the latter's religious function or communal scale. Chapter Three offers a scrutiny of Venice as a cultural construct, a seat of Gothic adventure, a place of "literary deaths" endowed with a "fluid, amphibious quality" (112, 113). Chapter Four examines the cultural role of pornography as potential means of articulating "the repressed, culturally unacceptable forms of sexual behavior" (170). In each case, Antoszek skillfully moves from Coover's images of the party, the city, and the film to expose their proximity to the carnivalesque, and then to suggest the implications of the presence of the carnivalesque in particular novels: Coover's focus on the body's nether regions and physiological functions and on the fragmentation of the human body is reinterpreted as fragmentation of the self, suppression of the Other, and the failure of language to fill "inevitable gaps in all representation" (82); his presentation of Venice as both the threshold and the marketplace of the Bakhtinian vision turns the place into "the public square, where the repressed, closeted inner aspects of the self are made public again" (120); while his double parody of pornography and anti-pornographic discourse turns *Lucky Pierre* into "a treatise on the nature of sex, physicality and representation" (168), whose main concerns are "performance, masquerade, and the role of arts in sublimating the abject" (164).

The strength of Antoszek's analysis lies not only in her comprehensive grasp of theory or its skilful application to Coover's novels, but also in the clarity of language and in the precision argument. Her book is evidently well-researched and offers many thought-provoking insights into Coover's novelistic practice.

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Benny Pock, *Mediality, Cybernetics, Narrativity in the American Novel after 1960*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011. 321 pages.

In his 1984 essay "Is it O.K. to be a Luddite?", Thomas Pynchon famously pointed out that, given the historical origins of the term, a Luddite is not so much a "technophobic crazy" but the one who "denies the machine" of the State (40). In the eyes of many postmodern critics, Pynchon's words offered the most succinct expression of the postmodern sense of rebellion against the imprisoning apparatus of the American military-industrial complex, which has kept the free thinking individual by his throat as "the Sirens of Los Alamos wailed [him] down, and wailed down Wall." Such has been the prevailing, if not "canonical," reading of Pynchon's work, the work of other writers of his generation, and the whole countercultural aesthetics of the early postmodern fiction. Its features, such as stylistically and thematically heterogeneous collage, self-referentiality,

sign-reflectedness, reader-orientedness—the list is well known—have been read as none other than markers of "historiographically metafictional," counter-systemic commentary on the American reality from the 1960s to the 1980s (Hutcheon, Maltby). But in developing this reading, critics seem to have forgotten that when Pynchon said it was O.K. to be a Luddite, he also acknowledged that whereas a Luddite sensibility always rages against the political apparatus, it recognizes that the machine as such is not the guilty suspect: "In the Computer Age" Pynchon wrote, "it may be that the deepest Luddite hope of miracle has now come to reside in the computer's ability to get the right data to those whom the data will do the most good" (41). In other words, a modern Luddite may be one who uses technology in a liberating manner, as a source of creative potentiality, instead of rejecting it as a tool of oppressive power.

Benny Pock's *Mediality, Cybernetics, Narrativity in the American Novel after 1960s* is a successful attempt to explore this creative potentiality in the engagement of postmodern fiction with the technology of new media. The book traces the history of this engagement to Norbert Wiener's theory of cybernetics, formulated first in 1950 in *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* as well as to Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1961) and *Understanding Media* (1964). Pock demonstrates the impact of cybernetics and McLuhanite media theory on the narrative strategies and identity constructs in the works of five writers: William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Paul Auster, Neal Stephenson, and David Foster Wallace. In Pock's view, just as McLuhan was highly critical of the type of subjectivity produced within the print regime of what he called the Gutenberg Galaxy, and proposed more holistic channels of cognition, such as the audio-tactile senses, as offering more suitable means of subjective performance, Pock's writers overcome the bounds of textuality by supplanting old types of narrativity with the more sensually eclectic modes of subjectivity construction made possible by the electronic media. This is especially true of Burroughs and Pynchon, whose works strongly undermine the myth of disembodied textuality, characteristic for the Gutenbergian view of books as carriers for "an abstract transfer of thought," by "invoking the tactile reception of new media, which refers to the increased sensual engagement demanded by television and electronic music" both on the level of formal devices and on the level of content (13).

