



## 2012 Issue No. 22 — Hyperaesthetic Culture

### **A Critique of the Hyper State: Aesthetics, Technology and Experience**

By *Melanie Swalwell*

... hyperactive man has plenty of ancestors ... people whose bodies have gradually become instruments.

– Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*, 109

The current period of technological change is one in which technology has increasingly come to be seen in aesthetic terms, that is, in terms of the senses and sensory experience. [1] It was not always thus: until quite recently, technology was still frequently alleged to be asensual and anti-aesthetic, in line with classic humanist fears about technology's alienating and dehumanising potential. Recent discourse on the experiential has been a factor in turning around such unfavourable impressions, to the point where technology is now frequently marketed – and, I argue, increasingly understood and felt – in terms of aesthetic and affective experience.

Producers and promoters of a range of technologies have become concerned with how technologies affect – and with how they are perceived to affect – users' senses. I became interested in the upsurge in advertisements for media technologies which referenced the senses during the mid-1990s. At this time, a discourse emerged in advertising about the intensification of sensory experiences of technology. Many advertisements paralleled the contemporary idea about the then new digital multimedia, emphasising the way that such media might stimulate "all your senses." The motif of sensory hyper-stimulation featured prominently, with hyper-stimulation often presented as desirable, part of what it meant to be up to date, fully experiencing the present.

Thinking about hyper-stimulation and the senses is, of course, not without precedent. A number of writers canvassed issues of hyper- – or, as it was referred to, over- – stimulation in modernity. Georg Simmel wrote of the effects on what he termed "personality" of the intensification of emotional life that came with the "swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli," arguing that this resulted in habituation and the adoption of a blasé attitude by the urban dweller. A little later, Siegfried Kracauer commented on the prevalence as well as some of the characteristics of "distraction" in mass culture, noting the "total" nature of the entertainment which, he claimed, "assaults every one of the senses using every possible means" (92). And some years later, Walter Benjamin adopted aspects of Freud's concept of shock, using these to advance an account of the relations between technology, experience and the senses in modernity. In the essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," shock serves as a figure of hyper or over-stimulation, where a high degree of stimulation results in the shock defence cutting in, protecting by desensitising and thereby impoverishing perception. However, shock was a multivalent figure for Benjamin. As the work of a number of scholars attests, he attended to its complexities and contradictions, attributing to shock the possibility of outcomes other than experiential impoverishment (Weber; Shiff; M. Hansen; Gunning). Noting the complexity of the shifts in experience that Benjamin associated with the reception of modern technology, Miriam Hansen

reasons: “understanding the issues he struggled with as genuine antinomies ... should help us ... to discern similar antinomies in today’s media culture” (M. B. Hansen 343). I agree with Hansen on this point. In tracing the transformation of sensory regimes, it’s been part of my wider project to develop an account with a dual awareness of the potential of media technologies to animate new sensory possibilities and subjectivities, as well as to cement existing aesthetics, relations with technology and conceptions of subjectivity. Rather than settle on one or the other as the “correct” reading of technology’s effects, the challenge – it seems to me – is to hold both possibilities in a productive tension.

Informed by such a framework, this article analyses representations of hyper-stimulation that featured in a sub-genre of print advertisements from the mid-1990s in Australia, for products such as stereos, home theatre systems, and smart drinks. The first section identifies the recurrent motif of hyper-stimulation in these advertisements, examining the assumptions and logic of this discourse and the hyper state it valorises, through recourse to theorists including Richard Shusterman, Paul Rodaway, and Raymond Williams. The next section profiles some of the less celebratory representations of hyper-stimulation in popular accounts of the intensification of work life, identifying the instrumentality underpinning this discourse of intensity. Finally, the third section adopts Williams’s insight on an older, alternative conception of experience, namely experimentation, in order to situate the critique offered of the hyper state within a larger frame of aesthetics, technology and experience.

In one sense, the moment in advertising which I am referencing is simply extending longstanding experiential marketing techniques whereby products are equated less with their functionality than with a desirable experience. [2] However, advertising also articulates wider cultural attitudes and anxieties. The appearance of these advertisements at a time of significant technological change interests me, and gives forth to the questions that motivate this article: What significance does this discourse of hyperstimulation and the valorising of hyper states hold for the aesthetic experience of technology? And what is the significance of hyper states for subjectivity, specifically relations to self, others, and technology?

