

URBAN CONSTELLATIONS: READING  
CONTEMPORARY CITYSCAPES WITH  
BENJAMIN AND BAUDRILLARD

By

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature on Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard, but not to merely retread old debates. It is concerned instead with a re-evaluation of the work of both thinkers in a particular context: the experience of the new cultural spaces, of twenty-first century post-industrial cities, and in relation to each other. I argue, following Benjamin, that these spaces function as contemporary ‘dreamhouses’. Deploying a constellation of Benjamin and Baudrillard’s ideas to read such spaces illuminates the experience of the contemporary cityscape around the themes of spectacle, distraction, interactivity, simulation and consumption. The thesis examines how these iconic architectural projects, the very technological body of the cityscape, mediate our experiences of art, nature, personal and collective memory, and notions of public culture. I argue that we must read Benjamin again *after* Baudrillard in order to assess the value of both thinkers’ contribution to the understanding of contemporary cities organisation of space and culture. The contingent proximity that is uncovered when reading the theorists both together and against each other, is one which ultimately argues for the persistence of certain ‘messianic moments’; traces or interruptions which can be uncovered against the notion of Baudrillardian ‘simulation’. The notion of the messianic opens up the possibility of a certain form of the political that is able to outplay Baudrillard’s logic of simulation, even if only momentarily. But this is to take seriously, rather than dispense with, Baudrillardian ideas. Both Benjamin *and* Baudrillard, together, are necessary to allow us to understand the experience of contemporary urban space and culture. These moments are located in contemporary cultural spaces, significant because of their preponderance at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and because of their attempts to reinvigorate certain ideas of urbanity, culture and city life in locations once responsible for industry, production and particular forms of working-class habitus. Taking the form of four empirical encounters between the theoretical concepts and the cultural spaces themselves, I set out to locate these messianic possibilities. Each of the four analytical chapters focuses on a different cultural space: The Lowry, Salford; The Deep, Hull, The Sage, Gateshead; and The Public, West Bromwich.

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# Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Table of Content

List of Figures

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE MODERN & POSTMODERN METROPOLIS, OR MANAGING URBAN EXPERIENCE**

Alien Invasions and Ghostly Encounters	1
Defining the Parameters of the Cityscape	3
Modern Cities: Marx, Capitalism and the City	6
Simmel's Philosophy of Money and the blasé personality	8
Freud: The Psyche as City, the City as 'civilisation'	11
Surrealist Dreamscapes and 'profane illuminations'	14
Debord, Vaneigem and Lefebvre: 'situations & 'ecstatic moments'	16
Postmodern Cities: Image, and Spectacular Architecture	19
Material, Symbolic & Affectual Cities	26
Conclusion: Contemporary 'dreamhouses' & their spectres	29

## **CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL CONSTELLATIONS, MOMENTS, AND *FLÂNERIE***

Stellar Affinities	33
Conceptual Constellations	35
Deciphering Surfaces	40
Marxism, the Messianic and the Symbolic: Potential Futures	44
Aesthetic Logic: Aura and Simulation	53
Dreamhouses and Drugstores: Technology and the Cityscape	59
Erasing Traces, Tracing Erasures: Trace, Transparency & Seduction	64
Ruins, Cultural Deterrence and the Transpolitical	66
Momentary Interruptions to Major Histories	69
Melancholic <i>Flânerie</i> and Disruptive Perambulations	73
Conclusion	80

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE LOWRY, OR CLASS, MASS SPECTATORSHIP AND THE IMAGE**

Going to The Match, Going to The Lowry	81
----------------------------------------	----

Grand Scheme, Big Dreams	85
L.S. Lowry's 'vision' of urban experience & the wane of 'aura'	92
The Shock of the Crowd	96
Aura, the Image and Meeting Mr. Lowry	101
Aesthetics and the Masses	107
From Urban Crowds to Football Crowds	109
Conspiracies of Art: Warhol and Lowry	113
Simulating Lowry's Cityscape: The Masterplan	115
Class as a 'dress-up' box	118
Conclusion	121

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: THE DEEP, OR THE ABYSS OF THE SURFACE**

Deep Snow	124
Surfaces and Depths	131
Proximity and Distance: "The Main Tank is 10m deep or, hardly deep at all"	138
Commodified Nature: "The Deepartment Store"	148
Optics and Tactics: "This way to Exhibition"	152
Hands on, Gloves off: "Out of Order"	158
Sanitisation/Domestication of Nature: "Picnic Place"	163
Preservers and Collectors: "Fossilised Shark's Teeth & Coral Propagation"	171
Conclusion: Deep Water	177

#### **CHAPTER FIVE: THE SAGE, OR ERASING THE TRACES, TRACING ERASURES**

Urban Reminiscences	182
The Ironic Nature of Iconic Structures	183
Tyneside's Pre-history	185
Deciphering the Traces of Postcard Cities	191
Cultures of Conviviality/Cultures of Transparency	194
Framing a View, Making a Rainbow	201
Thresholds to the Past: Walking the City, Telling Stories	207
Conclusion: Aesthetics of Disappearance?	214

#### **CHAPTER SIX: THE PUBLIC, OR THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT BRITISH BUILDINGS**

Finding a way in?	219
Premature Ruination and Cultural Deterrence	221

Messianic Destruction and History that Never Ends	223
Cultural Participation: the Masses, the Silent Majorities and The Public	229
Who are, what is, 'The Public'?	233
Facilities and Functionalities	237
Architectural Clones – Culture Degree Xerox	243
Closed to Reconfigurations	244
Souvenirs as Relics	247
Conclusion: Looking Through a Rose-Tinted Lens or Rebooting the System?	249
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	253
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES</b>	
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Thompson, Z (2010) Erasing the Traces/Tracing Erasures: Cultural Memory & Belonging in Newcastle/Gateshead', in Anca Pusca (ed) <i>Walter Benjamin &amp; the Aesthetics of Change</i> , Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan	

## List of Figures

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1	<i>Going to the Match</i> (Lowry, 1953)	82
Figure 2	The Lowry, Salford: External Photograph of Entrance	85
Figure 3	The Lowry, Interior. Photographer: unknown. Accessed at: <a href="http://www.building.co.uk/data/cost-model-museums/3074285">http://www.building.co.uk/data/cost-model-museums/3074285</a> .article on 11/12/07	88
Figure 4	The Lowry, Children's gallery	89
Figure 5	The Lowry, Gallery space	90
Figure 6	Still from Oasis Masterplan Video: Street Scene. Accessed at: < <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMazI2ROJXM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMazI2ROJXM</a> > on 16/1/10	115
Figure 7	Still from Oasis Masterplan Video: Going to the Match. Accessed at: < <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMazI2ROJXM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMazI2ROJXM</a> > on 16/1/10	116
Figure 8	Still from Oasis Masterplan Video: Man on Wall. Accessed at: < <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMazI2ROJXM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMazI2ROJXM</a> > on 16/1/10	116
Figure 9	The Lowry, Children's instructions	119
Figure 10	The Lowry, Mirror with Hats	119
Figure 11	The Deep's Snow Globe	124
Figure 12	The Deep, Exterior	131
Figure 13	The Deepartment Store	148
Figure 14	This way to the exhibition	152
Figure 15	North Sea Cod Tank	153
Figure 16	Viewing Pods into the Main Tank	158
Figure 17	Picnic Place	164
Figure 18	Gateshead pre-1925. Photographer: unknown Accessed at:< <a href="http://isee.gateshead.gov.uk/">http://isee.gateshead.gov.uk/</a> > on 12/12/07	188
Figure 19	Gateshead 2007. Photographer: Jeni McAuley	189
Figure 20	The Sage, Concourse. Photographer: Jeni McAuley	194
Figure 21	The Sage, Coloured Barrier	201
Figure 22	The Sage, View from Western Exit. Photographer: Jeni McAuley	202

Figure 23	Bottle Bank c.1925: Full Moon Pub, Centre in distance. Photographer: unknown. Accessed at: < <a href="http://isee.gateshead.gov.uk/">http://isee.gateshead.gov.uk/</a> > on 12/12/07	204
Figure 24	Bridge Street c.1925: Full Moon Pub, Right of frame. Photographer: unknown. Accessed at: < <a href="http://isee.gateshead.gov.uk/">http://isee.gateshead.gov.uk/</a> > on 12/12/07	204
Figure 25	Bottle Bank 2007	205
Figure 26	Bottle Bank 2007: James Hill memorial 1	206
Figure 27	Bottle Bank 2007: James Hill memorial 2	206
Figure 28	Trinity Square car park from The Sage	213
Figure 29	The Sage from Trinity Square car park	213
Figure 30	The Sage, Level 1, Bar area	214
Figure 31	Richmond Street 1981: Before Demolition: Trinity Square car park is just visible on the horizon. Photographer: Michael Kane	218
Figure 32	Richmond Street 1981: After Demolition: trinity Square car park is just visible on the horizon. Photographer: Michael Kane	218
Figure 33	The Sage: Rear View	218
Figure 34	The Public, Façade	219
Figure 35	The Public, Main Entrance Ceiling	220
Figure 36	The Public's Pause, March 2006	222
Figure 37	Café Couture	229
Figure 38	The Public, Alsop's Prototype. Accessed at: < <a href="http://www.thepublic.com">http://www.thepublic.com</a> > on 16/8/06	236
Figure 39	The Public's Toilets	237
Figure 40	Cedric Price's Fun Palace Drawing. Accessed at < <a href="http://drawingarchitecture.tumblr.com/post/460210503/fun-palace-cedric-price">http://drawingarchitecture.tumblr.com/post/460210503/fun-palace-cedric-price</a> > on 8/1/10	239
Figure 41	Centre Pompidou, Paris. Accessed at: < <a href="http://blog.lib.umn.edu/kenne474/architecture">http://blog.lib.umn.edu/kenne474/architecture</a> > on 12/8/08	242
Figure 42	The Public, Gift Shop Area 1	248
Figure 43	The Public, Gift Shop Area 2	248
Figure 44	The Public Gift Bag	248
Figure 45	View from Public Interior	252

NB. All photographs are the author's own unless otherwise stated. The photographs throughout the thesis are intended to offer the reader a sense of the buildings as well as serving to illustrate the discussion, and document the buildings. In keeping with the broader methodological strategy of the thesis they also seek to capture and take notice of overlooked, forgotten or minor moments within and surrounding the four projects.

# CHAPTER ONE: THE MODERN & POSTMODERN METROPOLIS, OR MANAGING URBAN EXPERIENCE

All the cosmopolitan centres that are also sites of splendour are becoming coming more and more alike. Their differences are disappearing.

Siegfried Kracauer, 'Analysis of a City Map', 1928

There's a crack, a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*, 1992

Baudelaire is the source of the cruel *aperçu* that the city changes faster than a human heart.

Walter Benjamin, 'The Return of the Flâneur', 1929

## *Alien Invasions and Ghostly Encounters*

For Jean Baudrillard, contemporary architectural forms appear as alien spacecraft, crash-landed on to their sites in the urban wasteland of post-industrial cities. They are the products of science fiction, residues of an imagined future, projected onto derelict space in the hope of enlivening it through cultural consumption rather than industrial production. City spaces are irrevocably transformed by these invasions, which appear as such since they pay no heed to the context or history of the surrounding cityscape. They are chimerical, monster-like structures from another planet. To read these spaces with Baudrillard, then, is to enter into a science-fiction story: a narrative of quantum physics, stellar activity, chaos theory, image technologies, and other theoretical parameters unfamiliar to conventional social and cultural analysis. For Walter Benjamin, writing about urban spaces in Paris exiled (as another kind of alien) from his home city of Berlin, cities beg another type of narrative, not a science fiction story but, rather, a ghost story. For him, cities are haunted: by their pasts, by the personal associations we map within them across time, by the utopian potential of their new architectural forms and the lost dreams inherent in their ruins. Neither thinker, then, offers a conventional means of understanding urban space or its transformation. I argue in this thesis that both Baudrillard and Benjamin provide an unconventional lens through which to view urban spaces. Furthermore, I

theorise their conceptual relationship as a ‘constellation’, which illuminates the contemporary cityscape in novel and necessary ways.

My thesis is primarily concerned with the management and development of the post-industrial cityscape, its recent transformation through the insertion of iconic architectural projects, and the associated production and management of urban experience. The millennium has witnessed a plethora of ‘cultural regeneration’ projects that are signalled by flagship structures housing cultural initiatives, for example, art galleries, concert halls, and museums. This transformation has developed in the UK but also elsewhere, Guggenheim, Bilbao being perhaps the most famous European example. These cultural venues, housed in their iconic shells, are a self-conscious attempt to produce a symbolic shift in the urban skyline, and a new identity for faded or forgotten cityscapes. There is, then, an element of similarity about these new buildings, designed as they are by a handful of high-profile architects, and proliferating wherever there is the chance of inward investment, and the attraction of mobile capital. The sites of such buildings are often waterfronts, disused docks, old steelworks and other vacant industrial spaces left empty and bare by the decline of the heavy industries.

As Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1999, p.223) points out, nineteenth-century Paris produced a set of seminal buildings, a new façade for the rapidly expanding city facilitated the advances in technologies such as glass and iron. The arcades, winter gardens, railway stations and exhibition halls were described by Benjamin as the ‘dreamhouses’ of industrial capitalism. My thesis is an interrogation of four buildings – The Lowry, Salford, The Deep, Hull, The Sage, Gateshead and The Public, West Bromwich – as *contemporary* ‘dreamhouses’. I analyse how these sites mediate and construct experience, through their iconography, their inner spaces, and their relationship to the cityscape in which they are placed.

### *Defining the Parameters of the Cityscape*

Before I describe the buildings I have employed as case-studies, and the rationale of their choosing, or discuss the conceptual repertoire that guides the analysis, it is necessary firstly to set out the contours of the debate through which the city has been theorised. The notion of giving a survey of literature on the city is far too broad and ambitious a task for the constraints of the thesis and in terms of its general relevance to the material therein. What this chapter aims to do, then, is to specify the theoretical constellations and contexts through which an account of Benjamin and Baudrillard and the theme of the urban emerge. Taking the modern city as a point of departure, I sketch out some of these accounts: the understanding of the modern city as the site of spectacular forms of capital, the effect on and management of urban behaviour and the emergence of an urban ‘personality’, and the cityscape as a site of material, psychological and symbolic experience. It is the attempt to give a broad understanding of how cities have been theorised within certain intellectual traditions, those traditions which have been a direct influence on Benjamin and Baudrillard. It is also to set out why it is that Benjamin and Baudrillard, in constellation, both consolidate and challenge previous accounts of urban experience, offering fruitful and frustrating ways of reading the cultural spaces of contemporary cities. Consequently, there is no sustained discussion of work where the built environment is configured as a mere backdrop to the lives of social groups; instead I argue that it is the real and imagined fabric of the city that actively structures and facilitates the form of experience made possible in the urban milieu.

Throughout this chapter, I trace the relationship between the individual and the city using accounts that address the notion of modern urban life and that establish the city as the site of forces which produce and constrain the modern individual: Marx,

Freud, Simmel, Surrealism, Situationism, and Postmodernism.<sup>1</sup> All cities, then, across history offer up moments of suppression or containment in order to function. The buildings under analysis, I will argue, are the latest, incomplete expressions of this urge: to delimit or prescribe urban experience in particular ways. What I demonstrate is that such management is central to all forms of urban life but that what that management might consist of – the form it takes – is subject to both temporal and spatial shifts and developments. At its core, my thesis seeks to register a fundamental *ambivalence* about the buildings under analysis. I seek to problematise the rhetoric that surrounds their arrival, to unpick the seamless narratives they wish to tell of themselves and the versions of urban culture they present.

At this stage it is perhaps pertinent to point out what the thesis is not concerned with. Whilst the buildings undoubtedly function as tourist attractions, I am not centrally concerned with their economic, political, and institutional dynamics, but rather the more specific experience of the spaces and how they function to construct a particular set of cultural effects. As such, there is no sustained discussion of the literatures on tourism, museums and heritage<sup>2</sup>. Equally, the literature on urban regeneration, civic boosterism and cultural policy is only broadly mentioned since it is much too economically-deterministic and policy-driven and does not pertain closely enough to the reading of the cityscape as a locus of subjective, symbolic experience<sup>3</sup>.

As well as being evidence of global architectural signatures, however, one must acknowledge the British context of such sites. At the forefront of the New Labour

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term with caution and a caveat: by 'postmodernism' I am referring specifically to those thinkers who have sought to theorise the cultural expressions of late modernity as examples of 'postmodern cultural forms' specifically Charles Jencks, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey and Jean-Francois Lyotard. This is not to say that any or all of these thinkers would consider themselves to be 'postmodernists' but for the sake of attempting to address their concerns with the cultural output of the latter part of the twentieth century in relation to one another. This is in line with Abbinnett's similar use of the term in *Marxism after Modernity* (Abbinnett, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For example, the work of (Boniface and Fowler, 1993; Urry, 2002; Geibelhausen, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> For further information on these approaches see (Roberts and Sykes, 2000; Bell and Jayne, 2003; Couch, Fraser et al., 2003; Degen, 2003; Lees, 2004; Evans, 2005; Miles, 2005; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Bell, 2007) .

Government's Urban White Paper (DETR, 2000) was the notion of 'culture' as a driver of regeneration in the post-industrial city. The paper sets out strategies for the revitalisation of urban environments. One key aspect was the directive that lottery-funded cultural initiatives, especially those involving 'flagship' buildings by well-known architects, should have positive, regenerative effects, on the cityscape. This exemplifies what commentators such as Scott (2000) and Clarke (2003) suggest is the reliance on cultural initiatives as catalysts to regeneration. Despite the conspicuous appearance of such lottery-funded cultural projects (museums, galleries and arts centres) it is open to question, however, to what extent these developments have caused the desired 'urban renaissance'.

British provincial cities increasingly compete nationally amongst each other as well as with London. But this competition extends to the global city market as British cities attempt to rival European destinations such as Barcelona, Paris and Berlin (Sassen, 2001). In this sense a hierarchy emerges with certain cities being more successful than others at what Liam Kennedy has called 'imagineering': the redevelopment of the city's image through the management of both its cityscape and its public perception (Kennedy, 2004). This creation of a hierarchical relationship between cities is accompanied by fears of the elision of regional differences and local context. This has led some commentators to remark that our cities are becoming generic "blandscapes" seeking formulaic solutions to the crises and effects of global capitalism thus rendering one urban landscape indistinguishable from another (Zukin, 1988; Zukin, 1995; Bell and Jayne, 2003; Yakhlef, 2004). The effect of capitalism is one of the fundamental paradigms to understanding the modern city and it is a discussion of this to which I now turn.

### *Modern Cities: Marx, Capitalism and the City*

For Marx, the antinomies of industrial capitalism, and its predication upon class struggle, serves to produce the proletarian individual as exploited and the bourgeois as exploiter. The modern industrial city, then, functions as the apex point of intensive capitalism and its contradictions. It is in the city where the newest forms of social life and technological organisation come together in such a way as to transcend all prior categories of traditional understanding. As Vidler points out,

A common and often explicit theme underlying the different responses of writers and social critics to the big cities of the nineteenth century might be found in the general concept of 'estrangement': the estrangement of the inhabitant of a city too rapidly changing and enlarging to comprehend in traditional terms; the estrangement of classes from each other, of individual from individual, of individual from self, of workers from work (Vidler, 2000, p.65).

The city, then, is the site of capitalism's violence, barbarism, and alienation as well as wealth accumulation, commodity production and exchange. Yet, in forming the labouring classes as a mass, the city concomitantly produces the potential for social change through class consciousness and associated collective action. The city, for Marx, is the site of both insurrection and revolution which form the dialectic of repression and possibility. The modern metropolis explodes the proportions of the city as it was previously understood, either in terms of the Ancient Greek *polis* or the medieval citadel. It transcends the limits on participation in terms of its mixing of class groupings and in terms of space, a transformation and obliteration of previous categories of urban understanding. As Marx points out, however, this explosion of limits in the modern city is the spatial concomitant to the shift in economic organisation from feudalism to capitalism. The modern city and its social and symbolic life are made possible by this shift in political economy. As the most potent site of capitalist production the modern city heralds the crystallisation of mercantile capital into bourgeois civil society. In *The German Ideology* (1970 [1845]), Marx notes that it

is in the urban milieu that bourgeois taste codes, aesthetics, law and philosophy – all the aspects of the ideological superstructure that simulate and legitimate the economic organisation at society's base – come to bear. These 'ruling ideas' serve to shore up the economic security of the bourgeoisie since they present the class organisation of society and its ideological superstructure as natural, inevitable and the best of all possible worlds. As Marx & Engels famously note: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force...the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas" (Marx and Engels, 2006, p.9).

For Marx, capitalism is inherently exploitative, barbaric *and* revolutionary; its very *raison d'être* the pursuit of profit on tighter and tighter margins, exploiting the labour power of the masses (the proletariat), for the benefit of the merchant classes (the bourgeoisie), whose name, from '*burgeois*', literally means 'of the towns'. The modern metropolis runs to the rhythm of the capitalist economy and is thus a site of rapid change, the dissolution of previous orders of labour, kinship ties and property ownership. In the modern capitalist city, as Marx famously states, "all that is solid melts into air"<sup>4</sup>. The experience of the city, then, under capitalism, perhaps best captured by Marx's colleague Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), is one of violence, barbarism, dehumanisation and alienation on the one hand and rapid investment, material, and technological change on the other. As Vidler notes, "From Baudelaire...to Engels...the physical fabric of the city was identified as the instrument of a systematised and enforced alienation" (Vidler, p.65).

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<sup>4</sup> The full quotation reads, "Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (Marx and Engels, 2002)

Marx's fascination at the revolutionary potential inherent within capitalism itself made him no less certain of its barbaric effects. The spaces of the nineteenth-century capitalist city – the factories, workhouses and mills – were the spaces of management of productive bodies; these spaces train the body of the worker. Rather than the worker using the machine, for Marx, the machine, uses the worker, who begins to imitate its mechanical, clock-work like motion. The only opportunity to change this highly exploitative and potentially ideologically-productive system is by a complete social revolution. In Marx's conception, capitalism would continue to constrict the workers to such an extent that they would be forced to revolt after being driven into penury and poverty by the capitalist system. The proletariat, then, for Marx's are capitalism's 'grave-diggers', whose revolutionary consciousness is increasingly sharpened the more exploited they become. The city as a site of alienation and estrangement is no more clear than in the crystallisation of labour power in the commodity form. As Frisby notes, for Marx:

The commodity form extends its 'necromancy' throughout bourgeois society, creating the riddle of the money fetish', of the 'magic of money'. 'the perfect fetish' of the consummate automatic fetish' of interest bearing capital and 'the *most fetishistic* expression of the relations of capitalist production' in 'the form of revenues and the sources of revenue...the mystery of the universal equivalent is resolved once money is seen as 'the direct incarnation of all human labour' (Frisby, 1986, p.25).

Yet, whilst Marx identifies the importance of the city in terms of being the centre of capitalist economic organisation, his concern is more the historical development of such epochs of production rather than the spaces in which such development takes place. To some extent, he overlooks the particular sites of capitalism in favour of the dynamics of the system itself.

### ***Simmel's Philosophy of Money and the blasé personality***

The alienating effects caused by the relationship between the money economy and the city, as well as its new social spaces, are traced by the German sociologist

Georg Simmel. This instrumental relationship between capital and the individual imbues all social transactions with abstraction, distance and equivalence. In *The Philosophy of Money* (2004 [1907]), Simmel notes that the rapidity and drive of the money economy produces a bombardment of commodities and impressions which is mirrored by the exchanges between individuals. As Lash notes, for Simmel, the movement of money in the urban marketplace is analogous to the movement of people in the social spaces of the modern city (Lash, 1999, p.129). The equivalence between things produces the main mode of interaction in the metropolis as one of 'exchange'. The experience of the modern city, then, establishes new forms of civic behaviour characterised by both an increased distance – an estrangement or abstraction of relationships – and an increased proximity – a greater nearness to people and things. Simmel describes the consequences of the objectified and estranged relationships of modern urban life in the concept of the blasé personality, which develops in the new rational spaces of the city. The strength of this objectification, and the focus on exchange value above all else, has the effect of overwhelming the individual and, conversely, of activating the desire for individual distinctions, such as the caprices of fashion and other notable or noteworthy behaviour. This 'objective culture' transcends and overwhelms the individual. The modern metropolis is:

the genuine showplace of this culture which grows beyond all that is personal. Here, in buildings and educational institutions, in the wonders and comforts of space-conquering technology, in the formations of communal life and in the visible state institutions, there is offered such an overpowering wealth of crystallised, impersonalised mind, as it were, that the personality cannot maintain itself when confronted with it (Simmel in Frisby, 1986, p.80).

How the individual attempts to confront and cope with this explosion of proportions and increased objectification is detailed in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1997 [1903]). Here Simmel outlines the psychological effects on the individual wrought by the assault on the senses that is the modern city, in his case, Berlin. The metropolitan sensibility, exemplified for Simmel by the blasé personality, is facilitated by the assault

on the senses inflicted by the shock, transience and cacophony of the modern life. He writes:

There is no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blasé attitude...The essence of the blasé attitude consists in the blunting of discrimination. This does not mean that objects are not perceived, as is the case with the half-wit, but rather that the meaning and differing value of things, and thereby things themselves are experienced as insubstantial (Simmel, 1997, p. 178).

The blasé attitude is a defence mechanism, then, to the impersonal contracts and anomic, atomistic and ritualised behaviour city dwellers are forced to engage in. Urban experience in this context is one of evanescent and fleeting contacts between individuals. Furthermore, the nature of modern life is inseparable from the urban milieu. As Savage et al point out: “Simmel was primarily concerned to establish that urban culture was the culture of modernity” (Savage, Warde et al., 2003, p.111). Modern life then *is* urban life<sup>5</sup>.

For Simmel, the urban dweller is subject to the effects of being *en masse*, submerged in a crowd, and bombarded with external sensory stimuli. The experience of the city, then, produces not only the indifferent blasé personality but a host of other psychological states and behaviours such as agoraphobia, the fear of public spaces or *Berührungsangst*, the fear of touching. In their extreme forms such responses become pathological, resulting in what Simmel names ‘neurasthenia’, a neurotic, nervous, hollowed-out form of subjectivity. The crowded urban milieu, the jostling and juxtaposition of strangers, the incessant flow, buffeting and shock of the metropolis, all

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<sup>5</sup> However, as Savage et al also suggest, Simmel recognised that urban culture comes to have a wide geographical spread transcending the urban/rural divide. Urban ways of living are translated to all forms of social organisation and become the modus operandi of modernity. Crucial to this, for Simmel, is the city’s role as the centre of the money economy rather than an actual causal effect of cities (Savage, Warde et al., 2003, p.112). This is similar to Louis Wirth’s ideas on the modern city. In *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (2003 [1930])Wirth, a member of the Chicago School, asked the question “What does it mean to be urban?” and concluded that it results in a specific type of personality and behaviour. Drawing on empirical data from eastern European rural émigrés to Chicago, Wirth contends that the rapidity, technological mediation and distancing effects of modern cities radically transform social relations, rendering them abrupt and impersonal in comparison with the close-knit, face-to-face communities of the country.

serve to produce such psychological coping mechanisms. The indifference and aloofness of the city dweller acts as a psychic shield which functions to protect the self, but this protection, simultaneously, exacerbates the reduction of the discriminatory abilities of the urban dweller, resulting in a qualitative shift in the nature of experience. However, the indignity of a closer proximity to strangers, for Simmel, can, equally, produce the bizarre exchange of temporary confidants: an improvised intimacy between individuals who have never and will never meet again. The chance encounters and anonymity the city enables, *because of* its monstrous proportions, offers up, *ironically*, moments which puncture the blanket of distant, circumscribed behaviour. These experiences function as moments of human 'warmth' within the cold, rational centre of the modern city. But these moments of warmth are fleeting. The protective shield the modern citizen must adopt is an individual boundary, one which replaces, figuratively, the physical boundary once made by the city wall, a boundary whose limits are obliterated by the scale and size of the modern metropolis. Simmel describes the necessity of this boundary to the survival of the fragile urban consciousness:

Since contemporary urban culture, with its commercial, professional and social intercourse, forces us to be physically close to an enormous number of people, sensitive and nervous modern people would sink completely into despair if the objectification of social relationships did not bring with it an inner boundary and reserve (Simmel in Frisby, 1986, p.73).

### ***Freud: The Psyche as City, the City as 'civilisation'***

The psychological spaces of the modern city dweller is also, perhaps most famously examined by Sigmund Freud. For Freud, the city, as the highest form of civilization, produces the individual, and therefore the wider social order, through the suppression of the instinctual drives of the psyche (1963). In order to maintain social cohesion, the individual must sublimate the life and death drives, which Freud names Eros and Thanatos, into socially-productive spheres such as work, family and romantic love. This is in contrast to the (morally-dubious) judgement Freud makes of tribal

societies who remain less “civilised” because of their failure to contain and channel instinctual urges into socially-useful activities. For Freud, the modern individual must seek to manage and regulate herself and concomitant desires in order for civilization – the modern city being its exemplar site – to exist. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud discusses the incest taboo and the desire to kill the father as two examples of ‘primitive’ instinctual urges which must be managed to allow civilization to perpetuate. Ignoring the more ethnocentric elements of this thesis, for him, the individual and society must sublimate such primitive desires into productive elements that enable civilised society to persist rather than succumb to their destructive tendencies. The management of the individual and society, then, for Freud, is concerned with the sublimation of desires and drives. If Eros is concerned with love, friendship, collective endeavours and creativity, Thanatos is the destructive or aggressive twin. Modernity, with its emphasis on rationality, control and bureaucracy can only function at the expense of a fundamental contradiction between the conditions required for such order and the individual who must suppress their deepest libidinal and instinctual desires.

Freud writes:

It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means) of powerful instincts. This cultural frustration dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings (Freud, 1963, p.34).

However, such acts are rarely completely successful and Freud attributes the gap between their success or failure to the emergence of guilt, frustration and aggression in the modern individual.

Freud also likens the psyche itself to a city. In his famous metropolitan metaphor, the ancient city of Rome with its layers of buildings correlate to the sensory impressions, memories, dreams and experiences collated in the individual’s psychic landscape. The city and the self are, for Freud, to some extent analogous. Just like the

city, for Freud, the modern psyche is a terrain of conflict and sublimation. The reception of stimuli that bombards the psyche of the individual from birth lodges sensory experiences in the unconscious which can reappear at certain moments, under certain conditions in ‘uncanny’ or *Unheimlich*, encounters; what Freud named the ‘return of the repressed’:

Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace – that is, its annihilation – we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be brought to light (Freud, 1963, p.6).

The unconscious, then, functions as a threshold space or the limit point of consciousness (Sandywell, 1996, p.355).<sup>6</sup> In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1963 [1930]), Freud begins to explore the wider connections between psychoanalysis and the culture of modernity and once more likens the psyche to the ancient city of Rome with its ruins and its layers of building over ancient foundations (Freud, 1963, p.7). In this way, memory traces, past experiences, trauma and infantile desires are covered over with new experiences but are never entirely eradicated or erased. Freud writes:

Let us try to grasp what this assumption involves by taking an analogy from another field. We will choose as an example the history of the Eternal City. Historians tell us that the oldest Rome was the *Roma Quadrata*, a fenced settlement on the Palatine. Then followed the phase of the *Septomontium*, a federation of the settlements on the different hills; after that came the city bounded by the Servian wall; and later still, after all the transformations during the periods of the republic and the early Caesars, the city which the Emperor Aurelian surrounded with his walls. We will not follow the changes which the city went through any further, but we will ask ourselves how much a visitor...may still find left of these early stages in the Rome of today...except for a few gaps he will see the wall of Aurelian almost unchanged. In some places he will be able to find sections of the Servian wall where they have been excavated and brought to light...he may be able to trace out in the plan of the city the whole course of the wall and the outline of the *Roma Quadrata*. Of the buildings which once occupied this

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<sup>6</sup> As Sandywell suggests, “In Freud’s metapsychology...dreaming, recollection, and psychic life in general are troped in the figures of a palimpsest and the layers of a buried city” (Sandywell, 1996, p. 350).

ancient area he will find nothing, or only scanty remains, for they exist no longer (Freud, 1963, p.6).

Just as ancient civilisations can be discerned from the rubble of an archaeological dig and mined for information about their habits, customs and lifestyle, individual experiences can be made visible under the right conditions through psychoanalysis.

### ***Surrealist Dreamscapes and 'profane illuminations'***

The Surrealists were concerned with the notion of the modern city as a 'dreamscape'. Taking the city as a site of intoxication and mythic qualities, surrealists such as Aragon and Breton attempted to 'make the familiar strange' in an artistic practice akin to what Benjamin describes as 'profane illumination'. This is the practice wherein the most banal and seemingly inconsequential objects, and their juxtaposition in the commodified spaces of the city, are interpreted as critical interventions to the onslaught of modern capitalism. As McCole writes: "Among the quintessential Surrealist experiences was the perception that certain objects, configurations, and places in the waking world sometimes appear to be surrounded by a mysterious shimmer; a haunting quality that hints at a deeper reality, a 'sur-reality'"(McCole, 1993, p215). The Surrealists then, sought to see, similarly to Marx, Freud and Simmel, *beneath* the dazzling, chaotic surfaces of the modern city, to reveal a deeper 'truth' about urban life. Their analysis, however, extended merely to the potential of the everyday as a catalyst to artistic practice rather than political transformation. It is this fact that, despite their undoubted influence on his work, marks the point where Benjamin and the Surrealists part company.

For the Surrealists, the modern city produced a dreamscape of extraordinary possibilities. Informed by their notion of the 'marvellous quotidian', that everyday strangeness which permeated the vast sweep of the modern metropolis, the city could

be read against itself through poetic reveries, transgressive novels and other revolutionary artistic practices. The purpose of their endeavours was to reveal the mundane as harbouring fantastical and unsettling juxtapositions through a combination of Marxist and Freudian-informed artworks. Writers such as Louis Aragon and Andre Breton attempted to challenge the ordered, oppressive and rational elements of modern urban life (Firchow, 1965; Aragon, 1994 [1926]; Breton, 1999 [1928]). The Surrealists were most definitely an influence on the first thinkers of the post-war consumer city, the Situationists, too. In particular on the 'psychogeographical' notions of *dérive* and *détournement*, with their tactical disruptions of planned, rational environments in favour of arbitrary, subjective journeys through urban space.

The post-war or post-industrial city produces another set of transformations and shifts in the management of urban experience which intensifies both the antinomies of capitalism, visual stimulus and psychological assault. As writers such as Debord (1995 [1967]), Jencks (1977), Harvey (1990), Jameson (1991) and Soja (1989) have explained, the post-industrial city becomes the site of consumption and leisure over production, spectacle over class struggle or political protest, and individual aesthetic marvels over the utopian or grand-scale architectural projects that characterised the modern period. Charles Jencks famously claims that this period marks the birth of postmodern architecture. He goes so far as to claim its very moment of inception at 3.32pm on July 15th 1972, in St Louis, Missouri. The implosion or controlled demolition of the Pruitt-Igo housing scheme, for Jencks, captures this transitional, if contested, shift in the life of the urban fabric (Jencks, 1977, p.9).

The transformation of capitalism into service and tertiary economies is seen in this period as key to the transformation of the city as a set of spectacular surfaces without depth. It is this spectacular city, which emerges in the affluent postwar period that is taken up in the accounts of the Situationist Internationale writers, (Guy Debord

and Raoul Vaneigem), as well as David Harvey, Fredric Jameson and Edward Soja. Despite individual differences, their work descends from a broadly Marxist perspective attending to the challenges of the post-industrial society in what is variously named, the 'society of the spectacle' (Debord, 1967), 'the revolution of everyday life' (Vaneigem, 1967), 'the condition of postmodernity' (Harvey, 1990), the cultural effects of postmodernism (Jameson, 1991), and the striated space of the postmetropolis (Soja, 1989).

### *Debord, Vaneigem and Lefebvre: 'situations & 'ecstatic moments'*

If the Surrealists attempted to intervene in the rationalising modern city, the Situationists present a mode of challenge to the (emerging) post-industrial or postmodern city. Debord and Vaneigem were key proponents of the practice now known as psychogeography. As with the Surrealists, it would be difficult to confer a collective coherence on those involved in Situationism, although the general principles of the movement might be outlined. For such writers, the city begins to transform itself around a particular set of principles allied to the transformations in capitalist production. This included a concern with spectacle as a new form of ideological imprisoning. For Debord, the 'society of the spectacle' is characterized as "the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life" (Debord, 1995, p.29), the result being "a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (1995, p.12). The (post)modern city becomes increasingly concerned with producing and managing spectacles and thus has the effect of alienating its inhabitants. Marx, demonstrated concern for the effects of commodity fetishism on the social world since it encouraged social relations between people mediated by commodities – the material manifestation of capital. Debord notes similarly, that the surplus value of semiotic capital, driven by the technological

advances of the post-war period, propels commodity and image production into overdrive. As Jappe argues, if, “according to Marx, money accumulated beyond a certain threshold is transformed into capital; according to Debord, capital accumulated beyond a certain threshold is transformed into images” (Jappe, 1999, p.19).

It is this culture, which might be loosely characterized as postmodern, that the Situationists were keen to critique. For them, the most potent solution to the proliferation of spectacular urban culture was a political/artistic intervention – a ‘situation’ – into and upon the city’s fabric. Tactics such as *détournement* and *dérive* sought to reclaim a sense of individual autonomy from the alienating, controlled and spectacular form of the contemporary city. Such tactical interventions were designed to reclaim the sense of subjectivity and individual attachment to the street, against the rationality of urban planners and capitalist developments. *Détournement* was the practice of a literal ‘turning against’ or derailment of the conventional meanings of texts, cultural documents and images, and *dérive* a ‘drifting’ or aimlessness which attempts to challenge the more formal and prescribed movement through city spaces. As David Pinder suggests: “by critically exploring the city, the situationists aimed to reveal not only the play of power in the city but also the play of possibilities” (Pinder, 2000, p.358). The Situationists and their tactics were hugely influential on the student movement and other radical protests at the end of the 1960s, particularly in Paris in 1968. As Debord himself stated, and underlined by Pinder, in 1968 the situationists “carried fuel to where the fire was” (Debord in Pinder, 2000, p.368).

Another key figure influenced by Surrealism and Dadism, and with links to Situationism and the French Left, is Henri Lefebvre<sup>7</sup>. Lefebvre, who was also

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<sup>7</sup> Rob Shields points out Lefebvre’s links to these intellectual circles. He writes: While a student, Lefebvre associated with members of both avant-garde movements, writing commentaries on their work and attempting to draw philosophical inspiration from their rejection of conventionality, artistic norms and assumptions about the role of the artist before later criticising their elitism and disinterest in the fate of the working classes from a sterner, Marxist position. Much impressed by the notoriety of the Surrealist poets Breton and Aragon, who produced

Baudrillard's doctoral supervisor, marks what Soja calls, the "reassertion of space in critical social theory" (Soja, 1989, p.47). Lefebvre's collaborations with the Situationists, Debord and Vaneigem, throughout the 1960s ended in a bitter parting of ways. But their influence on each other is important in acknowledging the attempts to interrogate and interrupt the new spectacular spaces of urban capitalism. If the Situationists attempted to turn against the rationality of urban planners through *détournement* and drift, Lefebvre sought the potential for revolutionary fervor in the collective effervescence of bodies in urban space. Drawing on the revolutionary uprising of workers in the Paris Commune of 1871, Lefebvre developed the concept of the "ecstatic moment in which totality was experienced in a manner that was fully authentic to be linked firmly to the idea of revolutionary fervour. Thus the notion of the 'revolutionary festival'" (Shields, 1999, p.103). There is clear connection between the notion of the 'situation' and the 'moment'. The main difference, as Shields notes, is that whilst the 'moment' can remain abstract – a utopian philosophical possibility – for Lefebvre, the 'situation' is connected to more practical subversions of the society of the spectacle. The ecstasy of the moment could always be faked, as far as the Situationists were concerned. Festivals, carnivals and apparently spontaneous displays of collective behavior could be stage-managed, organized, commercialized and 'spectacularized'. Lefebvre's theory, for Debord, had no way of distinguishing between the authentic and the synthetic 'moment'. It is his doctoral student, Jean Baudrillard, who goes on to investigate exactly how authenticity becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish (Shields, 1999, p.104).

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unedited 'automatic writing' and anti-rational works, he welcomed to Paris the Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara (a pseudonym of Sami Rosenstock), who, along with artists such as Marcel Duchamp, proclaimed nihilistic belief in all promises of progress or human redemption as the only possible response to the carnage of the First World War (Shields, 1999, p.1 fn).

In his later work, *The Production of Space* (1974) and similarly to Simmel, Lefebvre acknowledges how both the urban and urbanization transcend the geographical location of the city. As Soja notes, for Lefebvre “urbanization was a summative metaphor for the *spatialization* of modernity and the strategic ‘planning’ of everyday life that has allowed capitalism to survive, to reproduce successfully its essential relations of production” (Soja, 1989, p.50). This survival was underpinned by an increasingly totalizing, rationalised “socially-mystified spatiality, hidden from view under thick veils of illusion and ideology”. As Soja argues, “capitalism’s version of spatialization differed from previous modes of production, for Lefebvre, through its “peculiar production and reproduction of geographically uneven development via simultaneous tendencies towards homogenisation, fragmentation and hierarchization” (Soja, 1989, p.50). Lefebvre’s thesis, then, in many ways supplemented and compensated for Marx’s missing concern with the spatial and reconfigured its importance to the political project of Marxism. (Soja, 1989, p.50). Lefebvre’s work is, as Shields (1999) notes, a fundamental influence on the shift towards spatial analyses in the work of more recent writers on the city and the urban who both popularise and criticise a ‘postmodern reading’, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson and Edward Soja.

### ***Postmodern Cities: Image, and Spectacular Architecture***

David Harvey attempts to account for the spatial development of spectacular cities in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). Here, Harvey describes some of the pertinent features of the city in terms of its commitment to aesthetic transformation through architectural design and regeneration. Whilst he is keen to point to this so-called ‘postmodern condition’, writing from a neo-Marxist perspective, Harvey wants to claim that this is a mutation or the latest development in late-modernity rather than a break into a new condition of postmodernity. Nevertheless, he

readily admits that the shift towards newer more flexible forms of capitalist organization produce a concern with image, aesthetics and culture as primary drivers of urban transformation. Writing of the transformation of the once industrial city of Baltimore through a particular regeneration project, he states:

An architecture of spectacle, with its sense of surface glitter and transitory participatory pleasure, of display and ephemerality, of *jouissance*, became essential to the success of a project of this sort (Harvey, 1990, p.91)

Harvey recognises that the ability for a city to transform itself through a 're-imaging' becomes a marker of its ability to attract new forms of mobile and symbolic capital. He suggests: "Imaging a city through the organization of spectacular urban spaces became a means to attract capital and people (of the right sort) in a period (since 1973) of intensified inter-urban competition and urban entrepreneurialism" (Harvey, 1990, p.92). Harvey reads this shift as a response to the supposedly alienating, overtly rationalist projects of modernist architecture and town planning which produced cities as grid-like and logical rather than inhabitable. The Internationalist style of Le Corbusier or Frank Lloyd Wright would fall into this category. But Harvey wants to maintain that such utopian or grand scale design, despite its failure, has redeeming qualities that have been too quickly forgotten in a shift to postmodern forms characterised by vernacularism, pastiche and playfulness. In a critique of the postmodern architecture of Baltimore's Harbour Place, Harvey suggests that such design produces what he calls 'pleasure citadels'(1990, p.90), urban spaces intent on offering a sense of affect, destination and display. However, whilst Harvey makes some salient points, he is perhaps too quick to reduce postmodern architecture to the same totalising category to which he claims modern architecture is subject; that is it is ultimately all of the same kind. Harvey doesn't perhaps have a subtlety of reading that sees the difference between the celebratory forms of postmodernism that revel in pastiche, vernacular culture and the compression of history into an aesthetic effect.

This is one of the problems of critiques of postmodernism: they do not recognise that writers from a broadly poststructuralist position, such as Lyotard, Derrida, and Baudrillard, are not celebrating these effects but, rather, are attempting to interrogate the epistemological claims to truth that shore up earlier forms of social thought. Further, as Abbinnett points out, writers such as Harvey do not pay sufficient attention to the detail of the 'postmodern' theories they seek to critique (Abbinnett, 2003, p.44).

It is this distinction that is perhaps better made by Fredric Jameson in his assessment of the cultural realm of the postmodern city. Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) is the attempt to track the cultural expressions of the post-industrial age. While Jameson does not want to attach a specific historical period to the production of what he calls postmodern culture, unlike Harvey, he does want to claim that its effects are compounded by the development of post-war affluence, technological innovation and the increasing dominance of media-techno-capitalism. In a survey of various elements of popular culture including film, art and architecture, Jameson discusses these as the 'reflex and concomitant' of late capitalism with its 'waning' of aesthetic effect, surface over depth, the collapse of distance and a privileging of spectacle over reflection. In a demonstration of the limits of the depth hermeneutic associated with earlier forms of social theorising, Jameson posits the limits of "at least four other fundamental depth models [that] have been repudiated in contemporary theory" (1991, p.12). Certain aspects of these depth models are associated with some of the theories discussed above including Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Surrealism. Jameson wants to maintain that rather than a fracture between the modern and postmodern period, the culture that arises out of the development of media technologies and new flexible modes of capitalism is, rather, an extension of modernity rather than its end. There may be a 'postmodern culture' but it cannot be unhinged from the mode of production that underpins its cultural expression.

Without such a recognition, as Jameson states, “what replaces these various depth models is for the most part a conception of practices, discourses, and textual play” (1991, p.12). The structuring principle behind this transformation of the aesthetic realm is the development of capitalism into its ‘late’ stage:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation (Jameson, 1991, p.4).

However, Jameson’s urge to claim a postmodern culture of depthless aesthetics and simulation begins to appear unsupportable by his recourse to Adornian cultural critique. If, as Jameson argues, the critical distance or designation of semi-autonomy to the aesthetic realm that modernist critique is predicated upon – that disjuncture between object and representation – has collapsed in postmodern cultural forms, then how can so-called depth models retain their critical purchase on these new evanescent and fleeting cultural products? By accepting the experience of postmodern culture as the negotiation of the simulation – a Baudrillardian concept – Jameson attempts to maintain a Marxist critique derived through Adorno. This causes a problem, however. Adorno’s critique acknowledges a certain asynchronicity between the superstructural realm and the economic base – a certain distance between the subject and object – whereas Baudrillard’s concept of the simulation strongly repudiates such a possibility. Jameson’s analysis, whilst well-aimed, misses its target because he wants to insist upon the collapse of culture into simulation and aesthetic play but does not wish to pursue that Baudrillardian logic to its end (Abbinnett, 2003, p.122). At the last moment, Jameson always wishes to return to the dialectic and the possibilities of contradiction that might be uncovered in new forms of what he terms ‘cognitive mapping’ (1991, p.51). What form these new cognitive maps might take or how they might be produced within a simulated culture is not quite clear. Ultimately, however they call for a human

recognition of the new spaces of the city which through illegibility, their inability to be read, offer up a moment of resistance to their imposition on to the cityscape. The faith Jameson places in cognitive mapping, therefore, is concerned with the extent to which the 'lag' or delay in human perception, as compared to the speed of technological innovation, is able to provoke an instance of the Marxian 'negative' which adheres to the smooth surfaces of the postmodern metropolis. In other words, Jameson wants to maintain the idea that Marxism might have a critical purchase on these new cultural forms, both virtual and material. In his discussion of the Bonaventure Hotel, Jameson suggests that because the lobby, and in fact the entire interior, is disorientating for users, the building provokes a perceptual contradiction: shoppers cannot find the shops and thus cannot consume. This has a 'material' effect on the traders within which prevents the building's insertion into the cityscape from being a seamless affair, or a depthless 'postmodern' intervention of the built form.

Instructive is how Jameson's assessment of the cultural output of late twentieth century culture differs to Baudrillard's and is best captured in their respective accounts of a seminal moment of 'postmodern' architecture: The Westin Bonaventure Hotel in LA. Whilst Jameson seeks to appeal to the building's disorientating spatial effects – and the concomitant economic effects this might have on the traders inside whose potential customers may never find them – as well as its attempt to replace the city with a new miniature 'closed-off' version of itself, Baudrillard's analysis is much more devastating. The building, for him, is an empty signifier of an empty culture. Its glass skin acts just as reflective sunglasses do: not to conceal a wicked capitalist redevelopment plot, but to conceal the fact that there is *nothing* behind its shiny façade. Just as there is nothing behind the eyes of the sunglasses wearer: a far more terrifying and, ultimately, non-redemptive prospect.

The main difference, then, between Jameson's and Baudrillard's accounts is that Jameson still wants to retain the possibility of the negative. That is, the notion that the crises of global capitalism, its antinomies and contradictions, ultimately, cannot be erased. However, for Baudrillard, simulation is not merely the latest mode of superstructural 'veiling'. Indeed, if we read his history of forms of representation as in some respects similar to Foucault's genealogies, rather than successive phases which might be mapped on to the processes of production, simulation is more than a mode of late capitalist cultural reproduction (Gane, 2006). By addressing the concept of simulation as merely the "reflex and concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism", Jameson underestimates its ability to radically restructure our relationship to the 'real' and its representation (1991, p xii). As Baudrillard argues, the simulation is that which is "*always already reproduced*" (1993, p.73). It is a mode of reproducing social life that has greater significance than its use in popular culture and contemporary artistic endeavour. What is most powerful about the simulation is its ability to conceal the very moments of contradiction which would make possible traditional forms of (Marxist) critique. The sophistication of its staging is such that it appears seamless, natural, the best of all possible worlds. Yet, the significance of the Bonaventure Hotel's lobby is far greater than its disorientating effects and the negative impact this might have on the various traders and small businesses which seek economic success within its vast interior. The Bonaventure, rather, radically transforms our relationship to urban space; it signals a shift in the nature of architecture, it shuts itself off from the metropolis, more private citadel than public city space.

For Jameson, architecture, in the final instance cannot be dissociated from its economic origin, he writes:

Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually

unmediated relationship. It will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it (Jameson, 1991, p. 4-5).

Whilst architecture might be linked more easily to the economy, it still exists as an aesthetic effect. Following Benjamin however, I argue that there is still some autonomy to the aesthetic realm; it cannot be purely economically-determined. If architecture functions as media, as a *form* which produces a certain kind of experience, the buildings, then, are not just inert economic indicators but are actively producing, constructing and shaping an experience in their aesthetic configuration of space. This, in turn, works to produce a certain experience of the contemporary city that is beyond a purely economic explanation. Architecture functions through both material and symbolic means. As Caygill argues, for Benjamin, unlike the more orthodox Marxists, there is always an asynchronicity between the economy and its superstructural elements, thus some degree of autonomy is attributable to the cultural realm, even when that cultural realm concerns the material built form of the city (Caygill, 1998).

Whilst this may be overstating Jameson's case somewhat, I want to argue that there is a distinction to be made between Jameson's updating of Adorno's culture industry argument and both Benjamin's account of mass culture, and my reading of his work. I suggest that a Benjaminian reading offers a more subtle account than Jameson's recourse to Adorno principally because of his concept of the messianic. This allows, I think, for the unexpected, the unpredictable, a moment or event without precedence. It anticipates the postmodern context with its erosion of class solidarities and associated political movements, just as it remains firmly rooted in a modern sensibility and context. My intention is not to read Benjamin shorn of his historical circumstance and committed political inclinations, rather it is to expand that potential into the contemporary arena. I read him as anticipating the interrogation of 'grand

narratives' (Lyotard, 1989) and also able to temper or rescue the so-called 'descent into nihilism' claim with which many postmodern thinkers are charged. By bringing Benjamin's work into proximity with Baudrillard's, my thesis will, simultaneously, reject the notion of Baudrillard as postmodern nihilist by acknowledging the perspicacity of his work, its relevance to the contemporary cityscape, and yet also cling to the fragile sense of the political that the Messianic in Benjamin affords- *because of* the very form it takes: ruinous, minor, evanescent- as opposed to the Baudrillardian symbolic which, whilst it might erupt similarly, but which, for Baudrillard, is ultimately without political consequence, and thus without agency. This is unpacked more fully in Chapter Two which considers the conceptual constellation of Benjamin and Baudrillard and its efficacy as a mode of reading the contemporary cityscape.

### ***Material, Symbolic & Affectual Cities***

That the city is made up of material built forms is self-evident. That it is also a realm of symbolic meaning-making is perhaps less so. Both Benjamin and Baudrillard are attuned to such aspects of the city's environment; its existence as real and imagined space and its production of affect. As Frisby points out, for Benjamin, architecture was 'the most important evidence of latent "mythology", which could not be accessed by recourse to a purely objective economic analysis, or intellectual speculation' (Frisby, 1986, p.192). As Savage et al argue, for Benjamin, understanding the city "involved unlocking the hidden, obscured meanings by undermining – (shattering) – received accounts, placing fresh images and fragments together in a new combination to disclose their meaning" (2003, p.142). Such a method is beyond a reduction to material effects and economic determinism, recognising instead the subtle, seductive effects of the trajectory of commodity culture and how the subjective and objective are in perpetual oscillation. The example of the city's symbolic power is its expression in

dreams, memories and the imagination. Only an analysis which pays attention to both aspects, for Benjamin, is able to capture modern urban experience.

In his description of the city as a “linguistic cosmos” of street names and other symbols (1999, p.522) Benjamin draws attention to the important connections between architecture and the act of naming, which serve to produce the city as both a *symbolic* and *material* site. Such symbolic aspects of the city are also captured in the work of writers such as Barthes, Jencks and more recently, Zukin and Highmore. Barthes also considered the linguistic aspects of urban space describing the city as a language that can be both read and spoken. The city is, thus, a semantic landscape that is set into dialogue with its residents. He writes: “the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, simply by living in it, by wandering through it” (Barthes cited in Tonkiss, 2006, p.135). The semiotic or signifiatory aspects of the city is what Jencks (1977) attempts to deploy in his work *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, which posits a semiological approach to reading buildings. The city is read as a language system that can be ‘decoded’ in a similar way to a text. Jencks attempts to read the structuring elements of postmodern architecture such as its reliance on pastiche, playfulness, vernacular, and local histories. Broadly positive, if not celebratory with regard to postmodern architecture’s (supposed) anti-elitism and anti-rationality, Jencks recognises that there is a ‘double-coding’ to any architectural project which must:

Speak on at least two levels at once: to other architect and a concerned minority who care about specifically architectural meanings, and to the public at large, or the local inhabitants who care about other issues concerned with comfort, traditional building and a way of life...the architects can read the implicit metaphors and subtle meanings of the column drums whereas the public can respond to the explicit metaphors and messages of the sculptors...of course everyone responds somewhat to both codes of meaning...and it is this discontinuity in taste culture which creates both the theoretical base and ‘dual coding’ of postmodernism (1977, p.6).

The making of meaning in the city then, is also the concern of more recent work of urban analysis such as Highmore (2005), Pile (2005) and Tonkiss (2005). Their work,

whilst not identical, accepts the urban as a real and imagined, material and symbolic environment, and examines how this serves to structure and delimit the so-called ‘lived imaginary’ of the city (Highmore, 2005:xii). As Soja is forced to acknowledge in later work, his claim to originality in his recognition of the importance of the ‘spatial turn’ in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), is premature. This notion is already present in the work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin who all acknowledge the city as a site of interwoven material, spatial, psychological and symbolic elements.

The above literature demonstrates the broadest contours of the debates around cities, public space, culture and architecture. It sets out the key accounts from which Benjamin and Baudrillard draw inspiration, demonstrating the intellectual lineages or constellations into which their work fits, and describes some of the recent debates which have structured the discussion of the urban. What I propose to do now is demonstrate how, through the deployment of concepts drawn from the work of Benjamin and Baudrillard, it is possible to produce analyses of urban spaces that offer a nuanced and complex assessment of the cityscape as a nexus of material, symbolic and imaginary elements. Not only because each thinker is influenced by and seeks to extend some of the literature set out above – since in many ways their work is overlooked in the literature on cities, with some notable exceptions (Buck-Morss, 1991; Gilloch, 1996; Leach, 1999; Gilloch, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Pile, 2005; Leslie, 2006) – but also because their conceptual repertoire can be fruitfully applied to recent projects of urban design. Their concern with and development of themes such as the aesthetic, spectacle, commodity fetishism/simulation, the fate of the political, and the technologically-driven spatial transformations wrought by advanced capitalism and its more recent media-technico mutation, I will argue, all serve to offer a less obvious but ultimately more subtle account of the experience of urban space. Indeed, such themes are *essential* to understanding and assessing the contemporary experience of the city

and its current production of experience. Since the publication of the *Arcades Project* in German in 1982 and in English in 1999, Benjamin has increasingly been recognised as the urban thinker he undoubtedly is. Baudrillard, however, is still to be properly recovered as a thinker of the city. His recent work with the architect Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture* (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002), and the recent collection of architectural writings edited by Francesco Proto (Baudrillard, 2006) go some way to redress this imbalance. Hopefully, this thesis also contributes to this task. The development of the conceptual repertoire derived from Benjamin and Baudrillard that I deploy in my reading of the buildings will follow in Chapter Two.

