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CONSUMPTION AND THE CITY, MODERN AND POSTMODERN

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Abstract: The city has been witness to a curvature in space-time—whereby modern modes of surveillance and repression have been transposed into the hyperreal orders of a consumer society. Modernity's commitment to the law, and to the cognitive ordering of nineteenth-century urban space, centred on the allegorical figure of the stranger. Yet this cognitive space was itself ex-appropriated by the heterotopic peregrinations of the *flâneur*, which traced out the contours of an aesthetic space. However, the capacity of the system to absorb its own immanent contradictions has since seen the reappropriation of the *flâneur's* ludic existence—a manoeuvre by means of which consumption has come to assume the form of a new mode of social domination. The structural implications of consumption are thus considered here in the wake of a postmodern transition to a 'posturban' hyperspace.

key words consumption modernity city stranger *flâneur* posturban

> [T]he literature of modernity and the themes of modernism were not concerned with shopping.
>
> Wolff, 1990, 58

> Nor is it the case that shopping was 'invisible' in the literature of modernity. Quite the contrary…
>
> Wilson, 1995, 68

> The 'form' hypermarket can thus help us understand what is meant by the end of modernity.
>
> Baudrillard, 1994, 77

Introduction: the secret curvature of the urban question

> Things aspire to be straight, like light in an orthogonal space, but they all have a secret curvature.
>
> Baudrillard, 1988b, 70

"In a quasi-mathematical way," suggest Alliez and Feher (1989, 54) "the function of power appears to change in order to fit a posturban agglomeration involving a sophistication that gradually combines with and eventually replaces the former surveillance apparatus, just as the latter had replaced methods of confinement." The kind of change to which Alliez and Feher refer concerns the remarkable capacity of western society to reproduce itself despite the fundamental contradictions upon which it is predicated. Or, more precisely, it concerns the systemic propensity of western society to resolve[1] *by defining away* its own immanent contradictions—to mutate, reconfigure itself, adapt, and thereby (re)produce itself afresh. Stated quite so baldly, such a thesis can easily appear as something akin to the 'capitalist imaginary' of social

theory (Kellner, 1989). Yet despite its apparent simplicity—which is, of course, nothing like so simple in its actuality—such a thesis does indeed hold: "Disciplinary society is succeeded by the sophisticated city" (Alliez and Feher, 1989, 54).

Tracing the curvature that leads to this 'sophistication' of the city amounts to attempting to understand the profound changes that have come to define the current postmodern condition of western society. If modernity is equated with "the immense process of the destruction of appearances … in the service of meaning … . the disenchantment of the world and its abandonment to the violence of interpretation and history" then the postmodern may, in turn, be regarded as "the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances" (Baudrillard, 1994, 160–1). The postmodern might, in other words, be regarded in terms of the *reversal* and *cancellation* of all that had previously been accumulated, not simply over that particular period of history termed modernity, but over what will prove to have been the only historical period *as such.* (For modernity has always been the *producer* rather than a *product* of history: history belongs to modernity in a much more profound sense than modernity belongs to history.) The grand march of history is a vision peculiar to modernity—and a vision to which we have become all too well accustomed. Little wonder, then, that the 'destruction of meaning' defining the postmodern—by implication *beyond the end* of history—should arouse such confusion and suspicion, such awe and fear. For it serves to undermine everything modernity had sought to set in place in its attempts to render social life manageable. Yet there should be little doubt by now that modernity's was always already destined to be a *failed* attempt. Not only were the costs it incurred too great; the principles it

sought to instantiate—upon which to predicate and reproduce itself—were ultimately *impossible* principles, reflecting its impossible ends.

An exemplary case in point is provided by the reality principle, upon which the hopes and dreams of modernity were so very firmly pinned—and which have been so very thoroughly compromised by the irruption of all those simulacra and simulations that have, for us today, come to imply the destruction of meaning. For the disenchantment of the pre-modern world by meaning always relied upon the dialectical power of representation, "the visible and intelligible mediation of the Real" (Baudrillard, 1994, 5), to stand in for and exchange with the real. But from the Renaissance onwards, the emancipation of the representation from its pre-modern, hierarchical status (where its rigid exchange with the real was guaranteed by God) saw its eventual replacement by the modern serial (re)production of the sign, marking a shift away from the clear-cut possibility of the *counterfeit* and its succession by the *copy* (cf. Benjamin, 1975). And this shift has itself subsequently given way to a third order of *pure simulacra*, wherein the status of the real is, finally, fully undermined. Hence, according to Baudrillard (1993), the simulacra we live amongst today do not so much (mis)represent or denigrate either the real or the original, but are always already of the order of the *hyperreal*. They are copies for which there is no original, simulations which imply "a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard, 1994, 1). The history of modernity thus betrays a secret curvature in the movement from representation to simulation that curves back upon, absorbs, and thereby ends, the specificity of the modern: "Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false

representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum" (Baudrillard, 1994, 6).

