Casual Imagination

In literature, indeed, even the great criminal and the humourist compel our interest by the narcissistic self-importance with which they manage to keep at arm's length everything which would diminish the importance of their ego. It is as if we envied them their power of retaining a blissful state of mind – an unassailable libido-position which we ourselves have abandoned.

The great charm of the narcissistic woman has, however, its reverse side; a large part of the dissatisfaction of the lover, of his doubts of the woman's love, of his complaints of her enigmatic nature, have their root in this incongruity between the types of object-choice.[1]

The activity of shopping directly engages the shopper in the generation of a complex narrative all her own. In a sense she is the protagonist of the detective story, following her own desire as she moves through the store, but not to the scene of the crime. Access to her desire is so difficult, so mysterious.... Hence the difficulty for each of us in finding out what really interests us.

If woman is enigmatic, it is because she has reasons - good ones - for hiding herself, for hiding the fact that she has nothing to hide... [2]

1. Sigmund Freud, *'On Narcissism: An Introduction'* 1914. *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1953, p. 89.

2. Sarah Kofman, 'The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard,' *Diacritics*, 10, no. 3, Fall 1980 p 36.

Shopping is marked by a series of exchanges, of looks and projections, in an environment that is deliberately mazelike, composed of inhabitable space that is only corridors. Pedestrian space as such for resting, occupying in groups, and sitting down does not exist. All of this space is filled with items to purchase, and with the application of Bauhausian principles to store design, the architecture itself has been completely effaced.

In one sense the architectural plan could be said to describe the nature of human relations since it marks the elements it recognizes - the walls, doors, windows, and stairs, which both divide and selectively re-unite inhabited space.[3]

By the end of the fifteenth century, the madonna and child had become earth-bound. These figures are more than the subject of the picture - they *are* the picture, they fill it completely. A look at the floor plans for villas of the period reveals a tendency toward the same corporeality. It is difficult to tell which parts of the building are enclosed and which are open; the relationship between all the spaces is similar throughout. The chambers, gardens, loggias, and courts all register as walled shapes - they add up to fill the site. Doors and stairs are used only to connect adjacent rooms. This plan shows that there was no qualitative distinction between the way through the house and the inhabited space within it. In these villas, household members had to pass through room after room to conduct their business, with the effect that every activity was liable to be interrupted unless definite measures were taken. Similarly, as we know from the writings of Castiglione, Erasmus, and Cellini,[4] social contact in the villa was normal and privacy/solitude the exception. Rarely is architecture mentioned specifically in the writings of this period and there is a predominance of figure over ground. These figures occupy the room, but there is no indication of what these rooms were actually like.

Department stores are transparent so that nothing interferes with the shopper's vision. While space planning has remained quite rigid over the last forty years,

3. There are severe methodological problems in treating architecture and human relations as part of the same textual system, in addition to the collapsing of class and ideology into the assumed transparency of architecture, but since I set out to describe *how* the commercial space, specifically the department store, is mediated by the television commercial, I had to propose a relation. In this sense this article might be considered a textual reading of the spaces buildings occupy and the social relations within them. I found Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', *Architectural Design* 48, no. 4, 1978: 267-Y78, extremely useful in formulating some of these relations.

4. See Castiglione, *The Courier*; Cellini, *Autobiography*; Erasmus, *Epistolai*.

display techniques have continued to improve, particularly in relation to the variety, wattage, and mood of the lighting utilized. In addition, total environments are often built entirely of transparent materials, creating a phantasm (phantom) of set design.

Consider the difference in the utilitarian design of the supermarket versus the department store. The supermarket has high shelves and straight aisles allowing for the maximum amount of goods to be presented in a minimum amount of space.

The man with the proper imagination is able to conceive of any commodity in such a way that it becomes an object of emotion to him and to those whom he imparts his picture, and hence creates desire rather than a mere feeling of ought.[5]

Can we say that buildings accommodate what pictures represent - the social relations of a particular period in history? Can we generalize about these relationships by examining the plans, photographs and paintings of an epoch for characteristics which might allow for or provide insight into the ways in which people occupy space?[6]

After about 1650, a radical reorganization took place in home design. Entrance halls and back stairs combined to create a network linking the rooms of the entire house. Every room had a door or a passageway into the hall. At first, the corridor was installed parallel to the connecting room, but gradually it replaced the adjoining door completely. This parallel division functioned to give the family direct access to one another and also served to keep the servants in the adjacent area: an area that was not thought of as a place, but as an activity - a corridor, a passageway. This innovation mirrored the increasing desire for privacy and a simultaneous strain on the relations between the classes. The compartmentalized building was organized as a thoroughfare, because movement was the only thing that could give it coherence.

Private life, thrust into the background in the Middle Ages, invades iconography, particularly in Western painting and engraving in the sixteenth and above all the seventeenth century.[7]

5. Walter Dill Scott, *Influencing Men in Business*, New York: The Ronald Press, Co., 1911; enlarged ed., 1928, p. 131.

6. Evans, op. cit., p. 274.

7. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick, New

The corridor had another effect: as a thoroughfare it was able to draw rooms at a distance closer, but only by disengaging those close at hand. The corridor facilitated communication, particularly speed, but diminished contact. Privacy and uninterrupted solitude could not be secured.