### ***Conclusion: Contemporary 'dreamhouses' & their spectres***

Finally, I now wish to turn to some remarks on the nature of the buildings under analysis. As already noted, my thesis does not concern itself solely with the political or economic decisions that have driven such developments. Rather, following Sharon Zukin, it is concerned not so much with the political economy of cities but rather their symbolic economy. Miles, Hall et al usefully précis the distinctions between the political and symbolic economies when they suggest:

The former is concerned with the material conditions of groups in urban society resulting from the process of local and global urban development...the latter is concerned with the relationship between dominant representation of the city, through architecture, urban design and advertising, and what Rosalyn Deutsche calls the 'rights to the city', the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups in urban society. As Zukin argues, the symbolic economy approach is concerned with the relationship between culture and power (Miles, Hall et al., 2000, p.45).

In this respect, the project is not so much concerned with the cultural policies of urban regeneration exclusively, but rather the phenomenological and experiential aspects of the cultural sphere and its effect on the subjective negotiation of the cityscape. It is also a project with a dual aim, equally concerned with highlighting

how the perspicacious and elusive concepts of Benjamin and Baudrillard are particularly resonant when deployed in constellation, and the demonstration of how such a framework can underpin readings of the cultural experience of the contemporary cityscape.

There is, however, a rationale for the choice of the buildings under analysis: they are all located in post-industrial urban locations and they are all funded or part-funded by public finances in the form of National Lottery monies via the Arts Council or the Millennium Commission. This is a deliberate strategy since my thesis is concerned with public space, or at least, space built with public usage in mind rather than the solely private spaces of entrepreneurial capitalism. My research is intended as a comment on the nature of public architecture at the turn of the twenty first century, access to which is not debarred by financial constraints or penury, or out of bounds due to commercial or private usage. However, all of the venues discussed, since they involve some kind of cultural endeavour, require payment of some kind in order to take advantage of the full extent of their internal spaces, whether concerts, plays or other artistic performances. All except one – The Deep – can be accessed without paying an entrance fee. This idea of free entrance is in part a result of New Labour's strategy of eradicating admission fees for museums and galleries, and in part a deliberate attempt to make the buildings the focus of some renaissance of urban life.

Of course, this raises the question of inclusion and class which plays out in differing ways in the different locations. The spectre of class, to some extent, haunts all of these spaces. This haunting is perhaps inevitable since the locations were established upon their heavy industries which relied, in turn, on a propinquitous, abundant labour force and its attendant class structure. The notion of the haunting of spectacular spaces of the contemporary urban has been taken up in different ways by

various writers, including Benjamin (de Certeau, 1984; Debord, 1995; Edensor, 2005; Pile, 2005).

The buildings have a prescribed or self-consciously fashioned sense of how they wish to shape the visitors' experience. This comes through from both their dazzling exteriors and their internal aesthetic configuration of space as well as their attendant publicity material, websites and guidebooks. The spaces are narrated with a self-conscious sense of the kind of experience they expect visitors to have. Experience is constructed as pleasurable, as 'culturally-good'. A re-articulation of a certain 'Reithian' sensibility permeates the spaces<sup>8</sup>. The fact that they are iconic spectacles designed by 'starchitects' also serves to produce a sense of reverence for the building itself. Of prime importance in the construction of this narrative is the somewhat ironic notion that the spaces are interactive rather than didactic and that they are (apparently) accessible. This officially-sanctioned ideology is followed by visitors up to a point: we are led, choreographed through the space. What my readings seek are 'moments', those pauses, gaps or cracks which implicitly undermine that preferred reading; moments in which resistance to that preferred reading might occur.

The thesis and the readings therein are not concerned with the celebration of cultural regeneration, a sniping from the sidelines at its pretensions, or a reactionary outrage at the millions of taxpayer's money it has taken up. Rather, it is a reading that seeks to reveal the hopeless hopefulness of it all, one which traces the melancholia that such developments provoke. These buildings enchant the cityscape and yet, when read against the grain, potentially disenchant it at the same time. It is to perform an act

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of a 'Reithian' sensibility refers to the guiding principles of public service broadcasting as laid down by John Reith the founder and eventual Director General of the BBC until 1938. This is best encapsulated by the well-known phrase "inform, educate and entertain" as a 'mission statement' for broadcasters but also providers of 'culture' more generally. A certain paternalistic and moral code underpinned Reith's mission but the basic principle, perhaps modified for the 21<sup>st</sup> century context, is still detectable in the cultural spaces I analyse in the thesis. The phrase 'mission statement' also has certain evangelical connotations, connected to the preaching strategies of religious missionaries. I use this phrase consciously, then, to describe the method and delivery of 'culture' in these spaces.

of awakening to the ‘dreamhouses’ of contemporary urban culture. Baudrillard would want to maintain that this is not possible, that the experience they construct is so sophisticated, so cultivated, that oppositional readings or dissension is constantly jeopardised. His approach is rather more playful; rather than straightforward opposition, he offers instead ironic readings in the hope of at least *disturbing* these perfect surfaces of contemporary culture. What I am seeking to do in the thesis, then, is not to attempting to *create* these moments of disruption, but rather to locate them or ‘read them out’ – to evoke, what Benjamin would call the moments of ‘profane illumination’ at play. The ghosts I’m trying to evoke, summon and conjure – or at least trace by insisting upon the *possibility* of their presence- these residues, are best revealed, I argue, through the conceptual repertoire of Benjamin and Baudrillard in constellation. But, ultimately, by a sense of the Benjaminian ‘messianic’ as *rupture*, as a possibility that cannot be eradicated, however sophisticated the postmodern experience of the city may be. This point is crucial to my thesis: it is my reading of the ‘messianic’ as *rupture* and Baudrillardian irony as *disturbance* which both makes the distinctions between their critical projects apparent, and which also points to the similarities, the similar purpose driving each. The following chapter, then, sets out the concepts I put into play from each of the two thinkers demonstrating how they might be read in constellation, what such a reading entails, and how an analysis of the spaces can be produced out of this method.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL CONSTELLATIONS, MOMENTS, AND *FLÂNERIE*

It isn't that the past casts light on the present or that what is present casts light on what is past; rather an image is that in which the Then and the Now come together in a constellation like a flash of lightning.

Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, 1940

We can't say it's all the same, but the exceptions can only be moments.

Jean Baudrillard, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, 2000

Flânerie is a kind of reading of the street, in which human faces, shop fronts, shop windows, café terraces, street cars, automobiles and trees become a wealth of equally valid letters of the alphabet that together result in words, sentences and pages of an ever-new book. In order to engage in flânerie, one must not have anything too definite in mind.

Franz Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin*, 1928

### *Stellar Affinities*

In an interview of 1983, Baudrillard said “Benjamin is someone I admire profoundly”(Gane, 1993, p.54). This admiration was expressed on a number of occasions and Baudrillard’s work is littered with references to Benjamin.<sup>9</sup> Their work is interrelated and connected in more ways than simple admiration, however. At times Baudrillard willfully and mischievously misuses and reverses Benjamin’s notions to fit his own ‘fatal’ readings. It is necessary then, to try to explain how their work might be read together, with both this admiration and this (mis)reading in mind. This chapter has three primary aims. Firstly, it gives an overview of the conceptual ‘constellation’ that informs the readings of the buildings I have chosen for this thesis. This includes my definition and deployment of the ‘constellation’ in this context, and a discussion of how I use the term to demonstrate the complex links between the work of Benjamin and Baudrillard. The constellation is not an arbitrary term. It is a concept

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<sup>9</sup> For a full list of the places in his work where Baudrillard’s refers to Benjamin see (Roberts, 2008)

used frequently by Benjamin and other Frankfurt School colleagues<sup>10</sup> and its strength for my purposes is its ability to demonstrate the complexity, contradictions and reversibility of the relationship between Benjamin and Baudrillard's theoretical repertoire. Secondly, the chapter sets out the rationale for the method I use to approach each building: the notion of the 'moment'. It conceptualizes the moment, my use of it as a methodological device, and explains why it is important to the theoretical concerns of Benjamin and Baudrillard. Each analytical chapter begins with a 'moment' of experience provoked by the different buildings, which offer alternative symbolic or figurative 'entrances' to the spaces. These moments offer, what I argue, is a version of the 'profane illumination' causing a form of 'messianic' rupture to the seamless, smooth production of experience each building seeks to construct. Each chapter, then, has a different and particular momentary opening: visual (The Lowry), material (The Deep), psychological (The Sage), and temporal (The Public) in a strategy which seeks to find instances of the minor and the overlooked as a critical strategy of intervention into these iconic cultural spaces. Finally, this chapter engages with the debate around the possibility of the female *flâneur*. The *flâneur* is a central figure in Benjamin's city writings, at once ambiguous and complex, its relevance as both sociological *actualité* and metaphorical cultural trope has been widely discussed by both Benjamin scholars and thinkers on modernity and postmodernity (Frisby, 1986, p.473; Buck-Morss, 1991; Bauman, 1994; Tester, 1994). The *flâneur's* mobile gaze also embodies the particular form of scopophilic pleasure constructed by the modern city, and prefigures the multifarious mobile gazes that are constituted by postmodern culture in the form of tourist, TV viewer, internet surfer, and even social researcher (Featherstone, 1998; Parsons, 1999; Bairner, 2006). The debate surrounding the possibility of the female *flâneur* is taken as a provocation and a

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<sup>10</sup> As Eagleton notes, for Benjamin, the constellation "is a motif which runs from the first few pages of his book on *Trauerspiel* to the posthumously published 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1990, p.328).

guiding methodological principle (Wolff, 1985; Pollock, 1987; Wilson, 1991; Parsons, 2000). However, the *flâneur* is not a straightforward or transparent concept and its relevance, critical usefulness and ambiguity must be unpacked with careful nuance. I argue, following Parsons, that the city be taken as an affective, emotive and imagined environment, as well as a material or planned landscape. The construction and appropriation of urban experience, then, as it is created through the kaleidoscopic, marginal gaze of the *flâneur* as an *androgynous* figure, offers an important corrective to, and critical intervention into, the production of experience staged by the buildings. I argue that, since the buildings seek to shape and construct a particular experience of their spaces -choreographed journeys of their choosing- the *flâneur's* critical mobile perspective and corporeal recalcitrance, offers other modes of taking possession of their interiors.

### ***Conceptual Constellations***

Firstly, it is necessary to delineate the core critical concepts of Benjamin and Baudrillard that will be central to the project, their interrelation and overlap. The dominant metaphor, serving as the guiding methodological principle of the thesis, is the constellation. Of course, the constellation is, at its most fundamental, an image; an ocular spectacle of stellar activity in the night sky. This is particularly apposite, then, in relation to Benjamin and Baudrillard, themselves both theorists of the fate of the image. However, the constellation, as a metaphorical device, is also useful, as Gilloch (2002) has noted, since it *appears* and *deceives* at the same time depending on the position from which one looks thus: 'points which seem nearest to one another may prove to be those furthest apart' (2002, p.25). Moreover, as Buse *et al* (2006) have pointed out, in their discussion of the importance of the constellation in Benjamin's

work, the constellation opens up notions of nearness and distance, temporality and space:

What appears to us as an image in the night sky is in fact a juxtaposition of stars which are more and less distant from us...the light that makes up a constellation is a composite of light from different times depending on the distance it has had to travel to reach us (Buse, Hirschkop et al., 2006, p.108).

This notion is particularly valuable with regard to Benjamin and Baudrillard whose concepts reach us from different historical moments and contexts. Equally, the constellation opens up the possibility of the deception and illusion of the image: that the stellar activity we perceive is not a constant or unchanging set of positions existing permanently or concurrently in time and space. The constellation, then, allows for convergences, departures and reversibility: a sense that the relationship between the theoretical repertoire of Benjamin and Baudrillard is evident but that it is nuanced, subtle, registering more distinctly or hazily depending on the light and one's ocular perspective or positionality. As Terry Eagleton notes:

The concept of constellation, which Benjamin elaborated in close collaboration with Adorno, is perhaps the most strikingly original attempt in the modern period to break with traditional versions of totality. It represents a determined resistance to the more paranoid forms of totalizing thought on the part of thinkers who nevertheless set their face against any mere empiricist celebration of the fragment. By revolutionizing the relations between part and whole, the constellation strikes at the very heart of the traditional aesthetic paradigm, in which the specificity of the detail is allowed no genuine resistance to the organizing power of the totality. The aesthetic is thus turned against the aesthetic (Eagleton, 1990, p.330).

Equally, stellar activity provides a model for Baudrillard's 'fatal' readings, one which dovetails creatively with Benjamin's own critical model of the constellation. What Baudrillard goes in search of in his American odyssey *America* (1988 [1986]), is sidereal, of the nature of stars. It is:

*Astral* America, not social and cultural America, but the America of the empty, absolute freedom of the freeways, not the deep America of mores and mentalities, but the America of desert speed, of motels and mineral surfaces. I looked for it in the speed of the screen play, in the indifferent reflex of television, in the film of

days and nights projected across an empty space, in the marvellously affectless succession of signs, images, faces, and ritual acts on the road (Baudrillard, 1988, p.5).

Baudrillard, then, registers the glittering surfaces of America's semiotic culture as they flash past the windscreen of his hire car. As Mike Gane has pointed out, Baudrillard has been attacked for his purloining of the language of quantum physics in his attempt to find a critical vocabulary of alterity which might remain one step ahead of the simulation and its concomitant effect on social and cultural life (Gane, 2000, p.46). Thus, in his later work, he writes of 'black-holes', 'fractals' and 'strange attractors'. Black holes are, of course, collapsed or reversed stars. In fact, stars are always at the risk of collapse, of this strange reversibility.<sup>11</sup> That this reversal is always imminent captures both Benjamin's slim chance of the political, and the constant threat of it being wrested away, and Baudrillard's notion of the symbolic eruption: that the system pushed to its limit will collapse in on itself.

My use of the constellation across the thesis is both a hermeneutical device and a methodology of reading. It is not only Benjamin and Baudrillard's concepts which form a constellation. They, as thinkers, come out of other intellectual constellations to which I referred in the introduction, and to which I return in the substantive chapters of the thesis. The buildings themselves form a constellation of 'millennial' architecture, not only in the UK but internationally, too. This constellation would include other contemporary projects such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (1997), as well as earlier examples of iconic cultural venues including the Sydney Opera House (1973) and Paris's Pompidou Centre (1977). The locations in which the buildings are situated, equally, form a geographical constellation, as secondary sites close to more famous, major cities. Thus, Salford,

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<sup>11</sup> In an article from 1971 following the then recent discovery of black-holes, Ruffini & Wheeler outline the various states of collapsed stars from 'frozen star' to 'black-hole'. The formation of black-holes is linked to the addition of mass to a degenerate star resulting in a sudden collapse or reversal (Ruffini and Wheeler, 1971).

Hull, Gateshead and West Bromwich, in the UK, become synonymous, so their planners, designers and funders hope, with cultural activities.

There is a further methodological expediency to the constellation. It allows for the reading of theoretical concepts in different and changing critical arrangements or clusters. Baudrillard's concept of simulation, for example, might be read alongside Benjamin's notion of aura as the last stage in the cultural transformations wrought by post-auratic media. Or, it might be read as Baudrillard's response to Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and assessed alongside Benjamin's notion of the phantasmagoria: the dreamlike spectacle made possible by consumer culture. I am arguing, therefore, that through the figure of the constellation it is possible to produce a critical metaphor through which the relationship between the theorists' conceptual repertoire is understood. By defying linear explanation the constellation demonstrates the ways in which their concepts cluster in multifarious and contradictory ways depending on the context.

It is, of course, possible to make linkages between the two thinkers based solely on Baudrillard's own account of his indebtedness to Benjamin in three key texts: the 'The Order of Simulacra' essay from *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993 [1976]), 'The Political Destiny of Seduction' from *Seduction* (1991 [1979]) and 'The Precession of Simulacra' from *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994 [1981]). But it is also possible to trace connections via their own chequered relations to Marxism, their writings on cultural spaces and cities, the nature of the revolutionary subjects (the 'masses' and the 'silent majorities'), the melancholic fate of the intellectual, and the form theoretical writing might take: fragments/aphorisms and theory-fiction. What is most interesting to me is what their conceptual convergences and divergences offer to readings of urban space and, in turn, the reinterpretation of each writer's critical repertoire. As Jorge Luis Borges, states since "every writer creates his own

precursors” (2000, p.10), it is perhaps only *after* Baudrillard has written that we can see how Baudrillardian Benjamin was.<sup>12</sup> As I have noted, this particular constellation does not rely solely on the indebtedness that Baudrillard claims to Benjamin. The linkages between their work that Baudrillard alludes to is only one way of reading their work together and in no way exhausts or even begins to plunder the quarry that is present in the various permutations, correlations and echoes between the two. Constellations of stars, as I have mentioned, are both surface and depth, temporal and spatial, distant and near; ambiguous, deceptive and apparent, all at once. The conceptual relationship between Benjamin and Baudrillard is equally complex, contradictory and confounding. The constellation, then, helps us understand why neither thinker is sufficient alone to understand contemporary urban space: all of their concepts are simultaneously in play in the various locations, albeit more or less intensely, recognizably or immediately. My readings seek to capture the subtleness and nuances of such interrelations and point to the relevance of their ideas for an understanding of the contemporary cityscape.

The constraints of the format of the thesis, the two-dimensional restrictions of the page, and the expectation of a coherent linear narrative to the chapter form all pose difficulties to the full explanation of how the constellation might be brought to bear across the readings that follow. Since the constellation is a multi-dimensional object, it successfully captures the complexity, propinquity and alterity of the concepts of each thinker within their own critical paradigm and their relationship to each other’s work. What is important to clarify is that the constellation also informs the way one might read the thesis. It is perhaps, to make another analogy, similar to a

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<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard when asked about his influences in a 2001 interview said “Borges, who was a member of my imaginary list of authors, my ideal bestiary – if you want to indulge in this kind of mental game – alongside Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes. Only Bs, as it happens, as Baudelaire’s also in there... We should add Rimbaud or Artaud. It was that poetic vein I initially felt was mine (2004, p.6).

musical movement: in four parts, with rhapsodic themes and concepts, refrains that echo and repeat each other, with disconcertingly violent juxtapositions and awkward collisions. What one might call forms of theoretical dissonance. Consequently, it is not as straightforward as merely setting out which concepts are read out of which buildings since even the method of reading presumes a knowledge of the range of concepts at play. Is it necessary, for example, for the reader to understand the concepts of aura and simulation before the concepts of the messianic and the symbolic? What I propose to do, then, is to explain the main concepts that I draw out of the different locations and across the chapters of the thesis, on the understanding that sometimes they are paired, sometimes one concept above all others dominates, and sometimes concepts cluster in smaller configurations. Nevertheless, to apply this particular constellation of Benjamin and Baudrillard to the issue of the post-industrial cityscape and its management of experience, is to trace its emerging iconography through particular aesthetic configurations of space. The thesis, however, is not just about playing concepts off against each other, a judgement is ultimately made, to decide, which theorist (to continue the astronomical metaphor), in the end, has the greater gravitational pull. The next section considers the notion of architecture as a form of surface and explores the nature of surfaces and their relevance to Benjamin and Baudrillard's critical methods.

### *Deciphering Surfaces*

Both Walter Benjamin and his friend and sometime Frankfurt School colleague Siegfried Kracauer insisted on the importance of interpreting architecture as a means of understanding the social and cultural milieu. For Benjamin, the prehistory of the twentieth-century modern city could be read out of an analysis of the decaying arcades of nineteenth-century Paris. In their ruined state he approached them, in part

as archaeologist, in part as “polytechnical engineer”, and in part as cultural historian of the minor and the insignificant (Gilloch, 1996). Kracauer took a similar approach: in order to understand the city and the vagaries of modern culture, it was necessary to take a survey of its ‘inconspicuous surface-level expressions’. As Kracauer remarks:

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch’s judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. Conversely, knowledge of this state of things depends on the interpretation of these surface-level expressions. The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminates each other reciprocally (Kracauer, 1995, p.75).

Kracauer, as Frisby notes, was ‘matched only by...Benjamin...in his ability to decipher the signifiers of social space’ (Frisby, 1986, p.5). For Benjamin, these ‘surface-level expressions’ of a society or culture, the seeming ephemera and taken-for-granted objects of a given historical period, are infused with deeper meanings that, once deciphered, will reveal more about the culture in question than might appear at first glance. They are its “thread of expression” (1999, p.460).<sup>13</sup> As Max Pensky argues:

By regarding the relation between material and cultural production as *expression*, rather than *determination*, Benjamin claims that distinctive cultural expressions of an epoch are simultaneously material *and* symbolic, economic *and* cultural, such that the collective consciousness of nineteenth century European culture expresses itself in a double manner. The imperatives of capitalism are expressed both in the conscious attempts of its apologists, literary and aesthetic heroes, and statesmen to generate a dominant culture that expresses the triumphs of capitalist modernity, and in the largely unconscious *reactions* to the hellish consequences of this same modernity, which are expressed, in encoded form, in a thousand inadvertent, overlooked, or otherwise worthless cultural forms. These include: fashion, advertising, the endless ebb and flow of commodities, commercial ventures, consumer fads, popular literature, journalism and feuilletons, new building forms and materials, architectural embellishments, changes in design, and the inconspicuous

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<sup>13</sup> This notion of the products of capitalist society as hieroglyphic comes from Marx’s analysis of the commodity. Marx writes: “Value... does not have its description branded on its forehead. Rather it transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, human beings try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of their own social product, for the determination of useful objects as values is as much their social product as is their language” (Marx cited in Frisby, 1986, p.21). Equally, Kracauer writes: “Spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of any spatial image is deciphered there the basis of social reality presents itself” (Kracauer cited in Frisby, 1986, p.109).

emergence of new forms of bodily comportment, dress and affect that emerge as a population finds itself obliged to accommodate new productive and commercial technologies (Pensky, 2004, p.183).

Such phenomena, then, find their inception in the city as the nexus of capitalist innovation and transformation. This posits the urban milieu as ripe for interpretation and decipherment. Neil Leach's edited volume *The Hieroglyphics of Space* (2002) takes as its premise this notion of the city and its constituent elements as hieroglyphic.

Leach writes:

The metropolis, then, can be understood as an amalgam of objects of cultural production, and as such presents itself beyond the limitations of any strictly positivistic outlook as a repository of meaning. For the metropolis is more than a collection of transportation networks, buildings, parks, rivers and so on. It is a patchwork quilt of traces of human existence...the metropolis therefore lends itself to serve in textual terms as an object of research. It constitutes a series of spatial images –hieroglyphics – which may be deciphered in order to provide access to deeper underlying questions about society (Leach, 2002, p.2).

However, for Baudrillard, as Genosko points out, the notion of the hieroglyphic is abandoned since it implies a depth behind the surface of things that he would refute. Architecture, for Baudrillard, is, rather, able to create a 'dramaturgy of illusion and seduction'(Baudrillard, 2006). It has the potential to create both illusory and ludic experiences but if buildings are conceived as purely functional objects, this possibility is under threat. Baudrillard, then, still implies a dramatic 'staging' at play in architectural forms but outlines how such staging might be interpreted through his concept of 'seduction', offering up a critical method opposed to what he terms the obsessive 'production' of meaning in semiotic cultures. Seduction is conceived in opposition to production and allied to the ruse, the duel or the game in character. There may not be depth, then, but there may still be secrets. The key to unlocking these architectural secrets, for Baudrillard, is not to force them to appear, to *unveil* them in the Marxist ideological sense, but rather, to enter into a duel; to *seduce* spaces

into revealing their secrets. It is to perform a literal and figurative leading astray.<sup>14</sup> If Baudrillard wants to reject the category of production Benjamin, however, wants to reinvigorate it, to find *other* ways of being productive, just as children re-use the scraps of the adult world in startlingly new configurations.<sup>15</sup>

Both thinkers, despite their different approaches, are concerned with the surface of things and how those surfaces might be critically assessed. For Benjamin, the commodity form as it manifests in urban space serves to produce the dazzling gleam of technological ‘second-nature’. Benjamin’s concept of the phantasmagoria, the illusory and dream-like quality city spaces radiate through their nexus of signs, images, advertising and technologies, best describes the experience of the modern city. For Baudrillard, however, in his travels across America, it is the desert form – first nature- which offers up the model for reading the surfaces of a surface-driven, semiotic culture. The desert symbolizes the desolation of American culture, both in its absence and its irrelevance. This is first nature, however, thoroughly mediated. As Gilloch argues, “Baudrillard is at pains to point out that, of course, the desert is wholly mediated by culture: ‘the desert you pass through is like the set of a Western’. The desert is, paradoxically, the image of a culturally mediated absence of culture” (Gilloch, 2002, p.181). This is not meant purely as a derogatory assessment but rather as recognition that, unlike European countries, which are weighed down by their history and privileging of high culture, America exists having made the jump from primitive to modern society apparently in an instant. It is the only truly *modern* society, one of third-order simulacra: pop culture in its various forms.<sup>16</sup> His analysis,

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<sup>14</sup> The etymology of seduce is the Latin phrase “se-ducere” which means to lead aside or astray.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin writes “Children are particularly fond of haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on. They are irresistibly drawn to the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry. In waste products they recognise the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things, they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together, in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship” (1996, p.441).

<sup>16</sup> Baudrillard writes of America, “culture is space, speed, cinema, technology. This culture is authentic, if anything can be said to be authentic” (Baudrillard, 1988, p.100).

then, is both a surface-level assessment and an assessment of surfaces. As Genosko writes:

The desert form is the locus of all the features of Baudrillard's formalist bias. There is, however, little doubt that the desert in all of its diversity is rich in surface effects and forms, even special effects: desert pavement, crescent dunes, mirages, the surreality of moving rocks etc. The contour lines, colours, all the effects of dryness, openness and wind, lend themselves to Baudrillard's unbalanced reading of the surface of things (Genosko, 1994, p.126).

Therefore, this analysis proceeds from the position that the buildings in question might be variously interpreted, as 'surface level expressions' but that there is still an element of decipherment required to make sense of them as the embodiment of particular additions to the early twenty-first century cityscape. I now turn to the particular conceptual constellations that are fundamental to the theoretical framework of my thesis. The next section considers two of Benjamin and Baudrillard's enduring concepts, the messianic and the symbolic, and their foundations as developments and critiques of Marxist theories of history.

### ***Marxism, the Messianic and the Symbolic: Potential Futures***

As I have mentioned previously, one strong intellectual lineage that might draw Benjamin and Baudrillard into constellation is their adaptation of concepts that have their inception in the work of Marx. Neither thinker has a conventional or orthodox relationship to Marxism, yet Benjamin maintains a commitment to the values of historical materialism whereas Baudrillard rejects Marxian theory and practice. Baudrillard does, however, still remain preoccupied with concepts which originate in Marxist thinking across his work: the fate of commodity culture, the fate of the masses and the possibility of critique. One of the difficulties of extrapolating Marxian concepts from Benjamin's work is the well-documented fact that Benjamin

actually read very little Marx. As various commentators have asserted, if Marxist concepts are present in Benjamin's work their origin owes far more to Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1971 [1920]) than they do to *Capital* (1976 [1867]) (Tiedemann, 1999; Gilloch, 2002).<sup>17</sup> Despite this, there is no doubt that Benjamin's work certainly takes Marxism as one of its central premises, alongside Jewish mysticism. The relationship between Benjamin's Marxism and his Jewish mysticism is most obviously realised in his description of the 'messianic face' of history.

In contrast to Marxist notions of history as the unfolding of time towards the inevitable overthrowing of capitalist social and economic organisation, Benjamin's configuration of historical time, as set out in 'On the Concept of History' (1940), elucidates a 'messianic' relationship to the temporal order. The notion of the messianic is fundamental to the thesis in that it offers the model for the momentary interruptions that might occur as critical interventions into the iconic architectural projects under analysis. It is in the exposition of this messianic version of history, as a 'weak' power "on which the past has a claim", which exposes itself not as progress towards revolution through the sharpening of class consciousness to the contradictions inherent within capitalism, but, rather the gathering of revolutionary potential *in the moment* (Benjamin, 2003, p.390). As Buck-Morss highlights, the utopian promise of messianism motivates political action "because every experience of happiness or despair that was ours teaches us that the present course of events does not exhaust reality's potential and...because revolution is understood as a Messianic break from history's course and not its culmination" (1991, p. 243). That is, the search for points of combustion or moments of danger, that 'flash-up' at a given point in time and collapse the distance between the present and the past. The famous allegory of

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<sup>17</sup> As Tiedemann points out, by his own admission, Benjamin only began to "look around...in the first volume of *Capital*" after completing the exposé. He was familiar with the theory of commodity fetishism mainly in Lukács'; like many other left-wing intellectuals of his generation, Benjamin largely owed his Marxist competency to the chapter on reification in *History and Class Consciousness*" (Tiedemann, 1999, p.938).

Benjamin's is the 'angel of history' who, as in the Klee painting to which s/he is indebted, does not stride forward in a progressive teleology but rather, is cast forward by a storm (that we call progress). Facing backwards, s/he watches the pile of wreckage, ("one single catastrophe"), collect at her feet (Benjamin, 2003, p.392). Progress, as Benjamin suggests, "must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are 'status quo' is the catastrophe" (1999, p.473).

Caygill acknowledges the importance of eschatology and the notion of 'last things' in Benjamin's writings but not "necessarily in the sense of a Messianic completeness" (1998, p.149). He insists Benjamin's project be understood as "what happens after the 'storm of progress' that is blowing from paradise". He proposes, while the *Angelus Novus* witnesses the ruination of progress or history it is not "in the expectation of redemption, but in expectation of a new covenant or law" (1998, p.149). Caygill contends, "Benjamin's eschatology is one of the new covenant following the destructive storm, one which does not reconcile or redeem, but forgives through the 'obliteration' or 'extinguishing' of the 'traces of all misdeeds'(Caygill, 1998, p.150). Caygill, then, rejects the notion of a messianic *totality* to Benjamin's thought and posits, rather, that Benjamin is concerned with the hope that the destruction of tradition brings through new forms of social, technical and cultural organisation. This hope is not messianic in the sense that it will be revealed in the blinding flash of the coming of the Messiah but operates, instead, in a fragmented, unexpected mosaic of colour, "as of a rainbow" (1998, p.152). For Caygill, Benjamin's messianism is a shift in perception, a reordering, and a seeing differently. Just as the rainbow requires the correct prism to affect already-present white light, equally, hope, for Benjamin, is revealed in an "episodic and unpredictable" manner (1998, p. 152).

These messianic ‘moments’, then, are the chances that present themselves in the fight for the oppressed; all those minor figures and minor histories which historicism, by concentrating on the great and the good (the ‘victors’), ignores (2003, p.391). Benjamin, then, advocates “a conception of history that has liberated itself from the schema of progression within an empty homogenous time’ which will ‘finally unleash the destructive energies of historical materialism that have been held back for so long” (2003, p.406). He wishes to rescue not only the past and the dead, to redeem them in the flash of danger, but to rescue the Marxist concept of revolution too, by putting it to work in a messianic formation. As he states in the supplementary material to ‘On the Concept of History’, “a genuinely messianic face must be restored to the concept of classless society, and, to be sure, in the interests of furthering the revolutionary politics of the proletariat itself”(2003, p.403). Indeed, the language of Benjamin’s concept of revolution, this ‘smashing’, ‘waking’, ‘destruction’, and the channels of this messianic promise (the forgotten, discarded, ruined and decayed) as catalysts to illumination, brings Benjamin closer to Baudrillard’s idea of symbolic exchange as that which remains outside of the realm of production and thus the reaches of Marxist critique.<sup>18</sup>

Baudrillard’s early writings, from *The System of Objects* (1996 [1968]), *The Consumer Society* (1998 [1970]) through to *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]), all proceed from a predominantly Marxist political position. Influenced too by the structuralism of Lefebvre, Barthes, Levi-Strauss, and the media theory of McLuhan, these early books produce a reading of post-war consumer society as it is structured through objects and acts of consumption. As Barthes

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed, one of Baudrillard’s main problems with Marxism is the fact that Marx does not reflect on the importance of those elements that fall outside of relationships of production. Baudrillard argues: “If there was one thing Marx did not think about, it was discharge, waste, sacrifice, prodigality, play, and symbolism. Marx thought about production (not a bad thing), and he thought about it in terms of value” (1975, p.42).

suggested in his analysis of fashion (Barthes, 1990 [1967]) for Baudrillard, the objects that we consume are linked into a signifying system where they are not only interchangeable or fungible for each other (as Marxian exchange value) but at the level of the sign they take on even greater significance. Baudrillard, then, offers a new face to the commodity: its 'sign-value'. What the object is able to 'say' about us as the outcome of our consumption of it, takes precedence. In *The Consumer Society* (1970), Baudrillard goes further. It is not only the case that objects prevent us from developing social bonds with others but rather that the predominant method of making such bonds is *through* objects. Thus, consumer society, in the ascendant over industrial (producing) society, has radically transformed processes of social integration and social cohesion. Where once it was labour and the process of production that ordered social relations, now, it is consumption and the processes of consumption that perform this task. Baudrillard extends this form of analysis in *For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]) which incorporates McLuhan's ideas of media technologies and their transformation of perception ('the medium is the message') to produce a highly critical reading which, for Baudrillard, reduces communication to the reflex of the media code and is thus 'non-communication'. However, it is in *The Mirror of Production* (1975) that Baudrillard begins to question the Marxist logic of production and work through the implications of Marxist political economy, which eventually leads to his development of the idea of the simulation and the symbolic. These concepts are present in this work in embryonic form. Baudrillard's main contention here is that Marx's theory, in its insistence on the labour theory of value, colludes with capitalism. Since humans are only distinguished from animals by their production and reproduction of material life, Marx privileges labour as the sole purpose of humanity and value itself therefore as

‘productive’. Human social life is restricted on the basis that individuals are alienated from their labour under the capitalist mode of production. As Baudrillard contends:

There is no way of getting around this. Marxist labour is defined in the absolute order of a natural necessity and its dialectical overcoming as rational activity producing value. The social wealth produced is *material*; it has nothing to do with *symbolic* wealth which, mocking natural necessity comes conversely from destruction, the deconstruction of value, transgression, or discharge (Baudrillard, 1975, p.42).

If value is only ever envisioned as ‘productive’, Baudrillard contends, Marx ignores the significance of the symbolic and its role in social cohesion and conflict. Baudrillard writes: ‘These two notions of wealth [material and symbolic] are irreconcilable, perhaps even mutually exclusive; it is useless to attempt acrobatic transfers. According to Bataille, ‘sacrificial economy or symbolic exchange is exclusive of political economy’ (1975, p.43). This has important ramifications for the notions of revolutionary change inherent within Marxist theory since Marx entrenches the notion of revolution or revolutionary praxis firmly into the production process. Therefore he can only conceive of revolutionary subjects as those who fall foul of, or are subordinated by this process: the proletariat.

Drawing on Bataille’s notion of the ‘accursed share’ (1933), Mauss’s work on the gift (1950) and Levi Strauss’s structural anthropology (1958) Baudrillard argues that the symbolic realm offers an important corrective and intervention into the system of semiotic capitalism which, in its ubiquity and sophistication, cannot be transformed through the conventional political means of class conflict and forms of revolutionary consciousness. Using the example of tribal activities such as potlatch, Baudrillard describes how non-logocentric societies create meaning and social ties through acts of sacrificial ritual. Baudrillard describes ‘potlatch’ whereby the objects those that had the most value and had taken the longest to fashion, were collectively burned in order to both reinforce group collectivity instil the notion of reciprocity.

This served to install in tribal society the notion that the response to any 'gift' is cyclical and predicated upon a cycle of greater and greater 'generosity'. The challenge of a gift to which no equivalence can be sought stimulates the response of attempting to better it – the giver and receiver thereby enter into a symbolic exchange or, as Baudrillard later modifies it, a form of 'seduction'. Merrin (2003) describes Baudrillard's understanding of the symbolic thus:

What Baudrillard takes as the basis for the 'symbolic', is the emphasis upon a mode of collective experience or social relationship and its immediate moment of meaning and communication ... the *scene* of the gift is important here as it both creates positive social relations, as the gift communicates the giver and cements ties, whilst also prompting an agonistic cyclical competition in which individuals or groups attempt to accrue social power and rank by humbling the other with the generosity of their gift, creating an indebtedness only effaced with a greater counter-gift (Merrin, 2003, p.5).

This notion of exchange, gift and counter-gift is present within and understood by primitive societies, however, in our consumer society with its emphasis on and production of a semiotic mode of relations we have forgotten this principle since it becomes subsumed under the weight of the circulation of signs. Symbolic exchange then, offers a revolutionary intervention into the semiotic realm, but is of the order of sacrifice and spontaneity not collective 'political' action in the Marxist sense. Indeed, the symbolic is of the order not of production but 'seduction'. As Mike Gane (2000) has pointed out, Baudrillard's originary concept of symbolic exchange is developed throughout his work and is named variously as 'seduction', 'event without precedence', 'evil', 'the fatal', 'radicality', 'singularity': all terms which describe this 'double spiral' of the semiotic and symbolic in his work (Baudrillard, 1988, p.79) . Therefore, Benjamin's focus on detritus, waste, and residues as channels for the messianic interruption, might be deployed as a method of illumination in conjunction with Baudrillard's ideas of the sacrificial economy of waste, sacrifice and the symbolic. If semiotic culture is one of signs, media, and spectacle, the symbolic, by contrast, exists for Baudrillard as a challenge to the semiotic because it ruptures the

obsessive ‘production’ or simulation of the ‘real’, all the elements of its sophisticated staging thus revealing the fragile, contingent nature of how and what we understand as ‘reality’.

The messianic and the symbolic bear similarities in their order of ‘becoming’, both in their appearance as ‘interruptions’ and in their existence outside the realm of history or semiotic culture. Since both the messianic and the symbolic occur without warning, what remains at stake in both accounts is the extent to which either might be willed. For Benjamin, the messianic is a gathering of revolutionary consciousness in the moment, for example, in the ‘dialectical image’, which illuminates in an instant the contradictions at work within phenomena, and thereby the contingency of social and cultural organization, in a political *Gestalt* shift. For Baudrillard, the symbolic operates in a different register, without morals and without political agential will, arising instead from the excessiveness of the system itself. It serves to produce what Baudrillard calls ‘abreactions’ but not political consciousness. However, as Osborne states, it is “only if the Messianic remains exterior to history can it provide the perspective of a completed whole (without the predetermination of a teleological end), from which the present may appear in its essential transience, as radically incomplete” (2005, p.321). Thus, the messianic, whilst not *willed*, in its provision of a moment of recognition or revelation, allows for a reconfiguration of perception, and thus the kernel of transformative or political potential. For Baudrillard, the symbolic erupts similarly without warning but then inevitably falls back into semiotic modes of replication that nullify its critical potential – the status quo is quickly reinforced. For example, the events of September 11th, might function as a symbolic event but its force as interruption quickly mobilizes a mediated response in the so-called “War on Terror” to mollify and ‘explain’ the event through a set of familiar cultural and political tropes: “East versus West”, “Islam versus Christianity” “Rational versus

Irrational”. The symbolic, then, can interrupt but not radically reconfigure the social and cultural status quo.

Yet, despite their obvious differences, both the messianic and the symbolic are concerned with ruptures to the established order of things. In terms of the thesis, they offer a method for reading the buildings against the intentions of their producers. By producing analyses which begin from momentary experiences in these iconic cultural projects, my readings interrupt and intervene in the conventional narratives of the buildings as messianic, fragmentary arrests in the wider fabric, as tears, punctures and apertures. That I maintain such a method is possible is to reveal my adherence, in the end, to the messianic moment rather than the ‘chance’ of the symbolic ‘abreaction’.<sup>19</sup> That messianism, however, takes place absolutely within rather than without of semiotic culture. It is the attempt to redeem these buildings by finding ruptures in their apparent seamlessness and production of experience. To locate, what Benjamin would call their ‘secret cargo’ and Baudrillard, would call, their ‘secret image’: the opportunities the buildings carry in spite of, and unbeknownst to, themselves (Osborne, 2005, p326; Baudrillard, 2006, p.xii).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> As Osborne makes clear, for Benjamin, “both the Surrealist and Proustian models of experience from which [he] drew so much inspiration have an involuntary character which places them, subjectively, in the domain of chance. Their compelling force depends upon it. Yet as Benjamin himself shows, in his discussion of gambling as the transformation of time into a narcotic, to embrace chance is to surrender to the temporality of modernity as forgetting: intellectual mastery through practical submission” (2005, p.334).

<sup>20</sup> Baudrillard writes, “We are stuck in an unlimited, metastatic development of culture, which has heavily invested in architecture. But to what extent can we judge it? Today it’s very difficult to identify, in a given building, what belongs to this secret, this singularity that hasn’t really disappeared. I think that as a form it is indestructible but it is increasingly consumed by culture. Is any voluntary, conscious resistance possible? Yes, I think that each of us can resist. But it would be difficult for such resistance to become political. I don’t get the impression there could be any organized political resistance as such. It would always be an exception, and whatever you do will always be ‘exceptional’ in that sense. A work of art is a singularity, and all these singularities can create holes, interstices, voids, et cetera, in the metastatic fullness of culture. But I don’t see them coalescing, combining into a kind of antipower that could invest the other. No. We are definitely immersed in the order of culture, that is, until the apocalypse arrives” (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002, p. 20-21).

### *Aesthetic Logic: Aura and Simulation*

As I have already mentioned, there is a sense in which the entirety of the conceptual constellation I draw on is implicitly in play across the thesis as a whole. But some concepts, clearly, shine brighter in particular locations and illuminate more successfully than others the factors at work in the staging of experience in the various buildings. The concepts of aura and simulation are related to one another most obviously by Baudrillard's acknowledgement of his debt to Benjamin's work in perhaps his most well-known essays 'The Order of Simulacra' (1993 [1976]) and 'The Precession of Simulacra' (1994 [1981]). In 'The Order of Simulacra' essay, Baudrillard outlines his genealogy of simulacra from Renaissance first-order counterfeits to post-industrial third-order simulations which, as Gane argues, pertains to the particular forms of technical instruments available in a given historical period through which reality might be staged (Gane, 2000, p.16). Taking as its premise the revolutionary ability of the technological to 'mediate' the real, Baudrillard traces the history of representation from what he calls 'first-order' simulacra, giving as an example Renaissance art-forms such as stucco and trompe l'oeil. This ability to appear *as if* real (as in the case of the painted tree whose berries are so life-like birds gather to eat from it), successfully enforces the distinction between reality and the fake or counterfeit. This distinction is eroded by the technical capabilities of 'second-order' simulacra such as those produced by photography and film, which begin to erase the distinction between the original and its copy. Second-order representations, in their ability to reproduce many copies that bear no distinction from the 'original', produce a situation, as Benjamin states, where any notion of originality or uniqueness becomes futile. In the 'third order', one which Baudrillard appears to align with the technical capabilities of media-technico-scientific capitalism, 'reality' is infinitely reproduced and reproducible. What is produced in this order are the 'signs of the real'.

It is no longer a case of ideology in the Marxist sense, being that which successfully veils the contradictions of capitalism in order to convince that the order and arrangement of class society is natural, right and the best of all possible worlds. Rather, the order of simulation is of a different order altogether: that of the 'code' or, the production of the real without any recourse at all to origin, locale or context.

For Baudrillard, the social world or 'reality' has always been mediated through various forms of simulacra; the simulation is merely the most recent and pervasive form. Thus the third-order "corresponds to the communication revolution, the dominance of codes and the mass media...this form of simulation goes beyond any relation of representation: it is that which is always already reproduced" (Gane, 2000, p.15). Here Baudrillard makes his link to Benjamin, pressing him into service for his own ideas, and acknowledges that Benjamin, "was the first to draw out the essential implications of the principle of reproduction...that reproduction absorbs the process of production, changes its goals and alters the status of producer and produced" (1993, p.55). Thus, Benjamin's genealogy of the work of art in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility' (Benjamin, 2003 [1935-39]) outlines the effects of technical reproduction for the fate of the art work, being: the withering of the object's 'aura', the destruction of its unique status, and the tentative possibilities this affords for the political. For Benjamin, the 'aura' of an artwork is associated with its singular location in time and space, its uniqueness, the 'genius' of the artist and their ability to transmit their talent into material form, as well as traditional bourgeois values and categories of artistic merit and moral worth. Once shorn of these remnants of art's 'cult value', through the new media of film and photography, the aesthetic realm is instead reconfigured and reinvigorated through 'exhibition value', the ability to be circulated and on display (Benjamin, 2003, p.257).

Whereas Baudrillard understands technical capability as complicit with forms of simulation, Benjamin maintains a fragile political potential exists in new media technologies, present in their ability to represent and radically reconfigure the experience of modernity; its shock, transience and repetition. The fragility of this chance is made clear in the epilogue to the 'Work of Art' essay where Benjamin's assessment of Fascism and Communism's particular configuration of new aesthetic forms results in the aestheticisation of politics and the politicisation of aesthetics. The aesthetic realm, then, for Benjamin, is always in a constant tension between monumentalising the present and insulating it from future change by – in the case of Fascism – the 're-auraticisation' of Germanic Imperial values through the notion of national identity as timeless and universal, and – in the case of Communist Russia – a constant restaging and reimagining of the revolutionary moment (Abbinnett, 2003). Benjamin can, then, despite this constant threat to the aesthetic realm, maintain a tentative or cautious optimism for its political possibilities. This is possible, as Abbinnett suggests, because "the mechanical reproducibility of the image demands that we approach aesthetic experience in terms of its reconfiguration of the present. The technological arts of film and photography bear witness to the historical tragedy of reification (the 'storm of progress'), while at the same time pointing towards its unrealized possibilities of emancipation" (2003, p.89). For Baudrillard, the aesthetic realm is no longer able to retain its critical ability in this way. The transformation of media-technico-capitalism and the reproductive technologies at its disposal are so sophisticated that no time for reflection or political consciousness is possible. In his essay 'Requiem for the Media' he maintains that the media "fabricate non-communication", closing down rather than opening up the potential for imagining emancipatory futures (1981, p.169). Following his outline of the three orders of simulacra, in his later work he adds a fourth: the fractal or viral order. He contends:

At the fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value, there is no point of reference at all and value radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices, without reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of contiguity. At the fractal stage there is at no point any equivalence whether natural or general. Properly speaking there is now no law of value (Baudrillard, 1993, p.5).

In the essay 'The Hell of the Same', which first appears in *The Transparency of Evil* (1993 [1990]), Baudrillard outlines the fractal stage of simulation using the metaphor of the DNA code. In a discussion of cloning he suggests, just as the DNA code reveals the whole to be merely an accumulation of singularity "cloning enshrines the reiteration of the same: 1+1+1+1 etc" (1993, p.97). This 'hell of the same', as in the clone, is analogous to the way in which the system of simulation comes to replicate itself as a 'cellular metastasis' like cancer. Baudrillard argues (in a radical deployment of the concept of the monad as used by Benjamin), "If all information can be found in each of its parts, the whole loses its meaning" (1993, p.97).<sup>21</sup> For Baudrillard the human genome project seeks merely to "designate the smallest simple element, the minimal formula to which an entire individual can be reduced", just as "cancer designates a proliferation ad infinitum of a base cell without taking into consideration the organic laws of the whole" (1993, p.100). If cloning marks the phase of the fractal or viral reproduction of the body, for Baudrillard, the move towards virtuality engendered by technological advances, computerization and mass media, simultaneously, reduces information to the binary code and ensures that there will be no messianic cessation but rather a proliferation of sameness. Baudrillard states, "our Apocalypse is not real, it is *virtual*." Just as "messianic hope was founded on the *reality* of the Apocalypse", since we are trapped within our virtual reality of

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<sup>21</sup> It is in his discussion of cloning that Baudrillard again discusses Benjamin's work. He discusses cloning as "the last stage of history and modelling of the body, the one, at which reduced to its abstract and genetic formula, the individual is destined to serial propagation". He likens this loss to the loss of 'aura' of the traditional work of art in light of its mechanical reproduction. What is lost in cloning for Baudrillard is the 'aura' of the unique body. Just as through mechanical reproduction "things are conceived from the beginning as a function of their unlimited reproduction", cloning seeks to reduce the fate of the body to the same code and thus "ceases to be conceived as anything but a message, a stockpile of information and of messages, as fodder for data processing" (Baudrillard, 1993, p.99).

simulation, this ensures that “we will no longer have a right to this dramatic illumination” (2001, p.3).

The fourth order of simulation is best understood as the age of the transpolitical. The transpolitical ensures that every event is fragmented into a metastasis of representation. In this stage, like the computer virus, simulation spreads like a cancerous metastasis: it is a virulent attack upon the real through the breaking down of totality into the repetitious singular. In this fourth stage, we witness the attempts to eradicate the ‘other’, that which the system cannot assimilate, and its relegation to ‘difference’ in order that it may be represented and so become incorporated into semiotic culture. For example, Baudrillard discusses the AIDS virus as that which has sought to challenge the liberation of sexuality in a virulent form. Similarly, computer viruses attack the proliferation of information and ensure that, despite the system’s attempts, alterity may not be incorporated without consequences.<sup>22</sup> The ‘obscenity’ of representation to which the system subjects us is unstoppable such that “its no longer the future that is ahead of us, but the impossibility to end it all and see beyond the end” because “when everything can be seen, nothing else can be foreseen” (2001, p.2). He argues:

Living in our present societies occupied with the acceleration of all bodies, all messages, all processes in all possible sense and wherein, via modern media, each event, each narrative, each image gets endowed with the simulation of an infinite trajectory. Every political, historical, cultural fact is invested with a kinetic energy which spreads over its own space and thrusts these facts into a hyperspace where they lose all meaning by way of an inability to attain their meaning (Baudrillard, 2001, p.1).

This move to what Baudrillard calls the transpolitical and the globalization of the market is the format through which capital now functions. For example, Baudrillard

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<sup>22</sup> Baudrillard states “The high degree to which AIDS, terrorism, crack cocaine or computer viruses mobilizes the popular imagination should tell us that they are more than anecdotal occurrences in an irrational world. The fact is that they contain within them the whole logic of our system: these events are merely the spectacular expression of that system. They all hew to the same agenda of virulence and radiation, an agenda whose very power over the imagination is of a viral character ” (1993, p.57).

discusses how the ‘virtual money’ that is traded on the stock market results in a situation where its ‘real’ material impact is impossible to measure. Yet this acceleration of time and space paradoxically produces inertia. The system must endlessly repeat itself like a constant ‘action replay’.

In this sense, we are committed to experiencing history merely as ‘current events’ or purely aesthetic effects. For Baudrillard, history has reached its ‘critical mass’ and is now moving backwards. The transpolitical event – such as the (first) Gulf War or the fall of Eastern Europe and the attempts to establish democracy which followed, merely produced an ‘acting out’ of the political and served only to highlight its absence. He argues:

All of these instances failed. This revival of vanished or vanishing forms, this attempt to escape a virtual apocalypse is a utopia, in fact the last of our utopias – the more we try to rediscover the real and the point of reference, the more we sink ourselves into a simulation that has now become shameful and utterly hopeless (Baudrillard, 2001, p.2).

He goes on to suggest that since simulation absorbs any attempt to point to the real and collapses the possibility of political transformation through globalization, our efforts to recapture ‘reality’ results in an attempt to both ‘uncover the beginning’ and ‘speed up’ the end. This simultaneous desire to uncover, allied to a rush to anticipate, is exemplified in our obsession with points of origin through archaeology and the human genome project on the one hand, and potential futures through cloning and other reproductive technologies on the other.<sup>23</sup> The simulation of political events and war ensures that “all we are left with are effects” since “events themselves unfold without any signification or consequence and because effect stands in for the cause, we have reached the point where there are no longer any causes” (2001, p.4). The

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<sup>23</sup> Baudrillard discusses the fictional representation of cloning that appears in the film *Jurassic Park*. He suggests of contemporary society: “It’s a bit like the last scene of Jurassic Park, in which the modern (artificially cloned) dinosaurs burst into the museum and wreck havoc on their fossilized ancestors preserved there, before being destroyed in their turn. Today, we ourselves, as the human species are trapped in the same way between our fossils and our clones”(1998, p.3).

possibility for political reconfiguration in the conventional sense of the term is short-circuited, for Baudrillard, through the virulent proliferation of technologies of fourth-order simulation.

This interplay between aura and simulation is discussed in Chapter Three, where I read the cityscape of Salford as it is reconfigured by The Lowry as a cultural venue. Located in North-West England, approximately two miles from the larger city of Manchester, The Lowry is an arts complex comprising theatres, gallery space, screening room and the obligatory gift shop, restaurant and café. It is both named after and houses the collection of local-born artist L.S. Lowry (1887-1976). Designed by the Stirling-Wilford partnership, the building was the first of the four buildings in the thesis to be completed, opening on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2000. Taking as its ‘moment’ of figurative entrance, an encounter in the gallery space before Lowry’s painting *Going to the Match* (1951), I explore the order of spectatorship configured by the interior spaces of the building. A discussion of the fate of the image then, is evoked by The Lowry’s production and staging of experience. What haunts the space, I argue, present in both the painting and the various interactive activities visitors may make use of, is the spectre of class. When shorn of its attendant institutions of work, leisure and community, class registers itself merely as a proliferation of aesthetic effects: a ‘dress-up box’ of funny hats. Working-class life and culture, then, becomes distant, exotic, a lost and forgotten object, reanimated only as a simulated museum piece.

### ***Dreamhouses and Drugstores: Technology and the Cityscape***

The notion of the phantasmagoria, Benjamin’s rendering of Marx’s commodity fetish, plays a key part in his excavation of the Parisian arcades as ‘dreamworlds’ of nineteenth-century urban life. As David Frisby (1986)

acknowledges, these locations were bound up with Benjamin's attempt to produce a social theory of modernity through an excavation of its 'prehistory':

Benjamin's theory of modernity was to later have its source in the prehistory of modernity, one of whose central locations was the Parisian arcades of the earlier part of the nineteenth century. They were to be conceived as the threshold to a primal world of fantasy, illusion and phantasmagorias that expressed the dreamworld of capitalism' (Frisby, 1986, p.3)

The arcade was one of the architectural expressions of capitalism, one of its 'dreamhouses', and functioned as a space of enticement, illusion and liminality. Buck-Morss supports this interpretation when she suggests that, for Benjamin: "the key to the new urban phantasmagoria was not so much commodity-in-the-market as the commodity-on-display, where exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore" (Buck-Morss, 1991, p.81). New architectural venues then, as Benjamin recognized in the Parisian Arcades, create new modes of social interaction and communal experience. Along with new forms of technological media such as film and photography, new social spaces made possible by advancements in building technologies produce innovative modes of reception, which Benjamin characterized as a detached 'distraction', and imbued with the potential for forging new forms of critical consciousness. If the space in which auratic art is received is the awed reverence of the gallery space, museum or concert hall, and the manner a concentrated and contemplative state of absorption, new technologies produce what we might call 'post-auratic' forms of spectatorship and experience. Benjamin likens such modes to the way in which we already experience architecture: as habitual, in passing, taking the form of "a tactile reception". He states: "buildings are received in a twofold manner: by use and by perception" (2003, p.268).<sup>24</sup> This perception, then, best exemplified for Benjamin by the sauntering gait

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<sup>24</sup> The most well known translation of this passage is that from *Illuminations* (1999) and for the sake of completeness, I quote it here. "Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception- or

and fleeting glance of the *flâneur* is hijacked in Baudrillard's account, choreographed through displays of commodities in the 'drugstore' or shopping mall. The ordering of the mall's displays is deliberate and "arranged to mark out directive paths, to orientate the purchasing impulse towards *networks* of objects in order to captivate that impulse and bring it, in keeping with its own logic, to the highest degree of commitment" (1998, p.27). Whilst the arcades, for Benjamin, were the locus of commodity fetishism, since the glass fronts and interior settings ensured the commodities' visibility and proximity, they still engendered a distance which motivated a response.<sup>25</sup> In Baudrillard's analysis we witness a shift away from the dreamscape of the arcade towards the nightmare of the "machine for shopping"(Goss, 1993). For Baudrillard, this 'spectacle' is multiplied to its highest degree in the mall which "does not juxtapose categories of merchandise, but *lumps signs together indiscriminately*, lumps together all the categories of commodities"(1998, p.27). The mall takes from the arcade its interiorization of the city street and provides not just a lit passageway of enticement, luxuries and wonder but a total purpose-built environment for the display of the commodity, the drama of the spectacle and the proliferation of consumer goods. There are few opportunities for *flânerie* and its attempt to 'walk against' the urban crowd in the shopping mall. Just as technological advancements in iron and glass produce the arcades as the *Ur*-form of capitalist dreamhouse, for Benjamin, the architectural model which comes to inform contemporary buildings, for Baudrillard, is the mall; that insular, climate-controlled, policed, risk-free 'simulation' of the city street (1994, p.76). Thus, the shopping mall excoriates the 'reality' of the city street on which it is modeled and produces instead, a 'coolly' seductive space.

