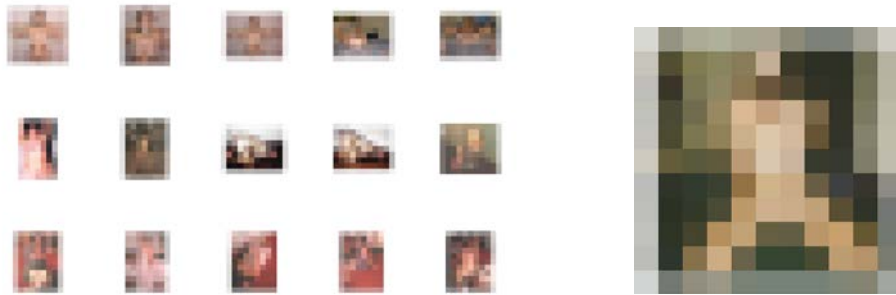


The following text gives some technical and art-historical context to the works “extrapolations”. These three pages are taken from a dissertation submitted for a Masters in Visual Arts at the Sydney College of the Arts. I’ve nothing much to add to what’s written here except to mention that it was probably this series more than any other that led one Sydney reviewer who visited my solo show in 2001, to dismiss the entire exhibition as “little more than porn”.

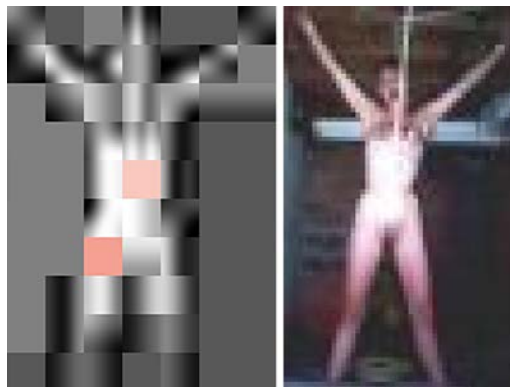
CHAPTER 9. *Extrapolations*



Thumbnails are low resolution images displayed on web home pages as indexes to the contents of a site. The stylised examples depicted above have been sourced from amateur bondage sites and form the basis of the series named *extrapolations*. As lures on websites, the diminutive proportions of the thumbnail is intended to reveal the potential of a complete image, without quite satisfying the eye. They are like glimpses, or promises of things seen at a virtual distance and most clearly apprehended as an impression at the periphery of vision. If one makes them larger (or, as it were, draws nearer to them), they refuse to yield new detail but instead appear more abstract. Although the thumbnails themselves cost nothing to download, they represent the threshold to a commercial transaction wherein the secrets of the image’s detail can be exchanged for the secret of a credit card number. To make the works in *extrapolations*, website thumbnails were treated in one of two ways, each of which exaggerate the image degradation characteristic of JPEG compression explained in the previous chapter:

Method 1: Reconstruction

The first method involves opening and saving a copy of the image for up to ten generations, forcing as many recalculations of the DCT compression algorithms. This simulates the effect of *serial* reproduction - the JPEG encoding which discards image information, acting as a consistent degenerative factor in each iteration. The final image in the ‘edition’ is upsampled without interpolation and reconstructed at a magnified scale in order to reproduce as clearly as possible the signs of digitisation and compression on the structure of the image.



thm_patty_016PRE.tif, 2001 (left) with original image on the right, Inkjet on paper, 42x 30cm

What magnification makes explicit, in a deliberately dumb and pedantic kind of way, are not the secrets of the naked body to which this preview presumably once stood as gatekeeper, but rather a kind of caricature of it, created by exaggerating the effects of JPEG compression and encoding algorithm. Its a method of forced a reprography that has precedents in the work of late 20th Century artists who dealt with analogue systems of duplication. Artists such as Timm Ulrichs^{9.1} 1967 and Emmett Williams used reprographic devices like photocopiers to break down image and text into noisy solutions of mechanical debris. Some examples are shown on the following page: figure 23 shows *Incidental Music for YoYo Ma* (1979) by Emmett Williams - a sequence of reproductions taken from a musical score and Figure 24, *Autogenese* by Wolfgang Ziemer-Chrobatzek from 1987, a serial edition of copies originating from an image of a ‘xeroxed’ watch.

