usually strong impact of the fourth, or debris, stage of objecthood is a prominent feature. Because this stage of re-use, of fragments rather than parts, of a conscious presence of history and an implied cultural lateness, has a great deal in common with the institution of the museum and the process of effacement which I discussed earlier, I would like to conclude by bringing the final object stage into connection with the museum as an institution.

American work since Jackson Pollock has commonly used the floor as a working surface. The canvas is tacked down and paint is dropped or poured, stained or scrubbed into the surface. Objects are embedded into it. The recent painting of Julian Schnabel, often as monumental in scale as the largest works of Pollock, treats the canvas as though it were an ocean floor of mud into which fragments of plates, rusted chains, wooden beams have all been pressed. Over this muddy depth a unifying small number of colors are applied. Cultural symbols that are here felt to be fragments of wrecks, are found on the surface along with natural or everyday objects. In the earlier paintings of Rauschenberg a similar debris of images mixed themselves within a murky surface.

In what were among the most powerful and tragic paintings of the last 30 years Jasper Johns took the fundamental reference points of culture—the numbers from one to ten, the letters of the alphabet, the target, the American flag— and painted them over with somber colors and abstract expressionist brush strokes. The symbols of order (the intellectual order of numbers and letters, the perceptual order of the target, the civic order of the flag) seemed to be vanishing within the treatment rather than recorded or given presence by it. The numbers and letters were undergoing effacement in order to become art. They too seemed to be sinking out of sight as though even such culturally fundamental facts might be as temporary as any other cultural code.

The invention on which the work of Johns, Rauschenberg and Schnabel depends is the work of Jackson Pollock who changed the surface of the work of art to make it record new facts. No invention since Monet's side by side strokes of pure color has been as resonant as Pollock's. In his work, the artist traces and retraces over the painting itself. At every later moment of work he is effacing part of his earlier surface. When we look at the finished canvas we can read the layers very easily. The end product is a sequential set of effacing processes, each one identified by the single color used at that stage. The surface is a historical record of partially effaced layers. Effacing has stopped, everywhere, at a significant middle point.

The process of making art, as we understand it in a world in which the destination of art is the museum, is precisely the process of effacement. Pollock's work contains a lyrical and elegant pleasure in this fact. Effacement is itself brought to a delicate perfection, a point of balance. In the later work of Johns, Rauschenberg or Schnabel, a more ruined surface, a painting situated closer to cultural disappearance has been created. Of these the imagined mortality of numbers and letters marks out a radical limit to what can be pictured as debris or can be subjected to the effacement that accompanies the making of art.

Postmodernism and Consumer Society

Fredric Jameson

ABSTRACT

A discussion of postmodernism implies a political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism. E. Mandel's *Late Capitalism* shows that postmodern society is a purer state of capitalism than previous stages in industrialized society. In reference to various aspects of art, architecture and contemporary culture this essay traces the development from modernism to postmodernism and postulates three distinctive features of this culture: (1) the progressive commodification of objects, e.g., Andy Warhol's work, (2) photographic superficiality, (3) the waning of affect. The past is displaced as a point of reference by a simulacrum of the present. Nonconcrete images appear as the final form of commodity reification. This gradual loss of the subject and of concrete points of reference to the world, conforms with Lacan's notion of schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain of language, with the paradoxical principle of creation by differences rather than unification, and with the photorealistic transformation of concrete objects into fetishized and commodified simulacra. Postmodern art implies an enormous expansion of culture in that everything is art; this has a political dimension. The characteristic forms are images or pseudo-events which point to the abandonment of critical distance and of negativity, the hallmarks of modern art. A solution to this inauthentic state of culture would be a return to a cognitive art that depicts multinational capitalism, the object of postmodern art, in new ways.

The argument for postmodernism depends on the hypothesis of some radical cultural break, generally positioned at the end of the 1950s or the beginning of the 1960s. On one level, of course, as the very name of the concept suggests, this break is defined as a break with modernism proper, or high modernism as I will henceforth call it. Thus, abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the films of the great *auteurs*, or the academic canonization of Wallace Stevens' poetry—these are seen as the last extraordinary moment of a high modernist impulse, which is spent and exhausted by them. Clearly, however, it is in the realm of architecture that these issues have been most centrally raised and explored, and it is indeed essentially from architecture that the very concept of postmodernism emerges. There the celebration of postmodernism ist much more than the championship of yet another new style: it involves an implacable critique of the modern itself and the International Style, whose bankruptcy is pronounced on the urban level, where it is credited with the destruction of the traditional city, and whose moral and aesthetic condemnation takes the form of a denunciation of modernism's elitism on the formal as well as the social plane: in particular, the disjunction of the great new Utopian high modernist building from its surrounding city context, and the subsequent transformation of high modernist constructions into so many sculptures, as Robert Venturi puts it. Postmodernism will then offer a kind of aesthetic populism, as the title of Venturi's manifesto, *Learning from Las Vegas*, suggests. And this populist rhetoric, however we wish to evaluate it, suggests yet another significant feature of all of the various postmodernisms today, namely the effacement of the older boundaries between high culture and mass culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts filled with the forms, categories and contents of that whole landscape of advertising and motels, of the late show and the paperback bestseller, in other words of that very Culture Industry so passionately repudiated by an older modernism.

In what follows, I will have to take the existence of such a historical break for granted, since I will be more interested in describing some of the most significant features of the postmodernisms that are its consequence. But I do want to stress a somewhat different point in advance, and it is this—that the debate around postmodernism is very far from being a merely cultural or aesthetic affair. It involves for one thing the operation of a certain historical periodization; and inevitably such a periodization on the purely cultural realm will not stay put, but must lead us on to conjecture about its equivalent on the other levels of social life. What eventually happens is that the hypothesis of a postmodernism in culture very rapidly turns into a hypothesis about a whole new social moment or even a whole new type of society, whose most influential name is "post-industrial" society, but which is also often called consumer society, media society, information society, and the like. Such theories have almost always had the ideological mission of demonstrating that this new social formation no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle; they have therefore for the most part been rejected by Marxists, with the exception of the economist Ernest Mandel, whose important book *Late Capitalism* sets out not merely to analyze the historical originality of this new society but to show that it is, if anything, a purer stage of capitalism than any of the moments that preceded it. It could be abundantly documented that every position on postmodernism in culture—whether celebration or moral revulsion—is also ultimately a political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today.