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rather, by touch and sight" (1999, p.233). I quote it too because I think it retains something that the new translation misses: the importance of the visual and the tactile in the perception of a building for Benjamin which is perhaps obscured by the omission of the qualifier of the earlier translation which adds: "by touch and sight" (1999). I also prefer the notion of buildings as something we appropriate rather than merely "receive".

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin's analysis of commodity fetishism and the influence of Marx, Freud and the Surrealists is described by Gilloch as the "deification of the industrial product, the eroticization of the inanimate object, [and] the projection of genuine aspirations and longings on to artefacts" (1996, p.126).

As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, which focuses on The Deep, an aquarium located in the North-East port city of Hull, the Marxist concept of the commodity fetish, as both Benjaminian phantasmagoria, and Baudrillardian simulation are in evidence in the various forms of commodified nature staged in The Deep. Here, the moment of figurative entrance is a material object: a snow globe purchased in its gift shop. Functioning as a commodity *and* a miniature world under glass, the snow globe is a perspective machine, a diminutive version of The Deep itself, plasticized and petrified nature under glass. What haunts The Deep, then, is the spectre of nature, and its untold destruction by the fishing industry upon which Hull once depended and thrived. If nature's commodified presence in The Deep is a form of forgetting of origins, as in fact all commodity fetishism is, the remembrance that takes place stages itself a Freudian 'return of the repressed'. In The Deep's restaurant, diners come face-to-face with marine life, both behind the glass and on their plates.

The Deep also reveals the extent to which technological advancement is essential to the staging and management of contemporary urban experience. The technological efficacy of the space structures the experience as a form of post-auratic spectatorship. By learning from the cinema and the video-game, the surfaces of the tanks, interactive devices and audio-visual equipment, combine to produce a kaleidoscopic 'spectacle of nature' (Davis, 1997). As Benjamin makes clear, architecture is both technology *and* media. He maintains that it is our experience of buildings in the cityscape that best captures the model for the experience of new media technologies: as embedded in the quotidian, experienced in passing and distractedly, rather than in an absorbed concentration. What becomes obvious is that the buildings that are the focus of my thesis must compete with the pervasive nature of technology in everyday life and are compelled therefore to incorporate its elements into their design and structure of spatial experience. The concept of 'distraction' is

particularly important since this tactile or haptic incorporation of the media object to which Benjamin draws attention is readily recognizable in our use of contemporary technologies such as mobile phones, digital cameras and mp3 players. Architecture, then, signals a new way of dwelling or being-in-the-world of new media. Benjamin's distracted spectator is able to activate a critical ability since the audience member's critical faculties are 'tested' against the 'reality' of what they witness on screen. Film, then, has the *potential* to foster critical consciousness in the masses, it opens up 'another nature' previously unseen to the eye, what Benjamin calls an 'optical unconscious'. For Baudrillard, of course, all media facilitate non-communication, substituting contact for content in the operationalization of a constant virtual interpellation. The shift from contemplative modes of reception towards distraction that Benjamin foretold is facilitated by the bombardment of media images facing the contemporary audience. In their very ubiquity however, they cultivate not critical consciousness but political apathy, the default condition of 'the silent majorities' (1983). Baudrillard states:

Contemplation is impossible, images fragment perception into successive sequences and stimuli to which the only response is an instantaneous yes or no-reaction time is maximally reduced. The film no longer allows you to contemplate it, it interrogates you directly (Baudrillard, 1994, p.63).

The 'test' function which Baudrillard attributes to the film, unlike Benjamin's test, is a test of pure functionality: "it triggers response mechanisms in accordance with stereotypes or analytic models" and so the media, rather than providing a new political space which transforms perception instead "translate a given conflict or problem into a question/answer game" (1994, p.63). The interactive and tactile elements of The Deep's exhibition space, then, radiate a different sheen when viewed through the lens of such conceptual configurations.

## *Erasing Traces, Tracing Erasures: Aura, Trace, Transparency & Seduction*

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin links his concepts of aura and trace. He writes, “the trace is appearance of a nearness however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth” (1999, p.447). The auratic, for him, is about the erasure of traces of origin and thus, like commodity fetishism, is akin to a form of forgetting. Equally, the masses of the modern city “efface all traces of the individual” (1999, p.446). As with many of Benjamin’s (and Baudrillard’s) concepts, their sense is often complex and contradictory. On the one hand, the destruction of aura offers political potential, on the other its associated loss provokes a melancholic response. Equally, traces are to be preserved, tracked down, as forms of remembering against the absent-mindedness wrought by bourgeois culture and commodity capitalism and, “effaced,” wiped out by the promises inherent in Scheerbart’s modernist glass architecture. One could be forgiven for being confused over this switching and reversal in Benjamin’s deployment of such concepts. As Wohlfarth suggests, Benjamin’s conception of the trace is perhaps best understood by reference to three figures in his work: the *flâneur*, etui-man and the destructive character. Wohlfarth writes:

The disenchanted world brings with it a crises of dwelling and an effacement of traces, thereby opening up an implicit alternative between three types: the peripatetic *flâneur*, who likes both to efface his traces like a criminal and to track down lost traces like a detective; the destructive character who effaces all traces; and the sedentary etui-man, who is anxious to multiply his traces within his own four walls. Thus, where the destructive character *effaces even the traces of his effacement of traces*, the etui-man *effaces effacement* in diametrically opposed fashion...The destructive character, is Benjamin writes, the ‘enemy’ of the etui-man. But the *most* destructive – the most *dishonestly* destructive- character is, clearly the etui-man himself – the bourgeois who seeks to replace *within* the traces that he has destroyed *without*. It is these *ersatz* traces that the destructive character effaces. He is, in short, the agent of a *renewed* disenchantment. He comes to disenchant re-enchantment. The traces he effaces are, in the first instance, less those of the crime than those of its luxuriating concealment” (Wohlfarth, 1999, p.148).

In Baudrillard's concept of seduction, it is precisely the erasure of the other's trace that portends the seductive strategy, as a complex game of reversal and a rejection of categories of meaning and discovery. Describing the following of a man by a woman artist, Sophie Calle, Baudrillard suggests that the secret game of following someone unbeknownst to them produces an erasure of the trace of the self and other. The game can only continue while the secret – the fact of following and being followed – remains. The city and the self then, is able to retain a certain enigmatic charm, a quality of not being known, it becomes a seductive space. The fact that at any moment the role could be reversed, the follower becomes the followed, highlights what is at stake. Baudrillard writes:

The other could reverse the situation, having sensed the stratagem, go after her, obliging her to accept his terms – he is no victim, he is as strong as she is). No the murder is subtler: it consists, as you follow someone step by step, of erasing his trace as you go. Now no one can live without leaving a trace. This is what makes anyone who is being followed turn around after a certain time (Baudrillard, 1999, p.130).

In Chapter Five, I read Benjamin's concepts of the trace and the storyteller in constellation with Baudrillard's concepts of transparency and seduction in a discussion of The Sage, Gateshead and consider what form traces might take in the contemporary city. A contemporary concert hall and music venue designed by Sir Norman Foster, The Sage radically transforms the Tyneside cityscape with its bulbous glass and steel structure. The relationship between individual and collective memory is drawn out in the chapter, which seeks to read memory itself as a form of trace and momentary arrest. The channels of this pause, then, are psychological: the building, by covering over old Gateshead with its shiny new footprint, opens up a new vista that, in turn opens up a memory trace. In this way, the seemingly auratic Sage is revealed as rather more ambiguous. In its erasure of traces of Gateshead's past it, paradoxically, opens up the possibility of remembrance: the trace of its process of

erasure. Memory in this sense functions as an aperture, which opens briefly to redeem the space. The Sage becomes a technological dispenser of stories. For Baudrillard, contemporary architecture, constituted virtually through technologies such as CAD, produces purely functional architectural objects.<sup>26</sup> They are ‘obscene’ in the sense that they reveal everything about themselves, leaving no place for illusion or drama, instead installing a total transparency. The city, then, through contemporary architectural projects, is emptied of threat and risk and therefore its strange attraction; risk and drama are literally ‘programmed out’. As Benjamin noted, the city is labyrinthine in all the various senses of the word: it has at its heart something both compelling and monstrous. For Baudrillard, contemporary architecture might *appear* monstrous – chimerical even- but it does not allow the individual the possibility of encountering or outwitting the monster. There is no ruse, no duel, no chance to seduce the beast. The memories that are evoked in the ‘walking away’ from The Sage perform what I argue to be a critical intervention into planned space. This idea is allied to Baudrillard’s concept of seduction; the potential for such walking to provoke a ‘leading astray’ which seeks to tease the building’s ‘secret’ from it.

### ***Ruins, Cultural Deterrence and the transpolitical***

In Chapter Six, I focus on The Public, an arts centre in West Bromwich, West Midlands, which, I argue, embodies the messianic cessation itself. The construction commenced in 2004 under the helm of architect Will Alsop, and was initially estimated at a cost of £32 million. My reading takes as its moment of entrance the point at which I was finally able to enter the building in February 2009, which seemed improbable at the point at which construction of the building was paused in 2006. It

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<sup>26</sup> CAD is the abbreviation of computer-aided design which is a short-hand way of describing the new forms of architectural technologies used in the production of contemporary buildings.

uses one moment in time, the eventual opening of the space, to reflect on another moment in its history, the point at which construction halted. The building, in this state functioned as a premature ruin, and thereby offered an opportunity to ruminate on its possible future. As Benjamin noted, it was when phenomena were at the point of inception or obsolescence, that they had the quality of being 'out of time'. At these points, they were pregnant with either utopian potential or the melancholy of ruined hopes. Either way they reveal the contingency of social and cultural organization, its curious fragility. Margaret Cohen writes:

Benjamin has heeded well the Marxian precept that a privileged moment to study the ideology of a social formation was when it was still under construction; when the raw joints and seams of its components had not yet been naturalized and/or masked. From the Surrealists along with Proust, Benjamin took the notion that an equally important moment was when a social formations structures started to decay, as their workings once more became visible (Cohen, 2004, p.203).

The Public occupies a liminal space in this regard: neither finished nor obsolescent it manages to hold both qualities in suspension thereby revealing something of the ambivalence of the contemporary cityscape. Plagued by the sacking of its architecture, vastly over budget, subject to changes of ownership and personnel, and the final humiliating failure of its interactive public galleries, which opened, finally, in the Summer of 2009, Baudrillard might consider this not as a premature ruin in the Benjaminian sense but as the object's revenge. For him, the Pompidou Centre in Paris offers up a model for all future cultural spaces. The Pompidou or Beaubourg announced itself as a monument to public culture at the very point at which public culture became an empty category – an ironic, cynical monument to the failure of '68. The Pompidou, then, functions only as a model of 'cultural deterrence', a 'sign' or simulation of culture in the face of its absolute impossibility. Baudrillard writes:

Deterrence is a very peculiar form of action it is *what causes something not to take place*. It dominates the whole of our contemporary period, which tends not so much to produce events as to cause something not to occur, whole looking as though it is an historical event (Baudrillard, 1994, p.17).

This deterrence function is a marker of the move to fourth-order of simulation or the ‘transpolitical’. This stage, for him, absorbs any attempt to point to the ‘real’ any longer, and yet our efforts to recapture and salvage meaning from media-technico capitalism result in an attempt to both ‘uncover the beginning’ and ‘hurry up’ the end. This duality of both the desperate attempt to uncover and the simultaneous rush to anticipate, is exemplified in our obsession with our point of origin through archaeology and the human genome project on one hand and potential futures through cloning and other reproductive technologies on the other.<sup>27</sup>

The many set-backs that have plagued The Public might function equally as the object refusing its allotted and prescribed role as a cipher of public culture at the moment when any sense of ‘the public’ is rendered impotent by increasingly atomized, individualized, and sectarianized Western societies. In its various ‘failures’, the building takes, what Baudrillard would call, its ‘revenge’, by imploding from within. An effect caused by the excessive investment of expectation in its ability to reanimate categories such as “the public”, “art” or “culture”. West Bromwich’s ‘star’, then, becomes its very own black-hole. I argue, rather, that by reading its ruinous moments as interruptions it avoids the ‘stamp of the definite’ and remains open to other possible futures.

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<sup>27</sup> Baudrillard discusses the fictional representation of cloning that appears in the film *Jurassic Park*. He suggests of contemporary society: “It’s a bit like the last scene of Jurassic Park, in which the modern (artificially cloned) dinosaurs burst into the museum and wreck havoc on their fossilized ancestors preserved there, before being destroyed in their turn. Today, we ourselves, as the human species are trapped in the same way between our fossils and our clones” (1998, p.3).

## *Momentary Interruptions to Major Histories*

In seeking out the momentary interruptions of the various buildings, as a form of ‘messianic’ pause, my thesis, attempts to adopt a Benjaminian approach, or at least, an approach which finds echoes in Benjamin’s work. I adopt the strategy of the ‘moment’ as a critical tool which might provoke alternative views of the buildings in question. Equally, by reading moments, the attempt is made to remain in contact with elements of the modern: the fleeting, the ephemeral, the contingent and transitory, which Benjamin, (and Baudelaire and Simmel before him), understood as constituent of modern urban life (Frisby, 1986). This is a reading which accepts the city as fragmentary, partial and incomplete, and proceeds as a technique to unpick the apparent totality of the spaces that are created in these landmark projects. As Benjamin’s analysis of the Parisian arcades hoped to demonstrate, such temples to commodity consumption, allowed, in their ruined state, the possibility of the dialectical image: the chance that, even if for just a moment, the concerns, values and rhythms of nineteenth-century Parisian life, could be discerned.<sup>28</sup> In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes:

By what route is it possible to conjoin a heightened graphicness (*Anschaulichkeit*) to the realization of the Marxist method? The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event (Benjamin, 1999, p.461).

The ‘dialectical image’, then, is exactly this kind of methodological moment for Benjamin, one he posits against the notion of history, or criticism, as the progressive

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<sup>28</sup> This is a method that owes a debt to Surrealist principles and practices of ‘profane’ juxtapositions, contiguities and montage of everyday objects, thereby revealing another layer of meaning underneath the conventional, a ‘sur’ reality. In the essay on *Surrealism*, Benjamin acknowledges the influence of Andre Breton on his own work: ‘He can boast an extraordinary discovery: he was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the ‘outmoded’- in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution- no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution- not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism” (Benjamin, 1999a, p.210).

acquisition of knowledge. The dialectical image, rather, reveals the contradictions of capitalist and bourgeois mores in imagistic instances. Benjamin writes, “In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only in lightening flashes. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows” (1999, p.456). The form of experience and aesthetic logic found in Benjamin’s work suggests that the aesthetic realm is able to retain some kernel of the ‘*weak* messianic power’ and is therefore able to illuminate, in the flash of the dialectical image, the social and cultural milieu. The dialectical image causes a brief arrest, a ‘profane illumination’ within the ‘catastrophe’ of sameness that is commodity capitalism and bourgeois culture, and therefore offers a moment of potential redemption. Its temporary arrest acts as a necessary ‘awakening’ from the somnambulism provoked by the phantasmagoric dreamhouse.<sup>29</sup> As Mike Crang argues, Benjamin, most notably in the *Arcades Project*, saw this as both a method of thinking and a practice of writing:

Instead of building a linear argument, he would work through images of juxtaposition and collage that would alter the meaning of each fragment... this procedure would make new truths erupt, and he hoped, disrupt the *status quo*, from the conjunctures and disjunctures between elements... Thus, for instance, he would present the latest shopping fad, next to the what seemed a dowdy obsolescent product to point out that both had made the same promise... The dialectical image sought to use contrast and comparison between things that were normally thought of as opposites (if put together at all) – the clashing and jarring of them would, he hoped, spark insights (Crang, 2003, p.136).

Further, as Buck-Morss suggests, the dialectical image was revelatory in that “the old-fashioned, undesirable, suddenly appeared current, or the new, desired suddenly appeared as a repetition of the same” (1991, p.100), thereby revealing the contingency

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<sup>29</sup> As Pinsky notes: “For Benjamin, Marx had understood that the hegemonic character of capitalism was, like all essentially mythic modes, both all-encompassing and, for that same reason, oddly fragile. In its ignorance of basic human needs and its blindness to the cost of human suffering it exacts, it not only requires the disenchantment of old religious- metaphysical forms of consciousness and sources of motivation, but also, in its advanced form, compels a new form of reenchantment that classical liberal political economy could not even register, let alone explain. Much of the *Arcades Project* describes this new enchantment as ‘sleep’, and the ideology of endless newness and guaranteed progress that capitalism depended on for a new motivational basis as a form of dreamlife. ‘Capitalism’, Benjamin writes in an unusually terse formation, ‘was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces’. Awakening from this sleep is the principle task of materialist historiography, and dialectical images are, for Benjamin, the moments of waking from this collective dream” (Pinsky, 2004, p.182).

of history and the erroneous nature of notions of progress under capitalism. Pensky notes that, for Benjamin, “images...need to be rescued from aesthetic discourses and endowed with a shocking, that is to say politically effective power” (2004, p.179). Yet, in Baudrillard’s analysis, the aesthetic realm is rendered impotent in its ability to critically illuminate the present (or the past) since the simulacra that serve to mediate the real for us in contemporary society obey no logic other than their own infinite proliferation. It is no longer a matter of the power of representation since simulation has ensured, as Gane points out, that: “reality itself becomes hyperreal in the aestheticization of reality through sign-value, media and computer models. These establish the blind but brilliant ambience of simulacra” (2000, p.15). What Baudrillard does adhere to though, despite the virulence of global semiotic culture, is the notion of singularity, either as an object or as an event (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002). This notion is held in reserve as a possibility against what he terms the “global” or the “neutral” object or event. In terms of architectural forms, the global translates as “clone architecture” or “screen architecture” which he sees in evidence in most contemporary architectural constructions. The singular, of course, is also akin to the momentary in its unique status, yet its possibility, for Baudrillard, cannot be willed, it must be discovered through serendipity, the realm of chance (Baudrillard, 2006). He writes, “it’s the idea of looking for something and finding something completely different...the important thing is to have looked. Even if you miss what you were initially looking for, the direction of the research itself shifts, and something else is discovered” (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002, p.73)

My readings of the four architectural projects I have studied, then, capture, at *this* historical moment, the ways in which the management of urban space and thus urban experience registers in given locales serving to mediate a particular relationship to the cityscape. To read the spaces against their ‘major history’ or culturally-

sanctioned narrative as presented by the architects, the Local Authorities and the official literature, is the purpose. Superfluous, commodified, design-led, theme parks to culture they may appear, but the teasing out of their significance is more complex on closer inspection. The very fact that these buildings are so-called catalysts of ‘regeneration’, the great white hopes of their locations and seen as able to assuage the impact of the crises of global capitalism, is a matter of poignant significance. But, of course, the very possibility of the buildings’ existence is predicated upon these very crises. They are, of course, the latest modification of capitalism, which, as Massey and Zukin point out, it is only in letting things go to ruin that there might be regeneration – capitalism is mobilized in novel ways but its basic contradictions are left unchallenged (Massey, 1988; Zukin, 1995) . The buildings are testimony to its particular configuration of the cityscape in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, following the financial crises of 2008, it appears that even the moment of iconic buildings is over. Instead, smaller projects, grass-roots ventures requiring far less investment are now sought (Linehan, 2007).

Attention, then, turns to the rescue operation: how we might redeem these buildings, if they even *are* redeemable; what the redemption they might provide is, and how that redemption might be ‘read out’ of the spaces they contain. As Benjamin remarks,

What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their “enshrinement as heritage.” – They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them (Benjamin, 1999, p.473).

The exhibition of such ‘fissures’ is the aim of the thesis, as against the passive acceptance of the buildings as forms of ‘cultural regeneration’. Such redemptive instances are sought to derail their prescribed choreography, and to produce

alternative 'entrances'. Entrances are also thresholds and therefore, as Benjamin notes, function as transformative locations: neither inside nor out they harbour a liminal potential. It is this potential, the ability to look, walk and read these spaces askance, or as Benjamin would have it, "against the grain, I am seeking to activate (2003, p.392). It is to seek a *Gestalt* shift, a transformation of perception, such that we can never look at the buildings in quite the same way again. Thus, these readings are not conclusive testimony, nor the last word on the matter, but it is what might be said now, at this point in history, at this moment in time. The door is of course always open: to return to the buildings at a future moment, to track their individual histories as they decay, or are re-made. The figure that provides the critical mode of taking possession of these spaces in alternative ways, I will argue, is a version of the *flâneur*.

### ***Melancholic Flânerie and Disruptive Perambulations***

The figure of the *flâneur* captures a fundamental ambivalence towards metropolitan life, a melancholy and a simultaneous fascination. There is, equally, a strong sense of melancholy permeating the work of Benjamin and Baudrillard, oscillating between a certain nostalgia and a simultaneous recognition of the futility of such nostalgia. This resonates strongly with the buildings themselves and the forlornness of their spaces. The buildings are both hopeful and hopeless. As attempts at regenerating the local economy they are plagued by the weighty expectations of success. What haunts the spaces, then, is perhaps the same sense of disillusionment that Benjamin detects in visitors to Berlin's art galleries. He notes how "their expressions...show ill-concealed disappointment that only pictures hang there" (1996,

p.481).<sup>30</sup> Equally, Baudrillard identifies a similar fate for the nebulous concept of ‘culture’ in the Pompidou Centre. He contends that it provides a space for circulation of the masses in the city, but not as a form of carnivalesque effervescence, or the radical congregations of 1968, but rather as terminal citizens of the silent majorities, “they exhaust themselves secreting an artificial solitude, remaking their ‘bubble’” (1994, p.62). Just as for Simmel the indifference and abstraction of the blasé attitude captured the psychological state of the modern city dweller, for Benjamin and Baudrillard, melancholia permeates the scene. For Baudrillard however this is not Baudelaire’s ‘spleen’, as a quality of *fin de siècle* yearning, it is, rather, the ‘tone’ of ‘systems of simulation’. Baudrillard writes, “We are all melancholic. Melancholia is the brutal disaffection that characterizes our saturated systems” (1994, p.162).

The *flâneur*, then, is useful as a methodological trope because s/he is both attendant to modes of urban semiotic capitalism, the melancholia and fascination of the city, and, I argue, in the act of walking through cities, able to provoke profane illuminations as critical interventions into these urban spaces. In Baudelaire’s poetry the *flâneur* is presented as a male figure of nineteenth-century urban life who in his perambulations registers the shock, transience and ephemerality of the modern city. He is both artist and dandy, immersed in the crowd and distant from it. Baudelaire captures the ocular nature of his perambulations and the quality of his mobile gaze when he describes the *flâneur* as a “kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness” (cited in Benjamin, 2003, p.328). In Benjamin’s work, the *flâneur* is the embodiment of the rhythms of capitalism and its antinomies, signifying idleness, time-wasting, non-productive experience and the circulation of commodities. He walks against the crowd rebuffing its incessant, massified surges and yet finds pleasures and diversions

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<sup>30</sup> This is something he notices in contrast to the galleries of post-revolutionary Moscow where the proletariat possess the spaces with a confidence and vigour the rest of Europe’s workers can only hope for Benjamin (1986).

therein. He is also, for Benjamin, the embodiment of the mobile gaze and the scopophilic pleasures created by the phantasmagoric modern city. In his last incarnation, however, he *becomes* the commodity, as a sandwich-man advertising his wares (Benjamin, 1999, p.448). Benjamin, then, draws attention to the figure's ambiguity and, in certain respects, his futility. His walking against the crowd, indeed even finding the space to walk, becomes increasingly threatened by the incessant nature of capitalist transformation and the ravages of urban development which sought to remove the arenas of circulation that were the *flâneur's* frequent haunts.

The gendered nature of *flânerie* is brought into question in the well-known debate surrounding the possibility of the female *flâneur*. Feminist scholars have critiqued the *flâneur's* ocular focus as indicative of the gendered and rational bias of modernity signifying the 'male gaze' and the relative freedom of men versus women in the new urban environments. For both Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock there could not be a female *flâneur*. In the nineteenth century women were barred from the street, closeted in the suburbs, or only able to walk in the city with a chaperone in tow (Wolff, 1985, p.45). Pollock draws attention to this fact through an analysis of the work of female nineteenth-century artists whose work draws on domestic and interior themes unlike their male peers whose focus was the city spaces of congregation, consumption and public life (1987, p.79). For Elizabeth Wilson, however, both Wolff and Pollock overstate the case (1992, p.100). She argues that their refusal to recognise women on the street or as public figures occludes certain class distinctions. For Wilson, working-class women were *always* public women, occupying the city as they travelled to their places of work or service. Equally, the prostitute is a public woman, although the term "streetwalker" conveys a rather different relationship to urban space

than *flâneur*.<sup>31</sup> However, Wilson even raises the question of whether the prostitute is the female *flâneur*. She writes,

Could not the prostitutes themselves be seen, ultimately, as the '*flâneuses*' of the nineteenth-century city? Such a suggestion may seem mere romanticism, and no feminist should ever romanticise the prostitute's lot in the way that men have so often done. Certainly, prostitutes, 'women of the streets' never inhabited the streets on the same terms as men. Yet to be a prostitute was not inevitably to be a victim – this notion was, and is, a feminist as well as a male romance of prostitution (Wilson, 1992, p.105).

Nonetheless, feminist attacks on the figure of the *flâneur* assume a coherence to male identity and ignore the specificities of class and gender. In doing so, they mask the complexities and nuances of the figure as either sociological *actualité* or cultural trope. Wilson suggests that, in fact, the figure of the *flâneur* reveals the very *lack* of coherence, the fissures and anxieties of nineteenth-century urban masculinity.

Deborah Parsons (2000) takes up this ambiguity and adopts the *flâneur* as a critical mode of reading. For Parsons, as for Benjamin, the figure is marginal, ambiguous, and even androgynous. In a survey of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women's writing, Parsons points to the ways in which women writers used the peripatetic figure as a trope of increased freedom, circulation and challenge.<sup>32</sup> Equally, like Wilson, Parsons does not accept the postulations of Wolff or Pollock that there can be no *flâneuse* merely because of the specific sexual divisions of the

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<sup>31</sup> Wilson writes, "The prostitute was a 'public woman', but the problem in nineteenth-century urban life was whether every woman in the new, disordered world of the city – the public sphere of pavements, cafes and theatres – was not a public woman and thus a prostitute. The very presence of unattended – unowned – women constituted a threat to both male power and to male frailty. Yet although the male ruling class did all it could to restrict the movement of women in cities, it proved impossible to banish them from public spaces. Women continued to crowd into the city centres and the factory districts" (Wilson 1992, p. 92)

<sup>32</sup> Parsons writes: "The concept of a *flâneuse* that I wish to propound is distinct from the *flâneur* that has been temporally universalized, and has thus become a highly complex concept, as a metaphor for the modern artist. From the examples that I have touched on in this chapter and will discuss in the following chapter, women as observers and artists seem to have increased access to the city as the male artist withdraws from it. The urban landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is even more variable, fleeting, and assaulting than that of the male *flâneur* of nineteenth-century Paris, yet it is a landscape to which women have greater access. The perspective of the *flâneuse* is thus necessarily less leisured, as well as less assured, yet also more consciously adventurous. A reassessment of the figure of the *flâneur* indicates that the concept of the urban spectator is ambiguously gendered. This androgyny undercuts the myth that the trope of the urban artist-observer is necessarily male and that the woman in the city is a labelled object of his gaze, from outside a gendered structure of literature (Parsons, 2000, p.41-42).

nineteenth century and the correlated designation of public space as male and private space as female. She writes, “Wolff and Pollock overlook the *flâneur*’s inherent contradictions” (1999, p.92). Parsons suggests that this fixed position is arrived at through a certain conception of socio-historical conditions as central to the concept of the *flâneur* which for her, and she argues for Benjamin, is less certain. She contends that the importance of the *flâneur* for Benjamin is “less...its historical identity and more ... its significance as a critical metaphor for the characteristic of the modern artist” (1999, p.92). She goes on to suggest that the decision to typify bourgeois women as being relegated solely to the private sphere, as Wolff and Pollock do, is overly hasty and denies the opportunity which exists to configure *flânerie* in the context of a female aesthetic.

Using Benjamin’s own ambiguous descriptions of the figure of the *flâneur* as a point of departure, Parsons considers the binary oppositions that arise from the different ways in which Benjamin describes and discusses the figure in his writings and considers whether these binaries are able to produce a third figure: the *flâneur* as androgynous being. She also aims to interrogate the notion of the *flâneur* as bourgeois rather than vagrant and authoritative rather than marginal, through a consideration of Benjamin’s writings on the figure in two key essays: ‘*The Flâneur*’ and ‘*On Some Key Motifs in Baudelaire*’. Rather than producing a monolithic account of the figure though, Parsons shows that Benjamin’s writings on the *flâneur* developed and changed over the time he worked on the *Passagenwerk*, thus avoiding any definitive categorisation. She writes:

The *flâneur* is frequently described as a personification of spectatorial authority, yet this interpretation overlooks the tensions and paradoxes inherent within the term, for, as Benjamin notes, the habitat of the *flâneur* was being destroyed just as he was becoming a recognizable social type, making the *flâneur* by definition someone who is out of place ( Parsons, 2000, p. 19).

This sense of marginality and being “out of place” is taken up by Sally Munt in an essay entitled ‘The Lesbian *Flâneur*’. Munt seeks to see the flâneur as a “vessel to be filled by the lesbian narrative...[to] contribute to the unfixing of the supremacy of the heterosexual male gaze in urban spatial theory” (1995, p.117). Taking three fictional *flâneurs* as possible models, Munt reads the flâneur as rendering possible multiplicities of identities and gazes in a “politics of *dislocation*” (1995, p.125).

It is this complex, ambiguous, “out of place” *flâneur* that I wish to appropriate as a model of reading contemporary urban spaces, positing my readings of the spaces in the thesis as a form of socio/cultural investigation that retains something of the *flâneur*’s reverie. Flânerie, then, offers both a critical mode of reading and a way of inhabiting space differently, a means of walking out of step. It is both a way of looking and a way of moving in alterity which might provoke both a perceptual shift and a corporeal recalcitrance or disobedience. The *flâneur*, then, can look differently and possess space against its prescribed intentions; s/he is an ‘insertion’, into the cityscape, capable of taking other paths. As Wilson points out there has been an enduring concern with women as an “irruption in the city, a symptom of disorder, and a problem” (1992, p.9). I am attempting to re-problematise and re-invigorate the category of disruption that is attached to the figure of the female and extend it, through the *flâneur* (as Parsons does) into an androgynous mode of reappropriating urban space, against the particular ordering that occurs in the buildings. Since the buildings so carefully manage the parameters of female (and male) experience, the *flâneur* becomes a necessary figure of disruption to the smooth interior spaces of the buildings.

The *flâneur*, then, is a figure that might articulate the complex web of *possible* looks and potential possession of space – tourist, local, adult, child, man, woman, lesbian – which does not seek to homogenise these differences, to smooth them out or

de-politicise them, but rather, which takes advantage of their disruptive potential, and the political possibilities of heterogeneous identities. These different ways of looking are political acts. This takes the view that the city however rational, designed, cold, planned, virtual it might be it is still an emotive, affective environment. As Benjamin notes, his map of Berlin would be made up of personal associations, in a recognition of the interpenetration of place, space and self. This turns the city against itself, imbues it with symbolic meaning that might disrupt its striated spaces.<sup>33</sup> Benjamin attributes a disruptive quality to the particular ways of looking inherent in children's play and appropriation of space. It is spontaneous, improvisatory and irreverent paying no attention to prescription or accepted social and cultural mores (1999a, p464-465). Lovers can be equally disruptive: the city takes on different qualities when charged with the erotic force of one's lover somewhere in the crowd.<sup>34</sup> In a 'One-Way Street' section entitled "Ordnance" Benjamin writes of Riga, the city where his then lover Asja Lacis lived,

I had arrived in Riga to visit a woman friend. Her house, the town, the language were unfamiliar to me. Nobody was expecting me; no one knew me. For two hours I walked the streets in solitude. Never again have I seen them so. From every gate a flame darted, each cornerstone sprayed sparks, and every streetcar came toward me like a fire engine. For she might have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar. But of the two of us, I had to be, at any price, the first to see the other. For had she touched me with the match of her eyes, I would have gone up like a powder keg (Benjamin, 1999a, p.461).

Here Benjamin locates the root of the messianic as it is articulated through personal happiness and disappointment, through the individual, subjective experience of an

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<sup>33</sup> He writes, "I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life – *bios*- graphically on a map...I have evolved a system of signs, and on the grey background of such maps, they would make a colourful show if I clearly marked the houses of my friends and girlfriends, the assembly halls of various collectives, from the 'debating chambers' of the Youth Movement to the gathering places of Communist youth, the hotels and brothel rooms that I knew for one night, the decisive benches in the Tiergarten, the ways to different schools and the graves I saw filled in, the sites of prestigious cafes whose long-forgotten names daily crossed our lips, the tennis courts where empty apartment block stand today, and the halls emblazoned with gold and stucco that the terror of dancing classes made almost the equal of gymnasiums" (Benjamin, 1999b).

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of love and lovers as disruptive to authoritarian attempts to control and manage the excessive energies of social democratic cities see (Lynch and O'Sullivan, 2007).

urban encounter. Every moment then, reveals itself to carry a secret cargo of potential, the chance of another chance.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has been concerned to set out the conceptual constellation that informs the thesis, to describe its form and efficacy for the purpose of both my readings of the buildings, and the interpretation of Benjamin and Baudrillard's critical repertoire. This constellatory relationship is essential to the understanding of contemporary urban experience and Benjamin and Baudrillard's modification of themes such as spectacle, the architectonics of consumption, technology, and politics. I also set out the strategy of reading contemporary architecture as a 'surface-level expression' and detailed the logic of reading surfaces as it appears in the work of both thinkers. By foregrounding the importance of the messianic and the symbolic as central concepts for each writer, I demonstrated how attendant political possibilities or lack thereof might be constructed through my readings of contemporary architectural spaces. Setting out my strategy of using moments as alternative figurative or symbolic entrances into the four spaces, I suggested that such a reading might perform disruptions to the smooth, planned experience of space as it manifests itself in the various buildings. By allying the use of momentary interruptions with the mobile gaze and bodily recalcitrance made possible by the ambiguous, dislocated figure of the *flâneur*, I suggest that my readings activate other possible ways of taking possession of these iconic cultural spaces of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that might retain a critical purchase on these slippery, elusive spaces of contemporary urban experience.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE LOWRY, OR CLASS, MASS SPECTATORSHIP AND THE IMAGE

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to the dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something is lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.

Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (1997)

Manchester was the scene of Lowry's loneliness. It gave a guise of locality to the phantoms that passed before his eyes. It imbibed him with the particular melancholy that blows in off the Pennines.

Howard Jacobson, 'The Loneliness of L.S. Lowry', (2007)

### *Going to the Match, Going to The Lowry*

The day is overcast and rather gloomy. Its winter chill is evidenced by the figures who hurry through the vast expanse of space towards the ground like arrows; bent almost double as if to ward off the wind's icy fingers. Hats of various styles: flat caps, bowlers and trilbies, cover their heads, while scarves and gloves offer further protection and a splash of colour. In the distance, the factory chimneys belch out their plumes of smoke and the church spire towers over the rows of red-brick terraced houses. To the right is an elevated figure, a soap-box beneath his feet to raise him above the crowd that has gathered. It's hard to say if he's a trade unionist, a missionary or merely a programme seller. There aren't many women, I notice. A few are dotted here and there but even they are outnumbered by the dogs. Stick-like figures that appear, because of their slender shape, to mirror their master's gait, bend into the wind too. Even the children are outnumbered by the dogs. Directly ahead looms the football ground. Its rhomboid silhouette dominates the scene and its stands appear already to be brimming with spectators. At the very top of the stand, on the right hand side, it is

possible to make out a row of small, bird-like figures which, after a moment, reveal themselves to be another line of spectators. Feeling brave, perhaps, sitting with legs swinging atop the highest edge of the stand, taking in, not the best view of the match, but certainly a bird's eye view of the surrounding area. And this surrounding area is formed of the *leitmotifs* of mid-twentieth century, working-class, urban life, captured on canvas by its most eminent painter: L.S. Lowry. As I step away from the painting, I read the card mounted on the wall to the left: *Going to the Match* (1953). The card further reveals that the image is a painting of football spectators making their way to a match at Burnden Park in Bolton. I shiver in sympathy with the figures in the painting, chilled to the core by the aggressive air-conditioning, aimed, one supposes, at preserving the artworks and preventing their deterioration so that future visitors, future generations even, might enjoy their nostalgic, homely, cosily-wrapped depictions of the past. But this painting, indeed, any of L.S. Lowry's art, may never have been here at all.



*Figure 1*

This chapter focuses on The Lowry, an arts centre in Salford, North West England close to the major city of Manchester. It houses two theatres, a gallery space, a children's interactive gallery [research centre], restaurant, café and gift shop. As one of the Millennium Commission's projects, the centre has been central to the recent regeneration of Salford Quays, the once prime dockland site of the Manchester Ship Canal. This chapter explores the order of spectatorship set in play in the venue through the exploration of a series of experiential moments provoked by the building beginning with my encounter with Lowry's *Going to the Match* (1953)<sup>35</sup>. This event triggers an exploration of Benjamin and Baudrillard's concepts of aura and simulation in a debate concerning the fate of the crowd Lowry paints. Issues of the transformation of spectatorship are also explored in terms of art and sport which mirror Benjamin's notion of the shift from auratic to post-auratic spectatorship. The classed nature of different forms of spectatorship is considered, with sports spectatorship, in this context the football crowd Lowry depicts, compared with the spectatorship of art as a historically bourgeois pursuit. In a trip to post-revolutionary Russia in 1926, Benjamin takes delight in witnessing the proletariat inhabiting once bourgeois cultural spaces with a new-found confidence. In Baudrillard's analysis, by contrast, the fate of football spectators is a demonstration of the fate of the masses, or what Baudrillard calls the 'silent majorities'. The provisional political potential Benjamin locates in the mass spectatorship made possible by new forms of post-auratic art, is contrasted with his colleague Adorno's faith in the 'aura' of the avant-garde, and with Baudrillard's claim that art is conspiratorial, giving the appearance of dissent whilst being riven with the values of the market. I consider the extent to which The Lowry both problematises the debate in its staging of auratic spectatorship – the viewer before the painting – with the production of its experience as post-auratic: accessible and collective.

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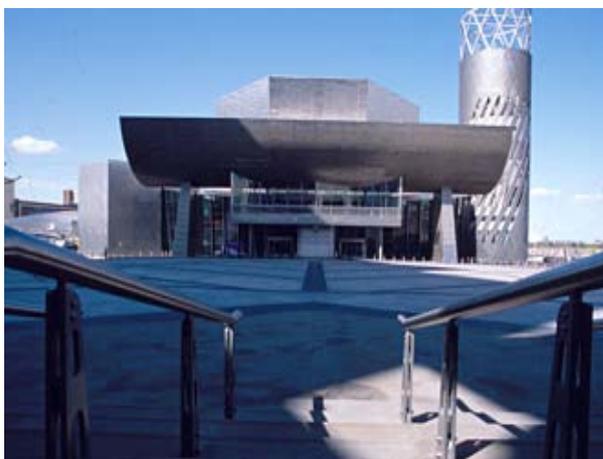
<sup>35</sup> This was originally entitled *Football Match* but its name was changed to *Going to the Match*. There is another painting by Lowry from 1928 entitled *Going to the Match*.

Finally, I question the extent to which aura is re-animated as an aesthetic effect through the display of the British pop-rock band Oasis' video for The Masterplan, which inserts the band into a Lowryesque cityscape, and in the galleries themselves through the use of dressing-up clothes. I argue that there is a pseudo-auraticisation, made possible, paradoxically by post-auratic media forms and spectatorship, or what Baudrillard would consider a simulation. Class is then configured through an iconography of nostalgic cosiness. We might understand this consumption of a lost world, of class as an aesthetic pleasure, as a particular experience of modernity. As Ben Highmore argues, "what counts as new, what is experienced as new, is not always the latest gizmo, but more often the foreign, the exotic" (2005, p.12). Configuring class as this form of the 'exotic' allows us to understand its consumption as an aesthetic pleasure of difference or otherness. To reverse one of Benjamin's famous images, aura is pumped back in<sup>36</sup>. I consider, then, how Lowry haunts the building as a 'destructive' element. Lowry becomes Benjamin's 'destructive character', serving to undo or puncture this cosy or nostalgic rendering of Salford's past.

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<sup>36</sup> In a discussion of Atget's photographs in a 'Little History of Photography', Benjamin remarks that Atget's technical skill at photographing the city, that which "was unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift", served a revelatory and political purpose. Atget's photographs 'work against the exotic, romantically sonorous names of the cities' and thereby "suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship" (Benjamin, 1999b, p.518).

## *Grand Scheme, Big Dreams*



*Figure 2*

The Lowry's ambitions are detailed in the book *Making The Lowry* (Myerson, 2000) Billing itself as a centre for 'art and entertainment'<sup>37</sup>, it is situated at the far western end of Pier 8 in Salford Quays, Salford,

Greater Manchester. It is bordered on each side by the Manchester Ship Canal and its former docks. Now mainly redundant, this once busy waterway was, for a time in the mid nineteenth-century, the most important trade route in the world. Manchester, as the major city, bears the scars of this former glory in the impressive façades and stature of its buildings, all monuments to Victorian capitalist entrepreneurialism and civic pride. The Free Trade Hall (now a branded hotel), site of Peterloo, the closest England came to revolt, the Town Hall and the old railway station façade of the G-Mex, are some of the notable grand architectural constructions. Salford, by comparison, in terms of architectural grandeur, is the rather poorer relation. The Lowry attempts to bring some twenty-first century architectural and cultural gravitas to Salford. Directly in front of its entrance is a large area of public space, fashioned as a plaza, framed by the Centre at one end and the Lowry Designer Outlet shopping mall at the other. On the left hand side of The Lowry, when approached from the east, is a footbridge linking the centre to Trafford Park and Daniel Libeskind's Imperial War Museum, another iconic millennial cultural project.

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<sup>37</sup> This description is taken from the centre's own publicity documentation.

Approaching the centre from the tree-lined canal-side avenue, the visitor meets The Lowry at its most imposing, arriving directly in front of its dramatic frontage. As one of its architects, Michael Wilford (of Stirling & Wilford) points out, The Lowry endeavours to be “a synthesis between the monumental tradition of public buildings and the more informal and accessible image of culture today” (Wilford cited in Clelland, 2000). This, then, is a public building that is ambitious in its aim: to provide a site for new forms of interaction with culture that remain untainted by the formal and reverent atmosphere of traditional cultural venues. Yet, it also nods to the local past and Salford’s previous incarnation as a site of industry and shipping in its design, by making allusions to the location’s nautical history. As Clelland points out, Michael Wilford’s speech at the opening of the centre very firmly set out his vision for how the centre might be viewed. Wilford said “we hope The Lowry functions well and becomes a source of pride among the citizens of Salford. Good Luck and God bless all who sail in her” (cited in Clelland, 2000, p.48). Thus by figuring The Lowry as a ship, Wilford makes reference to both Salford’s past and The Lowry’s future as a cultural space: a building in which to take a voyage, or, as Clelland remarks “a vehicle to ‘sail’ through culturespace, whether the space, together with it’s creative activities, is manifesting the visual or the performance arts” (Clelland, 2000, p.48).

It remains to be seen then what ‘anchors’ The Lowry to its locale apart from the nautical allegory. One might presume that the decision to house the L.S. Lowry collection must have been a pivotal factor in the commissioning of the building. This would be an erroneous assumption, however. The L.S. Lowry collection was, in fact, almost an after thought, and certainly it was not part of Stirling and Wilford’s original sketches for the site. It was only after a feasibility study had been carried out with regard to the use of the space as a gallery and the likely audience demographic researched, that the presence of visual art was considered. Salford Art Gallery already

owned the L.S. Lowry collection and so a ready-made collection was already within easy reach. As Myerson remarks:

Lord Cultural Resources reached the conclusion that the visual art dimension of the project needed to be reconsidered. Not only did the mainly small-scale works in the L.S. Lowry collection require an intimate sequence of custom-made galleries but there needed to be a study centre for the collection. In addition, having studied the demographics of the North-West of England, which has the highest concentration of children under 15 in the whole of Europe, Lord proposed a second gallery attraction – an interaction gallery for children and families which explored the nature of the performing and visual arts (Myerson, 2000, p.26).

Again, the need to provide a space that was far removed from the hushed reverence of usual gallery atmosphere is evidenced. The fact that demographic research played such a large part in the actual design of the building suggests that the scheme's success was crucial to the developers and the funders of the project and few chances were taken: this project had to appeal to as broad a cross-section of the local community as possible. Indeed, this reaching out to children was matched only by a reaching out to a broad spectrum of class groupings. As local councillor, Bill Hinds, pointed out: "Art in this country has always been a class issue. I've always felt that ordinary working-class people, kids especially, have never really been encouraged to participate in art"(cited in Myerson, 2000, p.29). Although this early optimism remained tempered by realism regarding the likely impact on the cultural lives of visitors a centre such as The Lowry could expect. Hinds said later: "I don't expect everyone will suddenly become an opera lover or a ballet lover or an expert on painting, but I do believe that everyone should have the opportunity to develop their minds and not feel it's not for the likes of them but for somebody higher up the social strata" (cited in Myerson, 2000, p.29). So, who better, then, as an artist, to draw in a wide variety of class groupings than the Salford-born, depicter of ordinary life than L.S. Lowry with his prosaic, provincial, medium-brow, figurative scenes that everyone can relate to? If The Lowry wanted to foster art-loving in the masses through its irreverent and transparent spaces, widening access to



Figure 3

culture and drawing-in the widest possible audiences to its attractions, L.S. Lowry would be the man to help them do it. The Lowry as an arts centre was always going to have art, but not necessarily Lowry's art. In many ways, the limited palette of his

city scenes are in dramatic contrast to the child-friendly, primary-coloured interiors of The Lowry centre itself. The fact that Lowry's work was never a *raison d'être* for the centre, although it has made use of its local associations to its benefit, is apparent in Clelland's review of the space itself. Certainly, Clelland raises the question of the success of the gallery spaces in terms of design. There is a sense in which, for him, the galleries housing of Lowry's art appears 'tacked-on', almost a dirty secret clouding the bright optimism the centre wishes to project. He notes:

The work of LS Lowry is not pivotal to the complex. Indeed the galleries for the permanent display of his paintings are perhaps the least convincing architectural achievements; the walls appear dull beneath an overweening roof....with the Salford of Lowry long gone, his automaton figures take their place in the freer, though perhaps more sinister, world we inhabit today. This notion of individual freedom is strongly engendered by the openness of the Lowry complex (Clelland, 2000, p.50).

This idea of freedom to traverse cultural space was an image that fascinated and pleased Benjamin too. In his *Moscow Diary*, written during his visit to the city in the winter of 1926, he writes fondly, and with misty-eyes, about the extent to which the proletariat in post-revolutionary Russia had come to "take possession of bourgeois culture" (1986, p.183). This traversal of the gallery space, a relaxed, confident perambulation, was certainly, for Benjamin, allied to the increasingly public culture of the city. Further, he notes how far removed this was from the experience of workers in

the rest of Europe (including his own native Germany) where to find the proletariat in a gallery would be to witness them having “the appearance of planning a burglary”



(1986, p.183).

The early years of Stalin’s Soviet Union offered more inspiring visions for Benjamin. He notes: “Nothing is more pleasantly surprising on a visit to Moscow’s museums than to see how, singly or in groups, sometimes around a guide, children and workers move easily through these

*Figure 4*

rooms” (1986, p.183). Indeed, for Benjamin, a

museum or gallery that appealed to a “wider demographic” was to be congratulated.

Fundamental to the comfort and inclusiveness of such a space were the kinds of displays and exhibits housed therein. Benjamin singles out the Polytechnic Museum for its “many thousands of experiments, pieces of apparatus, documents and models” (1986, p.183) as particularly successful, as well as the Tretikov Gallery where “the proletariat finds subjects from the history of his movement” (1986, p.183). Thus, the notion of moving easily through bourgeois space is equated with freedom and the democratisation of culture. Freed of the constraints of class-bound life the worker or child is able to educate themselves and foster their own appreciation of art. Even, perhaps, establishing a counter-canon, since the proletariat, by nature of his new freedom from bourgeois norms, is no longer, necessarily forced to consider the “masterpieces” as chosen by the collector, since he will, “rightly acknowledge[s] very different works...that relate to him, his work, and his class” (1985, p. 184). In retrospect, we might consider Benjamin’s remarks as hopelessly naïve and utopian but their echoes in the comments of the designers and commissioners of The Lowry

indicate their continued relevance for the use of space and education in the arts in contemporary cities. Who looks at art, who is able to look at art and who is encouraged to look at art are all questions raised by the designers, Local Authorities and funders of the Lowry project, the art of L.S. Lowry, and cultural commentators such as Benjamin and Baudrillard.

The Lowry prides itself on its public spaces, its pedestrian areas, and the flow of its circumnavigation. The Architectural Review praised its sequencing of public spaces as “the most urbane to be found in all the major millennium projects” with its promenades linking the theatres, gallery spaces, bars and gift shop. The building itself aims at openness, transparency and easy-access. Whether this encourages a more democratic engagement with culture is difficult to ascertain, though its aims are certainly worthy. How then does it stage an encounter with what Benjamin believed was an art form that supported, upheld and reproduced bourgeois power relations and cultural norms: painting?



*Figure 5*

In The Lowry’s exhibition spaces, we are positioned as spectators to receive his work in a particular way. The galleries, four connected box-shaped rooms, choreograph the spectator through

Lowry’s work in a thematic rather than chronological way. Interspersed with the paintings are sketches, letters to and from the artist, and photographs, in glass display cases, strategically-placed to break-up even this, rather small, exhibition space. We are encouraged to look in a particular way at Lowry’s world, to enter his way of seeing thematically. Thus, the famous urban

cityscapes are clustered together in one room which serves to intensify their impact. The theme of the crowd is apparent and, moreover it was the *architecture* of the crowd that fascinated Lowry, their clock-work like precision, their strategic comings and goings, the order in the rabble, the symmetry and patterns of the urban scene. The architectural form of Lowry's paintings captures the urban milieu in the actions of its inhabitants as much as the structures of the cityscape.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the choreography of The Lowry gallery mirrors the formality of Lowry's crowds. As Levy writes:

It was not in the people as individuals that the artist was to find the beauty he had earlier discovered in nature, but rather in the crowds, in the masses of people, in the patterns and shapes and rhythms they made against the background of streets and buildings, mills and factories, with their tall, smoking stacks. In these things he discovered the poetry of the industrial landscape (Levy, 1975, p.17).

*Going to the Match* (1953), demonstrated the command that Lowry had of the urban crowd and its formations. Andrews notes Eric Newton's response to the painting in The Manchester Guardian: "I cannot remember any picture of moving crowds more clearly stated than in *Going to the Match*, 1953, where two streams of spectators cross each other diagonally as though they had been drilled by a master of choreography" (1977, p.85).

This urban crowd, the experience of modern industrial urban experience itself, as described in the work of Marx and Simmel, is in many ways captured in Lowry's art. This transformation of experience engenders the masses, as proletarian workers, and as individuals who adopt the blasé personality. The urban crowd itself must be negotiated, the individual protected by the psychic shield of the sensorium which filters the buffeting effects of city living, its shock, its transience and its monstrosity. Lowry

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<sup>38</sup> Levy goes further when he states: "I think we must see him at his greatest *as* architect. His pictures have the strong, firm, securely interlocking qualities of architecture. Nothing is superfluous, everything has its place and its purpose in the scheme of construction. Everything balances, though not in any dull, symmetrical sense. The whole edifice is firm, solid, like a well-constructed building" (Levy, 1975, p.25).

managed to capture the essence of such experiences on canvas. It is to his vision of the cacophony of the modern industrial scene I shall now turn.

*L.S. Lowry's 'vision' of urban experience & the wane of 'aura'*

Britain's industrial past is laid bare in Lowry's paintings. The life that it both afforded and demanded is made visible in all of its complexity and mundaneity. The necessity of the preservation of such images is all the more marked since the life that Lowry's depicts is no more, or at least, is no longer as ubiquitous or visible in the same locales or habitus of contemporary working-class life and culture. Instead, that life is understood and experienced in a context that has been the "reflex and concomitant" (Jameson, 1991) of the destruction of industrial society – heavy industries such as ship-building, mining, textiles and manufacturing – and the attendant rise of the post-industrial. This wane, that began prior to, but was certainly consolidated post-war, of the British Empire and its associated trade routes, is characterised by the more general shift towards a global economy of consumption rather than production, and the impact that this has had on social life (Baudrillard, 1998). The fact of its decline, the sense in which the industrial scene and moment is over for Britain has led to a certain understanding of Lowry's work as 'cosy and nostalgic'. Certainly this view has prevailed in the years since his death in 1976 and is only recently being challenged<sup>39</sup>. Yet this 'cosiness' is an unfair and rather simplistic view of Lowry's work. As Mervyn Levy suggests:

The heart of Lowry's vision is of course the industrial scene; that combination of man (sic) and his environment which he was to discover in the early twenties, and which has provided him with the inspiration for his greatest

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<sup>39</sup> Howard Jacobson challenged this view in the Lowry Annual lecture in 2007. Jacobson notes "Not looking at what's before our eyes we have taken Lowry's matchstick men and matchstick cats and dogs...to be warmly appreciative, nostalgic evocations of the teeming street life of Manchester and Salford and it might be that every now and then temptation seized him to give into sentimentality of that sort...but for the most part these matchstick figures hurry off the canvas, the forward slope of their bodies suggesting not jut dejection, or the bad weather...but a sort of propulsion disconnected to their wills" (Jacobson, 2007)

pictures. The mills and factories, the smoking stacks, the grime and the gloom of the northern industrial scene out of which it has finally and miraculously distilled what Sir Herbert Read...described as 'the poetry of the English Industrial Landscape'. Yet is it much more than this, for Lowry's vision of the industrial scene affords a parable of man's (sic) destiny as acute for its time as that of Hogarth or Breughel in theirs (Levy, 1975, p.116).

Yet the notion of L.S. Lowry as parochial and provincial is a view that seems to prevail<sup>40</sup>. The subject matter of Lowry's paintings suggests that his art was of and for the people, from *below*. Marxist critic John Berger certainly had a political eye on Lowry when he chose his work for the *Looking Forward* exhibitions at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1952, 1953 and 1956, respectively, which were a mixture of British figurative realism, Kitchen Sink realists, Sickertian cityscapes by Ruskin Spear, and Lowry's industrial scenes. For Berger, as Spalding argues, "Lowry's paintings of industrial landscapes mirror [ed] the twentieth century decline of Great Britain". This was important since Berger, "as a Marxist...was alert to the ideological implications of style". As Spalding notes, however, Berger's initial appreciation of Lowry, as with other artists of the time, 'became more critical as his political attitudes hardened' (Spalding, 1986, p.95). For Berger, Lowry's industrial scenes, disappointingly, did not present the workers *at work*, therefore were not critical enough of the organization of the mode of production that forced this way of life into existence. Indeed, Lowry's cityscapes, rather, show the workers *escaping* from the grip of the mills, factories and other structuring institutions. Later in his career, and with what Allen calls 'over-indulgent hindsight', Lowry acknowledged that his desire to paint the industrial scene was prompted by his sense of its disappearance. His primary interest in capturing such scenes, then, was motivated by his propinquity to them rather

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<sup>40</sup> In the general conscience of the British public this was helped along, one might argue, by the rather unfortunate, trite, popular song of the 1970s *Matchstick Men* by Brian and Michael, whose subject matter was the familiar figures in Lowry's paintings and which became a number one British single after Lowry's death. The lyrics attest to the ordinariness of Lowry's imagery: "he painted Salford's smoky tops on cardboard boxes from the shops" and "kids who had nowt on their feet". They also attest to the eventual recognition that came to Lowry late in his life: "Now canvas and brushes were wearing thin when London started calling him", and the fact that the art world was eventually won over by this very Northern, very ordinary artist: "Now Lowrys hang upon the wall beside the greatest of them all, and even the Mona Lisa takes a bow".

than by politics or mere sentiment. He said, “I painted these subjects as I saw them... I was very interested in them because I lived among them. They were remarkable pictorial subject matter for me” (Andrews, 1977, p.49).