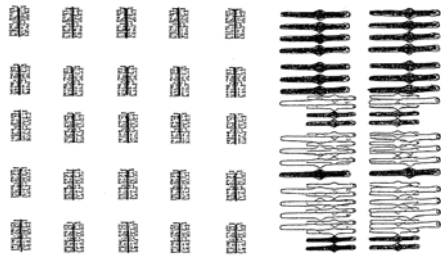


Figure 23

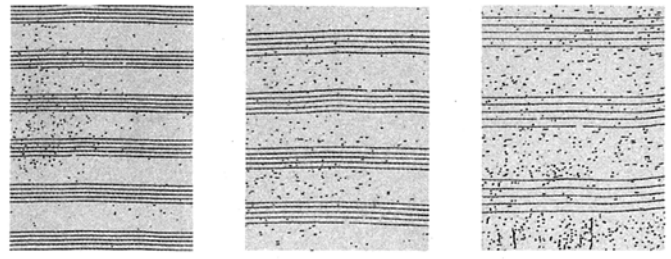
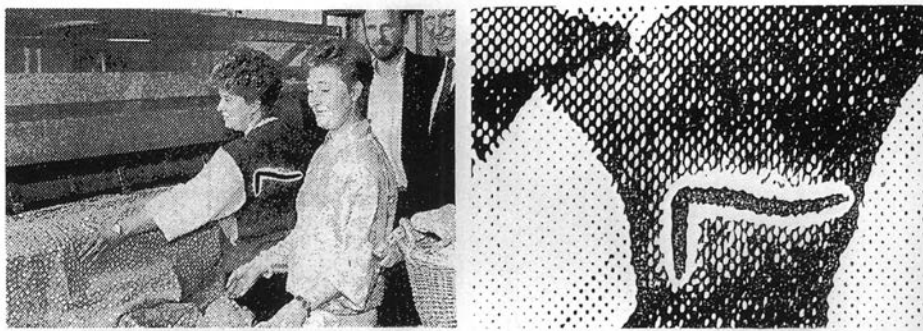


Figure 24

The reconstruction of the pixel grid throughout *extrapolations* has some association with the treatment of the process dot in some works of Sigmar Polke; particularly with *Druckfehler* (1996) and *Ohne Titel [Sfumato]* (1991) where the artist reproduces and enlarges errors that he has discovered in ordinary offset-litho printed pamphlets and books.

The errors in Polke's work represent minuscule catastrophes in the printing process; malignant tumours of ink that rupture the dot matrix but still co-habit the picture plane. The entire dot screen is rendered as if it were a landscape - a picture of a parallel world within pictures. Polke's magnification of the error is often no more than an expression of wonderment at Print's transmogrification of the real from the binary. The *Druckfehler* (German for *misprint*), or the truthfulness of the error, catches the print in an act of duplicity with photography and there is something both funny and embarrassing about this revelation.



Sigmar Polke, *Ohne Titel (Sfumato)*, 1991 Offset Litho on paper

Ironically, Polke began "painting" dot screens by using an eraser as a stamp. Each dot from his early works is a simple monochrome relief print struck from a human press. One of these works, *BZ am Mittag* from 1965 (not reproduced here), is the careful reproduction of a blurred photograph of the printed subject. There is a complication of irony and humour here. The blurring represents a kind of absurdity; an artist reproducing with a hard dot the soft edges of a poorly reproduced photograph. It can be reasoned in this instance that the origin of the blurring was in the reprography rather than the photography of the image.