Such an absorption would imply that society itself is now fully ensconced within the realm of pure simulation—which changes not only the nature of society, but also the possibilities for its theoretical engagement. And yet, as Baudrillard (1988a, 50) has noted, there may be seen to be a certain parallel with earlier social transitions at work in the mechanisms that have led to such a situation. For example:

> We don't realize how much the current indoctrination into systematic and organized consumption *is the equivalent and the extension, in the twentieth century, of the great indoctrination of rural populations into industrial labour, which occurred throughout the nineteenth century.* The same process of rationalization of productive forces, which took place in the nineteenth century in the sector of *production* is accomplished in the twentieth century in the sector of *consumption.*

For—and despite elements of the above formulation that Baudrillard himself might now be inclined to laugh at—"it was a vital necessity for capital to have workers and producers transformed into active consumers, and even direct stockholders in the capitalist economy (this doesn't change anything in the business, the strategy being, as always, to remove the tablecloth without changing the organization of the table)" (Baudrillard, 1995a, 100). In the postmodern world, therefore, it is primarily as *consumers* that we are invited to take our place in society. Accordingly, we are "in a new objective state, governed by the same fundamental processes, yet overdetermined by a new morality. This corresponds to a *new* sphere of productive forces in the process of directed reintegration within the *same* expanded system" (Baudrillard,

1988a, 51). And whilst "We would have experienced this before as police control. Today it is just like an advertising promotion." (Baudrillard, 1995a, 97). Hereinafter, we will have been subject to a "new mode of domination," which "distinguishes itself by the substitution of seduction for repression, public relations for policy, advertising for authority, needs-creation for norm-imposition" (Bauman, 1987, 168). And if the apparent freedoms implied by this 'sophistication' are somewhat perplexing—particularly in the light of all those everyday situations that seem to indicate that, at base, things somehow remain very much the same—this is, contra Porter (1993), a direct function of our 'new objective state.' It is worth considering in more detail, therefore, the curvature in urban space-time that has given rise to such a situation.

From Baudelaire (1970), to Simmel (1971), to Engels (1962), contemporary writings on the nineteenth-century city frequently expressed wonder and astonishment, sometimes perplexity and bemusement, often a pronounced concern over the developing conditions of modern urban life. More often than not, such perceptions owed more than a little to a powerful contrast—often implicit, occasionally explicit, sometimes polemically overstated—with a purportedly more *natural* prior mode of social existence, against which modern city life must have appeared as nothing less than a fundamental and unnatural mutation of the human species. Such astonishment, however—and, arguably to a lesser extent, such concern—showed a marked tendency to diminish and recede as the features of modern city living became more commonplace. This tendency occurred not simply as a result of an increased accumulation of material wealth in the city (which might be responsible for enabling the city's better functioning, for example) but was also the product of a gathering

accumulation of wealth of everyday urban experience and the emergence of a heteronomous series of urban discourses (a "techno-cosmopolitanism" (Gregory, 1994, 138) that provided the conceptual language appropriate both to speaking of and to acting upon, in accordance with pre-specified ends, particular aspects of the city and city life). Indeed, the diminution of such attitudes as astonishment and perplexity, and their replacement by such dispositions as Simmel's (1971) celebrated 'blasé attitude,' was itself a process issuing from the new social relations engendered by the modern city—as urbanism became, in Louis Wirth's (1938) memorable phrase, a 'way of life.'

If, today, we are once again witness to a renewed state of bewilderment with respect to the city and city life, then this perhaps owes more than a little to the fact that those questions initially raised in writings on the city during the last century never were the kind for which answers are ever actually available[2]—or at least not the kind of answers that have a habit of rendering the questions themselves meaningless or obsolete with the passage of time. To the contrary, the development of modernity brought about an impressive ability to displace (or defer) such questions—and, moreover, to *disavow* that any such displacement was taking place (or any such deferral underway). In short, modernity functioned in a manner that served to render invisible those questions most uncomfortable to its own continued existence: "Modernity had the uncanny capacity for thwarting self-examination … it wrapped [its] mechanisms of self-reproduction with a veil of illusions without which those mechanisms, being what they were, could not function properly" (Bauman, 1993, 3). To the extent that they were represented at all, those questions modernity would rather

addition, logically conceivable only as an *incomplete* or somehow *flawed* version of the former: the illusory is a flawed version of the real; the false a flawed version of the true; and so on (Bauman, 1990a). It is such a principle, binding binarized difference in hierarchical opposition, that underpinned modern thought and, indeed, modernity as a whole. Accordingly, where the pre-modern social world was characterized by a fundamental *ambivalence*, the rationalized social order of modernity rested firmly on the principle of opposition; which is to say a *precise*, *rationalizable* and *calculable* principle. In the terms in which Baudrillard (1981, 135) conceives of the development of a series of abstract formalizations and reductions capable of permitting precisely the kind of accountability demanded by a system governed by such a (self-defined) rationality, *"All ambivalence is reduced to equivalence."* Such abstract formalizations included: the reduction of heterogeneous concrete human labours to an homogenous abstract labour value; of multiple temporalities to clock time; of nature to the functional object-form; of multiple spatialities to a mappable Euclidean geometry; of the multiplicitous senses and qualities of the world to discrete signs. To this extent, therefore, modernity's 'forced realization of the world' was, correlatively, the 'disenchantment of the world.' Perhaps it should be added that this wave of disenchantment first emanated from the Christian Church. Thus, whereas the ambivalence of the enchanted world was evident in "the ancient cults where the basic intuition of a *specificity* of evil and death was still strong" (Baudrillard, 1993, 149, emphasis added), the Church sought to "impose the pre-eminent principle of the Good (God), reducing evil and death to a negative principle, dialectically subordinate to the other (the Devil)" (*ibid.*).

