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## THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF LATE CAPITALISM

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art or social class; the 'crisis' of Leninism, social democracy or the welfare state etc., etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism. The case for its existence depends on the hypothesis of some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s.

As the word itself suggests, this break is most often related to notions of the waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old Modern Movement (or to its ideological or aesthetic repudiation). Thus abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great auteurs, or the modernist school of poetry (as institutionalized and canonized in the works of Wallace Stevens) all are now seen as the final, extraordinary flowering of a high-modernist impulse which is spent and exhausted with them. The enumeration of what follows, then, at once becomes empirical, chaotic and heterogeneous: Andy Warhol and pop art, but also photorealism, and beyond it, the 'new expressionism'; the moment, in music, of John Cage, but also the synthesis of classical and 'popular' styles found in composers like Phil Glass and Terry Riley, and also punk and new wave rock (the Beatles and the Stones now standing as the high-modernist moment of that more recent and rapidly evolving tradition); in film, Godard, post-Godard, and experimental cinema and video, but also a whole new type of commercial film (about which more below); Burroughs, Pynchon or Ishmael Reed, on the one hand, and the French *nouveau roman* and its succession, on the other, along with alarming new kinds of literary criticism based on some new aesthetic of textuality or *écriture*. . . . The list might be extended indefinitely: but does it imply any more fundamental change or break than the periodic style and fashion changes determined by an older high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation?

It is in the realm of architecture, however, that modifications in aesthetic production are most dramatically visible, and that their theoretical problems have been most centrally raised and articulated: it was indeed from architectural debates that my own conception of postmodernism – as it will be outlined in the following pages – initially began to emerge. More decisively than in the other arts or media, postmodernist positions in architecture have been inseparable from an implacable critique of architectural high modernism and of Frank Lloyd Wright or the so-called international style (Le Corbusier, Mies, etc), where formal criticism and analysis (of the high-modernist transformation of the building into a virtual sculpture, or monumental 'duck': as Robert Venturi puts it)<sup>1</sup> are at one with reconsiderations on the level of urbanism and of the aesthetic institution. High modernism is thus credited with the destruction of the fabric of the traditional city and its older neighbourhood culture (by way of the radical disjunction of the new Utopian high-modernist building from its surrounding context), while the prophetic elitism and authoritarianism of the Modern Movement are remorselessly identified in the imperious gesture of the charismatic Master.

Postmodernism in architecture will then logically enough stage itself as a kind of aesthetic populism, as the very title of Venturi's influential manifesto, *Learning from Las Vegas*, suggests. However we may ultimately wish to evaluate this populist rhetoric,<sup>2</sup> it has at least the merit of drawing our attention to one fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms enumerated above: namely, the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern, from Leavis and the American New Criticism all the way to Adorno and the Frankfurt School. The postmodernisms have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply 'quote', as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance.

Nor should the break in question be thought of as a purely cultural affair: indeed, theories of the postmodern – whether celebratory or couched in the language of moral revulsion and denunciation – bear a strong family resemblance to all those more ambitious sociological generalizations which, at much the same time, bring us the news of the arrival and inauguration of a whole new type of society, most famously baptized 'postindustrial society' (Daniel Bell) but often also designated consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society or high tech, and the like. Such theories have the obvious ideological mission of demonstrating, to their own relief, that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely, the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle. The Marxist tradition has therefore resisted them with vehemence, with the signal exception of the economist Ernest Mandel, whose book *Late Capitalism* sets out not merely to atomize the historic originality of this new society (which he sees as a third stage or moment in the evolution of capital) but also to demonstrate that it is, if anything, a purer stage of capitalism than any of the moments that preceded it. I will return to this argument later: suffice it for the moment to anticipate a point that will be argued . . . , namely, that every position on postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatization – is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today.

A last preliminary word on method: what follows is not to be read as stylistic description, as the account of one cultural style or movement among others. I have rather meant to offer a periodizing hypothesis, and that at a moment in which the very conception of historical periodization has come to seem most problematical indeed. I have argued elsewhere that all isolated or discrete cultural analysis always involves a buried or repressed theory of historical periodization: in any case, the conception of the 'genealogy' largely lays to rest traditional theoretical worries about so-called linear history, theories of 'stages,' and teleological historiography. In the present context,

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*Jameson* however, lengthier theoretical discussion of such (very real) issues can perhaps be replaced by a few substantive remarks.

One of the concerns frequently aroused by periodizing hypotheses is that these tend to obliterate difference and to project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity (bounded on either side by inexplicable chronological metamorphoses and punctuation marks). This is, however, precisely why it seems to me essential to grasp postmodernism not as a style but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features.

Consider, for example, the powerful alternative position that postmodernism is itself little more than one more stage of modernism proper (if not, indeed, of the even older romanticism): it may indeed be conceded that all the features of postmodernism I am about to enumerate can be detected, full-blown, in this or that preceding modernism (including such astonishing genealogical precursors as Gertrude Stein, Raymond Roussel or Marcel Duchamp, who may be considered outright postmodernists, *avant la lettre*). What has not been taken into account by this view, however, is the social position of the older modernism, or better still, its passionate repudiation by an older Victorian and post-Victorian bourgeoisie for whom its forms and ethos are received as being variously ugly, dissonant, obscure, scandalous, immoral, subversive, and generally 'antisocial'. It will be argued here, however, that a mutation in the sphere of culture has rendered such attitudes archaic. Not only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather 'realistic', and this is the result of a canonization and academic institutionalization of the Modern Movement generally that can be traced to the late 1950s. This is surely one of the most plausible explanations for the emergence of postmodernism itself, since the younger generation of the 1960s will now confront the formerly oppositional modern movement as a set of dead classics, which 'weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living', as Marx once said in a different context.

As for the postmodern revolt against all that, however, it must equally be stressed that its own offensive features – from obscurity and sexually explicit material to psychological squalour and overt expressions of social and political defiance, which transcend anything that might have been imagined at the most extreme moments of high modernism – no longer scandalize anyone and are not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official or public culture of Western society.

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the varied kinds of institutional support available for the newer art, from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage. Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship. It will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion

and development is strictly contemporaneous with it. Later I will suggest that these two new phenomena have an even deeper dialectical interrelationship than the simple one-to-one financing of this or that individual project. Yet this is the point at which I must remind the reader of the obvious; namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and terror.

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The first point to be made about the conception of periodization in dominance, therefore, is that even if all the constitutive features of postmodernism were identical with and continuous to those of an older modernism – a position I feel to be demonstrably erroneous but which only an even lengthier analysis of modernism proper could dispel – the two phenomena would still remain utterly distinct in their meaning and social function, owing to the very different positioning of postmodernism in the economic system of late capital and, beyond that, to the transformation of the very sphere of culture in contemporary society . . .

I must now briefly address a different kind of objection to periodization, a concern about its possible obliteration of heterogeneity, one most often expressed by the Left. And it is certain that there is a strange quasi-Sartrean irony – a ‘winner loses’ logic – which tends to surround any effort to describe a ‘system’, a totalizing dynamic, as these are detected in the movement of contemporary society. What happens is that the more powerful the vision of some increasingly total system or logic – the Foucault of the prisons book is the obvious example – the more powerless the reader comes to feel. Insofar as the theorist wins, therefore, by constructing an increasingly closed and terrifying machine, to that very degree he loses, since the critical capacity of his work is thereby paralysed, and the impulses of negation and revolt, not to speak of those of social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the model itself.

I have felt, however, that it was only in the light of some conception of a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm that genuine difference could be measured and assessed. I am very far from feeling that all cultural production today is ‘postmodern’ in the broad sense I will be conferring on this term. The postmodern is, however, the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses – what Raymond Williams has usefully termed ‘residual’ and ‘emergent’ forms of cultural production – must make their way. If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable. At any rate, this has been the political spirit in which the following analysis was devised: to project some conception of a new systematic cultural norm and its reproduction in order to reflect more adequately on the most effective forms of any radical cultural politics today.

The exposition will take up in turn the following constitutive features of the postmodern: a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary ‘theory’ and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public history and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose ‘schizophrenic’

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structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone – what I will call ‘intensities’ – which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system; and, after a brief account of postmodernist mutations in the lived experience of built space itself, some reflections on the mission of political art in the bewildering new world space of late or multinational capital. . . .

Now, before concluding, I want to sketch an analysis of a full-blown postmodern building – a work which is in many ways uncharacteristic of that postmodern architecture whose principal proponents are Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Michael Graves and, more recently, Frank Gehry, but which to my mind offers some very striking lessons about the originality of postmodernist space. Let me amplify the figure which has run through the preceding remarks and make it even more explicit: I am proposing the notion that we are here in the presence of something like a mutation in built space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore – like many of the other cultural products I have evoked in the preceding remarks – stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.

The building whose features I will very rapidly enumerate is the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, built in the new Los Angeles downtown by the architect and developer John Portman, whose other works include the various Hyatt Regencies, the Peachtree Center in Atlanta, and the Renaissance Center in Detroit. I have mentioned the populist aspect of the rhetorical defence of postmodernism against the elite (and Utopian) austerities of the great architectural modernisms. It is generally affirmed, in other words, that these newer buildings are popular works, on the one hand, and that they respect the vernacular of the American city fabric, on the other; that is to say, they no longer attempt, as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city, but rather they seek to speak that very language, using its lexicon and syntax as that has been emblematically ‘learned from Las Vegas’.