One of the canonical works of high modernism in visual art is Van Gogh's well-known painting of the peasant shoes, an example which I have not innocently or randomly chosen. I want to propose two ways of reading this painting, both of which in some fashion reconstruct the reception of the work in a two-stage or double-level process.

I first want to suggest that if this copiously reproduced image is not to sink to the level of sheer decoration, it requires us to reconstruct some initial situation out of which the finished work emerges. Unless that situation—which has vanished into the past—is somehow mentally restored, the painting will remain an inert object, a reified end-product, and it cannot be grasped as a symbolic act in its own right, as praxis and as production.

This last term suggests that one way of reconstructing the initial situation to which the work is somehow a response is by stressing the raw materials, the initial content, which it confronts and which it reworks, transforms, and appropriates. In Van Gogh, that content, those initial raw materials, are, I will suggest, to be grasped simply as the whole objective world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty, and the whole rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil, a world reduced to its most brutal and menaced primitive and marginalized state.

Fruit-trees in this world are ancient and exhausted sticks coming out of poor soil; the people of the village are worn down to their skulls, caricatures of some ultimate grotesque typology of basic human feature types. How is it then that in Van Gogh such things as apple-trees explode into a hallucinatory surface of color, while his village stereotypes are suddenly and garishly overlaid with hues of red and green? I will briefly suggest, in this first interpretive option, that the willed and violent transformation of a drab peasant object world into the most glorious materialization of pure color in oil paint is to be seen as an Utopian gesture: as an act of compensation which ends up producing a whole new Utopian realm of the senses, or at least of that supreme sense—sight, the visual, the eye—which it now reconstitutes for us as a semi-autonomous space in its own right—part of some new division of labor in the body of capitalism, some new fragmentation of the emergent sensorium which replicates the specializations and divisions of capitalist life at

the same time that it seeks in precisely such fragmentation a desperate Utopian compensation for them.

There is, to be sure, a second reading of Van Gogh which can hardly be ignored when we gaze at this particular painting, and that is Heidegger's central analysis in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, which is organized around the idea that the work of art emerges within the gap between Earth and World, or what I would prefer to translate as the meaningless materiality of the body and nature and the meaning-endowment of history and of the social. We will return to that particular gap or rift later on; suffice it here to recall some of the famous phrases which model the process whereby these henceforth illustrious peasant shoes slowly recreate about themselves the whole missing object-world which was once their lived context. "In them" says Heidegger, "there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field." "This equipment," he goes on, "belongs to the *earth* and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman ... Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth ... This entity emerges into the unconcealment of its being," by way of the mediation of the work of art, which draws the whole absent world and earth into revelation around itself, along with the heavy tread of the peasant woman, the loneliness of the field path, the hut in the clearing, the worn and broken instruments of labor in the furrows and at the hearth. Heidegger's account needs to be completed by insistence on the renewed materiality of the work, on the transformation of one form of materiality—the earth itself and its paths and physical objects—into that other materiality of oil paint affirmed and foregrounded in its own right and for its own visual pleasures.

At any rate, both of these readings may be described as hermeneutical, in the sense in which the work in its inert, objectal form is taken as a clue or a symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate truth. Now we need to look at some shoes of a different kind, and it is pleasant to be able to draw for such an image on the recent work of the central figure in contemporary visual art. Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* evidently no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear: indeed, I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all (Fig. 1). Nothing in this painting organizes even a minimal place for the viewer, who confronts it at the turning of a museum corridor or gallery with all the contingency of some inexplicable natural object. On the level of the content, we have to do with what are now far more clearly fetishes, both in the Freudian and in the Marxian sense (Derrida remarked about the Heideggerian Paar Bauernschuhe that the Van Gogh footgear are a heterosexual pair, which allows neither for perversion nor for fetishization). Here, however, we have a random collection of dead objects, hanging together on the canvas like so many turnips, as shorn of their earlier life-world as the pile of shoes left over from Auschwitz, or the remainders and tokens of some incomprehensible and tragic fire in a packed dancehall. There is therefore in Warhol no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture, and to restore to these oddments that whole larger lived context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or of glamour magazines. Yet this is even more paradoxical in the light of biographical information: since Warhol began his artistic career as a commercial illustrator for shoe fashions and a designer of display windows in which various pumps and slippers figured prominently. Indeed, one is tempted to raise here—far too prematurely—one of the central issues about postmodernism itself and its possible dimensions: Andy Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification, and the great billboard images of the Coca-Cola bottle or the Campbell's Soup Can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capitalism, *ought* to be powerful and critical political statements. If they