To position L.S. Lowry as overtly political, then, or to figure his work as sentimental and sepia-toned, is overly-simplistic. As critic Marina Vaizey notes, in the catalogue accompanying Lowry’s memorial exhibition at London’s Lefevre Gallery shortly after his death in 1976:

It is cosy and tempting (and all too many have been tempted) to dismiss, with a note of condescension his work as being charming, naïve and quaint. For some, this may mean it is all the more acceptable. But if we look carefully at the intelligent, imaginative and continually surprising compositions, the grainy silvery radiance of his drawings, his powerful way with colour, and with texture, we can, if we have but eyes to look, how far from the picturesque his vision is. His is a tough-minded, resolute view” (Vaizey, 1976, p.3).

In reality, his paintings are rather scathing, melancholic attacks on the brutality, ugliness and hardship of working-class urban life, and the attendant emptiness and barbarity of its institutions: the church, the family, football and the factory, and their moments of respite amongst the hardship. But this is not with the aim of revealing the darker side of class relations. As Lowry himself notes, he “was not thinking very much about the people. I did not care for them in the way a social reformer does. They are part of a private beauty that haunted me. I loved them and the houses in the same way: as part of a vision” (cited in Levy, 1975)<sup>41</sup>.

This vision was particular to Lowry as an individual, and a quality evoked by the urban landscape, which permitted a certain way of looking. One aspect of this was the various kinds of anonymity that the urban locale permits, in its concentration of many

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<sup>41</sup> One of the reviews of his work that Lowry retained memory of throughout his life, according to his biographer Shelley Rohde, was Bernard Taylor’s comments. Taylor not only gave space in terms of column inches to Lowry’s work in the Manchester Guardian, but also understood this vision:” He has kept his vision as fresh as if he had come suddenly into the most forbidding part of Hulme or Ancoats under the gloomiest skies after a holiday in France or Italy. His Lancashire is grey, with vast rectangular mills towering over diminutive houses. If there is an open space it is of trodden earth, as grey as the rest of the landscape. The crowds which have this landscape for their background are entirely in keeping with their setting” (Rohde, 1979, p.101).

individuals in close proximity. Lowry's vision of the city, his way of looking and seeing the world, are translated in a particular way for us by the presentation of his work in The Lowry centre.

The cityscapes of Lowry aren't merely realist scenes, however. As Levy suggests, and Lowry himself acknowledged, many of his scenes are composites of 'the actual and the imaginary incorporating a variety of elements from the stock mythos of the artist's imagery. Factories, buildings and streets woven into a 'vision'. As Levy points out with regard to *Going to the Match*: 'The picture is therefore not a picture of a particular football match but a 'vision' of all football matches" (Levy, 1976, p.79). Lowry's paintings, then, were 'dreamscapes' built up of this 'intimacy of affection with the crowd' and his own 'symbolic' vision. As he remarked to Mervyn Levy, 'if I had shown things as they are – it would not have looked like a vision. So I had to make up symbols. With my figures also, of course" (Levy, 1976, p.79).

The intimacy and affection with the crowd and the industrial cityscape was heightened by his position not only as locally-born and bred but also as someone who never travelled abroad. This fact provides an interesting juxtaposition to Benjamin's claim that it is the tourist who sees the city's veneer most sharply:

If we were to divide all existing descriptions of cities into two groups according to the birthplace of the authors, we would certainly find that those written by natives of the cities concerned are greatly in the minority. The superficial pretext- the exotic and the picturesque appeals only to the outsider. To depict a city as a native would call for other, deeper motives – the motives of the person who journeys into the past, rather than to foreign parts...the city as a mnemonic for the lonely walker: it conjures up more than his childhood and youth, more than its own history" (Benjamin, 1999a, p.262).

For Benjamin the necessity of habit and of finding one's way dulls the vision before the eye of the local. Yet, Lowry, I suggest, manages to retain a double vision, a keen eye for the novel, the remarkable and the profane which permeates the harsh industrial cityscape. The themes and images that recur in his work, not least in the fashions of the

stick-figures who populate his scenes, reflect an in-depth critical knowledge of both the North-West city and the artist's own past. In *Going to the Match*, the flap caps, bowler hats, scarves and boots of the masses are evident, even though the painting was completed in 1953; long after such styles had waned. Andrews notes:

He was once asked why all the people in the crowd scenes in his pictures, even in the 1950s, wore the old-fashioned clothes, the shawls and the caps and big boots, of a y gone age. He replied: 'That's because my real period was the Depression age of the twenties and thirties. My interest in people is rooted there. I like the shape of the caps. I like the working-class bowler hats, the big boots and shawls.' But Lowry was only pleasing the questioner, not answering the question. Working-class bowler hats for any but special occasions were extinct by the 1920s. Lowry's true period was the time before the Great War: the period of his *Mill Worker*, shawled and clogged, of 1912; the period of *Hindle Wakes* (Andrews, 1977, p.75).

Lowry's 'dreamscapes', then, his composites of real and imagined places, reflect both aspects of his own biography as well as his relationship to the cityscape of Salford and Lancashire. This focussing on the fashions of figures of the past even when the scene and the fashions had evolved, was a process of preservation: Lowry kept reanimating such scenes in his paintings. As Levy notes, Lowry's local vision was something he stumbled upon, discovered by accident:

When I was young, I did not see the beauty of the Manchester streets. I used to go into the country painting landscapes and the like. Then one day I saw it. I was with a man in the city and he said, 'Look, it is there'. Suddenly I saw the beauty of the streets and the crowds (Lowry cited in Levy, 1975, p.17).

This notion of the chance find echoes Benjamin's notion of the 'profane illumination': that which flashes up out of the cloak of the everyday and reveals something previously unseen. The crowd as a key element of Lowry's vision, and as a constituent element of modern life for Benjamin and Baudrillard, is the subject to which I now turn.

### ***The Shock of the Crowd***

Lowry's vision, his way of looking askance at the urban milieu, and his explanation for this ability is related to his experience as an outsider, and to his

loneliness, the fact of possessing the keen eye of the solitary individual. He remarks, “had I not been lonely, I should not have seen what I did” (cited in Levy, 1976, p.3)<sup>42</sup>. Lowry’s mode of looking, then, this being simultaneously *in* but not *of* the crowd, is analogous to Benjamin (and Baudelaire’s) description of the *flâneur*. The urban crowd of course fascinated Benjamin too. In his work on the poet Baudelaire, he identified Baudelaire’s *flâneur* as a key actual and allegorical urban figure, along with the ragpicker, gambler and prostitute (Benjamin, 1973). The *flâneur* is part of the urban mass but moves against it in particular ways, whether in traversing or seeing it differently, from the perspective of the outsider, exile or stranger. The crowd for Baudelaire, as Benjamin describes, is a reservoir of electrical energy which one dips into and receives the ‘shock’ of modern urban existence:

Moving through this traffic, involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electrical energy (Benjamin, 2003, p.328)

The urban crowd then for Baudelaire and Benjamin, as for Lowry, is both a stimulus of, and an assault on, the senses of the city dweller. The diversity of people, their proximity and energy, subject the stroller to the buffeting effects of modern life.

Lowry’s fascination with outsiders, the grotesque and the ugly was far less politically motivated and far more to do with the radical aesthetic formation they offered. His painting *Cripples* (1949) is not sentimental or pitying but draws the eye to the

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<sup>42</sup> Exile and loneliness, seeing differently, out of time or space, are also, of course, claims made of Benjamin’s work too, and his faith in the ‘heroes of modernity’, those figures on the margins, to reveal something of the experience of the modern city must also be considered in conjunction with his own precarious position in exile in Paris during the 1930s when such ideas came to fruition in his work on the *Arcades Project*. Similarly, Baudrillard’s peculiar position as a ‘peasant’ in Paris and his less than conventional route into and associations within the academy also cast him as an intellectual outsider of sorts. Of course, this calls to mind the title of the 1926 Surrealist novel by Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, somewhat of an oxymoron in that the term ‘peasant’ refers to those not from the French capital. Certainly, both thinkers have been considered ‘out of time’ in some way, seeing either beyond their time, against their contemporaries, or outside disciplinary conventions.

spectacle of urban oddity and the urban as the site of such radical juxtapositions, of the diversity within the masses.

He is often, as in *The Cripples*, a mocker of suffering – his sense of irony is acute. That same malice of fate which denied his parents, and his mother especially, sight of his success, also shaped *The Cripples*; *all* cripples. They will not be spared in his canvases, his compassion will not ameliorate their lot. They will be seen for what they are; grotesque and comic objects ‘funny to look at’, as Lowry observed...[he was not] interested in deformity as an element of human suffering, only as an appearance: comic, ugly and grotesque (Levy, 1975, p.16).

Just as Baudelaire’s prostitutes were both grotesque and alluring, or Benjamin’s lesbians ‘mannish’ and heroic, Lowry’s cripples and other urban ‘oddities’ were ugly and comic. Yet he understood them, just as Baudelaire and Benjamin did, as endemic to the cityscape as a sight of aesthetic novelty and horror. However, his love of Charlie Chaplin’s slapstick-battling against the absurdities of modern life is evident in both the subject matter and the costumes of his figures – the big boots, bowler hats and canes.

Levy notes:

The artist has often spoken...of his affection for the art of Charlie Chaplin, and there seems little doubt that his own humour has been influenced at points by the film comic. His paintings of the *Man Lying on a Wall* and *Father Going Home* display more than a touch of Chaplinesque influence. Both pictures are the very stuff of like, exemplifying as they do the revolt of the little man” (Levy, 1975, p.19)

Benjamin too was fond of Chaplin noting, “in his films Chaplin appeals both to the most international and the most revolutionary emotion of the masses: their laughter”. Quoting Soupault, Benjamin notes “aside from the fact that this is the hardest thing to do, it is socially also the most important” (Benjamin, 1999a, p.224). But whilst laughter was certainly a motive in Lowry’s art, as Levy notes, this was not the cosy laughter of nostalgia: “There is even something of the classical fairy tale element in his vision – that sharp, sometimes terrifying, contrast of good and evil, of malicious or at least, mischievous forces always at work alongside the safe and happy areas of life” (Levy, 1975, p.13). Lowry’s work appears to resonate, then, with something of what

Mike Gane has called Baudrillard's Manichaeism: the inevitable entwining of the good and evil at play in the world, in a constant duel. As Gane notes, this is not evidence of Baudrillard as a mere 'evil genius',<sup>43</sup> watching scornfully as the world "tumbles into ruins". Rather, he writes, "Baudrillard insisted he was merely melancholic, fascinated by the exponential logic of objects in their passionate indifference to human subjectivity" (Gane, 2000, p.32). Melancholic Manichaeism, or ironical pataphysics, then, his only theoretical weapon now that 'dialectical and revolutionary responses [are]...completely inappropriate modes of resistance" (2000, p.32). Just as Baudrillard searches for other modes of resistance, Lowry too hardened his attitudes and became more ironic, more scathing in his later work.

The crowd as a spectacle and a sea of bodies is both intoxicating and terrifying. In order to make the crowd less anonymous, Benjamin notes, physiognomists produced pen portraits of urban types in the magazines of nineteenth-century Paris, in an attempt to tame the urban mass (Benjamin, 1999). The negotiation of the anonymous crowd renders a shift in the form of experience characteristic of modern life. This is the distinction Benjamin makes between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. As Benjamin notes, in 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', if *Erfahrung* is the notion of experience as intelligible, enduring and coherent, *Erlebnis* is one of disparate, disorganised, shock-like interruptions (2003, p.343). As Highmore notes:

For Benjamin, everyday modernity evidences a major trauma: modern *Erlebnis* is no longer registered as *Erfahrung*. The 'fragile human body' that has been bombarded on the battlefield and whose senses have been daily assaulted in the modern city, has had a glut of *Erlebnis*. What has been blocked is the sense making that would give account of this within a collective culture (Highmore, 2005, p.67).

This transformation of experience is both a cause of excitement and intoxication, as the crowd and the city offer visual delights and distractions, and also occasions a sense of

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<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of Baudrillard as 'evil genius' in relation to Derrida, see Abbinnett, (2008).

loss, of experience as no longer enduring and coherent but evanescent and fleeting. This produced an affective response, first noted by Benjamin in Baudelaire's work: melancholy. The notion of melancholy as a particularly modern and therefore urban quality of experience, is articulated most famously by Baudelaire in *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869). Melancholy, as the mood of modernity, is concerned with a certain waning and transformation of experience<sup>44</sup>. As Benjamin notes, Baudelaire's city is 'veiled by tears of nostalgia' and of the loss of auratic experience the technological modern life engenders (Benjamin, 2003, p.338). For Benjamin, melancholy is a threshold mood to a transformative moment; it both accompanies modern life and is what provokes the mood for social re-ordering and re-organization<sup>45</sup>. Equally, for L.S. Lowry, his melancholic mood, engendered on his urban perambulations, was the catalyst to a moment of creative transformation resulting in his paintings. For Baudrillard, however, melancholy does not provoke or produce transformation in this way, rather, it becomes the *modus operandi* of contemporary semiotic culture. It is where we end up. Melancholic fascination is the experience of the crowd as aesthetic spectacle, a theme taken up by Baudrillard in his 1980s American travelogue. Baudrillard also recognizes that the contemporary urban crowd has an energy, what he calls, a 'kinetic' quality. However, in his writing about what he claims is the last great modern city, New York, he finds that the crowds on the street, the constant circulation of people, elicit, not shock, but a form of 'ecstasy'. This crowd is atomised rather than collective; it is merely the circulation of bodies through the geometrical grid of streets in a mass spectacle. Unlike European streets, which are subject to a certain ebb and flow of the masses and a history of insurrection and revolution, for Baudrillard, the streets of New York are "turbulent, lively, kinetic, and cinematic, like the country itself" (2000, p.18).

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<sup>44</sup> Spleen in this sense is translated as "melancholy with no apparent cause, characterised by a disgust with everything", from *Le Nouveau Petit Robert* 2009

<sup>45</sup> I discuss this further in relation to boredom as similarly transformative, in Chapter Four which focuses on The Deep.

There is no purpose to the activities of its inhabitants other than to present the “permanent scenario of the city” (2000, p.18). The waning of auratic experience that Benjamin identifies in modern urban life, the shift to *Erlebnis*, ironically, results in a concomitant ‘smoothing out’ of shock’s disruptive qualities. The crowd, for Baudrillard, exists not as a reservoir of energy into which one is dipped for spectacle and diversion, but as pure ‘cinematic’ spectacle, a pure image. Indeed as Rex Butler (1999) suggests, for Baudrillard “a hyperproductive city like New York is in danger of becoming a pure simulacrum, of collapsing under its own perfection”<sup>46</sup> (Butler, 1999, p.65). If Benjamin identifies a shift in the qualitative experience of social life in the modern city, as a certain ‘waning’ of tradition, I wish to turn now to its parallel shift in the experience of art. These are the transformations Benjamin associates with the destruction of the artworks’ ‘aura’.

### ***Aura, the Image and Meeting Mr. Lowry***

If modern urban experience is about the shattering of experience as enduring, coherent and focused on tradition, there is a concomitant transformation in the aesthetic realm. In the fragment *Dreamkitsch* (1927), which is his earliest discussion of Surrealism’s ability for revelation, Benjamin notes the spatial quality of what we traditionally understand as ‘art’ which “begins at a distance of two meters from the body” (1999a, p.4). This distance, then, is an important aspect of the ‘aura’ of the artwork and its mode of reception, in the traditional gallery space. Benjamin notes:

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<sup>46</sup> This notion of the collapse of the perfect system is discussed by Baudrillard in *The Transparency of Evil* (1993) wherein he turns his attention to the globalisation of political and cultural forms and is experienced as ‘pure simulation’ as in the global capitalism which attempts to impose a system free from the evil of the ‘other’, such homogenisation only seeks to subvert ‘evil’ into a form of virulent attack from within the system itself. As a system of ‘pure simulation’, global capitalism whose logic is to eradicate all traces of ‘otherness’, seeks only to leave itself vulnerable to attacks from within. Thus the evil ‘otherness’ is experienced as a virulent attack. For example, the imposition of a system of unrestricted communication through computer technology opens itself up to attack by viruses. As a grotesque form of the spectacle the collapse of the Twin Towers eerily encapsulates Baudrillard’s notion.

“the essentially distant is the unapproachable; and unapproachability is a primary quality of the ritual image” (2003, p.338). These ritualistic elements of art are linked to its place in history and tradition, what Benjamin calls its ‘cult value’. ‘Cult value’ is the historical and ritualistic climate within which the artwork was created and connected to notions of singularity, originality and artistic genius. The auratic quality of art then is enforced by the sense of reciprocity between the viewer and the artwork, a seeing and being seen. ‘Aura’ endows the object with the ability to look back at us.

Benjamin writes:

Experience of the aura thus arises from the fact that a response characteristic of human relationships is transposed to the relationship between humans and inanimate or natural objects. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us (Benjamin, 2003, p.338).

Lowry’s paintings then, which track the ebbing away of industrial modes of life, also trace the decline and disappearance of that version of urban modernity. In our encounter with his art, we are embroiled in the melancholic gaze of aura as one of modern life’s evanescence, even as we experience his art in what Benjamin would consider an *auratic* encounter. This is as much to do with the tricky, ambiguous concept of aura itself. As Gilloch notes:

Aura is unfathomable darkness, unbridgeable distance, unexpected reciprocity. As such it combines both negative and positive moments. On the one hand, it is a form of obscurity and inscrutability, a murky residue of the cultic origins of the work of art; in the other it is a source of ‘melancholy, incomparable beauty, a moment of mutual recognition, a mnemonic device for the remembrance of the dead’ (Gilloch, 2002, p.177).

This understanding of aura brings it into close contact with Baudelaire’s spleen and, I would argue, Lowry’s vision. As Leslie points out, aura is “an aspect of experience in general”. It is technological transformation which begins its eradication. Just as the cityscape and the crowd witness the ebbing of aura from day-to-day urban experience, installing a shock-like, quality to the urban milieu, reproductive technologies eradicate

the haze of aura from the work of art. Leslie writes, “Aura’s decline is manifest in technological cultural forms such as film and photography. This does not imply, however, that aura has seeped out off all experience *tout court*, for art is only a subset of possible experience” (Leslie, 2007, p.149).

Benjamin, of course, constantly sought to find the dialectical moment, the moment of transformation that this destruction of aura might entail. For him it was the political potential the destruction of tradition might herald. Transformations in technology were central to this transition. If traditional methods of art such as painting and sculpture were concerned with the artwork’s ‘cult-value’ new forms of technological reproducibility released art’s ‘exhibition value’. This ‘exhibition value’ could be deployed politically since the artwork is able to be disseminated and circulated to a wider audience. Thus art is separated from the magic and ritual traditions that underpin notions of artistic genius and traditional bourgeois artistic categories. Post-auratic art is concerned with dissemination, with being on display. Photography and film, for Benjamin, are the media that herald and allow this shift.<sup>47</sup> If aura is the explicit distance of the artwork from the viewer – however close or near to it we are – photography and film bring the world into proximity by their technological interrogation of space. Herein lies the political and revolutionary potential of post-auratic art, but equally its potentially fatal consequences. Caygill outlines Benjamin’s position thus:

Technology can be used to resist the change in experience, to monumentalise the present by closing it off to any other future than the repetition of the present, or it can be used to promote the transformation of experience itself. Benjamin did not see these alternatives as options, since technology was ineluctably changing the nature of experience, and if this were not affirmed, the attempt to freeze the present and deny a future would generate imbalances, distortions and the release of the uncontrollable violence of passive nihilism (Caygill, 1998, p.95).

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin writes: “Painting, by its nature, cannot provide an object of simultaneous collective reception, as architecture has always been able to do, as the epic poem could do at one time, as film is able to do today” (2003, p.264).

Just as aura is destroyed then, it can also be *re-animated* through the very same new technologies that mark its destruction, for example in the ‘cult of the movie star’ and the aestheticization of politics.

At the exit to The Lowry’s gallery space is an exhibition of the film *Meet Mr Lowry*. This biographical film is screened on a loop for visitors who take their seats in an open-plan space of benches. This serves to stress the casual, non-didactic, non-auratic nature of the delivery of information, and is in contrast to the more formal seating arrangement of the centre’s theatres. Lowry is shown discussing his paintings and his inspirations in a very plain, apparently non self-reflexive way. He says, “I just paint what I see”. There is little artistic pretention, in fact, he is actively resistance to such indulgence. This is of course, in itself a construction of a particular ‘image’. Lowry was well-known for misleading interviewers, the press and even his biographers. He was particularly keen that the fact of his day-job be concealed lest he was deemed to be a mere ‘weekend painter’ or hobbyist (Rohde, 1979). Yet at other times, he actively encouraged the idea that he was merely tinkering at his pictures. The film, then, offers some rather crude psychological analysis, making reference to his closeness to his mother, the fact of his never having married and the discovery of paintings after his death which evidenced an eroticism or libidinous quality absent from his more well-known cityscapes. However, to construct him not as enigmatic, inscrutable, genius, but as accessible, and ordinary is still absolutely, to bestow an auratic reverence upon him in terms *of* that ordinariness, and that ‘northern-ness’. The footage of him talking as an elderly man ascribes to Lowry a cuddly, if somewhat eccentric, uncle quality and, thus, by proxy to the building that houses his work and takes his name. This sense of romantic nostalgia, in the staging of Lowry and his art, imbues the centre with a borrowed authenticity that actively constructs The Lowry

Centre as inclusive, accessible and unthreatening. It provides a familiarity that smoothes out the building's insertion into the Salford cityscape.

The exhibition, then, despite Lowry's commentary to the contrary, stages him as an auratic spectacle. In the film, he explicitly both undermines and gives fuel to this reading, (remarking "I am not an artist, I am a man who paints"), just as the film and its staging work to undermine the content of Lowry's cityscapes as both melancholic and critical. Its presentation instead stages our relationship to his work as cosily-insular, infecting it with the qualities of an urban coherence. A coherence The Lowry centre itself wishes to re-animate. Aura, for Benjamin, as Leslie points out "is about distance, about being cut off from the source of something" (Leslie, 2007, p.151). The distance of the industrial scene is made more so, not less, in The Lowry's attempts to bring it closer for us. We are cut off from the industrial scene Lowry painted, since it has all but disappeared in this locale, our only access to it is through its auratic re-staging in The Lowry centre. This serves to imbue Lowry with what Gilloch (2005) has called an 'artificial aura', We do not encounter the subject matter of his art, the modern city as he did, alienating and disturbing, beautiful and mournful in the same moment, but as cosy, familiar, digestible, and thereby shorn of its critical qualities.

This inscription of synthetic or artificial aura demonstrates something of the limits of Benjamin's faith in post-auratic art's political potential. Despite the fact the new media technologies enabled the democratising principles of dissemination and thus mass spectatorship, Benjamin's optimism is tempered by their potential to be harnessed as a 'force' of the system itself. In a biting critique of Fascism he addresses the fate of new technologies in an era which serves not to release the masses from their oppression under capitalism but rather to maintain it through the diversionary tactics of rallies and parades, thereby "giving the masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves" (1999, p.234). The Lowry's claims to cultural inclusion and

expression may well be considered a diversionary spectacle of the kind Benjamin envisions, but, of course, the truly terrifying fate that he imagines is far more devastating and dangerous than mere 'bread and circuses' for the urban crowds. His concern is that film and photography are deployed as the technologies of propaganda<sup>48</sup>. Benjamin's final 'proactive formulation', as Gilloch notes, is: "Fascism as the aestheticization of politics, and communism as the politicisation of aesthetics" (Gilloch, 2002, p.194). It is in this context that the *contingent* potential of new media in Benjamin's work must be understood. Its potential is constantly under threat of being wrested away by sinister ideological forces. Of course, it is this wresting away, conditioned by the ascendancy of replication, circulation and exhibition value in new media forms, that Baudrillard takes from Benjamin and deploys in his notion of simulation. Here, Baudrillard demonstrates the fragility of Benjamin's political potential and instead demonstrates the tragic outcome of Benjamin's concept of aura: not only the aestheticisation of politics, but the radical, unrelenting, aestheticisation of every aspect of social life. Like Benjamin, Baudrillard tracks the fate exhibition value such as is made possible by technical reproducibility. There is no more original and its copy but rather, argues Baudrillard, the second-order simulacra of the series: "the very possibility of two or *n* identical objects...In the series, objects become indistinct simulacra of one another" (Baudrillard, 1993, p.55). In its third order, it's 'post-industrial phase' the simulation is characterised by a referral to the real not in the way that the counterfeit refers to the real but in the creation of a total reality that no longer refers to any real outside of itself, the hyperreal. This transformation of the image sphere in terms of its effect on modern spectatorship, and political organisation of the masses, is a subject to which I will now turn.

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<sup>48</sup> Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of Will*, amounts to little more than a Nazi propaganda film of the Nuremberg rallies, is a prime example of Benjamin's concern. It is interesting to compare this spectacle of the masses to LS Lowry's cityscapes of the urban crowd.

### *Aesthetics and the Masses*

The famous debate between Benjamin and Adorno (Adorno, Benjamin et al., 2002) is concerned with how the aesthetic realm is able to contribute to the social transformation and the fostering of political consciousness. Adorno argued that autonomous art (through its asynchronicity with the economic base and avant-garde formations) was central to this process and remained a possible force for the forging of the critical consciousness necessary to produce social change. Leslie argues that both Adorno and Benjamin maintained a faith in the proletariat as the (only) revolutionary class but whilst the decline of the bourgeoisie was inevitable, the communist reorganisation was less so. Leslie writes: “Benjamin does not suppose the triumph of the proletariat to be a question of historical inevitability, but rather a matter of social necessity whose realisation is uncertain. He defies the oblivious optimism of the vulgar-Marxist interpretation of social change” (Leslie, 2000, p.4). Technology, then, offers possibility of social change and reorganisation but does not guarantee its outcome. Leslie warns that, for Benjamin,

Proletarian power is not a mechanical, natural, or inevitable result of technological change, but a possible, though not necessarily guaranteed, interruption of calamitous technological developments. The fizzling ignition-fuse, emblem of the devastating, explosive power of the bourgeoisie must be severed before the spark makes contact with the dynamite (Leslie, 2000, p.5).

Equally, as Blencowe points out, whilst the masses remained Benjamin’s revolutionary subjects, it was the nature of their constitution that determined their agency; whether they were formed as a ‘loose’ or ‘compact’ mass. As she explains, the distinction Benjamin makes is not merely between the masses and the individual but rather in the qualitative difference of the masses. The proletarianized masses are a ‘loose’ mass capable of remaining open, flexible, and differentiated through class-consciousness. In contrast, the ‘compact’ mass of the petit bourgeois, constitute a qualitative inflexibility

and crowd-like “reactive psychology”(Blencowe, 2008, p.149). This ‘loose’ mass, then, is, for Benjamin, the receptive audience for new forms of collective post-auratic spectatorship. This makes a crucial distinction that counters the claim that the “masses” are generally reactionary towards non-auratic art. Blencowe writes: “The loose masses, given the right conditions, can and do experience new destructive art as meaningful and valuable” (2008, p.149). These ‘right conditions’ are connection to the nature of art’s *collective* reception<sup>49</sup>.

The ability of film to ‘open up’ the inaccessible is further proof for Benjamin of its revolutionary potential. In terms of the urban environment, film is able to capture the very elements that he himself, in his *Arcades Project*, and arguably, LS Lowry in his vast cityscapes, attempts to uncover. Therefore, the hidden, the discarded, that which is lost to the contemporary eye, is represented anew and thus critically illuminates the present in the dialectical image. Unlike painting or sculpture, wherein the aura of the artwork imposes a distance between object and spectator, film invokes closeness, a proximity that abandons contemplation and immerses the spectator in the action. The speed of movement of film ensures that “no sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it has already changed” (1999, p.231). In this sense, notes Benjamin, film produces a new form of spectatorship which is categorised by distraction rather than contemplation. This mode of reception is characteristic of modern life and the increasing number of stimuli vying for the individual’s attention. However, as Caygill points out, this distracted form of spectatorship is not to suggest that the individual is paying less attention but rather it is predicated upon “a different, more flexible mode of perception” (1998, p.115), and critical ability, similar to that of the sports spectator. Benjamin writes:

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<sup>49</sup> Blencowe writes: “If the collectivity is composed of qualitative difference, if it is a loose mass, and *if* the mass is in a situation to formulate a *collective* response, as are the audience of a film, then the collectivity *itself* can provide a medium for perception” (Blencowe, 2008, p.150).

It is inherent in the technology of film, as of sports, that everyone who witnesses these performances does so as a quasi-expert. Anyone who has listened to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race will have an inkling of this (Benjamin, 2002, p.114).

It is the fate of such flexible modes of collective reception to which I will now turn.

### ***From Urban Crowds to Football Crowds***

From the Quays Theatre Bar, at the eastern tip of The Lowry, it is possible to look out across the waterway and see Old Trafford, the stadium of Manchester United, glimmering in the near distance. This is not the stadium that features in Lowry's *Going to the Match*, which is Bolton Wanderer's Burnden Park. Corporate sponsorship and the floating of football teams on the stock exchange have rendered football spectatorship a very different affair to when Lowry captured on canvas its gathering crowds. Indeed, even Burnden Park is no longer the home of Bolton Wanderers, instead it is the recently-built, corporate-sponsored Reebok Stadium. For Benjamin, the sports spectator demonstrated what he hoped would become the fate of the masses: the enabling of critical faculties of the spectator. Benjamin noted that the distracted spectator of a cycle race was the mode of looking engendered by post-auratic artworks such as film and photography. He writes, "the audience is an examiner but a distracted one" (Benjamin, 2003, p.269) Post-auratic artworks, then, are concerned instead with 'exhibition value', with mass spectatorship, distribution and consumption. For Benjamin, such dissemination serves to produce a new critical consciousness within the masses since they are able to become 'experts', or, critical viewers. However these critical viewers, of either sports or film, were engaged in public or collective spectatorship, sharing their watching experiences. This potential is certainly under threat with regard to sports, as a recent commentator in *The Guardian* remarked:

A modern reworking of LS Lowry's famous 1953 piece, *Going to the Match*, would require the matchstick figures not to be striding out towards the Bolton Wanderer's ground, but slumped in armchairs with a remote control in one hand and a family-sized bag of Doritos in the other. Clearly, they would no longer be match-stick figures. If football was once the people's game—a claim it could make even long after Lowry — there are now new owners (Kelner, 2007, p.33).

The rising cost of football tickets since the incarnation of the Premier League in 1992 and the ensuing battle over TV rights has endeavoured to promote the game's profile and attract a whole new set of upwardly-mobile fans, simultaneously dismantling football's place as an institution at the centre of working-class leisure time. This is most clearly symbolised in the success of Manchester United. The juxtaposition of The Lowry and Old Trafford in the context of Salford Quays is, as Benjamin might have argued, a 'profane illumination' of spectatorship. Baudrillard might argue it marks the era of theme-park, 'disneyfied' football just as much as The Lowry marks the moment of theme-park 'disneyfied' 'culture'.

Football, historically viewed as 'more than just a game' and, rather, a pillar of working-class life, has been reduced to the spectacle of a theme-park ride, and a very expensive one at that. As Kelner argues, this dilemma between watching your team in the flesh at great expense or on the box at great expense has taken a further turn: "this season, a viewing card, a direct debit to one, other, or all of the sports broadcasters, and a high-speed broadband internet connection will replace, hat and rail ticket in the football fan's armoury" (Kelner, 2007, p.33). New forms of technology such as digital TV, the internet and mobile phones, have created other arenas in which to view the beautiful game. Indeed, Kelner notes the sense of shame once attached to not 'being there', physically, at the game, is rapidly on the wane: "in fact, it is almost a working-class badge of honour to watch on TV, a sign that although you might not be able to afford a couple of grand for a season ticket, you have not abandoned the...game altogether" (Kelner, 2007, p.33). And, of course, even those reduced to armchair status

are expending significant amounts of money to do so. The auratic status of being ‘at the game’ of going to the match, is thus radically transformed.

In Baudrillard’s analysis then, the ‘masses’, whether compact or loose, are transformed into the inert ‘silent majorities’. Unlike Benjamin, for Baudrillard there is no differentiation here, only a congealment of apathy and boredom. The political or cultural realm, becomes a desperate attempt to gauge a response from the disinterested ‘silent majorities’ who can no longer be represented<sup>50</sup>. For Baudrillard, the masses absorb every attempt to engage them. This is their power, their challenge to the system, their mode of resistance. Neither ‘optimistic’ nor pessimistic, but, rather, “ironic and antagonistic” (2001, p. 211). Baudrillard is persuasive in his argument and indeed one cannot deny that a general inertia seems to haunt the social and cultural realm. Sports spectatorship, for Baudrillard, is the demonstration of the hyperconformity of the disengaged, apathetic, *apolitical* contemporary ‘masses’. For him sport now functions in the domain of the transpolitical: “a transparent form of public space from which all the actors have been withdrawn, and a pure form of the event from which all passion has been removed” (Baudrillard, 1993, p.80).

To demonstrate the removal of this passion Baudrillard uses the example of a football match which was played to empty stadium, to prevent violence breaking out between opposing supporters. This ‘phantom’ match was played not to a physically-present audience but instead relayed ‘live’ televisually, to millions. This ‘minimization’ of the event, one which for him made such little impact as to have hardly taken place at all, was simultaneously ‘maximized’ on screen – relayed as a pure image. He writes, “No one will have directly experienced the course of such

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<sup>50</sup> We need only consider the voting categorisations such as ‘white van man’; ‘Mondeo man’; ‘pebble-dash families’ to understand how attempts to represent the ‘unrepresentable’ masses are carried out in contemporary society. Baudrillard argues “each individual is forced despite himself or herself into the undivided coherency of statistics” (2001, p. 213).

happenings, but everyone will have received an image of them” (Baudrillard, 1993, p.80). The football crowd, then, are locked out for fear of the reality of their ‘lively passions’ and agitations. The aura of the crowd is lost in the abyss of the screen image. This is “a pure event, in other words, devoid of any reference in nature, and readily susceptible to replacement by synthetic images” (1993, p. 80). Just as there is a synthetic aura, then, for Benjamin, there is, equally, a synthetic simulation for Baudrillard. In another example, football spectatorship becomes the key marker of the era of ‘silent majorities’. The masses for him, have little interest in collective *political* action, but are rather more concerned with the collective *spectacle* of the sports event. Their potential revolutionary energies are swept up in the euphoria of support for their national team<sup>51</sup>.

New technological arenas, then, as Benjamin recognised, produce new kinds of spectatorship. A recent media account describes the impact of the YouTube phenomenon on football fandom. Not only can those who missed a game watch re-runs on the website but the format also allows amateur video makers to post film clips, too. This new medium allows for a window into modern-day football viewing in a quite unexpected, humorous, but ultimately, poignant way:

There is a hilarious and instructive YouTube clip that sums up the current state of football fandom brilliantly. It is simply a recording of the reactions of a West Ham fan as he watches on Sky TV his team’s crucial end-of-season fixture at Old Trafford, when Carlos Tevez’s winning goal preserved the Hammer’s Premiership status. Nobody watching him burying his head in the sofa cushions, pacing around the room, chewing his fist, alternately muttering imprecations, shouting at the TV, or stunned into temporary silence, would doubt for one moment the viewer’s passion (Kelner, 2007, p.33).

More than a comment on the phenomenology of watching contemporary football, Kelner posits the image as the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of *Going to the Match*. The story has a further ironic twist: after the clip is forwarded to West Ham fans across the globe,

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<sup>51</sup> Baudrillard notes how a world cup qualifying match is watched by more spectators than a presidential debate (Baudrillard, 1983, p.12).

within a day or so of the video being posted, it had been viewed by approximately four times the number of people than had been inside the ground watching the match it references. The piece ends by reminding us that while *Going to the Match* features football in its bygone era as working-class theatre, even viewing the painting, not to mention the scene it depicts, is further complicated by the fact that its £1.9million price tag ensures it hangs in the rooms of those who can afford it: The Professional Footballer's Association. It is, *at least for now*, on loan to The Lowry, not hidden away in the rooms of the PFA.

### ***Conspiracies of Art: Warhol and Lowry***

The art market and its vicissitudes concerns Baudrillard, too, in particular in terms of its emptying out of the possibility the aesthetic realm holds to render a critical moment. Indeed, the very painting with which this chapter opens has been at the centre of its own art-world event. To date, *Going to the Match* is the most valuable Lowry painting ever sold. Lowry was never particularly interested in the price of his paintings, although at appropriate moments he had no objection to selling them for financial sustenance, claiming to be keener that owners liked his work rather than owned it from a financially speculative point of view. As Andrews notes “he was profoundly grateful for genuine appreciation. He did not like to see his picture used as speculator's commodities” (Andrews, 1977, p.108).

That the value of art is rendered monetary is a fact underlined by American economist Tyler Cohen who, in a recent book, urges the bored visitor to the contemporary art gallery to “discover your inner economist” by “pretend[ing] you're thief deciding what to steal” (Cohen, 2008). The example is used to illustrate the various advantages of the market mentality, in this case an end to the indolence that art

and culture foist upon us. Upon reading this comment one cannot help but be struck by its similarity, yet notable difference, to Benjamin's discussion of the proletariat in European galleries in the 1920s. However, in Cohen's case, the reason to approach an artwork as if about to steal it is concerned not with an unease at the space in which it is housed, but, rather more with the staving off of boredom by the amateur assessment of a painting's likely price. Hardly the same issue that troubled Benjamin during his reveries through post-revolutionary Russian cultural spaces. Yet, the same issue, of art and its market, is taken up by Baudrillard in his essays *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays* (2005). For Baudrillard the aesthetic realm is rendered impotent at the moment Duchamp signs his urinal and places it in the gallery. This marks a descent into the 'ready-made'. It is at almost the same historical moment of course, that Benjamin discusses the political potential that might accompany the transformation of categories of art through reproduction. Andy Warhol's 1960s pop-art, concerned with the replication and repetition of screen-print images, is, for Baudrillard, the natural legacy of this Dadaist sleight of hand, and of Benjamin's post-auratic art. At first sight Warhol's work offers a biting critique of society's consumer values. For Baudrillard, however, when Warhol is still producing those iconic repetitious images thirty years later, they are no longer 'authentic', in the sense that they are an original deployment of the reproductive artistic technologies. Instead they become 'synthetic' simulations – bad copies of bad copies – their critical power short-circuited. Simulation, then, in this sense colludes with what he calls the 'conspiracy of art'. How the notion of simulation further plays into The Lowry's ordering of spectatorship is the discussion to which I now turn.

### *Simulating Lowry's Cityscape: The Masterplan*

At the entrance to The Lowry's gallery spaces, in an exhibition of 2007, The Lowry staged the video of the Manchester pop/rock band Oasis. In *The Masterplan*



(2006) video the band are drawn as 'Lowryesque' characters and inserted into a Lowry landscape. The video references various Lowry paintings, including *Going to the Match* (1953), *Man Lying on a Wall* (1957) and *Daisy Nook* (1946), in a virtual

Figure 6

blurring of auratic and post-auratic spectatorship

exemplifying the 'necessary' interactivity of contemporary art spectatorship. In the decision to stage the video as part of their art exhibition, as an auratic spectacle of post-auratic media, The Lowry offers a curious sensation of mirrors being held up to mirrors. The centre that seeks to regenerate Salford, using the artwork of an artist who painted the city's past, stages the pop video of a local band who seek to key into nostalgic depictions of northern vernacular culture by having facsimile versions of themselves inserted into an animated Lowryesque cityscape. Oasis, then, are showcased in The Lowry as *participants* in Lowry's paintings. The video is not just animation, but a *re-animation* of Lowry's industrial cityscapes. It serves to bring the band and The Lowry galleries into constellation with the signifiers they themselves wish to align: nostalgia, working-class 'Northernness', and a lost, but mourned, (and fictional) urban coherence. This is a particular strategy of contemporary cultural spectatorship which, as Baudrillard states, must align the viewer, as closely as possible, with the artwork. He writes:

All cultural spaces are involved, some new museums, following a sort of Disneyland processing, try put people not so much in front of the painting - which is not interactive enough and even suspect as pure spectacular consumption - but into the painting. Insinuated audiovisually into the virtual

reality of the *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, people will enjoy it in real time, feeling and tasting the whole Impressionist context and eventually interacting with the picture. The masses usually prefer passive roles, and avoid representations. This must change and they must be made interactive partners. It is not a question of free speaking or free acting- just break their resistance and destroy their immunities (Baudrillard, 1997, p.22)<sup>52</sup>

This is not post-auratic democratisation either, but the recreation of *synthetic* aura, or in Baudrillard's terms, a *simulation* of aura. Despite Benjamin's tentative optimism for the destruction of aura new technologies herald, and the radical political potential this might unleash, he also acknowledged that they could be used to 'close off' the present. Photography and film are able to capture the rhythm of modern life by their technical means, "reflecting upon experience from within and changing it" (Caygill, 1998, p.95). Equally, argues Caygill, Benjamin was fully aware of the possibility that they could "be used to conform to an existing pattern of experience and to insulate it from change" (Caygill, 1998, p.95). To abolish the photograph's contingency, such as in the



Figures 7 & 8

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<sup>52</sup> Disneyland for Baudrillard is an important signifier of what he calls the 'deterrence function' of cultural spaces. For Baudrillard, Disneyland may appear to reinforce the ideologies of American values, albeit in "miniature and comicstrip form" (1994, p.12) but it actually exists as a function of deterrence, as an attempt at "saving the reality principle" by "concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" (1994, p.13). The ludic, childish qualities of Disneyland exist in order to trick us into believing that 'outside' is adult when in fact "childishness is everywhere" (1994, p.13). Thus Baudrillard argues, "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (2001, p. 175).

process of the 're-touch', was to conform to previous aesthetic norms and to limit photography placing it within the realm of auratic art and the bourgeois categories to which this was subject. For Benjamin, technology must maintain the contingency that the photograph and the film possess and not attempt to recreate 'aura' by 'monumentalising' the present. The staging of the Oasis video, I would argue, does just that, in simulating Lowry's industrial scene the iconography of the video plays on the image of Lowry as a signifier of working-class, Northern culture and therefore as a short-hand for authenticity. The visual signifiers therein are less Lowry's critical vision than the trite song *Matchstalk Men*'s cosy depictions. In the video itself the band are inserted to a simulated version of Lowry's artworks, including *Going to the Match*, which is re-staged with Manchester City as the home team (Oasis's local side), and Lowry's scurrying spectators are dispersed into a homogenous blue mass already inside the ground.

This strategy of course fits with both The Lowry's own staging of Lowry's work, as cuddly uncle and inscrutable 'ordinary man', and Oasis themselves, a 90s British rock group who self-consciously trade on nostalgia both in their music, styling and sonic output. Oasis's aesthetic is infused with a veneer of romanticised hindsight for 'swinging sixties' culture. This ensures that despite the apparent transformative potential and novelty of re-animating Lowry's scenes in their music video, the recycling of his urban tropes remain romantic rather than revolutionary.

The experience of spectatorship both organised by and provoked by an encounter with The Lowry's exhibition spaces keys into the key theoretical concerns of Benjamin and Baudrillard. Just as the artwork's 'aura' is transformed through the new reproductive technologies which alter what has traditionally been understood as art. and the city's crowds produces a transformation of experience, as 'shock-like' and melancholic, the staging of the Oasis video in The Lowry demonstrates the blurring of

auratic and post-auratic spectatorship. This collision of traditional and contemporary media forms potentially problematises Benjamin's faith in the transformative potential of technology. The Lowry's final flourish of simulation is its rendering of 'class' as an aesthetic pleasure, in the gallery space itself.

### ***Class as a 'dress-up' box***

In *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson compares two paintings. One is Van Gogh's *A Pair of Boots* (1887), the other Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980). For Jameson, the discrepancy between the two images offers something of what he calls the 'waning of aesthetic' affect that is characteristic of contemporary cultural experience. In the Van Gogh painting there is reference to the outside world, to the toil and hardship of the experience that created those boots as worn, lived-in. This, for Jameson, evidences a 'trace' of the irremovable reality of human existence. In the Warhol image this has collapsed into the absolute image of surface, adhering to the code of advertising imagery and commercial signage. This image reveals nothing; it is a dazzling, empty 'affect'.

How might we maintain Benjamin's faith in new media technologies' potential when historical fact and history itself is simulated for pleasure? In The Lowry galleries, next to the paintings of the industrial scene is a mirrored desk. On each of its ends hang scarves, flat caps and bowler hats, the very costumes of the working-classes depicted on the surrounding walls in Lowry's paintings. Children are encouraged to sit at the desk, put on a hat and scarf and draw what they see of themselves in the mirror.

The everyday work-wear of the industrial masses is re-animated by post-industrial children, as a spectacle for play, albeit directed play. In the encouragement to children's creativity there is a certain unease or discomfort, at the sight of markers of class distinction being reduced to a dress-up box of costume play. It is the consumption



Figures 9 & 10

of working-class twentieth-century life as an aesthetic pleasure, as what Highmore calls an 'exotic' object (Highmore, 2005). The children that visit The Lowry, their target demographic, are freed at the end of their 'labour' to return to their relatively affluent (by comparison) lives. The aesthetic effect does not end there. The back cover of Myerson's *Making the Lowry* book evidences a more macabre event. In a rather ghoulish, Halloween-like twist, to mark its opening, The Lowry hired a children's face painter. This was not to produce the usual tigers, lions and bears of the child's birthday party, rather, the sallow-cheeked, dark-rimmed eyes of Lowry's figures. A literal haunting of the building took place, the repulsive class-bound 'other', the grey faces of Salford's by-gone workers, returned, albeit briefly, inscribed on the faces of the post-industrial generation children in the gallery. A ghoulish, enactment of aura -as a face-to-face encounter, as reciprocity and looking-back- occurs, animated by the corporeal enactment of Lowry's figures on a living child, even if this class is 'painted on'<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin notes this auratic moment when he writes: "cult value does not give a way without resistance. It falls back to a last entrenchment, the human countenance" (2003, p.257).

Of course, unlike for the poor souls of Lowry's art, all traces of class could be wiped off at the end of the visit. Actual working-class life cannot be removed from the body in this way. The body carries the traces of hardship and toil; the matchstick figures in Lowry's work were such because they were poor and relied on their own two feet to traverse the cityscape. Those children arriving at The Lowry centre in the family 4x4, solicited by the centre's commissioned demographic study of their prime target market, cannot imagine the horrors of the industrial Salford. The Lowry re-stages and claims to rejuvenate. It is telling that the markers of class on the body contemporarily would differ substantially from Lowry's depictions. It would be obesity, smoking, heart disease, alcoholism or drug addiction that might cast its shadow over their corporeality. The Ordsall Estate, which is just to the south of The Lowry, across the dual carriageway that marks the boundary to Salford Quays, has its fair share of such problems.<sup>54</sup>

The Lowry aims to widen access to art and culture. To do so, however, is to be caught up in the values of culture as commodity. The centre is shot through with commercial values, not just in its organisation of visitor's consumption, in its selling of L.S. Lowry as a brand in the gift shop, in its selling of class as an aesthetic effect and in its funding- National Lottery monies are often considered to be a tax on the poor. Yet, as Baudrillard argues, if Disneyland performs a deterrence function to American reality, equally, the presence of the Lowry Outlet Shopping Mall directly opposite The Lowry performs a similar purpose: to mark itself out as the place of consumption serving to make us doubt that The Lowry is absolutely concerned with consumption too: the consumption of 'culture'. The iconic buildings of 'cultural regeneration', then,

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<sup>54</sup> The Ordsall Estate was deemed in 1994 to be one of the poorest, most deprived estates in the UK with unemployment, teenage pregnancy and mortality rates above the national average. The Local Authority is keen to point out how the area has benefitted generally from the development of Salford Quays, of which The Lowry is a key element. There has been a shift in the area's 'image', best indicated by rising house prices and the building of flats and houses catering for young professionals. However, major inequalities still persist as detailed in the various neighbourhood documents of Salford City Council. See <http://www.salford.gov.uk/ordsallsnap.htm>

are revealed as the architecture of *consumption*. In this case the consumption of class as an aesthetic spectacle. By positioning Lowry's paintings as cosy, nostalgic visions it ignores their melancholic critique of the industrial scene. Whilst Lowry's work is auratic, it is so in Benjamin's ambiguous sense of the term, as both a longing and a recognition of the futility of that longing. However, the industrial scene, as presented by The Lowry, as aesthetic effect, as synthetically-auratic, undermines the melancholy potential of Lowry's art and instead imbues the building with a mood of forlornness.

### ***Conclusion***

If we adhere to Benjamin's notion of the generational responsibility that attends to the messianic, and, then, to children as eternally hopeful figures, whilst we might be critical of The Lowry centre's production of experience, there will be unexpected effects and unintended consequences of this relationship between the generations that experience The Lowry and the art/culture therein. A faith that such a relationship might yet contain politically-transformative potential, of which we can only speculate. In other words, whilst we might be sceptical of its methods and motives, we might want to hold to its determination to produce a collective, if partial, notion of art and culture; to argue, at least, for its presence. Equally, since the rise of individual cultural experiences facilitated by new media technologies, in the case of the football spectatorship, meeting the recipient halfway means the recipient never having to leave the house. Benjamin's 'etui-man' returns: the bourgeois in his luxurious shell. It is perhaps important, then, that The Lowry still pays lip-service to the value of public culture and democratic access, even if it must exist within the structure of the market. It might serve as an outpost of culture, of public involvement as against the concomitant absolute individualisation of other forms of 'cultural' experience in terms of music, television and film. The Lowry, and the other buildings in this thesis,

demonstrate the ambivalence of public culture's last gasp; the death throes of this twentieth-century notion of collective experience on a grand scale, and the limits of such project's ability to deliver their promises, to exist outside of the spectacle of commodification and icon-making that accompanies their claims to transformation of the post-industrial cityscape.

Perhaps the transformative or political potential Benjamin wishes to hold to is augmented not through the auratic or post-auratic blurring of The Lowry's exhibition spaces, which are perhaps too easily co-opted by Baudrillard's claims to aestheticisation, but by the way Lowry's art points to the contradictions between the two modes of spectatorship. Despite his relative distance from the original blueprints and plans for the centre, despite its eventual name, Lowry's position within its galleries works to offer a destructive element. He is, to use a favoured notion of Benjamin's, a 'destructive character' (Benjamin, 1999b, p.541). The inclusion of his work was initially expedient and allowed Salford a new arena for his artwork, moving it from the city's art gallery to its new location. But more than that, its presence serves to undermine and momentarily rupture the rhetoric of commodified urban cultural experience The Lowry prides itself on offering. Every encounter with a Lowry artwork, themed 'experience', 'dress-up box', or tea towel in the gift shop produces a dissonance between the urban life he presents and the contemporary experience offered by the centre. Lowry's presence here serves to subtly undermine some of the bluff and marketing jargon of the centre's pretensions. He is, then, a thorn in The Lowry's side; a rough edge that cannot be smoothed out. As much as he is imbued with an auratic reverence by the staging of his presence in the building's gallery space, he reappears to puncture and disrupt such a reading. His melancholic presence haunts and revitalises our experience of The Lowry, retaining the trace of class, of the masses, of the teaming metropolis that once existed on this site. Just as he claimed ghostly presences haunted

his cityscapes<sup>55</sup>, he now haunts *this* cityscape, as a spectral presence in the building which claims his name. In *Going to the Match* the crowds hurry to the football ground, the life-blood, the heart of the community. If The Lowry centre could achieve half as much attention and vitality, it would be going *some* way to compensating the past that Lowry paints.

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<sup>55</sup> He is quoted in Levy's books as saying "I have been called a painter of Manchester workpeople. But my figures are not exactly that. They are ghostly figures which tenant these courts and lane-ways which seem to me so beautiful" (Levy, 1975).

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE DEEP, OR THE ABYSS OF THE SURFACE

Because she is mute, nature mourns...the sadness of nature makes her mute.

Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and On the Language of Man', 1916

As Canetti suggests in his parable about animals, behind each of them it seems that someone human is hidden and is secretly mocking you.

Jean Baudrillard, 'Objects, Images and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion',  
1997

The urge to collect objects, for individuals as well as societies, is a sign of impending death. One finds this need acutely manifested during preparalytic periods. There is also the mania for collecting – in neurology, 'collectionism'.

Paul Morand, 'L'Avarice', 1929

### *Deep Snow*

Sitting at my desk, I hold in my hand a snow globe. A souvenir purchased from



The Deep, a £52 million 'aquarium' in Hull, East Yorkshire. As I shake it, the snow falls quickly through the liquid, covering the base of the globe in tiny white crystals. The fish wobble on their wires amongst

*Figure 11*

the plastic plant life. The snow globe, a glass or plastic bubble which freezes a scene, is a fairly commonly-produced object for tourist sites to sell in their gift shops. Snow shakers, snow globes, snow storms: however they are named, were important objects for Benjamin, as both a collector and as a thinker.<sup>56</sup> The snow globe, like the arcade, is a miniaturization of the world,

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<sup>56</sup> Esther Leslie writes: "A Paris Guide from 1852 describes each glass-roofed and marble-lined passageway as a 'city in miniature'. Such description attracted Benjamin who has long harboured a fascination for the small, the child's tiny facsimile of things and the miniature worlds in snow shakers or on stamps. Parisian arcades are a miniature dramatization, importantly of the wider world, that is to say the antinomies of capitalism" (2006, p.94).

a monad of sorts. By making snow globes analogous with the built form of the arcade, Esther Leslie (2006) makes an allusion to it being a world under glass; one which condenses and concentrates the activities therein. I want to make a similar point with regard to The Deep. To use The Deep's own souvenir, its own minor keep-sake object, as a model for reading the space is, then, to take the smallest, seemingly most inconsequential object from the gift shop of this iconic millennial project, and from this fragment reveal something of the whole. The toy is thus recast as a philosophical object. I wish to extend this analogy, but to replace the arcade to which Leslie draws attention with another of Benjamin's dreamhouses, the winter garden. If the arcade is a glass house of commodities, the winter garden is self-evidently a glass house of nature. The housing of nature under glass has had a resurgence most recently in The Eden Project, Cornwall (2001), another in the family of so-called Millennial projects to which The Deep belongs. An aquarium is a snow globe *par excellence*: a dramatic bubble of glass and liquid that configures itself as a 'window' into the sea. By extending the analogy between The Deep's interior, and the snow globe, the building is revealed as a concentrated miniaturisation of the antimonies of media-technico-capitalism with specific reference to its interaction with nature.

The snow globe comparison encapsulates many aspects of the experience of this building: the problem of depth and surface, 'phony' and 'real' nature, spectacle and consumption, as well as the issue of the building's insertion into this particular location in North East England in 2002, as site of cultural tourism and a token of cultural regeneration. To read The Deep as a snow globe, to figuratively 'turn the space in the hand', to tip it this way or that, is a model for a critical interpretation of the building. This seeks to reveal different sets of relations between nature and culture, humanity and the natural world and the building's location and historical

context. The outcome is an illumination of the ways in which the building stages and mediates these relationships. This method, then, allows for the necessary shift of perspective, the chance to read the space both with, and against, the grain, as well as from surface to depth and depth to surface. As a visitor, you are propelled through the building's interior in a particular way: choreographed through the exhibition. The building's internal design works to create a 'smoothness' of movement through its interior akin to the tactile manipulation of the snow globe in the hand. And, just as there is a certain 'graspability' or 'comfort-in-the-hand' to the snow globe form, there is a certain orderliness or 'packaging' of the experience of nature in *The Deep*. To read the space *against* this smooth staging, this linear narrative, to look at it through the lens of theory thereby revealing its discontinuities, disjunctures and paradoxes, is the purpose of this chapter. When reading, then, I want you imagine the action of holding a snow globe, of turning it in the hand, of returning sometimes to the same point, of seeing the same thing from different angles; of covering old ground.