On the first of these counts Portman’s Bonaventure fully confirms the claim: it is a popular building, visited with enthusiasm by locals and tourists alike (although Portman’s other buildings are even more successful in this respect). The populist insertion into the city fabric is, however, another matter, and it is with this that we will begin. There are three entrances to the Bonaventure, one from Figueroa and the other two by way of elevated gardens on the other side of the hotel, which is built into the remaining slope of the former Bunker Hill. None of these is anything like the old hotel marquee, or the monumental *porte-cochère* with which the sumptuous buildings of yesteryear were wont to stage

your passage from city street to the interior. The entryways of the Bonaventure are, as it were, lateral and rather backdoor affairs: the gardens in the back admit you to the sixth floor of the towers, and even there you must walk down one flight to find the elevator by which you gain access to the lobby. Meanwhile, what one is still tempted to think of as the front entry, on Figueroa, admits you, baggage and all, onto the second-storey shopping balcony, from which you must take an escalator down to the main registration desk. What I first want to suggest about these curiously unmarked ways in is that they seem to have been imposed by some new category of closure governing the inner space of the hotel itself (and this over and above the material constraints under which Portman had to work). I believe that, with a certain number of other characteristic postmodern buildings, such as the Beaubourg in Paris or the Eaton Centre in Toronto, the Bonaventure aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city; to this new total space, meanwhile, corresponds a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hypercrowd. In this sense, then, ideally the minicity of Portman's Bonaventure ought not to have entrances at all, since the entryway is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it: for it does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute. That is obviously not possible, whence the downplaying of the entrance to its bare minimum.<sup>3</sup> But this disjunction from the surrounding city is different from that of the monuments of the International Style, in which the act of disjunction was violent, visible and had a very real symbolic significance – as in Le Corbusier's great *pilotis*, whose gesture radically separates the new Utopian space of the modern from the degraded and fallen city fabric which it thereby explicitly repudiates (although the gamble of the modern was that this new Utopian space, in the virulence of its novum, would fan out and eventually transform its surroundings by the very power of its new spatial language). The Bonaventure, however, is content to 'let the fallen city fabric continue to be in its being' (to parody Heidegger); no further effects, no larger protopolitical Utopian transformation, is either expected or desired.

This diagnosis is confirmed by the great reflective glass skin of the Bonaventure, whose function I will now interpret rather differently than I did a moment ago when I saw the phenomenon of reflection generally as developing a thematics of reproductive technology (the two readings are, however, not incompatible). Now one would want rather to stress the way in which the glass skin repels the city outside, a repulsion for which we have analogies in those reflector sunglasses which make it impossible for your interlocutor to see your own eyes and thereby achieve a certain aggressivity toward and power over the Other. In a similar way, the glass skin achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the Bonaventure from its neighbourhood: it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel's outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it.

Now consider the escalators and elevators. Given their very real pleasures in Portman, particularly the latter, which the artist has termed 'gigantic kinetic sculptures' and which certainly account for much of the spectacle and excitement of the hotel interior – particularly in the Hyatts, where like great Japanese

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*Jameson* lanterns or gondolas they ceaselessly rise and fall – given such a deliberate marking and foregrounding in their own right, I believe one has to see such ‘people movers’ (Portman’s own term, adapted from Disney) as somewhat more significant than mere functions and engineering components. We know in any case that recent architectural theory has begun to borrow from narrative analysis in other fields and to attempt to see our physical trajectories through such buildings as virtual narratives or stories, as dynamic paths and narrative paradigms which we as visitors are asked to fulfil and to complete with our own bodies and movements. In the Bonaventure, however, we find a dialectical heightening of this process: it seems to me that the escalators and elevators here henceforth replace movement but also, and above all, designate themselves as new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper (something which will become evident when we come to the question of what remains of older forms of movement in this building, most notably walking itself). Here the narrative stroll has been underscored, symbolized, reified and replaced by a transportation machine which becomes the allegorical signifier of that older promenade we are no longer allowed to conduct on our own: and this is a dialectical intensification of the autoreferentiality of all modern culture, which tends to turn upon itself and designate its own cultural production as its content.

I am more at a loss when it comes to conveying the thing itself, the experience of space you undergo when you step off such allegorical devices into the lobby or atrium, with its great central column surrounded by a miniature lake, the whole positioned between the four symmetrical residential towers with their elevators, and surrounded by rising balconies capped by a kind of greenhouse roof at the sixth level. I am tempted to say that such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize. Hanging streamers indeed suffuse this empty space in such a way as to distract systematically and deliberately from whatever form it might be supposed to have, while a constant busyness gives the feeling that emptiness is here absolutely packed, that it is an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume. You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body: and if it seemed before that that suppression of depth I spoke of in postmodern painting or literature would necessarily be difficult to achieve in architecture itself, perhaps this bewildering immersion may now serve as the formal equivalent in the new medium.

Yet escalator and elevator are also in this context dialectical opposites: and we may suggest that the glorious movement of the elevator gondola is also a dialectical compensation for this filled space of the atrium – it gives us the chance at a radically different, but complementary, spatial experience: that of rapidly shooting up through the ceiling and outside, along one of the four symmetrical towers, with the referent, Los Angeles itself, spread out breathtakingly and even alarmingly before us. But even this vertical movement is contained: the elevator lifts you to one of those revolving cocktail lounges, in which, seated, you are again passively rotated about and offered a contemplative spectacle of the city itself, now transformed into its own images by the glass windows through which you view it.

We may conclude all this by returning to the central space of the lobby itself

(with the passing observation that the hotel rooms are visibly marginalized: the corridors in the residential sections are low-ceilinged and dark, most depressingly functional, while one understands that the rooms are in the worst of taste). The descent is dramatic enough, plummeting back down through the roof to splash down in the lake. What happens when you get there is something else, which can only be characterized as milling confusion, something like the vengeance this space takes on those who still seek to walk through it. Given the absolute symmetry of the four towers, it is quite impossible to get your bearings in this lobby; recently, colour coding and directional signals have been added in a pitiful and revealing, rather desperate, attempt to restore the co-ordinates of an older space. I will take as the most dramatic practical result of this spatial mutation the notorious dilemma of the shopkeepers on the various balconies. It has been obvious since the opening of the hotel in 1977 that nobody could ever find any of these stores, and even if you once located the appropriate boutique, you would be most unlikely to be as fortunate a second time. As a consequence, the commercial tenants are in despair and all the merchandise is marked down to bargain prices. When you recall that Portman is a businessman as well as an architect and a millionaire developer, an artist who is at one and the same time a capitalist in his own right, one cannot but feel that here too something of a 'return of the repressed' is involved.

So I come finally to my principal point here, that this latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment – which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of spacecraft to those of the automobile – can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.

But as I am anxious that Portman's space not be perceived as something either exceptional or seemingly marginalized and leisure-specialized on the order of Disneyland, I will conclude by juxtaposing this complacent and entertaining (although bewildering) leisure-time space with its analogue in a very different area, namely, the space of postmodern warfare, in particular as Michael Herr evokes it in *Dispatches*, his great book on the experience of Vietnam. The extraordinary linguistic innovations of this work may still be considered postmodern, in the eclectic way in which its language impersonally fuses a whole range of contemporary collective idiolects, most notably rock language and black language: but the fusion is dictated by problems of content. This first terrible postmodernist war cannot be told in any of the traditional paradigms of the war novel or movie – indeed, that breakdown of all previous narrative paradigms is, along with the breakdown of any shared language through which a veteran might convey such experience, among the principal subjects of the book and may be said to open up the place of a whole new reflexivity. Benjamin's account of Baudelaire, and of the emergence of modernism from a new experience of city technology which transcends all the older habits of bodily perception, is both singularly relevant and singularly

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*Jameson* antiquated in the light of this new and virtually unimaginable quantum leap in technological alienation:

He was a moving-target-survivor subscriber, a true child of the war, because except for the rare times when you were pinned or stranded the system was geared to keep you mobile, if that was what you thought you wanted. As a technique for staying alive it seemed to make as much sense as anything, given naturally that you were there to begin with and wanted to see it close: it started out sound and straight but it formed a cone as it progressed, because the more you moved the more you saw, the more you saw the more besides death and mutilation you risked, and the more you risked of that the more you would have to let go of one day as a 'survivor.' Some of us moved around the war like crazy people until we couldn't see which way the run was taking us anymore, only the war all over its surface with occasional, unexpected penetration. As long as we could have choppers like taxis it took real exhaustion or depression near shock or a dozen pipes of opium to keep us even apparently quiet, we'd still be running around inside our skins like something was after us, ha ha, La Vida Loca. In the months after I got back the hundreds of helicopters I'd flown in began to draw together until they formed a collective meta-chopper, and in my mind it was the sexiest thing going; saver-destroyer, provider-waster, right hand-left hand, nimble, fluent, canny and human: hot steel, grease, jungle-saturated canvas webbing, sweat cooling and warming up again, cassette rock and roll in one ear and door-gun fire in the other, fuel, heat, vitality and death, death itself, hardly an intruder.<sup>4</sup>

In this new machine, which does not, like the older modernist machinery of the locomotive or the airplane, represent motion, but which can only be represented in motion, something of the mystery of the new postmodernist space is concentrated.

#### NOTES

- 1 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge, Mass.: 1972.
- 2 The originality of Charles Jencks's pathbreaking *Language of Postmodern Architecture* (London: Academy, 1978) lay in its well-nigh dialectical combination of postmodern architecture and a certain kind of semiotics, each being appealed to justify the existence of the other. Semiotics becomes appropriate as a mode of analysis of the newer architecture by virtue of the latter's populism, which does emit signs and messages to a spatial 'reading public', unlike the monumentality of the high modern. Meanwhile, the newer architecture is itself thereby validated, in so far as it is accessible to semiotic analysis and thus proves to be an essentially aesthetic object (rather than the transaesthetic constructions of the high modern). Here, then, aesthetics reinforces an ideology of communication and vice versa. Beside Jencks' many valuable contributions, see also Heinrich Klotz, *History of Postmodern Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Pier Paolo Portoghesi, *After Modern Architecture* (New York, 1982).
- 3 'To say that a structure of this type "turns its back away" is surely an understatement, while to speak of its "popular" character is to miss the point of its systematic segregation from the great Hispanic-Asian city outside (whose crowds prefer the open space of the old Plaza). Indeed, it is virtually to endorse the master illusion that Portman seeks to convey: that he has re-created within the precious spaces of his super-lobbies the genuine popular texture of city life.'