Method 2: Filtration

The title of the series, *extrapolations*, refers to the process used to flesh out the image from the limited grid of pixels. Sometimes called interpolation, it is a calculation performed by the imaging software that increases the number of picture elements in an image. New pixels are added by guessing their values from pixels that already exist. For example, where a red pixel sits beside one that is yellow, the operation would insert an intermediate orange pixel. Because this process relies on approximating values from given data, it could be described as semi-intelligent - synthesising image substance without increasing or clarifying subject detail. Additional artifacts are welded to the images in *extrapolations* as an accumulative effect of applying basic filtration such as softening, sharpening and median. Filters like these perform very simple adjustments of brightness values in three-by-three pixel arrays. Although they come prepackaged as one-button functions in commercial programs like Adobe Photoshop™, the operations themselves are fundamental to bitmap image editing and predate this software by at least a decade.

The use of bondage and torture photos initially came about because I was attracted to their provocative theatricality. As a series of static poses, they also allowed me to observe how a recognisable and possibly objectionable subject survives extreme degradation within the substance of the image. The discernable presence of the body in some of the thumbnails seems to diminish as the image becomes marked with digital 'noise'. However the noise is also a sort of ornamentation and, by decorating the bound or submissive posture, can accentuate it and even seem to encourage the subject to rise up to the "surface" of the picture, combining equal traces of the tasteful with the perverse. This is a subjective interpretation but some indication may be seen in figure 25, which gives the impression of the body being constituted within an architectural subdivision of the picture's surface.



Figure 25: *thm_annie_15.3.tif*, 2001 (left) with detail on the right, Inkjet on paper, 42x 30cm

In other thumbnails, the posture of the body becomes more strongly suggested by the reduction of tones and the tendency of the process to smooth the divisions between them. I am surprised at how often this effect is redolent of painting - particularly impressionistic watercolour - where detail is *implied* rather than exactly rendered (for example in figure 26). This is partly due to median filtration, which averages pixel tones within definable areas and is similar in principle to the technique known as 'tonal impressionism', adopted by a number of Australian painters around the early part of the last century.^{9.2} It might also be because of physical similarities between the pigment ink used in inkjet printing and watercolour paint. Inkjet printing involves super-heating a liquid base that carries droplets of dye or pigment to the substrate which in this case was a heavy textured paper. The application of ink corresponds, like the process dot of offset lithography, to the quasi-scientific method of pointillist chromo-luminarism. Dots (from the inkjet printer) are scattered stochastically on a surface as separated spots of pure colour which are then 'mixed' into a continuity by the retina of the eye.

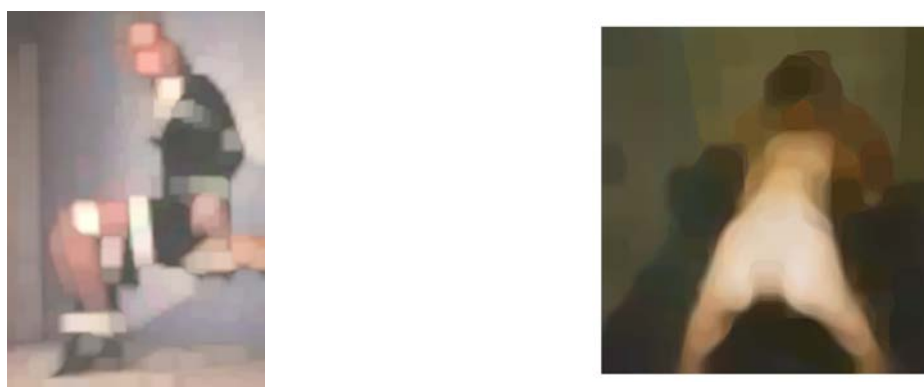


Figure 26: (left) *thm_ori0244mx.tif*, 2001 and (right) *bwife21var.tif*, both inkjet on paper, 42x 30cm

There are other associations between the mediums of print and paint that are suggested by the work in *extrapolations*. The method of filtering and layering is quick and unscripted and feels closer to the improvisational nature of drawing or painting than other applications of the computer in producing art.^{9.3} There is also something about the textural character of the image that reminds me how a redeeming aesthetic and artistic value - qualities of painterliness perhaps - have historically been used in the defence of artworks against charges of obscenity.