This notion returns us to the methodological concerns of Benjamin and Baudrillard. Benjamin uses the metaphor of a man digging to demonstrate his preference for theoretical insight as a mode of digression: to return again to the same point, to trammel material once more for unforeseen fragments, to mine for yet more revelations.<sup>57</sup> This method of reading is one which refutes the accumulation of 'facts' or the notion of linear historical progression that is best articulated in Benjamin's final work, 'On the Concept of History' (1940). Here Benjamin sets out most clearly

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<sup>57</sup> He writes: "He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging... They must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is merely a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth... Fruitless searching is as much part of this as succeeding, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of narrative... but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic matter, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers" (Benjamin, 1999b, p.611).

his understanding of a 'messianic' sense of time. The present and the past are linked and can be brought into close proximity through the dialectical image in a momentary collision that produces a rupture. This might reveal something of the ever same in the seemingly novel or other potential futures that have been lost in a historicist mode of understanding which privileges the accumulation of facts in 'homogenous empty time'. The search for such messianic encounters or indeed the indication of a messianic understanding of history is, for Benjamin, revealed not in the monumental actions of 'great men' but in the minor histories of the overlooked or the repressed. Such moments of revelation, then, require a method that is fit for the task, one which looks again at the seemingly obvious or mainstream accounts precisely for such minor histories: a method which, as Benjamin remarks, attempts to "read what was never written" (2003, p.405). It is a method almost without method and one which Benjamin sought to follow in *The Arcades Project*, and involves the amassing of debris, detritus: a collection of seemingly disparate and inconsequential fragments, that when juxtaposed, show not tell (1999, p.460). Benjamin, then, ascribes a revelatory power to the fragment. Baudrillard, through the notion of the crystalline, alludes to another kind of fragment: the fractal. The fractal is the crystallization of the whole in the smallest of its parts. But this fragment is not able to perform Benjaminian revelation; rather it works in an opposing manner, to conceal. For Baudrillard, there is an important distinction to be made between the fragment which still retains the chance of opening up a critical space and the fractal, which belongs, for him, to the realm of fourth order simulation. It is the fractal which best describes the proliferation of simulated forms in contemporary media-technico-capitalism. The fractal is the order of the virus, the computer code and the virtual. He writes:

We must stress this difference between the fragment and the fractal. The fractal is a kind of segmentation, or proliferation, but each element doesn't clear the decks

around itself. The fragment really does create a void, a blank space. Indeed, that's what enables the fragment to constitute a singularity.... Seen from close up, the fractal and the fragment seem quite alike. Neither is a part of the world of the real and representation; both are outside meaning, outside representation, but they are so each in their own, completely opposing way. It's a distinction that's difficult to grasp (Baudrillard, 2004, p.68).

Snow flakes are also fractals; in fact fractals abound in nature, as well as in computer codes and virtual forms<sup>58</sup>. There is a sense, then, in which the fractal is of the order of first *and* second nature: nature and technological second nature or 'culture'. The presence of snow – even fake snow – in the snow globe of *The Deep*, alerts us to this complexity. In this way, the snow globe functions as a tiny aspect of the whole, that is, of *The Deep* as a phenomenon. The snow globe offers itself as a crystallization, through which we might discern the logic of the greater whole.<sup>59</sup> The snow globe functions as a perspective machine: in housing a miniature world it plays with perspective: size, distance, nearness, and as an object that alters perspective it allows us to look and see differently thereby interrupting or arresting the smooth narrative of *The Deep*.

The chapter proceeds to address three key themes that arise from this method of reading *The Deep* through the work of Benjamin and Baudrillard. Firstly, it addresses notions of surface and depth, provoked by the very nomenclature of the building, and the lay out and experience of the space within. Surface and depth, as key concepts in the methodology and epistemology of both thinkers are considered in relation to certain 'depth hermeneutics' such as Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Surrealism. The second

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<sup>58</sup> Snowflakes are one of nature's fractals formations, others can be found in certain trees and plants life. The vegetables cauliflower and broccoli are fractal formations. Their combination in the vegetable romanescu offers a particularly spectacular fractal form. The main difference between natural and technological fractals is that nature's fractals always exhibit some form of imperfection. For more information on fractals in nature, see the educational website [www.webecoist.com](http://www.webecoist.com)

<sup>59</sup> In this sense, the fractal is also monadological. The monad is a preferred Benjaminian critical concept. Gilloch describes the monadological fragment for Benjamin thus: "The fragment, the individual work, is a monad, one which points beyond itself, comes to stand for, or stand in for, the totality of which it is a part. What is present is incomplete, apparently trivial; what is complete is absent, unrepresentable except through the trivial. This paradox frames the ambiguous status of the monadological fragment: it is derided and prized in the same moment" (2002, p.40).

part of this section relates notions of surface and depth to the role surfaces play in The Deep's exhibition spaces. Secondly, the chapter considers what Susan Davis has called 'spectacular nature' (1997). Learning from the form of the arcade and the mall, The Deep borrows architectonic devices, most commonly used in the display of commodities, to stage nature *as* commodity. This form of display sets in play a mode of spectatorship which has more to do with cinematic gaze than the contemplation of the artwork in a gallery. I also suggest that the kaleidoscopic effect fashioned by the exhibition space serves to compensate for the privileging of the (necessarily) visual relationship to marine life and its attendant lack of tactile experience through certain compensatory interactive elements. If boredom is, as Benjamin suggests, a threshold to non-prescribed creativity, by erasing its possibility through interaction, can The Deep only ever reproduce a synthetic, simulated relationship to nature?

Finally, the chapter considers the building's mediation between 'first' and 'second' nature. This is important because the decision to locate an aquarium on a site historically dedicated to the fishing industry provokes particular questions about the relationship between humanity and nature, its past and its future. Further, The Deep stages an 'idea' of privileging 'culture' over industry as a driver of regeneration in Hull and acts as a space of confrontation: the scene of human interaction with nature. How curious it is that The Deep, a space of both the spectacle and the conservation of marine life, is located here, a site responsible for the devastation of fish stock; the very *destruction* of 'first' nature through the industrialized, technological 'second' nature of the fishing industry. Stranger still is the fact that Hull's future economic prosperity is wholly reconfigured and dependent upon a renegotiated form of the destruction of nature. What we might want to call a 'soft' destruction performed through the semiotic consumption of nature in The Deep as a tourist site, rather than the 'hard' destruction performed by the productive force of the fishing industry. Deploying Baudrillard's

ideas of contemporary interaction with nature as informed by apocalyptic *fin de millennial* anxieties over nature's extinction, I consider the extent to which nature is re-animated and replicated through simulacral forms in an attempt to stave off its own end. How far, for example, The Deep's staging of nature is concerned with shoring up nature's 'reality' as a nostalgic object, at the moment of its disappearance?

## *Surfaces and Depths*



The building, taking the exterior form and style of a geological shard or fragment, sets up a contrast between its exterior and interior, its surface and its depth. Architect Terry Farrell had a three-fold influence for the shape and façade of The

*Figure 12*

Deep: the work of German Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich's work *The Ice Sea*; the geological history of Hull, which was covered by a large ice sheet during the last ice age; and the triangular site on which it was to be built, known locally as Sammy's Point (Pearman, 2002).<sup>60</sup> By configuring the building's surface as if it were a shard of the earth's crust forced upwards by a tectonic shift, Farrell attempts to build optimism – the idea of pushing up and through the surface – into the very form of his regeneration project for Hull<sup>61</sup>. Other allusions, however, are also possible. The building acknowledges, intentionally or otherwise, relevant local signifiers in its form: a ship's hull, which ties into both Hull's name and its long history as a successful trading and fishing port as well as referencing its site on former shipbuilding land, and marine-life, in its shark-like pointed façade. Yet, as Pearman notes, Farrell's earliest sketches for the site were “not of the exterior form of the building at all, but are a schematic of spaces being carved

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<sup>60</sup> John Markham explains the history of Sammy's Point: “One of Hull's best-known features, Sammy's Point, is a disrespectful reminder of the shipbuilding yards of Martin Samuelson, and the name of another ship building firm, C. & W. Earle, became almost synonymous with that of Hull itself” (1989, p.83).

<sup>61</sup> As Pearman notes, the external form of the building took on particular significance for this project: “the aim of the design was to make the building look as though it was rising from the ground. There was danger that is the cladding was incorrect it might look as though it was slipping into the ground...a vessel sinking beneath the waves. This was not an image that Hull, after all the consideration it had given to the regenerative and symbolic importance of its new landmark building wanted to risk happening” (2002, p.28).

out of a solid object” (2002, p.23). The route down through the building was originally conceived of as though via a series of fissures in a solid rock, this eventually became a walkway around the ‘void’ of the main tank. The design of the building, then, was always concerned with a self-conscious staging of a journey from surface to depth. But it was also, from the outset, concerned with re-energising Hull’s image through its exterior surface. Farrell acknowledges this when he says:

At the very first presentation I said this should be about something externally identifiable, like the Blackpool Tower or the Peak Tower in Hong Kong...I showed them pictures of my buildings on postage stamps and banknotes and said ‘This is what you should aim for’. And it’s worked: The Deep has been on a postage stamp. It’s part of Hull (Farrell cited in Rose, 2007).

In the scene contained within the snow globe we watch a falling through depth, an artificially created effect since the object must be shaken by hand to produce its falling motion. This effect mimics the movement of sinking to the bottom produced in the descent through the exhibition space itself, and the rapid upwards motion which takes place at the end of the exhibition courtesy of the buildings’ transparent lift which transports passengers back to the surface and the exit, through the interior of the main display tank. In this respect, there is a sense in which the experience of the building can be mapped on to depth models of social inquiry that are also concerned with the metaphor of movement from surface to depth, as a model of understanding, revelation and uncovering of the social and psychological world. The revelation of depth is a privileged strategy and fundamental concept in social thought exemplified by the depth hermeneutics of Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Surrealism, Semiotics, Radical Feminism and even Foucauldian genealogies, which seek to excavate power relationships as they are constructed through historical discourses.

This notion of surfaces that conceal depth is revealed in Marx’s work when he places commodities at the centre of his analysis of advanced capitalism, detailed in

*Capital Vol. 1* (1976). For Marx, the commodity is a complex nexus of meaning, value and object. To look beneath the surface of the commodity is to reveal its dual nature as use-value and exchange-value. All commodities share a common determinant in their production: socially necessary labour-time. Thus, the commodity is not just a thing, an object, or something useful or able to be exchanged: the commodity conceals the labour process, in turn; the labour process conceals the class antagonisms or contradictions and the fundamentally hierarchical and economically-structured nature of capitalist society. Its appearance, 'at first sight', however, belies such contradictions. Marx writes:

A commodity appears, at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it....But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness (Marx, 1976, p.163)

Marx's analysis of the commodity, then – a seemingly straight-forward, taken-for-granted, indeed, ubiquitous 'thing' – when considered beneath its apparent 'surface', produces a complex unravelling of every aspect of the capitalist mode of production and its concomitant effect on social organisation. The commodity is a *miniaturisation* or *fetishisation* of the capitalist production process and its attendant contradictions.

For Freud, in the psychology of the individual, the unconscious is the depth pendant to the surface of conscious experience. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud claims that dreams are the surface manifestations which offer clues to unconscious desires. Dreams are symbolic in nature and must be decoded to reveal their significance. Their meaning is not apparent or straightforward but must be deciphered through psychoanalysis. In his later work, Freud included other surface manifestations such as parapraxis, or what is now commonly known as the 'Freudian slip', as a further useful expression on the individual's unconscious. In the slippage between the spoken and intended word, the true meaning of the individual's thoughts

and intentions might be revealed. Freud writes,” In the same way that psycho-analysis makes use of dream interpretation, it also profits by the study of the numerous little slips and mistakes which people make – symptomatic actions as they are called” (Freud, 2001[1925], p.48) At the centre of Freud’s depth hermeneutic then, is the symptomatic diagnosis. Freud’s tripartite structural theory of the psyche designates to the Id, the Ego and the Super-Ego certain functions. The Id is the realm of uninhibited drives and desires – the zone of the ‘unconscious’, the ego the organised, rational realm, and the super-ego the hyper-critical, moral zone. For Freud, it was the notion of these three realms in conflict with each other which produced the symptoms from which he was able to diagnose various forms of psychic disturbance. In Chapter 2, I introduced the discussion of how surface and depth play their role in the concepts and thought of Benjamin and Baudrillard. I wish to develop that discussion in what follows.

Both Benjamin and Baudrillard are concerned with ideas of surface and depth in both the method and form of their writing. This is perhaps best encapsulated not by their own statements but in one by Benjamin’s colleague and friend, Siegfried Kracauer, who writes:

An analysis of the simple surface manifestation of an epoch can contribute more to determining its place in the historical process than judgements about the epoch itself. As expressions of the tendencies of a given time, these judgements cannot be considered valid testimonies about its overall situation. On the other hand the very unconscious nature of surface manifestations allows for direct access to the underlying meaning of existing conditions. Conversely, the interpretation of such manifestations is tied to an understanding of these conditions. The underlying meaning of an epoch and its less obvious pulsations illuminate one another reciprocally (Kracauer, 1975, p.67).

Benjamin’s technique, certainly in his city writings, was to assess these surface manifestations as part of the debris of urban life. Its discarded, obsolete and unfashionable fragments, for him, held a particular profane power of revelation. He is, then, concerned with the revelation of the *essence* in the complexity of appearance that

is the modern city. In cultural objects, spaces and ephemeral matter is manifest in the concerns and values, as well as the hidden dreams and utopian impulses, of a given social epoch, in his case modern industrial commodity capitalism. It is a method of 'immanent critique', one which attempts to be in the closest accord with its object (Gilloch, 2002, p.33). It is also an approach which takes something from the Surrealist movement's appropriation of everyday items and reconfiguring them in absurd formulations. The Surrealists were concerned with the notion of the city as a 'dreamscape'<sup>62</sup>. Taking the city as a site of intoxication and mythic qualities, Surrealists such as Aragon and Breton attempted to 'make the familiar strange' in an artistic practice of 'profane illumination' wherein the most banal and seemingly inconsequential objects are interpreted as critical interventions to the onslaught of modern capitalism. Breton and Aragon, whose novels *Nadja* (1928) and *Paris Peasant* (1926), respectively, concerned themselves with fantastical reveries in sites of everyday urban life such as the crumbling arcades, city streets and gardens, had a significant influence on Benjamin and his own theoretical wanderings through the ruined dream houses of the nineteenth century in *The Arcades Project*. Indeed, for Aragon, the ruined arcades were "human aquaria", where "the whole fauna of human fantasies, their marine vegetations, drifts and luxuriates in the dimly lit zones of human activity" (Aragon, 1994, p.13). Whilst Benjamin might in the end disagree with Surrealism's conclusions, their celebration of and intoxication in the dreamscape of the *mythology moderne*, he was undoubtedly impressed with their techniques.

Benjamin's approach, then, is not an attempt at peeling back an ideological veil in a crudely Marxist sense, but rather the attempt at a form of double vision: to see

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<sup>62</sup> McCole writes: "Among the quintessential surrealist experiences was the perception that certain objects, configurations, and places in the waking world sometimes appear to be surrounded by a mysterious shimmer; a haunting quality that hints at a deeper reality, a 'sur-reality'...in pursuing such experiences, Benjamin asserted, the surrealists were 'following the traces not so much of the soul as of things' themselves...Paradoxical though it may sound, he looked to the surrealists for a nonpsychological concept of dreamwork. In Benjamin's conception, dreams were not keys to individual psychic conflicts; rather they were a medium, in which an essential dimension of the transpersonal human relationship to the object world was enacted" (1993, p.215).

both the veil and the object, or better, the object *in* its veil.<sup>63</sup> What matters, however, is that Benjamin holds to a sense of *veiling*, a distinction between the apparent and the manifest, the essence and the appearance. He sought to see beyond the ideological veneer of products of commodity capitalism, to see both closer and further<sup>64</sup>. Baudrillard's career, in contrast, might be characterised as a journey of tracking the veils' disappearance, in all forms of social and cultural life. From his early work's Marxist, structuralist and semiotic concerns, towards his renouncement of their value as critical models (*Mirror of Production* 1975, *Symbolic Exchange & Death*, 1976, *Seduction* 1979), to his middle period which attempts to trace the impact of new media technologies on the social world (*Simulacra and Simulations*, 1981, *In The Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 1983, *Cool Memories*, 1987, *America*, 1988) Baudrillard's concern is the very erasure of the distinction between real and the appearance, the real and its imitation, which is increasingly compromised and assisted in no small way by the transformative power of media technologies in post-industrial capitalism. For him, it is no longer a question of *veiling* reality but of *simulating* it. There is, then, for Baudrillard, no veil to see through, no mask through which the critic must discern actuality, only everything on show at all times; reality as fluorescently-lit, as completely transparent and *obscene*. Unlike Benjamin, the fragmented or aphoristic style of Baudrillard is undertaken against the notion of 'hidden' depth and against the possibility of redemption through aesthetics or politics, operating, rather, as a 'celebration' or 'simulation' of the vacuous 'surface' that is American culture. Since

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<sup>63</sup> Howard Caygill has remarked upon Benjamin's particular adoption of Marxist thinking and, in particular, its distinction between economic base and cultural superstructure thus: [Benjamin] "radically qualifies the schema by insisting upon their *asynchronicity*. There is no question of assuming that culture 'reflects' an economic base, for the main object of investigation is precisely the *character* of the relationship between the two. Benjamin thus begins not by adopting the distinction of base and superstructure but by establishing an analogy between Marx's focus on the immanent critique of developmental tendencies in the sphere of the economy and his own in the sphere of culture" (1998, p.98-99) (my emphasis).

<sup>64</sup> Detlef Mertins describes Benjamin's critical method thus: "Regardless of medium, he considered criticism an activity of stripping its objects bare, mortifying them, dragging the truth content of what is depicted in the image out before it". As Mertins points out, using Benjamin's own description, this is not as "an unveiling that destroys the mystery but a revelation that does it justice" (Mertins, 1999, p.207)

the domination of capitalism in postmodernity is guaranteed and perpetuated by the image in the form of simulation, for Baudrillard, it makes no sense, nor is it possible, for the image to retain its critical power. The model for him of *this* reality and the one from which all societies now learn, is America. However, this is not to be misconstrued as a celebration or nihilistic acceptance of such developments. Baudrillard still maintains that to say everything is on show, that nothing is hidden and that nothing has meaning *has* meaning, but the method through which one might assess what that meaning is, the form in which to present that critique, is not, for him at least, a depth hermeneutic. Simultaneously too close and not near enough to their subjects to retain a critical purchase, and still insistent upon a clear demarcation between essence and appearance, depth models are no longer adequate to critique prevailing and likely societal and cultural transformations.<sup>65</sup> Instead, what is required is a form of theory-fiction, one that borrows from the literature of Borges, Kafka and Canetti and, in the form of the aphorism, or fragmentary writing, from Nietzsche and Adorno, which thereby attempts to *outplay* the simulation; to challenge the ‘real’ into existence in the form of a symbolic dual, against semiotic omnipotence. It is a provocation then that seeks to solicit a response from all the legitimate simulacra of the real (Abbinnett, 2003, p.42). A shift from ‘critical’ to what Baudrillard calls ‘fatal’ theory.

Whereas Benjamin’s surface method was concerned to capture the essence of modernity in its fleeting, transitory, ephemeral form, in the form of an immanent critique that sought to uncover and thereby *arrest*, even momentarily, capitalist modernity’s onward march, Baudrillard’s task is more difficult and undertaken for different reasons. The point about America for Baudrillard is that there *is* no depth to find, it functions purely as a surface – as a cinematic space. America is ‘just as it is’

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<sup>65</sup> In *The Mirror of Production* (1973) and *Seduction* (1979), Baudrillard performs a critical destruction of two depth hermeneutics: Marxism and Psychoanalysis.

(1988, p.28). The most appropriate method of chronicling such a place, then, is a horizontal journey across its surface. This method is perhaps best exemplified in *America* (1988), in which he ‘skates’ across the surface of the contemporary United States, as the “aeronautical missionary of the silent majorities” (1988, p.13). In attempting not to “get behind” American reality but to meet its surface with the surface of his fatal theory, *America* might be considered Baudrillard’s version of immanent critique, perversely *without* depth. For Baudrillard the exemplary space in America is the desert, thus geological surfaces come to signify the desertification of cultural surfaces. If Benjamin seeks to locate the depth in the proliferation of surfaces, Baudrillard tracks the surfaces that proliferate.

The Deep's contrast between its exterior surface – as a pointed shard or fragment- and its interior depth – as a total or complete world- is complicated by the role of surfaces within the exhibition space. The staging of depth is only possible through surfaces, in this case glass. The glass of the tanks, then, refracts into a proliferation of surfaces. These surfaces function as window, lens, and screen; surfaces which mediate the spectacle of marine life therein. It is to this discussion I shall now turn.

***Proximity and Distance: “The Main Tank is 10m deep or, hardly deep at all”***

The various tanks in The Deep are possible because of the technological advances in plexi-glass. Sections of the roof had to be left uncompleted so that the large acrylic sections that form the tank walls and the lift shaft could be placed into position to hold the 2,850,000 litres of water contained within (Pearman, 2002, p.52). As both Benjamin and Baudrillard acknowledge, glass is a key material in the transformation and technological advancement of commodity capitalism. For

Benjamin, it is glass which is the modern architectural technology, along with iron, that permits the construction of the key spaces – the ‘dream houses’ – of the nineteenth century. Glass is implicated in the creation of the phantasmagoria and indeed possesses a phantasmagoric quality; it is a tricky, seductive surface and crucial to new forms of commodity fetishism. In the arcades the shoppers’ reflection in the shop windows becomes intermingled with that of the commodity, thus allowing a moment of transference, of identification, to take place.<sup>66</sup>

Glass makes possible a new way of seeing, for Benjamin. His recognition of the fragmented, fleeting, visual mode that characterises the modern city, captured in the figure of the flâneur, and its subsequent disruption of modes of seeing predicated upon distance and contemplation, allows Benjamin to articulate successfully the harnessing of the visual by capitalism through the display of commodities. Moreover, his insistence on the ability of the commodity to lull the modern subject into commodity fetishism through a form of visual seduction is an early analysis of the importance that the ‘sign-value’ of the object comes to possess. Buck-Morss supports this interpretation when she suggests that, for Benjamin: “the key to the new urban phantasmagoria was not so much commodity-in-the-market as the commodity-on-display, where exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore” (Buck-Morss, 1991, p.81). Glass is a material key to this promotion of the visual stimulation of commodities.

Benjamin’s recognition of the importance the visual comes to attain in urban spaces, is a clear pre-cursor to Baudrillard’s analysis. In *The System of Objects* (1968 [1996]), Baudrillard discusses our involvement in social relations whereby the

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<sup>66</sup> Leslie decries this process thus: “The fact of consumerism, with its priority of the commodity, aims for domination, an incursion even into the unconscious world. For Benjamin this was a consciousness invaded by the petrifying and fantastic workings of commodity fetishism and reification. Mirrored in the endless reflections of shop windows, the crowd, claims Benjamin, transforms into a spectacle. It sees itself walking and buying” (2006, p.95).

subject/object distinction is increasingly eroded, and such relations are mediated by the 'sign-value' of the object. Similarly to Benjamin, Baudrillard recognises that in consumer society the object's use-value and exchange-value are sublimated and what occurs is an elevation of its sign-value. In this sense, Baudrillard describes how objects are not appropriated in a haphazard manner, or because of their use-value, but rather by our 'translation' of the sign-system of the objects as a language, wherein the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. He suggests that we must understand consumption as "a system of communication and exchange, as a code of signs continually being sent, received and reinvented – as language" (Baudrillard, 1996, p.93). In this sense, all objects become interchangeable.<sup>67</sup> In *The Consumer Society* (1970 [1998]) Baudrillard elaborates his structural analysis and outlines more clearly the machinations of the system itself as it plays out in particular formations of urban space. Focussing on the drugstore, or what we would understand as the shopping centre or mall<sup>68</sup>, he describes the particular ways in which the consumer is forced to interact with objects. Primary to his analysis are notions of profusion and calculation. For Baudrillard the drugstore achieves a synthesis of both activities "not the least of which are shopping, flirting with objects, playful wandering and all the permutational possibilities of these" (1998, p.27). Echoing Benjamin, Baudrillard's theory outlines the importance of display to the commodity's power of seduction. Baudrillard describes the visual aspect to this seduction: "few objects today are offered *alone*, without a context of objects which 'speaks' them. And this changes the consumer's relation to the object: he no longer relates to a particular object in its specific utility, but to a set of objects in its total signification" (1998, p.27). In Baudrillard's analysis we witness a shift away from the dreamscape of the arcade

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<sup>67</sup> He writes: "Objects become substitutable in a more or less unlimited way within the field of connotations, where it assumes sign-value. Thus the washing machine serves as an appliance and acts as an element of prestige, comfort etc. It is strictly the latter field which is the field of consumption" (Baudrillard, 1998, p.77).

<sup>68</sup> The mall is, of course, a contemporary form of the arcade.

towards the nightmare of what Jon Goss has called the “machine for shopping” (1993, p.88). The mall takes from the arcade its interiorisation of the city street and provides not just a lit passageway of enticement, luxuries and wonder but a total purpose-built environment for the display of the commodity, the drama of the spectacle and the proliferation of consumer goods.

This spectacle of commodities, involving the fetishisation of looking, is played out in particular ways in *The Deep*. The display of the sea-life involves aspects that could be mapped directly onto the architectural counterparts of arcades or malls. Just as in the arcade objects are placed behind glass for perusal, the marine life in *The Deep* is similarly located, for visual pleasure and stimulation. Yet, glass is deceptive: it appears to offer proximity whilst always maintaining a distance. For Baudrillard, too, glass performs an illusion: it “is at once proximity and distance, intimacy and the refusal of intimacy, communication and non-communication. Whether as packaging, window or partition, glass is the basis of a transparency without transition....we can see but cannot touch” (Baudrillard, 1996, p.42). As Gilloch and Dant suggest, glass offers “optical pleasures but prevents tactile satisfactions” (2004, p.141). Glass provides the illusion of nearness, of proximity, and simultaneously -in the case of *The Deep*- it is a *surface* which allows us to see at *depth*. Proximity and depth, here, are inextricably linked. The nearness to marine-life afforded by glass, as a surface, proffers a depth of vision. Glass, as a mediating technology which allows us see the natural world ever more closely, plays with perspective, merging depth and surface and compressing near and far. It is a surface of illusion and ludic possibilities, and it is also a surface of reflection. When glass is used in mirrors, for Benjamin, its illusory possibilities are multiplied. He writes: “One may compare the pure magic of those walls of mirrors which we know from feudal times with the oppressive magic worked by the alluring mirror-walls of the arcades, which invite us into seductive bazaars” (1999, p.541). The glass of the tanks in

The Deep allows us to see at depth, in close-up and, as a surface of reflection, it performs a two-fold task: it allows us to *reflect on* a nature from which we are usually distant (sea-life), and it *reflects back* those visitors peering into the tanks. But is this proximity to nature illusory, or at least a proximity which has more affinity with shopping than the contemplation of natural creatures? For Baudrillard, as a material of apparent transparency and openness, glass comes to play a crucial role in the shift in contemporary culture towards a semiotic omnipotence and the proliferation of images in fourth-order simulation, which heralds the obscene: everything on view at all times through a proliferation of depthless surfaces. Yet, for Benjamin, as we will see, there is something in the logic of surfaces that is able to produce a transformative moment, even within the operational logics of a space such as The Deep.

Glass is not the only mediating surface that transforms the relationships between surface and depth, proximity and distance, for the two thinkers. Film performs a similar function. For Benjamin, film allows us to see further, deeper, closer *and* panoramically; it is a surface that contains transformative possibilities. Key to this notion of transformation is Benjamin's concept of the 'optical unconscious'. As Ryder points out, before film the notion of the optical unconscious is not possible (2007, p. 143), just as before Freud the notion of the unconscious is unthinkable, and before Marx, the commodity is merely a useful or exchangeable object. Indeed, Benjamin's theory of the potential of post-auratic art of film and photography was profoundly influenced by the Freudian notion of the unconscious. He writes that Freud's:

[On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life] isolated and made analyzable things which had previously floated unnoticed on the broad stream of perception. A similar deepening of apperception throughout the entire spectrum of optical—and now also auditory—impressions has been accomplished by film (Benjamin, 2003, p.265).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> McCabe writes of the particular affinity between psychoanalysis and film, that so fascinated Benjamin, in a discussion of the modernist, avant-garde film *Borderline* (1931) thus: "Film also acted as the medium par-excellence to self-consciously manipulate (if often heavy-handedly) psychoanalytic tropes, such as Freud's proto-

Equally, Benjamin's main methodological principle informing the Arcades Project, to show not tell,<sup>70</sup> is informed by filmic montage, and the possibilities inherent in cinematic technology. Film realises the potential, in surface form, of Surrealist methods of revelation, strategies which sought to 'make the familiar strange' through incongruous juxtapositions of the quotidian.

This is why film, for Benjamin, becomes the *Ur*-aesthetic form, one which is best equipped to apprehend modern – capitalist, technological – urban life. It is only film that can capture the fluidity, the shock-like experience [*Erlebnis*] and the transitory, ephemeral nature of modern city living.<sup>71</sup> In its ability to capture these evanescent experiences of the city, film offers itself as a transformative art-form and simultaneously reinvigorates the aesthetic realm's political potential. Part of this potential is linked to the way in which film is consumed. Film's very form, as a mass-consumed 'surface', opens up 'another nature', the chance that we, *en masse*, might see the world again, afresh, and therefore the possibilities of its transformation.<sup>72</sup> This other nature is something of which we remained unconscious before the advent of post-auratic media technologies<sup>73</sup>. Benjamin demonstrates the interpenetration of this first and second nature comparing the camera man to a surgeon penetrating skin, able to

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cinematic notion of the 'bodily-ego' as the 'projection of a surface'" (McCabe, 2002: 639). If Freud's bodily-ego is filmic, then, film's revelation, as Benjamin recognised, is the space usually reserved for the unconscious.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin writes: "I needn't *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriated no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them" (1999, p.460).

<sup>71</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, Benjamin's friend and colleague, also regarded film as the modern aesthetic form *par excellence* and its potential was the possibility it afforded for reinvigorating the modern city: allowing us to see it as if for the first time. He writes This is Siegfried Kracauer's argument too. He suggests film offers the redemption of physical reality. He writes: Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmented. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life" (Kracauer, 1960, p.300).

<sup>73</sup> Miriam Hansen describes it thus: This prismatic work of film involves a *double* structure of technological mediation: it refracts a world that is already shaped by heteronomous structures that have become second nature to us. By bringing this world into visibility, film creates a "*new realm of consciousness*"; it enables human beings to represent to themselves their technologically altered *physis*. (Hansen, 2004:22)

excavate and, more importantly, display – put on exhibition – this ‘other’ nature; this new field opened up by the ‘optical unconscious’.<sup>74</sup> This new proximity then, this nearness to the world, is all the better for being shared. In the *Work of Art* essay, Benjamin recognises in film spectatorship a ‘collective proximity’ (Gilloch, 2007, p.10) that contrasts with the individual distance required to contemplate the auratic artwork. In the cultural spaces of film, cinemas, the distracted film audience hones a new expertise of spectatorship, one which reveals the unseen aspects of everyday life, the surface elements we would previously have missed. Film allows us access to another nature just as surely as Freud’s slip of the tongue illuminates our deepest drives and desires. In some senses, then, the glass surface of the aquarium tanks performs a filmic function. It too allows us to see at depth just like film; it ensures a proximity to the sea-life therein we could not otherwise achieve.<sup>75</sup> As Leslie notes, for Benjamin, “the optical device produces a psyche and restructures it, as well as providing a way of knowing a previously unseen, unrevealed world of actions and connections” (2002, p. 64). In this respect, *The Deep* offers exactly this experience, ‘second-nature’ allows us to see ‘first-nature’ in close-up. Indeed, by mimicking a product of technological second nature, film, in its staging, *The Deep* allows us the chance to “see” first nature again<sup>76</sup>. What is problematic, however, is that whilst glass permits the simultaneity of intimacy and distance it also contributes, through its role in display, to the

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<sup>74</sup> Esther Leslie describes this new field: “Film is mobilized as that realm where actual constraints are superceded. Film is politically significant because potential realities are realized actually, but within the realm of representation. The new image world of the camera becomes a new play-space for humanity, authentic but also provisional and blatantly manipulated” (Leslie, 2000, p.142).

<sup>75</sup> Benjamin writes: “Clearly it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. “Other” above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space in formed by the unconscious....We have some idea what is involved in the act of walking...we have no idea at all what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step...this is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis” (2003, p.266).

<sup>76</sup> As Leslie points out, this notion of technological ‘second-nature’ is Lukacs. She writes: Lukacs model of reification had presented the idea of ‘second nature’. Lukacs idea of reification implies a politically crippling disarming of the senses and intellect of a humanity confronted by ‘second nature’. An uncontrollable domination is permanently threatened by ‘second nature’. Equally, Leslie notes the limits to the liberating force of ‘second-nature’ for Benjamin: Benjamin elaborates in detail the way that technology, instead of liberating humanity from myth, confronts it as an uncontrollable force...just as overwhelming as the forces of a more elementary nature in archaic times”(Leslie, 2000, p.157).

commodification of nature, too. The material qualities and effects of glass and film, and their role as surfaces with transformative potential, keys into debates about critical distance and perspective in the work of Benjamin and Baudrillard to which I will now turn.

Distance, for Benjamin, is a crucial component of criticism, which is rapidly and radically transformed with the coming of new forms of industrial culture and urban living<sup>77</sup>. Perhaps it is instructive to consider this ambiguity alongside his tentative optimism for post-auratic art and the warning he lays down in the *Work of Art* essay. Just as film offers the possibility of rendering obsolete all prior aesthetic categories – categories that sought to uphold bourgeois cultural power- equally, the potential is there within film, through its very technological operation and associated techniques, to insulate against change as much as radically to transform the present. The potential of film, or any of the other post-auratic forms, is just that: *potential*, not a guaranteed outcome. But the proximity and political potential that film might offer for Benjamin is, for Baudrillard, illusory. Film is not a transformative surface, in the way it is for Benjamin, rather it is an operational medium that merely reflects the banality and obscenity of contemporary life; critical distance is closed up. In his *American odyssey* Baudrillard (1988) discovers the fate of these image technologies, and our future in another surface: the horizontality of the desert. For Baudrillard this is the exemplary American space. Here a geological surface comes to signify the desertification of our cultural surfaces; the desert is crystalline. In fact, the distance between film as a representational mode and a reflection of real life is completely collapsed. For Baudrillard, America functions purely as a cinematic surface. He writes:

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<sup>77</sup> He writes: “Criticism is a matter of correct distancing. It was at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible to adopt a stand point. Now things press too urgently on human society... Today the most real, mercantile gaze into the heart of things is the advertisement. It tears down the stage upon which contemplation moved, and all but hits us between the eyes with things as a car, growing to gigantic proportions, careens at us out of a film screen” (Benjamin, 1996, p.476).

It is not the least of America's charms that even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic. The desert you pass through is like the set of a Western, the city a screen of signs and formulas...The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards to the screen, you should begin with the screen and move outwards to the city (Baudrillard, 1988, p.56).

Image technologies offer up a technical operationality that short-circuits their critical power and leads to a 'cool' obscenity<sup>78</sup> (1991, p.160). While mirrors and glass might be illusory surfaces, for Baudrillard, the screen is purely operational: "the screen is a surface in the form of an abyss, not a mirror-shaped one; it's something in which you lose your image and all imagination...in the screen the problem of depth doesn't arise. There's no other side of the screen" (2004, p.64). There is then, for Baudrillard, a certain 'evil of transparency' in the omnipresence and omniscience of image-making technologies.

The debate over distance is encapsulated in Benjamin's distinction between aura and trace. As I discussed in Chapter Three in relation to the artwork, aura is always concerned with a distance, however close the object may be whereas the trace is concerned with a proximity, however faint. In getting closer through film, the contemplative space that aura requires is extinguished. Following this argument is to settle in a moment of ambiguity in Benjamin's thought. If post-auratic art such as film and photography destroy aura, rendering obsolete the very categories upon which it is based (originality, authenticity etc.) then glass, as a material of transparency, is an ally in that same cause. For Benjamin, aura was a process of forgetting origins – of the human origins of the object/commodity- and the capture of traces, one of remembering

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<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the limits to Benjamin's tentative notion of the political potential inherent in post-auratic technologies is evidenced in his lament in *One-Way Street* (although not directly to do with new media technologies but rather the German economic crisis) that 'warmth is ebbing from things...we must compensate for their coldness if they are not to freeze us to death' (1996, p. 454)

those origins<sup>79</sup>, how then are we to capture traces in a material that Benjamin claims, leaves none: glass? This proximity to nature, then, achieved by the glass tanks of *The Deep*, is akin to the proximity Benjamin ascribes to film, but the glass in *The Deep* is not just a window onto the marine-life therein, it is also a lens, and a distorting lens at that. Stand too close to the tank and the fish are blurred, the thickness of the glass twists the image, the effect mildly vertiginous. Equally, stand too far away and the same effect is produced. The optimum viewing point is still a question of the correct distance. New media technologies and material technologies such as glass serve to obliterate distance, to erase it.<sup>80</sup> But this distortion that the glass enables is a distortion of our relationship to 'first nature'. Thus, the technologized second-nature surface of the plexiglass *reveals* something of the origin of this deformed presentation of the natural world at the same time as it spectacularizes it.

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<sup>79</sup> In the letters, Adorno and Benjamin discuss this notion of aura as a form of 'forgetting'. Adorno counsels Benjamin that what is forgotten in the auratic object is the "moment of human labour" (1999, p.321), Benjamin retorts that, "even if the question of aura does involve a 'forgotten human moment', this is still not necessarily the moment of human labour. The trees and the shrubs which offer themselves to us are not made by human hands. There must therefore be something human in the things themselves, something that is *not* originated by labour" (1999, p.327).

<sup>80</sup> Modern transport technologies are equally complicit in the compressing of distance. As Richter notes, "for Benjamin, the experience of pleasure is predicated upon distance. While this pleasure is not simply located in distance itself, it does reside in the possibilities distance opens up. That is to say, in order for distances to be traversed, or as Benjamin says, 'conquered', distance must first exist" (Richter, 2005, p.143). This is Benjamin's concern when he writes: "On a trip through Germany, it is impossible to achieve feeling of being on a journey. There are no more journeys in Germany. Trains serve only local traffic. Every half hour, new passengers board, ride along for a while, and make room for new ones. In this way, distances, whose covering or conquering once mediated a feeling of joy, crumble, breaking apart into uniform little pieces" (Benjamin, cited in Richter, 2005:143). For Baudrillard in America, the land of image, distance is obliterated in another way too, by the vast space of the country: "You do not get any distance on Europe from here. You do not acquire a fresh angle on it. When you turn around, it has quite simply disappeared" (1988:29).

*Commodified Nature: “The Deepartment Store”*



*Figure 13*

Standing in the gift shop in The Deep, I reach out towards a multitude of fake furry facsimiles of ...lions? I expected fish, but lions? The fish are there, of course, bright orange clown fish, soft grey hammer-head sharks, with cartoon eyes and cunning smiles stitched on to their stuffed heads. But why are there lions in The Deepartment Store? It appears that the commodification of nature staged here presents its spoils as an indiscriminate jumble of all kinds of creatures. Not only the expected sea life but animals from rain forests, carved wooden ‘tribal’ instruments, spiders, monkeys and bugs. All of these creatures, when transformed into furry or plastic simulacra of themselves, are presented to the visitors as an indiscriminate set of commodities: all are equal before the consumer. As Marx pointed out, commodification ensures a commensurability that levels everything to everything else (Marx, 1976). Not only is this indicative of a particular, problematic, anthropomorphic relationship to the natural world, but also of a more devastating paradox. The labels on these fluffy toys indicate the origin of their species: Made in China. The rapid

industrialisation of the developing world, their role in the supply of commodities to the first world, and the concomitant issues of pollution and threats to the ecological balance, is perfectly captured. Projects such as The Deep, then, which work to preserve and nurture sea life, are caught, well and truly in the nets of commodity capitalism. A tension is clearly evident between the project of sustaining marine life and preserving species and how a project such as The Deep must operate in the tourist-driven capitalist economy that cultural regeneration keys into: by selling stuff. To consider that the objects for sale in the Deepartment store would have been produced in the developing world, had as by-products numerous pollutants and chemical waste, then been shipped via container, into the port of Hull, is to acknowledge an uneasy contradiction. The Deep cannot be easily separated from its staging as an urban tourist attraction, despite its claims to ecological and marine education. Indeed, this is its very purpose: to draw people to Hull. The Deep seeks to attract visitors by packaging a relationship, staging an ‘experience’ of, in this case, nature. In doing so, it relies on certain methods of display that are familiar to us from theme parks, shopping malls, cinemas, and other public spaces of spectacle. The format would have been familiar to Benjamin who recognised in the nineteenth-century world fairs successors to the spectacle of consumption produced in the arcades; they were a form of ‘training ground’ for the masses for their further inculcation into the phantasmagoric world of commodities. The world fairs required visitors to look without touching thereby educating the masses in the *modus operandi* of commodity capitalism: the scopophilic dazzle and distraction of the object.<sup>81</sup>

This notion of diversion and distraction is taken to another level by the Arcades with their plethora of specialist shops, cafes and bars, gas-lit and under cover, they

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<sup>81</sup> Benjamin writes: World exhibitions thus provide access to a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted. Within these *divertissements*, to which the individual abandons himself in the framework of the entertainment industry he remains always an element of a compact mass. This mass delights in amusement parks – with their ‘rollercoasters’, their ‘caterpillars’ – in an attitude that is pure reaction (Benjamin, 1999, p.18).

provided both an escape from inclement weather and functioned as passageways through the city. It was in these spaces, for Benjamin, that the masses experienced the enchantment of commodities. Unlike the world fairs where the gratification of consumption was endlessly delayed, the arcades offered the chance of scopophilia *and* the opportunity to purchase the goods on display; they were the breeding grounds for commodity fetishism in the nineteenth-century consumer society. As Leslie points out: “Efforts are made to tame and train the nineteenth-century mob, to turn it into a consumer crowd that forgets its role in production” (Leslie, 2006, p. 95). The contemporary cultural venue’s gift shop performs exactly this form of training. In many ways the exhibition tanks in *The Deep* function, as did the world fairs, as visual bait to the shopping event after the spectacle: the chance to purchase commodified nature. If the consumer crowd, through commodity fetishism, is trained into absent-mindedness, the crowds in *The Deep* are also trained in forgetting; in this case, their role in the ‘hard’ destruction of nature wrought by those very processes of production that serve to manufacture the gift shop’s products, and the ‘soft’ destruction caused by their consumption of nature as an aesthetic spectacle. If the commodity fetish is concerned with forgetting the fact that the commodity is the product of alienated human labour, in *The Deep* there is a double forgetting at work: that marine life are *not* commodities, that is, they are not the products of human labour but rather co-exist with humans, and that it is through our treatment of them *as* commodities, as capital, that we are complicit in their destruction and their artificial resuscitation in public aquariums. Indeed, lest we forget, *The Deep itself* is a commodity, a bearer of a social process: twenty-first century cultural regeneration or the millennial architecture of consumption.<sup>82</sup> The final irony and tension between remembering and forgetting is in

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<sup>82</sup> Pearman (2002) underlines the importance of the building as well as what it contains when he writes, “The building is as much a part of that exhibition as the fish or the computer screens. It works in both a linear and volumetric fashion to achieve its effects. It avoids design clichés, be they the lure of the exquisite detail or the

the collective name of the objects we purchase in the gift shop: souvenirs. In French the verb *se souvenir* means 'to remember'. A souvenir, then, as commodity, forgets even as it serves to remember.

As Gilloch and Dant point out, both Benjamin and Baudrillard, are "attentive to the architecture and architectonics of consumption...not so much the commodity itself but its spatial location" (2004, p.142). If the built form of the arcade is taken up by *The Deep* in a self-conscious manipulation of the spectators' gaze, focussing it inwards to the display of nature, it is a relationship mediated by the mall. Baudrillard's analysis of *Parly 2*, a late twentieth-century shopping mall, details the transformation of the arcade's phantasmagoric spectacle of luxury goods into the 'blandscape' of the mall, a "banal non-place of consumerism", where "commodities are presented to us, not as isolates, nor even as series, but as ensembles, as syntagmatic systems....as models and simulations" (Gilloch and Dant, 2004, p.142). The shopping mall, whose most common architectural form is known as "bunker architecture", figures as a vast, windowless, construction, most typically sited on the urban periphery. Again, parallels to *The Deep* are notable. As Pearman points out, the decoration on the building's exterior "the effect of the layered and textured façade, with its angles and fissures and constantly-changing colours and reflections, is to overcome the necessary blindness of such exhibition boxes" (2002:30). This 'blindness' in exterior form serves to produce a heightened visibility inside the space. *The Deep* works, then, just as the arcade and the mall, to elevate the objects on display by focussing all gaze inwards. It borrows its sense of spectacle from both the architecture of consumer spaces and from contemporary filmic techniques.

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distractingly sculptural interior space. You are not especially aware, for instance of the nature of the handrails or floor finishes. They are good, but they are not the point. The fetishising of materials, deployed so successfully on the exterior, is held firmly in check in the interior where there are other things to look at (2002, p. 68)". Once inside the building, then, our gaze is firmly directed to the displays, the fish in the tanks. The fetishised outside of the building, that we might overlook, merely correlates to the fetishised nature on display inside.

*Optics and Tactics: “This way to Exhibition”*

The North Sea cod swim mournfully round their tank. They jealously eye the



tropical lagoon they can glimpse from above, with its Caribbean diorama and perfectly crafted, imitation boardwalk, complete with weathered rope handrail. Even the sharks have a bright, well-lit tank, with sleek rays and colourful coral as their tank-mates. The North Sea cod must accept their fate: an artificially-darkened tank, complete with gas-pipeline, old fishing nets and the steel foot of an oil rig platform. The tank is

*Figure 14*

grey, depressing and melancholic. Every

effort has been made to replicate, to the highest standard, the creature’s natural environment. That they were the last fish the Deep located, that they had to be farmed, that these fish have never blown North Sea water from their gills, matters not. The Deep is committed to verisimilitude, to presenting us with an authentic nature; a perfect simulation.

That *The Deep* relies on a range of spectacular and cinematic tricks, borrows from the shopping mall, and the movies in its displays is, perhaps, no surprise. The



Figure 15

*Deep*, despite its claim for iconic, individual status, in many ways repeats tropes common to any contemporary tourist site. Yet, I want to suggest that the reason filmic tropes, effects, lighting and sound are deployed is not just to conform to our media-saturated

expectations as tourists in tourist sites,

although this is significant, but because in this case, in mediating a relationship to marine life, it must *compete* with film. Film is the model of contemporary cultural consumption. As Benjamin points out, film cuts through reality with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel: gets to the heart of the matter. With regard to marine life, film is the exemplary mode of mediation.

The experience of sea life is always mediated by a surface, to some degree. Even deep-sea divers cannot have an unmediated, tactile relationship to marine life. The experience of sea creatures is, necessarily, visual, privileging the look over the touch, and involves some form of technological prosthesis. Film fulfils both criteria: being an optically-driven surface and a form of prosthesis; one which extends our vision and increases our proximity to objects and situations through its display of images. The staging of nature in *The Deep* is, at times, self-consciously filmic, or better, *cinematic*, since cinema informs the very sea-life experts who had a hand in constructing the spectacle and since *The Deep*, like the cinema, is a space of mass

spectatorship.<sup>83</sup> The cinema, then, informs our understanding of marine worlds. Even fictional exploits of the sea prior to film prophesies the cinematic experience. In many respects, Verne's *Nautilus* imagines both the cinema screen and the aquarium tank: it is a vast, window onto a world; a world that until now remained unseen.<sup>84</sup> From the exploits of Cousteau to Attenborough's *Blue Planet*, the BBC's recent *Oceans* series and even films such as *Jaws*, Pixar's *Finding Nemo* and DreamWorks' *Shark Tale*, our relationship to sea life is visual, it *is* filmic. The Deep is bound to reproduce this relationship in its exhibition since it must appeal to both our familiar mode of appropriation of the sea and to the mass tastes of the tourist market. Thus, The Deep toys with filmic imagery and effects. The 'close-up' is simulated via the port holes into the tropical lagoon and the periscopes offering views into the main tank or the Humber. Using these devices visitors can hone in on certain creatures or sections of the tanks. The 'panning shot' is simulated by the large window onto the main tank which offers a broad vista of the sea life therein, and enframes the kaleidoscopic effect of their movements. Film is alluded to in the exhibition design, too. The *trompe l'oeil* of the Caribbean diorama in the tropical lagoon mock-up could have been lifted directly from

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<sup>83</sup> As Pearman points out: "Soon, you get your first glimpse into the big tank – the Open Seas section- with its scores of species, and – though you are just beneath the surface at this point – you start to get a physical idea of the central concept of depth. Looking through the huge acrylic viewing panel, or sticking your head up into the underwater domes, and especially trying out the periscope, is to feel a little like Jules Verne's Captain Nemo from his prophetic 1870 novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Nemo's marvellous submarine *Nautilus* boasted huge panoramic windows, allowing the wildlife of the oceans to be observed at close quarters. Later, some of this became reality in the televised 1960s and 1970s underwater exploits of Jacques Cousteau, which apart from being popular television proved mightily influential on a new generation of marine biologists – The Deep's Dr David Gibson among them – and which achieved a kind of apotheosis with David Attenborough's 2001 TV series *The Blue Planet*. Much of the technology and interpretation available to that series – which means the resources of marine institutes around the world – is deployed at The Deep" (Pearman, 2002, p.87).

<sup>84</sup> An excerpt from Verne's novel describes the cinematic effect produced by the *Nautilus*: "We remained mute and did not stir, not knowing what surprise, agreeable or disagreeable awaited us. But a sliding noise was heard. It was as if panels were being drawn back in the sides of the *Nautilus*...two crystal panes separated us from the sea. At first I shuddered at the thought that this feeble partition might break, but strong copper bands bounds it, giving it an almost infinite power of resistance. The sea was distinctly visible for a mile around the *Nautilus*. What a spectacle! What pen could describe it? Who could paint the effect of light through the transparent sheets of water, and the softness of its successive gradations from the lower to the upper beds of the ocean? The transparency of the sea is well known and its limpidity is far greater than that of fresh water. The mineral and organic substances which hold it in suspension increase its transparency...in the fluid medium through which the *Nautilus* was travelling, the electric light was produced in the very bosom of the waves. It was not luminous water, but liquid light"(Verne, 1957, p.81).

a film set. As could the large mock-up of a geological layer complete with fake fossils that greet visitors at the end of the suspended walkway near the start of the exhibition. Equally, the projection of sound and various lighting effects in the ‘big bang’ installation mimics Dolby technology, while the darkened, enclosed space alludes to the cinematic anticipation of spectators as the curtains open and the lights dim before any blockbuster. The ‘special effects’ of spot-lighting simulate daylight in the depths of the tanks, highlighting what in nature would be in darkness, and the specially-manufactured water provides extra clarity, and a heightened visuality, since it is shorn of all of its murk-making elements.<sup>85</sup>

Seeing and touching are central to Benjamin’s theory of reception, and it is architecture that trains us in this mode. He writes, “buildings are received in a twofold manner: by use and by perception- or better, tactilely and optically” (2003, p.268). It is this experience of the built environment, this interplay of touch and sight, which is most analogous to our experience as film spectators. And, in the case of *The Deep*, this plays out in particular way. To appropriate the space, then, we do so not in the individual, contemplative state as if before the artwork, but in the distracted, massified state as if before a film. If the spectator’s experience of *The Lowry* involves a form of static looking – an auratic gaze – the *Deep* involves a filmic, kinaesthetic or *post-auratic gaze*. This is produced by the glass of the tanks as screen, but also by the myriad of special effects deployed in the exhibition design. Strategically-placed windows as you journey down through the exhibition, work to create glimpses or snatches of vision, which offer a myriad of perspectives into the interior of the aquarium tanks and create the effect of motion; of a spectacle passing you by even as

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<sup>85</sup> Pearman describes the process: “they mix the salt water in (for it is manufactured on site to exactly the right level of pollution-free purity)...the cylindrical concrete protein skimmer tower...keeps the water optically clear” (2002, p.86).

you traverse it.<sup>86</sup> The Deep thereby plays with the idea of the panorama<sup>87</sup>, but instead of being laid out before you or wrapped around you, you are propelled through and around *it* producing the effect of montage, cutting, splicing and close-ups. A cinematic movement is thereby set in play by the space's design. This movement is, of course, mirrored by the inhabitants of the tanks as they swim in small uniform shoals, or depending on their species, describe the tank in slow, stealthy arcs. Such movement is further complimented by the chromatic effect of the fishes' iridescent bodies which produce flashes of rainbow shades in a Technicolor delight. The Deep is thus an ambiguous space: at once ordering a commodified auratic visuality and, at the same time, a filmic, tactile spectatorship. Just as, for Benjamin, film learns from architecture, in *The Deep*, architecture learns from film, staging a mobile, optical extravaganza of fish life, projected by the glass 'screens' of the tank; filmic surfaces that in a combinatory possibility become screen, window, mirror and lens, all at once. This is 'Hollywood blockbuster' nature.

But *The Deep* isn't film, rather it *simulates* film and therefore the political, transformative potential ascribed to the medium by Benjamin, is short-circuited. By simulating film, then, this kinaesthetic spectatorship is shorn of its haptic element. For Benjamin, film is appropriated, like architecture, by 'touch and sight': there is both a visual and a tactile element to it. In choosing to simulate film, to appear *as if* film, is to decouple the space from this tactile element Benjamin purports film to possess. Perhaps to consider this notion of the 'tactile' element Benjamin ascribes to film is to

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<sup>86</sup> Pearman describes the architectural tricks of the building thus: Thanks to the arts of architect and exhibition designer, it feels as if it is set at a much greater depth than is actually the case. Partly this is because of the physical layout of the building – you glimpse lower levels in such a way as to make them seem a very long way down, and they are lit so as to help this illusion – and partly because of the sense of depth engendered by your glimpses into the undersea world of the big aquarium tanks, at various stages of your progress (Pearman, 2002, p.76).

<sup>87</sup> Panoramas were nineteenth-century simulacral devices which used painted screens in a 360 formation. They were designed to immerse viewers in a scene and through the fabrication of an optical trick, contrived to convince them that they were transported into another space. They thereby produced the illusion of movement. Benjamin of course discussed panoramas as one of a number of dream spaces of the industrial modern city. Panoramas are considered pre-cursors to modern forms of moving-image technology and virtual reality models which, with the use of headsets and specialised suits, allow the user to be transmogrified into a virtual scene. Popular contemporary versions might include *Second Life* or the *SIMS* computer games (Benjamin, 1999, p.5).

settle into a problematic aspect of his idea of post-auratic spectatorship. What gives post-auratic artworks their *tactile* element is their ability to be manipulated, as Leslie puts it ‘manhandled’ (2000, p.150). However, the lack of tactility here is not solely because of *The Deep*’s *simulation* of filmic effects. It is also because, placed behind glass, the animals are -can only be- for visual display, thereby pointing to the limits of our sensory experience of nature<sup>88</sup>. Thus, left with only the visual element, *The Deep* attempts to compensate for the lack of tactility by inserting *interactivity* in its stead. If film, for Benjamin, allows us to experience ‘as if for ourselves’ -both viscerally and visually- and provides a cathartic outlet, or helps us to adapt to and manage the shock-like demands of life in urban technological (capitalist) modernity, its simulation short-circuits its potentially transformative power. Film, for Benjamin, expands the limits of experience; it is a surface which fosters depth: the “deepening of apperception” (Benjamin, 1999c, p.229). It is this shift in perception, this ability to reveal unforeseen possibilities in the everyday, the opportunity to re-imagine the social world, which establishes film’s transformative power. By simulating film – reproducing it as a third or fourth order version of itself – this critical power is lost under the weight of its staging. *The Deep*’s simulation of filmic experience manages to produce a contradiction: a post-auratic spectatorship that reinstalls aura, a synthetic aura, and disguises the alienation and reification inherent in our relationship to nature. Such effects work to *produce* marine life, they serve to order our spectatorship, drawing attention to the actors in the show -the fish- who form their own ‘star system’ headed up by the sharks. This serves to install a ‘cultish’ distance from marine life *despite* its apparent proximity. In the *Work of Art* essay Benjamin warned against monumentalising the present, re-inscribing a synthetic aura into film, with the “spell of

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<sup>88</sup> Laura U. Marks takes up Benjaminian and Deleuzian ideas arguing for a ‘haptic spectatorship’ – a sensory relationship between viewer and film, or what she calls ‘the skin of the film’- in relation to intercultural cinema (Marks, 2000).

the personality”, which served to insulate against change and the radical reconfiguration of the present, rather than foster it (Benjamin, 1999c:224).<sup>89</sup> Is The Deep learning from the movies just as surely as it has learned from the mall? Turning now to the discussion of how The Deep confronts the problem of the (necessarily) optical rather than tactile relationship to marine life, and attempts to solve it technologically.

