

Pleasure/ Leisure and the ideology of the corporate convention space

Amid all the cries of crisis surrounding the end of capitalism, it is perhaps important to consider what Herman Kahn calls the 'key vocation of the future', the extraction of the maximum amount of information from whatever data is at hand.¹

The so-called new endeavour, this extraction of information, implies a further investigation than just the 'reading', albeit a textual one, of the 'data' under discussion. In 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology', Frederic Jameson asks the question, 'How can space be ideological?'. The space he refers to is the space of architecture, nothing less than the schematization of social relations worked out in a literal form. Jameson further problematizes the question by attempting to banish the spectre of the body as the fundamental measure of a 'humanist' Marxism by asking '... if the body ceases to be the fundamental unit of spatial analysis, at once the very concept of space itself becomes problematic: what space?'.²

Caught between the 'phenomenological' as implied in the concept of the body and its lived experience and the 'structural', where the individual building or city is taken as a text in which all codes are to be read, Jameson recalls Henri Lefebvre's concept of urban space as the fundamental category of politics and of the dialectic itself. Jameson particularizes the role of the Italian architectural historian, Manfredo Tafuri, whose project in the realm of architectural history has been to

1. Herman Kahn, in Jonathan Crary, 'Eclipse of the Spectacle', *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis, ed. The New Museum, 1984, pp. 286-287.

2. Frederic Jameson, 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology', *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology*, Princeton Architectural Press, 1984, p. 51.

introduce a notion of class criticism into architecture. Although Jameson points out that this might be seen as an oversimplification of Tafuri's project, it is interesting to consider Tafuri in relation to the concept of social space in the practices of many artists engaged in articulating a relation to architecture. Certain assumptions are shared: that the critique must take a negative form, which doesn't allow for the positing of some future revolutionary style, or for the possibility of it occurring under capitalism at all. This critique is usually centered around the repudiation of the humanistic Marxist tradition and becomes a somewhat tautological circuit. If the body (read subjectivity) is abandoned as the unit of measure, what replaces it? Even the switching of devices implies a receiver.

But there are other ways to consider how space is ideological. Under the rubric of post-modernism, for example, the city is understood to be a collection of images which are constructed by the inhabitant as they are experienced; no longer are cities idealized concretizations of social relations. The cinema has become the central determining metaphor for simultaneous collective reception³ in a public space (although the specifics of each individual watching the cinema are ultimately private / psychoanalytical). It is this form of image-making and receiving that gives the lived experience of the city its particular ethos. The success of films such as *Liquid Sky*, *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* operate predominantly through the construction of a believable NYC experience. These films are a kind of *mise-en-scène*, which have become so internalized that the viewer / inhabitant is left with the unnerving feeling that s/he is living in a movie. While on a simple level 'living a movie' might be compared to 'all the world is a stage and we are merely players' of Renaissance life, *mise-en-scène* must be viewed in today's terms as ideological, precisely because it is so 'invisible and taken for granted'.

Another publicly oriented, small-audience form of address is the *private* space of the corporate convention, which employs a variety of visual forms and other theatrical devices to reach its audience. For it is this social space, figured differently than the 'private' in private humanistic space, that remains basically unknown and outside of what might be called public corporate space, which might include, for example, the lobby of a headquarters, general exhibits designed for the public, and advertising campaigns on network or cable television.

'The world as a stage' has a long tradition. It was a central ideological metaphor

3. For a discussion of the concept of 'simultaneous collective reception' see Benjamin Buchloh's 'From Faktura to Factography', *October* 30, 1984, pp. 82-120.

