing at the same time as Dick, and arguably another existentialist, albeit one of a very different ilk, also employs the machine as an ordering principle: a model which determines the form of his text.

#### **VII: J. G. Ballard's materialist fictions of the abstract and the relational, and their significance within the more general context of twentieth-century fiction.**

On J. G. Ballard, another writer who has been described as being "beyond psychiatric help", explaining his philosophical stance and principal influences. The concepts of Deleuze and Guattari are employed to interpret his earlier fictions of the 1960s and '70s, showing how a correct understanding of his writings is impossible without a clear philosophical sense of the abstract, or a concept of the relational. The connexion between machines and schizophrenia is elaborated further, and Ballard's themes of machinic psychosis and escape are shown to have direct parallels in a wide field of canonical, non-science-fictional texts.

#### **VIII: The influence of behaviourism, cybernetics and anti-psychiatry on the fictions of J. G. Ballard and Bernard Wolfe.**

Focuses upon Ballard's later novels, from the 1980s to the present, examining how the scientific field of cybernetics, as filtered through the psychiatric theories of R. D. Laing and Gregory Bateson, shapes Ballard's narrative structure, prose, characterization and ideas. A comparison with Bernard Wolfe, himself a novelist influenced by the study of cybernetics, and one of Ballard's major influences, serves to confirm an interpretation of Ballard as a writer of intense political commitment, as well as to clarify the correspondence of his concepts with those of Deleuze, and to place him within a tradition of socially-functional myth-making.

**IX: The continuing struggle with mind/body dualism, as it is expressed through writing about machines in the fictions of Ian McEwan, John Banville and Christopher Priest.**

Offers close readings of a number of 'literary' novelists writing at the end of the millennium - none of whom has yet been accused of any psychological frailty - revealing how the concepts of the machine outlined in this thesis have shaped recent fiction. It examines how the materialist concerns of the philosophers and genre-fiction writers discussed above have been insinuated into the mainstream literary novel, to the point of determining its principal themes; and it suggests that these fictions constitute an attempt to reconcile the traditional humanist values of the novel with this burgeoning materialism - an attempt which is cognate with Hulme's attempt to reconcile mechanism and vitalism. The recent vogue for metafictional narrative techniques is explained as a symptom of the subjective anxieties engendered by this attempt to engage with materialism through the concept of the machinic.

**X: Conclusion.**

Examines the allure, and fear of, 'thinking machines', as expressed by representations of Holleriths in novels by Evelyn Waugh and Margery Allingham. A comparison with Borges' writings on Ramon Llull's thirteenth-century 'thinking machines' serves to emphasize the fundamental relational operation of such machinic systems, and to reinforce the philosophical need for a general typology of relations.

**Appendix 1:** Three case studies of psychotic artists, reproduced from *L'Art Brut*, in French.

**Appendix 2:** Original translations of the case studies.

**Appendix 3:** Glossary and translation of terms.