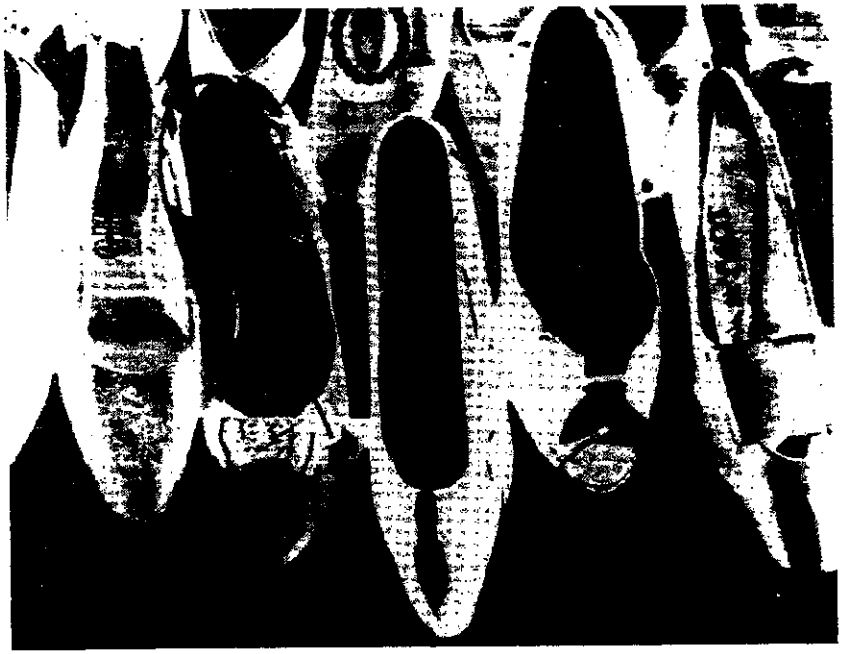

Fig 1 Andy Warhol, *Diamond Dust Shoes*

are not that, then one would surely want to know why, and one would want to begin to wonder a little more seriously about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capitalism.

But there are some other significant differences between the high modernist and the postmodernist moment, between the shoes of Van Gogh and the shoes of Andy Warhol, on which we must now very briefly dwell. The first and most evident is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense—perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms to which we will have occasion to return in a number of other contexts.

Then we must surely come to terms with the role of photography and the photographic negative in contemporary art of this kind: and it is this indeed which confers its deathly quality to the Warhol image, whose glacéd X-ray elegance mortifies the reified eye of the viewer in a way that would seem to have nothing to do with death or the death obsession or the death anxiety on the level of content. It is indeed as though we have here to do with the inversion of Van Gogh's Utopian gesture: in the earlier work, a stricken world is by some Nietzschean fiat and act of the will transformed into the stridency of Utopian color. Here, on the contrary, it is as though the external and colored surface of things—debased and contaminated in advance by their assimilation to glossy advertising images—has been stripped away to reveal the deathly black-and-white substratum of the photographic negative which subtends them. Although this kind of death of the world of

appearance becomes thematized in certain of Warhol's pieces—most notably the traffic accidents or the electric chair series—this is not a matter of content any longer but of some more fundamental mutation both in the object world itself—now become a set of texts or simulacra—and in the disposition of the subject.

All of which brings me to the third feature I had in mind to develop here briefly, namely what I will call the waning of affect in postmodern culture. Of course, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all affect, all feeling or emotion, all subjectivity, has vanished from the newer image. Indeed, there is a kind of return of the repressed in *Diamond Dust Shoes*, a strange compensatory decorative exhilaration, explicitly designated by the title itself although perhaps more difficult to observe in the photographic reproduction. This is of course the glitter of gold dust, the spangling of gilt sand, which seals the surface of the painting over and yet continues to glint at us. Think, however, of Rimbaud's magical flowers "that look back at you," or of the august premonitory eye-flashes of Rilke's archaic Greek torso which warn the bourgeois subject to change his life: nothing of that sort here, in the gratuitous frivolity of this final decorative overlay.

The waning of affect is, however, perhaps best initially approached by way of the human figure, and it is obvious that what we have said about the commodification of objects holds as strongly for Warhol's human subjects, stars who are themselves commodified and transformed into their own images. And here, too, a certain brutal return to the older period of high modernism offers a dramatic shorthand parable of the transformation in question. Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* is of course a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude and social fragmentation and isolation, a virtually programmatic emblem of what used to be called the age of anxiety. I regard it as an embodiment not merely of the expression of that kind of affect, but even more as a virtual deconstruction of the very aesthetic of expression itself, which seems to me to have dominated much of what we call high modernism, but to have vanished away—for both practical and theoretical reasons—in the world of the postmodern. The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and the outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then projected and externalized without, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling.

Contemporary theory has among other things been committed to the mission of criticizing and discrediting this very hermeneutic model of the inside and the outside and of stigmatizing such models as ideological and metaphysical. But what is today called contemporary theory—or better still theoretical discourse—is also, I would want to argue, itself very precisely a postmodernist phenomenon. It would be inconsistent to defend the truth of such theoretical insights in a situation in which the very concept of "truth" itself is part of the metaphysical baggage which poststructuralism seeks to abandon. What we can at least suggest is that the poststructuralist critique of the hermeneutic, of what I will shortly call the depth model, is useful for us as a very significant symptom of the very postmodernist culture which is our subject here. Besides the hermeneutic model of inside and outside which Munch's painting develops, there are at least four other fundamental depth models which have generally been repudiated in contemporary theory: the dialectical one of essence and appearance (along with a whole range of concepts of ideology or false consciousness which tend to accompany it); the Freudian model of latent and manifest, or of repression (which is of course the target of Michel Foucault's programmatic and extremely symptomatic pamphlet *La Volonté de savoir*); thirdly, the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity whose heroic or tragic thematics are closely related to

that other great opposition between alienation and disalienation, itself equally a casualty of the poststructural or postmodern period; and finally, last in time, the great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified which very rapidly was itself deconstructed and unravelled during its brief career during the 1960s and 1970s. What replaces these various depth models is for the most part a conception of practices, discourses and textual play. Here too depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (intertextuality is in that sense no longer a depth model at all).