Before proceeding to examine individual literary works, Pock contextualizes his perspective within the broader framework of poststructuralist theories of textuality and the subject. Although these theories clearly circumscribe the anti-essentialist treatment of subjectivity in the work of postmodern narratives in the 1960s, their impact was facilitated by the intense response of postmodern artists to the cybernetic theory of communication, especially, its concepts of autopoiesis and the feedback loop. Starting with the clarification of McLuhan's theory of electronic media as extensions to human nervous

system and consciousness in the light of the cybernetic models of Wiener, Friedrich Kittler, and biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Pock explains that since "media give spatio-temporal form to thought, engaging it in a feedback loop that mutually reconfigures thought and medium" (62), and since a literary text is one such medium, its interaction with other memory carriers and transmission tools such as television or a computer works towards the expansion of the boundaries of one's memory, identity, and consciousness. "Literature may thus function as a form of memory which may be employed for individual as well as collective purposes" (67), or as Pynchon would have it, for the purposes of getting "the right data to those whom the data will do the most good." Surprisingly, Benny Pock never mentions Pynchon's 1984 essay, even though his argument at this point moves on to the historical account of what Fred Turner has termed the "cybernetic counterculture," a 1960s movement of which today's media-based Luddites, Yes Men, and digital-rights movement, Electronic Frontier Foundation, are notable remnants. Pock's account of cybernetic counterculture and its fascination with new media as a way of developing a "transpersonal subjectivity" is meticulously detailed: we are given everything from the reading list at the Joan Baez Institute for the Study of Nonviolence to the details of activities of the Manhattan USCO group, Merry Pranksters, John Cage and Roy Ascott, and even the Acid Tests at the 1966 Trips Festival in San Francisco. Pock certainly deserves great credit for reminding today's scholars of the postmodern engagement with technology (especially the ones dealing with science-fiction and its themes of disembodiment) about those early links between technology-friendly art and political subversiveness. This section is one of the strongest moments in the book, though the following chapter on William Burroughs and Pynchon does not fall far from its benchmark.

Pock finds Burroughs an exception among Beat writers in terms of his reflections on the relation between the new media and the counterculture. Not only does Pock emphasize the writer's frequent references to notions of feedback looping and game theory over his interest in psychedelic experiments, but actually re-classifies Burroughs's "expansive" style as a project of making media-based consciousness expansion alive and tactile in the text, a project based on the principle of looping aural elements (tape recordings), visual elements (images) and the medium of written language. According to Pock, Burroughs's *Nova* Trilogy (1961-64) is the most complete example of this enterprise, a "manifesto against the old usage of the book in favor of the newer media" and the best example of what Pock recognizes as a cybernetically structured "expanded subjectivity" (102, 97).

What in Burroughs's writing works best on the level of form becomes a theme in Thomas Pynchon's novels. Pock concentrates especially on *The Crying of Lot 49*, arguing that cybernetic logic underpins the subversive elements in the novel, thus restructuring the environment of Oedipa Maas, the novel's protagonist. By re-reading the oft-

quoted passages from Pynchon's novel—Oedipa's reception of the painting by Remedios Varo, her interactive encounter with Nefastis's machine, her vision of the San Narciso street layout as an electronic circuit, or Mucho Mass's becoming a radio DJ—Pock finds in Pynchon a pattern of characters undergoing a change of consciousness as a result of a sensory media experience, a pattern which links the "countercultural inversion of the Marxist dogma" with "cybernetic information theory" (116).

The following chapters of *Mediality, Cybernetics, Narrativity* deal with writers who represent so radically different types of postmodern aesthetics and countercultural contexts from Burroughs and Pynchon that one would wish to see them discussed in separate volumes. Despite the strength and ingenuity of Pock's interpretations of Auster, Stephenson, and Wallace, the background of their engagement with the theory of cybernetics and the media dominant at their historical moment is not as detailed and illuminating as was the case in the discussions of the writers from the 1960s. Entering a dialogue with Joseph Tabbi's *Cognitive Fictions* (2002), Pock reads Auster through the prism of second-order cybernetics and the neurophysiological notion of autopoiesis (a term denoting the operational mode of all living systems that share the aspects of self-organization, self-transformation, and operational closure). The interpretive angle helps Pock examine the ways in which Auster's work "emulates the moment-to-moment movement of consciousness" (146) and allegorizes memory and cognition processes as ways of structuring and restructuring information and organizing self-narratives on a man-medium platform (142). From Auster, Pock moves on to the cyberpunk writer Neal Stephenson, and although in this case the idea of the writer's engagement with cybernetics and media technology is by no means far-fetched, this chapter marks the moment in *Mediality, Cybernetics, Narrativity* where the book seems to be approaching its own heat death—maybe because the novels he deals with are about information overload. The Stephenson chapter stands brilliant on its own, with its careful teasing out of the formal and thematic elements of information processing, or spatial navigation and programming in *Snow Crash* and *Diamond Age*, but just like the following chapter on David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, it gets caught up in the loop of self-replicating levels of commentary and cross-references to texts and writers discussed earlier. This being said, it needs to be admitted that since in Pock's analysis, Wallace's and Stephenson's novels figure as protest declarations against what Raymond Williams has called the "mechanical materialism" of new media, the last chapters of *Mediality, Cybernetics, Narrativity* fulfill its promise of presenting a historical overview of McLuhanite and cybernetic influences in postmodern literature after 1960s. Benny Pock's book is by all means a recommended point of reference for anyone interested in broadening their understanding of the role played by technology in the shaping of postmodernist aesthetics.