(In fact, Portman has only built large vivariums for the upper middle classes, protected by

astonishingly complex security systems. Most of the new downtown centres might as well have been built on the third moon of Jupiter. Their fundamental logic is that of a claustrophobic space colony attempting to miniaturize nature within itself. Thus the Bonaventure reconstructs a nostalgic Southern California in aspic: orange trees, fountains, flowering vines and clean air. Outside in a smog-poisoned reality, vast mirrored surfaces reflect away not only the misery of the larger city, but also its irrepressible vibrancy and quest for authenticity, including the most exciting neighbourhood mural movement in North Africa). Mike Davis, 'Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism,' *New Left Review*, 151, May-June 1985: p. 112).

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Davis imagines I am being complacent or corrupt about this bit of second-order urban renewal; his article is as full of useful urban information as it is of bad faith. Lessons in economics from someone who thinks that sweatshops are 'precapitalist' are not helpful; meanwhile it is unclear what mileage is to be gained by crediting our side ('the ghetto rebellions of the late 1960s') with the formative influence in bringing postmodernism into being (a hegemonic or 'ruling class' style if ever there was one), let alone gentrification. The sequence is obviously the other way round: capital (and its multitudinous 'penetrations') comes first, and only then can 'resistance' to it develop, even though it might be pretty to think otherwise. ('The association of the workers as it appears in the factory is not posited by them but by capital. Their combination is not *their* being, but the being of capital. To the individual worker it appears fortuitous. He relates to his own association with other workers and to his cooperation with them as *alien*, as to modes of operation of capital,' [Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* in *Collected Works*, volume 28, Moscow, 1986, p. 505].)

Davis's reply is characteristic of some of the more 'militant' sounds from the Left; right-wing reactions to my article generally take the form of aesthetic handwringing, and (for example) deplore my apparent identification of postmodern architecture generally with a figure like Portman, who is, as it were, the Coppola (if not the Harold Robbins) of the new downtowns.

4 Michael Herr, *Dispatches*, New York: Knopf, 1978, pp. 8-9.

## THE CONSTRAINTS OF POSTMODERNISM (EXTRACT)

What Kenneth Frampton (following Tzonis and Lefavre) calls Critical Regionalism, is for one thing virtually by definition not a movement: he himself calls it a 'critical category oriented towards certain common features',<sup>1</sup> but there seems no good reason for us not to go on to characterize it as an exemplar of that virtually extinct conceptual species, an *aesthetic*, for it is certain that Critical Regionalism knows, perhaps in untraditional proportions, the same fundamental tension between the descriptive and the prescriptive that marks all philosophical (but also all vanguard) aesthetics. Such systems – and it would be appropriate to limit its history as a project to the bourgeois era as such, from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries – in effect seek, by describing the constitutive features of authentic works of art as they already exist, to suggest invariants and norms for the production of future works. To put it this way is to realize how unseasonable this project is today, and how unfashionable the very conception of aesthetics must be in an age of artistic nominalism and antinomianism. It can be argued that the 'second modernism' of the avant-gardes represented any number of efforts to free art from aesthetics (I take this to be Peter Bürger's position in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*); it can also be argued that aesthetics emerges as a problematic with secular modernism, whose contradictions finally render it impossible (this would at least be one way of reading Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*). Meanwhile, on any philosophical view, the totalizing normativity of this kind of traditional philosophical discourse is

Jameson clearly very unpostmodern indeed: it sins against the poststructural and postmodern repudiation of the conception of a philosophical system, and is somehow un- and antitheoretical in its values and procedures (if one takes the position that what is called theory today, or 'theoretical discourse', constitutes a displacement of traditional philosophy and a replacement of or substitute for it).

Yet it is equally clear, not merely that Frampton is aware of all this but also that a certain deliberate retrogression is built into the project itself where it is underscored by the slogan of an *arrière-garde* or rearguard action, whose untimely status is further emphasized by Frampton's insistence that whatever Critical Regionalism turns out to be, in its various regions of possibility, it must necessarily remain a 'marginal practice'.<sup>2</sup>

But these features suggest a second paradox in any typology that associates the aesthetic of Critical Regionalism with the stylistic postmodernisms of the relevant (mainly North American) contemporary architects: for while it can be said that Critical Regionalism shares with them a systematic repudiation of certain essential traits of high modernism, it distinguishes itself by attempting at one and the same time to negate a whole series of postmodern negations of modernism as well, and can in some respects be seen as antimodern and antipostmodern simultaneously, in a 'negation of the negation' that is far from returning us to our starting point or from making Critical Regionalism over into a belated form of modernism.

Such is, for example, very precisely the stand outlined here on the matter of the avant-garde, which remained, in high modernism, both Enlightenment and Utopian, sought to out-trump the vulgar bourgeois conception of progress, and retained the belief in the possibilities of a liberatory dimension to technology and scientific development. But the postcontemporary forms of such 'progress', in global modernization, corporate hegemony and the universal standardization of commodities and 'life styles', are precisely what Critical Regionalism seeks to resist. It thus shares the doxa of the postmodern generally with respect to the end of the avant-garde, the perniciousness of Utopianism, and the fear of a universalizing homogeneity or identity. Yet its slogan of an *arrière-garde* would also seem incompatible with a postmodern 'end of history' and repudiation of historical teleology, since Critical Regionalism continues to seek a certain deeper historical logic in the past of this system, if not its future: a rearguard retains overtones of a collective resistance, and not the anarchy of trans-avant-garde pluralism that characterizes many of the postmodern ideologies of Difference as such. Meanwhile, if the current slogans of marginality and resistance are also evoked by Frampton, they would appear to carry rather different connotations than those employed in, say, current evocations of multiculturalism, which are urban and internal First World, rather than geographically remote, as in his systematically semiperipheral examples, located in Denmark, Catalonia, Portugal, Mexico, California in the 1920s and 1930s, Ticino, Japan and Greece.<sup>3</sup> The enumeration warns us, to begin with, that 'region' in this aesthetic programme is very different from the sentimental localism we have discussed on the occasion of Buford's view of the new American short-story writers: here it designates, not a rural place that resists the nation and its power structures but rather a whole culturally coherent zone (which may also correspond to political autonomy) in tension

with the standardizing world system as a whole.

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Such areas are not so much characterized by the emergence of strong collective identities as they are by their relative distance from the full force of global modernization, a distance that provided a shelter or an eco-niche in which regional traditions could still develop. The model shows some similarities to Eric Wolf's remarkable *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, which posits a relationship between remoteness from colonization and the ultimate possibility of organizing popular resistance to it. Obviously, social and collective organization has to provide a mediation in both cases: in Wolf, it is the fact that a collective or village culture was left relatively intact that enables the formation of conscious popular insurgencies (I take it that the multiculturalisms see such forms of resistance in terms of reconquest and reconstruction rather than in terms of the survival of residual traditions). Frampton quotes the California architect Harwell Hamilton Harris to something of the same effect:

In California in the late Twenties and Thirties modern European ideas met a still developing regionalism. In New England, on the other hand, European Modernism met a rigid and restrictive regionalism that at first resisted and then surrendered. New England accepted European Modernism whole because its own regionalism had been reduced to a collection of restrictions.<sup>4</sup>

It should be added, in view of Frampton's explicit dissociation of Critical Regionalism from populism,<sup>5</sup> that this is not to be understood as a political movement as such (another feature that distinguishes it from the essentially political conception of the modernist *avant-gardes*). Indeed, the untheorized nature of its relationship to the social and political movements that might be expected to accompany its development, to serve as a cultural context or to lend morale and support, is something of a problem here. What seems clear is that a mediation of intellectuals and professionals is foreseen in which these strata retain a kind of semi-autonomy: we may then conjecture a political situation in which the status of national professionals, of the local architects and engineers, is threatened by the increasing control of global technocracies and long-distance corporate decision-makers and their staffs. In such a situation, then, the matter of the survival of national autonomy as such, and the suggestion of idealism that may accompany a defence of the survival of national artistic styles is regrounded in social existence and practice.

There is thus a sense in which Critical Regionalism can be opposed both to modernism and to postmodernism alike. On the other hand, if one wished rather to stress its more fundamental vocation to resist a range of postmodern trends and temptations, Frampton offers a revised account of architectural history that would document a continuity between a certain High Modernism and the critical-regional practice of the present day:

A tectonic impulse may be traced across the century uniting diverse works irrespective of their different origins . . . Thus for all their stylistic idiosyncrasies a very similar level of tectonic articulation patently links Henrik Petrus Berlage's Stock Exchange of 1895 to Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building of 1904 and Herman Hertzberger's Central Beheer office complex of 1974. In each

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instance there is a similar concatenation of span and support that amounts to a tectonic syntax in which gravitational force passes from purlin to truss, to pad stone, to corbel, to arch, to pediment and abutment. The technical transfer of this load passes through a series of appropriately articulated transitions and joints . . . We find a comparable concern for the revealed joint in the architecture of both Auguste Perret and Louis Kahn.<sup>6</sup>

We will return in a moment to the formal implications of this historical revision in which it is modernism (and in particular the work of Frank Lloyd Wright) whose essential telos is now located in a tectonic vocation.

On the other hand, with a little ingenuity, Critical Regionalism could be readjusted to its postmodern position in our scheme, on the basis of its post-Utopian disillusionment and its retreat from the overweening high modernist conception of the monument and the megastructure, and of the spatial innovation powerful enough to change the world in a genuinely revolutionary way. From this perspective, Critical Regionalism could be seen to share postmodernism's more general contextualism; as for the valorization of the part or fragment, it is a kind of thinking that here returns in an unexpected way, namely, via the synecdochic function whereby the individual building comes to stand for the local spatial culture generally. In this sense, Critical Regionalism could be characterized as a kind of postmodernism of the global system as a whole (or at least of the semiperiphery if not the Third World), as opposed to the First World's own internal and external postmodernisms that I have described earlier.