Nor is this depthlessness merely metaphorical; it can be experienced physically and literally by anyone who, mounting what used to be Beacon Hill in Los Angeles from the great Chicano markets on Broadway and 4th St., suddenly confronts the free-standing wall of the Crocker Center, a surface which seems to have been designed to be seen two-dimensionally, as through a stereopticon (Fig. 2)). What kind of volume sustains this immense surface? Impossible to say whether the space of this putative building is rectangular, triangular or of some other type. There is no doubt an exhilarating rush in the contemplation of this great free-standing sheet of windows that seems to defy our conventional experience of mass, like the great monolith in Kubrick's *2001* which confronts pre-evolutionary humankind like a destiny. On the other hand, and we will return to this question at the end of the present paper, there can be no doubt that such peculiar architectural shapes unsettle our traditional concepts and experience of the city in a disturbing way, and transform the city into something very problematical for our conventional capacity to perceive and to represent.

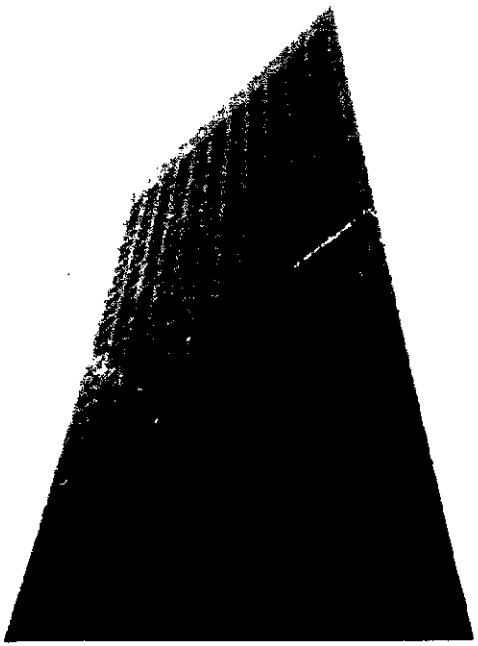

Fig. 2 Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, *Crocker Bank Building*, Downtown, L.A.

Returning now briefly to Munch, one would want to show how elaborately the painting deconstructs its own aesthetic of expression, all the while remaining imprisoned in the latter's fundamental limits. Its gestural content already underscores its own failure, since the realm of the sonorous, the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat, are by definition incompatible with the mute medium of the visual representation, something underscored within the work by the protagonist's lack of ears.

Yet this absence of the scream from the silence of the painting merely reinaugurates the dialectic of inside and outside, projecting us further on in the loop that leads from the absent scream to the even more absent reality of that atrocious solitude and anxiety which the scream was itself to "express." Such loops then themselves return to the painted surface in the form of the great concentric circles in which sonorous vibration becomes visible, as on the surface of a sheet of water, and which ultimately fan out from the sufferer to become the very material geography of his universe, pain become the very substance of this sunset and this landscape.

The suggestion must remain peremptory and dogmatic that concepts such as anxiety and alienation are no longer appropriate to the postmodern age. The great Warhol figures, Marilyn herself or Edie Sedgewick, the notorious cases of burn-out and self-destruction of the ending 1960s, and the great dominant experiences of drugs and schizophrenia have little in common any more, either with the hysterics and neurotics of Freud's era, or with the experiences of radical isolation and solitude, of anomie, private revolt, Van Gogh-like madness, which dominated the period of high modernism. In an overly schematic way, this shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject.

Such terms inevitably recall one of the more fashionable currents in contemporary theory–that of the "death" of the subject itself–the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or individual–and the stress, either as a new moral value or as an empirical description, on the decentering of that formerly centered subject. But the problem of expression is obviously also very closely tied to the older conception of the subject as a monad-like container within which things are felt and then expressed by a projection outwards. And although we have not made this second connection explicit, it seems clear that the high modernist conception of a unique *style* (along with the more collective high modernist notion of the artistic vanguard or avant-garde) must also stand or fall along with that older notion (or experience) of the so-called centered subject.

Here too Munch's painting stands as a complex reflexion on this complicated situation: it shows us that expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm in its own right, you thereby also shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the windless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison-cell without egress.

Postmodernism will presumably signal the end of this dilemma, which it replaces with a new one. The end of the bourgeois ego or monad no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego as well–what I have generally here been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more–the end for example of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation in contemporary society from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling.

This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings—which it may be better and more accurate to call "intensities"—are now free-floating and impersonal, and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria to which I will want to return at the end of this paper.

The waning of affect, however, might also have been characterized, in the narrower context of literary criticism, as the waning of the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality, the elegiac mysteries of *durée* and of memory (something to be understood fully as much as a category of the literary criticism associated with high modernism as with the works themselves). We have often been told however that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism proper.

It is necessary to stress the link between this increasing spatialization, or at least this detemporalization, and another fundamental characteristic of our culture and our society which many observers have insisted on. This may be called the gradual eclipse of historicity, the loss of any vital imaginative sense of the past, in all its radical difference from us, and the concomitant incapacity to image or project radically different futures—an incapacity which has immediate political as well as aesthetic consequences. This process is at work in mass culture, in what have come to be called nostalgia films (or *la mode rétro*), and on a somewhat different level of cultural production, in E.L. Doctorov's *Ragtime*, which better than any other recent novel strikingly dramatizes the transformation of the past, under postmodernism, into the sheer images and stereotypes of that past, the displacement of the past as referent with a new experience of the past as simulacrum and as pseudo-past. Such nostalgia art is organized by the category of the pastiche, and is of a piece with what the architecture historians term "historicism," namely the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre calls the increasing primacy of the "neo." Something which does not exclude a certain humor, as the architecture critics remind us, and which is also not incompatible with passion, or at least with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images or simulacra of itself, for pseudo-events and spectacles, in a society of exchange value generalized to such a point that the very memory of use value has been effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has remarked in a telling phrase that in it, "the image has become the final form of commodity reification."

But this description now requires us to return in a new way to the question, if not of time itself or temporality, then at least of temporal organization. Because if the subject has lost its identity, that is its capacity to persist over time and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, then it is hard to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could be anything but "heaps of fragments" and a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. These are, however, still negative or private accounts of postmodernist form: its positive formulations bear the names of textuality, *écriture* or schizophrenic writing, and it is to these that we must now briefly turn.