### **Experiential Intensity**

Dating from the mid-1990s, many advertisements for media technologies carried a highly specific set of messages about hyperaesthetics, as one advertisement after another claimed that with the use of a particular product would come an extraordinary sensory experience. Hyper-stimulation was a recurrent, persistent motif in this sub-genre of advertising. More stimulation was presented as desirable, to be embraced for the immediacy, excitement and often extreme experiences that it was alleged this would bring. A quick survey of slogans for “high-tech” consumer electricals from the period illustrates aspects of the formula in use. We are warned that results will be: “Explosive” (Kenwood, fig. 1), “In Your Face” (Philips, fig. 2) and that we should “Prepare for impact” (Philips), in the face of “a sensory onslaught” (Pioneer, fig. 3). Claims are made that a product will “blow you away” (Panasonic, fig. 4); “[do] amazing things to [your] system” (TDK); “take you by storm” (JVC, fig. 5); “take sound to the extreme” (Sony); and finally, “make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end” (Pioneer). Accompanying these slogans, a range of visual devices were used to communicate experiential intensity, hyper-stimulation, and the alleged novelty of the promised experiences. Lightning and fireworks displays were used in some ads (see figs 1 and 5, for example); others used figures with jolts of electricity going through them, or other visual devices signalling energetics. Onkyo provides a case in point, in its rather curious decision to promote its home theatre systems with an image of a deranged-looking woman who has tomatoes lodged in the lenses of her glasses (fig. 6). Meanwhile, a series of Panasonic advertisements for stereo systems variously featured: a man visiting a jackhammer-equipped dentist; a person with a dog biting their tongue (“You can feel it,” fig. 7); another where a person is flung across a room, allegedly from the force of the stereo’s sound (“a bass signal you can feel and top notes that will blow you away,” fig. 4); and finally, an ad where a man’s head has entered

inside the stereo system, and the sound evokes synaesthetic associations – his feet are splashing in water, and the top of the stereo has morphed into a pool (fig. 8). This last image plays on the popular 1990s’ cybercultural theme of immersion, reminiscent of Margaret Morse’s memorable description of cyborgism as incorporation, a getting beneath the skin of the machine.

**When POWER & SOUND come together the results are EXPLOSIVE**

**XD-790CRS**  
**Dolby Pro-Logic Mini System**

At Kenwood, our pursuit of excellence in audio technology is more than a search for the perfect waveform. We want our sound to be something that moves you. Something that will excite and inspire. The XD Series audio systems are a perfect example of this.

**Hear the technology.**  
**Inspired technology.**  
**From Kenwood.**

**SRS 3D Digital Sound System**  
 SRS (Sound Retrieval System) technology creates a 3-dimensional sound field from just two front speakers by interpreting sound the same way the human ear does. This innovative system is therefore able to take audio enjoyment far beyond ordinary cones, putting the listener in the middle of the action without requiring additional speakers and other components.

**Power output**  
 The amplifier gives you 2 x 100W RMS (Stereo Mode) 4 x 50W RMS (Surround Mode). Extra bass sound is provided with the incorporation of N.B. Circuit 1 & 2 and the 3-way speaker system ensures

**New Release**

all that high-powered sound gets the high-quality acoustics it deserves.

**Karaoke**  
 Duets or solos are available with the 2 Mic inputs.

**3-Disc Multiple CD Player**  
 The carousel-type CD player accommodates up to three CD's, and allows you to keep one disc in play while replacing the others.

**Other Key Features**  
 Full logic twin auto reverse cassette deck. Auto power save. Manual equalizer. 40 Preset AM/FM stations. CCRS for one-touch CD-to-tape recording plus Dolby B NR.

**KENWOOD**  
 KENWOOD ELECTRONICS AUSTRALIA PTY. LTD. (ACN 001 499 074)  
 Locked Bag 504, 8 Figtree Drive, Australia Centre, Himeleshi, NSW 2140, Australia. TEL: (02) 9746 1888, FAX: (02) 9746 1509

Circle 3220 on Reader Service Card

Figure 1. Kenwood

advertisement.