But it will be more useful, in conclusion, to sketch out the oppositions and tensions between the critical-regionalist aesthetic and the features of an actually existing postmodernism. . . . The new schema suggests some interesting formal aspects, in addition to the logical possibilities of new lateral syntheses or combinations that are intriguing enough to be left for another time. The crucial issues to be touched on now are, however, the theme of 'joints and supports' as well as that of the tectonic generally; the matter of the scenographic and also of the 'grid'; and finally the role of technology in all this, or in other words of the truest bearer of modernity (if not of modernism) in the architectural process.

It is at any rate by way of form itself that the new aesthetic is best approached, for in this area Frampton provides a series of features that are systematically defined in opposition to current doxa, and in particular to Venturi's influential description of the essentials of any building in terms of the 'decorated shed' or in other words the façade with its ornament and the space that is constructed and projected behind it. Both these features are categories of the representational for Frampton, and it is indeed the very primacy of representation in contemporary architecture that the notion of a Critical Regionalism is designed fundamentally to challenge. He does not engage in any elaborate polemic with the idea of the spatial, save to observe everything that is abstract about it (when contrasted to place):<sup>7</sup> an abstraction in the concept that itself replicates abstraction in the instrumental relationship to the world itself. Indeed, his selection of a remark by Vittorio Gregotti – 'The worst enemy of modern architecture is the idea of space considered solely in terms of its

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economic and technical exigencies indifferent to the idea of the site' – would seem to authorize a dialectical continuation, for which a certain aesthetic abstraction of space could be grasped as the correlative to the economic and technical one evoked here. Space can indeed not be seen as such, and in that sense a 'space' is difficult to theorize as an aesthetic object in its own right; yet it is perhaps because the critique of visual representation (that will come into its own in the related discussion of the facade) does not take directly on this abstract aesthetization of space, that the diagnosis of the 'scenographic' is here so brilliantly proposed and deployed. Flamboyant spaces become visible as the scene of imaginary gestures and dramas, and it is by way of this supplement of the melodramatic and the theatrical that a critique of commodity form can enter the more properly architectural diagnosis (it would for example be of no little interest to prolong this analysis in the direction of Michael Fried's historical theory of modernism as a tendential resistance of 'absorption' to 'theatricality'). Frampton's own working philosophical categories here are 'ontological' (as opposed to 'representational') categories; besides invoking Heidegger's conception of the relationship of dwelling to building, he would seem to rely heavily on the more problematical (or 'humanist') notion of 'experience' as an alternative to the spectacle and commodity conceptions of the visual and the scenographic.

In fact, however, Frampton has a more formal alternative to these particular aesthetic modes: an alternative framed by the tripartite values of the tactile, the tectonic and the telluric which frame the notion of space in such a way that it turns back slowly into a conception of place once again. This alternative tends now to displace those parts of the building that are visible (and thus lend themselves to categories of the visual arts) in favour of a 'privileging of the joint as the primordial tectonic element': a non-visual and non-representational category which Frampton attributes to Gottfried Semper and which for him constitutes 'the fundamental nexus around which building comes into being, that is to say, comes to be articulated as a presence in itself'.<sup>8</sup> The category of the joint as a primal articulation of the two forces that meet in it (along with its correlative of the 'break or "dis-joint" ... that point at which things break against each other rather than connect: that significant fulcrum at which one system, surface or material abruptly ends to give way to another')<sup>9</sup> would seem to be the fundamental innovation of the aesthetic of Critical Regionalism, whose non- or antirepresentational equivalent for the other arts (or literature) remains to be worked out.

In my view, Frampton's more conventional emphasis on the tactile features of such buildings is best grasped by way of this more fundamentally structural one of forces in opposition, rather than as the privileging of one type of bodily sense ('touch') as opposed to another ('sight'). Indeed, his illustrations – the relationship between a solid parquet and 'the momentum of an induced gait and the relative inertia of the body' in Visconti's *The Damned*, for example<sup>10</sup> – would seem to authorize an interpretation whereby it is the isolation of the individual sense that becomes the fundamental symptom of postmodern alienation, an isolation most often visual, but which one could just as easily imagine in terms of tactility (as for example in the gleaming – but obviously highly tactile – surfaces of Venturi's Gordon Wu Hall, or the remarkable film of running water of Norman Foster's Century Tower in Tokyo, where paper-thin

*Jameson* water itself becomes virtually a new and undiscovered Science-Fictional element akin to polished concrete or steel). The aesthetic of Critical Regionalism would presumably have to insist on the synaesthetic or structural-relational sensoriality of even the tactile as a vehicle for that more fundamental category and value that is the tectonic itself.

The related value of the ‘telluric’ can also be grasped in this way, as a seemingly Heideggerian and archaic, ‘rear-guard’ emphasis on the earth itself and on traditional sacred structures, which can also be read far more contemporaneously as a systematic negation of that emphasis on the grid (that is to say, on abstract and homogeneous corporate space) that we have found both Koolhaas and Eisenman obliged to engage in one way or another in their only partially ‘postmodern’ forms of production. Here it is the way in which the tectonic and its fundamental category, the joint, necessarily enforces a downward distribution of pressures and forces that can be said, not merely to reveal and acknowledge the site as such but even in some creative sense to unveil and to produce it as though for the first time (Gregotti is again quoted to the effect that such ‘siting’ constitutes ‘an act of knowledge of the context that comes out of its architectural modification’).<sup>11</sup> But at that point, the negation of the value of the grid ceases to be a merely ideological option (a kind of humanist preference for place over against the alienated poststructural and postmodern dehumanization of space) and expresses a positive and formal architectural value in its own right: a value that goes a long way toward ‘regrounding’ (in all the senses of this word) Frampton’s defence of the various forms of local or regional ‘critical’ architecture in the global differentiation of the ‘ground’ thus ‘marked’ and ‘broken’ by a truly telluric-tactile construction.

We must now finally come to the role of technology and modernity in this aesthetic for it is in the unique relationship of Critical Regionalism to such ‘Western’ realities that this proposal most fundamentally distinguishes itself from the populist or cultural-nationalist, Third World, and anti-Western or antimodern responses with which we are familiar. However deliberately regressive and tradition-oriented this aesthetic may seem, insisting as it does on what Raymond Williams would have called a cultural politics of the ‘residual’ rather than the ‘emergent’ in the contemporary situation, it equally explicitly acknowledges the existence and the necessity of modern technology in ways whose originality must now be shown. We have already seen, for example, how Koolhaas acknowledged the constraint and ‘necessity’ of technological modernity (that ‘one third of the section of a building . . . [is] inaccessible to architectural thought’) by concentrating it into the single fixed point of a kind of architectural ‘condensor’ (the 1811 Manhattan grid plan for urbanism, the elevator for the individual building) whose acceptance released the surrounding space to a new kind of freedom or innovation.

Frampton’s conception of the acknowledgment of this necessity seems both less programmatic in that it does not foresee a single kind of solution to the matter the way Koolhaas seems to do, and more ‘philosophical’ or even ideological insofar as the dualistic nature of the opposition between technology and its other is somehow through his various examples always maintained (this is the sense, for example, in which he can even evoke Norman Foster’s work – here the Sainsbury centre of 1978 – with its ‘discrimination between servant and served spaces’ as an articulation still distantly redolent of properly tectonic

values<sup>12</sup> rather than as the outright 'late-modern' technological and corporate celebration seen by other analysts such as Jencks). Jameson

Still, two of his crucial illustrations for the exemplification of an already existing Critical Regionalism would seem to open up this dualism in a suggestively new way and to stage this aesthetic as a strategy for somehow including and defusing technological modernity, for outsmarting it in the very constructional process itself. Thus he shows how Jorn Utzon's Bagsvaerd Church projects a kind of double life, its exterior 'combination of modular assembly and *in-situ* casting' constituting 'an appropriate integration of the full range of concrete techniques which are now at our disposal' and 'not only accord[ing] with the values of universal civilisation but also represent[ing] its capacity for normative application';<sup>13</sup> while the interior of the church suddenly projects a vault that goes well beyond its customary signification of 'the sacred in Western culture' and indeed incorporates 'the subtle and contrary allusions' deployed by the Chinese pagoda roof (along with the 'Nordic vernacular of the stave church'), whose ideological consequences as an architectural 'symbolic act' Frampton here analyses with exemplary perspicuity.<sup>14</sup>

A rather different, if not inverted, way of dealing with the modern Frampton then deduces from the practice of Tadao Ando, whose very theory (itself no doubt a development out of the uniquely Japanese philosophical attention to what was in the 1930s and 1940s called the problem of 'overcoming modernity') characterizes it as the strategy of an 'enclosed modernity': here the technological is as it were wrapped within the renewal of more authentic Japanese attention to light and detail and thus ultimately to what Frampton calls the tectonic.<sup>15</sup> The procedure here would seem to be something like the reversal or inversion of Utzon's move, described above; yet both hold out the possibility of inventing some new relationship to the technological beyond nostalgic repudiation or mindless corporate celebration. If Critical Regionalism is to have any genuine content, it will do so only on the strength of such invention and its capacity to 'enclose' or to reopen and transfigure the burden of the modern.

It is, however, worth emphasizing the degree to which the very concept and programme of Critical Regionalism reflects its moment in history, and in particular expresses the pathos of a situation in which the possibility of a radical alternative to late capitalist technologies (in both architecture and urbanism alike) has decisively receded. Here not the emergent but the residual is emphasized (out of historical necessity), and the theoretical problem is at one with a political one, namely, how to fashion a progressive strategy out of what are necessarily the materials of tradition and nostalgia? How to use the attempt to conserve in an actively liberatory and transformational way? The problem has its historical roots in the specificity of postmodern technology and urbanism, where 'progress' – if the concept exists at all any longer – involves a very different ratio of the introduction of new machinery to the transformation of the built environment than it did in the nineteenth century (in which a different kind of technology obtained, with a very different, more visible and stylistic impact on nature than is the case with the information technologies). So it is that today very often some of the most militant urban or neighbourhood movements draw their vitality from the attempt to prevent an older city fabric from being disaggregated or destroyed altogether: something that foretells significant and ominous dilemmas in co-ordinating such 'chains of equivalence'

*Jameson* (to speak like Laclau and Mouffe again) with those of 'new social movements' that necessarily refuse such conservative family-and-neighbourhood ideological motivations.

