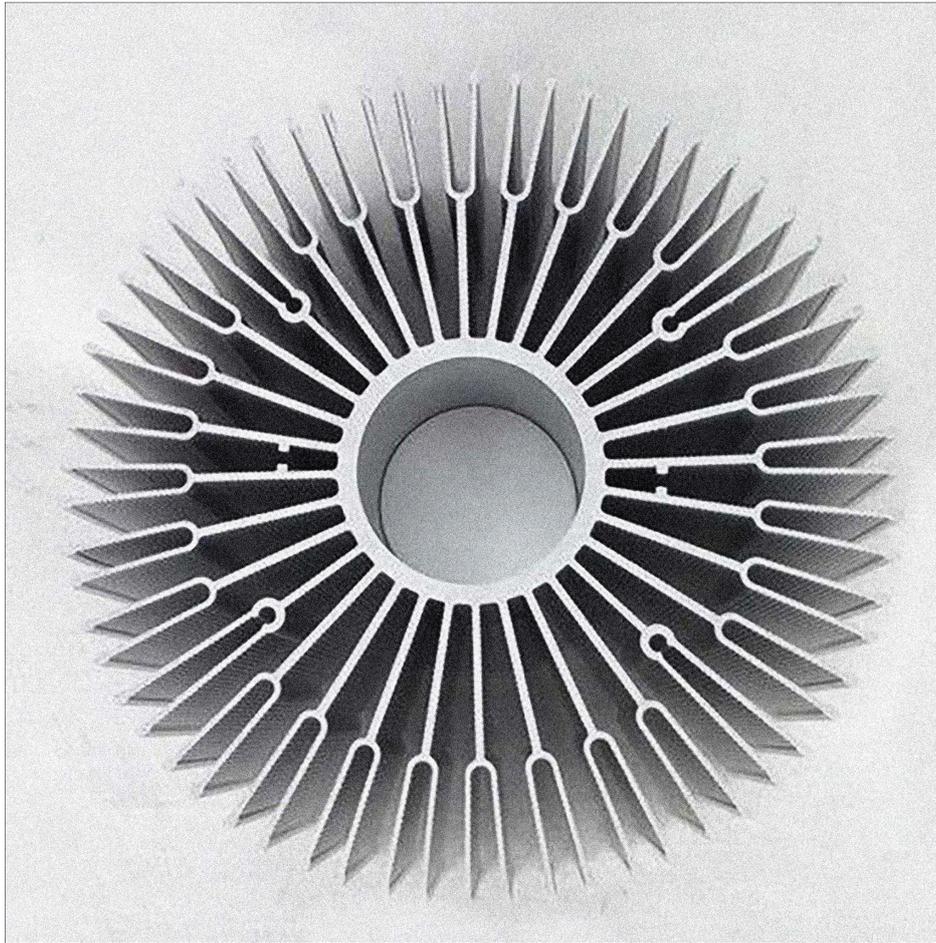


A Terminal Posture

Kristian Kragelund



Bjorn & Gundorph Gallery
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A Terminal Posture

Bjorn & Gundorph Gallery is pleased to present *A Terminal Posture* by Danish-born, London-based artist Kristian Kragelund (1987). The solo exhibition marks the first with the gallery, and comprises several new bodies of work that continues the artist's interrogation of technology through the formal legacy of Minimalism.

Kragelund explores the potential of industrial debris as ambivalent artefacts of human history in a time of rapid technological change. An "artefact" is commonly defined as a historical object created by a human(oid) that provides information about the given time in which the object was created. Popularly employed by social sciences such as anthropology and ethnology, the term is noticeably vague in its definition: from a tool to a totem, it could be anything created by humans that gives information about the culture of its creator and users.