Figure 2. Philips

advertisement.



Figure 3. Pioneer

advertisement.



Figure 4. Panasonic

advertisement.



**JVC**  
**HOME CINEMA**

**When Performance Matters**

JVC has always been driven by the challenge of bringing out every nuance of a source signal — sound or visual. Whether you prefer your movies in widescreen or as large as 61" rear projection, JVC has the very finest in home cinema products and soon will give you the very finest high resolution digital pictures and sound with DVD. Digital Video might be new to most companies, but JVC has been one of the pace setters from the very beginning. This means that JVC also understands that Dolby Pro-logic amplifiers must be better able to maximise the potential of the source and to ultimately control speakers, to bring out the very best in surround sound. Before you set up your home cinema, will it take you by storm?

For further information contact HCL (02) 9370 8888 or 1 800 225 044.

**JVC**

Circle 0000 on Reader Service Card

Figure 5. JVC

advertisement.



**Amaze your eyes,  
wow your ears,  
stimulate your brain.**

When you see Onkyo's Home Theatre systems your ears and eyes will be... amazed. Because Onkyo turns your TV into a dimensional sensory experience just the way the film director expected you to see and hear it. Not flattened on a little box with a thin soundtrack.

Onkyo's Home Theatre products have been designed to be truly future proof. They employ the latest technologies in surround sound or 3D audio, including Digital Signal Processing (DSP), Dolby™ Digital (AC-3)™ and Lucasfilm's THX™ certification. So it is a smart investment in lasting entertainment pleasure.

Treat your senses to a personal demonstration of exceptional, yet affordable Home Theatre by calling Toll Free 008 251 367 Australia-wide or in Sydney 9975 1211 and we will set up a personal appointment with one of our authorised Onkyo consultants. It is amazing.

**Onkyo, the only Home Theatre products with a unique 5-year warranty.**

**ONKYO®**

SMH The Guide, November 11-17, 1996

advertisement.

Figure 6. Onkyo



advertisement.

Figure 7. Panasonic



advertisement.

Figure 8. Panasonic

In every one of these cases, even those which seem bizarre or support ambivalent readings, hyper-stimulation is presented as desirable, to be embraced for the intensity, immediacy and excitement that it allegedly brings. The promise is of liberation from boredom and dullness and the undesirable state of affairs associated with a lack of intensity, that is, the mundane, the ordinary. Consumers are offered an extension of self through sensation: ecstatic bodily experiences and altered states or loss of consciousness, self and everyday restraints are alluded to as the result of using the advertised product. While there is much that could be pursued in relation to these themes, for the purposes of this article I focus on the way that in such ads, stimulation resulting in intense sensation has become an end in itself.

### Hyper State



These advertisements are modelling a certain kind of self – an extension of self – through sensory hyper-stimulation. I call it the hyper state. The hedonistic search for aesthetic sensations and pleasures that will deliver such a hyper state is treated as if it is the one thing that matters. You experience what you consume, and you are what you experience. It's a kind of revamped *cogito*: I sense therefore I am. Hyper is used as an index of the intensity of experience, indicating product desirability, and the message is, the more the better. That which is hyper could be thought of as an emergent "structure of feeling," in Williams's terms. Or perhaps the cultivating of extreme media-based experiences is better figured – after Michel Foucault – as a technology of the self. In any case, there are strong resonances between the logic of hyper states, and Shusterman's summary and critique of Richard Rorty's conception of the postmodern aesthetic life as one of self-enlargement and self-enrichment. As Shusterman writes, quoting Rorty:

"The desire to enlarge oneself ... is the desire to embrace more and more possibilities, to be constantly learning, to give oneself over entirely to curiosity." This quest for self-enlargement involves a dual "aesthetic search for novel experiences and (for) novel language" to redescribe and thereby enrich those experiences and their experiencer. (345)