I have found Lacan's theory of schizophrenia useful here, not because I have any way of knowing whether it is clinically accurate or helpful, but rather as a suggestive aesthetic model, as description, in other words, rather than as diagnosis. I am in fact very far from thinking that any of the most significant postmodernist artists—Cage, Ashbery, Sollers, Robert Wilson, Ishmael Reed, Michael Snow, Warhol or even Beckett himself—are schizophrenics in any clinical sense. Nor is the point some culture-and-personality diagnosis of our society and its art, as in psychologizing and moralizing culture critiques of the type of Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*, from which I am concerned radically to distance the spirit and the methodology of the present remarks: there are, one would think, far more damaging things to be said about our social system than are avaible through the use of pop psychology.

Very briefly, Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning. I must omit the familial or more orthodox psychoanalytic background to this situation, which Lacan transcodes into language by describing the Oedipal rivalry in terms, not so much of the biological individual who is your rival for the mother's attention, but rather of what he calls the Name of the Father, paternal authority now considered as a linguistic function. His conception of the signifying chain essentially presupposes one of the basic principles (and one of the great discoveries) of Saussurean structuralism, namely the proposition that meaning is not a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, between the materiality of language, between a word or a name, and its referent or concept. Meaning on this view is generated by the movement from Signifier to Signifier: what we generally call the Signified—the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance—is rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of Signifiers among each other. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers. The connection between this kind of lingustic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a two-fold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of certain temporal unification of past and future with the present before me; and second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. The following excerpt from the autobiography of a schizophrenic indicates what it feels like:

> I remember very well the day it happened. We were staying in the country and I had gone for a walk alone as I did now and then. Suddenly, as I was passing the school, I heard a German song; the children were having a singing lesson. I stopped to listen, and at that instant a strange feeling came over me, a feeling hard to analyze but akin to something I was to know too well later—a disturbing sense of unreality. It seemed to me that I no longer recognized the school, it had become as large as a barracks; the singing children were prisoners, compelled to sing. It was as though the school and the children's song were set apart from the rest of the world. At the same time my eye encountered a field of wheat whose limits I could not see. The yellow vastness, dazzling in the sun, bound up with the song of the children imprisoned in the smooth stone school-barracks, filled me with such anxiety that I broke into sobs. I ran home to our garden and began to play "to make things seem as they usually were," that is, to return to reality. It was the first appearance of those elements which were always present in later sensations of unreality: illimitable vastness, brilliant light, and the gloss and smoothness of material things. (from: Renée/Marguerite Sechehaye, *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl*, New York: New American Library, 1970)

In our present context, this experience suggests the following remarks: first, the breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and the intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that

present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material, or better still, the literal, Signifier in isolation. This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect, here described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity.

What will happen in textuality of schizophrenic art is strikingly illuminated by such clinical accounts, although in the cultural text, the isolated Signifier is no longer an enigmatic state of the world or an incomprehensible yet mesmerizing fragment of language, but rather something closer to a sentence in free-standing isolation. Think, for example, of the experience of John Cage's music, in which a cluster of material sounds (on the prepared piano for example) is followed by a silence so intolerable that you cannot imagine another sonorous chord coming into existence, and cannot imagine remembering the previous one well enough to make any connection with it if it does. Some of Beckett's narratives are also of this order, most notably *Watt*, where a primacy of the present sentence in time ruthlessly disintegrates the narrative fabric that attempts to reform around it. My example will however be a less sombre one, a text by a younger San Francisco poet whose group or school—so-called Language Poetry or the New Sentence—seem to have adopted schizophrenic fragmentation as their fundamental aesthetic.

China

We live on the third world from the sun. Number three. Nobody
tells us what to do.
The people who taught us to count were being very kind.
It's always time to leave.
If it rains, you either have your umbrella or you don't.
The wind blows your hat off.
The sun rises also.
I'd rather the stars didn't describe us to each other; I'd
rather we do it for ourselves.
Run in front of your shadow.
A sister who points to the sky at least once a decade is a
good sister.
The landscape is motorized.
The train takes you where it goes.
Bridges among water.
Folks straggling along vast stretches of concrete, heading
into the plane.
Don't forget what your hat and shoes will look like when you
are nowhere to be found.
Even the words floating in air make blue shadows.
If it tastes good we eat it.
The leaves are falling. Point things out.
Pick up the right things.
Hey guess what? What? I've learned how to talk. Great.
The person whose head was incomplete burst into tears.
As it fell, what could the doll do? Nothing.
Go to sleep.
You look great in shorts. And the flag looks great too.
Everyone enjoyed the explosions.
Time to wake up.
But better get used to dreams.
– *Bob Perelman*

(from: *Primer*, Berkeley: This Press, 198

Many things could be said about this interesting exercise in discontinuities: not the least paradoxical is the reemergence here across these disjoined sentences of some more unified global meaning. Indeed, insofar as this is in some curious and secret way a political poem, it does seem to capture something of the excitement of the immense unfinished social experiment of the New China—unparalleled in world history—the unexpected emergence between the two superpowers of "number three," the freshness of a whole new object world produced by human beings in some new control over their collective destiny, the signal event, above all, of a collectivity which has become a new "subject of history" and which, after the long subjection under feudalism and imperialism, again speaks in its own voice, for itself, as though for the first time. It also shows, however, the way in which what I have been calling schizophrenic disjunction or *écriture*, when it becomes generalized as a cultural style, ceases to entertain a necessary relationship to the morbid content we associate with terms like schizophrenia, and becomes available for more joyous intensities, for precisely that euphoria which we saw displacing the older affects of anxiety and alienation. Consider, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre's account of a similar tendency in Flaubert:

> His sentence closes in on the object, seizes it, immobilizes it, and breaks its back, wraps itself around it, changes into stone and petrifies its objects along with itself. It is blind and deaf, bloodless, not a breath of life; a deep silence separates it from the sentence which follows; it falls into the void, eternally, and drags its prey down into that infinite fall. Any reality, once described, is struck off the inventory.