The family, which had existed in silence but 'did not awaken feelings strong enough to inspire the poet or artist', became a concept. This powerful concept was formed around the conjugal family, as opposed to the 'line' – that of parents and children, and the specific relation between them that the concept of childhood refined.[8]

As the events of the seventeenth century were displaced onto the nineteenth, the body was conceptualized differently. It lost its carnality and was seen as spiritual otherness - just as the telling of sexual thoughts, desires, and transgressions became part of confessional discourse. Consider the famous Pre-Raphaelite painting by William Morris, in which his wife Jane is the subject of his representation of Guinevere. There the body becomes the site of an invisible occupant. The objects surrounding her and the space they mark are stand-ins for her spiritual presence.[9]

The old code of manners was an art of living in public together. The new code emphasized the need to respect the privacy of others.[10]

The matrix of connected rooms was appropriate to a society that valued carnality, recognized the body as the person, and experienced gregariousness as habitual. The corridor plan, which completely replaced the Renaissance villa plan, signified the drastic separation of those three functions. What was previously united under one roof was now institutionalized as consumption, production, and distribution in distinct parts of the city. The corridor plan was also appropriate to a society that found carnality distasteful, that separated the body, dividing it into a multitude of discourses, and that regarded privacy as habitual.

York: Vintage Books, 1962, p. 347.

8. Ibid., pp. 839-364.

9. Evans, op. cit., p. 274.

10. Louis Sebastian Mercier, *Les Tableaux de Paris*, Paris: Gustave Desnoiteres, 1853, p. 19.

The design in the mind of the architect belongs to an order of eternal truth which the actual building expresses in material stuff.[11]

Prior to the sixteenth century, no buildings existed that contained a stage and an auditorium with spectator seating. In his Gran Teatro delle Scienze, Giulio Camillo (ca. 1475-1544) hoped to construct a model theatre that reversed the relationship of spectator to audience. Originally, Camillo had thought to use the metaphor of the human body as a microcosm of the universe in order to illustrate his memory system, but later he chose instead the ancient metaphor of the world as a great theatre.[12]

May we not regard every living being as a puppet of the gods, which may be their plaything only, or may be created with a purpose. [13]

Camillo was attempting to combine the form of the encyclopaedia with the Ciceronian mnemonic method of visual 'loci' for the retention of knowledge or orators. The art of memory was associated with images. Pictures were believed to signify an ultimate reality which words could not represent. In one hour, by occupying the centre of the stage, the scholar could master the universe which the theatre reconstructed through a Vitruvian ordering of the planets in conjunction with elements from Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hermetics, and the Kabala. Along with the memory theatre came the conviction that man could grasp and hold the greater world - of which he, man, is the image - through the power of his imagination. Imagination became man's highest power and he could obtain the world beyond appearances by holding onto significant images.

Before the invention of printing, oral memory became codified into rules. According to Cicero, the invention of the art of memory rested on Simonides' discovery of the superiority of the sense of sight over the other senses. 'Simonides', says Plutarch, 'called painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks.' Poetry, painting, and mnemonics were seen as intense visualization. By the Middle Ages the

11. Frances A. Yates, *Theatre of the World*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 191.

12. Ernst Curtius, *European Literature ard the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 138-144.

13. Plato, *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pengle, New York: Basic Books, 1980, Section 1, line 644d, pp. 24-25.

art of memory had been dropped from rhetoric and degraded as a memory aid for a weak man who had to use corporeal similitudes to retain his spiritualness.[14]

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women, merely players. [15]

In the late sixteenth century, Andrea Palladio designed the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, based on a reconstruction of a Vitruvian theatre. Its proscenium represents the stylized facade of a two-story palace and, as in the traditional Roman theatre, it has five doorways, three in the back and one on each side. What is most unusual about the theatre is its use of stage design in perspective (the contribution of Vincenzo Scamozzi, who completed the theatre after Palladio's death) to give the illusion that the five doorways on the twenty-foot stage empty into the street. It might be interesting to consider the relationship of the use of perspective and its representation in the theatre to the development of the Enlightenment city.

The first boulevard was designed by Sebastiano Serlio in 1507 for an Ariosto play; the illusion of the boulevard existed before the boulevard. Many of the ways in which perspective might be utilized were formulated by men who today we would call military strategists (although at the time there was no such profession - hence the term 'renaissance man'). Theatre for the 'renaissance' mind represented imagination in space, not fiction. Early plays were often historical tableaux performed in the palace.

Serlio's five books of *Architettura* did more to turn the theatre in the direction of the frenetic expansion of Vitruvius' remarks about changing scenes. With Serlio's illustration of the comic, tragic, and satiric, the art of theatre was identified with the art of changing perspectives. The audience looked at a 'picture theatre,' a window, where the 'renaissance' developments in optics and mechanics as well as perspective could be displayed.[16]

14. See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966. pp. 129-159, and Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, 'Giulio Camillo's Emblems of Memory,' *Yale French Studies*, no. 47, 1972: p. 47-56.

15. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Richard Knowles, New York: Modern Language Association, 1977, Act 2, Scene 7, lines 147-148.

16. For a discussion of perspective and optics in relation to the construction of the theatre, see Yates, *Theatre of the World*, pp. 112-135.

In one sense, perspective could be seen as taking over the function of the occult memory art, displacing perception and emotion onto a kind of mechanics. Perhaps this can best be expressed by comparing the medieval street, meandering and crooked, with a limited vista and haphazardly erected buildings which had grown up organically along the arteries of the town, with the boulevard based on perspective, imposing order from a fixed plan, demonstrating the illusion of harmony, and having a view as though there could be a window on the world.

Perspective had become a methodology, among other things, a way of methodologizing the imagination.

Walter Benjamin quotes Georg Simmel: 'Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by the marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another.'[17] For Benjamin, this situation is not a pleasant one.