In more recent times, the term 'artefact' has been introduced to describe a tangible by-product, or error, occurring as the result of the computation of data. The most common of these artefacts is a so-called "compression artefact," a noticeable distortion of media (including images, audio, and video) caused by the application of lossy compression. These artefacts appear as spurious signals: visually, they appear as bands or 'ghosts' near edges; audibly, they appear as sonic "echos." In both cases, artefacts are carriers of complex information that has become partially or fully indecipherable—partially lost to history, unintelligible to human comprehension. But to which extent do data artefacts qualify as carriers of societal knowledge when their deteriorated language – broken data – goes beyond human semantics? What is the status of these new artefacts, as objects and as relics of their time – what "information" do they hold, as material or as objects in their own right?

In *A Terminal Posture*, Kragelund re-purposes a range of artefacts sourced from the data and energy industry into formal elements of artworks. A range of discarded full-size silicone discs (Untitled_Artefact_x, 2020), appropriated as rejects directly from a production site in Silicon Valley, CA., is installed throughout the gallery, their glitches particularly noticeable in the spectral colour patterns. A new body of wall-based work (Untitled_Orchids 1-5, 2020) presents similar laser-cut silicon wafers – also known as semiconductors – sourced from a research facility in the US specialising in the development of automated control systems and artificial intelligence (AI) for the military industrial complex. Fitted within frames, these disused semiconductors can be considered as failed or burned out nervous systems of super-computers, once imprinted with data but now reduced to dysfunctional silicone relics: in other words, high-tech waste. Kragelund relates the unknowability of these former processes to his own prosopagnosia ("face blindness") through the printed figure of an orchid, whose large genetic variety of colours and patterns makes it ideal for training face recognition to AI.

Elsewhere, arranged to an off-set grid-like pattern, anodised solar cells in blue technical hues have been stripped of their circuits and electrical wiring thus rendered unable to contain and distribute the energy the harvest (Untitled_CellF1, 2020).

A sculptural work of reclaimed aluminium heat sinks from computer CPUs are organised on a horizontal plane resembling a model of a cityscape (Algotopolis, 2020). Heat sinks are post-human design objects shaped by algorithms to maximise surface areas so as to expel maximum heat from computers; however, their formal resemblance to modernist architectural schemes suggests a deeper linkage between human and machine thinking around design, efficiency, and spatial administration.

The title of the exhibition is adapted from a particular short chapter in J.G. Ballard's seminal novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), in which the boundaries of the mechanic and the human, the building and the body, poetically dissolve into impermanent placeholders and metaphors for one another.

A Terminal Posture.

Lying on the worn concrete of the gunnery aisles, he assumed the postures of the film actress, assuaging his past dreams and anxieties in the dune-like fragments of her body.

- J.G. Ballard / *The Atrocity Exhibition*

Through these various formal propositions, Kragelund offers a subtle critique and reading of the contemporary technological moment as it relates to creation and cognition – by humans and machines alike. By employing aesthetics in this process, he evokes its long critical tradition of grappling with the most abstract of concepts: representation, information, memory, nature, time. His methodology suggests that while technology may already have exceeded or imploded many of these notions from within (often far beyond human comprehension), art still offers analogies – metaphors – to critically approach them, as entry points into deeper philosophical and political speculation.

Jeppe Ugelvig, 2020

Jeppe Ugelvig is a Danish curator and critic based in New York and London. His writing appears frequently in publications such as Frieze Magazine, Artreview and Spike Art. His work focuses on historic and theories of cultural production, with a particular focus on technology.

Silicon semiconductor wafers

Almost all of today's electronic technology involves the use of silicon semiconductors.

The functions of which includes the amplification of signals and energy conversion, the most important aspect being the integrated circuit (IC), which are essential in the development and use of computers, smartphones, medical and military hardware etc.

There are approximately 68 million square meters of silicon semiconductors shipped around the world each year, however it is one of these few obscure things that are ever present, yet very rarely come in direct contact with - making Silicon Valley a rather befitting alias.

Besides including some of the largest companies in the world, particularly in Taiwan, China and Japan, the semiconductor industry is the third largest manufacturing sector in the US economy with the unique feature of having approximately 25% of its combined budget devoted solely towards research and development. This gives a notion of the projected importance of these devices in the future as we move towards an epoch of increasingly advanced and complex tasks performed by tech.