Frampton's conceptual proposal, however, is not an internal but rather a geopolitical one: it seeks to mobilize a pluralism of 'regional' styles (a term selected, no doubt, in order to forestall the unwanted connotations of the terms national and international alike), with a view toward resisting the standardizations of a henceforth global late capitalism and corporatism, whose 'vernacular' is as omnipresent as its power over local decisions (and indeed, after the end of the Cold War, over local governments and individual nation states as well).

It is thus politically important, returning to the problem of parts or components, to emphasize the degree to which the concept of Critical Regionalism is necessarily allegorical. What the individual buildings are henceforth here a unit of is no longer a unique vision of city planning (such as the Baroque) nor a specific city fabric (like Las Vegas) but rather a distinctive regional culture as a whole, for which the distinctive individual building becomes a metonym. The construction of such a building resembles the two previously discussed movements of a stylistic postmodernism and Italian neo-rationalism to the degree to which it must also deploy a storehouse of pre-existing forms and traditional motifs, as signs and markers by which to 'decorate' what generally remains a relatively conventional Western 'shed'.

In order for this kind of building to make a different kind of statement, its decorations must also be grasped as recognizable elements in a cultural-national discourse, and the building of the building must be grasped at one and the same time as a physical structure and as a symbolic act that reaffirms the regional-national culture as a collective possibility in its moment of besiegement and crisis. But perhaps it is with allegory as with the mythical that its effects remain wanting unless the object has been labelled in advance and we have been told beforehand that it is an allegorical effect that has been sought after? This interesting theoretical problem, however, becomes visible only when a 'text' is isolated from the social ground in which its effects are generated. In the present instance, for example, it should be clear enough that an architectural form of Critical Regionalism would lack all political and allegorical efficacy unless it were coordinated with a variety of other local, social and cultural movements that aimed at securing national autonomy. It was one of the signal errors of the artistic activism of the 1960s to suppose that there existed, in advance, forms that were in and of themselves endowed with a political, and even revolutionary, potential by virtue of their own intrinsic properties. On the other hand, there remains a danger of idealism implicit in all forms of cultural nationalism as such, which tends to overestimate the effectiveness of culture and consciousness and to neglect the concomitant requirement of economic autonomy. But it is precisely economic autonomy that has been everywhere called back into question in the postmodernity of a genuinely global late capitalism.

An even graver objection to the strategies of Critical Regionalism, as to the various postmodernisms generally when they claim a political vocation for themselves, is awakened by the value of pluralism and the slogan of difference they all in one way or another endorse. The objection does not consist in some conviction that pluralism is always a liberal, rather than a truly radical, value –

a dogmatic and doctrinaire position that the examination of any number of active moments of history would be enough to dispel. No, the uneasiness stems from the very nature of late capitalism itself, about which it can be wondered whether pluralism and difference are not somehow related to its own deeper internal dynamics.

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It is a feeling raised, for example, by the new strategies of what is now called post-Fordism: the term can be seen as one of the optional variants for such terms as *postmodernity* or *late capitalism*, with which it is roughly synonymous. However, it underscores one of the originalities of multinational capitalism today in a way that tends to problematize the assumptions of the strategy of Critical Regionalism itself. Where Fordism and classical imperialism, in other words, designed their products centrally and then imposed them by fiat on an emergent public (you do have a choice of colour with the Model-T: black!), post-Fordism puts the new computerized technology to work by custom-designing its products for individual markets. This has indeed been called postmodern marketing, and it can be thought to 'respect' the values and cultures of the local population by adapting its various goods to suit those vernacular languages and practices. Unfortunately this inserts the corporations into the very heart of local and regional culture, about which it becomes difficult to decide whether it is authentic any longer (and indeed whether that term still means anything). It is the EPCOT syndrome raised to a global scale and returns us to the question of the 'critical' with a vengeance, since now the 'regional' as such becomes the business of global American Disneyland-related corporations, who will redo your own native architecture for you more exactly than you can do it yourself. Is global Difference the same today as global Identity?

#### NOTES

- 1 Kenneth Frampton, 'Critical Regionalism: Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity' in *Modern Architecture: A Cultural History*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1985, p. 326.
- 2 Ibid., p. 327.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 314–26.
- 4 Ibid., p. 320.
- 5 Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, pp. 20–1.
- 6 Kenneth Frampton, 'Rappel à l'ordre: The Case for the Tectonic', *Architectural Design* 50, 3/4, 1991, p. 24.
- 7 Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', pp. 24–5.
- 8 Frampton, 'Rappel à l'ordre', p. 22.
- 9 Ibid., p. 24.
- 10 Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', p. 28.
- 11 Frampton, 'Rappel à l'ordre', p. 24.
- 12 Ibid., p. 25.
- 13 Frampton, 'Critical Regionalism', p. 314.
- 14 Ibid., p. 315.
- 15 Ibid., p. 324.

#### IS SPACE POLITICAL?

The clever title 'The Residence of Architecture in Politics' usefully suggests that architecture can somehow never get out of politics, but must learn to dwell in it

*Jameson* on a permanent if uneasy basis; and also that we have to do here, not with inventing or forging a relationship between architecture and politics where presumably none existed before, but rather simply with revealing what was there all along, what we may choose not to see but what can, in the last analysis, scarcely be avoided. Building codes, zoning, city ordinances, local politics, wards and parishes, bosses, payoffs, unions, the Mafia – I suppose all this comes to mind first when we think of attempting to refocus our object so that an architecture space can slowly be seen as persisting in the middle of politics. But this is complicated by the remembrance that at least two different meanings are deployed when we use the word *politics*. One is politics as the specialized, local thing, the empirical activity; as, for example, when speaking of a political novel, we mean a novel about government and general elections, about Quebec City or Washington, about people in power and their techniques and specific tasks. The other is politics in the global sense, of the founding and transformation, the conservation and revolutionizing, of society as a whole, of the collective, of what organizes human relationships generally and enables or sponsors, or limits and maims, human possibilities. This larger acceptation of the word *politics* often seems non-empirical, on the grounds that one cannot see vast entities like society itself; perhaps we should characterize this distinction as that between the particular and the general or universal. Regardless, two very different dimensions come into play here, neither of which can be sacrificed without serious damage to thought and experience, but which cannot be simply synthesized or unified either. I want to propose that these two dimensions acquire an essentially allegorical relationship to each other, which runs in both directions. Thus the empirical institutions and situations of the city stand as allegories of the invisible substance of society as a whole; while the very concept that citizens are able to form of society as a whole becomes allegorical of their empirical possibilities, their constraints and restrictions or, on the other hand, their new potentialities and future openings.

But this is only the beginning of the oppositions or antinomies a political architecture has to face. There is also, for example, the fundamental tension between architecture as the art of the individual building and urbanism as the attempt to organize the life and circulation of the larger city space: this may not exactly correspond to the role division between architect and engineer to which it is obviously somehow related. Nor does it correspond exactly to the allegorical relationship I suggested above: for although a larger entity, never fully totalizable, the city is not exactly non-empirical; while the individual house or building, tangible enough and presumably accessible to the senses, can probably not be thought of as fully empirical either (maybe nothing really is), since our concept of the building as a whole must always accompany every segment we intuit.

Nothing in the other arts quite corresponds to this tension or contradiction, although it is sometimes suggestive for them when we try out this building/city opposition as an analogy. Architecture is business as well as culture, and outright value fully as much as ideal representation: the seam architecture shares with economics also has no parallel in the other arts, although commercial art – rock music, for example – comes close in certain ways; but even that analogy serves to underscore the differences. However the other arts react to the market, they somehow work outside of it and then offer their wares

for sale. Architecture seems to be first for sale and only later on, after it is built, to leave the market and somehow become art or culture as such. Jameson

Then there is the public/private opposition, which equally does not seem to register in quite the same fashion in the other arts: theatre versus literature does not quite capture the difference between the symbolic meaning of public buildings – the symbolism they acquire (connotation of fascist public art, for example) fully as much as the symbolism they were intended to have (the glory of the sovereign, the power of the collectivity or of law as such, or of the republic) – and the more quotidian meaning of private space, which comments on the way people live after hours and how they try to reproduce the labour force after the official activities of labour are over. Perhaps that is also part of the building/city opposition, but only part of it; or perhaps it is subsumed under that in some uneven way, since the city also includes the street and consumption, and not merely working and dwelling: the late capitalist city above all has to make a very large place for these spaces which are neither public nor private.

Now politics would also seem to include some notion of change, even when that involves running to stay in the same place (as in ordinary city or even national or state government). But in its most dramatic embodiments, politics surely always has the vocation of realizing a collective ideal, fulfilling or at least staging the great collective project. And this is precisely an allegorical matter. None of the individual projects that makes up politics has the supreme value of the whole collective activity, but each must participate in its value in some way other than as a mere part of the whole: they are allegorical of it, each in its own local and modest way; the revolution (of whatever kind) is realized fully in each small effort that makes it up.

How can artistic works be read in these political senses? How they can be expected to participate in a collective project is perhaps the most difficult question, unless we want to remain with the easy answer that, as monumental public construction, they ratify its success and remind the passing collectivity of its own achievements, symbolically offering the occasion to restage and recelebrate the inaugural act, the foundation of collectivity, the sealing of the social contract itself (Rousseau spoke of festivals, but architecture is a more durable festival). I doubt if many of us today, however significant and indispensable we may feel public monuments to be, find enormous aesthetic excitement in the contemplation of projects like this; the general deterioration of public values has clearly drawn such architecture with it in its wake; people often loosely attribute this to the suspicion of politics, the corruption of public officials, voter apathy, post-Watergate, and the like, but it probably has more to do with the privatization of the public sphere, the displacement of governmental initiative by the great corporations, the increasing centrality of multinational business in late capitalism. Thus our public buildings are now the great insurance centres and the great banks, the great office buildings, the ring of towers whose construction around the outskirts of Paris was authorized by Georges Pompidou as a tangible symbol of the financial centrality of Paris in the new Europe. These buildings show an obvious kind of symbolic political meaning; but there can be more subtle connotative meanings that affirm this or that aspect of contemporary business society. I wonder, for example, whether the general low-rise modernist glass-box style of yesterday did not fulfil a

Jameson symbolic function with respect to the social (and not merely represent a quick and undistinguished financial and spatial solution), just as the deplorable omnipresent pastel postmodern buildings do today: they remain messages, even though their content may be little more than mere repetition.