Before the institution of the arcades in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, pedestrians were literally pushed out of the way on the boulevards by the fast-moving carriages of the royal and the wealthy. Although the arcades represented the increasing commercialization of public space, they also responded to a need, providing a thoroughfare and a vista for the pedestrian. The arcades, at least, provided a shop window on the world. The harnessing of private-sector values to create a passageway that was public (but which in fact was private) helped to generate a new subject - the *flâneur*. He felt more at home strolling in the interiorized miniature city than within his own four walls. The arcades, like the boulevards, also shared a militaristic function, for while they were not too wide to effectively blockade, they could be shut against the 'rabble'. However, unlike the boulevards, they did not allow for a mingling among classes; rather, they encouraged a new form of spectatorship to become normal. Not only was there a predominance of the eye over the ear, but the lack of allowable contact and the separation between the classes made this voyeurism the only form of communication that was acceptable. The world of experience was becoming the imagination.

The *feuilleton* section of the newspapers created a market for another kind of

17. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn, London: New Left Books, 1973, p. 38.

speculation: anthologies of literature designed to be sold in the streets. First came the portraits, or 'physiologies,' then came the *feuilleton* section itself with its short, gossipy witticisms, large ads and serialized novels. The *feuilleton* linked together the phantasmagoria of Parisian life. It set a standard of value by providing relief from the tedium of an increasingly fragmented yet mundane existence. In the newspaper, scattered, illogical events from day to day, had no underlying connection except contemporaneity.

Here the [masses that crowded through the arcades] appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. [18]

If the *flâneur* is an unwitting detective it accredits his idleness. In Alexander Dumas' serialized novel *Mohicans de Paris*, the hero searches for adventure by following a scrap of paper which he gives to the wind to play with. But, no matter which trail he follows, each leads him to a crime. The increasing need to narrativize daily life, to imbue its fragmentation with meaning while simultaneously laying the foundation for what would lead to information theory and surveillance technology, is reflected in Benjamin's remark that it was the detective story that was most emblematic of the fabric of Parisian life in the nineteenth century. Yet it was not only the detective story, but the *flâneur* and other participants who contributed to this narrative of city life. In his quest for the fantastic, this idler was fascinated by social situations within which he could imagine himself. Imagination was reaching beyond the world of appearances to a private, self-contained world where the subject was supreme. This was imagination free from images, unbound by conventional memory practices. The printed page made memory unnecessary and provided an audience, a shared practice where this constant desire, the telling and retelling- even if it couldn't be expressed by touching or conversation - found other means of expression, as a history, a poem, a private discourse, or a secret.[19]

Life before the seventeenth century was lived in public, either in the streets (outside of the small, one-room dwellings that housed all but the wealthy), or in the 'big' house that fulfilled a public function. This was the only place where friends,

18. Ibid., p. 38.

19. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

clients, relatives, servants, protégés and workers (the same people who would have spent their early years in the one-room dwelling) could meet and talk. These visits were not simply either professional or social: there was little distinction between the categories.

The traditional ceremonies which accompanied marriage . . . afford further proof of society's rights over the privacy of the couple.... Privacy scarcely ever existed when people lived on top of one another, masters and servants, children and adults, in houses open at all hours to the indiscretion of callers.[20]

In discussing newspaper ads in the mid-nineteenth century, Benjamin complained that the ad took up more space and was better designed than the copy around it, so that even when the product was criticized in an editorial, the effect was negligible. Advertisements, shorter news items, serial novels, and a decrease in subscription rates began to alter the way in which newspapers were consumed. Suddenly, to be out of date was to be out of fashion - a sin. The news items caught on because they could be employed commercially. *Reclamé's*, independent notices masquerading as news items, referred to products that were advertised in the paper. Although they were denounced as irresponsible and deceptive, their use underscored the increasing connection between advertisements and paper sales. These short news items and different typefaces allowed the papers to have a different look every day, predisposing their daily purchase and making them appropriate complements to the newly defined cocktail hour - the ultimate in non-serious gossip that had become institutionalized in the cafés.

Deception had come under criticism in other public forms, particularly in the diorama where it was charged that Daguerre's sorcery 'carried the viewer away to Switzerland, the land of yearning, and the effort was so perfect that a sentimental Englishwoman believed she had reached the valley of Chamonix, the destination of her consolatory escape from the metropolis - or at least she owned to being truly enchanted.'[21] This observation is typical of spectator responses to the diorama in that it explicitly links the power of the imagination and the impression of reality with sorcery and witchcraft. By 1889, when Anton von Werner's memoirs were published, the issue of deception as ethics was directly addressed. Werner compiled a mass of

20. Aries, op. cit., p. 405.

21. Dolf Sternberger, *Panorama of the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Urizen Books, 1977, p. 11.

testimony by domestic and foreign colleagues, all of them confirming that the art of deception was 'done for its own sake, and not - to deceive.'[22]

Just as the changing face of the paper predisposed the pedestrian stroller to purchase it, so, too, the daily change in advertisements enticed the stroller into the new department stores. Already the stroller in the arcades appreciated the displays in the store windows. As Baudelaire remarked, 'They gave the *flâneur* somewhere to rest his eyes.' (Even as late as Dadaism, Marcel Duchamp noticed the relation of the avant-garde to the practice of the consumer that the product of the avant-garde was to have the same characteristics of planned obsolescence/mass production as the products of mass consumption while simultaneously allowing the producer/artist to register shock at being reduced to a machine.[23]) The spectacle of looking, along with the accumulated skills of set design, painting and lighting were employed to transform the stroller into a shopper and the arcade into a department store. 'The intoxication to which the *flâneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers.'[24]

By the early 1890s many people who, perplexed by the changes taking place in American life, began to turn to the political and economic writings of Ruskin and Morris, but also of Carlyle, Kropotkin, Tolstoy and others who wanted to turn back the course of industrial development. All of these authors argued that first it was important to create a humane society; only then could satisfactory products be made. Versions of this society varied but in most of them the division of labor was minimal, wealth came directly from the land, and craftsmen, not artists or machines, made the everyday goods. The model of the ideal citizen in this felicitous state was the medieval artisan. He was a member of a society of equals, and he was free to work as he wanted, unencumbered by abstruse ideas about what 'art' was.[25]

Baudelaire saw his existence outside conventional society, as a *bohème*, all the more heroic because it was so *'ordinaire.'* His poem, 'Le vin des chiffoniers,' details

22. Ibid., p. 34

23. Discussed in Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976.

24. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 55.