***Hands on, Gloves off: “Out of Order”***



Figure 16

During his visit to Moscow in the winter of 1926, Benjamin visited the Red Army Club. He describes the clean, bright space in his diary of the trip, noting the many chess boards (Lenin’s favourite game) and the relative

austerity of the space compared with other

state-run clubs. On the wall hangs a wooden relief map that draws his attention. He describes it thus:

A schematically simplified outline of Europe. If you turn the handle next to it, all the places Lenin ever lived in Russia and in Europe light up one after another in chronological sequence. But the apparatus works poorly, many places light up at the same time (Benjamin, 1986, p.64).

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<sup>89</sup> Equally, Kracauer’s faith in the transformative power of film, like Benjamin’s, was tentative and provisional. As Leslie points out, it began to fade as early as the advent of the colour movie: In the city the lights substitute for an animated life. Lighting and advertisements, celluloid and colour become the very components of an illusion that sustains the social world as it is....For Kracauer, inside the cinema there is little chance of learning anything about the world. Film is increasingly unsatisfactory....colour in the moves, he says, is dead ballast, making nature look as if it has been painted. In striving to look natural, colour actually produces a fake that is untrue. Coloured film is a lie posing as truth (Leslie, 2007, p.46).

Inside The Deep I approach the periscope that offers views into the Humber, and its neighbour which offers views into the main tank. Both are covered with a makeshift note: out of order. The Deep, just as the Red Army Club, prides itself on its interactive elements, yet neither deliver quite what they promise. Interactivity appears as an attempt to bridge the tension that is set up in the staging of the spectacle of marine animals inherent to The Deep; a certain compensatory device. At various points throughout the exhibition there are interactive elements. Voice-over canopies are sited at intervals on the suspended walkway offering visitors a linear narrative of the earth, beginning with the big bang through the various historical epochs to the present, at the press of a button. Millions of years of geological history are compressed into sound bites and mapped perfectly on to the space of the walkway which simultaneously marks on its handrail the passage of one million years at 1.5cm intervals. The notion of interactivity is thus woven through the exhibition space culminating in the multi-media extravaganza that is 'Deep Blue One' which places the visitor at the centre of a complex, confusing narrative of future sea exploration via large video screens, console desks, and simulators. The Deep desperately wants us to be involved as much as possible in its exhibition, indeed such forms of interaction are central to most contemporary tourist spaces and cultural endeavours since they appear to democratise access<sup>90</sup>. The Deep seeks to direct us through the space in particular formations - essentially a form of passive spectatorship- but through the deployment of interactive devices that attempt to convince us of our *activity* in the event. Just as the kinaesthetic effect must be manufactured, our interaction is constantly solicited, echoing

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<sup>90</sup> Susan Davis (1997) in her work on Sea World in California notes the more cynical elements involved in such forms of interaction: "The tactile emphasis at Sea World derives in part from research into factors that effect theme park length of stay. Sea World's managers have latched on to the notions of "participation" and "interaction", theorizing that people stay longer if entertainment is less passive, less dependent on just watching and more physically involving. Over and over again, Sea World's managers told me, 'We are interactive', 'We're participatory', 'We're touchable'. The vice president for entertainment explicitly compared the park to Disneyland in this way, asking, "Have you ever tried to touch anything at *Disneyland*? Have you every tried to sit on their grass?" (1997, p.103).

Baudrillard's notion of the 'referendum mode' which we inhabit as 'silent majorities'. There is, paradoxically, no space in the space; as visitors we are constantly interpellated into the narrative of the exhibition, constantly diverted whilst simultaneously propelled in manageable portions through the building's interior: no loitering, or at least no unstructured loitering, allowed. Susan Davis, in her description of the Sea World experience in California, notes how the park manages its need to appear to offer interaction and the necessity to process, as smoothly as possible, the large numbers of visitors. There is a constant tension, notes Davis, between the need to appear as though every visitor has the chance to participate and the recognition that every visitor cannot possibly have the same experience of the space:

Since participation slows people down, it threatens to create so much involvement that a share of the spectacle cannot be guaranteed to the whole audience. Again, participation is a capacity problem. As the chief engineer put it, '[I]f you have anything that only one person can do at a time, if that person takes ten minutes to enjoy what he's doing, you can only accommodate a hundred people a day. When you have thirty thousand people, that's a problem' (Davis, 1997, p.106).

The Deep, then, is caught in a similar bind: it must make nature visible and 'hands-on' and, simultaneously propel the greatest number of visitors it can, through its exhibition spaces.<sup>91</sup>

Much of this interaction, as we might expect, is aimed at children but not in a way that makes best use of what Benjamin understands as the *childlike* appropriation of the world. The interactive elements in The Deep ensure, rather, that a *childish* prodding and poking ensues. For Benjamin, the creativity of children is borne out of boredom and the remnants of the adult world which creates a threshold space *to*

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<sup>91</sup> Pearman writes: "Your route is not timed – you are free to wander through at your leisure. Being a linear route descending through the building, generated by the building's architecture, it is intended to be self-policing. On quiet days there will be time to linger in the set-piece areas. At busy times the increased pressure of people ought naturally to encourage people to move through faster. The trick of the circulation pattern is that you arrive back at your starting point on the third floor where there is a café and viewing platform: so nothing is missed" (Pearman, 2002, p.76).

creativity.<sup>92</sup> Boredom is thus a space of potential transformation; a liminal, transitory, threshold space. He writes: “boredom is a warm grey fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colourful of silks”(1999, p.105). Without boredom, then, we eliminate those spaces of potential creativity, substituting a colourful imaginary for a dull sameness.<sup>93</sup> Interaction, which is aimed at eradicating boredom, excising it from the space, thereby short-circuits any potential creative interaction. Such unoccupied, undemarcated use of time and space is thus substituted for a Baudrillardian operationalization; a ‘referendum mode’ of exploration and appropriation. We are invited to ‘press this button’, ‘listen to this voice-over’, solicited for our feedback in a pre-scribed – already-written- experience.<sup>94</sup> Our relationship to the space is already accounted for, already decided, and already ordered. We are presented with a relationship to nature that has had ours and its improvisatory elements channelled

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<sup>92</sup> Benjamin describes the creative, mimetic transformation of the bourgeois interior in the child’s reconfiguration through play in *One Way Street*: “Standing behind the doorway curtain, the child himself becomes something floating and white, a ghost. The dining table under which he is crouching turns him into a wooden idol in a temple whose four pillars are the carved legs. And behind a door, he himself *is* the door – wears it as his heavy mask, and like a shaman will bewitch all those who unsuspectingly enter” (Benjamin, 1996, p.465).

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Benjamin describes the complexity of the notion of boredom as a threshold for Benjamin: “Potentiality inheres in one of the most striking presentations of the threshold condition. This takes place when boredom is describes as a ‘warm grey fabric’ that has, on its other side ‘lustrous and colourful silk’. For Benjamin ‘we’ sleep wrapped in this blanket. The sleeper appears ‘bored’. On awakening the sleeper wishes to communicate the dream and yet all that is narrated is this boredom. Overcoming boredom is the narrating of the dream. Doing so, however, necessitates ‘at one stroke’ turning the ‘lining of time to the other side’. This ‘other side’ –time’s other side, a side revealed or turned out in an instant by an action, is the narrating of the dream as the overcoming of boredom. What is significant here is twofold. In the first instance this possibility is already present in the fabric holding boredom in play. In other words, it is present as a potentiality. That is why in the following entry in the *Convolute* boredom becomes ‘the external surface of unconscious events’. Crossing the threshold will involve more than simple movement. Secondly, the ‘fabric’ – one side of which is grey, the other lustrous, two sides holding a threshold in place, a place whose articulation is given as that across which something would occur when one side is turned to another – provides a way into understanding what a ‘dialectical antithesis’ to boredom would involve. For Benjamin, the dialectic needs to be explicated as a juxtaposition of elements rather than their synthesis. Opposition needs to be shown. It becomes a form of narration whose conditions of possibility are themselves already possible. The possibility lies in the construction of boredom itself. Rather than existing as a discrete entity, it exists as bound up with its opposite. The overcoming of boredom is not the move to the coloured underside. Indeed, it is not even a matter of the simple juxtaposition of grey and colour, as though as that was involved amounted to choice. Benjamin’s formulations should not be taken as literal. Rather, narrating the dream that would be the movement across the threshold – the movement on from boredom- needs to be thought in relation to the structure of temporality marked out by awaiting. Moreover, it is a sense of awaiting that depends upon the potential actuality of interruption” (Benjamin, 2005, p.167)

<sup>94</sup> Baudrillard writes: “Interactivity is the end of spectacle. It all began with the abolition of the stage and the immersing of the spectator in the spectacle. Living Theatre. When everybody becomes an actor, there is no action any longer, there is no stage. Only with the strict separation of stage and auditorium is the audience fully an actor” (1997, p.98). For Benjamin, in his first and second versions of the *Work of Art* essay, the audience identify with the screen actor who acts out the audience’s self-alienation. In the third and final draft of the essay, Benjamin shifts the audience’s identification to the camera.

out.<sup>95</sup> The potential of the *flâneur*'s, kaleidoscopic gaze and the child's creative play is transformed into Baudrillard's bored TV viewer, the 'computer terminal' citizen drowning under information and with ever less knowledge. Boredom is not transformative for Baudrillard; it is where we end up.<sup>96</sup> He alludes to this in his distinction between play and the ludic thus: "Consider a game of computer chess. Where is the intensity of the game of chess, or the pleasure proper to computers? The one involves play, the other the ludic" (1991, p.160). Computer interactive devices are, for Baudrillard, absolutely the realm of the ludic. The childlike fascination found in play is substituted for a childish inattention: the former still offers an improvisatory or dialectical possibility, the latter, tantrum-led, demanding immediate satiating. Children's play is transformative, their ludic manipulation is not.

Perhaps interactivity is the necessary deterrence function that The Deep performs to convince us of nature's aliveness, at the moment of its disappearance. It is the attempt to save nature's 'reality principle'. Just as the ludic, childish qualities of Disneyland exist in order to trick us into believing that 'outside' is adult when in fact "childishness is everywhere" (Baudrillard, 2001, p.175). Thus Baudrillard argues, "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (2001, p.175). This false distinction, between inside and out, the real and the imaginary is held in place, Baudrillard argues, by the car park. This acts as a threshold, a transitory space, but one which differs

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<sup>95</sup> Davis says of Sea World's interactive elements: "In one sense, participation is exactly about sitting on the grass verge or the bench; it is the way customers make the theme park spaces temporarily their own, as opposed to being channeled relentlessly through them. And while Sea World makes a few such areas available, it does so conscious of the need to create structured antistructure, to supply the feeling that something is spontaneous...but generally, interactivity at the park takes more structured forms. Children are provided with an environment they can physically engage, where they can play roughly, and even get wet – but the forms and kinds of engagement have been carefully planned for them. This is preshaped interaction" (1997, p. 104).

<sup>96</sup> Baudrillard writes: "Boredom is a subtle form of filtrable virus, of fossilized tonality, which might be said to pass invisibly across the substance of time, without altering it. Fine particles of boredom striate time like neutrinos, leaving no trace. There is scarcely any living memory of boredom. This is why it can superimpose itself on all kinds of activities, even exciting ones, since it lives in the interstices" (1997, p.52).

strikingly to Benjamin's analysis of the same phenomenon. For Baudrillard, this threshold is silent, without possibility. This threshold is merely a point of contrast with the theme park itself, the cacophony of its spectacle. He writes, "the contrast with the absolute solitude of the parking lot – a veritable concentration camp – is total" (1994b, p.12).

Interactive elements, then, by erasing the possibility of boredom, impoverish creative interactivity with the space and the nature therein. Yet, ironically, the broken interactive elements signal not a failure as far as The Deep is concerned but a success: they attest to their use. The Deep's designers acknowledged their concern at using interactive elements in the exhibition after research at the ill-fated Magna Science Centre in Doncaster which opened before The Deep and which had struggled to maintain its own interactive elements (Pearman, 2002. p.60). But the fact that some of The Deep's interactive elements *are* 'out of order' becomes a moment of redemption, an interruption, to the perfection of ludic encounters Baudrillard claims.

### ***Sanitisation/Domestication of Nature: "Picnic Place"***

I watch the first tear, the primary breaching of the membrane, as white flesh rips easily, masticated into oblivion by a row of tiny teeth. Frenzied feeding ensues. Heads of all shapes, sizes and colours bob before falling into the steady rhythm of eating. Occasional tussles occur, fighting over the choicest cuts. The vinegary smell of ketchup permeates the atmosphere. Lunch time at The Deep is fully underway. That they serve fish in The Deep is a curious phenomenon. That we are treated to an insight into marine life, that we consume them as visual stimuli throughout the exhibition, as furry facsimiles in the gift shop, is one thing. But being asked to eat them in the café, is quite another. This curious occurrence discloses the relationship to the site and Hull's

past in a particular way. The silencing and erasure of the indigenous population of fish is what gives voice to the new ‘fancy fish’ of The Deep. To eat fish in Hull at any other time over the last two hundred or so years would be a common occurrence. Fish caught that morning would be eaten that evening in any number of houses across the city. You can still buy fish in Hull, but whether it comes from a local boat, owned by a local fisherman, is no longer guaranteed. The city’s fortunes rest on its relationship to the North Sea and its provision of fish stocks, as well as its function as a trading port. As Markham notes:

Fishing had long been practised off the East Yorkshire coast but the development of the docks and the railway links with inland towns stimulated its growth in Hull, at a time when the existence of so many poor people created an insatiable demand for more cheap protein. The rich fishing grounds of the North Sea attracted fishing families like the Hellyers from Devon, and the discovery of the Great Silver Pit area in 1843 was a powerful fillip to the industry (Markham, 1989, p.83).

The Deep designates official ‘feeding places’ to satiate its visitors: the Observatory Café, the Two Rivers Restaurant and the Picnic Place, thus, the notion of feeding is



explicit throughout the space. Even the fish have designated feeding times, turned into a tourist spectacle. Just as zoos stage the feeding of the lions, The Deep produces the same event for the sharks. Divers

*Figure 17*

are lowered into the main tank

with buckets of dead fish to satisfy the predators. This performance of feeding, with a guide who talks the crowd through the process, reifies the event into an object of spectacle and manages the relationship between the crowd and the fish in a particular

way. We are exposed to a performance of feeding that is artificial: we see the sharks being fed but not *feeding*. Some sharks are filter feeders, taking in water, filtering it through their mouths (which act as a sieve) and ingesting any edible elements before expelling the water through their gills. They are, therefore, in a process of *constant* feeding. Nevertheless, all sharks are predators, and in their natural environment they are either feeding, or maximising feeding possibilities through stealthy swimming. At The Deep such feeding is reduced to a meal time that satisfies both the visitors' desire for spectacle *and* anthropomorphises the relationship of the fish to their own sustenance. Benjamin's fascination with the illustrator Grandville is instructive here. In his sketch of the Rings of Saturn, Grandville discloses something of nineteenth-century utopian ideals about new forms of construction materials and the idea of nature as a pure commodity<sup>97</sup>. As W.G. Sebald remarks, in *The Natural History of Destruction* (2004), the Grandville sketches of animals in human dress sitting at tables and using knives and forks are disturbing because they hint at the cruelty of the natural world that we as humans are not exempt from.<sup>98</sup> But Grandville's etchings are also a kind of anthropomorphic disclosure, expressing the more cynical elements of the utopian desire of domestication. Equally, feeding time at The Deep sanitises the natural relationship, humanizes it, covering up both the relationship – the natural law of the food chain as the unrelentingly cruel battle for survival- and at the same time works to domesticate it, quite literally. In the Two Rivers restaurant a space of confrontation is opened up between the diners and the marine-life. Friday and Saturday nights provide

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<sup>97</sup> Benjamin writes: "Grandville's fantasies confer a commodity character on the universe. They modernize it. Saturn's ring becomes a cast-iron balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn take the evening air" (1999:8) For Benjamin, Grandville's work, which he links dialectically with the phantasmagorias of the World Exhibitions, contains a "secret theme": "the enthronement of the commodity, with its lustre of distraction" (1999, p.7).

<sup>98</sup> Writing in the context of the everyday activities that continued despite the untold destructions of WWII, Sebald notes: "You do not expect an insect colony to be transfixed with grief at the destruction of a neighbouring anthill, but you do assume a certain degree of empathy in human nature, and to that extent there is indeed something alarmingly absurd and shocking about continuing to drink coffee in the normal way on Hamburg balconies at the end of July 1943, rather like the sight of Grandville's animals, in human dress and armed with cutlery, consuming a fellow creature"(Sebald, 2004, p.42) Also, in a pleasing echo, one of Sebald's books is entitled *The Ring of Saturn* (2002).

the opportunity for diners to consume their meals looking into the main tank. Face-to-face, then, with the fish. This seemingly, ‘fun dining experience’ reveals a profound species to species encounter, one which calls to mind Freud’s notion of the ‘return of the repressed’, the uncanny encounters provoked by the material world which the unconscious has sought to banish (Freud, 1919). These repressions are hinted at in the feeling of horror that arises when something apparently familiar becomes disturbing, creepy and strange. Freud writes: “the uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and returned from it...everything that is uncanny fills this condition” (Freud, 1985, p.368).<sup>99</sup>

In *About Looking* (1991), John Berger suggests that our ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ relationship to animals is lost in urban capitalist modernity which, in seeking to dominate or master nature, deprives us of a symbolic or ‘authentic’ communion with animals. He writes:

The 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Western Europe and North America, saw the beginning of a process, today being completed by 20<sup>th</sup> century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken. Before this rupture, animals constituted the first circle of what surrounded man. Perhaps that already suggests too great a distance. They were with man at the centre of his world (Berger, 1991, p.3).

This apparent loss of a symbolic contact with animals, for Berger, is “epitomized by the pathos of an unrecognizing looking, an imperfectly-met gaze” (Baker, 2001, p.11). The fetishised, anthropomorphic performance of feeding time in *The Deep*, and the dining experience in front of the tank, therefore presents a model of species interaction that still keys into notions of mastery, control and distance. In *The Deep*’s restaurant, then, and at feeding time, we are faced with the uncanny encounter of fish as both ‘other’ and ‘same’. The glass surface of the tanks reflects the fish back to us just as, Benjamin maintains, the glass windows of the arcades reflect the spectator’s image and

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<sup>99</sup> For further discussion of the uncanny in relation to cities and Benjamin’s work, see (Pile, 2005)

intermingle it with the image of the commodities on display, thus allowing an identification to take place. In *The Deep*, there is both an identification and the *re-presentation* of an ordering where we are still at the top of the food chain. The proximity of nature afforded by the technological prosthesis of the plexiglass is challenged by the ‘distance’ opened up between spectator and animal in the feeding time event. If Berger posits a misrecognition between us and the animal, when face to face, Benjamin in *One-Way Street*, in a section entitled *Gloves* reverses the confrontation. He writes:

In an aversion to animals the predominant feeling is fear of being recognized by them through contact. The horror that stirs deep in man is an obscure awareness that in him something lives so akin to the animal that it might be recognized. All disgust is originally disgust at touching” (Benjamin, 1985, p.50).

For him, animals and humans, then, are not opposed to each other but rather propinquitous, and it is this fear, this uncanny sense of the ‘return of the repressed’, that fuels our need to reinstate an imaginary and physical boundary between us and them. For Berger, Grandville’s animal etchings are disturbing not because of their cannibalistic display but because they are a shameful reminder of our jurisdiction and control over nature and a marker of the beginning of the end of a quotidian relationship with natural beasts: “these animals have become prisoners of a human/social situation into which they have been press-ganged” (1991, p.19). As Baker argues, for Berger, as the real, symbolic relationship between us and animals is eroded, their simulacra, their stunted representations, proliferate in two specific forms: “Pets, Beatrix Potter books and Disney films exemplify the family relation; zoos, games reserves and wildlife photography attest to the spectacular relation” (2001, p.13). The effect of this is, at the point of their disappearance from everyday life, to multiply animals as mere “mementoes from the outside world” (1991, p.12). The zoo, then, in its spectacular staging of nature, is for Berger a monument to the impossibility of an authentic

encounter with animal life. Indeed the proliferation of zoos and the like correlates exactly to the point in history at which animals disappear from daily life. They are “an epitaph to a relationship which was as old as man” (1991, p.21).<sup>100</sup> For Berger, the family visit to the zoo is a “more sentimental occasion than a visit to a fair or a football match” (1991, p.23). It is an the opportunity for adults to show children “the originals of their ‘reproductions’” and also “the hope of re-finding some of the innocence of that reproduced animal world which they [adults] remember from their own childhood...[yet]...the animals seldom live up to the adults’ memories, whilst to the children they appear for the most part, unexpectedly lethargic and dull” (1991, p.23). This disappointment, Berger suggests, is because although visitors to the zoo move past each cage not unlike visitors to an art gallery past each image, “in the zoo the view is always wrong. Like an image out of focus” (1991, p.23). But for Berger, we become so accustomed to this vision of nature in captivity that we stop noticing its skewness or bat it away with a compensatory claim, “what do you expect? It’s not a dead object you’ve come to look at, it’s alive. It’s leading its own life. Why should this coincide with its being properly visible?”(1991, p.24). This notion of the animal leading its own life and escaping the glare of the spectator reminds us of Benjamin’s experience of the fish otter in the Berlin Zoo of his childhood. Benjamin describes the waiting, usually in the rain, before the otter’s enclosure, desperate for a glimpse of the creature who would defy the rules of the zoo, and its carefully simulated enclosure, staying hidden in the murky water of its man-made pool. For Benjamin the slimness of the chance of catching sight of the otter served only to make the experience more prized, and imbued

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<sup>100</sup> Berger recognises the symbolic nature of zoos in terms of the cultural capital they add to the city: “When they were founded – the London Zoo in 1828, the Jardin des Plantes in 1793, the Berlin Zoo in 1844, they brought considerable prestige to the national capitals...Likewise in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public zoos were an endorsement of modern colonial power. The capturing of the animals was a symbolic representation of the conquest of all distance and exotic lands” (1991, p.21). Berger also recognises that this symbolic power was initially tied into notions of public education and municipal progress: “Like every other 19<sup>th</sup> century public institution, the zoo, however supportive of the ideology of imperialism, had to claim an independent and civic function. The claim was that this was another kind of museum, whose purpose was to further knowledge and public enlightenment. And so the first questions asked of zoos belonged to natural history; it was then thought possible to study the natural life of animals even in such unnatural conditions” (1991, p.21).

his rain-soaked waiting with an urgent anticipation. The threshold moment of waiting – of boredom- the expectation of the animal’s appearance, charged the moment, and served to heighten the sensory experience of the child, one which repaid itself in the form of its recognition on subsequent visits. This moment of waiting, then, is one of identification. Benjamin notes, “In such hours passed behind the gray-gloomed window, I was at home with the otter. But actually I wouldn’t become aware of that until next time I stood before the cage”(2006, p.81).

For Berger, however:

The zoo cannot but disappoint. The public purpose of zoos is to offer visitors the opportunity of looking at animals. Yet nowhere in a zoo can a stranger encounter the look of an animal. At the most, the animals gaze flickers and passes on. They look sideways. They look blindly beyond. They scan mechanically. They have been immunised to encounter, because nothing can any more occupy a *central* place in their attention. Therein lies the ultimate consequence of their marginalisation. That look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and with which, in any case, all men had always lived until less than a century ago, has been extinguished.”(Berger, 1991, p.28).

In some respects, Berger’s position is similar to Baudrillard’s, but for different reasons. At the point of its disappearance, simulacral forms ensure nature’s infinite proliferation. For Baudrillard, our contemporary encounters with nature are part of a wider process of semiotic destruction through simulation embodied in the attempts at nature’s perfection that collapses this distinction between us and the other. Instead of nature as other, we seek instead, an incorporation-which is also an obliteration- of the very qualities that create this otherness: a form of nature’s ‘ethnic cleansing’.

In another example of sanitisation, the visitors at The Deep are not given access to the perennial, unavoidable spectacle that is the daily body count of fish consumed by the predatory sharks. This is sanitised away. No reference to its possibility is mentioned on The Deep’s website, unlike the London Aquarium’s which makes a statement categorically denying its occurrence. Yet, Mall of America’s Underwater Adventures Aquarium found itself at the centre of a media event in 2008

when visitors filmed one of their sharks consuming a smaller shark (Clarke, 2008). An emergency alert went out as aquarists launched a boat into the tank to prevent the smaller shark's death. The visitors caught on camera did not know whether to panic, look away with revulsion or keep filming. Other aquarium's are less guarded than The Deep and admit that since sharks are predators, despite keeping them well-fed, accidents can and do happen; smaller fish disappear from the tanks. Any moral objection to showing nature's cruelty rings hollow when faced with Baudrillard's insistence on the obscenity of contemporary culture where everything is on display at all times.<sup>101</sup> For The Deep to ask us to look away now seems somewhat hypocritical.

But The Deep must key into prevailing discourses on our relationship to nature and it must manage and be seen to be managing this relationship in particular ways. The various key stage educational documents available on the buildings' website, its commitment to school tours and educational talks are part of this careful management of the image of The Deep in its role as nature's PR adviser. As Davis writes of the Sea World experience, but equally applicable to The Deep, this hidden aspect of marine life serves to manage and order the relationship to nature in particular ways:

Like every tourist attraction, Sea World has an extensive backstage, and like most tourist attractions but unlike most theme parks, it allows selective parts of its backstage or production area to be seen. It is here that customers can occasionally glimpse the construction of spectacular nature in progress...Nevertheless, for the most part, the nature Sea World's animals appear in is very limited, a tight frame. Animals are not often seen mating or killing, although this has occasionally happened in shows, rather, mammals and birds and usually seen simply eating, grooming, or swimming. The complexly manipulated process of the reproduction and maintenance of their lives is more or less invisible, except when it is carefully brought forward and re-represented in selected contexts such as video tapes, guided tours, and scheduled 'meet the experts' interactions(Davis, 1997, p.110).

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<sup>101</sup> Of a similar situation at Sea World, Davis writes: "Sea World's management feels that although some revelation is unavoidable, visitors don't wish to know all the details of captivity. Things that must remain invisible for the comfort of paying visitors include the seriously sick and dying animals, although animals undergoing rehabilitation are carefully displayed if they don't appear wounded and can be appropriately interpreted." (1997, p.110).

Whilst The Deep appears to produce a relationship to nature that is ordered through concepts of preservation and conservation, the fact that it operates as a driver of economic resurgence produces this apparent paradox. It must also operate at the level of cultural destination, as a tourist site. It therefore, inevitably, falls into a contradiction of promoting a relationship to nature that is different to previous Heideggerian ideas of ‘standing reserve’ – nature as existing *for* exploitation- and yet simultaneously enacts a certain ‘soft’ destruction on that which it claims to preserve<sup>102</sup>. That this takes place in a building that serves to regenerate the economically-striated Hull, a city whose fortune was made on, amongst other things, a vibrant fishing industry, is particularly pertinent.

### ***Preservers and Collectors: “Fossilised Shark’s Teeth & Coral Propagation”***

The Deep is currently working on a project to exhibit cold water coral *Lophelia pertusa* as part of the Twilight Zone exhibition. A page on their website describes the process:

Corals will be collected ethically from the legs of North Sea oil platforms. The corals colonize these structures at depths in excess of 90m...As part of the routine maintenance of oil structures the coral colonies have to be occasionally removed to protect the structural integrity of the structure. The Deep and the Scottish Association for Marine Science are currently working in conjunction with major oil companies operating in the North Sea to make this possible ([www.thedeep.co.uk](http://www.thedeep.co.uk)).

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<sup>102</sup> Neil Leach describes Heidegger’s position thus: “What we find in our contemporary age, according to Heidegger, is a condition in which humankind treats nature as a form of resource, something to be exploited, stockpiled and so on. ‘Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*]’. And it is this sense of ‘standing reserve’...that lies at the heart of modern technology...The problem is not so much nature being devalued as standing-reserve, but humankind finding itself in the same condition” (Leach, 2006). Benjamin challenges this idea when he notes the ancient custom of libation “which forbade the picking up of crumbs at the table since they belonged to the heroes”. He goes on: “If society has so denatured itself through necessity and greed that it now receives the gifts of nature only rapaciously – that it snatches the fruit unripe from the trees, in order to sell it most profitably, and is compelled to empty each dish in its determination to have enough – the earth will be impoverished and the land will yield bad harvests” (Benjamin, 1996, p.455).

At the same time as it seeks to *preserve* marine life, The Deep also offers the opportunity for visitors to *collect* it. Not merely as a memorable tourist experience but also as a material object. The Deep's website also advertises fossilised shark's teeth:

**78mm (3.5inches) Fossilised Megalodon Tooth in a presentation case**

This fossilised tooth is from the largest shark to ever live, the Megalodon. It has no living relatives and was the last in a line of giant sharks, that for reasons unknown died out over two million years ago. Its teeth have been found all over the world, the largest being approx 7.5" in size. These are highly collectable teeth. Some can be worth thousands of pounds. 10% of sales are donated to the Shark Trust. Price: £115.00 (Including VAT at 15%) ([www.thedeep.co.uk](http://www.thedeep.co.uk)).<sup>103</sup>

The two images juxtaposed offer something of the difficult balance The Deep has to strike between the preservation of nature and its availability for collection as a souvenir. It's grappling with nature both as 'standing-reserve' and as a set of increasingly depleted resources.

The Deep has a certain family resemblance to a winter garden, another form of nineteenth-century dream house marked out by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. Such spaces are particularly pertinent since they are built to protect a nature that would otherwise perish; thus it is a 'forced' nature that is also an act of preservation. The winter garden is also a particular kind of bourgeois collection which keys into notions of accumulation and imperialism. For Benjamin, winter gardens are dusty *fata morgana*: spaces of optical illusion (1999, p.155). Housing a collection of nature under one roof, they are phantasmagoric, simulated worlds. The particular formation of iron and glass used in such buildings works to produce and encapsulate, for Benjamin, the utopian promise of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture and technology. At their

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<sup>103</sup> The Megalodon shark existed in the Miocene era. Of course, Benjamin likened the Arcades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when viewed from the 20<sup>th</sup>, to Miocene caves which could be deciphered to trace extinct forms: "As rocks of the Miocene or Eocene Age in places bear the imprint of monstrous creatures from those ages, so today arcades dot the metropolitan landscape like caves containing the fossil remains of a vanished monster: the consumers of the pre-imperial era of capitalism, the last dinosaur of Europe" (1999, p.540).

inception in the nineteenth-century they keyed into prevalent bourgeois cultural ideals. Such ideals, as Barthes says, are captured in Jules Verne's fiction, which reflects the dominant nineteenth-century notions about our interaction with the natural world that served to fuel the construction of such spaces<sup>104</sup>:

Verne belongs to the progressive lineage of the bourgeoisie: his work proclaims that nothing can escape man, that the world, even in its most distant part, is like an object in his hand, and that, all told, property is but a dialectical movement in the general enslavement of Nature. Verne in no way sought to enlarge the world by romantic ways of escape or mystical plans to reach the infinite: he constantly sought to shrink it, to populate it, to reduce it to a known and enclosed space, where man could subsequently live in comfort: the world can draw everything from itself; it needs, in order to exist, no one else but man (Barthes, 2000, p.65-66).

This process of miniaturisation, then, that winter gardens and *The Deep* serve to perform- to contain tiny versions of greater space whether it be the sea or the entire spectrum of the earth's plant life- are forms of control. What has shifted, perhaps, are the ideas that serve to propel such initiatives. Instead of accumulation and the imperialist appropriation of the world, they key into contemporary versions of the same discourses: preservation and conservation. Such discourses, however, reinvigorate and reconfigure the ethics of possessing what is essentially a living collection.

The collector is radical figure for Benjamin, for s/he lifts commodities out of their signifying chain and re-constitutes them in a new context. This re-framing serves to release the object from its usefulness and its value as commodity. To collect, then, is to preserve with the intention of reconfiguration – a new relationship, a new formation<sup>105</sup>. As Gilloch & Dant point out, “the collector, in the tactile activity of “removing the object from its original context and inserting it into a new configuration...may come to disclose...its truth” (2004, p.142). Collecting, then,

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<sup>104</sup> Of course, most famously, Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, his analysis of photography, refers to a photograph of his mother known by him (and never revealed to the reader) as the Winter Garden Photograph. This photograph for him elicits the ‘wound’ exerted by the image that he calls the *punctum* (Barthes, 2000).

<sup>105</sup> For Benjamin, collecting is also about proximity and remembrance. It seeks to snatch obsolete items from their fate as the outmoded debris of commodity capitalism: “Collecting is a form of practical memory, and of all the profane manifestations of ‘nearness’ it is the most binding” (1999, p.205).

privileges the touch over the look. This might well be the intention and the outcome of removing ‘second nature’s objects from their context – the commodified world of things- but when it comes to the objects of ‘first nature’, the collector is less the surrealist-engineer of commodity capitalism and more akin to the bourgeois accumulative, imperialist Benjamin seeks to wipe out. Collectors of ‘nature’ are involved in another destruction: an erasure of traces and thereby a forgetting. To remove objects of nature from their original context and reappropriate them in a new environment heightens their demise in first nature. They are ‘preserved’, sited under glass, as visual commodities.<sup>106</sup> This, for Baudrillard, is a fatal preservation. Thus, collecting nature has a paradoxical outcome: the extinction of its ‘traces’ *through* collection, through the very tactility that seeks to re-member it. As for the project of preservation for future generations, can it avoid this double bind, of preservation through destruction, and to what ends?

For Baudrillard, this desire for the proximity to nature – the ability to see it in ‘close-up’ - becomes imperative just at the moment it slips away from us. For him, we become obsessed with our origins, our natural history, in a moment of nostalgia, just as it is on the brink of destruction. For him, projects such as The Deep are complicit in disrupting the symbolic relations *of* nature and *to* nature for semiotic pleasure, and for the sake of an operational perfection. Baudrillard draws our attention to these ideas, and to another contemporary winter garden, in his discussion of Biosphere 2.<sup>107</sup> A project that sought to collect and maintain a replica of the world’s bio-diversity, its

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<sup>106</sup> Recent work by marine biologists traces the demise of anemonefishes such as clownfish to collectors in the aquarium trade. In an article entitled *Losing Nemo*, a reference to the Pixar children’s film *Finding Nemo*, the collection of such species is, perhaps unsurprisingly, linked to their decline in their natural habitats. (Jones, Gardner et al., 2008). Equally, Nigel Clark has noted the contrast between cosmopolitan urban cultures – as a mixing and dispersal of identities- guided by the notion that “leaving ‘home’ can be a positive and creative experience...and the deepening sense of ecological danger of displacing biological life from its normal surroundings. In this context, leaving home is known as ‘bioinvasion’” (Clark, 2004, p.264). This notion of ‘leaving home’ calls to mind Lukács’s notion that the modern experience is one of “transcendental homelessness” – a form of alienation from the self and society – best expressed in literary form by the novel (Lukács, 1971).

<sup>107</sup> The Eden Project in Cornwall, a sister millennial project to The Deep, is perhaps the most recent British version of the phenomenon Baudrillard critiques. Bartram and Shobrook perform a Baudrillardian reading of the space as “ecoutopia achieved”(Bartram and Shobrook, 2000).

plant life, species, and various climatic regions, Biosphere 2 was a glass dome built in the Arizona desert between 1987 and 1991. As an experiment of human survival, a model of biological and ecological perfection, Biosphere 2 sought to preserve certain species to ensure their survival<sup>108</sup>. As Gilloch and Dant point out, the collector, in Baudrillard's formulation, seeks origins in a wave of nostalgia, mastery and control that is "a mastery... over birth and death" (2004, p.142). This mastery extends to the desire to excise all elements of 'evil' or otherness from nature itself. As Hegarty remarks, for Baudrillard, our centuries' long battle with nature as 'other' is eroded: "now nature is expected to be already tame" (2004, p.123). In Biosphere 2, disruptive forms were excluded in the attempt to programme out chance, evil, death; for him, all the symbolic forms. This management of nature is the attempt to minimize its unpredictability, its threat, under the guise of its protection. For Baudrillard "the nature we should be preserving (through non-intervention) contains death and catastrophes. It also certainly contains extinction, yet here we resist evolution as its 'reality' is something outside our control" (Hegarty, 2004, p.123).

Technological progress offers up a further dimension to this striving for control of the uncontrollable: the perfection of nature in the form of cloning. Our fate, Baudrillard claims, is to be "trapped between our fossils and our clones"; between a constant nostalgia for what has disappeared and its re-enactment and reanimation through new technological forms (1997, p.138). He writes:

A contradictory dual operation: man, alone of all species, is seeking to construct his immortal double, an unprecedented artificial species. He caps natural selection with an artificial superselection, claiming sole possession of a soul and a consciousness and, at the same time, he is putting an end to natural selection which entailed the death of each species in accordance with the law of evolution. In ending evolution (of all species including his own), he is contravening the symbolic rule and hence truly deserves to disappear. And this

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<sup>108</sup> Baudrillard writes: "Such a very American hallucination this ocean, this savannah, this desert, this virgin forest reconstituted in miniature, vitrified beneath their experimental bubble. In the true spirit of Disneyland's attractions, Biosphere 2 is not an experiment, but an experimental attraction. The most amazing thing is that they have reconstituted a fragment of artificial desert right in the middle of the natural desert (a bit like reconstituting Hollywood in Disneyworld)" (1994, p.85).

is without doubt the destiny he is preparing for himself, in a roundabout way, in that, in his arrogant desire to end evolution, man is ushering in *involution* and the revival of the inhuman, biogenetic forms. Here again, we have before us a reversion effect, running counter to any ideal or 'scientific' vision of the species (Baudrillard, 1994, p.84).

It is in his treatment of cloning that Baudrillard again discusses Benjamin's work. He describes cloning as "the last stage of history and modelling of the body, the one, at which reduced to its abstract and genetic formula, the individual is destined to serial propagation"(1994b, p.99). He likens this loss to the loss of 'aura' of the traditional work of art in light of its mechanical reproduction. What is lost in cloning for Baudrillard is the 'aura' of the unique body. Just as through mechanical reproduction "things are conceived from the beginning as a function of their unlimited reproduction", cloning seeks to reduce the fate of the body to the same code and thus "ceases to be conceived as anything but a message, a stockpile of information and of messages, as fodder for data processing" (1994b, p.99).

If we need to 'collect' species in buildings like *The Deep*, for Baudrillard, we do so because we have already destroyed them. It is the mark of what Benjamin understood as the Janus face of progress. In order to bring nature closer to us through technological advances, we produce the opposite effect, wreaking destruction on nature itself. As Leslie remarks:

One convolute of the *Arcades Project* is called 'Boredom and Eternal Return'. The old is inherent in the new, it is a return. This represents the Janus face of progress, pulling in two directions at once. Progress is presented dialectically: as opposed to its potential direction, human progress, its actual, present stakes are social regress, accompanied by a technological progress. Progress is adjoined to catastrophe. Precisely *this* capitalist technological idea of progress ushers in catastrophe (Leslie, 2006, p.109).

The more we are cut off from nature, the further we go, technologically, to be near it. *The Deep* serves to reinstate nature's 'reality' at the very point of its disappearance. But for Baudrillard this nature, this culture, is no better than a life-support machine. For the

chance to stave off our own demise, we investigate possibilities not of *life* but of *survival* – under glass – petrified like the fish in the Deep “in the glass coffin of Biosphere 2”. This bubble-culture feeds back into all aspects of the social world, not just our relationship to nature but to each other, to humanity as a whole (Baudrillard, 1994, p.88). We *are* the fish in The Deep, for Baudrillard. Functioning like Disneyworld to maintain the illusion of a real world- we are already under glass – at a distance from the real, the symbolic balance of the social is eradicated by the semiotic perfection of media technologies. He describes America, but could just as easily be describing the fate of the fish in The Deep, and offering a premonition of the fate of all contemporary culture, as: “ a paradisiac and inward-looking illusion...whereas the demand for happiness used to be something oceanic and emancipatory, here it comes wrapped up in a foetal tranquillity” (1988, p.45). Such speculation, of a first nature becoming secondary to its own simulation, may not seem so fanciful when faced with Pearman’s description of The Deep’s research space and the facility’s “Total Environment Simulator”:

Essentially, complete coastal, estuarine and river environments can be recreated in miniature in the 16m long, 6m wide and 1.6m deep flume. When loaded up in use, this chunk of equipment weighs 200 tonnes. It can generate its own currents and waves, tropical rainstorms and the like (Pearman, 2002, p.66).

The Deep is indeed, a world in miniature under glass!

### ***Conclusion: Deep Water***

I began the chapter with the image of a snow globe. Benjamin liked them, according to Adorno, because they were images of alienation, of “petrified, frozen or obsolete components of culture” (cited in Leslie, 2008, p.25). For Adorno they housed “*Nature morte*, still life, dead life”. At least, as Leslie remarks, “the snow globe

meddles somehow with life and lifelessness”: a perfect souvenir, then, of The Deep. (2008, p.25).<sup>109</sup> It is almost too easy though to ridicule it as a solution to Hull’s economic striation and sustainability, it seems woefully inadequate for this purpose, always failing to live up to the city’s former glory. Yet, we must beware the danger of mythologizing Hull’s industrial past. As Markham notes, in the nineteenth century Hull had more slums at sea, on the fishing fleets, than in its rapidly expanding townscape. North Sea fishing is not glamorous; it is heavy, dirty, dangerous work. We must not fall into nostalgic reflections or yearnings here, perhaps, in the end, preservation under glass is better than death at sea. But that warning doesn’t preclude us from a critical stance to its supposed successor: design-led regeneration and, in this instance, the paradoxical, problematic relationship to nature The Deep serves to order. It allows us to ponder what a different relationship to nature might be; it allows us to consider the shortened life-span, the stunted growth of our relationship to nature and to urban space. Hull’s fishing industry lasted for hundreds of years; I can’t believe that The Deep, this product of cultural regeneration, will do the same.

Perhaps in order to establish what might redeem The Deep we need to return to the point I made in the introduction: that the snow globe form allows us access to the Benjaminian method of digression. Let me take the liberty of that method, then, and offer a digression of sorts: a collection of some other glass objects and images that Benjamin favoured. Firstly, the *Flaschenpost*, the message in a bottle: perhaps The Deep might function as a warning signal, from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century to the future.<sup>110</sup> If

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<sup>109</sup> Celeste Olaquiaga discusses the souvenir as a cultural object of memory and includes the example of the snow globe. Describing a snow globe of a hermit crab she names Rodney, Olaquiaga uses a Benjamin-inspired reading of the tragic objects of kitsch and the failure of their utopian wish. She writes: “What we acquire when purchasing Rodney the commodity is an extant wish – ours, as participants in a culture that does not accept death and seeks to capture life at whatever cost, even that of sacrificing real life for the sake of a fleeting imaginary perception. It is in this intrinsic contradiction between a desire and the preclusion of its unfolding that the dialectics of kitsch take place, moving between an irretrievable past and a fragmented present, at home only in the certainty of its own impossibility” (Olaquiaga, 1999, p.68).

<sup>110</sup> Equally, for Benjamin writing was also a form of *Flaschenpost*, a method of preserving his work. His sketches in *Central Park*, sent to his colleagues in New York, certainly sought to perform this function.

the winter garden encapsulates nineteenth-century notions of nature under its glass dome, perhaps *The Deep* offers a similar encapsulation of contemporary concerns. For Baudrillard we must be wary of preserving objects under glass, for fear that this mode comes to infect all aspects of culture. Another glass object springs to mind, another miniature world: the ship in a bottle, a wreck of sorts, and along with this the image from Benjamin's letter to Scholem of a man waving from a mast: "Like the one who keeps afloat on a ship wreck by climbing to the top of a mast that is already crumbling. But from there he has a chance to give a signal leading to his rescue" (1999c, p.24). Benjamin is both waving *and* drowning. Perhaps *The Deep*, in some ways located as it is, washed up, a ship-wreck on the Humber's shoreline, is also a *Flaschenpost*, a message in a bottle, a warning to the future, a reminder of how our relationship to nature, to the other, and to the past is constantly reconfigured through new technological forms and modes of presentation. Cultural (and natural) regeneration is one of these modes. But since its success is always dependent on economic stability, prosperity, perhaps the global financial events of 2008 have already marked its demise; its moment is already over. It is still born, perfectly formed but lifeless, prematurely fossilized. The snow globe of *The Deep* serves as a crystallisation of a set of themes just as the building itself is frozen beneath the weight of its effects: crystallized. Yet, as Leslie reminds us, snow is transformative, shifting, always in the process of becoming its opposite, always about to melt (Leslie, 2008). And perhaps here we find what Benjamin regards as the 'tiny fissure in the continuous catastrophe' (2003, p.185). Baudrillard's only hope is that the symbolic erupts violently enough to "smash this glass coffin...any accident will do if it rescues us from a scientific euphoria sustained by drip-feed" (1994, p.88). *The Deep* symbolises perhaps, an ominous warning of future environmental disaster. As Gilloch notes, for Benjamin, the uncanny, disturbing lure of the Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities* is its "'death symbolism' which is 'rooted

in the 'daemonic' character of nature. Since all aspects of nature, all events and all circumstances can become possible omens of good or ill fortune, one becomes hopelessly lost in the infinite and impenetrable proliferation of ambiguous signs" (2002, p. 49). For Benjamin, this: "'vitalist', mythical cosmology, constituted nature as "a realm of portents and omens warning of calamitous future events" (2002, p. 49). As Gilloch notes, "the principle element of this sinister ambiguity is water. Cleansing, purifying, life-giving, water is also mysterious, unfathomably and murderously engulfing". It is "still waters not turbulent waves [which] prove most deadly" (2001, p.50). The threat of rising sea levels to Hull, its fate if we carry on as we are, is perhaps this perfectly cruel, perfectly symbolic event Baudrillard envisions: nature's revenge. What we must consider, then, is how we might intervene in this fate of nature, how a reconfiguration or transformation of our relationship to the natural world, might prevent such catastrophe. Ecological disaster, the threat to first and second nature from the rising sea-levels provoked by climate change, becomes the pressing concern of this generation, a messianic responsibility that becomes ours to discharge. The snow globe, then, as a miniature version of 'second nature' must be shaken again, *technological second nature* must be shaken, to ensure the preservation of first nature, and the site of The Deep. As Benjamin reminds us, reflecting on the relationship between humanity and nature in 'To the Planetarium', what needs to change is the dubious characteristics of its current formation. He writes:

The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery of not nature but the relationship between nature and man (Benjamin, 1996, p.487).

It is for this sake, this possibility of a transformation, that we might shake the globe once more and hope for a new configuration, a new set of possibilities, a new imagination.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> I am indebted here to Esther Leslie's discussion of snow globes in her recent work (2008).

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE SAGE, OR ERASING THE TRACES, TRACING ERASURES

I have long, indeed for many years, played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life –*bios* – graphically on a map.

Walter Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', 1932

Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace – that is, its annihilation – we have long been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing that has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances...it can be once more be brought to light.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930

Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself.

Iain Sinclair, *Lights out for the Territory*, 1997

### *Urban Reminiscences*

The day they sectioned my grandmother, she told two doctors, a policeman and a social worker, in no uncertain terms, that her father would be along shortly to sort this whole misunderstanding out and, being called away from his work as landlord of the Full Moon Inn, he would be rather annoyed, too. That no father would be along anytime soon, that the Full Moon existed no more, that she was, in fact, an 81-year old woman with advanced vascular dementia who was about to be transported, via ambulance, to a Local-Authority run home where she would end her days, produced a moment of pathos yet to be surpassed in my own life. This chapter is not about the decline of my grandmother, or a personal biography of me and my family. Rather, it seeks to discuss memory, both personal and collective, and its importance for an understanding of (urban) space and (urban) experience mediated by buildings, architecture, the material fabric of the city and its interlinkage with the texture of everyday life. And how, even at its most endangered, when most under threat – as it is under the cruel demise of the dementia sufferer- those moments of recollection, of

lucidity which rupture the blanket of amnesia, are most often linked to the very distant past, our earliest memories, the time furthest away. That such recollections might also include or be unable to be separated from spatial and architectural contexts is testament to the overwhelming power not only of memory but of the built environment to structure lived experience, to trigger such moments. In 'Berlin Chronicle' (1932), Walter Benjamin describes certain traumatic memories – the notification of a death – as being inextricably linked to a vivid recollection of his childhood bedroom; details he thought lost suddenly became clear, sharpened, in close up. That Elizabeth Ann Kane (née Stephenson) mistook her location in the Gateshead of 1997 for a different, earlier location in the same town, Bottle Bank, on the banks of the River Tyne, demonstrates, in some way, Benjamin's notion in action. The area surrounding Bottle Bank is now acclaimed, but for very different reasons. It is the site of a spectacular project of millennial architecture, The Sage, Gateshead.

### ***The Ironic Nature of Iconic Structures***

To picture the visual iconography of the Tyneside cityscape before its recent regeneration, is to enter into a world first captured in fiction and on celluloid in the British gangster film, *Get Carter* (1971) (Mike Hodges, dir.). The film had moderate success at the time of its release but more recently has enjoyed cult status and even a Hollywood remake (2000)<sup>112</sup>. What is interesting upon viewing *Get Carter* today is that the re-imagined cityscape of 1960s Newcastle/Gateshead is the backdrop to the plot. The then newly built Trinity Car park performs a pivotal role in the narrative, being the scene of a violent murder. Gateshead's recent acquisition of high rise flats

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<sup>112</sup> In the Ted Lewis novel on which the film is based, *Jack's Return Home* (1970), the protagonist returns to an unnamed steel town near Doncaster thought to be Scunthorpe. The decision to locate the film version on Tyneside is perhaps indicative of the opportunity the newly-regenerated area offered in terms of visual capital. The remake, featuring Sylvester Stallone transported the action to Seattle.

and concrete shopping precincts signified its shift away from the traditional terraces and smog and dirt of old Tyneside. This old world of heavy industries, working-class communities and working men's clubs is bettered signified by the bridges clustered over the river, The Tyne Bridge occupying the status of icon before the Trinity car park's arrival, in this newly modernised brutalist, underpass-networked cityscape. In a scene with the main character Jack Carter (Michael Caine) – who brings the brash new swinging London of the 1960s to the region – and his lover, Anna (Britt Eckland), extended clips of this newly-built, newly-regenerated Tyneside are interspersed with a speeding sports car flashing by the high rise monoliths and streets in the sky of this re-imagined and regenerated conurbation. The scene envisions Gateshead and these particular characters on the threshold of a new modern, cosmopolitan, sexy and bold future. In 2010, this version of the regeneration of central Gateshead is all but over. Its central icon, the Trinity Square car park, is on the verge of demolition<sup>113</sup>. That the car park forms an iconic silhouette on the Gateshead banks of the Tyne and yet is doomed to rubble provides a fertile intervention into the discourses and practices of urban revitalisation of which Gateshead has been at the forefront in recent years. Tyneside has a number of iconic projects, not all of them built in the last ten years. Along with the Trinity Square car park there is, of course, the Tyne Bridge, perhaps *the* signifying motif of Tyneside and its heavy industrial past, prior to the cluster of millennium projects huddled on the Gateshead bank: BALTIC, The Sage and the Millennium Eye Bridge. The Tyne Bridge, often mistakenly assumed to be the model for the Sydney Harbour Bridge, is the icon that preceded both the Trinity Car Park and The Sage as a vision of technological innovation, and what Liam Kennedy (2004) has called

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<sup>113</sup> The Trinity Square car park, the centre piece of a vast remodelling project of Gateshead in the 1960s was designed by architect Owen Ludler in 1962 but didn't open until 1969. Ludler also fashioned the Tricorn Centre in Portsmouth - another recent victim of the latest version of urban regeneration, 21st century style. Its original plans included a panoramic view of the cityscape from its top floor cafe but a tenant was never found for the café which remained closed for the rest of the building's short life.

‘imagineering’, for the Tyneside cityscape. Understanding the cityscape in this way prompts a somewhat different assessment of the site of The Sage, one which locates it as merely the newest version of an old process of urban change through iconicity. This chapter examines the most recent addition to the Tyneside<sup>114</sup> skyline. Completed in 2004 and designed by ‘starchitect’ Sir Norman Foster it is both a striking insertion of a novel architectural form and a staging of cultural experience in its function as a concert hall.

### *Tyneside’s Pre-history*

Historically, the fortunes of the local area were established through a triumvirate of heavy industries. Coal mining, in particular, provided the economic underpinning to the region since at least the thirteenth century, and the River Tyne gifted the region with the means to transport this fuel with relative ease down the east coast to the lucrative markets of the south and, most importantly, London. The steel industry was also a vital economic driver for the region and Tyneside, along with its neighbour Wearside, became the largest and most successful shipbuilding area in the UK, from the nineteenth century onwards. The region thus played a key role in the military conflicts of the empire and its concomitant expansion through trading, importing and exporting of the spoils of imperialist Britain (Manders, 1973; Brazendale, 2004). These heavy industries however, left their dirty, scarred mark on the area. As Woodhouse notes, in his review of a ‘century of Gateshead’, “the depressing conditions that had settled over Gateshead during the interwar years proved difficult to alleviate and in 1934 J.B. Priestley described the town as ‘nothing better than a huge dingy dormitory’” (2001, p12). With the economic downturn of the 1970s

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<sup>114</sup> Tyneside is the term used to describe the conurbation that comprises the majority of the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear. It includes the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the towns of Gateshead, Jarrow, North Shields, South Shields and all other settlements lining the banks of the River Tyne in North-East England.

and a shift in the political horizon of the country with the election of a Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979, Tyneside suffered, along with other industrial cities in the UK, a rapid and devastating decline. Although there is one surviving shipyard on Tyneside, the days of its reliance on heavy industries as economic drivers, are over. More recently, the local economy, in line with a wider global shift, has taken a turn towards tertiary industries – there are large numbers of call centres and other service sector companies based in the region – and to the tourism sector as a main source of income. Overturning the image of the region as an ugly, industrial and a cultural wasteland has been a prominent and necessary strategy of the various local authorities involved in regenerating Tyneside. It is also necessary to draw a distinction between the region's capital city, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead, the adjacent town on the south side of the River Tyne. Newcastle's city status and its function as the main business, shopping and leisure destination has meant it has, historically, been better equipped to cope with economic transformations than its poorer neighbour. The Quayside area of Newcastle was first redeveloped in the 1980s. Gateshead's renaissance, which is the focus of this chapter, comes at least a decade later.

I argue in this chapter that The Sage simultaneously erases and evokes, eradicates and re-inscribes notions of cultural memory and belonging as it pertains to contemporary cities. If we subscribe to Baudrillard's argument we may concede that much recent architecture, and the transformation of the urban fabric it entails, appears generic: the serial reproduction of place-making buildings deploying 'pre-programmed' methods of design, such as CAD<sup>115</sup>. The resulting 'architectural code'

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<sup>115</sup> CAD or computer-aided design is the use of computer software programmes for various forms of product, engineering and architectural design. Instead of building plans having to be drawn by hand by teams of draughtsmen and women, such software allows for speedier changes and increased manipulation of the image on screen. The drafting can be done in both 2D and 3D form. The main advantage of such a method is the creation of

renders one place indistinguishable from another when, paradoxically, the aim is to create instantly recognisable logos, and instead installs an obscene transparency which eradicates the 'secret' of the architectural object (Augé, 1995; Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002; Baudrillard, 2006). I want to interrogate this notion by seeking the traces of memory and belonging that exist *in spite* of such buildings, or, indeed, which may be evoked by them. If, as Baudrillard argues, the revolution of the image sphere has transformed our ability to register the effects of time, history and the self as anything other than an aesthetic pleasure, what are the implications of this for the transformations of urban space and its concomitant effects on lived experience? Do the aesthetics of change that accompany the transformation of once industrial space into post-industrial developments wipe out all connections to history and context in a seamless colonization?