of Renaissance life, setting into place the entire schema of statecraft as a kind of stagecraft. Statehood consisted, in part, in the ability to inhabit the role of the monarch at a time when monarchy was not well established. This required the reworking of popular mythology and the staging of dramas that could provide a lived experience in which the principals involved could participate, first at a state function and then later in actuality. For example, the combined talents of Inigo Jones and James I were realized in the masques at the court of James I. In these masques stagecraft and statecraft provided a seamlessly rendered allegory which, during performance, took on both an alchemical and a mythic status. Usually a hoped-for event, such as an alliance with another country or its conquest, was dramatized as though it were a mythic play. As the events unfolded, the audience, unlike most agit-prop today, was actually the audience for whom it was intended and became aware of the real stakes in the drama. Generally, this event would culminate with the King and Queen, who were victorious in the drama, descending from the stage and dancing with the audience - symbolically celebrating the desired event. Magic and the alchemical tradition were intrinsically a part of this process yet, the mechanical and scientific tradition grew out of / alongside the alchemical one. The metaphor of changing lead into gold was a metaphor to describe a change in consciousness from 'baseness' to a higher spiritual level - the unification of man with heaven and the end of the feudal wars. The technical marvels achieved by Jones must be viewed as part of this tradition.

Jones is generally credited with the design and implementation of sophisticated stage sets and flats. He produced complicated 'flying' sequences by using a pulley / lever system to lift ornate chariots and other devices to the rafters, gradually floating them down to the stage. In addition, he developed a sophisticated system for flying sets (flats) in and out of place on the stage in a matter of seconds, again using a pulley system to manipulate them through the rafters, producing illusions which seemed like magic and which referred to this alchemical tradition.⁴ The monarch who could produce these illusions in the company of this private arena was also thought to be able to produce them in the public area. In another study Frances Yates⁵ describes how complicated the parade routes of returning or visiting royalty

4. Lily Campbell, *Scenes and Machines on the English Stage during the Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, 1923.

5. Frances Yates, 'The Entry of Charles IX and His Queen into Paris, 1571', *Astraea*, London: Routledge and Kegan, 1975, pp. 127-148.

could become as court artists and sculptors, poets and musicians busily prepared the 'way'. This process included the erection of special arches and monuments, the carving of special verses into already existing stonework, and the over-all implementation of the several interlocking themes that the royal procession was intended to narrate. If this could not be done in the allotted time, the parade would be postponed.

In the public sector these processions had the function of initiating the general populace into the dominant mythology and rhetoric (ideology) of statehood. Monarchs like Elizabeth I of England, who were long-lived, were those who were the most adept at combining and utilizing the complex symbols at their disposal. Elizabeth I as the Virgin Queen was able to replace older pagan festivals celebrating the Virgin Mary with the Accession Day Tilts, a chivalric event held in her honor as the Virgin Queen. As she substituted the pagan rituals for the chivalric ones, she maintained their symbolic richness. In a similar fashion she also manipulated a number of other mythological and historical symbols including Astraea, the goddess of the world during the Golden Age before men became evil.⁶

This kind of production exists today, not in statecraft *per se*, but in the central controlling metaphor of life, that of corporate capitalism. This form of stagecraft has recently been dubbed 'industrial theatre'.⁷ In a Coca-Cola bottler convention held in San Francisco in 1979, a new slogan was sold to the bottlers using the convention as a celebratory sales meeting with numerous parties and special functions, including a \$3-million celebration in a refurbished warehouse. This form of corporate spectacle is a relatively recent phenomenon developed over the last ten years and used increasingly to manage the non-tangible aspects of worker-relations in an increasingly white collar work force; in particular, it is used to manage the lower echelons of that work force - sales people. The corporations have identified that these are personnel who need to be continually motivated, and also, who could just as easily sell one thing as another. Furthermore, they realize that capitalism is built on intangibles and the deliberate manufacture of specific ideological systems. Consequently, they are looking for ways to foster company loyalty as well as lower absenteeism and boost productivity. In developing the idea of this corporate spectacle, they have, perhaps inadvertently, returned to the Renaissance model outlined above. Certainly there are a number of common factors in terms of the way these presentations are