25. David Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915*, Boston: Little Brown Co., 1979, p. 442.

the way in which the poet derives his heroic subject from the refuse of society: it is a chronicle of the ragpicker. 'Here we have a man who has to gather the day's refuse in the capital city. Everything that the big city threw away, everything that is lost . . . he catalogues and collects . . . he collects like a miser guarding a treasure the refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects.'[26] This same mythical projection extends to the consumer who was presented with the possibility of heroism by adopting the images of commercial products. As Charles Perrier said in criticism of Courbet's painting, 'Nobody could deny that a stone-breaker is as worthy a subject in art as a prince or other individual.... But, at least, let your stone-breaker not be an object as insignificant as the stone he is breaking'.[27]

Realism in art became the protest - and yet the paradigmatic expression - of an increasingly bourgeois society. Even though realism attempted to forsake all idealism to depict reality, it still frequently repeated Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas about the intuitive grasp of truth that the uncorrupted man, as represented by the peasant, embodied. The bohemian spirit, constructed in opposition to the bourgeois spirit, had an ambivalent relation to and was part of the bourgeoisie: the differences were complementary rather than exclusive. Nowhere is this clearer than in the work of Baudelaire who, 'having failed to create a politics of his own, brought to perfection the attitude of stifling contempt for the world, making the city mere decoration for a private drama.'[28] With the growth of the department stores, which presented vast panoramas for gazing, the *flâneur* was free to pursue his private drama indoors. (Certainly, not being able to buy must have made it all the more enticing.) Not only did this roving spectatorship focus 'pleasure' within proscribed, rigid ways along 'memory paths'[29] - but the bourgeoisie fulfilled the aims of the revolution by providing it in the form of the mass and the anonymous crowd, the perfect correlative to privacy, collectivization and individual fantasy.

In the early nineteenth century, the subject matter of salon painting was considered important as it expressed the cultural values of the ruling class (which

26. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 79.

27. Quoted in Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1971, p. 35.

28. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 14.

29. Term used by Freud to describe the way in which events are inscribed within memory. See especially 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895), where, despite the neurophysiological orientation, Freud attempts to account for the way in which memory trace follows one route in preference to another.

until the first French revolution had been totally based on court life). After the middle of the century (and during the short-lived Second Republic), advertising in stores and newspapers might be seen as taking over much of this function, particularly among the bourgeois and peasant classes. Artists had already begun to construct an aesthetics in opposition to the academic salon style, as can be seen by tracing the acceptance of the work of Manet, Courbet, Daumier and Millet. Subject matter had become increasingly unimportant in conventional terms; gone were the representations of 'noble' subjects in historical settings with all the trappings of wealth.[30]

Not only that, but a different attitude, best expressed by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*, fostered the popularization of art as an *experience* - taking it away from the educated class, where a certain amount of erudition was required to 'read' the salon paintirigs, and 'making it available to everyone.'[31] The quality of the work of art could only be known by a personal experience of that quality and that experience could only be achieved by placing oneself in the right relationship to the work under consideration - by adopting the right attitude.

It might be argued that advertising effectively assumed the functions of salon painting for the newly emergent bourgeoisie. Salon painting, with its emphasis on legible signs, was already a kind of advertisement for the aristocracy. This 'advertising' was also aided by the widespread acceptance of a Kantian-based aesthetics, since it was this aesthetic that could be incorporated into the practice of advertising and made to place the spectator in the 'right relationship' to the newly discovered commodity. Did advertising facilitate an aesthetics which had come to be based as much on taste as fashion, and which was also bound up with the notion of the 'masses' in Marx's sense as well as Rousseau's natural man?

30. See Nochlin, *Realism*, and Sternberger, *Panorama*, pp. 111-129.

31. Kant continued his investigation of synthetic propositions in the realm of aesthetics: that all judgments of aesthetic criteria are based on subjective states and not on rationally applied criteria, and that these judgments are not only based on personal taste, but can claim universal truth. Clement Greenberg is perhaps the best known critic espousing this formalistic (because it takes into consideration only the intrinsic qualities in the work of art) viewpoint. This view has been attacked in recent years for its failure to be historically specific, for its reduction of all art to a celebration of the senses, rather than allowing for the real network of complex relations situating the work of art within culture to be exposed (T. J. Clark).

It doesn't take much acuteness to recognize that a girl who at eight o'clock may be seen sumptuously dressed in an elegant costume is the same who appears as a shop girl at nine o'clock and a peasant girl at ten.[32]

The bohemian was about to become the 'anti-hero' of the mid-nineteenth century. For with his ability to empathize with both the organic and inorganic as the source of his inspiration, the poet enjoyed the incomparable privilege of being both himself and someone else, as he saw fit, like a roving soul in search of a body - even if that body became an 'old boudoir full of faded roses' or a 'forgotten Sphinx that in some desert stands.'[33]

In the broader context of a burgeoning commercial culture, the foremost political imperative was what to dream.[34]

As Victor Hugo said, 'A street, a conflagration, or a traffic accident assemble people who are not defined along class lines. They present themselves as concrete gatherings, but socially they remain abstract-namely, in their isolated private interests. Their models are the customers who, each in their private interest, gather at the market around their common cause.'[35] Hugo wrote this to explain, in part, the failure of the 'mass' to solidify into a political body. For Benjamin, it was monstrous that private individuals could cluster around their private interests.[36]

. . . it was enough in some areas of Paris to be seen dressed like a worker to risk being executed on the spot.[37]

Yet, increasingly this historical period was marked only by private interests (expressed by all classes in their imaginative fantasies), in the construction of the

32. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 28.

33. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

34. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1976, p. 109.

35. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 62.

36. Ibid., p. 68.

37. T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851*, Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973, p. 14.

bourgeois family (both divided and contained by housing), and even in the 'collectivization' of the commune movement.[38] So it is not surprising that the 'cube of the individual' became the basic building block of modern architecture,[39] or that advertising came to represent what was valuable in a culture for the majority of its people.

I am proposing that just as there is a relation on many levels between the *flâneur* and the bourgeoisie, so too, there is a complementary relation between 'realism' in art, the adoption of the 'transcendental subject' in aesthetics, and the increasing importance of advertising - particularly as an expression of 'social' reality, of the way in which the imagination can be made to stand-in for experience.

Considering the quantitative possibilities of mass production, the question of 'national markets' became one of qualitatively changing the nature of the American buying public. In response to the exigencies of the productive system of the twentieth century, excessiveness replaced thrift as a social value. It became imperative to invest the laborer with a financial power and a psychic desire to consume.[40]

The wife's service was becoming one of directing the consumption by her selection of the goods and services that society was producing.[41]

The modern housewife is less of a routine worker and more of an administrator and enterpriser in the business of living. Homecraft had passed into self-determination. The woman could work out an economic plan of life in which family resources are utilized to buy the best possible combination of satisfactions for today and the best sequence of satisfactions for the future. Women as portrayed by ads in the 1920s were the repositories of choice and freedom that mass-produced goods were said to encompass. Women were invested with a high degree of political and social determining power - a formation that linked the expanding commodity market with the political climate born out of suffrage.[42]

38. In this sense the commune movement can be seen as further dissipating the clammy heat of intimate relations begun before the institution of the bourgeois family.

39. For instance, see Le Corbusier at Algiers, particularly the obus plan.

40. Ewen, op. cit. p. 25.

41. Ruth Lindquist, *The Family in the Present Social Order: A Study in the Needs of American Families*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931, p. 14.

In 1852, as the Second Republic came to a close, Aristide Boucault opened the first department store in Paris. Based on an understanding of customer psychology, the department store flourished by supplying a desire that a customer 'didn't know she had until [she] entered the premises.'[43] Department store practices were bound up with a recognized philosophy clearly articulated: clear pricing on goods, unlimited exchange, free access to the store, and quality items at lower prices due to added bargaining power. In addition, exploration of the store was encouraged: free libidinal access, including touch. Before the advent of the department store, even in the arcades, stores were still within the domain of the home. Browsing was discouraged. It was morally incumbent on the customer to purchase once she entered the family-run store. The use of glass in the arcade show windows was crucial for the development of display techniques. For not only did it frame and present the goods, but in the reflected light it collapsed the image of the gazing spectator onto the displayed items. In *Bonheur des dames*, Emile Zola characterizes Mouret, the department store proprietor, as successfully combining financial daring with artistic panache. For instance, Mouret created a white linen display so dazzling that, as Zola said, it made 'the December skaters look black' by comparison.

The presence of female shop assistants served to change shopping from a dreary, solemn occasion to an enjoyable activity. Management responded to the attention by adopting sophisticated employment schemes; even so-called shop mashers were employed, attractive young women meant to entice male shoppers to the store. Often they were peasant girls, trained in the stores in the fine arts of Salesmanship, Manners and Style. These women also served another function by bringing the peasant class within the consumer fold.[44]

Industry could sell to the masses all that it employed the masses to create...

The time has come when all our educational institutions . . . must concentrate on the great social task of teaching the masses, not what to think, but how to think, and thus to find out how to behave like human beings in the machine age.[45]

42. Benjamin R. Andrews, 'The Home Woman as Buyer and Controller of Consumption,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 163, May 1929 p. 42 .

43. Alexandra Artley, *The Golden Age of Shop Design: European Shop Interiors*, New York: Whitney Design Library, 1976, p. 14.

44. For a discussion of how this practice continues today, see Rachel Grossman, 'Woman's Place in the Integrated Circuit', *Radical America* 14 no. 1, January-February 1980: p. 29-49.

The department store provided a safe arena for the new work of the bourgeois woman in the home - consuming - by giving her an institution to which she could go unchaperoned. Department stores could not be dens of vice, like the tavern, for what woman of good breeding would risk her reputation? Instead, they were based on the baroque idea of the palace, and the woman was often handed over to the gentleman proprietor, who took the place of her father or husband.

What is most needed for American consumption is training in art and taste in a generous consumption of goods, if such there can be... Advertising, whether for good or ill, is the greatest force at work against the traditional economy of an age-long poverty as well as that of our own pioneer period; it is almost the only force at work against puritanism in consumption. It can infuse art into the things of life; and it will... [46]

Early department stores were constructed around a gallery utilizing an atrium and skylights to maximize the availability of light to the multiple tiers. Palatial in design and elegance, they differed considerably from most department stores today with their self-effacing fixtures and invisible walls. Early department stores presented a simulation of the glamor and glory of the court, now available to everyone. Their ornate balconies, crystal chandeliers, and grand staircases provided both an efficient flow of pedestrian traffic and unlimited visual access: to see and to be seen. Shopping had become the grand activity - the merchant's court.