I want to argue that whilst it might appear to be so - Baudrillard has many valid points – it is never so completely. The simulation never quite perfects its virtual assault. Benjamin's concept of the trace is used to unpack and reflect on these ideas considering what is at stake in the aesthetic configuration of urban space. In the face of this apparent flawless transformation of the cityscapes, there remain traces of previous usage, both material and immaterial, in memories, in ruins, and in views, that are activated through walking and viewing as a critical practice. These traces act as apertures – openings into the present – that reveal it to be contingent rather than the natural unfolding of the destiny of urban space. The Sage, then, does not merely cover over traces and impose itself, as Baudrillard might suggest, rather its very existence creates the possibility of such traces returning, even if only fleetingly. The fact that the local history of the area will soon become commodified and overlaid by an official

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a digital prototype of a building which can be verified and tested on screen rather than having to be manufactured and constructed as an actual material object.

version as expressed by the recently opened heritage centre<sup>116</sup> on the site, presses ever more keenly on the need to capture such traces in all their evanescence. As Doreen Massey states: “the identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told of them, *how* those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant” (1995, p.186).

Since I am local to the area, having grown up there, my experience of it clearly has a particularity that cannot be overlooked. Yet, being someone who grew up in Gateshead but who has spent the last 15 years living elsewhere, I am in an ambiguous position



Figure 18

with regard to reading this radically transformed landscape. Whilst Benjamin believed that being a ‘native’ is important to the forming of a city in one’s mind<sup>117</sup>, he also considered that since cityscapes were appropriated by habit, the power of the city to reveal itself to the indigenous citizen wanes with use and familiarity.<sup>118</sup> It comes as no surprise to me, then, that this exploration of the site of The Sage, takes me through not only the space and its surroundings as tourist, but also back in time through memories

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<sup>116</sup> The visitors’ centre Gateshead Heritage @ St Mary’s was officially opened by the Earl of Wessex on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009. It is staged in St Mary’s church next to The Sage, the oldest building in the vicinity, dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and redeveloped following a £1.2m transformation, funded by Gateshead Council, the European Regional Development fund and the heritage lottery fund. (Gateshead Council 2009).

<sup>117</sup> In his review of Hessel’s *On Foot in Berlin*, entitled ‘The Return of the Flâneur’, Benjamin writes, “If we were to divide all the existing descriptions of cities into two groups according to the birthplace of the authors, we would certainly find that those written by natives of the cities concerned are greatly in the minority....The account of a city given by a native will always have something in common with memoirs; it is no accident that the writer has spent his childhood there” (1999a, p.262).

<sup>118</sup> Benjamin writes, “It is true that countless facades of the city stand exactly as they stood in my childhood. Yet I do not encounter my childhood in their contemplation. My gaze has brushed them too often since, too often have they been the decor and theatre of my walks and concerns” (1999b, p.611).

of the same but substantially different place. There is, then, both a spatial and temporal disturbance involved in my theoretical excavations. If the experience of urban space cannot be divorced from the context, history, and experiences of the observer who occupies it, perhaps – and as against Baudrillard – the local in the regions will always experience the global architectural forms that increasingly occupy urban space in a way that might evoke moments of rupture to that apparent seamlessness.

In Benjamin’s account of the city of his childhood, he describes memory as a



*Figure 19*

key location, able to harbour the traces of the chaotic, frantic, onslaught of urban living. He writes, “the city--where people make the most ruthless demands on one another, where appointments and telephone calls, sessions and visits,

flirtations and the struggle for existence

grant the individual not a single moment of contemplation--indemnifies itself in memory” (1999b, p.614). This securing of the urban in the memories of the city dweller is a strategy that seeks to rupture, or at least hold off momentarily, the threat to the past and the future engendered by iconic projects of regeneration. Whilst such buildings, and certainly in the case of Tyneside,<sup>119</sup> are generally perceived as successful in rejuvenating former industrial sites blighted by the decline of their manufacturing industries, projects such as The Sage form part of a homogenous wave

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<sup>119</sup> Witness the recent article in *The Guardian* entitled ‘Spirit of the North’, February 14<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Jeffries, 2008).

of 'image make-overs'.<sup>120</sup> Such unequivocal praise for cultural regeneration fails to address the ethics of re-inscribing new practices onto space that all but erases its former purpose, the lives of those who used the space previously, or the lives of those displaced by the imposition of culturally exclusive venues (Bailey, Miles et al., 2004; Miles, 2005; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Miles, 2005a) Further, Edensor (2005) argues that the eradication of the interstitial spaces provided by industrial ruins, removes valuable sites able to provoke critical reflection. Edensor "understands industrial ruins as symbols through which ideologically loaded versions of progress, embedded within cultures of consumption ... can be critiqued"(2005, p.15).

Thus, memory has a political purpose. To remember is not just to call forth past experience in a wave of rose-tinted nostalgia, or an act of mourning over what once was and is no longer, rather, it is to perform an act of redemption. Forgetting, as Benjamin reminds us, is to abandon oneself to the myth of progress.<sup>121</sup> Further, buildings such as The Sage, as key markers of reinvention and economic progress attest to a double forgetting: erasing the ruins of an industrial past and superimposing that past's traces with their own footprint: in the case of The Sage, a footprint measuring 8584m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>122</sup> As such ruins disappear, the critical 'spark of illumination' that might be revealed through memory, only grows in significance. In this context, I am arguing that such memories are political because they counter the more exclusionary discourses of progress that accompany projects of urban regeneration, by privileging other narratives, in momentary flashes as briefly captured traces. Tolia-Kelly's concept of "re-memory" is particularly useful here. Re-memory is "not always a recall or reflection of actual experiences...re-memory can be the memories of others as told to

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<sup>120</sup> The exemplary example of this shift being Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao but could also include The Lowry, Salford; Urbis, Manchester, and Middlesbrough's MIMA.

<sup>121</sup> Edensor suggests, "modern capitalism proceeds by forgetting the scale of devastation wreaked upon the physical and social world...obliterating traces of this carnage fosters the myth of endless and seamless progress" (2005, p.101).

<sup>122</sup> Umberto Eco argues, "one forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by absence, but by multiplying presences" (Eco cited in Boym, 2001, p.108).

you by parents, friends...[providing] a sense of self beyond a linear narrative of events” (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Since the memories precipitated by The Sage of Gateshead’s past are not only my memories but memories of my grandmother’s memories, re-memory is a useful conceptualization of the ways in which memories proliferate and adhere to the sensory stimuli of physical spaces.

### ***Deciphering the Traces of Postcard Cities***

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes, “to dwell is to leave traces” (1999, p.9). For him, such traces offer up the possibility of decipherment. Through the collection of traces, of the debris, detritus and discarded remnants of the city, we might find clues to, not only the past, but possible futures that the past contained. The collection of traces is to bring together a constellation of the past, present and future in a moment of redemptive proximity. Benjamin makes a distinction between the concepts of trace and aura suggesting, “The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be....In the trace, we gain possession of the thing.” Whereas aura “is the appearance of a distance” through which the thing “takes possession of us” (1999, p.447).

This is important, since we could argue that urban regeneration projects such as The Sage, attempt to reproduce an auratic spectacle through the construction of iconic architectural destinations. Thus, if The Sage is an auratic object that seeks to “take possession of us” as visitors, by detecting the traces it covers over and evokes, as they are configured through personal and collective memory, we might outwit or outmanoeuvre this aim. In this way, we subvert the building’s auratic claim through the collection of material and immaterial traces: ruins, photographs and memories.

I turn now to an exploration of The Sage itself. What does the building invite me to do should I enter into its glassy, steely embrace? The eastern path to The Sage is landscaped: neat, orderly, and unblemished. Immediately outside its revolving doors is a large circular paved area: a pseudo agora. Inside the building, a vast concourse traverses the whole of the first floor from the east to west entrances. Various but controlled possibilities for its use are present, advertised by familiar urban signifiers: café, gift stand, ticket office, brasserie. The building, in offering all the activities of the city under one roof, calls out to me, “loiter, linger, pause under the space of my steel canopy...don’t leave me”. Upon entrance, The Sage feels empty, echoey, forlorn. Inside the landmark, the most interesting thing to see appears to be the view outside. The concourse functions as a lookout post, a viewing platform across the River Tyne. As Roland Barthes notes, Guy de Maupassant had a similar impression of the Eiffel Tower. Eating his lunch there everyday, he was afforded what he regarded as the best view of the city made possible by the structure: one in which the Eiffel Tower didn’t feature (2000, p.236). I cannot imagine this is the fate the architects, planners and local council had envisioned for The Sage.

In *Invisible Cities* (1972), Italo Calvino describes a city that has been so transformed through development it now bears little relation to its past self:

In Maurilia, the traveller is invited to visit the city and, at the same time, to examine some old postcards that show it as it used to be: the same identical square with a hen in the place of the bus station, a bandstand in the place of the overpass, two young ladies with white parasols in the place of the munitions factory. If the traveller does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one, though he must be careful to contain his regret at the changes within definite limits: admitting that the magnificence and prosperity of the metropolis of Maurilia, when compared to the old, provincial Maurilia, cannot compensate for a certain lost grace, which, however, can be appreciate only now in the old postcards, whereas before, when that provincial Maurilia was before one’s eyes, one saw absolutely nothing graceful and would see it even less today, if Maurilia had remained unchanged; and in any case the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was (1997, p.30-31).

Of course, Calvino reveals his vast panorama of world cities as a fiction. Every city described by Marco Polo in the book is Venice, or at least a version of Venice, thus revealing the city as a palimpsest: a collection of layers built up from different stories, times and spaces that multiply and expand the city, allowing it to transcend the limits of its bounded space (Highmore, 2005). Yet, certain versions of cities, particularly those that are officially sanctioned by local authorities and other agencies of regeneration, are often the most dominant.

A 'postcard' city is what Gateshead, or more properly to give it its new tourist moniker 'NewcastleGateshead', has become. Indeed, it is what the local agencies have actively sought to produce through the transformation of the built environment. Gone are the heavy industries, in their place a cleaner, better-presented city-break destination. This multi-coloured media face is made possible because of a triumvirate of 'millennial' projects, of which The Sage is the most recent<sup>123</sup>. Commissioned by Gateshead Council in 1997 after a competition that saw renowned architect Sir Norman Foster the victor, the building opened in December 2004. Costing a total of £70m (with £47.3m awarded in National Lottery Funds via The Arts Council of England), the building's primary function is as a concert hall. Under its globular awning, various musical spaces provide a home to the Northern Sinfonia orchestra and Folkworks, an education and music collaboration. In terms of acoustic capability, The Sage is said to be on a par with The Grosser Saal in Vienna and The Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

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<sup>123</sup> The other two being the Gateshead Millennium Bridge and the renovation of the Baltic flour mill into BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art.

The Sage, as an iconic building and as a tourist destination, inscribes new practices of looking and consuming onto the Gateshead townscape. The Sage is now both an object



of the tourist gaze and the commodification of that gaze in the sale of postcards of its image, and the snapshots of the tourists who visit the site (Crang, 1996; Urry, 2002). However, The Sage received mixed reviews in the architectural

*Figure 20*

trade press. One critic described, it as “...a

building without parts. A building of a single, unmodulated scale. A building without top or bottom, without front or back” (Woodman cited in Price, 2007, p.250). And further, as Price notes, “The critics were not suggesting that it simply dwarfs surrounding structures but that the single oversailing roof fails to provide any human scale that relates to its location” (2007, p.250). Such criticism seems to suggest that rather than revitalising city culture, The Sage stands apart from its location, as an imposing, ‘auratic’ icon, rather than providing the stage on which to instigate a new urban rhythm on Tyneside.

### *Cultures of Conviviality/ Cultures of Transparency*

The Sage prides itself on its ability to reinvigorate the southern bank of the Tyne. It enthusiastically details its social spaces, its various cafes and bars, but most effusively, the 100m public concourse that traverses the building, which acts as a

threshold to the east and west sides of the new river walk. Gateshead Council's website suggests:

The covered concourse, with its magnificent panoramic views is the public focus of the building. This is a major new internal public space, an 'urban living room', open fourteen hours a day, with cafés, bars and ticket office...forms part of a major pedestrian route linking the Swing Bridge with the new Gateshead Millennium Bridge (gateshead.gov.uk: 2007).

That the concourse is advertised as an 'urban living room', blatantly acknowledges what Benjamin foresaw in the Parisian arcades: the historical destiny of city space. As Gilloch argues, the interiorisation of the city street captured in the arcade was, for Benjamin, an example of the "‘embourgeoisement’ of space... The arcade was the interior disguised as an exterior, a place of exclusion and of the exclusive. It shut out unpredictable and unwelcome elements, both natural (rain) and social (the poor)... The arcade was the fantastical successor to the street and its subtle transformation" (1996, p.125-126). Similarly, The Sage's rhetoric of 'public' space and urban culture is a perfect example of the current colonisation of the city in the form of this pre-scribed, pseudo-public space. Baudrillard writes,

Inventing a public space is indeed a grand design. But what's the point of wanting to recreate it in an enclosed space that is designated and protected (whatever it may be) while the whole problem is that public space is disappearing in the rest of the city... [such buildings] seek to disguise and exorcise the devastation and desertification of the town (Baudrillard, 2006, p.75).

The thresholds of The Sage serve to filter out undesirables: those who are not partaking in conspicuous consumption or city-break tourism.

In the arcades, Benjamin recognised the inception of the aesthetic configuration of space into a site of phantasmagoria and consumption. The Sage in its adherence to that model is merely one of the most recent examples of that legacy, and takes it a step further. Whereas the arcades of Paris were dream worlds housing commodities, architectural forms such as The Sage are themselves commodities: big, shiny, temples

lulling the tourist, the consumer and the city-dweller to them in choreographed somnambulism. Perhaps the imposition of The Sage on this space serves as both an act of forgetting and a wilful inducement to sleepwalk. As a site of consumption The Sage is rather less brazen than either The Lowry or The Deep. The gift 'shop' is actually more of a stand selling a small selection of publications: one a history of Northern Sinfonia, one a book of photographs of The Sage's construction taken by a keen amateur. Amongst the other items for sale are 'ethnic' musical instruments such as wooden frogs and rain sticks, notepads with musical notations, key rings in the shape of the building and The Sage logo, a mobile phone 'sock', bottle opener and various postcards. This is a collection of disparate although not totally random items, The Sage is much less concerned to commodify and sell-back its image than some of the other buildings. This perhaps evidences the fact that, above all, The Sage's 'culture' is somehow less tangible, less visible than in the other locations I have researched: instead of art objects, technology or nature, The Sage hosts 'music'. Music, in its 'invisibility' is less easily re-sold to keen tourists and visitors. Attending a concert at The Sage does not compel one to buy a postcard of the event in the same way as other cultural consumption might. Of course, in this case, The Sage itself becomes postcard material.<sup>124</sup> The building is perhaps less akin to an arcade than another 'dream house', the railway station, its cavernous concourse functioning as a place of movement or transit.

If the Arcades were attempts to recreate the cluttered bourgeois interior in the public spaces of the city, the railway stations were liminal places of transformation engendered by the new possibilities of transport technologies. Benjamin hoped the new

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<sup>124</sup> However, there were plans, when the building first opened, to pipe music through its vast concourse and public areas in order that visitors to the building might hear music, something they could only experience otherwise if they paid for a concert ticket. This of course reveals the tensions inherent in The Sage as a tourist destination as well as a cultural venue. That visitors might somehow be disappointed not to hear music in a venue for music provokes the suggestion of reducing music to the banality of musak – the background music that accompanies elevator rides. For a discussion of 'furniture music' or musak in relation to Kracauer's Hotel Lobby see (Trigg, 2006).

steel and glass structures of the early twentieth century, might usher in a new age, freed from the trappings of bourgeois culture and enabled by the potential of new material technologies he first recognised in nineteenth century dream houses. He held a tentative hope that the transformation of architecture brought about by such technological innovation could assist in the revolutionary purpose at hand.<sup>125</sup> This hope is evidenced by his assessment that “objects made of glass have no “aura”(1999b, p.734)”. Yet this idea, appropriated in the work of Jean Baudrillard, contains no such redeeming utopia, however slight. Baudrillard suggests that whilst transparency in architecture may have begun with the modernists as utopian and transformative, when transported to late capitalist, media-dominated societies, this transparency is not a shift towards the politicisation of the masses, but rather an example of the proliferation of the image – to the point of obscenity – made stone (or rather glass and steel). The problem Baudrillard has with contemporary architecture is its pornographic visuality, which removes the ‘secret’ and all possibility of illusion. These are all elements, for him, of a symbolic exchange lost in favour of a semiotic omnipotence. Such buildings usher in a barren sameness, a virulent metastasis of simulation,<sup>126</sup> that threatens to infect all aspects of social life eradicating all traces of otherness, alterity, negativity, or what he terms ‘evil’.<sup>127</sup> The success of such endeavours perform what Baudrillard

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<sup>125</sup> In a section of the *Arcades Project* that pours scorn on the claustrophobic clutter of the bourgeois living room, he writes: “Living in these plush compartments was nothing more than leaving traces made by habits. Even the rage expressed when the least little thing broke was perhaps merely the reaction of a person who felt that someone had obliterated “the traces of his days on earth”. The traces that he had left in cushions and armchairs, that his relatives had left in photos, and that his possessions had left in lining and etuis and that sometimes made these rooms look as overcrowded as halls full of funerary urns. This is what has now been achieved by the new architects, with their glass and steel: they have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces. “It follows from the foregoing,” Sheerbart declared a good twenty years ago, “that we can surely talk about a ‘culture of glass’. The new glass-milieu will transform humanity utterly. And now it remains only to be wished that the new glass-culture will not encounter too many enemies” (1999b, p.701-702).

<sup>126</sup> Baudrillard says, in an interview given in 1995: “simulation today assumes the form of virtuality, through which we are attempting to invent a perfect, self-identical world” (2005, p.12).

<sup>127</sup> Chris Turner writes, by way of explanation, “What exactly does Baudrillard mean by evil? First, it must be said that it is to be understood not theologically as substance, but metaphysically as form. It is, as Baudrillard says elsewhere, the ‘non-unification’ of things – good being defined as the unification of things in a totalized world’ – and, as such, it comprises for us ‘all that rests on duality, on the dissociation of things, on negativity, on death’ (2005, p.14-15). Thus, evil is that element of the system that is not and cannot be self-identical. Evil is Baudrillard’s latest configuration of the symbolic element that remains embedded in the semiotic world but which

considers to be the ‘perfect crime’: being that “which attempts to efface its own traces” (2005, p.13). The architectural object, designed entirely through CAD, in its dependence on the binary model of the virtual, is totally complicit in this movement. It is divorced from context, history and identity. It is ‘clone architecture’, able to be endlessly reproduced, spreading indiscriminately over every available space. It is the ‘ready-made’ of the built environment. He argues:

This is not simply a matter of materials and building techniques; it is also a question of models. Just as all images are possible using the camera, which asks nothing more than to function, so all architectural forms can be revived out of a virtual stock of forms, arranged either conventionally or in some other way. As a result, architecture no longer refers to a truth or originality of some sort, but to the mere technical availability of forms and materials (Baudrillard, 2006, p.166).

This ‘virtual’ architecture is no more prevalent than in what is perhaps the exemplary instance of regeneration through iconic architectural means: Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao<sup>128</sup>. Of it, Baudrillard says:

A virtual object if ever there was one, the prototype of virtual architecture. It was put together on a computer out of optional elements or modules, so that a thousand similar museums could be constructed merely by changing the software or the scale of the calculation. Its very relation to its contents – art works and collections – is entirely virtual....Now, admittedly, it is not just any old technology and the object is a marvel, but is it an experimental marvel...which will give rise to a whole host of clones and chimeras. The Guggenheim is a spatial chimera, the product of machinations which have gained the upper hand over architectural form itself (Baudrillard, 2006, p.167).

The extent to which The Sage might fall into the category of architectural chimera is ambiguous. It certainly seeks to perform the same function as Gehry’s Guggenheim: regeneration through culture in the form of a landmark building. It also attempts to make a bold iconic statement in its site on the banks of the River Tyne. The problem

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is subsumed in it by the proliferation of simulacra. Throughout his work it has been named variously: symbolic exchange, seduction, fatality, radical illusion, but all terms essentially refer to the same concept.

<sup>128</sup> Hal Foster echoes Baudrillard, in his discussion of the implications of computer-aided architecture in reference to Gehry. He writes: Because CATIA (computer-aided three-dimensional interactive application) permits the modelling of nonrepetitive surfaces and supports, of different exterior panels and interior armatures, it has allowed Gehry to privilege shape and skin, the overall configuration, above all else: hence the non-Euclidean curves, swirls and blobs that became his signature gestures in the 1990s, most famously in the Guggenheim Bilbao, which looks like a cross between an ocean liner run aground and a spaceship landed in the Basque Country” (Foster, 2008, p. 175).(Foster, 2008)

with this kind of architecture for Baudrillard is that it has already anticipated its own reception. For Benjamin, the modern city, its architecture and its crowds were conceptualised as labyrinthine.<sup>129</sup> The labyrinth was, for him, the foundational spatial, temporal and phenomenological form that best described the rhythm and experience of urban capitalist modernity in its complex, interwoven, opaque, mythological and ineluctable nature. Such maze-like configurations must be ‘mined’ for their secrets, “excavated in order that traces and signs of another reality could be both recalled and redeemed” (Frisby, 1986, p.211). To understand the city as a labyrinth is to read it as an experience of both possibility and risk, of diversion and transgression.<sup>130</sup> For Baudrillard, this chance has been eradicated in buildings like The Sage. Benjamin’s Minotaur – the mythic creature that haunts the labyrinth - and thereby the risk element of urban space, has been pre-programmed out.<sup>131</sup> There is no unforeseen danger, no unaccounted for element lodged in the building by mistake. To traverse it offers no unexpected turn: its origin in the computer code ensures that.

Whilst Benjamin was cautiously optimistic that post-auratic cultural forms were, “the enemy of secrets” (1999b, p.734) (secrets in this sense being the structures supporting traditional bourgeois culture), for Baudrillard, the destruction of this ‘secret’ is exactly that which ushers in these hyper-functional, pre-determined spaces. Such buildings, for him, are monstrosities that “do not provide a rhythm for the city and its exchanges, they are projected on to it like extraterrestrial objects, like spacecraft falling to earth from some dark catastrophe” (1990, p.105). To understand such spaces, then, for Baudrillard, it is no longer possible to adhere to Benjamin’s notion of excavation as a process of revealing cities’ concealed spatial and social layers, their

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<sup>129</sup> Indeed, as Frisby notes, the notion of the labyrinth is central to Benjamin’s analysis of the topography of Paris, to his analysis of modernity, and his method of writing (Frisby, 1986, p.210).

<sup>130</sup> For a wider discussion of the role of freedom and risk in the city and in particular the role of women as figures of urban disorder, see Elizabeth Wilson (1992). Wilson notes that “Benjamin’s Minotaur was ‘three-headed’, being the three prostitutes in a small Parisian brothel” (1992, p.2).

<sup>131</sup> As Wilson notes, Benjamin’s Minotaur “was ‘three-headed’, being the three prostitutes in a small Parisian brothel (1992, p.2)

maze-like form and secret flows. For him, buildings like The Sage, being superimposed as pre-formed objects onto the city's surface, break the tacit link between architecture, place and context. They are mere spectacles of architectural functionality and possibility in all its phantasmagoric narcosis. The visitor to them becomes not *flâneur* but *badaud*, the stupefied, passive imbiber of 'cultural good'.<sup>132</sup> For Baudrillard, the construction of iconic buildings "serves only to impress the tourists, and their function, like that of airports and places of interchange in general is that of a place of expulsion, extradition and urban ecstasy" (2006, p.52). If Benjamin's liminal spaces, the arcades, railway stations and winter gardens, were thresholds to forms of urban experience that disrupted the clear demarcations of public and private, interior and exterior, whilst simultaneously creating new stages to house the 'dreaming collective', in Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary versions of the same, such architecture functions, rather, to serve an eviction notice on prior forms of urban sociability. If The Sage is, as Baudrillard maintains such buildings are, crash-landed onto its site, where might the after shock of such an event register? I want to argue that its affect registers in the memories that are evoked by the pedestrian experience of such an 'alien' architectural form.

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<sup>132</sup> The *badaud* is a French term used to indicate another urban type contemporaneous with the *flâneur*. Shaya explain its origins: "The word can be translated as gawker; it carried the connotation of idle curiosity, gullibility, simpleminded foolishness and gaping ignorance. The *Grand dictionnaire universel* (1867) defined him (*sic*) in this way: "The *badaud* is curious; he is astonished by everything he sees; he believes everything he hears, and he shows his contentment or his surprise by his open, gaping mouth." If the *Flâneur* was the model for the Baudelairean poet, the *badaud* offers a model for the crowd he passed through (Shaya, 2004, para 15).

### *Framing a View, Making a Rainbow*

The ‘dreaminess’ or phantasmagorical nature of The Sage, is activated by both the scale of its dramatic, insect-like shell and its interior features, its various levels and curved concert hall walls. Moving across the main concourse space of level 0 offers a panoply of views across the Tyne towards the Tyne Bridge’s iconic span, its neighbouring bridges and Newcastle Quayside. These glimpses are framed by the space and the bulbous, bug-eyed windows which face the river.<sup>133</sup> The mezzanine levels of The Sage’s interior, acts as perfect viewing platforms. On level 0, viewers are held safely from the edge by a continuous perspex barrier that segues from one colour to another along the length of the floor. In the same scene from a different perspective, when witnessed from floor 1 above, the barrier catches and disperses the light so that the view of the river is undisturbed but filtered through hazy colours; the view of the cityscape is now diffused through this prism, seen as if through a rainbow.



*Figure 21*

The kaleidoscopic effect of colour offers a fantastical panorama that both reinvigorates and re-energises the view of this ‘dirty old cityscape’. As I further survey this view framed by the building’s vast, bulging windows, I inspect a landscape lived and worked on by my ancestors, part of their everyday lives, their quotidian experience. This same but radically altered scene is now reified as part of a tourist gaze: framed by

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<sup>133</sup> For a discussion of the new urban vistas made possible by technological structures in relation to Benjamin’s work see (Mertins, 1999).

and because of, The Sage. Each point upon which the eye rests is able to elucidate a memory: the street where my great-grandparent's pub was; the place my mother and aunt worked; the bridge the boy from school threw himself from, and so on: A 'Small History' of Gateshead. From here, I can just make out what is left of Bottle Bank: the ancient road from the River Tyne to Gateshead and the South, the trade route and the black market route. What was once a narrow, steep, pub-lined passage is now manicured and widened, loft apartments and the Hilton Hotel, lining its west side. These are views that are made possible by The Sage, views that are seen afresh when framed by the building's skeleton. My mind is cast backwards into the past, my feet propel me out of the eastern door, away from The Sage and onto what's left of old Gateshead streets. Instead of acquiescing to the building's desperate cry for me to linger, its demand has the opposite effect. The magnetic, auratic Sage propels/repels me out of its doors. Having presented me with a view that I have never seen before in quite this way, I unfurl myself from its steely grip to peer at the traces it has revealed.

Exiting from The Sage's western door, I head towards Bottle Bank. In 1831, the architect Thomas Oliver, in his 'Perambulatory Survey, took a walk through this



Figure 22

area detailing his surroundings. He lists the oil refineries and manufacturers, the rope works, boat and ship builder's yards, the docks, quays and collieries, located here (Manders, 1973, p.53). Taking this same walk today, the scars of Gateshead's industrial past can just about be discerned, but they are harder to find and rapidly disappearing. The landscape described by Oliver is long gone, in its place a carefully coiffured,

urbanity. Wholly different to the place I remember,

having grown up here. Wholly different to the landscape described in the stories of my family; the stories that located “us” in this place, tied us to this townscape, that catalogued our lives in this built environment. As a child, I always loved the name ‘Bottle Bank’, a magical phrase conjuring up images of a lost Gateshead, to my 1980s sensibility. Whenever my grandmother would share its stories, her exotic tales of the strangers who came in on the various river craft, it seemed a very different place to the street as it existed during my childhood. Her parents were publicans and ran the Full Moon pub on the street during the 1920s. She would tell me of late nights and boozy men, after-hours card games, and the disdain of her disapproving straight-laced mother. I was always fascinated to hear more of this glamorous nocturnal life my grandmother had been party to, as a young girl. However, this past, hers and Gateshead’s, was only revealed in snatched phrases, disconnected reminiscences, momentary indulgences. Attempting to piece together when she would have lived on Bottle Bank, and how old she would have been, for the purposes of my research, the traces were harder to discern. Searching the archives of trade directories and census records, I was unable to find entries detailing the time her family spent on the street. Further, the pub itself, I found, was not on Bottle Bank after all but further down towards the river, its official address being 25 Bridge Street.

Perhaps not only memory, but also mis-memory has a hand in constructing our relationship to space, as Benjamin states: the city is appropriated by habit in a state of distraction (2003, p.268).<sup>134</sup> Or, perhaps it is merely the mistake of the child in the city seeing in the long stretch of Bridge Street and Bottle Bank, progressing as they did one to the other, as a street that continued forever. The pub was located at the cross roads

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<sup>134</sup> However, mis-remembering, (as Benjamin demonstrates when recalling what he elects as “the most remarkable of all the street images from ...early childhood” (1999b, p.597) is also crucial to urban experience. The childhood experience he recollects as an adult has grown hazy in its details: he is unable to remember whether he witnessed this important image with his nursemaid or his governess; just as my grandmother misremembered the street name of her childhood home. Or, rather, the streets at child’s eye level were indistinguishable from one another.

of Bridge Street, Bottle Bank and Church Street and it existed on this site until at least 1935. Exactly when the Stephenson family ran the pub is not clear but it loomed large in the (mis)memories of my grandmother and for me constructs a topographical marker of old Gateshead. Photographs of it have proved equally elusive and of the three located it is featured only partially: peeking out between other buildings or with only its roof or gable end captured.



*Figures 23 & 24*

Partial, fragmentary images, just like my grandmother's memory of it and its own history, reduced as it is, to single-line entries in old trade directories. Today the street-name sign has gone too. The only sign there now is outside the new loft apartments and reads "Curzon Place". Whilst Bottle Bank still exists, it bears no name. How ironic that in spite of this Gateshead Council has recently installed a memorial sculpture to a famous local fiddle player who lived on Bottle Bank. It exists as the only 'approved' monument to a once central site now vanished.<sup>135</sup> Iain Sinclair, in his

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<sup>135</sup> A report from BBC News website states: "Plans have been unveiled to create a permanent memorial to a famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Tyneside Musician...a spokesman for Gateshead Council said "...I think it is fitting that this James Hill commemorative piece should be situated close to where his home was on Bottle Bank and near The Sage Gateshead... I hope people young and old, passing on their way to Gateshead Quays, the Hilton or the Swing Bridge will all enjoy the piece and get to know something of James Hill and his music" (2007).

psychogeographical wanderings through cities, notices the erasure enacted by  
monumentalisation.<sup>136</sup> He writes:

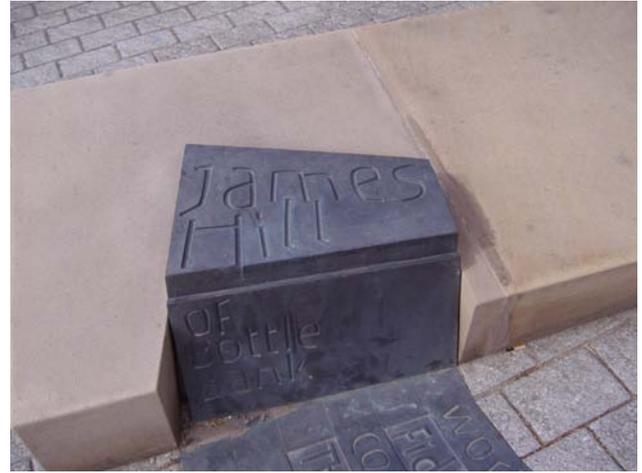
Memorials are a way of forgetting, reducing generational guilt to a grid of albino chess pieces, bloodless stalagmites. Shapes that are easy to ignore stand in for the trauma of remembrance. Names are edited out...These funerary spikes, unnoticed by the locals as they go about their business, operate a system of pain erasure; acupuncture needles channelling, through their random alignment, the flow of the energy field. (Sinclair, 1997, p.9)



*Figure 25*

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<sup>136</sup> For an excellent account of the Situationists, the legacy of Surrealism and links to contemporary psychogeography see David Pinder's recent work (Pinder, 2000; Pinder, 2005; Pinder, 2005). For a discussion of Iain Sinclair's work in relation to the Situationists see (Borden, 1999).



*Figures 26 & 27*

Yet, whilst The Sage fabricates a synthetic urbanism, in a chimera of cultural participation, its ability to frame a view that might not have been seen before in quite this way, allows for the opening up of an aperture: a space to the past via a journey along the streets its very existence hastens to eradicate. It is, then, an ambiguous space, simultaneously hopeful and hopeless, oscillating as it does between erasing the past and revealing its traces. Its hopelessness is its reduction of urban experience to a set of coded signs shorn of any undesirable elements. Its hopefulness is the reaction it might provoke despite itself: the exploration of the traces that remain on its site or those that might be evoked by it. Such traces produce both an act of remembrance and a moment of critical redemption embedded in the act of walking, as a refusal of the closing off of the past and other potential futures. The concern, of course, is that if our cities come to look more and more similar through re-development, and the particular ‘aesthetics of change’<sup>137</sup> that this engenders, all traces of their past use and the lives of those who inhabited them are erased. One form of intervention or interruption of such processes of colonization might be contained in the practice of walking.

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<sup>137</sup> For a detailed examination of the notion of the ‘aesthetics of change’, which proposes a spatial as opposed to a textual or representational approach to the notion of aesthetics, and which focuses “on the direct experience of seeing, the material space and the practice of walking...as a particular way of experiencing spaces of change or transition”, see Anca Pusca’s recent work (2008, p.370).

## *Thresholds to the Past: Walking the City, Telling Stories*

In *One-Way Street*, Benjamin reveals how the city unfolds itself to the walker through personal connections:

A highly convoluted neighbourhood, a network of streets that I had avoided for years, was disentangled at a single stroke when one day a person dear to me moved there. It was as if a searchlight set up in this person's window dissected the area with pencils of light (1996, p.461).

One of Benjamin's key images of urban subjectivity, the *flâneur*, as city walker, experiences on foot the modern city, its liminal spaces, its anonymity, and its non-stop spectacle. Although an ambiguous figure – he ends up, in his last incarnation, himself commodified – the figure offers a metaphor for urban experience and the potential walking might have to rebuff the onslaught of capitalist modernity. It is through the figure of the *flâneur* that we might understand the possibility of a pedestrian politics. Certainly, Michel de Certeau (1984) considers walking in the contemporary city a critical practice that can transform the rational, planned space of 'concept' cities and produce a counter-reading of the cityscape. The spatial and signifying practices of urban walking "elude urbanistic systematicity" through "legend, memory, and dream" (1984, p.105). Subverting or transforming the pre-scribed spatial order, the walker can perform a 'pedestrian speech act'.<sup>138</sup> For de Certeau the urban spectacle, of the kind The Sage represents, eradicates "superstitions": the "stories and legends that haunt urban space like superfluous or additional inhabitants" and that make a city liveable. Acts of walking, then, attempt to ensure such spectres endure. Iain Sinclair's psychogeography is perhaps the contemporary equivalent to this walking as political,

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<sup>138</sup> De Certeau writes, "First, if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g. by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and invents others, since the crossing, drifting away or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. Thus Charlie Chaplin multiplies the possibilities of his cane: he does other things with the same thing and he goes beyond the limits that the determinants of the object set on its utilisation. In the same way, the walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else (1984, p.98).

transgressive and dream-like. In *Lights out for the Territory* (2003 [1997]), Sinclair seeks to mark out nine pathways across London, to inscribe alternative routes into the cityscape. This inscription is also construed as a literal practice of destructive linguistic intervention: ‘to cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city, to vandalise dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking...recording and retrieving the messages on the walls, lampposts, doorjambs: the spites and spasms of an increasingly deranged populace’ (2003, p.1). If Benjamin’s project is to “read what was never written”, Sinclair’s is to inspect “texts that nobody is going to stop and read” (2003, p.3). Whose story, then, does *The Sage* allow us to read?

The Storyteller, for Benjamin, is a figure of *Erfahrung*, of lived, accumulated experience. S/he, in the telling and re-telling of the tale, inscribes, preserves and transforms it for future generations. As McCole notes, for Benjamin, “Storytelling... is a medium of exchanging and transmitting experiences and he therefore traces the disappearance of the living figure to an increasing atrophy of experience itself” (McCole, 1993, p.275). This atrophy of experience is linked to the transformations in the labour process; with Benjamin likening the trace that storytelling leaves to the thumb print on the pot of the artisan. Storytelling is artisanal, a skill, a *craft* itself, but its exchange ‘value’ lies outside of monetary or commodity exchange. He writes:

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work – rural, maritime and then urban- is itself an artisanal form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure ‘in itself’ or gist of a thing, like information or a report. It submerges the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him [sic] again. Thus, the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel (Benjamin, 2002, p.149).

Perhaps the figure of the storyteller as *subject* has waned, but its function is reactivated by *The Sage* as *object*.<sup>139</sup> *The Sage*, in its novelty, its technological innovation, in its youth, evokes, paradoxically, the wisdom of the old. Not only in its nomenclature but

in its ability to prompt the telling of stories, to figure as the catalyst to a new set of tales, opening up what Kracauer has called ‘the bridge to yesterday’ (Leslie, 2004, p.78).<sup>140</sup>

Despite his provocation that no redeeming feature is possible in a pre-programmed built environment, even Baudrillard must concede that, as hard as they try such places cannot pre-determine absolutely their every use (or non-use). He concedes: “the rules of the game do not belong to anyone. Every model, every project must inevitably expect to be thwarted. The architect...is never master of the city or the masses, nor of the architectural object and its use” (2006, p.76). This *détournement* or seduction of a building’s prescribed use is perhaps our only hope against the functionality and transparent circulation demanded by such projects. Nevertheless, for Baudrillard this subversion of rules is not political but, rather, concerned with the perverse logic of the masses and of the object itself. He writes, “If you install rigid structures, they will invent flexibility. But if you propose flexibility, they will invent something else – just as children do with their toys. That reaction, this malign inflection, this perverse effect cannot be built into any forecast...it is the effect of the ill will that is engineered behind all objects” (2006, p.76). Of course, for Baudrillard, it is not enough to walk; we have to follow, erasing the other’s trace as we go in a seductive game of chance encounters. This means always being open to the possibility that the situation may be reversed, that follower becomes followed and vice versa. In the concept of seduction, Baudrillard (1990) encapsulates its possibilities to ‘lead astray’, but also demonstrates how this possibility is constantly under threat by semiotic culture’s insistent transparency, its constant ascription of meaning to the use

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<sup>140</sup> Sadly, the decision behind the naming of The Sage is far less romantic than the images it conjures: of sagacity, wisdom, culture, education, the sharing of knowledge. It is so-called because one of the main sponsors of the project is The Sage Group plc. Indeed all of the various rooms, halls and events spaces in the building repay their debt to the various people and organisations who have given financial support by being named after them (2005, p.47).

of space, its reduction of seduction's 'hot' intensities to a 'cool' circulation.<sup>141</sup> Baudrillard writes, "Since seduction never stops at the truth of signs. But operates by deception and secrecy, it inaugurates a mode of circulation which is also secretive and ritualistic, a kind of immediate initiation that plays only by its own rules" (2001, p.163). Seduction is a duel and dual encounter, but also a moment of chance. It is this notion of serendipity that Baudrillard still maintains is possible, although this is obviously not 'willed'. The etymology of serendipity is interesting, being a Sanskrit word which means 'wisdom'. Of course sagacity, The Sage's adjectival form, also means wisdom. Here Benjamin and Baudrillard part company. For Baudrillard, the wisdom of serendipity is not and cannot be a conscious practice, or a moment of 'truth', but is more an 'abreaction', something evoked by the excessive, proliferation of meaning-production in systems of semiotic capitalism. For Benjamin, the potential and wisdom embodied in chance encounters and improvisatory action is the reconfiguration of given objects, materials and spaces of the kind inherent in a child's eye view and appropriation of the city. It is also made possible *through* the technological mediation of the cityscape. As Leslie notes, for Benjamin:

Industrial capital relations corrode the oral communicability of experience, but technical reproduction reimburses that change, instituting new potential for a familiarity between receivers and producers, once more in the form of collective experience: through mediated, mass-produced things. Space is recovered technically" (Leslie, 1998, p.9)

What Baudrillard calls 'clone architecture' then, might still, for Benjamin, evoke chance encounters which, for him, might be usefully allied to the types of tactical walking practices adherent to the critical possibilities of *flânerie*, and as against the

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<sup>141</sup> Baudrillard writes: "To produce is to materialize by force what belongs to another order, that of the secret and seduction. Seduction is, at all times and in all places, opposed to production. Seduction removes something from the order of the visible, while production constructs everything in full view, be it an object, a number, or concept. Everything is to be produced, everything is to be legible, everything is to become real, visible, accountable" (Baudrillard, 1990, p.34).

*badaud's* sleep walking.<sup>142</sup> It involves a certain Situationist notion, a paradoxical 'drifting' with instinctual intent.<sup>143</sup>

Certainly, recent plans for the development of land next to The Sage seek to provide spaces for walking that connect the various disparate sites of Gateshead's recent development. Recommendations include considering ways improvisation, use and reuse might be provided to the areas not merely limited to the iconic projects that line the riverbank. Urban Initiatives, in a development report for the Local Authority, acknowledge that Gateshead's rapid redevelopment around The Sage has neglected the connective tissue of pavements, and other forms of pedestrian permeability necessary for convivial urban street life, and seeks to remedy such omissions in its recommendations for future development. Drawing a contrast with the Newcastle side of the river, and in an apparent criticism of The Sage, BALTIC and the Hilton Hotel sites on the Gateshead side, the Urban Initiatives' report states that, "the urban tissue on the Gateshead side of the Tyne appears fragmented...dominated by large footprint buildings set in large, undefined open spaces that generally discourage use by pedestrians" (Initiatives, 2007). This at least gives hope that future transformations might recognise the unpredictable pedestrian as a vital component of contemporary city living, whilst also activating fears that the walker's disruptive possibilities will be incorporated into forms of 'planned drifting'.

In an act of reclamation, an act of embodying these memories, allowing these ghosts to speak, I walk up Bottle Bank, to inspect what is left of it. I photograph the Central Bar, one of the last original buildings, a long triangular shaped pub, rather like

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<sup>142</sup> This notion of children's play and the appropriation of space is an interesting link to Benjamin's concept of mimesis and play which I will develop in the following chapter which examines The Public.

<sup>143</sup> As Parsons notes, "Drifting ignores the ordering and intentionality of space, and instead makes space a fluid entity, interdependent with the flux and flow of the individuals that move through it...The *flâneur* fetishizes the practice of drifting, surrendering to the erotics of the urban imaginary.. it is this experience of drifting that provides access to the desperately desired 'chance encounter', 'heightened moment' of 'profane illumination' (Parsons, 2004, p.66).

the flat-iron building in New York. Afternoon drinkers eye me suspiciously, as I snap away on Railway Passage. The Half-Moon Inn is located on this street, and was often a cause of confusion, my grandmother would tell me, to those seeking out her father's pub, The Full Moon. The Half Moon is held together with scaffold and looks rather precarious standing, as it is, bolted to and held up by the new building next to it, with only its listed status saving it from obliteration. Later, my step-mother tells me that other listed buildings on Bottle Bank had not been saved. Victims of arson attacks, their remains were demolished and the developers moved in unhindered. We speculate about the likelihood of the fires on the site being linked to the developers who, blocked by the listed status of the buildings, may have taken the only action they felt was open to them in order to proceed with their strategic beautification.<sup>144</sup>

Attacking The Sage from the opposite side is now my mission, an attempt to catch the building unawares, an act of bodily recalcitrance. Approaching the building from the South side, I notice the seagulls that are never far from the city, being so close to the North Sea, perched on its hull, paying no heed to its status as iconic or otherwise. To them it's merely a perfect spot to perch. Making my way through the car park and out to the east side, the building is surrounded by steps and grass banks fashioned as a small amphitheatre, whose aim is quite obviously to function as outside public space for activities linked to the building. Two women sit there on their lunch break, and they eye me curiously, as I approach. The sight of people with cameras is still novel enough here to raise a look, for how much longer due to its growing status as a city-break destination, I don't know. Turning to look back at the Gateshead cityscape I see the Trinity Multi-story car park looking out across the scene, snubbed by its newer, shiner

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<sup>144</sup> This of course echoes Benjamin's comments on Haussman's Parisian interventions in *The Arcades Project* which were acts of politically-motivated 'creative destruction'. Benjamin quotes Le Corbusier: "The avenues [Hausmann] cut were entirely arbitrary: they were not based on strict deductions of the science of town planning. The measures he took were of a financial and military character" (Benjamin, 1999, p.125).

cousin. The Trinity's dull, grey pallor can in no way compete with the Sage's shiny, vibrant skin.



*Figures 28 & 29*

In my final encounter in the Sage's interior space, I defy the notice and sneak through a back door into Hall 2 where I manage to snatch a couple of photos. Moving round to the bar on level 1 outside Hall 2 the building reveals its wondrous shapes and lines. Above the café, I snap away, inspired by the activity below and the way it is framed by the building's stylish curves, bee-hive-like layers and scale. It is a large space but the soft carpets on level 1 add an intimate feel. I notice a qualitative difference in the visitor's 'tones' on this level amongst the smaller number of visitors, which are hushed, much more so than those below in the bustling café. In Hall 1 the lighting rig is lowered for repairs and guarded by a Sage employee who warns me that no flash photography is allowed. I re-set my camera and the object defies me, flashing away anyway. There is a family also viewing the Hall and on their way past me the father pauses to ask, "Are you doing a project or something?" I reply "Yes I'm doing a PhD and The Sage is one of the building's I'm looking at". Looking rather impressed he continues, "In what way, do you mean in terms of their ability to sustain themselves?". I reply, "Well it's about urban regeneration and these buildings are often



Figure 30

used as tools of regeneration for post-industrial cities so I'm looking at four buildings that symbolise that: here, Salford, Hull and West Bromwich". He remarks, "Aren't you doing anything on Liverpool then?" A "No",

I say, "although that's a classic example of regeneration through culture- it's getting quite a lot of attention at the moment".

### ***Conclusion: Aesthetics of Disappearance?***

My act of walking as a method of retaining or activating memories, as a process of disturbing the surface and evoking other stories that might haunt these sites, is a fragile task. Even the possibility of walking as critical practice, as a catalyst of memory, is fraught with danger as the sites that prompt memories disappear. Memory as a redemptive practice is not concerned with reconstructing a coherent picture of the past. As Benjamin writes, "articulating the past historically does not mean recognising it "the way it really was". It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger"(2003, p.391). The 'danger' in this case being that the urban space of contemporary Gateshead, with its voluminous redevelopment projects, covers over this link to its past and to other possible futures. The rapidity with which urban space evolves in contemporary cities can only add to the unravelling of memories the city space evokes.<sup>145</sup> The sense in which the aesthetics of disappearance is intrinsically linked to the aesthetics of change as urban spaces evolve, is also considered by

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<sup>145</sup> As Edensor points out, "Though rapid in Benjamin's era, the processes of the rampant replacement of commodities and the resiting of production now operate on a far more global scale than when Benjamin was writing, indicating the even speedier production of obsolescence whereby whole urban areas and industries, together with their factories, their labour, the techniques and machinery used in production, and the objects they produced, all become waste"(Edensor, 2005, p.101).

Benjamin's friend and colleague, Siegfried Kracauer, who highlights this threat in his essay 'Street without Memory' (1932). Kracauer describes how one's memories can be shocked into being, as familiar landmarks disappear, or are erased entirely by the destruction of the space in which they stood. Such erasure, for Kracauer, was the installation of an eternal 'now', a constant presentness.<sup>146</sup> This, too, is Baudrillard's fear: that memory itself will be eradicated by the imposition of simulated versions of the past, synthetic histories engendered by a process of 'museification' that produces an officially sanctioned form of cultural memory. He writes, "It is no longer buildings which burn or cities which are laid waste; it is the radio relays of our memories you can hear crackling" (2006, p.54).

Memory itself may be under threat by the eradication of ruins and the simulations that take their place. Yet, I want to argue that memory still retains the ability to rupture the seamless colonisation of public space, to reconnect cities to their pasts and potential futures, even if only fleetingly. Unexpected apertures can appear, provoked by the very buildings that seek to cover over the traces of the city's history. The traces that are evoked by The Sage, the space of and for memory that it makes, is one that even the violence of its staging cannot eradicate. The Sage, then, functions as a 'storytelling' object, its imposition paradoxically opens up *new* spaces: psychological, optical and oral. The silencing of the past and the spectres that haunt this location are re-articulated through the momentary arrest of sights, of memories, of stories captured on foot. The Sage, despite being a coherent, hermetic object, when placed on its site, offers itself as a catalyst to new critical apertures, both material and immaterial. Such apertures, whether as memories, vistas or ruins, are messianic traces, captured on foot in the act of walking. Such practices, I have suggested, are a necessary

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<sup>146</sup> Esther Leslie writes of Kracauer, "He tells of his searches for two favourite cafes on the Ku'damm. All he finds of one is a hollowed-out interior. And the other, now a confectioner's, so represses the earlier memory of the café that it is as if it had never been there. Only the present exists" (Leslie, 2004, p.78-79).

counter to discourses of local history which privilege officially-sanctioned versions of the past, and discourses of urban regeneration, which uncritically privilege new developments as progressive, irrespective of context.

Memory, then, acts as a temporary cessation, the attempt to salvage something non-synthetic from contemporary urban space and the constant transformation it heralds, a form of the ‘*weak* messianic power’ to which Benjamin attests. As Gilloch writes of Kracauer’s disconsolation at the disappearance of his favourite cafés:

The fate of the cafes brings into focus distinctive features of our experience of the modern cityscape: how ‘perpetual change erases memory’; how the endless quest for novelty merges into the flow of undifferentiated, empty time; how the past is consigned to oblivion by the present, and perhaps most importantly how it may fleetingly reappear as a disturbance that gives a shock to today’s passer-by. For it is paradoxically the act of obliteration, the present absence of the former cafés which brings them so vividly to mind. Demolition and erasure bring with them a sudden appreciation of what is no longer there (Gilloch, 2004, p.300).

In a journey that began in a pre-scribed space, a programmed, ‘auratic’ edifice such as The Sage, I too have been travelling into Gateshead’s past, and mine, before it is too late. We can only hope that the unexpected responses to such spaces, the apertures that might open in memories, however fleetingly, might prevent the complete decoupling from the past and the imposition of a constant ‘now’.<sup>147</sup> If The Sage is a catalyst of apertures, the time and space opened up by them – just as in the lens of a camera – is one that occurs in a split second. Yet, this fragile chance is that to which we must cling since, as Benjamin reminds us:

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<sup>147</sup> The fragility of this chance is captured well by Perec (1974) in a rumination on his home city of Paris: “My spaces are fragile: time is going to wear them away, to destroy them. Nothing will any longer resemble what was, my memories will betray me, oblivion will infiltrate my memory. I shall look at a few old yellowing photographs with broken edges without recognising them. The words ‘*phone directory available within*’ or ‘*snacks served any hour*’ will no longer be written up in a semi-circle in white porcelain letters on the window of the café in the Rue Colquilliere” (1997, p.91).

Cultural treasures, [and we might include The Sage in this category if we believe the rhetoric which surrounds it] “owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period (Benjamin, 2003, p.392).

A commitment to finding such apertures, such traces, in our pre-fabricated present, however slim the chance, is a labour of responsibility to the past, and the future, we must bear.

My grandmother in her final years always longed to return to Gateshead’s old streets, even after most of them had been demolished; to her they still existed, living on in her memories. My uncle took photographs at various stages of Gateshead’s restructuring, tracking its erasure. When they built new flats on the site of one of her old houses, in Richmond Street, my mother and her siblings considered whether she might like to live in one of them, might gain comfort in a familiar, though changed, location. She expressed a desire to move, but this was really a desire to time-travel: to transcend the now and the reality of her failing memory, to return to a Gateshead whose streets were imprinted behind her eyelids, whose names were repeated like a catechism for comfort: Sunderland Road, Ellison Street, Richmond Street, Bottle Bank. In re-animating these memories, in opening up the aperture for their re-telling, The Sage has revealed itself not as Baudrillard would insist, as alien spacecraft, but as Trojan horse: harbouring a secret cargo from the past.



*Figures 31 & 32*



*Figure*

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## CHAPTER SIX: THE PUBLIC, OR THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT BRITISH BUILDINGS

The little platform of present time on which I stand...

Virginia Woolf *A Sketch of the Past*, 1939

Destruction catches up with some things when they've scarcely had a chance to enjoy their place in the sun

Siegfried Kracauer, 'Calico-World', 1926

### *Finding a Way in?*

I cannot quite locate the entrance. I am reminded of Baudrillard and Jameson's encounter with the Bonaventure Hotel. Can this tricky pink palace be



Figure 34

playing a similarly disorienting game?

But this is West Bromwich not Los Angeles<sup>148</sup>. It is snowy outside and

once inside the streets are imbued with a pink, iridescent hue; the pink glass of the building's façade serving to render the outside with a rosy-tint. It is

perhaps too soon to know whether a pun

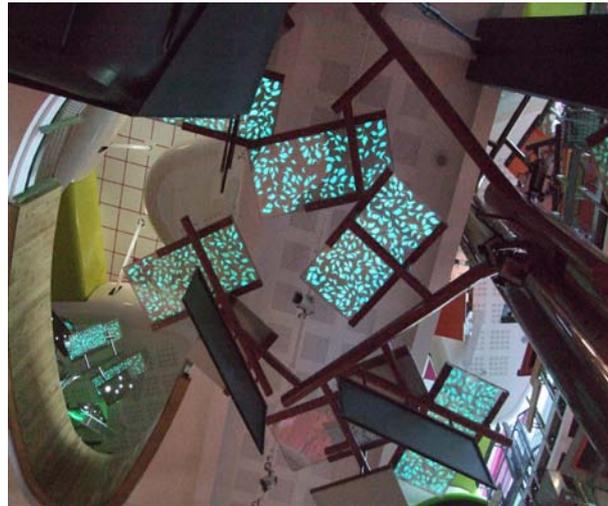
on rose-tinted spectacles is appropriate. The Public's approach is surrounded by a void; a nothingness of paved, landscaped frontage. It rather less draws people in than repels the casual visitor, the imposing open area at its front doesn't encourage casual peering in; a concerted effort has to be made to enter its doors. The visitor is exposed,

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<sup>148</sup> King & Jackson state "West Bromwich is an in-between place. In between the city of Birmingham and the city of Wolverhampton. In between Manchester and London, on the West coast main train line. West Bromwich is the principal town of the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell, an area of 33 square miles (8600 hectares) with a population of 282,750. In these terms, it's similar to Belfast or Bradford. It sits on the north western side of the West Midlands conurbation, surrounded by Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley"(King and Jackson, 2004). The broom village (Bromwich) or heath land on which it was once stood and takes its name was first mined at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by the *fin de siècle* it was a busy iron-manufacturing town in The Black Country – so-called because of its smog-filled skies.

realising that the building's glass frontage offers a panoptical screen to his or her entrance, encouraging the scopophilia of those already inside the building. Newcomers dawdle and hang back, unsure of its welcome. If The Public is trying to encourage a socially-diverse audience it fails at its first hurdle. A certain level of cultural capital and social competence is necessary even to enter the space. Its name begins to appear oxymoronic; its mission statement a bluff of empty rhetoric. Or perhaps it's the weather that's testing my nerves, it's cold and I want to be inside this great pink box. Strikingly, once over the threshold, the building draws you and your vision upwards towards the building's apex and the upstairs gallery space with its various mobile displays, intriguing curves and filtered light. To the left of the entrance is a passage which opens on to the restaurant/cafe bar. Like the fish of

The Deep's tanks, diners and coffee-drinkers can be surveyed by passing pedestrians whilst enjoying West Bromwich's new culture space, or at least its 'eaterie', Café Couture, which along with the toilets and a small exhibition space, is the only open and accessible part of The Public



*Figure 35*

at the moment of my first entry

in February 2009. That I am even standing in this space at all is rather remarkable. The Public was originally due to open in 2005.