6. Ibid.

7. Mike Sheridan, 'The Entertaining of Business', *Sky*, April 1985.

managed. Usually the president and his assistants participate directly in the spectacle as the stars or announcers; the overt message is nearly always masked, using entertainment, story-ideas and humor; and there is the use of elaborate and expensive special-effects to please the audience and add a 'specialness' to the occasion. To support the production of these special effects, another industry has developed the 'multi-image presentation' facility. These facilities, located predominantly in urban areas, create with the help of 'staging companies' or convention centres, the industrial theatre spectacles. The intense investment corporations have in the production of pleasure for the labor force could serve as the basis of a kind of logic for consumption. For example, various pleasures might compete with one another even now as ideologies provide some rationale on the part of corporations for keeping their narrative scenarios on the broadest level of popularized pleasure, to avoid conflict and maintain their shares of worker intangibles. Here is an example of a typical scenario:

After a long conference at an Arizona resort last year, Abbott Laboratories bussed its regional sales executives to a desert location for an outdoor barbecue. Out of nowhere, black-hatted cowboys on horseback swooped down, firing pistols, and encircled the startled executives. The chaos mounted when suddenly, hidden speakers blared the 'William Tell Overture' and a lone horseman raced to the rescue. Clayton Moore, the actor who played the original Lone Ranger on television, soon made short work of the men in black, restored order, and then handed each executive - still a bit unsure of what was happening - a silver bullet imprinted with 'Momentum '84', the conference slogan.⁸

On a less overtly dramatized level, corporations frequently employ multimedia presentations to get messages across to their workers. These shows, using as few as two projectors or as many as 60, seem to combine the most effective forms of address from both cinema and television. From cinema, they utilize the 35mm projected image (which looks better projected large) instead of the 16mm film image. They also take advantage of a 'cinema viewing' situation - simultaneous collective reception - but in an environment which has the intimacy of television (everyone knows everyone else), along with elements of discursiveness because of the 'talk-show host' format usually adopted for these meetings. In fact, it is not at all unusual for the slide presentation to be followed by a kind of variety show, complete with stars, but hosted by the president of the company.