Symbolic meaning is as volatile as the arbitrariness of the sign: in other words, as in dreams, the spatial unconscious can associate anything with anything else – a dead body meaning jubilatory euphoria, a loved one's photograph triggering violent xenophobia. It is not enough to say that opposites mean each other: they especially mean each other. As St Augustine says in his treatise on scriptural allegory and interpretation: a thing can mean itself or its own opposite – Noah's drunken nakedness means disrespect or respect, 'depending on the context'. What is arbitrary then is that old and time-honoured mechanism called the 'association of ideas': in Proust, for example, the 'modern style' in buildings is incorporated into the Verdurins' cultural offensive and documents the cutting-edge superiority of the former 'little clan', now become the most advanced salon in all of Paris: 'In the first years of the XXth century, the "modern style" knows great success in Munich, where it is considered, in architecture, to be a reaction against the greco-roman pastiches of the period of Ludwig II, and, in interior decoration as a "protest against apartments crammed with over-heavy furniture".'<sup>1</sup>

It is altogether logical then that, in the high tide of the war effort and of Germanophobia, this particular trait (a 'Munich' style) should be the operator of a complete reversal of meaning. In any case, according to the fatal evolution of an aestheticism that ends up biting its own tail, the Verdurins claimed no longer to be able to stand the modern style (in any case it was associated with Munich) nor white bare apartments, and now exclusively favoured antique French furniture in a darkened setting.

In the same way, a sugar-candy postmodern decoration can for a moment stand as a heroic repudiation of the dominant, old, repressive modern glass-box international style, only in another blink of an eye to become 'indissolubly' (at least for this moment and this particular, equally ephemeral, present) associated with the high- and low-life ultraconsumerist speculation of a Reagan 1980s destined to join the 1920s in the history books for sheer upper-class indulgence. I'm not sure whether this really means that anything can carry a symbolic charge of 'anything else', as St Augustine thinks (remember, he only has in mind two alternate and available messages: it either does or doesn't figure the inscription of God's providence; is either positive or negative as far as eternity is concerned); but it certainly foretells caution in the a priori deduction of social meaning from the internal content of any particular work of art. It is the extraordinary capacity of content itself to undergo ceaseless and convulsive metamorphoses in its own right that ought to give the interpreter pause; and that inspires the knee-jerk appeal to that not very meaningful thing called 'context' (let alone 'contextual', 'contextualism', etc., which are often intended to mean something like social or sociological analysis, but which may prove to be poisoned gifts in the arsenal of the various Lefts who brandish them).

If an architecture wished to dissent from the status quo, how would it go about doing this? I have come to think that no work of art or culture can set out to be political once and for all, no matter how ostentatiously it labels itself as such, for there can never be any guarantee it will be used the way it demands. A

great political art (Brecht) can be taken as a pure and apolitical art; art that seems to want to be merely aesthetic and decorative can be rewritten as political with energetic interpretation. The political rewriting or appropriation then, the political use, must also be allegorical; you have to know that this is what it is supposed to be or mean – in itself it is inert. Nor is this only a matter of use or reception by the public; it must be an active, interpretative reception or use (in other words, a reading, what Heidegger calls the *qua* or the *als*). In this particular area, and by comparison with the other arts, architecture is the most repressive: all other arts demand some minimal effort of reading (which may not seem to go so far as interpretation but which perhaps none the less still minimally includes it or implies it). Even a painting demands a glance; whereas architecture can be lived in, be moved around in, and simultaneously ignored. Much of US culture could be discussed in terms of just this repression of space and of architecture. Perhaps this explains the paradoxes of Manfredo Tafuri's work, for example, for whom you can intervene in thinking about architecture but not in the building of it. Many of us, however, feel that Tafuri's is a peculiarly frustrating position that we would at least like to try to transcend, and my suggestions now will be little more than that clumsy attempt, fraught with traces of that same frustration.

I want to suggest that the political relationship of works of art to the societies they reside in can be determined according to the difference between replication (reproduction of the logic of that society) and opposition (the attempt to establish the elements of a Utopian space radically different from the one in which we reside). At their extremes, both these stances raise some questions: for example, can even the most undistinguished work still altogether replicate or reproduce the hegemonic spatial logic? If we see it allegorically as an example of that very spatial logic, are we not in the process of lifting it from its context and making it somehow exemplary, even of the status quo? But does this not amount to endowing it already with a certain aesthetic value? This is perhaps the place to raise the Venturi question, as it were, namely, whether intellectuals can ever really speak the vernacular. Or, to put it another way, is irony in architecture possible? Is it possible, as Venturi suggests, to replicate the city fabric, to reproduce its logic, and yet maintain that minimal distance that is called irony and that allows you to dissociate yourself ever so slightly, but ever so absolutely, from that status quo? If so, it is clearly that minimal distance that would allow your building to qualify as art, rather than as construction. At the point of that minimal distance you could wage an argument against absolute conformity, and could claim a certain implicit critical function for your work; that it was not the same as the buildings around it but was just slightly different, and that it put those undistinguished structures in perspective and judged them as shoddy and worthless in comparison. But at this minimal, almost imperceptible point, replication turns around into negation; only the ironic stance makes it possible for the reversal to go unseen, since notoriously (and ironically) irony is by definition what can never be definitively identified as being ironic. You have to be able to take it the other way as well; the condition of irony is to be able to remain invisible as irony.

How then could a building establish itself as critical and put its context in negative or critical perspective? The perplexity of our political reflections on architecture finds itself concentrated in this question: since architecture

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becomes being itself, how can the *negative find any place in it?* In the other arts, again, the negative is lodged in the very medium and the material: words are not, and can never become, things; distance in literature is thereby secured. Indeed, nowhere is Venturi's argument more powerful than in his critique and reversal of the project of a Utopian modern architecture, which sought to create a radically different and other space within this one, and ended up producing not buildings and dwellings but sculptures, falling inertly back into the space of being with a vengeance.

Other more dialectical critiques of the Utopian (such as Herbert Marcuse's essay *On the Affirmative Function of Culture*) have argued that excessive Utopianism in a cultural artifact ends up itself reproducing the system, and ratifying, reconfirming the uses of culture as mere window dressing, a sandbox, an inoffensive area of sheer aesthetic play that changes nothing.

On the other hand, the idea of Utopian space, the Utopian building, or even the Utopian city plan, dies hard; for it alone can embody the political aspiration for radical change and transfiguration. Even in aesthetic terms, it is hard to see how any ambitious artist could elude the inveterate impulse to create something different, minimally distinct from the space of what already is all around it (we have just seen how Venturi's irony opens the door onto precisely that slightly different space). Hard to see, then, how the modern could really be terminated, the habit of thinking in terms of the new, of making something even slightly different. The mechanism which enforces this irrepressible modernist teleology is, of course, the market itself, which has to demand new products and fashions in spite of itself. Yet how Utopian projections fare in postmodernity, and what forms they can take in a period in which everybody talks as though they had done with Innovation and with Utopia, is the interesting question for us today. It is also an interesting political issue.

But the logical contradiction lies elsewhere, in the difficulty of producing difference out of the same. It is a difficulty compounded by our conviction as to the increasing systematicity of this system, of its closure as a totality from which, as Foucault taught us again and again, we can scarcely hope to escape. In that case, what we think of as a radically different space from our own is little more than a fantasy projection of difference, it is the same masquerading itself as difference: the real future, if it comes and if it is radically different from this present, will by definition scarcely resemble the fantasies of the present about difference and about the future. From within the system you cannot hope to generate anything that negates the system as a whole or portends the experience of something other than the system, or outside of the system. This was Tafuri's position, whose perplexities are as salutary for us as Zeno's paradoxes, and as unresolvable.

But perhaps his particular paradox can be turned inside out. 'A mode of speech', Wittgenstein said, 'is a mode of life.' Perhaps we can see whether any of the new forms we have imagined might secretly correspond to new modes of life emerging even partially. Perhaps indeed we might start to do this at the existential level, at the level of daily life, asking ourselves whether we can think of spaces that demand new kinds or types of living that demand new kinds of space.

How strong is the wall? And can we imagine anything to replace the room? Does this particular question, for example, have the speculative value that its

analogies might have in the other arts: as when the Modern Movement asked whether we could do without story-telling or narrative, or modern music asked whether we could do without tonality (and all the forms and developments – closure and event – inherent to that system)? I once imagined framing this problem in terms of the sentence itself, speculating that it may be misleading to frame the social consequences of spatial innovation in terms of space itself – the indirection of some third term or interpretant drawn from another realm or medium seems to impose itself. Such was the case in film studies a few years ago when Christian Metz elaborated his film semiotics in a vast rewriting programme in which the essentials of filmic structure were reformulated in terms of language and sign systems. The tangible result of such a rewriting programme was to produce a dual problem that might never have been articulated or brought into focus had it remained couched in purely cinematographic terms – the problem of the minimal unities and macroforms of what, in the image, might correspond to the sign and its components, not to speak of the word itself; and of what in filmic diegesis might be considered to be a complete utterance, if not a sentence, let alone a larger ‘textual’ paragraph of some sort. But such problems are ‘produced’ within the framework of a larger pseudo-problem that looks ontological (or metaphysical, which amounts to the same thing), and which can take the form of the unanswerable question of whether film is a kind of language (even to assert that it is like a language – or like Language – sets off metaphysical resonance). This particular period of film studies seems to have ended, not when the ontological question was identified as a false one, but when the local work of transcoding had reached the limit of its objects, at which point the judgment of the pseudo-problem could be allowed to take its course.