The modern belief in rationality and progress—modernity's effective 'turning its back' on the conventional wisdom of traditional ways of acting—thus inaugurated a situation demanding the precise possibility of *evaluation*. Habit, custom, convention, tradition, received wisdom—all of these, underpinned by the pre-modern conviction of the authority of the Church, share the common feature that an established way or means of proceeding is, in and of itself, necessarily (and sufficiently) valid. This is legitimated by God and assured by the sheer weight of past tradition alone; in effect, therefore, by the kind of force of authority necessarily of a higher order than (individual or collective) human will. It is only when, by force of *reason*, the weight of past tradition is lifted—symbolized most poignantly in Nietzsche's 'death of God,' and encapsulated in Marx's evocative statement; 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is sacred is profaned' (see Berman, 1983)—that the human capacity for re-considering (collectively or individually) society's ways and means of proceeding is given its release (Chadwick, 1975); thereby necessitating some manner of assessing the validity of the manifold different ways and means by which social existence might be taken forward. And herein lies one of the most significant—and, importantly, *unintended*—consequences of modernity. For as soon as a departure is made from traditional, unreflexive, habitual modes of social existence, a profound aporia between different systems of evaluation makes itself evident. "Through most of human history," writes Bauman (1993, 4), "little difference was seen or made between now strictly separated standards of human conduct, such as 'usefulness', 'truth', 'beauty', 'propriety'." With the birth of modernity, such a process of differentiation necessarily asserted itself—and frequently in terms that were intrinsically antagonistic, irreconcilable, aporetic: "The once unitary and indivisible 'right way' begins to split

into 'economically sensible', 'aesthetically pleasing', 'morally proper'" (Bauman, 1993, 5).

But if the abstract reduction of ambivalence to equivalence was heralded in pre-modern times by the Christian Church, it was finally fully instated by the modern secularization of time noted above—thereby permitting the illusion of an unprecedented advance in human existence whilst always already ensuring that modernity would never be a completed project. Modernity was destined to proceed, in asymptotic fashion, towards an entirely *illusory* finality (Baudrillard, 1995b), throwing up all manner of new problems as it went along. The logocentrism of the principle of opposition that modernity had made its own was to remain haunted by the spectre of ambivalence, no matter how hard the institutions of modernity tried to exorcise its ghost. And, fundamentally, such a haunting manifested itself above all in the disorientating turmoil of the modern city. The ambivalence thrown up on the reflex of modernity's own (impossible) desire to overcome, once and for all, ambivalence *as such* made its spectral presence felt most particularly in the fleeting, fragmentary experience of modern city life (Simmel, 1971).

At the heart of Simmel's (1971) suitably impressionistic observations on the nineteenth-century city—on its pace, rhythm and transformation of pre-existing temporalities; on its novel social relations (affected and co-ordinated above all by the cognitive force of the modern 'colourless' money-form); and on its transformation of social and physical distance and space—there is an insistent reference to such a fleeting, fragmentary quality to modern metropolitan life, where the full solidity of

presence *as such* gives way to a kind of *spectral* presence—true to the sense of a haunting by something that has, ostensibly, been laid to rest. Moreover, the ambivalence manifest as this fragmentary quality of city life came to be personified in the fleeting figure of the *stranger*.[4] The stranger came to populate the modern city in almost direct proportion to the extent to which modernity as a whole sought to disavow the inevitability of ambivalence. For, with the new forms of distantiated social relations that modernity ushered in, the entry of the stranger into the spaces of modernity was on the one hand entirely necessary, yet on the other necessarily fraught with anxiety.

"There are friends and enemies" writes Bauman (1990a, 143) "And there are *strangers*." The stranger is, precisely, a category defined by its veritable *imprecision*: neither friend nor enemy; neither neighbour nor alien—breaching the barrier set up between both. The allotropic category of the stranger *necessarily* defies the parameters of modernity's logocentric ordering principle—in a manner that might appropriately be characterized as 'viscous' or 'slimy:'[5] spreading across both sides of the opposition; irritatingly invading both sides of the divide; infuriatingly straddling the boundary—improperly, neither fully present nor fully absent from either side. Yet, such a 'sliminess' or 'viscosity' simultaneously possesses a *glutinous* quality—necessary for sticking or gluing those terms modernity sought, precisely, to hold *together* in their very *opposition* (Doel, 1996). The very possibility of the stranger is, therefore, a direct effect of modernity's (impossible) attempt to annihilate ambivalence. It is the displacement and welling up of that very ambivalence its own ordering functions sought to erase. And, moreover, this displacement issued

specifically from the *reconfiguration of social and physical space* that was intrinsically necessary to the development of modernity.

If the spatial constitution of pre-modern society was such that physical and social distance were intimately correlated, the social form of the modern city—and the appearance of the stranger—points explicitly to the break-down of any such simple correlation. In pre-modern society, those whose lives were lived in proximity in physical space were, in general, correspondingly close in social terms. Those geographically distant were, similarly, socially distant. And whilst such a situation could never guarantee a clear-cut division between near-by friends and neighbours on the one hand, and far-off aliens and potential enemies on the other, it nevertheless afforded a kind of certainty with respect to social relations (enemies close to home, for example, were at least recognizable as such; they did not bear the unpredictability of the *potential* threat *necessarily* borne by aliens). It is in the context of the collapse of this correlation between social and physical space wrought by the forces of modern urbanization that the true significance of the predominance of the stranger may be grasped. For, in defiance of the boundaries that traditionally aligned physical and social space, the stranger is—seemingly 'unnaturally'—"socially distant yet physically close" (Bauman, 1993, 153). Such was the ambivalence characterizing the spaces of the modern city, made incarnate in the figure of the stranger.