Due to their widespread application in almost all industries, the companies that manufacture and test these are according to *marketwatch.com*, *The Economist* and *CNBC Trading* considered, albeit somewhat volatile, reliant indicators of the health of the overall global economy.

Silicon [Si-14] is a plentiful natural and non-metallic element of the carbon-family and makes up 27.7% of the earth's crust, only surpassed by oxygen. It has the unique property of conducting energy under some conditions and insulating under others, while being resistant to very high temperatures and currents. The inherent properties of Silicon can be modified through introducing impurities (so-called doping) Through a variety of chemical and mechanical processes, allowing for increased conductivity and maximised control. These characteristics make it an ideal material for making transistors that amplifies and conveys electronic signals.

A symbolic comparison of the semi-conductor's role in a computer would be to that of the nervous system of the body. It regulates and controls impulses and distributes the necessary amounts of data and energy to the appropriate sectors of a much larger and completely interdependent system.

Kristian Kragelund, 2020

Artefacts and The Age of Anxiety

Anthropologists have suggested that for analytical purposes, 'culture' can be viewed as a three-part structure composed of the following subsystems: 'Artefacts', 'Mentifacts' and 'Sociofacts'.

An 'Artefact' is commonly defined as a historical object created by a human(oid), that provides information about the given time in which the object was created.

More specifically it is a term used in the social sciences, particularly anthropology, ethnology and sociology for anything created by humans which gives information about the culture of its creator and users. However, from a philosophical point of view, the classification of an artefact is rather vague and relative.

Take a seashell used by indigenous people to scrape fat and tissue of the pelt from a skinned animal as an example. Does the essential properties of an inanimate object change the second a human picks it up and ascribes a function to it? Is it when the same human sharpens the edges of the seashell to improve the objects functionality, or is when the human picks up the shell from the riverbed and walks to the tannery station in her camp? At what point does the seashell become an artefact encoded with anthropological information and contemporary scientific relevance? A 'Mentifact' is a term used to describe the traits of a specific culture, such as beliefs, values and ideas. Furthermore, it offers classifications as to how speech, language and symbols over time have the potential to become conceivable objects in their own right. Mythologies, religion, philosophy, and folk wisdom are fundamental in this abstract ideological subsystem, inasmuch as they tell us what we ought to believe, what we should value and how we ought to act based upon those values and beliefs. This concept has been useful to anthropologists in refining the definition of culture.

The idea of the mentifact was first introduced during the cognitive revolution in the social sciences on the 1960s, as a quantitative tool to grasp the complexities of cultures.

Essentially, it disregards or at least questions the value of artefacts as defining elements of social epistemological knowledge, and proposes that cultural dynamics are created through a complex web of social interactions.

'Sociofacts', also known as 'Psychofacts', define the social organisation of culture and is applied to identify patterns of social relations (power structures), most notably in regards of a given society's predominant political, military or religious affiliation.

Sociofacts regulate how the individual functions relative to a group, whether it be family, church or state, and traces whichever behavioural patterns (i.e. rituals) are absorbed and transmitted from one generation to the next.

Of the aforementioned subsystems, the significance of the artefact for the way in which we structure historical narrative is the easiest (at least on a platonic level) to approach.

For an object to become an Artefact, it has to transcend the boundary of object/subject relationship and undergo a semiotically irreversible transformation; from being a rock, to being a hammer. The rock not only appropriates the function of a hammer, but likewise the idea of one, which, depending on how we look at it, is an eternal concept.

The other two subcategories proposed for the articulation and definition of culture, both heavily rely on linguistic elements in the transmission of information from generation to generation. Often, this communication relies on spoken and/or written language, which implicates an exponentially evolving margin of error and corruption of the authentic message each time it is relayed.

As mentioned in the very beginning, an artefact is an object purposely and consciously created by a person to fulfil a specific purpose within a given culture, at a given time - something which contemporary science and sociology can employ in their research and understanding of historical consensus.