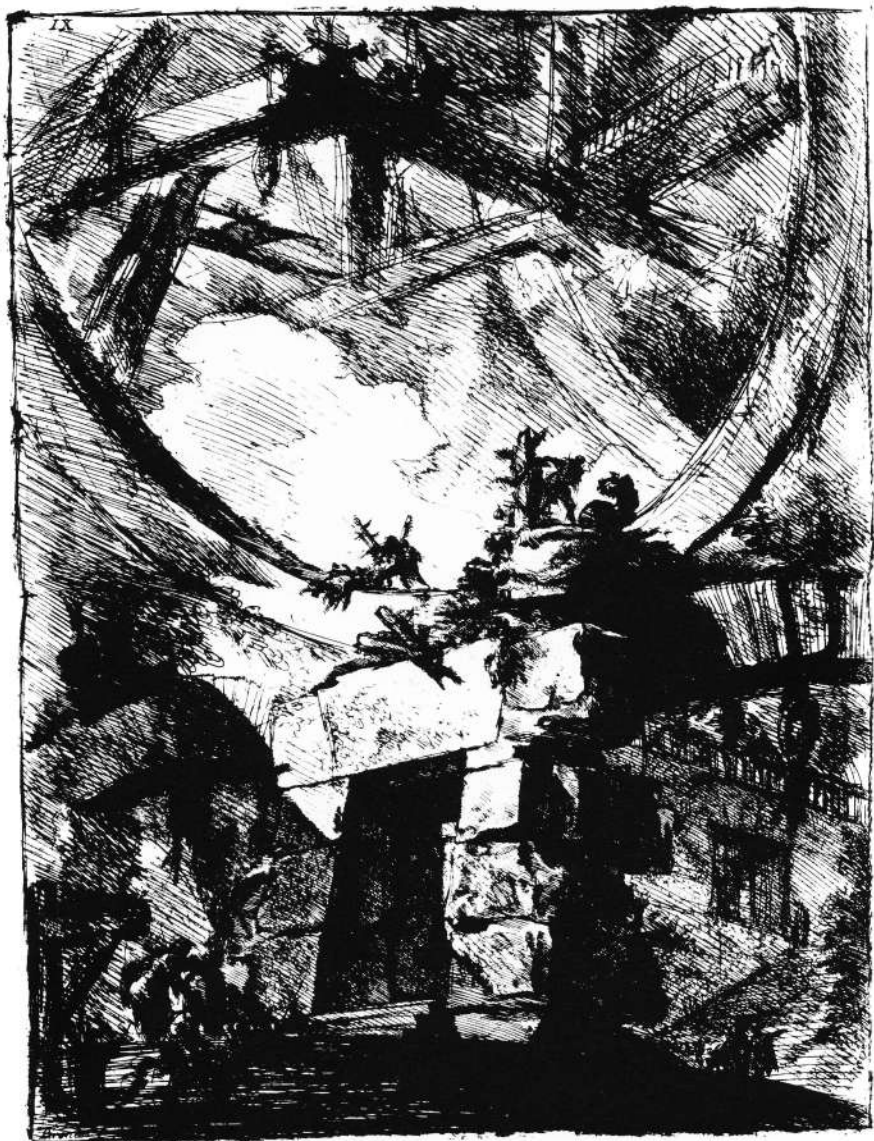
8. Sheridan, *op. cit.*

Another tie of these newer forms of stagecraft to the Renaissance tradition is the secrecy that surrounds the events. In the Renaissance period, alchemical societies communicated with one another using a complex system of codes and visual images open to interpretation on a number of different levels - somewhat similar to Barthes' textual analysis. Their meaning was opaque to some but transparent to those who were initiated. The inner workings of these large corporate conventions also follow the dictates of a secret society. Usually there is no press surrounding these conventions, or gatherings (as they are often called), nor are the subjects or the images of these visual presentations released to the general public. Instead, corporations, who spend millions of dollars on advertising, do everything in their power to veil these events with secrecy.

How ideology provides for forms of subjectivity has been one of the key concepts in developing a radical critique of corporate capitalism, in particular, countering the notion that this critique would have to take place in some (utopian) future. As Lyotard points out in *The Postmodern Condition*,⁹ narrative is a way of consuming the past, a way of forgetting so that something else can take its place. With science, information (data) is hoarded and stored as a new kind of capital. In tying their presentations not to corporate ethos, but to elements of popular culture, the corporations are hiding 'information' from their employees, while simultaneously reminding them that they are an elite group, members of a somewhat secret society - while actually giving them less 'information' than the stodgy old business meeting did.

In a sense the humanist measure of the body has been replaced somewhat by *mise-en-scène* as the measure for the way in which corporate private space is understood. This *mise-en-scène* sets the stage not as an experience in the old-fashioned way of group politicking and individual encounters, but as a kind of group transcendental experience in which the effects of the encounter are more important than the event that was mutually witnessed. These effects act as a counter to the 'alienated sameness' that is the lived experience of the 'everydayness' most of us have. The corporations have taken over many of the functions of consumer society, reminding us exactly how much pleasure-in-leisure is a part of capitalism.

9. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.



Piranesi, *The Prison Series IX*, circa 1750

ADAM'S WISH

video projection / mixed media

The New Urban Landscape, World Financial Centre, New York, 1988; *Real Art Ways*, Hartford, Connecticut, 1989

Installing the project for *Real Art Ways* at Hartford (a city undergoing major development) raises questions about art and arts organisations' participation in urban development. Development is not intrinsically bad, and RAW has been instrumental in improving the quality of cultural life. But this same cultural life is sold by developers to pave the way for further development. RAW have participated in the re-development of Hartford's downtown yet it does not benefit from the revitalisation of the area. Nor do the artists. Like their counterparts in Manhattan, they are forced to re-locate by escalating rents. Should we as citizens of a particular place be only grateful when a developer wants to build a building, or should we have a voice in what our city will become?