The stranger was, as Simmel (1971; 1978) definitively showed, vital to the new conditions of social life modernity sought to impose and yet inevitably destined to arouse considerable anxiety. Arguably, the paragon of this paradoxical situation is the

development of the modern money system, which was both prerequisite to *and* sustained by precisely the kind of relation embodied by the stranger: "The desirable party for financial transactions—in which, as it has been said quite correctly, business is business—is the person completely indifferent to us, engaged neither for nor against us" (Simmel, 1978, 227). Equally, however, encounters with strangers inevitably take the form of anxiety-ridden 'mismeetings;' fleeting, episodic encounters both born of, and necessary to, the modern, capitalist political economy—and yet, importantly, irrevocable detached from the intimacy of the pre-modern, pre-capitalist moral economy, where social and physical space were more likely to overlap. Thus it might be said that the fragmentary, disjunctured modern urban world was, at one and the same time, the world experienced by the stranger and the experience of a world populated by strangers; a world in which a universal strangehood had come to predominate. Modernity itself bore the consequence of engendering, out of the desire for coherence, unity and order, the disjunctured urban world of the stranger, concomitantly the modern urban world of strangers (Lofland, 1973). In parenthesis, it may be ventured that this situation underpinned the proliferation of popular institutions characterizing the nineteenth century, and especially the nineteenth-century city, which arguably represented a distinctively modern means of overcoming the loss of pre-modern, organic communities (Baernreither, 1889; Morris, 1983; Razzell and Wainwright, 1973, see especially Letter XXI, 320–323).

For those concerned to maintain the power of defining and sustaining the modern molar order, however, the spectral presence of the stranger functioned as a sign of the necessity of *imposing* order—the only way possible, seemingly, of confronting and

thereby seeming to exclude, categorically, the possibility of the *flâneuse* (Wolff, 1990). As Elizabeth Wilson (1995) notes, however, the nineteenth-century *flâneur* carves out a far more *indeterminate* existence—in relation to an effervescent sociality that irrupts, in truly aleatory fashion, amidst the urban spaces and urban crowds modernity has itself engendered. Accordingly, the apparently masterful gaze of the *flâneur* is intrinsically less sure or secure than has often been assumed. The fact that, for instance, a certain number of women did—in admittedly exceptional and famous cases (such as that of George Sand)—engage in *flânerie* signals the import of grasping the full complexity of the *flâneur's* (*flâneuse's*) nature. The commonly accepted interpretation of the *flâneur*, as embodying an overriding voyeuristic mastery of urban public space (from which women are practically excluded, being confined to the rigidly privatized domestic space of the home), arguably not only misspecifies the complexity of the gendering of modern urban space in its universalizing of a class-specific domesticization (experienced predominantly by women of the middle classes); it also "to some extent … overlook[s] the desperation which motivates the wanderings of the *flâneur*" (Wilson, 1995, 73).

The public spaces of the nineteenth-century city were subject to a series of profound transformations linked, as Walter Benjamin (1973) and Siegfried Kracauer (1937) have demonstrated, to the overwhelming dominance of the process of commodification. The erstwhile public spaces of the city were witness to a blurring of their status by the growing prevalence of private commerce, generating such new urban cultural experiences as that offered by the Parisian arcades so magically described by Benjamin (Buck-Morss, 1989; McRobbie, 1992; Gregory, 1994).

Certain of these commodified spaces—perhaps most notably the department store (Miller, 1981; Williams, 1982; Leach, 1984; Bowlby, 1985; Lawrence, 1992; Laermans, 1993)—were targeted specifically towards women of the middle and upper classes, where such women could themselves assume a role akin to that of the *flâneur*.[9] Hence, whilst the city offered women of the appropriate financial means distinctive new freedoms, the necessity of such *separate* spaces provides a clear indication that these women's experience of the city was of a male-dominated environment. But, equally, working-class women cannot accurately be said to have been *excluded* from modern urban public space, notwithstanding the unequal and uneasy existence they led in relation to those men, of all classes, occupying such territory. As Wilson (1995, 70) remarks, with specific reference to working-class women, "to read the journalism of the mid- and late nineteenth century is to be struck by their *presence* rather than their absence." This is, perhaps, most evident in the overriding reformist concern with female prostitution in the nineteenth-century city (Acton, 1968; Buck-Morss, 1986; Walkowitz, 1977, 1980, 1992).

Thus, modernity's gendering of the public and private *spheres* (Wolff, 1990) did not map itself at all neatly or simply onto public and private urban *space*. To the contrary, the increasingly commodified urban arena was charged with a tense and equivocal sexualization, underpinned by a profound ambivalence. And, notably, it was frequently the *lack* of any clear, unambiguous *spatial* demarcation between public and private spheres that was wont to heighten and reinforce the dangers of the city for women—particularly those for whom the city was unfamiliar. The following extract from *The Saturday Review* of 1862 illustrates this well:

> A 'Paterfamilias from the Country' makes his appearance in London, and sends his two daughters, young, lovely and guileless, on a shopping walk. Unacquainted with the moral geography of the West End, they innocently trip down the tabooed side of Regent Street. The natural consequence follows. A young gentleman of amorous disposition, seeing them there, upon the equivocal ground, solitary, sauntering and attractive, comes to the conclusion that they had rather be looked at than not, and begins to ogle them accordingly (Anon., 1862, 125).

Thus is was that a pronounced moralizing subtext to the ordering zeal of the urban reformer concerned itself with the presence of certain 'types' of women in the public spaces of the nineteenth-century city. This was, of course, an entirely contradictory situation, reflecting the hypocrisy of bourgeois male Victorian sexual attitudes, insofar as such men's concerns to render the public spaces of the city safe for their own wives and daughters was wholly incompatibly with the frequent exploitation of working-class women by such men (which took place within the domestic spaces of the home as well as the surrounding public spaces of the city) (Barret-Ducrocq, 1991; Trudgill, 1973).