Over the last decades, parallel to the rapid evolution of software development, a new definition of the artefact has been introduced; as a tangible by-product, or error, occurring as the result of the computation of data. The sense of artefacts as digital by-products is similar to the use of the term 'Artefact' in the applied sciences, where it refers to something that arises from the process in hand rather than the issue itself.

In the theories of natural science and signal processing, an artefact is 'any error in the perception or representation of information, introduced by the involved equipment or technique(s).'

A compression artefact is arguably the most common artefact we encounter in our daily lives (much more so, than, say a Byzantine tool at the National Museum), which is a noticeable distortion of media (including images, audio, and video) caused by the application of lossy compression.

Lossy data compression involves discarding some of the media's data so that it becomes simplified enough for storage within a desired virtual space or for it to be transmitted within certain bandwidth limitations.

In signal processing, particularly digital image processing, Artefacts appear as spurious signals near sharp transitions in a signal. Visually, they appear as bands or 'ghosts' near edges; audibly, they appear as sonic echos.

When we, as a society, move towards a complete digitisation of all accumulated data and knowledge, does it not beg the question whether this 'new' artefact, or glitch/error, as we presently call it, will be a defining subcategory of the future in the theoretical construction and dissimulation of culture?

Attempts to map the evolution of language and semantics will forever fall prey to the limitations of self-articulation (we can only describe language with the words it provides), and is as such incapable of holistically asserting any epistemological truth, which is why we tend towards an affinity for artefacts in our quest for authenticity and existential understanding of origin and direction - as opposed to the written word.

However, when these artefacts are not solely produced by the human intuition and the human hand, but are in fact the by-products of rogue and overloaded algorithms, it somewhat short-circuits the romantic notion that human action and ingenuity stands as the primary agents of our time.

Recently, scientists have exclaimed that we have now officially entered the age of *The Anthropocene*; A geological epoch in which the activity of man is the dominant influence of environment, climate, etc. However, one might suggest, as with all historical ideologies and narratives, that the

identification of the anthropogenic era has emerged retrospectively, and what we are currently living through could appropriately be referred to as *The Algotocene*.

‘Algo’ carrying the double meaning of both being the abbreviation used in a variety of coding languages for algorithm, as well as *álgos* being the greek word for ‘pain’ and on an expanded spectrum ‘anxiety’. The Age of Anxiety.

Anxiety being a diffuse, objectless, future-oriented variation of fear; a (de)motivating factor of human actions, that will have profound social, cultural, geopolitical and economical impact on our society, likely on par with the consequences we have attributed to the anthropogenic. It will determine elections, policies, ethics and identity for years to come, it will lay bare a capitalist structure where the continual production and consumption of goods determines priorities of public health and welfare. An anxious population will be kept in check and line by cliff-hanger negotiations of congressional support-schemes or ever postponed prospects of international trades deal and future custom restrictions (after leaving well-established unions of commerce and legal accountability), ensuring that final decisions and proclamations are solely made on a basis that more suspense and uncertainty will unavoidably follow.

Anxiety, being at once personal, yet collective and at the same time abundantly universal, crosses the threshold of what we have started to refer to as ‘hyperobjects’ - entities of such vast temporal, spacial and existential dimension that they defeat traditional ideas of what constitutes any articulated object or phenomenon. A hyperobject cannot be defined nor indicated by any single sensory experience of reality, its accessibility is most often solely permitted through data and analysis, and its visceral sensation is somewhat analogous to an uncanny interruption of the physical real.

Our anxieties are embodied and amplified by a relentless image culture that indirectly lends shapes and forms to more immediate fears; something we can directly engage with, as opposed to the nature of anxiety. Anxiety takes no form, it poses no direct or immediate threat to organic or material matter (however, it enables this threat), it does not ‘steal our job’, ‘disrespect our God’ nor ‘violate our borders’ - it is, as a hyperobject, beyond conventional classification; it is ambiguously spiritual yet explicitly concrete. It is as detrimental, pertinent and terminal in its presence as any future religion or messianic deity could possibly be or become.

Kristian Kragelund, 2020