The suggestion in this advertising discourse is that if you're not living such a life and leading such a lifestyle, accruing extraordinary sensory experiences, then you are missing out. Yet there is more at stake here than just an appeal to consumption. The discourse on experience on which the hyper state is premised is of considerable importance. It derives from the centrality which personal experience of the present is accorded in contemporary culture. On this view, experience authorises and legitimates. Williams writes that experience (present) has developed as a particular kind of consciousness, often involving an appeal to the whole being, as against reliance on more specialised or limited states or faculties. He notes that it is distinguished in some contexts from "reason" or "knowledge." The emphasis accorded subjective experiences of the present could hardly be more pronounced than in these advertising portrayals of extraordinary, intense sensory experience. At its most extreme, Williams notes that this kind of experience bestows an "unquestionable authenticity and immediacy" and can become the basis for subsequent reasoning and analysis (128). Moreover, it is one which potentially works to stabilise the *status quo*, not merely because of its consumerist origins, but because of the "unquestionable authenticity" with which this form of experience is credited.

The notion that you are what you experience is close to what Rodaway calls subject as lifestyle, or – appropriately for this article – the hyper subject. [3] Such a subject, Rodaway writes,

... is defined not by an accumulation of experience, an individual biography and social history, but what it lacks, that is, possession of the current fashionable accessories or encounter with the latest "experience" (each commodity forms). The subject is not a creative and knowing agent ... but a hedonistic, relatively passive entity which seems to be dependent – even addicted – to a continuous supply of ready-made identities inscribed in commodities, products and experiences which can be purchased in the market-place. (266)

What I particularly notice in and draw from the work of writers like Shusterman and Rodaway, is that that which is coming to constitute the intense experience of the present is predominantly experience that is focussed on the self. If we think about the pursuit of hyper states as a technique of the self – another chapter in Foucault's genealogy of modes of relationship to the self – we have to acknowledge the lack of any heed for self-knowledge. Whereas the ancient Greek notion of the aesthetic life entailed "care of the self" in line with the imperative to "know oneself," the contemporary hyper state appears to beget a subject more interested in accruing exciting moments in order to gratify – rather than know – thyself (Foucault 22).

## Hyper Resourceful

Running parallel with desires to be intensely experiencing the present are anxieties around keeping up and not falling behind. According to popular commentators, we live – and especially work – in a culture of stimulation. Alongside advertisements that extol pleasurable hyper states are others, then, which tell of the flip side: where intensity is seen in a different light, and hyperstimulation and hyper states are necessary to get things done, to break through and have an impact.

Popular accounts such as opinion pieces in newspapers forecast – and actively construct – the intensification of everyday life as the “inevitable” result of technological development. In the accounts by Cynthia Peters, Peter Toohey and Jennifer Hewett which I will cite, readers are told that rhetorics of intensity have thoroughly pervaded the world of work. Just keeping up allegedly requires a level of intensity that is markedly different from that of a generation ago. Hyperactivity is now a reality in the contemporary workplace: for years we have been hearing that the working week is “expanding relentlessly,” and that “longer hours are for everyone, especially those in better paid jobs” (Hewett). Contemporary Western societies are, it is claimed, increasingly marked by “cut-throat competitiveness” in the marketplace (Peters), a relentlessly expanding working week resulting in artificially high levels of stimulation and anxiety (Toohey), and a corporate-managerial world where the pull/reach of “the office” is almost unqualified (Hewett). Whilst the focus on the ensuing stress and intensity is not exclusively centred on the realm of paid employment, work often seems to function as a lightning rod for anxiety.