The presence of the prostitute in the nineteenth-century city came to be cast, in very clearly patriarchal terms, as a metaphor for the loss of nature; for the breakdown of the 'natural order' that the modern city was seen as representing. But whilst the characterization of the prostitute as an 'unnatural type' signals the degree to which the presence of women in the city was constituted, by the bourgeois masculine discourse of the urban reformer, in terms of a retrospective *naturalization* of a more rigidly patriarchal prior social order, the *flâneur's* experience of the city was equally framed

in relation to such perceptions. Ryan's (1994, 49) remark that "Whilst the city was the birthplace of a new set of values constituted within modernity and capitalism, it was also the arena for the reformulation of a pre-capitalist patriarchal culture" thus applies across the entire spectrum of men forging their lives and identities in the nineteenth-century city. But the *flâneur* is, perhaps, marked by far more a profoundly contradictory nature than Ryan allows.

The *flâneur* occupied a paradoxical class position, which was of profound significance to his disposition. As Wilson (1995, 63) notes, "He is a gentleman … yet he is subtly *déclassé*, and above all he stands wholly outside production." And while the role of the *flâneur* "was open to one narrow segment of the population only, educated men … it … often led to poverty and obscurity" (*ibid.*, 72). Many of those *flâneurs* indulging in the conspicuous consumption synonymous with the urban pleasure zones of the modern city carved out an uneasy existence as artists, writers and journalist, possessing "the attitude of men who have been bought: while critical of and opposed to the philistinism of bourgeois society, they were paid to entertain it" (*ibid.*, 64). Their position was one which "rejected conventional society, yet … [was] financially dependent on it, and as a result their attitude towards society was cynical or ironic rather than passionately and committedly oppositional" (*ibid.*). The *flâneur's* experience of the modern city, which—in common with most other nineteenth-century urban experiences—amounted to a fragmentary and episodic one, resulted for the *flâneur* as much as for the reformer in a profound *nostalgia*—in a sense of loss for the *epic* quality of life retrojectively attributed to an earlier mode of existence. But, for

the *flâneur*, the vertiginous turmoil of the modern city was marked above all by an overbearing sense of *impotence*.

The aestheticized, ludic existence pursued by the *flâneur* represented a reaction to, and a mode of coping with, the otherwise disorientating, *agoraphobic* spaces of the city. Indeed, the impotence experienced by the *flâneur* was etched directly into his peregrinations through aesthetic space. According to Benjamin (1985, 40), "The path of someone shy of arrival at a goal easily takes the form of a labyrinth." And so it was that the aesthetic spacing produced by the wanderings of the *flâneur* took on a labyrinthine form. The *flâneur* constantly *lost himself* in the aesthetic spaces of the city, his peregrinations interminably deferring his satisfaction and contributing to the melancholy of his existence. As Wilson (1995, 75) suggests, "In the labyrinth the *flâneur* effaces himself, becomes passive, feminine." Such is the *flâneur's* predicament in relation to the threat to the established patriarchal order posed by the modernization of the city.

In a certain sense, therefore, the proximity of the *flâneur* to the prostitute in the *physical* space of the modern city suggests a kind of uneasy (and undoubtedly unequal) parallel between their respective positions in *social* space—a parallel occluded in theorizations of the male gaze that accept its self-asserted mastery on its own terms. In the light of the virulent commodification saturating the public spaces of the city, prostitution had also come to serve as a metaphor for the omniscient presence of the commodity-form and the resultant commercialization of urban public space. Hence, to the *flâneur*, it seemed as though "The whole of society was engaged

in a sort of gigantic prostitution; everything was for sale and the writer was one of the most prostituted of all since he prostituted his art" (Wilson, 1995, 73). Now, clearly, there is an immanent danger of romanticization with respect to portrayals of the *flâneur* as a wholly tragic figure, but for the *flâneur*, and for the prostitute, their respective existences were ultimately *stoical* ones, pinning their hopes not, clearly, in terms of the discourses of urban reformism, but not in strict opposition to them either. Rather, their lives took the form of a continued daily survival against the odds that modernity itself had set.

Hence, the animated public spaces of the modern city, populated by those strangers objectified in the surveillance of agencies of the state, represented a dramaticized playground to the *flâneur*, a figure who exercised his ultimately defeated and emasculated gaze over the urban spectacle, cathecting the strangers around him in accordance with his own aestheticized vision of the world. The corollary of this dislocated, aestheticized urban space was thus a profoundly disjunctured, aleatory experience of life, which promoted above all else a nostalgic longing for times past. The *flâneur* was, as Elizabeth Wilson (1995) has convincingly argued, never more than a fleeting, spectral figure—ultimately an impossible, phantasmagorical figure—stoically inventing himself (and occasionally herself), forging a seemingly heroic existence in the face of a vertiginous, turbulent urban world. Yet the proteophilia embraced by the *flâneur* undoubtedly provided for a new kind of *aesthetic* spacing—the contours of which have since become as intimately connected with the postmodern world of the late twentieth-century city as they were with the modern world of the nineteenth-century metropolis.

Seduction, repression and the consumer society

> The truth about consumption is that it is *a function of production* and not a function of pleasure, and therefore … it is not an individual function but one that is *directly and totally* collective.
>
> Baudrillard, 1988a, 46

If the *flâneur's* existence was marked by its aleatory, ludic character, by its detached sense of disdain for yet continuing aestheticized fascination with the cognitive spaces of the modern city, modernity has since come to appropriate something of the *flâneur's* outlook, transforming both itself and the *flâneur's* earlier ex-appropriation of the spaces of the modern city in the process.