That is a valuable, if hostile, anatomy of what one may call the post-modernist or schizophrenic stirrings in a certain Flaubert (there are many others). But it clearly does not seem terribly apt as a characterization of the spirit of Perelman's poem.

The poem, however, has another compositional secret, which we must now reveal. In fact, the represented object of Perelman's poem is not really China at all. The author has related how, walking in Chinatown, he came across a book of interesting photographs in a stationary store, a book whose Chinese captions and texts obviously remained dead letters to him (or should one say material Signifiers?). The sentences of the poem are Perelman's captions to those pictures, their referents are other images, another absent text; and the unity of the poem is not in its text at all, but outside it, in the bound unity of another, absent book. The deception is not unlike that of photorealism itself, which looked like a return to representation after the long hegemony of abstract expressionism and its aesthetic, until people began to realize that the newer painting could not be said to be realistic at all in any traditional sense, since their referent is not any real or outside world, but rather merely photographs of that world, or in other words, of the world transformed in advance into images—of which the photorealist painting is now the simulacrum.

This account of schizophrenia and temporal organization might, however, have been formulated in a different way, which brings us back to Heidegger's notion of a gap or rift, albeit in a fashion that would have horrified him. I would like, indeed, to characterize the postmodernist experience of form with what will seem a paradoxical slogan: namely the proposition that "difference relates." Our own recent criticism, from Macherey on, has been concerned to stress the heterogeneity and profound discontinuities of the work of art, no longer unified or organic, but now a virtual grab-bag or lumber room of disjoined sub-systems and random raw materials and impulses of all kinds. The former work of art, in other words, has now turned out to be a text, whose reading proceeds by differentiation rather than by unification. Theories of difference, however, have tended to stress disjunction to the point at which the materials of the text, including its words and sentences,

tend to fall apart into random and inert passivity, into a set of elements which entertain purely external separations from one another.

In the most interesting postmodernist works, however, one can detect a more positive conception of relationship which restores its proper tension to the notion of difference itself. This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving; more often it takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness. I believe that the most striking emblem of this new mode of thinking relationships can be found in the work of Nam June Paik, whose stacked or scattered television screens, positioned at intervals within lush vegetation, or winking down at us from a ceiling of strange new video stars, recapitulate over and over again prearranged sequences or loops of images which return at dissynchronous moments in the various screens. The older aesthetic is then practiced by viewers, who, bewildered by this discontinuous variety, decide to concentrate on a single screen, as though the relatively worthless image sequence to be followed there had some organic value in its own right. The postmodernist viewer, however, is called upon to do the impossible, namely to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference. Such a viewer is asked to follow the evolutionary mutation of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: something for which the word *collage* is still only a very feeble name.

A final analysis of that euphoria or those intensities which seem so often to characterize the newer cultural experience is needed to complete this exploratory account of postmodernist space and time. Let us stress again the enormity of a transition which leaves behind it the desolation of Hopper's buildings or the stark Midwest syntax of Sheeler's forms, replacing them with the extraordinary surfaces of the photorealist cityscape (Fig. 3), where even the automobile wrecks gleam with some new hallucinatory splendor.

The exhilaration of these new surfaces is all the more paradoxical in that their essential content—the city itself—has deteriorated or disintegrated to a degree surely still inconceivable in the early years of the 20th century, let alone in the previous era. How urban squalor can be a delight to the eyes, when expressed in commodification, and how an unparalleled quantum leap in the alienation of daily life in the city can now be experienced in the form of a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration—these are some of the questions that confront us in this last moment of our inquiry. Nor should the human figure be exempted from investigation, although it seems clear that for the newer aesthetic the representation of space itself has come to be felt as incompatible with the representation of the body: a kind of aesthetic division of labor far more pronounced than in any of the earlier generic conceptions of landscape, and a most ominous symptom indeed. The privileged space of the newer art is radically anti-anthropomorphic, as in the empty bathrooms of Doug Bond's work (Fig. 4). The ultimate contemporary fetishization of the human body, however, takes a very different direction, what I have already called the simulacrum, whose peculiar function lies in what Sartre would have called the *derealization* of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality. The moment of doubt and hesitation as to the breath and warmth of Duane Hanson's polyester figures (Fig. 5), in other words, tends to return upon the real human beings moving about in the museum, to transform them for the briefest instant into so many dead and flesh-colored simulacra in their own right. The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a gloss skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density. But is this now terrifying or an exhilarating experience?

Fig. 3 Richard Estes, *Bus Reflection*

It has proved fruitful to think such experience in terms of what Susan Sontag once, in an influential statement, isolated as "camp." I propose a somewhat different cross-light on it, drawing on the equally fashionable current theme of the "sublime," as it has been rediscovered in the works of Edmund Burke and Kant: or perhaps, indeed, one might well want to yoke the two notions together in the form of something like a camp or "hysterical" sublime. The sublime was for Burke an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse in astonishment, stupor and awe of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether: a description then refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself—so that the object of the sublime is not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature, but also a matter of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces. Burke, in his historical moment at the dawn of the modern bourgeois state, was only able to conceptualize such forces in terms of the divine; while even Heidegger continues to entertain a fantasmatic relationship with some organic precapitalist peasant landscape and village society, which is the final form of the image of Nature in our own time.