In this context, a 1998 advertisement for Jolt Cola offers a particularly telling example of the hyper state (fig. 9). Jolt capitalised on the demand for, and anxiety about, high levels of stimulation with its promise-threat of a drink that would be experienced like “a carbonated slap in the face.” Selling a drink with “twice the caffeine,” Jolt promised consumers stimulation when they *need* it. Drinking Jolt allegedly helps in accomplishing the things that one *has* to do. Whether its consumers are enjoying a LAN party or burning the midnight oil, Jolt promised stimulation that would spur those who consume it on to action. Unlike beverages which cultivate images of extreme sports or leisure pursuits, Jolt focuses on periods of extreme demand, times of urgency (though rendering this as a work/leisure split is not that compelling, as working hard and playing hard are increasingly characterised by a similar degree of frenetic activity). [4] Cola might be a soft drink, but Jolt’s forceful language and mode of address indicate that it is *anything but soft*. Observe Jolt’s address to readers, asking whether they are “Feeling calm, peaceful and relaxed?,” a state which is immediately juxtaposed with a word-image of frenzied, loud and intrusive stimuli, as readers are told to imagine a hypnotist “screaming the Zimbabwean war chant while banging [their] head with a large mallet.” In the abrupt shift from calm to frenzy and the wake of this palpable threat, we begin to “get the picture” that to feel “calm, peaceful and relaxed” is, according to Jolt, undesirable. Indeed, feeling calm under such conditions would be near impossible.

**Feeling  
calm,  
peaceful  
and  
relaxed?**

**we can  
fix that.**

**Jolt has twice the caffeine for twice the taste.**  
 You know how a hypnotist holds his watch in front of  
 you and says you are getting sleepier, sleepier.  
 Well imagine that same hypnotist screaming  
 the Zimbabwean war chant while banging your  
 head with a large mallet. Getting the picture?

**a carbonated slap in the face**

**JOLT COLA**

©2007 P&G

Figure 9. Jolt Cola

advertisement.

Tracing the Latin root of intensity helps to unpack what is going on here. The Latin verb *intendere* has two forms, *intentus*, which has amongst its meanings to be intent, eager, attentive, as well as *intensus* meaning stretched or strained in a physical sense. Jolt Cola adopts both of these meanings of intensity, putting the latter in service to the former. In line with free market rhetorics of intensity, to be enthusiastic, eager and energetic in the workplace is accorded the highest value (*intentus*), even though this depends upon the denial of the effects of physical strain and bodily exhaustion (*intensus*). This approach is an attempt to represent that which is experientially distinct for current, technologically-literate generations in the experience of the present. But the treatment of hyperstimulation and intensity is marked by a crudely calculative, instrumental approach to extracting the maximum. The senses are of course affected by this corporeal denial, but for Jolt, sensing becomes merely a function of stimulation, which is further confused with impact.

In this version of intensity, to be energetic is not merely desirable, it is virtually an essential job and life requirement. Otherwise, the message is, you'll be left behind. Jolt glorifies work, particularly work conducted at a frenetic pitch of intensity. The company's claim that its product will provide stimulation and energy when you need it dovetails neatly with the voluntarism of free market rhetoric, which champions the visibly energetic individual. As Samuel Weber writes,

“[r]arely has the complicity between technocracy and voluntarism been as manifest as it is today” (74). Toohey summarises this as “[h]ard work, long hours will result in success”. Whilst some of those in positions of privilege within the “new economy” might be able to “stay ahead,” enjoying an enhanced sense of immediacy as a result of an eager, attentive approach, in the main the vision of intensification is inflexible, and offers little that can be considered new. Yet when claims such as these are spun often enough, they take on a normalcy.

If this all seems highly instrumental, it is. Like Virilio’s hyperactive man who views his body as an instrument, a means to an end, the hyper state has here morphed into the hyper-resourceful self, in which the individual employee supposedly draws on every last skerrick of energy, creativity, and brain power, mining this as resource for their employer (Virilio 109; Heidegger). Affect, too, is thought of instrumentally: calm and relaxed states are of *no use* to the organisation and so are denied; frenzied work, on the other hand, supposedly boosts performance and so is acceptable. A thoroughly familiar maximising of output reduces technology (including such “smart drinks”) to a tool for extracting resource value. Those who don’t burn out may adapt to and become dependent upon the hyperactive lifestyle. Perhaps, as Toohey suggests, they will be better adapted to weathering the strain, but at what cost?