As the *flâneur* traced his aestheticized, ludic pathway across the open public spaces of the nineteenth-century city, his peregrination was always already *transversal* with respect to the institution of the law, to the modern molar order. The *flâneur's* peripatetic existence was decisively *not* predicated in terms of a margin that might be transgressed. Rather, it was carved out in an heterotopic relation of *disjuncture* to the cognitive space of the city, spontaneously redefining the law into the *rules* of an unremittingly reflexive game. This is of profound importance insofar as "*it is not the absence of the law that is opposed to the law, but the Rule*" (Baudrillard, 1990c, 131). And such an 'opposition' is not, in fact, an opposition *as such*: the rule in this sense is that which does away with both the law and *its* opposition (that is, transgression or the 'absence of the law'); it is that which moves to a different register, *beyond* the law. So it was that the random walk of the *flâneur* marked out the potential course of a line of flight from modernity as a whole. The path of the *flâneur*, it might be said, carried

with it the potential to ex-appropriate—to seduce and abandon—the very terms of opposition that modernity worked within, transcribing the teleological order of the *law* (and at the same time *its* transgression) into the *rules* of the open-ended cycle of a game. And as Baudrillard (1990c, 131–2) points out, "it makes no sense to 'transgress' a game's rules; within a cycle's recurrence, there is no line one can jump (instead, one simply leaves the game)."

But, if the seduction of the world as a *game* was the *flâneur's* remittance from the order codified in the law, nothing less than *the extension the role of* flâneur *to the whole of society* has been the particular coup the system has pulled off to ensure its own continued survival. The city is now a *managed* playground. In contradistinction to the character of the *flâneur's* earlier *pure* ludic existence, the play the system's mutation has since instigated is, above all, *managed* play. Certainly, it is no more a scripted or narrated play than was the open-ended play marking the *flâneur's* wanderings through the city streets. It remains characteristically *aleatory*. But, at a certain juncture in space-time—though doubtlessly irregularly and unevenly—"the *flâneur*, through seduction, was transformed into the consumer" (Bauman, 1993, 173). The essentially *virtual* world of the *flâneur* was *realized*; made *actual*. The gaze of the *flâneur*—and indeed, perhaps prototypically, of the *flâneuse* too—was in effect captured, or more precisely *bought*, by the spectacular display on offer in the commodified spaces of the modern city. And herein lies the ultimate truth of the gaze of the *flâneur*. For the emergent captains of consumerism, "The right to look gratuitously was to be the *flâneur's*, tomorrow's *customer's*, reward" (Bauman, 1993, 173). There was money to be made in the gaze of the *flâneur*, and it is as a direct

consequence of this relation, defined in the terms of a commodified specularity, that consumption has come to assume its unprecedented importance with respect to our postmodern society. In the transmogrification of the world of the *flâneur* into the world of consumption, "the miraculous avatar of the commodity into the shopper is accomplished. … It is no more clear what (who) is the object of consumption, who (what) is the consumer" (*ibid.*, 173–4). In such a world, it might be said, "the same homogeneous space, without mediation, brings together men (*sic.*) and things—a space of direct manipulation. But who manipulates whom?" (Baudrillard, 1994, 76).

Thus, under postmodern conditions, the city's specificity has been shorn of its relation to an earlier industrial-productive rationale; to the functional reproduction of labour power; to the collective means of consumption; to ordering and policing by the repressive apparatuses of the state; and even, it might be added, to urban theory. It has been relieved of *any* specificity *as such*. Hereinafter it is consumption, that dangerous supplementary dimension of capitalism, that has become the dominant mode of social integration, reconfiguring and redefining the relation between the body of the *socius* and the body of the subject, between 'society' and its 'individuals' (Falk, 1994; Bauman, 1995). The capacity of 'the market' to provide commodified 'solutions' to the problems of everyday life—not to mention its capacity to gestate the problems for which solutions are necessary—ensures not only for the continuing realization of value on the part of capital; it also (and ultimately more importantly given the notorious quality of supplementary dimensions to supplant and supplete) imposes a distinctive new mode of social integration, via the daring and audacious manoeuvre by which the world of the *flâneur* is appropriated. Modernity has taken its

own ironic revenge, adsorbing the law onto the surficial curvature of an asymptotic statistical *norm* (Baudrillard, 1990b; Clarke and Doel, 1994; Doel and Clarke, 1996).

As Baudrillard (1990b, 164) stresses, "The law is an *instance*,[10] whereas the norm is a curve; the law is a transcendental, whereas the norm is a mean." The modern city was, above all, a world constituted in accordance with the law; in the characteristic terms of the *margin* of the law. Accordingly, the modern urban world was the primary locus of a foreboding *anomie*; of conflict, crisis, violence, madness, revolution and transgression; of everything that departed from the jurisdiction of the law. But we have since been witness to the cancellation and withdrawal of all this. The *anomie* synonymous with the modern city has distended into the statistical field of anomaly, "a field so normalized that abnormality no longer has a place in it" (Baudrillard 1990a, 26). Hereinafter, everything takes on the quality of an immanent sequence of arbitrary events, entrained in a thoroughly normalized curvature. And whilst "*Anomie* is that which escapes the jurisdiction of the *law*; anomaly is that which escapes the jurisdiction of the *norm*" (Baudrillard, 1990a, 26). Or, more accurately, anomaly is that which ultimately *cannot* escape the *asymptotic* curvature of the norm. Today there are no lines we can jump; no laws to be transgressed. The transition from the law to the norm renders the very possibility of transgression impossible. We have truly entered the phase of the *lottery society*, governed by the seductive fascination of an indeterminate play of aleatory forces. Hereinafter, "The systemic strategy is merely to invoke a number of floating values in this hyperreality" (Baudrillard, 1993, 3). And yet, as will be seen, the law does not so much effect a mortal disappearance as *live on*, in its second coming as pure simulation—inasmuch

as "Simulation is nothing less than the abolition of the opposition between true and false, good and evil… . The whole system is a kind of realization of indifference" (Baudrillard, 1995c, 91).