The essence of the commodity structure is that the relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus takes on a 'phantom objectivity,' an autonomy that seems strictly rational and all embracing to conceal every trace of its functional nature: the relation between people.[47]

Shopping creates a particular subject within an activity that is complexly coded. Of course, there are psychoanalytical concepts that would be applicable,

45. Edward A. Filene, *Successful Living in the Machine Age*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931, p. 157. Filene was a department store merchant who became the 'mouthpiece' of American industry.

46. Leverett S. Lyon, 'Advertising,' in *The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, ed. Edward R. A. Seligman, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1930, vol. 1, p. 475.

47. Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971, p 45.

although it has not been my intention to apply them in so preliminary an article. Shopping functions as both a means to something and as an end in itself. It is located as a reward, as a pleasurable activity encompassing so much that is considered desirable in the culture within which we live. Shopping as an activity is relatively recent. As work became less a matter of accumulated skill and more a question of loyal diligence to task, consumption was depicted as the way in which diligence could be objectified. By smoking a pipe or looking a certain way, people could accumulate the social appearance necessary in a world which placed decreasing value on creative skill. Creative skill came to be located in the act of consuming. 'They must consume to be healthy.'[48]

There is no one who escapes shopping's primarily bourgeois dictum, an activity that bears the trace of yet another bourgeois activity of exchange: 'the baby's cry answered by the breast . . . where the non-specific demand of the baby, the cry', forever gets the same response, the breast - the ultimate pacifier. 'Rather than merely answering the generalized request for love, the mother's response satisfied the need by provoking and reducing the excitation to a particular zone of the body . . . The desire that the 'lost object' causes . . . is at once unconditioned in that virtually any object will suffice, and conditioned in that the object must gratify a particular zone.'[49]

Shopping is an activity that consists of predictable yet indeterminant activities, where, as in the cinema, what we go to see, what we experience over and over again, is our own desire.

A signifier is what represents a subject. For whom? - not for another subject, but for another signifier.[50]

Television commercials are viewed on TV sets in the home. Shopping takes place in a space specifically constructed for that purpose. Just as theatres are constructed to make possible specific spectator relations with the film, stores are constructed to produce specific subject-effects in the consumer. These, of course,

48. Ewen, op. cit., p. 38.

49. John Brenkman, 'The Other and the One: Psychoanalysis - Reading The .Symposium,' *Yale French Studies*, no. 55-56, 1977, p. 418.

50. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W. W Norton & Co., 1978, p. 198.

are quite different from the spectator subject-effects produced through the cinematic institution, although there are also a number of parallels. In fact, early shopping malls were often built around movie theatres.[51] However, we cannot make the comparison 'film is to theatre structure' as 'television commercial is to shopping structure.' The shopper in the store is not stationary, but is constantly moving and there is usually not an actual film or TV commercial with which to enter into an identificatory relation. During Macy's promotional week, designers were spotlighted in monitors in front of their respective departments. This practice was discontinued when the department managers noticed that the shoppers who watched the videotape no longer felt the desire to browse in the department where the videotape was playing.

All of this leaves to the side the fact that while the cinema subject is passive and the shopping subject is constituted as active, and both reflect a private subject involved in a private activity, the spectator sits and the film does its work, the shopper moves and the store comes to life.

When the shots of a TV commercial are considered in relation to the store, rarely do they represent diegetically the mall or store complex, so already we are not speaking of a denotative relation, but of several referential and discursive interactions.[52] The department store and the television commercial need the spectator/shopper to 'come to life'. Both exploit the mechanisms of identification often associated with, and in some relationship to, the cinematic institution. And while the specific nature of these relations has yet to be articulated, nonetheless, they too create an effect such that all traces of their respective discourse are erased.[53]

51. David Horn, 'A Moving Picture Theatre and a Shopping Center', Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1930.

52. Much of the recent film theory has tended to collapse these two registers. See Christian Metz, 'Metaphor/Metonomy, or the Imaginary Referent,' and Bertrand Augst, 'Metz's Move,' both in *Camera Obscura*, no. 7, Spring 1981. 'Métaphor/Métonomie, ou le référent imaginaire,' was first published as the fourth section of *Le Signifiant Imaginaire: Psychanalyse et cinéma* (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1977). To quote Augst: 'The danger of confusing the discursive and the referential concepts is in fact implicit in any form of enunciation because the associations between referents . . . can always be stated, and once they are, they in turn become the principle and the driving force behind various discursive sequences which may be codified to varying degrees. Conversely, the associations which appear in discourse always suggest the existence of parallel associations between the corresponding referents' (p. 38).

The commercial often utilizes a 'musical' format where the diegetic rules which control the logic of the narrative are suspended, creating a thirty-second world in which there is perfect resolution: the commercial, more than other conventional Hollywood genre, allows for the willful suspension of belief in favor of a continuity carried through the music. The store also seeks to create a situation where realism might be suspended. In its maze-like corridors is constructed an imaginary space where nothing interferes with the shopper's perceptions, not the past, not other memories; there is only *now*. And credit, which has been instantly available since 1882, allows for immediate possession.

The store engages the shopper in a process of self-fetishization, a continuous repetition of an activity whose 'aura' is its power as an image which attracts and transforms.[54] There are certain specific features of the psychological process of shopping that might allow us to say this - such as the primary and secondary narcissism that is clearly involved, or the fetishization of objects which take the place of or stand for our desire (recalling Freud's dictum that associations take place along proscribed paths: the inscription of the 'plan').

But if the woman fetishizes herself, is her recovered unity re-experienced as an adult 'mirror-phase'? Surely, she does not regress to the pre-symbolic. Or, is there someone else on the other side of that mirror? Fashion for women revolves around these issues. How can she gain access to this Other? How does she 'misrecognize' herself? Fetishism is a broad term that can be applied to the 'everyday' as well as the psychoanalytical. I am using it here as both the 'process of fetishism' where different objects are substituted for desire, as well as fetishism where objects are tied to other objects, including, of course, the subject herself.