The ascendancy of hyper states as I have termed them – whether based upon the pursuit of novel and extraordinary experiences, or the repudiation of calm and the pursuit of hyperactive ones – has been underway for well over a decade. Figures such as the “workaholic” and the “sensation junkie” help make tangible some aspects of the logic of the hyper state. Hyper states share more than just a prefix with what has been designated the hyper-real. For instance, there are resonances with Jean Baudrillard’s pondering of the significance of attempts to forcibly decode the gene. As he writes,

... nature provides us with an opposite example [to “calling on all one’s resources”] by leaving two-thirds of the human genome to lie fallow. One wonders what purpose these useless genes might serve, and why they should be forcibly decoded. What if they were only there to meet a requirement for a degree of leeway? (101-2)

I share Baudrillard’s concern at what he sees as an attempt to reduce the margins and occupy the interstices, in everyday life as well as genetics. As he continues, “this is the ideal everywhere set before us today, by way of the techniques of self-maximization, of performance blackmailing, of absolute realization of the human being as programme ... .” [5]

I have already noted the self-focused nature of the hyper subject. Rorty’s subject concerned only with accruing novel experiences, and novel language in which to describe them, convinces me that this self-obsessed subject needs some fleshing out. They may well be full of experiences and gratification, but as Shusterman claims, the zone this subject inhabits is ethics free. Intent on survival and so perhaps prepared to do whatever it takes, such an individual (for that is what they are) recalls Hal Foster’s description of the fascist subject – fortified against everything and everyone which threatens, yet continually at risk of “going to pieces.” In such circumstances, it seems reasonable to ask, as Paul Smith does, whether this is a subject, or merely a fiction of a subject, “a purely theoretical ‘subject,’ removed entirely from the political and ethical realities in which human agents actually live” (xxix)?

### **An Alternative Conception of Experience**

Whilst the discourse of intensity and the hyper state demand critique, Smith has a point. Figures are necessarily simplifications, and they fail to capture the nuance and complexity of actual lived relations: for instance, I know I can be something of a sensation junkie, and yet I consider myself to be an ethically-engaged person, not simply self-focused, and possessing a degree of self-knowledge. This is the first problem: despite the prominence of representations of hyper

intensity, these do not adequately describe the ways that users engage aesthetically with technologies. The instrumentalising of (human and technical) bodies in representations of the hyper state is heavy-handed and unsatisfactory. Instrumentality is not always so stable, as Alphonso Lingis observes: “a hand is not only an instrument, for seizing and taking. Hands are also organs for exploration” (69). Furthermore, whilst shifts in experience associated with technological development are often considered only in terms of decline (Buck-Morss’s anaesthetics thesis, for instance), new technologies also offer new subjective possibilities (Benjamin, “Work of Art”; M. B. Hansen). How else might we think the configuration of (hyper)aesthetics, technology and experience? And how might this be conceived so as to imagine, with adequate complexity, the multi-dimensionality of possible relations from which subjectivity arises? In an attempt to move beyond these impediments, in what remains, I point to another rendering of experience, which is consistent with thinking of relations with technology in aesthetic terms.

Excavating the term “experience” in *Keywords*, Williams notes that it was “once the present participle not of “feeling” but of “trying” or “testing” something” (128). This older conception of experience – experimentation – provides a way to theorise what is also possible in the aesthetic, embodied experience of media technologies. However, arguments appealing to experimentation – perhaps like those appealing to “pleasure” or “new experiences” – often seem vulnerable to criticism, so some comment on this is warranted.

One of the reasons “experimentation” often makes an easy target is that it requires that one believe in the possibility of the new. It has also, to an extent, been trivialised by being made (to seem) to serve consumerism. An example of this is found in John Hartley’s book *Uses of Television*, in which he identifies – and to an extent, champions – the “Do It Yourself” citizen, and the phenomenon of “suiting yourself.” Hartley argues that television provides a “training ground,” in which we learn,

... the practice of putting together an identity from the available choices, patterns and opportunities on offer in the semiosphere and the mediasphere. Whether it’s a fully “fitted” identity, expensive, integrated and in a recognizable off-the-shelf style, or an identity more creatively put together from bits and pieces bought, found or purloined separately, is a matter of individual difference ... How do you learn this difficult trick of “suiting yourself,” as it were, while remaining locked in to various actual and virtual, social and semiotic communities? Television audienceship provides the training ground. (178)