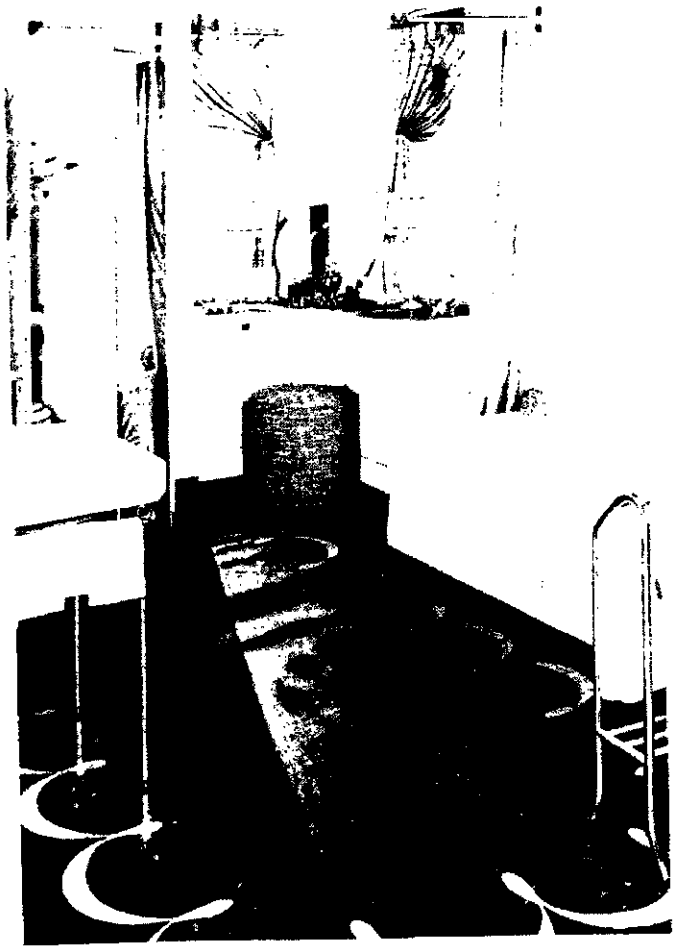

Fig. 4 Doug Bond, *Bathroom*

Today, however, it may be possible to think all this in a different way, at the moment of a radical eclipse of Nature itself: Heidegger's "field path" is after all irredeemably and irrevocably destroyed by late capitalism, by the Green Revolution, by neocolonialism and the megalopolis, which runs its superhighways over the older fields and vacant lots and turns Heidegger's "house of being" into condominiums, if not the most miserable, unheated, rat-infested tenement buildings. The *other* of our society is in that sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify.

Fig. 5 Duane Hanson, *Tourists*

I am anxious that this other thing not overhastily be grasped as technology per se, since technology is here itself a figure for something else. Yet technology may well serve as adequate shorthand to designate that enormous, properly human, and anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery, an alienated power, what Sartre calls the counterfinality of the practico-inert, which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis.

Technology is however in the Marxist view the result of the development of capital, rather than some primal cause in its own right. It will therefore be appropriate to distinguish several generations of machine power, several stages of technological revolution within capital itself. I here follow the economist Ernest Mandel, who outlines three such fundamental breaks or quantum leaps in the evolution of machinery under capital:

> The fundamental revolutions in power technology—the technology of the production of motive machines by machines—thus appears as the determinant moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century—these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the 'original' industrial revolution of the later 18th century.

The periodization underscores the general thesis of Mandel's book *Late Capitalism*, namely that there have been three fundamental moments in capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage: these are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own—wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational capitalism. Late or multinational or consumer capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great 19th-century analysis, constitutes on the contrary the purest form of capitalism yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capitalism into hitherto uncommodified areas. This purer capitalism of our own time thus eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way: one is tempted to speak in this connection of a new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious: that is, the destruction of precapitalist third-world agriculture by the Green Revolution and the rise of the media and the advertising industry. Clearly, my own cultural periodization into the stages of realism, modernism and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme.

We may speak therefore of our own age as the Third (or even Fourth) Machine Age; and it is at this point that we must reintroduce the problem of aesthetic representation already explicitly developed in Kant's earlier analysis of the sublime—since it would seem only logical that the relationship to and the representation of the machine could be expected to shift dialectically with each of these qualitatively different stages of technological development.

It is appropriate therefore to recall the excitement of machinery in the preceding moment of capitalism, the exhilaration of futurism most notably, and of Marinetti's celebration of the machine gun and the motor car. Automobiles are still visible emblems, sculptural nodes of energy which give tangibility and figuration to the motive energies of that earlier moment of modernization. The prestige of the great streamlined shapes can be measured by their metaphorical presence in Le Corbusier's buildings, vast Utopian structures which ride like so many gigantic steamship liners upon the urban scenery of an older fallen earth. Machinery exerts another kind of fascination in artists like Picabia and Duchamp; revolutionary or communist artists also sought to reappropriate this excitement of machine energy for a Promethean reconstruction of human society as a whole, as in Fernand Léger and Diego Rivera.

What must then immediately be observed is that the technology of our own moment no longer possesses this same capacity for representation: not the turbine, nor even Sheeler's grain elevators or smokestacks, not the baroque elaboration of pipes and conveyor belts, nor even the streamlined profile of the railroad train—all vehicles of speed still concentrated at rest—by rather the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself. Such machines are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment, of some older speed-and-energy sculptures. Here we have less to do with kinetic energy than with all kinds of new reproductive processes; and in the weaker production of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content—into narratives which are *about* the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of the production and reproduction of the simulacrum. When Japanese architects, for example, model a building on the decorative imitation of stacks

of cassettes, then the solution is at best a thematic and allusive, although often humorous one. Yet something else does tend to emerge in the most energetic postmodernist texts, and it is the sense that beyond all thematics or content the work seems somehow to tap the networks of reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us. Architecture therefore remains in this sense the privileged aesthetic language; and the distorting and fragmenting reflexions of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central role of process and reproduction in postmodernist culture.

However, I want to avoid the implication that technology is in any way the "ultimately determining instance" either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production: such a thesis is of course ultimately at one with the post-Marxist notion of a "post-industrial" society. Rather, I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating, not so much in its own right, but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp—namely the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capitalism itself. It is therefore in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable other reality that the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized and understood.