Hence Baudrillard (1994, 29) announces the "*End of the panoptic system.*" The classically modern mode of surveillance, once deemed necessary for the active repression of those tendencies antithetical to (yet themselves engendered by) the capitalist mode of production—tendencies that, along with capital, accumulated predominantly in the city—always already contained within itself the potentiality of a passive *internalized* and *individualized* auto-surveillance (Attali, 1981, 283–9). And if the undoubtedly costly centralized apparatuses of surveillance and repression are inescapably necessary for the maintenance of the modern, cognitive space of the city—as a direct function of those social locations structurally pitched against the system—then why not release the capacity of the system to self-adjust towards ensuring that the division or boundary between sides is itself done away with? Why not let the 'against' of the system *as such* be defined out of existence (or, rather, transposed into the orders of pure simulation, to live on in the form of a ghostly second coming)? In much the same way as a truly effective antibiotic destroys itself as the result of its very effectiveness, or a truly effective polemic is rendered meaningless by its total capacity to convince, the mutation of the modern social order towards a fully-fledged consumer society has served to absorb the law (and all that it implied) into the aleatory rules of a ludic society. Accordingly, repression becomes an increasingly less dominant form of social control in the face of a levelling process that constitutes subjects first and foremost as *consumers*, transposing preceding social

groups into the hyperreality of simulation. We have witnessed the transmogrification of repression (and the margin of the law) into seduction (and the curvature of the norm). Hereinafter, "Even repression is integrated as a sign in this universe of simulation. Repression become deterrence is nothing but an extra sign in the universe of persuasion" (Baudrillard, 1994, 76).

This is not, of course, to say that the ghosts of class do not continue to stalk the postmodern world. To the contrary: the disappearance of class is not of a mortal kind. It is, rather, effected by a metastatic process that results in the disappearance of the possibility of an *authentic meaning* to class and class struggle. Accordingly, class continues to *proliferate*; along new axes, defined increasingly in relation to cultural as well as economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984)—whilst the burgeoning (and classically impure) *middle* classes attest to the extent to which class has become thoroughly imbricated with consumption. Nor is any of this to say that a radical process of *individuation* has served to dissolve, willy-nilly, the existence of supra-individual groupings or collectivities *per se*. Again, to the contrary: the irruption of an effervescent, molecular, counter-structural sociality in the time of Maffesoli's (1996) 'tribes' is similarly a direct consequence of the metastasis attacking the oppositional clarity of the law, and forcing its proliferation over the smooth plane of a 'superficial abyss' (Baudrillard, 1990c). The transition from a situation requiring an active, centralized force of repression to a situation governed, in accordance with a statistical norm, by a passive and decentralized force of seduction is, by co-implication, the transition to an era of 'instant collectivities,' which—most importantly for the city—posses the transitory 'effervescence' of the urban crowd without the necessity of the

co-presence of its members in physical space (cf. Shields, 1992). Hence, the neo-tribe is the phenomenon of a veritable hyperspace, which short-circuits the differences between physical, social, aesthetic and moral spaces in a kaleidoscopic and aleatory play of differences that is itself *indeterminate* and, precisely, *indifferent*.

In the light of all this, it should be emphasised that the structural revolution of the system pulls off a feat of absorption—or, more accurately, a*d*sorption—rather than eradication with respect to the modern social order. The seduced of society have been granted a kind of freedom, no longer being coerced into compliance with the law, on the implicit understanding that it will be in their own self-interest to play by the rules of the consumer society; that they will (however cynically) accept and internalize the belief that this society is suited to them, and therefore they to it. For, indeed, the market does possess—for those who are not dispossessed—a certain 'democratic' character unlike all other modern social systems that have attempted to tackle the same basic problem. "Everyone is equal before the rule. We are not equal before the law, of course. The law is a principle of profound inequality. But everyone is equal before the rule because it is arbitrary. So there we find the foundations of a true democracy … though not by any means of the usual political type" (Baudrillard, 1995c, 92). The market is a system *in principle*—if only in principle—open to everyone. It is a system of sheer indeterminacy, based neither on productive meritocracy, nor on any anterior mark of exclusivity (such as inherited wealth or status). And as if to reinforce this latter point, success in this system can buy into, at the level of simulation, the nominal trappings of inherited status: the market in landed titles, for instance, is both popular and profitable.

In all practical terms, therefore, accepting the freedoms offered by the consumer society amounts to an acceptance, however cynical, of the rationality, efficiency and providence of the market—which entails the concomitant acceptance of the singular importance of money, and all that obtaining it involves: that is to say, above all, *earning* it, though winning it speculatively, inheriting it, and so on, are more than acceptable. And, of course, attaining it *illegitimately* does not automatically taint the notoriously colourless money thus obtained. Moreover, the acceptance of this freedom, and the concomitant acceptance of the emphasis to be placed on money and its acquisition, are mutually reinforcing self-orientations. For money, too, is a commodity, and it would therefore follow logically that the problem of attaining money is, precisely, a problem also best (that is, most 'democratically') dealt with by the market (specifically, the labour market—a very particular market, to be sure, but a *market* nevertheless).

Though hardly (re)enchanting, all of this follows directly from the widespread acceptance that the present system is the one most capable of guaranteeing personal freedom. Faith in consumerism, the market and the pursuit of money amounts in principle—and again it is the principle that is important—to an acceptance that this provides the *only* possible freedom from repression. This the system's own mutation has ensured: "Seduction versus terror. Such is the wager, since no other exists" (Baudrillard, 1993b, 183). Seduction amounts to a 'package deal,' the only available freedom from the residual 'second world' of repression—even if, for the silent majority, it amounts, for the sake of realism, to the acceptance of money as a

'necessary evil,' incurring the cost of trading one's labour power on the market. Hence, "What makes money so terribly attractive and prompts people to try so hard to obtain it, is exactly the possibility of buying oneself out of this second world" (Bauman, 1987, 169). Failure to accede to the requirements of the consumer society constitutes the circumstances deemed necessary for the continued repressive enforcement of the law: "To put it bluntly" remarks Bauman (1995, 204), "yesterday's underdogs were non-producers, while today's underdogs are non-consumers." The parallel worlds of seduction and repression constituting the consumer society are, therefore, entirely mutually dependent: "The two parts can only exist together—and only together can they be eliminated" (Bauman, 1987, 168). They are the double face of the self-same structuring principle.