What must be continually kept in mind is that the concept of fetishism in

53. I refer to the denotative nature of the film as well as the psychical effects (subjecteffect) produced within the subject as s/he watches a film in the theatre. See in particular JeanLouis Baudry, 'The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,' first published in English in *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974-75); Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier,' published in French in *Communications*, no. 23 (1975), published in English in *Screen* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1975): Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Cinema and Suture' and Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture,' both in *Screen*, 18, no. 4, Winter 1977-78. In a related yet different way the relations between the consumer and the 'shopping institution' are such that they appear to be transparent, anonymous, invisible, and yet natural.

54. See, in general, Guy DeBord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit: Black & Red, 1977.

psychoanalysis is bound up with questions of sexual difference and disavowal.[55]

The image/object is a mixture of what is present and also at the same time what is absent - of fulfillment and lack. In a commercial this same operation is at work when the image of the product and the product itself are associated. In the store you have a real material - the product for sale - *used* to represent something else. A fiction has been generated elsewhere, yet the material of the signifier appears to remain within the real space of the store, while in the TV commercial you are faced with what is unreal, because the material of the signifier is not completely real, but is absent. There is a slippage between the referential and discursive levels. As Christian Metz has said, the material signifier is much more unreal in film (and commercials), which makes the belief in the diegesis of the film (or commercial) all the more real (in cinematic terms).[56]

The concepts of mass production/efficiency and product differentiation through advertising removed to some extent the analyzable signifier that Jean-Louis Baudry describes in 'Author and Analyzable Subject', replacing it with other signifiers not as specifically tied to an 'author'.[57] Mass production and product differentiation were germaine to the construction of the consumer subject. As mass production took the value of an object away from its producer-author, it had to be given value through product differentiation. Advertising tries to place the consumer in the 'right relation' to the product. A product which initially is perceived as having no meaning must be given value by a person who already has meaning for us. Television commercials, like ads, invite us to freely choose ourselves in a way in which we have already been constructed. Barthes characterized the hermeneutic code, the code of expectations, as a proposition of truth articulated like a sentence.[58] In this sense, 'truth in advertising' can be seen not as a movement by irate citizens

55. See Jacqueline Rose, 'The Cinematic Apparatus: Problems in Current Theory,' in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980, pp. 172-186. Basically Rose argues that the concepts of the 'imaginary,' 'disavowal,' 'fetishism,' and so on only have meaning in relation to 'sexual difference.' See also 'The Cinematic Apparatus as Social Institution: Interview with Christian Metz,' *Discourse*, no. I (Fall 1979): 7-38.

56. Metz, 'The Cinematic Apparatus', p. 17.

57. Translated by Bertrand Augst and Johanna Drucker in *Apparatus*, ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, New York: Tanam Press, 1981, pp. 67-83. See Metz's response in *L'éffet cinéma*, Paris: Editions Albatross, 1978, pp. 51-78.

58. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974, pp. 84-88.

to clean up the ad business, but as part of a public relations campaign which attempted to legitimize the advertising industry's own concept of truth as honesty; and as identified with a concept of reality whose naturalness disguises the ideological material of the cultural message - making it appear self-evident.[59]

Most television commercials revolve around a sentence (slogan) articulated through partial representations, utilizing the principles of montage. It is the particular aptitude of filmic images to maintain some kind of diegetic continuity that has allowed the television commercial to continue in the tradition of Kuleshov's experiments pushing to extremes the possibilities for associations between images.[60]

Baudry describes Chanel and her suits as creating for the buying public a neurosis that is identifiable. Chanel's company makes a perfume which is advertised on a similar premise. The glamorous and recognizable star's face (Catherine Deneuve) is associated in the print ad with the bottle of perfume. But perhaps the most slippery signifier of them all is the commercial where an undulating, vaporous, and sexual shape, changing its colours from green to blue and gold, spends twenty-five seconds before our eyes only to be at last identified as the bottle of Chanel No. 5. The subject as author-producer is analyzable in brand names, designer jeans, and even in department stores themselves: the Sak's woman and the Macy's woman.

The commodity's value is not so much the unmediated relation between a need and the object's inherent qualities, but the effect of those underlying intersubjective, symbolic libidinal relations on the consuming subject, which determines the relation of subjects to objects. As Lacan has said, history in psychoanalysis is an open interplay between the events in a subject's life - or history - and the history that the subject makes of these events. Narrative is not simply the expression of an already formed ideology, but the very form that ideology takes.

It is, of course, in making sense, in naturalizing the discontinuities, the ruptures in the social fabric that ideology takes on its 'always-already' formed characteristics. Floyd Dell, a libertarian historian of the 1920s, saw modernity and mass production machinery as establishing family life on the basis of romantic love because it changed the fundamental character of the productive relation that had characterized the patriarchal formation.[61] Businessmen had a different view: that of the reconstitution of the declining pre-industrial patriarchy into a recomposed

59. See James Rorty, *Our Master's Voice: Advertising*, New York: The John Day Co., 1934.

60. For a discussion of Kuleshov's experiments, see Jean Mitry, *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, vol. I, Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963, pp. 283-295.

conception of authority. There was still Mom-and-Dad-and-the-Kids, the family romance, but the link between them was thoroughly externalized as the bourgeois family became the site of leisure and consumption.[62] I would argue that the power of this history-making ability, as it mediates the relation between this subject and her/his objects in the imaginary/symbolic realms (as those relations have been constructed in Western metaphysics) is bound up with questions about representation itself - within historical formations preceding psychoanalysis.[63] How can one trace back a concept as poorly defined as 'imagination' within the 'world of experience', retrospectively, into a mythical past? The store is the plane upon which the subject and object are united in a real sense. It is tempting to map a Lacanian reading onto the construction of the shopping subject. Certainly you could argue that the S/s, the repressed signifier that turns out to be an endless chain of associations, occurs in this activity.[64] Even though the objects themselves lie outside the discursive system, and there is not a one-to-one correspondence between these operations and the referent; they have come to represent what they signify. We do not buy a pair of jeans, we buy an image of the jeans, in a different way than we buy an egg, even a brown, fertile egg. We buy how this image will make us feel - an image

61. Floyd Dell, *Love in the Machine Age: A Psychological Study of the Transition from Patriarchal Society*, New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 193.