Such a rewriting programme may be useful in our present architectural context, provided it is not confused with a semiotics of architecture (which already exists), and provided a second historical and Utopian step is added onto this key one, whose function is not to raise analogous ontological questions (as to whether built space is a kind of language), but rather to awaken the question of the conditions of possibility of this or that spatial form.

As in film, the first questions are those of minimal units: the words of built space, or at least its substantives, would seem to be rooms, categories which are syntactically or syncategorematically related and articulated by the various spatial verbs and adverbs – corridors, doorways and staircases, for example, modified in turn by adjectives in the form of paint and furnishings, decoration and ornament (whose puritanical denunciation by Adolf Loos offers some interesting linguistic and literary parallels). Meanwhile, these ‘sentences’ – if that indeed is what a building can be said to ‘be’ – are read by readers whose bodies fill the various shifter-slots and subject-positions; while the larger text into which such units are inserted can be assigned to the text-grammar of the urban as such (or perhaps, in a world system, to even vaster geographies and their syntactic laws).

Once these equivalents have been laid in place, the more interesting questions of historical identity begin to pose themselves – questions not implicit in the linguistic or semiotic apparatus, which begin to obtain when this is itself dialectically challenged. How, for example, are we to think of the fundamental category of the room (as minimal unity)? Are private rooms public rooms, and

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rooms for work (white-collar office space, for instance) to be thought of as the same kind of substantive? Can they all be deployed indifferently within the same kind of sentence structure? On one historical reading, however, the modern room comes into being only as a consequence of the invention of the corridor in the seventeenth century; its privacies have little enough to do with those indifferent sleeping spaces that a person used to negotiate by passing through a rat's nest of other rooms and stepping over sleeping bodies. This innovation, thus renarrativized, now generates cognate questions about the origins of the nuclear family and the construction or formation of bourgeois subjectivity fully – as much as do queries about related architectural techniques. But it also raises serious doubts about the philosophies of language that in effect produced the formulation in the first place: what is, indeed, the trans-historical status of the word and the sentence? Following Heidegger and Emile Benveniste in their different ways, modern philosophy significantly modified its vision of its own history as well as its conception of its function when it began to appreciate the relationship of its most fundamental (Western) categories to the grammatical structure of ancient Greek (let alone the latter's approximations in Latin). The repudiation of the category of substance in modern philosophy can be said to be one response to the impact of this experience of historicity, which seemed to discredit the substantive as such. It is not clear that anything similar took place on the macrolevel of the sentence proper, even though the constitutive relationship of linguistics as a discipline to the sentence as its largest conceivable object of study has come to be understood (and is reinforced, rather than dispelled, by the attempt to invent compensatory disciplines like semantics or text-grammar, which dramatically designate the frontiers they would desperately like to transgress or abolish).

Historical speculation is here only exacerbated by the drawing of political and social consequences. The question of the origins of language itself (the ur-formation of the sentence and the word in some galactic magma at the dawn of human time) has been declared illicit by everyone from Kant to Lévi-Strauss, even though it is accompanied by a question about the origins of the social itself (and used to be accompanied by another related one about the origins of the family). But that of the possible evolution and modification of language is still conceivable and entertains a vital relationship to the Utopian question about the possible modification of society (where that is itself still conceivable). Indeed, the forms taken by just such debates will seem philosophically receivable or, on the contrary, antiquated and superstitious in strict proportions to your deeper convictions as to whether postmodern society can be changed any longer or not. Debate in the Soviet Union over the theories of N.J. Marr, for example, has been categorized with Lysenko as a scientific aberration, largely owing to Marr's hypothesis that the very form and structure of language itself altered according to the mode of production of which it was a superstructure. As Russian had not sensibly evolved since the tsarist period, Stalin put an abrupt end to this speculation with a famous pamphlet ('Marxism and Linguistics'). In our own time, feminism has been virtually alone in attempting to envision the Utopian languages spoken in societies in which gender domination and inequality would have ceased to exist: the result was more than just a glorious moment in recent science fiction, and should continue to set the example for the political value of the Utopian imagination as a form of praxis.

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It is precisely from the perspective of such Utopian praxis that we can return to the problem of the judgment to be made on the innovations of the Modern Movement in architecture. For just as the expansion of the sentence plays a fundamental role in literary modernism from Mallarmé to Faulkner, so too the metamorphosis of the minimal unit is fundamental to architectural modernism, which may be said to have attempted to transcend the sentence (as such) in its abolition of the street. Le Corbusier's 'free plan' may be said in much the same sense to challenge the existence of the traditional room as a syntactic category and to produce an imperative to dwell in some new way, to invent new forms of living and habitation as an ethical and political (and perhaps psychoanalytic) consequence of formal mutation. Everything turns, then, on whether you think the free plan is just another room, albeit of a novel type, or whether it transcends that category altogether (just as a language beyond the sentence would transcend our Western conceptuality and sociality alike). Nor is it only a question of demolishing the older forms, as in the iconoclastic and purifying therapy of Dada: this kind of modernism promised the articulation of new spatial categories that might properly merit characterization as Utopian. It is well known that postmodernism is at one with a negative judgment on these aspirations of the high modern, which it claims to have abandoned. But the new name, the sense of a radical break, the enthusiasm that greeted the new kinds of buildings, all testify to the persistence of some notion of novelty or innovation that seems to have survived the modern itself.<sup>2</sup>

But there are also more obvious and immediate ways in which space can be considered to be ideological: indeed, one of the most important and influential modern Utopian novels, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887), abolishes kitchens in individual apartments as a feminist gesture in order to dramatize the move toward more genuinely collective living, which is unavoidably enforced by the collective dining halls and their great collective kitchens. Here a feature of building space carries a deeply inscribed symbolic meaning or connotation which is not cancelled by the tensions and vibrations introduced by two other contradictory features, namely, the actual place of women in the citizenship system of this Utopia, and the still individualistic nature of the living and sleeping arrangements (as distinguished from the dining ones). This spatial symbolism is evidently a macrostructural effect, despite its apparent intervention in a single component (the kitchen) of the larger plan: for the removal of the latter is possible only on the condition of the reorganization of the housing complex as a whole, and the presence in it of collective dining and cooking spaces. I once served on a jury for a student project designed to fulfil a Cuban programme for a new city outside Havana. It was explained to me that American architecture students almost never have the opportunity to design collective spaces of this kind any more. This is, therefore, the example of a specific kind of ideology – the ideology of individualism – being reinforced by omission, rather than by positive features: a strategy of containment that prevents the issue from coming into view in the first place (and it was very much in this way that Lukacs described the operations of ideology in *History and Class Consciousness*). One did note, in passing, the absence of Bellamy's collective kitchens, and the persistence of single-family apartment spaces (including individual cooking and eating areas), as signs that the Cuban Revolution was perhaps not yet as Utopian as the bourgeois revolutionary

*Jameson* Bellamy. On the other hand, this particular example brings starkly home the relationship between the possibility of certain symbolic meanings and the possibility of radical social and systemic change: it is only if wholesale social changes, such as those betokened by collective kitchens, were even discursive possibilities in American politics – it is only if some minor but actually existing party flew these changes on their bannerhead as future possibilities – that a certain kind of building could hold onto an intentional political symbolism, by including a non-operative collective dining space somewhere in the apartment structure, for example (let alone a space for collective tenants' meetings or neighbourhood theatre, or even the most realistic and virulent of all these symbolic signals, perhaps, room for child care for the apartment dwellers).

Still, one can think speculatively of other ways in which certain kinds of spatial ideologies are expressed, and I enumerate them in no special order. I believe one can posit a certain ideology of privacy as the other face and positive form of the repression of the collective in Western life, along with the expression of that form we call private property, as it generates equivalents for itself at every level of social life (thus, for example, William James famously linked up the feeling of personal identity, the unity and centredness of the subject or psyche, to my private property, my ownership of my own memories: as soon as I lose title to them, I lapse into schizophrenic dissolution).

Privacy – no doubt ritually acted out as far back as the violation of the body and the ban on touching – dramatically enacts its relations with private property in the form of the great estates, enormous wooded tracts into which outsiders cannot penetrate uninvited. There is here a dual dialectic of the senses, of seeing and hearing: no one is to be allowed to see me (as James Hall pointed out, the distances felt to constitute a violation of my person or, on the other hand, a worshipful inspection, are variable from culture to culture), and my money buys me the freedom from hearing anyone else: sound also violates, and submission to other people's sounds is a symbolic index of powerlessness and vulnerability. All of this suggests some deeper drive to repress the social and sociability as such: my reward for acquiring a fortune is my possibility of withdrawing from everything that might remind me of the existence of other people in the first place. Or rather, the other way around, my submission to those reminders, day-in and day-out, my immersion in the social (and the at least formerly collective), is itself a mark of weakness. Just as commodity reification in capitalism is determined by the attempt to flee class guilt and, in particular, to efface the traces of production and of other people's labour from the product, so here too, in the great estates (imaginatively reinvented in E.L. Doctorow's *Loon Lake*), my deepest social longing lies in the will to escape the social altogether, as though it were a curse, matter or animality from which privacy allows an escape into some angelic realm. It is a contradictory longing, to be sure, whose 'comeuppance' Orson Welles displays for us in Citizen Kane's old age, or in the remorse of the last heir of the Ambersons.

Still, the right to repression runs deep, and the privilege of escaping from the *polis* and from politics in general is supremely acted out in this separation of private life from work or public space. That it may be symbolic only of the privileges of the head of the household might be deduced from the rather different dynamic of privacy within the apartment or dwelling space itself. There, sexuality and power, or control, seem to be the not so symbolic stakes:

who has a right to close his door, and upon what, is a question that goes hand in hand with the other one about the right to determine the use of the television set (or the living room).

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Space otherwise notoriously underscores and reinforces whatever division of labour is active in the social order in question: what would be at stake aesthetically and practically in the planning of a building that deliberately transgressed those divisions? On the other hand, what would that building have been in the first place? The factory might at best afford a space for expressing Japanese team styles, rather than the Fordist assembly line (it is true that this distinction has often been ideologically deployed as a genuine marker of distinct cultural systems, of the truly pre- or post-individualistic as contrasted with the Western exploitative). The office building, meanwhile, could at best offer the occasion for dramatizing different management methods, as opposed to radically different labour processes and relationships to property itself.