Today, the level of dependence on the market is more pronounced than ever. Our faith in consumption has extended to the point where our own fragmented identities—cast adrift from both pre-modern communal *and* modern class-related positions—are subject to the provision of a 'market solution' (which is not, of course, to say subject to solution by the market—quite the contrary!). Today, as Bauman (1990b, 102) puts it, "Through the market one can put together various elements of the complete identikit of a DIY, customized self": *You are what you buy.* This is precisely the consequence of a structural revolution that has set in motion the aleatory play of the forces of pure simulation. And if the dispossessed of the system can readily perceive themselves as the victims into which they have been made, this is only to the advantage of such a system: *Know your (dis)place(ment).* The spiralling rate of property-related crime instigated broadly against 'the seduced' indicates an intimate,

sporadic and aleatory connection between the two worlds at the level of social practices, which, whilst driven by (and attesting to) the seductive powers of consumerism, provides the vestiges of the law with perhaps its most sharply-defined legitimation ever—in its second coming as a public relations machine. (And yet it should also be noted that the fundamental indeterminacy of the system has simultaneously given rise to an increase in (concern over) such middle-class shopping disorders as kleptomania, which, notably, also find their ancestry in the nineteenth-century emergence of modern consumer culture (Abelson, 1989; Camhi, 1993).)

It should be stressed, therefore, that consumption holds no potential whatsoever as a panacea for the emergence of a utopian postmodern urban society. Indeed, it no longer maintains any real connection with pleasure at all. To the contrary: "As a social logic, the system of consumption is established on the basis of the denial of pleasure. Pleasure no longer appears as an objective, as a rational end, but as the individual rationalization of a process whose objective lies elsewhere" (Baudrillard, 1988a, 46).

Concluding remarks: on the posturban question[11]

> Little by little social consciousness ceased to refer to production and to focus on everyday life and consumption. With 'suburbanization' a process is set in motion which decentres the city.
>
> Lefebvre, 1996, 77

> From thirty kilometers all around, the arrows point you toward these large triage centers that are the hypermarkets, toward this hyperspace of the commodity where in many regards a whole new sociality is elaborated.
>
> Baudrillard, 1994, 75

Notes

[1]The literal sense of 'resolve'—which derives from the Latin *re-solvere*: to re-release; to unfasten again—might be borne in mind here.

[2]"A question with no answer is a barrier that cannot be breached. In other words, it is questions with no answers that set the limits of human possibilities, describe the boundaries of human existence" (Kundera, 1984, 139).

[3]Of course, modernity did not at all preclude or exclude movements that detracted from this, its own ideal representation. To the contrary: the variety of (oftentimes nostalgic or utopian) characterizations of modernity as productive of a false and flawed social existence—from Marx and Engels to Ruskin, William Morris, Pugin and so on—bears full witness to the extent to which modernity actively gestated visions of its own inadequacies and impossibilities.

[4]This section is greatly indebted to the lecture 'The City and the Stranger' given by Professor Zygmunt Bauman on 7th December, 1994 under the auspices of the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds.

[5]On the 'slimy,' see Sartre (1957, 604–59).

[6]The subtle distinction between the *law* and the *norm*, which might be said to distinguish the modern and the postmodern, is, accordingly, suspended until the later sections of this essay.

[7]In the context of what follows it might be noted that the term 'statistics' initially related to the categorization and enumeration of the inhabitants of the territory of the nation *state*.

[8]Proust (1981) likens the random commun(icat)ion between two homosexuals observed by the narrator Marcel to that between insect and flower, the *transversal* nature of which is discussed in detail by Deleuze (1972) and Deleuze and Guattari (1983). This accords with Benjamin's (1973, 26) remark that the *flâneur* "goes botanizing on the asphalt." In Elizabeth Wilson's (1995, 65) terms, the *flâneur* is "the naturalist of this unnatural environment."

[9]Though the department store was probably the most significant space of its kind, other examples included such developments as ladies'-only eating establishments, tea rooms and so on (Wilson, 1995).

[10]I have returned the English translation of the French term *'instance'* (as 'rule') to the original, which perhaps better captures the meaning of this phrase. Rendering *'instance'* as 'rule' elides the crucial difference between the *law* and the *rule*. The other available English translation (Baudrillard, 1990a, 26) translates *instance* as 'institution,' also missing the distinction Baudrillard is aiming to bring out here; between the *curvature* of the norm and the *margin* of the law.

[11]This section focuses on the account of social space implicit in Baudrillard's neglected essay, 'Hypermarket and hypercommodity' (Baudrillard, 1994, 75–78), which arguably assumes with respect to theory the form of model Baudrillard describes with respect to social space; hence the treatment it receives here.

[12]"We live in a dark and fearful time, a time of polls and ratings and market research. … They take polls, do research. They find out what people want, and give it to them. *This doesn't work*, since when people find their alleged ideas thrown back at them … these ideas are somehow *changed*, *diluted*, not what they meant *at all*. They already *know* the stuff, it's the same stuff they told the market researcher, *its boring …. they're finding out what they already know.*" (Heimel, n.d., unpaginated).

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