62. The significance of youth is central here both as signaling a change in production values (strength to run a machine and work versus accumulated skill) as well as shifts in authority. Age becomes a detriment - compulsory retirement. See Max Horkheimer, 'The End of Reason', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, 1941: pp. 366-388.

63. I have been referring to the construction of the bourgeois family so as to discuss the construction of the consumer. The subject however, is not articulated within the frame of Marx' 'social imaginary'. This chain of 'facts' spanning the last four hundred years has been reconstructed from the present perspective, and shares in the problems of a historicizing methodology.

64. Lacan adopts Saussure's linguistic description of the sign to generate his re-reading of Freud 'that the unconscious is structured like a language.' S/s, signifier over signified, with the bar containing in the form of its barrier the idea of a repression of the signified such that a symptom is a signifier whose signified is repressed from consciousness. This is particularly apparent in Freud's case histories, such as 'The Rat Man' (1909) This repressed signified can be seen as an endless chain of repressed signifiers; additionally Lacan's formula for metaphor the replaced signifier doesn't vanish, but slips below the bar to function in an associative chain marked by nodal points (Lacan, Écrits, pp. 148-152). For it is the structure of metaphor (as read by Lacan) that makes symptoms possible.

that places us in the 'right relationship' to these feelings. Fredric Jameson characterizes the space of the imaginary as an ambiguous redoubling, a mirror reflection, an immediate relation between the subject and its other in which each term passes immediately and is lost in a play of reflections such that the fragmented subject becomes re-united in the object.[65]

The decentered subject - unlike the transcendental subject, who was idealized by Kantian metaphysics, and unlike the bourgeoisie, for whom the avant-garde was this idealized subject - was ready for reflection. Advertising produces an image of resolution that cannot be accomplished in social life. The aura of television is the fetishization of the image itself. The set is the mediator between the image and the producer of the image, the spectator. Ultimately, it is the image that becomes the locus of value. Since pseudo-experience is not gratifying, we find our pleasure in its pseudo-ness, in the process of image-making, of technological manipulation. This is why contemporary advertising no longer glorifies the product, but glorifies the system, the corporate image and advertising itself.[66]

We take our pleasure in the technology of fantasy, through the deliberate fake-ness of special effects. The relation constructed through special effects involves the spectator in both avowal and recognition, denial and repression. '[A special-effect shot] can pull its illusion out of the hat, while simultaneously displaying its capacity to astonish the senses.'[67] This process occurs along with the 'ordinary' mechanisms already operating through the TV commercial and its signifiers.

Since the mid-1970s, a revival has been taking place in downtown San Francisco department stores. There has been a return to the baroque palace construction of the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, now there is a twist, for the shopper is not naive; the shopper knows that the recaptured glory that the store attempts to pass onto its customers - as it dispenses with its own self-effacement - is not the revival of the beaux-arts tradition, but the analyzable subject of the store itself, as author-distributor, permanently on display in the building.

65. Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' *Social Text* 1, no. I, Winter 1979: pp. 130-148.

66. Shierry Weber, 'Individuation as Praxis,' *Critical Interruptions*, no. 1, 1980: pp. 34.

67. Christian Metz, 'Trucage et cinema,' in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. 2, Paris: Rlincksieck, 1972, pp. 173-192, my translation.

CASUAL SHOPPER 1981

3/4" colour video, stereo sound, 28 mins

This film is about people who shop casually, who go to the mall to browse at their leisure, when there is nothing better to do. It features a woman, a dentist's receptionist; and a man selling ski equipment part-time. He is saving his money for a European holiday. They are both looking for something.

This is a love story that never advances beyond that which can be imagined, which is never consummated, but returns to a prosaic scene where dreams are exchanged and desire circulates endlessly.

The activity of shopping is a predictable yet indeterminate one, where, like the cinema, what we go to experience over and over again is our desire. This activity constructs a particular subject within a specific terrain, the mall or store, where a number of forces are mediated by the individual as he or she participates in the experience, including the complex drives at work in the individual psyche as well as the social imperatives of the commercial.

Just as cinemas are constructed to make possible specific spectator relations with the film, so stores are designed to produce specific effects within the consumer, through the use of endless corridors filled with objects for free libidinal access, set design and grid lighting. Of course, there are fundamental differences between the movie spectator and the shopper. The shopper is not stationary, but is constantly moving and does not identify with the objects in the store in the same way as with the characters on the screen. But, they are linked in several crucial ways through the process of looking that must be brought to both occasions to activate desire - the spectator sits and the film does its work, the shopper moves and the store comes to life.

Starring: Harriet Payne & Bill Shields
Camera: Jed Handler, Rick Lambert / Audio: Diane Stockler, Rick Lasky / Production Assistants: Deborah Sullivan, Alex Prisadesky
Post Production: Television Office, UC Berkeley / Sound Design & Mix: Andy wiskes & Dan Gleich / Audio Prerecording: Peter Miller
Audio Post Production: Zoetrope Studios