I raise these political questions about built space not because they are the only ones, but in order to show their instability and, on the one hand, the ways in which they tend to slip into culturalism (how differently did the Victorians, or do the Japanese for that matter, think their spaces and their existential practices?) and, on the other, the revolutionary or systemic, the Utopian (the Tafuri option again: it is useless to speculate on changing something until we are in a position to change everything). The question can be asked in reverse, of course: and then (still paranoid) it reads – to what degree are we necessarily locked into our own system, so that even our fantasies of change reflect its internal logic, rather than our genuine discovery of something else, something radically different or other? This is a question various intellectual movements have sometimes tried to respond to by teaching that imprisonment, rather than offering a glimpse of something else: yet architecture drawn to those strategic specifics would presumably not be a very cheerful place to live in at any length.

Still, it seems possible to posit, alongside the political and social ideology that architecture might under certain circumstances be thought to express, those rather different ideologies or specific ideologemes that are at work all around us in social life and that architecture might only incidentally reinforce. I want to conclude with two of those, which I will identify as humanism and chaos respectively, and then mention the burning political problem which the concept of politics exercised here seems to prevent us from raising.

## PART ONE

By way of historical reconstruction and also in order to gauge the profound conservatism of the present moment, I have lately been trying to reflect on exactly what it was we used to stigmatize as humanism in the bad sense: old-fashioned philosophy and literary criticism, metaphysics, the centred subject, narrativity as such (with or without a happy end)? Liberal politics and social rhetoric? The Western great books and the great Western Judeo-Christian tradition? The valorization of 'Man' (very much in the ironic feminist mode)? In architecture, however, the strong form of humanism is not particularly traditional (in the sense, for example, of some antimodern tastes and values that would confront the various architectural modernities with indignation and

*Jameson* call for the restoration of Victorian cityscapes and historicist forms). Rather it is phenomenology itself, as that has made itself felt in the area of space: and it must be said that however self-enclosed Husserl's phenomenology was in the problem of the structure and nature of mental operations and intellectual acts – however much Heidegger then found urgency in the relationship of human beings to time and anxiety (and following him, Sartre, to decisions and freedom) – the work of Merleau-Ponty was always significantly committed to a life in space. The analysis of perception and the Utopian vocation to restore bodily experience to a kind of prelapsarian plenitude – which make up everything glorious about Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writings – necessarily had as their complement the experience of space itself in all its imaginable varieties. It is easy to see how this conception of the vocation of philosophy would find its ally in an aesthetics of perception, that is, in a defence of art as what dispels a numbness and a habituation of perception and restores a more vibrant and articulated life in the world (clearly not all aesthetics offer this justification and defence of art by any means; but it has been influential in modern times, and not only in the idiosyncratic version of the Russian Formalists). Here too a vocation of the art critic is inscribed, as someone who will open up our perception of the works (and thereby presumably of the world itself): Ruskin and then Proust.

But in architecture, the building really is the world, or almost: so that opening up our capacities to perceive architectural space is already, and not even virtually, to extend our capacities for perception itself in general. But it is a two-way street: the architects who are seduced by this view of their vocation must then accept the human body as the ultimate criterion and build buildings to its scale. Or rather, since it is already supposed that this was done by the tradition, whence the valorization of antiquity and then of its development in the Renaissance, architects are thereby bound to return to some of those physical and tactile values, and to eschew the dissonances of what exceeds or maims or diminishes the human frame: what administers shocks to it for whatever purpose.

The same set of values can of course also be detected in urbanism: 'good city form', the ideal of the city somehow memorizable and mappable (Kevin Lynch) and organized around the human body to a human scale – this is phenomenological humanism on the level of the urban itself. It may well involve a certain tension with purely architectural phenomenology, asking certain buildings to accept a reduced position within the perception of the whole, rather than to strive to become themselves microcosms and models of the totality (and thereby the totality of perception). But the same implicit belief in the scale of the human is at work here.

Now these visions are glorious moments in our history, and reflect certain extreme conquests: one can deconstruct them, as Derrida did with Husserl; one can also make an ideological analysis of their function at a given time in which they are re-elaborated with a whole inner situation logic. Thus it seems clear that they represent a response to spatial alienation and an attempt to restore non-alienated experience to the modern industrial city. But the modern was also a response to that alienation, of a radically different type; and we can grasp something about what makes the phenomenological-humanist position reactionary by comparing its harmonious serenity to the desperate violence of the modern itself.

The phenomenological view of architecture is Utopian, in so far as it promises to restore or to resurrect from within the fallen body of the modern city-dweller – with clogged and diminished senses, therapeutically lowered and adjusted feelers and organs of perception, maimed language and shoddy, standardized mass-produced feelings – the glorious Utopian body of an unfallen being who can once again take the measure of an unfallen nature. Architecture serves as the intermediary of this resurrection by exercising those new or heightened faculties in a therapeutic way and organizing the external world for perception itself. Heidegger does not altogether fall into this category, yet his notion of the way in which the building stands at the centre of the universe and articulates, indeed, reinvents, what he calls the *Geviert*: the relationship between heaven and earth, between man and the gods, is somehow analogous to the aims of phenomenology and a good illustration of one dramatic version of that programme.

This is the case when you read Christian Norberg Schulz (or as I have said in a different way for the city: Kevin Lynch). It is difficult to argue against these visions, since such an argument would seem to stand out for ugliness and squalour, for lack of perception, and so forth. But two things need to be pointed out: first, that this is bad Utopianism in Marx and Engels' early sense: it asks for resurrection without paying the price; change without politics; transformation by simple persuasion and common sense – people will react directly to this beauty and demand it (whereas the argument started from the premise that people could no longer perceive fully in the first place).

The second point is a class one: when one then reads something like Roger Scruton's *Aesthetics of Architecture*, it becomes clearer that we have to do not merely with a class vision, a description of the way in which the upper classes (like Hölderlin's gods) inhabit their spacious dwellings and live their bodies, but with even more, all the complex mirror-dialectics of envy involved in class perceptions. What is being excited here is not the will to restore my perceptions, but rather the envy of those full perceptions as they are exercised by another class (and not by the bourgeoisie, but by the aristocracy: thus these are middle-class envies that survive in the general form of culture after the bourgeois revolution itself). It becomes then a little more complicated to distinguish between an attempt to restore older kinds of space and the incitement of collective fantasies whose very different function is that of legitimating a nobler way of life (and thereby excusing whatever has to be done, economically and politically, to perpetuate that way of life which virtually by definition is not for everyone, but whose minority experience somewhere is nonetheless supposed to redeem the fallen lives the rest of us have to lead).

## PART TWO

As far as spatial ideologemes in the urban area are concerned, I think I can do nothing better than refer to the recent novel by William Gibson, *Virtual Light* (1993), a book inspired by a collaboration with the architects Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts on reimagining San Francisco. I want to point out the persistence, through this exciting narrative, of a now standard opposition between the planned – the boring, totalitarian or corporate (as in the malls of

Jameson this novel) – and the chaotic, somehow natural, ‘grown in the wild’ structure called The Bridge:

But none of it done to any plan that he could see. Not like a mall, where they plug a business into a slot and wait to see whether it works or not. This place had just *grown*, it looked like, one thing patched onto the next, until the whole span was wrapped in this formless mass of *stuff*, and no two pieces of it matched. There was a different material anywhere you looked . . . (p. 178).

It is worth exploring the genesis of this particular binary opposition – deeply entrenched in postmodern doxa, where it stands for pluralism, neo-Fordist flexibility, postmodern marketing, and so forth, as opposed to bureaucracy. This is a hangover of cold war propaganda, in which socialist planning is grasped as imposing an unwanted order on human life, in contrast to which capitalism becomes celebrated as a place of freedom, a kind of jungle playground of consumption, with plenty of interstices for those who want to drop out of the system. Clearly, it is an opposition ill calculated to measure the degree to which late capitalism is a form of standardization, and a lifeless application of grids and prefabricated forms. To be sure, in the new moment, chaos is derived as it were fractally from prefabricated modules (whence the term flexibility): freedom is thus apparently achieved on the far side of human production by means of computers and cybernetic techniques.

But how can an architect plan such productive chaos? Can it be built into the city or into the individual building, particularly when that building is a megastructure that wants to rival the city? Is not the mall, which prophetically passes before us as the antithesis in Gibson’s account, the final sorry result of the attempt to generate a rich simulacrum of wild life in the project not to plan? I don’t particularly care about the answers to these questions, but they serve to highlight the omnipresence of this stereotypical opposition between intention, plan and praxis, on the one hand, and, on the other, chaos, the informational, the late capitalist and consumption.

### PART THREE

The business of identifying ideologemes is a crucial one; it is a necessary part of politics (although not all of it), and architecture is a useful experimental laboratory in detecting and observing the operations of ideologemes one would not normally expect to find there. But I confess that in none of what I have said do I find any reference to the most significant political development (and issue) of our own period, namely, globalization itself, and by the same token I find no reference to the important question of what architecture might have to do with globalization and how it can offer possible political interventions into the new world system. As this conference itself, in its mobility, presupposes globalization, and as contemporary architecture, with its multiple projects all over the world, is unthinkable without it (more unthinkable than a modernism which could well be imagined fulfilling itself within a single national regime), I wonder how I have managed to evade the question of the multiple levels in which all thought has to move today, namely, the local, the regional, the national and the global: buildings are as

locked into these as are concepts; politics must engage them (I'm thinking of the meshes on a flywheel) as substantively as aesthetics or theory. But I suspect that in order to reach globalization as a reality, or a kind of thing-in-itself, we will first have to spend considerable time in identifying its various ideologies, not least the spatial ones.

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#### NOTES

- 1 *Le temps retrouvé*, Éditions de la Pléiade, vol. 3. Gallimard, 1989, p. 1204.
- 2 F. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 104–7.