The metaphor of shopping functions very well for Hartley’s argument. Although he doesn’t use the term experimentation himself, his use of shopping as a metaphor for trying out identities summons up the concept. Experimentation has in this way come to be seen in terms of trivial consumption – “trying things on,” perhaps with little commitment beyond that – linked with an ethic of “suiting oneself,” the very figure of gratification and self-enlargement noted above by Shusterman and Rodaway. [6]

Another difficulty with the concept of experimentation is made clear in Celia Lury’s problematic description of what she terms the “experimental individual.” For such an individual, Lury writes,

... the capacity to put *all* the parts of the person to work is at a premium (not simply those parts that had been subject to wil(l)-ful modification, but also those previously a matter of social and natural determination), an individual for whom the possession of a resource-ful self is something to be worked at in the very serious role-play of what might be called experimental individualism. (23)

Reminiscent of Baudrillard’s “calling on all one’s resources,” experimentation is still standing in

here for calculation – “wil(l-)ful modification,” and putting “all the parts of the person to work.” “Experimental individualism” suggests that the decision to exploit one’s self as resource is a personal – rather than a social or political – one. Finally, this is still caught up with the calculation of ends. There is nothing very experimental about calculation. By contrast, I take Williams’s reference to trying and testing to imply a distinct lack of prior knowledge regarding outcomes. Experimentation entails the possibility that the outcomes so arrived at may not please.

## Conclusion

I have focused in this article on hyperaesthetics as a discourse about experience, describing and theorising aspects of what I have termed the hyper state. Clearly the hyper state is not the only possible configuration of aesthetics, technology, and experience, and I remain interested in a range of other configurations of “hyper” and “aesthetics.” Williams’s excavation of the term “experience” is helpful not only in pinpointing the particular conception of experience to which the hyper state appeals. His tracing of “the old association between experience and experiment” is also instructive in theorising the possibility of having new and unfamiliar encounters through technology, and the opportunities these present to try out new relations. Elsewhere, I have theorised such experimental moments as the players’ chance to respond kinaesthetically to an avatar’s movements, or to play as an Othered refugee in a work of game art (Swalwell, “Kinaesthetic Responsiveness”; Swalwell, “The Meme Game”). Such aesthetic encounters offer the chance to try out unfamiliar relations, with self, others, and things, including technology. In these moments, the “hyper” in hyperaesthetics refers not to the quantity of stimulation dispensed, but to a going beyond existing, well-worn models of subjectivity.

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## Endnotes

1. Although aesthetics has since the Enlightenment been associated with art and with notions of the beautiful, the original realm of aesthetics was not art but the body and the senses. As Terry Eagleton notes, “[a]esthetics is born as a discourse of the body” (cited in Buck-Morss 125). I use aesthetics in this way, which derives from the Greek roots *aisthesis*, meaning the sensory experience of perception and *aisthetikos*, that which is perceptive by feeling.
2. On the general shift toward the experiential in advertising, Pasi Falk’s genealogy of modern advertising is useful (see chapter 6).
3. Actually, Rodaway gives the hyper-subject quite a specific meaning in relation to his discussion of Baudrillard’s writing, which my usage, referring to his comparison of the consumer and the hyper-subject, simplifies somewhat. The focus of Rodaway’s article is slightly different. As he writes, “[i]n exploring examples of the subject in hyper-reality, we will explore less extreme forms of the hyper-subject” (253, 263-6).

4. Kracauer hypothesised that leisure forms matched those of work ("The form of entertainment necessarily corresponds to that of enterprise" (93)). And there is certainly slippage for Jolt Cola between the two: once you've finished working hard it's expected that you'll party hard. As Jolt's website once proclaimed: "The 'Jumper Cable' is quickly becoming the latest, greatest drink ... just blend your favorite rum with Jolt Cola ... and get ready to party!"
5. Baudrillard's analysis provides a glimpse of what is at stake in the sensory relation to technology. Like the gene, the senses are also susceptible to being rendered in totalising ways, in terms of performance maximisation and functionality, as well as in attempts to render affect calculable.
6. In the wake of the chain store Sportsgirl adopting the slogan "I shop therefore I am," shopping seems a problematic metaphor for identity construction, given how easily it can be trivialised.

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