The World Financial Centre is a complex of four high rise towers built during the Wall Street boom of the mid-80s, a glittering edifice attesting to the power and glory of capitalism...its marble passageways and brilliantly illuminated domes are reminiscent of the baroque splendour of Alain Resnais' film *Last Year in Marienbad*. And yet no narrative unfolds. I was struck by the absence of an iconography, by those images, stories and allegories that are associated with the study of art and architecture. I decided to consider the history of trompe-l'oeil and illusionistic ceiling painting in relationship to corporate architecture particularly as the space of the World Financial Centre seemed to relate to the history of

church architecture.

I made a one-minute video loop; projected onto the 30 foot wide dome of the North Gatehouse it functioned like the trompe l'oeil ceiling paintings in St. Ignacius' Church in Rome. These paintings place the spectator in certain relations to the images portrayed while dictating the path the worshipper must follow as s/he moves through the space. The main character of the tape is a worker called Adam. First I explored his relationship to the commodity structure, and then I worked backwards historically to look at iconography in relation to illusionistic space. The last sequence deals with the dystopia of city life and the escape (fall) of Adam back into corporate space. Essentially there is no escape from corporate space which I present as a kind of monument or tomb.

In the opening sequence the worker pauses for a moment and looks up at the dome. At the moment of his seeing, he ingests the entire dome in a yawn that accompanies his look. It is this moment of ingesting that is the catalyst for narrative play to occur. It licences his imagination, allowing his body to be split, multiplied and inscribed onto the face of the dome. In terms of the history of architecture there are two things going on here. One is the relationship to the imagination that is contained in classical architecture. The other is the introduction of irrationality into classical architecture, perhaps best expressed by Manfredo Tafuri's reading of Piranesi's *Le Carceri* and *Il Campo Marzio*.

With classical architecture as revived in the Renaissance period, proportion, harmony and beauty were defined by a series of rules based on the body as a system of human measurement.

Consequently, the imagination as it is described by Claude Perrault (1684) must be subjected to these rules in order to guarantee continuity with the historical past; nature, as opposed to human institutions must likewise be subjugated. The body of Adam undergoes a number of transformations according to a series of computer graphic and compositional rules until his ultimate dissolution as a series of clouds. His imagination is subjected to a certain set of rules, those rules which govern the relationship each of us have to the commodity structure.

Tafuri characterises Piranesi's project as a systematic critique of the concept of place. This critique takes the form of an archaeology of perspective as a series of rules invented by man but disrupted by nature. Nature is not seen as creating a harmonious juncture between form and content but as liberating form as a kind of endless space, through irrationality, disarticulation, randomness - but not literalness. That's why the absolute space in *Le Carceri* is represented as a prison. The structure of this tape expresses a basic irrationality. For after Adam dissolves into the dome, nature takes over and produces a lightning storm. Suddenly and without reason we are looking at the Sistine Chapel, where Adam is reaching out for the hand of God.

The structure of the tape hereafter is motivated by Adam falling, and represents space as a kind of free fall zone. For Adam there is no escape from this space and no control over it. Yet he represents the reintroduction of the iconographic figure into architecture by occupying this space, through his falling. This project is part of a series of projections which deal with what I have been calling cinematic architecture. *Adam's Wish* encapsulates the history of iconographic loss in architecture, a loss which can be traced through the baroque, where forms get looser; into rococo with its focus on ornamentation going towards abstraction; and then into the neo-classical period where ornamentation disappears. The re-introduction of ornamentation to buildings today is not necessarily historical or iconographic; indeed it is often a pastiche of history, not specific, so that its sense of containing a public understanding of place is muted. If architecture refers to a sense of shared community and to a public vision and responsibility, why is the loss of iconography not more keenly felt and desired? By projecting the tape onto the structure of the dome itself, I want to make an iconographical denotation directly within the architecture of the building.

(Extracts from a conversation with architect and writer Ken Saylor, March 1989)