This analysis of postmodernism raises the issue of the possible political content of the newer art. We have to postulate some thoroughgoing modification or mutation of the very sphere and function of culture itself in late or multinational capitalism. Such a mutation can be described as an enormous expansion in culture to the point where its older autonomy is lost and everything in our social life—from economics and politics all the way to the psyche and to the older superstructures—becomes coterminous with culture itself. To say that everything has become a pseudo-event or an image or a spectacle is to imply this proposition about the expansion of culture generally. But the proposition also implies that culture—no longer autonomous or semi-autonomous as a realm—has tended to lose its capacity for critical distance, for negativity, for subversion, and in general for political intervention, however this last is understood. This is essentially the case as to the political content of Andy Warhol's art. But the problem may fully as well be one of our critical and theoretical categories as of the works themselves: *a priori*, the proposition of a restructuration of present-day society and a shift in the older function of culture suggests that our older conceptions of political culture or cultural politics—based largely on models of self-consciousness, or of negation and subversion, of critical distance—are no longer useful in the current situation.

I will therefore very tentatively propose a different cultural model, which marks a certain return to the cognitive and pedagogical models of political art as they can be found, in very different ways, *both* in Lukács *and* in Brecht. Unlike theirs, however, such a model will be a spatial one and will take as its organizing principle what is today often called the process of cognitive mapping. In a famous work, Kevin Lynch has suggested that the alienated city is a space in which people are unable to map either their own position or the urban and social totality in which they find themselves. Disalienation then involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction of a spatial but also a social world in which the relationship of the individual subject to his or her community

again becomes transparent and representable. The informing presence in my appropriation of Lynch is the great Althusserian redefinition of ideology as "the representation of the subject's *imaginary* relationship to his or her *real* conditions of existence": a definition I am here largely reformulating in terms of position and place, and in which urban space is itself but a figure for social space and the social totality in general.

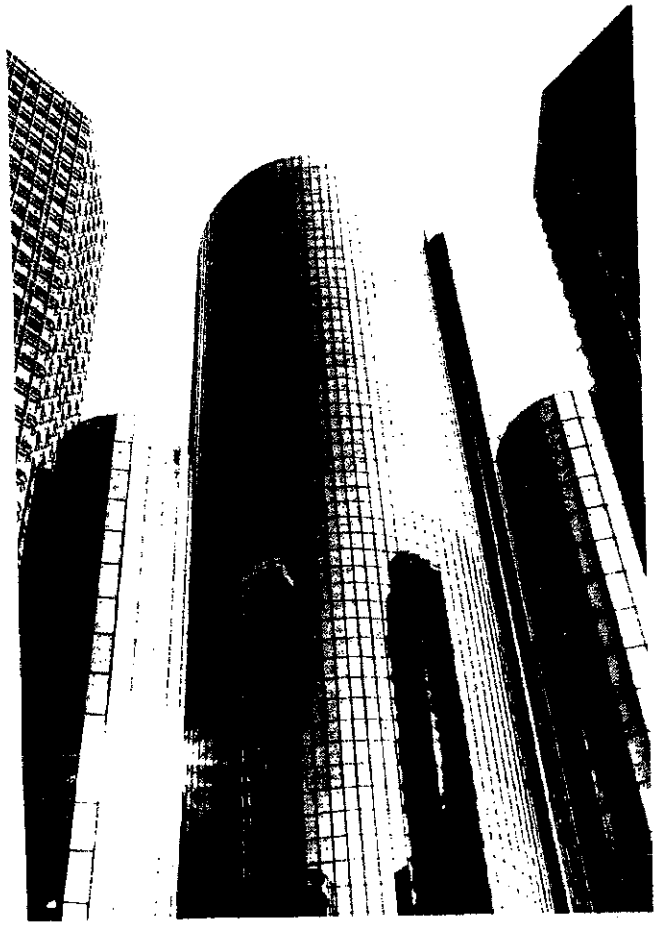

Fig. 6 John Portman, *Hotel Bonaventura*, Downtown L.A.

Indeed, no critique of postmodernist architecture and urbanism is quite so powerful and disturbing as that which can be addressed to the destruction of older kinds of city space, something which seems to prolong the destructive influence of architectural high modernism (itself precisely the object of a properly postmodernist critique) but which marks, I believe, a qualitative change and a dialectical intensification over modernism. What happens in new public spaces like the hypermarkets or the Bonaventura Hotel (Fig. 6

is a twofold movement of euphoria and alienation (or perhaps I should say schizophrenization): on the one hand, you are now submerged in a new total environment in which even the empty volumes are somehow filled, and in which you live your henceforth postmodern body in a new way; at the same time you are utterly bereft of any coordinates and incapable of locating yourself in relationship to anything: a feature well dramatized by the unhappiness of the shopkeepers within the Bonaventura, who complain that people simply cannot find them, and can certainly not find them a second time. All of this is intensified in a new way in the emergent postmodern cityscape of such complexes as La Défense or the new towns around Paris: not only the abolition of the street as a category (something already well underway during the modernist period), but above all the disappearance of profile and of even those perspectives, depths, grids and regularities which allow you to measure the location of one building with respect to another. It is as though these bewildering complexes had finally abolished space in the older sense of a network of *places* and were now beyond nature and matter in some new free-form dynamic.

It is not a question of returning to some older machinery, some older and clearer national system, or some more traditional and reassuring enclave of perspectival space. Yet if this analysis be correct, at least one cultural politics or one type of new political aesthetic would seem to impose itself, without there being any way of knowing whether it can be fulfilled or not. This would be an art which held to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to its fundamental object–multinational capitalism–and yet which achieved the breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing it in which we might again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain the capacity to act and to struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial and our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if ever there is any, will have as its mission a renewal of cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.