I want to use this moment, my eventual crossing of the building's threshold, to discuss other threshold moments in its history, the first being the moment its construction ceased. The chapter proceeds, then, to take as its point of departure the moment The Public was halted, and argues for an understanding of this as a process of

premature ruination. It then examines the other set-backs and deferrals of its completion as a series of interruptions. By deploying the notion of the ruin, in the Benjaminian sense, I argue that we might understand the building as a material form of the messianic cessation and its operation as fleeting and momentary. Further, I examine the extent to which Baudrillard denies the messianic cessation since for him, the moment is constantly deferred. There is no pause, only an endless proliferation and recuperation of events. This leads into a discussion of the notion of ‘the public’, and what public participation in the urban arena might mean. Who is or was the project for, and how does it serve to mediate notions of community, participation and political constitution? But the building’s plague of funding issues, a somewhat hostile local public, the sacking of its architect and the arts group for whom it was built, the Arts Council’s withdrawal of funding and the failure of its interactive galleries all signal, I argue, the fragile operation of messianic pauses that register what Benjamin might call a hopeless hopefulness for its future against Baudrillard’s hopeless hopelessness.

### ***Premature Ruination and Cultural Deterrence***

The Public had apparently done everything right. It had keyed into New Labour’s recommended regeneration strategy for the new millennium: a cultural initiative in a post-industrial site involving the local community had employed a renowned architect, Will Alsop. Having successfully deployed the ‘code’ for success it was due to open in 2005. So far, so what? Well, The Public never opened in 2005 as it was supposed to. By March 2006, it had spiraled into debt (after its costs soared from £40m to £53million). Alsop, interviewed in 2008, recalls Sylvia King’s admission that a miscalculation in the accounts had resulted in a £3m loss. He states that he urged King to inform the funders. She did so and they called Price

WaterhouseCoopers who immediately ‘panicked’ and put the project into administration. The members of staff who consisted of the community arts workers, including Sylvia King, were made redundant in an attempt to cut costs: a community



arts building with no community arts workers and at the end of Summer of 2006, its construction halted, The Public was abandoned, unfinished. Figure 36 shows the building in March 2006.

*Figure 36*

Baudrillard writes of contemporary architecture:

We put up buildings that are still born, remnants which will never have been anything but remnants (our age no longer produces ruins or relics only waste and residues). Genuine monuments of disaffection with the human project, insofar as all that was asked of them was to provide employment, to keep the economic wheels turning for the time required by their useless construction. Perhaps it is they which stand as true testimony to this civilization – commemorating within its own lifetime an industrial and bureaucratic system that is already dead? Here again, history is taking a fantastic step backwards by building the ruins of the future (Baudrillard, 1994, p.79).

In 2006, it appeared Baudrillard was correct. The Public stood empty, unfinished, a premature ruin. As he notes, in our accelerated culture we no longer have to wait for their decline and decay to herald our ruins: now they are with us before they have even been built. But perhaps there is another way to read the failure of The Public and that way is the Benjaminian ruin. Benjamin thought that by reading ruins, objects that were out of fashion or buildings that were decayed, we might understand something about our current society, the values and dreams inherent therein; we might sketch out other paths we could have taken, other futures that might have been.<sup>149</sup> The

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<sup>149</sup> Gilloch notes that the significance of the ruin is first brought out in Benjamin’s work on *Trauerspiel*. Indeed, for Gilloch, the methods of ruination and redemption are key to Benjamin’s critical method. He writes

Public, then, is this kind of ruin; a premature ruin but a ruin nonetheless, and thus it offers up a chance for us to decipher it. The Public's failure may tell us more about the motives behind such projects than those cultural initiatives that are successful. That a project adheres to a formula or code is not necessarily a guarantee of success. Ruination then offers moments of pause, of critical reassessment, in the hope that some other future might be found. It is not a celebration of ruination, but rather recognition of its all too frequent occurrence and the ethical and political significance of this occurrence. Ruination then, offers up a chance of decipherment, an interruption, a questioning of motives, an active engagement with the fragments of the modern world. When thinking of The Public's ill-fated construction process we are reminded of Benjamin's observation of Neapolitan architecture that: "one can scarcely discern where building is still in progress and where dilapidation has already set in" (1996, p.146). In this way the space remains ambivalent rather than closed off: "the stamp of the definite is avoided" (1996, p.416). This notion of ruin, then, as a fragment, or temporal moment, can be aligned with Benjamin's project of messianism – as a pause of reconfigurative potential – to offer a perhaps less nihilistic vision than Baudrillard's.

### ***Messianic Destruction and History that Never Ends***

To explode the continuum of history is thus the project of Benjamin's historical materialism. It is through this cessation that the past may be redeemed in a messianic moment of reconfiguration and reorganisation. Benjamin notes that the knowledge of the potential of the messianic moment was present during the French Revolution when "on the first evening of fighting it so happened that the dials on

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"Mortification and (re-) engineering – these critical activities not only 'recreate' the work of art (illuminate it in a new way) but also 'recreate' criticism as a genre (reconceptualise it and reorient it as a practice)" (Gilloch, 2002, p.86).

clocktowers were being fired on simultaneously and independently from several locations in Paris” (2003, p.395). The revolutionaries were seeking to literally ‘stop’ time. Benjamin regards this as the moment “this consciousness came into its own” (2003, p.395). As Boyer points out, the revolutionaries wanted, not to step outside of historical time but “mechanical time, homogenous and empty time, the time that caused forgetting and sonambulant unawareness” (Boyer, 1994, p.195). For Benjamin universal history is complicit in understanding time as both ‘homogenous’ and ‘empty’, as something that must be filled with facts and data. This accumulation can only be stopped in the form of a cessation of time itself. He states, “thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well” (2003, p.396). This arrest of thought provides the moment of ‘shock’ which seeks to prevent the catastrophe of the ‘ever the same’ for Benjamin, since through the shock of arrest the historical subject is “crystallised as a monad” (Benjamin, 2003); the moment of cessation illuminates the subject as a microcosm of totality and its potential is revealed.<sup>150</sup> Benjamin contends the historical materialist project, by following the principals of monadology, is able “to recognise the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or, to put it differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (2003, p.396).

For Benjamin truth, or indeed historical understanding, is not arrived at by the collection of objective facts but by the dialectics of seeing: taking from the past and the present to illuminate the ‘now’ and the ‘then’ and perhaps the ‘yet to be’. This

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<sup>150</sup> Gilloch discusses how Benjamin’s theory is influenced by the German Romantic tradition of immanence and monadology. The Romantics suggested that for criticism to operate the critic must work in a way which is in closest accord with that which he/she is critiquing. In this way the work of art is understood as only achieving the state of art if it is able to be subject to this type of critique. For the Romantics it was not a question of good or bad art since art that was not up to the demands of immanent critique was not art. Further, the Romantics employed the concepts of monadology, in the sense that for them the individual work of art formed part of a greater whole. Thus, the single work of art possessed within it and pointed to the essence of the *whole* of art. Gilloch describes the monadological fragment thus: “The fragment, the individual work, is a monad, one which points beyond itself, comes to stand for, or stand in for, the totality of which it is a part. What is present is incomplete, apparently trivial; what is complete is absent, unrepresentable except through the trivial. This paradox frames the ambiguous status of the monadological fragment: it is derided and prized in the same moment. Above all, the fragment serves as a sign for, or more precisely, becomes an allegorical representation of, the infinite” (Gilloch, 2002, p. 40).

illumination then is achieved not through the application of an objective view of history as deployed by historicism, but as memory shot through with truth and arrived at through the arrest of time and thus progress by the privileging of other voices. In this way it is possible to see how fundamental the messianic cessation is to Benjamin's critical project. He reminds us that:

Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it...The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious (Benjamin, 2003, p. 391).

Caygill suggests, as well as being central to Benjamin's work, "in many respects the arrival of the Messianic theme alleviates the bleak rigour of Benjamin's thought" (1998, p.149). However, Caygill argues that it "is not essential to Benjamin's concept of experience that the intimations of the future be figured Messianically, and indeed to do so in a superficial way compromises its rigour" (1998, p.149). Rather, Caygill acknowledges the importance of eschatology and the notion of 'last things' in Benjamin's writings but not "necessarily in the sense of a Messianic completeness" (1998, p. 149). The pause of the messianic then is fleeting, momentary and evanescent but it still registers a trace of the negative or the corrective to Baudrillard's infinite proliferation of media-technico capitalism. It might interrupt and reconfigure the present, open up new opportunities or release the utopian potential of past ideas. This pause in *The Public* is messianic, then, in the sense that it is *incomplete*; it registers as both a literal and figurative interruption that cannot be easily recuperated.

For Baudrillard, though, such moments of messianic cessation are over. Contemporary architecture reflects the logic of a social "reality ...entirely impregnated by an aesthetic [which] has become inseparable from its own image". Buildings such as *The Public*, or the Pompidou are, for Baudrillard, "monument[s] of

cultural deterrence” which serve “to keep up the humanist fiction of culture [yet]...it is a veritable fashioning of the death of culture that takes place and it is a veritable cultural mourning for which the masses are joyously gathered” (1994, p.65). He goes on:

The whole simulacrum of cultural values is annihilated in advance by the external architecture...with its networks of tubes and the look it has of being...a world's fair building with its (calculated?) fragility deterring any traditional mentality or monumentality, overtly proclaims that our time will never again be that of duration. That our only temporality is that of the accelerated cycle and recycling...this the Beaubourg Museum wishes to conceal but Beaubourg cadaver proclaims...in any case, the very ideology of cultural production is antithetical to all culture...culture is a site of the secret, of seduction, of initiation, of a restrained and highly ritualized symbolic exchange (Baudrillard, 1994, p.64).

Thus, just as for Baudrillard Disneyland exists to conceal the fact that America itself is Disneyland, that ‘real’ life is out there, so too does the Pompidou/Beaubourg exist to conceal the fact that the entirety of Western culture is moribund and ruined. Thus, the frantic staging of more and more culture, as in the Beaubourg, is increasingly necessary. The problem for him is not that things stop but that they follow an infinite proliferation – that they *go on* without end. If modernity is a state of catastrophe for Benjamin and Baudrillard – something that has befallen us as a ‘state of emergency’, their responses to how we might counter such a state differ. For Benjamin, we need an emergency break, for Baudrillard, the break was pulled long ago, to no effect, we are still careering along with no prospect of hitting the buffers.

It is in his discussion of time and history in the various essays addressing the Millennium that Baudrillard once and for all negates the possibility of the messianic cessation. He argues that time or history cannot come to a stop since time is simultaneously too slow and too fast. Just as we move backwards to our origins we are on a perpetual fast forward to the future, or the end. Thus every moment of

history marks an end and simultaneously staves off this end, since every moment after the end ensures the end will never come. Baudrillard states:

Thus, when we speak of the 'end of history', the 'end of the political', the 'end of the social', the 'end of ideologies', none of this is true. The worst of it all is precisely that there will be no end to anything, and all these things will continue to unfurl slowly, tediously, recurrently, in that hysteresis of everything which, like nails and hair, continues to grow after death (Baudrillard, 1994, p.116).

As Butler suggests, Baudrillard's analysis "shows how history at once excludes the event and stands in for it at every moment – it both stands in for and denies the last moment" (1999, p.157). This simultaneity of time displays, Butler suggests, "the actual and the virtual within systems of simulation" (1999, p.157). The revolution has simultaneously occurred (and we have not recognised it) and is yet to occur. Time must be understood as operating within two modes, both linear progression and cyclical circularity, which are mutually supportive and reciprocal. It is not possible to choose between them, since each exists because of the other. Similarly, fourth-order simulation is fated to produce an extreme response from the very *other* it seeks to eradicate. By attempting to "excise negative characteristics" and remodel things "synthetically into ideal forms" (Baudrillard, 1993, p.44), the system produces its own subsequent challenges. The system exists *because of* (not in spite of) its other.

Whilst we might be aware of a sense of progression of time – which we comprehend in a linear way – simultaneously we are aware that time ends and also begins in the same moment. For example just as the final seconds of the clock hand whereupon reaching '12' marks both the end of one moment and the beginning of the next, likewise each moment of time is both the end and the deferral of that end. It is not a cessation of one moment and the beginning of another afresh – the end is always in the beginning and the beginning always in the end. Butler describes Baudrillard's concept of history thus:

History is only possible because of the end of history (history is only possible because the events of history are excluded at the beginning), and history leads to the end of history (the end of history takes place because there is too much history). And this end of history is unthinkable because it is either too soon (insofar as we can think it, it has not happened yet) or too late (insofar as it has happened we are unable to think it); but it is also what *doubles* history, explains how it is possible (Butler, 1999, p.157).<sup>151</sup>

For Baudrillard, therefore, there can be no messianic cessation of time since to know it would be impossible – we would always be too soon or too late to recognise the ‘moment’ of its occurrence. As Gane has highlighted, for Baudrillard, “the role of fatal post messianic theory fiction is to challenge the world into existence, not to freeze it” (Gane, 2000, p.75).

Wherein the traces of the messianic exist in Baudrillard it is either: that the messiah ‘has been and we have missed him’ or ‘he will never come, since time goes on incessantly’ or more likely, as Gane has suggested, the trace of the messianic is located within the notion of ‘symbolic exchange’, as the basis “of a universal structure of all symbolic forms” (2000, p.103) and not just a Western predilection.<sup>152</sup> It is through symbolic exchange or its later incarnation in Baudrillard’s work as ‘seduction’ (1979) that we may experience ‘the event without precedence’ upon which the whole notion of the messianic cessation is predicated. Gane posits:

The event without precedence is seduction; it is also without origin, coming from somewhere else and arriving always unexpectedly – a pure event that erases in one fell swoop all conscious and unconscious determination. And because it is without precedent it ‘liberates us’ from genesis and history (Gane, 2000, p.103).

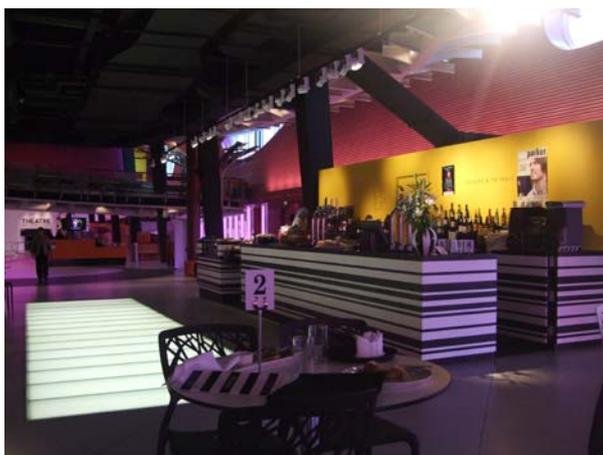
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<sup>151</sup> Butler’s footnote to this discussion is particularly illuminating – he suggests (writing pre-2000): “the final equivalence to be drawn here would be between the year 2000 and the now, for like the now the year 2000 would either be too soon (insofar as we can think it, it has not yet happened) or too late (insofar as it has happened we can no longer think it)” (1999, p.159). Thus reading this passage in 2010 I cannot think of the year 2000 since it is too late yet to think of 2012 is too soon – I am not able to think it as it has not yet happened. Thus Baudrillard can claim in the same instance that history is both at an end and constantly without end.

<sup>152</sup> Gane presents Baudrillard’s current position thus: “By the end of the 1980’s Baudrillard has stepped back to argue that the crucial revolution is that of uncertainty, has developed his notions of transfinite or transpolitical forms and has defined the nature of the transition from third to fourth order simulacra described as going beyond alienation “in the same direction, following the object as strange attractor. All that remains ‘after the end of the dialectic and alienation’ is a lack of determinacy as to the position of the subject and the position of the other” (Gane, 2000, p.96).

It is by entering into a duel, the game of which is to give a gift which cannot be returned, that we will experience ‘the event without precedence’, for Baudrillard, not through the messianic cessation. One of the key statements in Benjamin’s discussion of the messianic in ‘On the Concept of History’ is his ascription to it of a generational responsibility. It is both for those who have gone before, and those yet to come, that the moment presents infinite possibilities. He writes: “like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power” (2003, p.390). The Public owes its debts as much to West Bromwich’s industrial past as it does its cultural future.

***Cultural Participation: the Masses, the Silent Majorities and The Public***



*Figure 37*

As I peruse the view of West Bromwich from the safety of The Public’s Café Couture, I notice a curious sight that causes me to look twice. Standing at the counter are two identically-dressed, head-scarf-wearing

females. They look like extras who have wandered in from a Lowry painting. Purchasing two bottles of stout they proceed past me to take a seat at one of the tables. This sense of the uncanny is heightened as they approach: they are identical.<sup>153</sup> These elderly spectres are twin sisters. Unaware of my fascination they happily proceed to imbibe their lunchtime

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<sup>153</sup> I discussed Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’ or *Unheimlich* (unhomely) in relation to The Deep in Chapter Four, as a moment of eerie recognition between the human and fish as they mirror each other’s gaze. In Freud’s explanation the uncanny is also provoked by encounters such as doubling, and repetition. Twins are one of the examples of this eerie-sameness in human-form.

drinks. The couple are noticeable because they appear both out of place, in the dazzlingly pink surrounding of The Public, and time, representing the past of West Bromwich in their traditional and anachronistic working-class garb. West Bromwich's industrial history and its bright shiny future collide in this moment, registering on the retinas as a curious illumination. That my photograph of them no longer exists, since it was taken on my camera phone and subsequently lost both makes me doubt it ever occurred and, simultaneously, serves to intensify the image in my mind. The photograph I do have of the place they once stood is now haunted by their absence.

The notions of inclusion and participation run through the discourses that surround all four of the buildings I have examined in this thesis. In The Lowry this debate oscillates around class exclusion and the democratising potential of art and culture. In The Deep it is the encounter between humans and nature that seeks to draw people to Hull, once a busy fishing and trading location. The Sage presents itself as a new icon for Tyneside and serves to instigate a new rhythm for the decaying riverside through its concerts and musical performances. Such notions, of inclusion and community, are lost causes for Baudrillard. For him, "events themselves unfold without any signification or consequence and because effect stands in for the cause, we have reached the point where there are no longer any causes" (1994, p.117). Marx's revolutionary 'masses' or Benjamin's – whether compact or loose – are transformed into the inert 'silent majorities'. This idea underpins Baudrillard's idea of the end of the social and his questioning of the masses as ever having being revolutionary agents in the way Marxist theory proposes. For Baudrillard, since the 'masses' are impossible to represent they must be 'tested' or 'studied' and through this process the very notion of the masses themselves is 'thought' into existence. Sociology then merely replicates (or simulates) its own objects of concern. The

political and cultural arena becomes an attempt to gauge a response from the apathetic ‘silent majorities’ who can no longer be represented.<sup>154</sup> The masses absorb everything: information, politics, culture, like a black hole, and herein lies their power. It is not their revolutionary fervour or productive power, but rather the very impossibility of their representation, their apathy. This is their challenge, their mode of resistance. This challenge, however, is not ‘optimistic’ or pessimistic but rather “ironic and antagonistic” (2001, p. 211). He argues:

To a system whose argument is oppression and repression, the strategic resistance is to demand the liberating rights of the subject. But this seems rather to reflect an earlier phase of the system; and even if we are still confronted with it, it is no longer a strategic territory: the present argument of the system is to maximise speech, to maximise the production of meaning, of participation. And so the strategic resistance is that of the refusal of meaning and refusal of speech; or of the hyperconformist simulation of the very mechanisms of the system, which is another form of refusal by overacceptance. It is the actual strategy of the masses (Baudrillard, 2001, p 221).

Baudrillard is persuasive in his argument and indeed one cannot deny that a general inertia seems to haunt the social. Rather than Benjamin’s notion that technological reproducibility would result in a dissemination of information through which the revolutionary moment could be mobilised, in Baudrillard’s work, it is precisely the mass dissemination of information that produces the inertia of the masses – they have information overload and are fatigued. Certainly, we could argue that a certain ‘waning of affect’ (Jameson, 1991) accompanied the arrival of The Public. Whilst the other three buildings were able to capitalise, eventually, on the general bonhomie that accompanied the building of such projects in the early years of the new millennium, The Public’s set-backs and delays have evidenced a sort of cultural exhaustion or fatigue at the extent of change such buildings might herald. By the time it opened,

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<sup>154</sup> We need only consider the voting categorisations such as ‘white van man’; ‘Mondeo man’; ‘pebble-dash families’ to understand how attempts to represent the ‘unrepresentable’ masses are carried out in contemporary society. Baudrillard argues “each individual is forced despite himself or herself into the undivided coherency of statistics” (2001, p. 213).

there had already been a spate of what one journalist called ‘lottery- funded flops’ (Crow, 2004).<sup>155</sup>

However, this strategy of hyperconformity or silent inertia that Baudrillard outlines is not a political strategy, rather it removes the masses from that plane altogether. How, then, might we understand political groups such as the ‘anti-capitalists’, collective action around identity politics, or community arts projects, who act in spite of this ‘mass inertia’? Perhaps we can understand it as a response to the inability of totalising systems to empower or mobilise any longer. Benjamin’s recognition that ‘messianic cessation’ may not come about in the totalising blinding flash of the messiah but, rather, as Caygill (1998) argues, a muted illumination of colour, is useful here. It is possible to argue that fragmented political action contains the kernel of ‘*weak* messianism’ – the challenge to the system not through the revolution of the masses but, in our fractured global times, as a gathering of ethical responsibility in a focussed rupture, a momentary, fractured resistance to the globalized virulent domination of capitalism. The masses can only challenge the system through inertia or hyperconformity in Baudrillard’s thesis, demonstrated for him through their consistent refusal to be drawn on the subject of political will or action. Of course, public consultation and community involvement is a key component and strategy of contemporary cultural participation, however cynical Baudrillard might be of its aims.

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<sup>155</sup> For a discussion of some of the policy-driven reasons behind lottery-funded success or failures, with specific reference to the museum, see Brabazon & Mallinder (2006). Ironically, the article details the success of Preston’s National Football Museum over Sheffield’s Museum of Popular Music. Perhaps the success of Preston’s project was hailed too soon; from March 2010 it will relocate to Manchester’s soon to be vacated URBIS building. The irony proliferates: URBIS was yet another example of iconic millennial architecture, although not lottery funded. It was the ‘museum of the city’, with various exhibitions and displays to enable visitors to understand city life and experience. They went so far as to have a mock-up bus-stop to simulate the experience of waiting for a bus. URBIS is even more Baudrillardian than Baudrillard in this move. Its untimely or timely death perhaps marks the fragility that haunts all of these recent projects.

### *Who are, what is, The Public?*

In his conversations about The Public project, Will Alsop has made clear that whilst the intention was to build an attraction for West Bromwich it was not to take the form of a ‘theme park’ but rather a ‘place that reflects [the town’s] belief in itself’ and one that is “community driven” (Glancey, 2002).<sup>156</sup> In discussions with Liam Kennedy, before the project was brought to a halt, Alsop described his method of getting the local people on board and of having a creative partnership with already-present arts workers:

The Public project has been a very seminal project from my personal point of view and I’ve learned a lot from doing it. Eighty per cent of what I espouse about public consultation came from this project (and 75 per cent of that came from Sylvia King). You might have ideas about access and engagement with people but if you don’t know who they are then you’re fucked. Sylvia and her team knew, and so we could have a whole series of workshops, with the young and the old, cultural minorities and majorities. ... People should be invited to be part of a creative engagement, not asked to respond to something – asked to create something. The only rule in sessions is you cannot say anything negative, you must say positive thing (not, ‘you’ll never get this off the ground; rather, what we need is...’) Get people to write descriptions, to draw. I take that away and then I play it back to them. This does not undermine my sense of myself as an architect; it is a combination between their acts of madness and my own acts of madness” (Kennedy, 2004, p.48).

These collaborative ‘acts of madness’, then, were central to Alsop’s whole process of designing the building. Sylvia King, as Chief Executive of The Public (formerly Jubilee Arts), provided the link to the community and the local knowledge initially as a community arts outreach programme and Sylvia King joined in 1979. Sylvia discusses the history of Jubilee Arts in an essay entitled ‘Making Mansions’ and the utopian elements of the group are very clear. The debts such an organization owed to the revolutionary social movements and events of the late 1960s are also underlined.

King writes:

The project was part of the wider manifestation of ‘arts for everyone’ that had been inspired by a range of social and political actions in the 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>156</sup> Glancey actually calls The Public “the Black Country’s Pompidou” (Glancey, 2002).

The student riots in France, sit-ins and ‘actions’ at universities and art colleges up and down the country here, the Mexican muralists and their role in revolution, UNESCO’s pronouncements on cultural and democracy – all had informed an idealistic and demanding post-war generation (King, 2004, p. 54).

This idealism, King notes, led to a raft of community theatre projects, experimental arts venues, bookshops, darkrooms and general ‘art-making’ throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This was the context, then, in which Jubilee Arts expanded its base from community theatre to include various kinds of new media artists, and also the moment they bought a double-decker bus. Sylvia herself would drive the bus around the community taking ‘culture and art’ to the locals.<sup>157</sup> The arts group that was to become known as The Public by the turn of the millennium was peripatetic in its delivery. King notes that their ambition, though, was to have dedicated arts space. After winning some Sandwell regeneration money in 1994 and an Arts Council grant in 1995, it was the Arts Council’s final award of £17.9m which allowed the building that is now in place to be realized. King describes the ambition the group had for the place:

Our notion was simply to pull the pieces together in a beautiful space: the work we do with communities and with learning opportunities; add to that a chance to set up a new business; in clued the space for debate, clubbing and music or theatre venue to revive the town at night; and finally a show-case, a shopfront for the whole enterprise, Gallery X. This interactive gallery takes the topics from the project work and brings together the public, artists, designers, and videomakers and entwines them as part of the national conversation (King, 2004, p.60)

The attempts to solidify these ideas and their purpose into a building for location was the job of Alsop. What Jubilee offered Alsop was the sense of the building’s purpose

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<sup>157</sup> She notes, “the feminist movement hadn’t quite penetrated as far as the Black Country. Still, Kate (the first bus worker) and I reveled in the glory of ‘swinging’ that bus and the glorious moments when someone would ask for the driver and we’d smile winningly and own that title and watch the jaws drop...oh what waves we thought we were making” (King, 2004, p.56).

and its target audience. The building alongside the arts workers could enable what

Alsop calls “the programming” of West Bromwich’s public space. He says:

When I first got the job they wanted to build the building on the edge of town, which wouldn’t have had any effect. So we engaged in that debate and succeeded in moving it to the former bus station, so it is in the middle of a public square – it will be great. And West Bromwich is in the very fortunate position of having an organisation like The Public that can programme that public space (Alsop cited in Kennedy, 2004, p.49).

Figure 38 is Alsop’s mock-up or simulation of these ‘acts of madness,’ The Public<sup>158</sup>.

This was the virtual image that the project’s website showed up to and beyond its pause in 2006. Whilst it had undergone changes and modifications, this final visual



Figure 38

prototype of the building

outwardly retained the ambitions

King had for its interior. King

was again central to these

decisions. Alsop formulated his

design from a photograph of

Sylvia in a pink tutu teaching

circus skills to young people from

nearby Tipton; attempts were made by Alsop to have the building connect organically

and aesthetically to its *raison d’etre*. Of the notable architectural features, design

critics made much of the jelly-bean-shaped windows, two-tone aluminum cladding

and the building’s colour: “bengal rose pink” – a design, then, that adhered to the

ludic and vernacular principles of postmodern architecture, or what more recently

Jencks has called “ecstatic’ architecture, signaling a shift in postmodernist cultural

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<sup>158</sup> Accessed at <http://www.thepublic.com/> on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2006. The working name of the building was c/PLEX, up to 2005 when it was changed to The Public. It has also undergone a series of different logos, names, and limited companies including “THE pUBLIC”, “The Public Gallery”, and “The Public Gallery Limited”.

production (Jencks, 1999).<sup>159</sup> Other architectural critics likened the building to a giant aquarium or a Holstein cow (Sudjic, 2006), relevant perhaps when considering the building's attempts to provide an all-purpose 'cultural environment' or, perhaps, to milk the 'cultural cow' for all it's worth!

The building's website image in 2006 was accompanied with the following mission statement:

“THE pUBLIC

The Public is everyone.

Everyone who's creative

Everyone who has ideas.

The Public is for dreamers, thinkers, doers, lookers.

You are a member of the public already.

The Public, formerly known as Jubilee Arts, has been carrying out pioneering community arts work for nearly thirty years in West Bromwich and the surrounding area. The Public is now taking this experience forward in an exciting project to create the Public Building, the largest community arts development in Europe. The Building will be a place to dream and realise your potential in an inspiring, hands-on arts space, as well as somewhere you can learn, be entertained and relax.”

In its very name we can see its utopian attempts to mark itself out as something for everyone, as if belonging by virtue of its name alone to the people of West Bromwich. It is also self-consciously styled as a 'dreamhouse', a place “for dreamers”. But this rhetoric of inclusion perhaps overstretches itself. The mission statement cannot help but remind us of Baudrillard's claim that we now live in a referendum mode where the more apathetic we become the more our responses and participation are actively sought, in presuming an apathetic and disinterested public, the marketing rhetoric works hard to convince of the project's relevance and connection to its locale. The problem for Baudrillard with such notions of participation is that they reduce

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<sup>159</sup> Jencks recognises ecstatic architecture as a form of excessiveness, a vertiginosity, or pseudo-religiosity. It is, Jencks notes, 'often best appreciated when not fully understood...[when] grasped fleetingly'. Jencks includes Alsop in his list of ecstatic architects. Despite this new heightened language of architecture, Jencks notes that “ecstatic space produces the greatest ecstasy when it is in the services of a persuasive role that is public and credible: the background for a museum or church, the setting for a music or mystical experience”. Jencks also notes, however, that such fashion in architectural form will not have longevity, just as ecstatic moments are fleeting (Jencks, 1999, p17).

everything to meaning, ‘truth’ and accountability. This is pointless, for him, because the public (his silent majorities) will not be forced to respond in the way political and cultural agencies and elites might wish them to. And furthermore, they cannot be satiated with such projects. Such notions are the utopian remnants of ideas of social and cultural progress. He writes:

What happens to the project of truth (by which I mean the determined ambition to fulfil a program, to respond to needs, to be a transformer of social or political situations, with a cultural and pedagogic mission, etc. – in short, everything that goes into the official discourse and related to the conscious will of the architect himself)? For better or worse, what one finds is that these programmatic intentions are always hijacked by the very people at whom they were aimed. They are reformulated by the users, by that mass of people whose original – or perverse – response can never be written into the project. There is no ‘automatic writing’ of social relations or of mass needs, either in politics or architecture. Here too there is always a duel, and the reaction is unpredictable. The reaction in question is that of a fully fledged participant in the process, a participant who tends most often to be included as a passive element but does not necessarily play by the rules of the game or respect the rules of dialogue (Baudrillard, 2006, p.163).

Baudrillard’s cruel logic comes to bear when considering the sacking of the arts workers, including King and Alsop. This is an example of the unpredictability of the project, and another kind of ruination or hollowing out. Ironic, given they are the very reason for the building’s existence.

### *Facilities and Functionalities*

After my tea in Café Couture, I approach the shimmering shell directly ahead of me. It becomes clear that this space-age flourish is the toilets, once I see the giant Ladies and Gents symbols at its entrance.



*Figure 39*

They really are rather remarkable. Inside they are painted a vibrant yellow, the lights bounce off the chrome fittings and the internal organisation is spacious, forming an open-plan arrangement. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp famously placed a urinal in a gallery heralding what he called a 'readymade', and making a move which questioned the entire cultural history of art and its meaning. These toilets are equally worthy of the status of art *objet*. And, unlike The Public's interactive galleries, at least they are open. I speak to the security guard about access and he explains to me that the technology required to run the galleries is malfunctioning; the various disparate software won't communicate in synch, a literal communication breakdown. These galleries are supposed to be the building's centre-piece, its playful artistic centre.

For Benjamin, as I have noted elsewhere in the thesis, children's play is a potentially transformative and disruptive moment in the world of things. In Chapter Two I discussed this transformative potential in terms of a way of seeing anew, of looking askance, as a methodological imperative. In Chapter Three, I discussed the potential of play that is harnessed into the ludic encounters of interactivity in The Deep. In this chapter, I wish to turn to the way that notions of play and fun informed the very building of The Public. Will Alsop's designs for The Public were heavily influenced by a building that was, in many ways, a true ruin or failure: Cedric Price's Fun Palace (1961-4). Price's building was never built but the driving idea behind the project was the concern to collapse the distinction between the high art of the gallery space and the accessibility of popular culture. He sought to invite visitors, as Benjamin might have put it, to 'get behind the camera', operate the equipment, and inhabit the space without reverence. Price's idea was to build a 'laboratory of fun'. Exhibiting a very Benjaminian faith in the transformative potential of new technological organisation, Price and his theatre-director partner, Joan Littlewood, believed that through new technologies the public could reorder and reorganise their

environment. This allowed them to gain greater control and revel in increasingly responsive encounters with spaces. The marketing material for the Fun Palace bears more than a passing resemblance to The Public's mission statement above:

Choose what you want to do – or watch someone else doing it. Learn how to handle tools, paint, babies, machinery, or just listen to your favourite tune. Dance, talk or be lifted up where you can see how other people make this work. Sit out over space with a drink and tune in to what's happening elsewhere in the city. Try starting a riot or beginning a painting – or just lie back and stare at the sky ([www.interactivearchitecture.org](http://www.interactivearchitecture.org)).

The Fun Palace was to take the form of a constantly transforming, flexible leisure

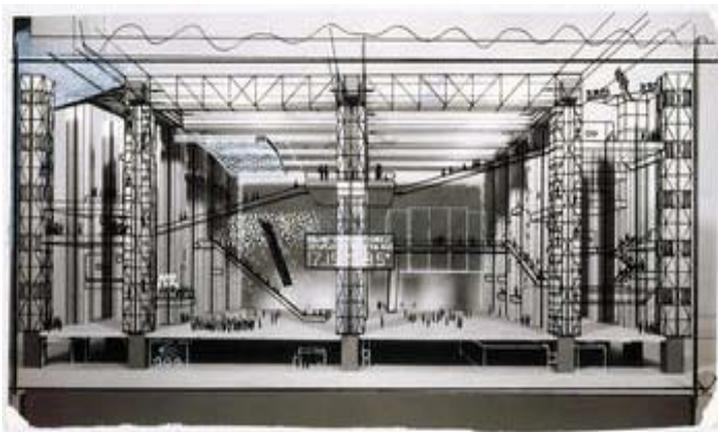


Figure 40

space, something that looked like a factory from the outside but inside contained various interactive devices, such as cranes, models, art materials and tools. The visitors were

to improvise, to rearrange and invent their own environment from the disparate elements therein. The Fun Palace had at its core a utopian principle of involvement, hands-on action and the transformative potential of such engagements.<sup>160</sup>

Benjamin too appreciated the improvisatory qualities of play, its re-ordering of the world, thereby revealing that world's contingency and its possibilities.<sup>161</sup>

Children's play was exactly this sort of re-ordering, and Benjamin noted how much

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<sup>160</sup> The building itself was also to be movable, flexible and interactive. As the Price archive at the Canadian notes: "The only fixed element within the Fun Palace was to be the structural grid of steel lattice columns and beams. All other programmatic elements – hanging theatres, activity spaces, cinema screens and speakers – were to be movable or composed of prefabricated modular units that could be quickly assembled and taken apart as needed. The columns, or service towers, in addition to anchoring the project, also contained service and emergency stairs, elevators, plumbing, and electrical connections.

<sup>161</sup> This idea of assemblage and reassemblage, as Gilloch notes, is also essential to another of Benjamin's physiognomies, the ragpicker. The ragpicker collects the ruins and debris of the city and reassembles it into something worthwhile, turning dust to gold (Gilloch, 2002).

play was rooted in the concept of mimesis, the mimetic imitation of the natural and social world. For Benjamin, children, “bring together in the artifice produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new intuitive relationship. Children thus produce their own small world of things within the greater one” (1996, p.450). The ‘mimetic faculty’, is fundamental to this interaction and children often imitate both human and non-human objects in their playful encounters (Benjamin, 1996, p.465).

He writes:

Children’s play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behaviour, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and a train (Benjamin, 1999b, p.720).

For Baudrillard, the order of the ludic - of play - is not productive it is *seductive*. However, functional play, hijacks the ludic mode, reducing its intensity to a cool ‘seduction’. Benjamin privileges the child’s eye view as inventive and askance. But in Baudrillard’s analysis this possibility is reversed. Play and interaction are carefully stage-managed and programmed, ‘managed’ by the binary code. He writes:

Obviously the ludic cannot be equated with having fun. With its propensity for making connections, the ludic is more akin to detective work. More generally it connotes networks and their mode of functioning, the forms of their permeation and manipulation. The ludic incorporates all the different ways one can ‘play’ with networks, not in order to establish alternatives, but to discover their state of optimal functioning (Baudrillard, 1990, p.158).

The Fun Palace was never realised, various sites across London were sought but ultimately it ran aground in 1970, after objections from various citizens, church groups and planning authorities wherever it was proposed to be built. Not only has it clearly influenced The Public building, it was also cited as a fundamental influence on Rogers & Piano’s Pompidou Centre (1977). Of course, this is significant because it is the Pompidou Centre that is, for Baudrillard, the exemplary form of cultural destination of the late twentieth century. The Pompidou Centre opened in 1977 as an

arts space, museum, library, cinema and performance hall, a veritable feast of cultural pick-and-mix. Built after a competition overseen by French Cultural Minister Georges Pompidou, the building's mission was to create a space to meet the "criteria of interdisciplinarity, freedom of movement and flow, and an open approach to exhibition areas". Baudrillard struggles to give a name to its machinations calling it "the Beaubourg effect, the Beaubourg machine, the Beaubourg thing" (1994, p.61). For him, what is foretold in the "Beaubourg hypermarket of culture is ...the model for all future forms of controlled socialization...the space-time of a whole operational simulation of social life" (1994, p.67). The building is merely a "carcass of flux and signs, or networks and circuits" which serves as a "monument to the games of mass simulation" (1994, p.61). Facilitating nothing more than the end of culture as a useful and democratizing category and acting as a monolithic object of deterrence, The Pompidou Centre, for Baudrillard, is a cynical monument to the failure of those 'hot', energetic, revolutionary sparks of 1968, serving instead to control and contain, to provide a stage for the apathetic circulation of the silent majorities. It is an empty sign which serves to highlight nothing more than the emptiness and death of contemporary culture. As Gane argues:

The interior culture gives the impression not of living vital art, but of a certain form of reanimation, since all the contents are anachronistic. It is a fitting monument only to cultural disconnections, to hyperreality, a culture that is transient and recyclable (it reassembles units or particles which are all the same) (Gane, 1991, p.144).

Baudrillard notes that the people within this space circulate, not in a communal sense with the energy of the collective, but rather "affect a cool demeanour", mobilised in "an artificial solitude", each individual thus "remaking their bubble" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.62). Further the Beaubourg deploys a "manipulative aleatory practice" to seduce the masses in a "labyrinthine practice of signs ... that no longer has any meaning" (1994, p. 65). At least, argues Baudrillard, a true labyrinth, one that

celebrates its own ‘simulation and fascination’ would allow for a sense of mystery or the possibility of the game rather than the obscene totality of the simulation.

Benjamin’s critique of the modern urban environment, with its complex, ‘mythical’ combination of signs, sites of consumption, metro stations, cafés and arcades, is thus harnessed into a set of aesthetic effects, for Baudrillard, in the Beaubourg. It self-consciously attempts to entice a crowd but once it does so, it has



*Figure 41*

little to offer the visitor other than a circular movement through its vast, empty spaces. In this regard, it is the perfect monument to a moribund, culturally-bankrupt culture. The combination of effects serves to

fashion the Beaubourg into a ‘monument

of cultural deterrence’ wherein the building acts as a black hole absorbing culture and creating, in its place, an antiquated ‘simulation’ of culture. It is a form of culture’s hollowing out. What would have been more instructive, Baudrillard contends, is if the Beaubourg had actually attempted to erect “a monument or anti-monument...to hyperreality and to the implosion of culture” (1994, p.63) rather than the outdated attempt to culturally educate the masses when the building itself is the product of an empty culture. By displaying its ‘insides’, with its pipes and conduits on the outside of the building, the Beaubourg presents a “calculated fragility” which deters “any traditional mentality or monumentality” and “overly proclaims that our time will never again be that of duration, that our only temporality is that of the accelerated cycle and of recycling, that of the circuit and the transit of fluids” (1994, p.64). Indeed, as Gane suggests, the building “may appear explosive, but in effect, it is implosive, as it absorbs energy from its environment and impoverishes it by

establishing something of its own security. In the end, for Baudrillard, “Beaubourg is at the level of culture what the hypermarket is at the level of commodity: the perfect circulatory operator, the demonstration of anything (commodity, culture, crowd, compressed air) through its own accelerated circulation (1994, p.68).

### *Architectural Clones – Culture Degree Xerox*

The Pompidou Centre, then, doesn’t result in the utopian project that Rogers and Piano, or Price’s Fun Palace heralded. Rather, it is the model for all cultural spaces which function to keep alive the fiction of culture itself. They are the built-form of what Baudrillard calls ‘culture degree Xerox’ (1993, p.9), the aestheticisation of the whole society. He writes:

Architecture is to a large extent doomed today merely to serve culture and communication. In other words, it is doomed to serve the virtual aestheticisation of the whole of society. It functions as a museum of the packaging of a social form known as culture, a museum of the packaging of immaterial needs which have no other definition than their being inscribed in numerous buildings designated for cultural ends. When people are not being turned into museum pieces on the spot (in heritage centres, where they become the virtual extras in their own lives, this too being a form of ‘ready-made’), they are siphoned off to the huge, more or less interactive warehousing spaces that are the world’s cultural and commercial centres, or to places of transit and circulation which have rightly been described as sites of disappearance (Baudrillard, 2006, p.169).

Benjamin is cynical of the notion of ‘culture’ too. For him, cultural documents evidence the history of the victors and their triumphs. He writes: “there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (2003, p.392). It was necessary to remain vigilant to that which was carried out in the name of ‘culture’. This concern was politically motivated. During his visit to Moscow, as I noted in Chapter Three, he was impressed by the new proletarian spaces such as the Polytechnical Museum, and the repossession of the galleries by the workers. Moscow was a place filled with the rhythm and motion of revolutionary experiment, new possibilities appeared apparent in the technical and tactical rearrangement of the city.

For Baudrillard, this notion of political re-organisation is over. After the situations of '68, and their recuperation into planned strategies of culture such as The Pompidou, hyperconformity is the only mode of resistance available to the 'silent majorities'. To claims that a capacity of more than 30,000 people would warp the building's structure, Baudrillard cried 'make Beaubourg bend' (1994, p.69). In 1997 Baudrillard got his wish when the Pompidou Centre had to close for a two-year refurbishment, after being worn-out by the excessive usage of the public. For him, since political and cultural elites excessively solicit our response, the silent majorities can respond with apathy or hyperconformity – silence or excessive over-consumption. Only these strategies have any intervention into the fabric of social life.

### *Closed to Reconfigurations*

The Public's galleries are not able to be bent, used, re-configured or otherwise at the moment; I can't even look around. They are out of order, closed for repair. They appear to have rebelled to their demand to offer programmed public space.<sup>162</sup> When they opened briefly in June 2008, they were described by *The Guardian's* architecture critic, Steven Rose. Upon first reading, they sound more like a form of modern incarceration: each visitor is electronically-tagged through the space. After offering some personal information such as a voice sample, the gallery recognizes you as you move through its interior, for example "your voice sample might be played back at you as a sound installation, or you'll see your signature words joining a 'data

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<sup>162</sup> Baudrillard writes of the notion of architectural objects rebelling: "In this situation, the architect himself can play at thwarting his own plans, but he cannot aspire to control the object as event, the symbolic rule being that the player is never greater than the game itself. We are all players, gamblers. In other words, our most fervent hope is that the rational sequences of events will unravel now and again and be replaced, if only for a short-time, by an unprecedented sequence of a different order, an extraordinary, apparently pre-destined build-up of events, in which things which have until then been artificially kept apart will suddenly appear not to occur randomly, but to be converging, spontaneously and with equal intensity, by the very fact of their being interconnected"(2006, p.164).

stream' running down wallscreens like waterfalls as you appear". But as Rose notes "this is conceptual highbrow" meets low-tech "end of the pier ghost train" (2009, p.24), an interactive, technologized, old-school thrill. Alsop was also quoted in *The Guardian*, having returned to the building, and hailed it as the best thing he's ever done. Whether this was truly felt or a marketing rhetoric to remind us of its relevance after everyone had seemingly forgotten about it is uncertain. However, this victory parade is premature. In the months they take to repair the galleries there are fears that the technology within cannot maintain pace with the private home, that the very notion of public technology will become out-moded and obsolete, superseded by the games consoles, digital television and broadband capabilities of the average domestic space. Perhaps Benjamin was wrong. Perhaps the fact that technology can 'meet the recipient halfway' means the public will not come at all. This would be Baudrillard's cynical interpretation of participation, that the apathetic silent majorities will not leave their sofas. Either way, *The Public*, as an outpost of public culture seems increasingly necessary: a vital stand against a retreat to the private sphere technology might hail. That the collapse of high and low culture such places attempt to forge could mean a descent into the smug middle-brow, might be the main problem.

So, *The Public* standing deserted, its galleries short-circuited, for Baudrillard, would have been a fitting tribute to an impoverished, deserted culture. *The Public's* sense of its own possibilities, its ability to transform and rejuvenate local participation, community cohesion and access to the arts ends up, for Baudrillard, exactly a marker of its impossibility, in fact, that which prevents it from happening. Emptiness or overuse, a literal stampede to its doors, an erasure of its pretensions through its wearing out, this is Baudrillard's fatal strategy, his only 'politics' of disruption, for him, it is all that is left. It does not even come necessarily from the subject, but from the object too. He writes:

Our world would not be bearable without this innate power of *détournement*, this 'strange attraction', this radicality originating from elsewhere, originating in the object (for radicality comes now not from the subject, but from the object). And there is something attractive in this for architects themselves: to imagine that the buildings they construct, the spaces they invent are the site of secret, random, unpredictable and, in a sense, poetic behaviour and not merely of official behaviour that can be represented in statistical terms (Baudrillard, 2006, p.164).

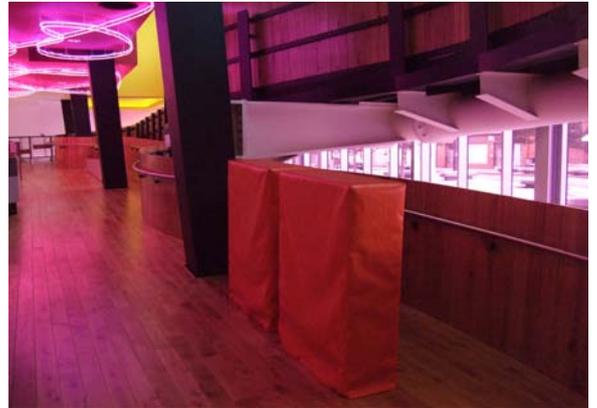
The challenge for The Public is in its ability to retain the mimetic, *sensuous* correlation between humans and the world, between first and second nature, within the formalised and structured experience of the interactive gallery: whether it has enough space for transformative 'play', whether it can resist the temptation to programme every possible encounter within, whether it can leave room for play's imaginative potential for reconfiguration; or, as Benjamin might ask, whether there is any room left in the *Spielraum*. Neither thinker offers a conclusive answer, if there were one to be had. In the end, it's a leap of faith. A commitment, despite and in spite of Baudrillard, to the idea that there is still something better about having an idea of 'public' culture and hiding it in big pink and black monoliths, than giving up on it altogether. Benjamin and Baudrillard are caught here in an uneasy, irreconcilable aporia: Benjamin's somewhat romantic faith in the (bourgeois) child's playful reconfigurations is matched by Baudrillard's nihilistic provocations of an apathetic audience. But here Benjamin's generational responsibility comes back into play. The technological arrangements of The Public's gallery spaces are (will be) understood by this generation of children (and adults) whose perception is wholly technologized. It is to their demand, and to technology's, that The Public will have to answer. Benjamin refused to give up on the transformative potential technology offered, whilst warning of the constant threat of being wrested away by dubious forces (in his case both capitalism and Fascism). This is not to be in overt celebration of such events, whether as ruins, or as finished articles, but to ascribe them with potential, in a watchful, mournful, critical hopefulness.

### *Souvenirs as Relics*

Having seen all there is to see in the half-opened Public, I pass, not in the intended order, from galleries to gift shop but instead by the cordoned off area designated for the gift shop, another premature failure. Unlike in the other buildings, The Public's souvenirs are produced out of the gallery spaces themselves. The art that the visitors make during their visit will be available for them to purchase on a mug or t-shirt by the time they exit the gallery. The visitors, then, make their own gifts, rather like a cultural version of the supermarket's self-service check-out machine. This is to be a smooth, seamless traversal from art-making to commodity purchasing. But the check out areas are covered, the shelves empty. Only a pile of unused, logo-ed plastic bags hint as its proscribed use.

In an early fragment from 1921, entitled 'Capitalism as Religion', Benjamin reverses Weber's claim that capitalism usurps religiosity in a shift from religious to secular society. Instead, Benjamin notes, capitalism *is* a religion. Without doctrine, cultish in character, its meaning only makes sense in relation to its own rules, or as Caygill has pointed out, "in the language of historical materialism, exchange value dominates use value" (2005, p.221). Equally capitalism is incessant in its 'celebrations', has 'no weekdays' and creates guilt or debts for its followers. Capitalism, like religion, offers an answer to the worries, torments and restlessness of human existence; buy something. There is a certain agitation that there is nothing here to buy, to take away. Of course, for Baudrillard, in a comparison between Wall Street in 1929 and the crash of 1987 the difference is that the system of transcapital has exceeded all limits. The stock-market is virtual, trading on virtual capital without correction. The billions lost in 1987, for Baudrillard, have no effect, they are wiped out to no end. This is the feature of the transpolitical, the transeconomic, the

transaesthetic: there is no external force that can interrupt its infinite proliferation (Baudrillard, 1993, p.11) . Yet, in this moment at least, I leave this building not with a souvenir but with a relic, a plastic bag of a company already obsolete<sup>163</sup>.



*Figures 42, 43, 44*

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<sup>163</sup> The gift bag says “The Public Gallery”. This was a limited company that had gone into receivership at the time I visited The Public. At the same time, the Arts Council had announced it was to pull its annual funding and Sandwell MBC plugged the gap in the monies. The bags, one employee told me, could no longer be used.

***Conclusion: Looking Through a Rose-Tinted Lens or Rebooting the System?***

I have argued throughout the chapter that The Public's succession of failures and set-backs evidence some form of intervention into the smooth colonization of space that Baudrillard might want to insist marks the arrival of contemporary architecture and the transpolitical mode's expansion without limits. This, for him, results in a cultural deterrence effect applicable to projects such as The Public. Despite Baudrillard's somewhat sneering dismissal of the project of cultural education, I have tried to salvage its purpose from both its moments of interruption as chances for its future to be re-thought, and in its ability to redeem the utopian principles both thinkers find in versions of the ludic.

All of these moments of failure, of interruption, of ruination, I have read as examples of the messianic pause – something which restructures and re-organizes what follows, something which resists the smooth operation of such a building's imposition. They serve to offer a future by registering traces both on the building and the cityscape in which it is situated. The Public's interruptions' also exemplify a wider social and cultural shift, a downturn in faith, perhaps, in such buildings and their rejuvenative potential. In many ways, the project was caught on the threshold of bonhomie towards the contemporary urban regeneration discourse and its potential for transformation. Since it was the last of the buildings discussed in the thesis to be constructed, funded and planned, it missed out on the wave of acclaim that accompanied The Lowry, The Deep and The Sage. This wane of popularity, particularly as some of the millennial projects began to fail, preceded the various political and funding wrangles relating to the wider economic crisis or 'credit crunch' of 2008. This perhaps evidences something of what Benjamin would call the

‘asynchronicity’ between the economic base and its superstructural formations (Caygill, 1998).

My reading questions whether it is possible to maintain that such projects reflect the logic of serial reproduction of the kind Benjamin discusses, the political potential inherent in technological reproducibility, as well its attendant democratizing potential through the widening of cultural participation. Of course, for Benjamin, this dissemination was not just about access but about fostering the class consciousness of the masses. For him, reproducibility was linked to the proletarianisation of society. We are provoked by Baudrillard’s attempt to convince us that these buildings exist as the mere simulation of culture: as the “signs” of regeneration and prosperity, their form taking that of the shopping mall regardless of their intended purpose. They merely allow the city to compete in the realm of visual, the buildings themselves having no more worth than as icons for the purposes of marketing, mere insignias on the city council’s letter-headed note paper. One does wonder whether the double-decker bus that Sylvia King and her colleagues drove through West Bromwich and its surrounding areas in the 1980s might not have had a greater impact in this regard.<sup>164</sup>

Benjamin’s hope is tentative and, if appropriated contemporarily, carried out, I would argue, *within* the realm of the transpolitical. But equally, it is predicated upon a messianism: the faith that each moment contains “splinters of messianic time”, and in this way offers us a future within the catastrophe of modernity, an opportunity to ‘wake-up’. Such awakening, however, as afforded by the ruins of The Public is not a permanent possession. As Buse argues, for Benjamin, awakening is “something fitful and passing, once we are fully awake... the moment of possible understanding has

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<sup>164</sup> In a strange, almost incomprehensible twist, that even Baudrillard couldn’t have invented, after her sacking Sylvia King was employed by the nuclear waste agency Nirex in 2007, because of her work with communities and success at building public trust. Sylvia was employed to talk to people who might be asked to live in close proximity to nuclear waste products. See [http://www.thestirrer.co.uk/sylvia\\_king3103071.html](http://www.thestirrer.co.uk/sylvia_king3103071.html)

passed” (2005:107). Baudrillard offers his only consolation to the dominance of simulation as the possibility of reversal, the chance that, in attempting to eradicate all forms of otherness and to proceed along the line of the code, the system spawns its own revenge, an event that could not have been predicted, a symbolic ‘abreaction’. 9/11 was, for him, this kind of event. This challenge or ‘event without precedence’ is the nearest Baudrillard comes to any notion of the messianic.

Yet, as Benjamin remarks, in an excerpt from his Moscow Diary from 1926, what is revealed in a ‘moment’ is a range of possibilities, regardless of success or failure since: “in either case, something unforeseeable will result and its picture will be far different from any programmatic sketch we might draw of the future” (Benjamin, 1986, p.6). This underlines the fact that a messianic cessation doesn’t necessarily provide a future purged of injustice and barbarism (especially given what we now know to be the fate of the Russian Revolution), and we could say, in a far more trivial example, the same for this building. However, that the simulation of form in the case of The Public has not been a smooth operation involving the mere the logic of the code registers this slim chance or challenge to proliferation of simulacral forms Baudrillard describes. That the site has been and remains contested and controversial, has stuttered to its fragile existence, gives it a sense of unfinishability which offers it hope, and allows it to continue to provoke questions about the aesthetics and ethics of the urban environment. More than ever all we have are moments, small chances that appear suddenly, without warning, and disappear quickly, without resolution. The moment of reflection or pause doesn’t necessarily ensure a better future but it, nonetheless, allows us to remain critical and watchful of the choices that are made in the name of ‘culture’; open to other possibilities. Benjamin’s notion of ruin and Baudrillard’s cultural deterrence and hyperconformity are in some ways both methods

of critical nihilism, dependent on forms of destruction to reveal their ‘truths’.<sup>165</sup> In the end it is perhaps the difference between a positive and a negative nihilism. Benjamin’s positive nihilism is, however, always consoled with the messianic possibility, and this perhaps, in the end manages to outwit Baudrillard’s hypercriticism. The game however, remains in constant play. Capitalism is always in the process of ‘re-booting’. West Bromwich is warmed by a (temporary) rosy-glow.



*Figure 45*



*Figure 46*

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<sup>165</sup> In his Theological-Political fragment, Benjamin writes: “the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away. To strive for such a passing away...is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism” (2002, p.306). Baudrillard writes: Now, fascination (in contrast to seduction, which was attached to appearances, and to dialectical reason, which was attached to meaning) is a nihilistic passion par excellence, it is the passion proper to the mode of disappearance. We are fascinated by all forms of disappearance, of our disappearance. Melancholic and fascinated, such is our general situation in an era of involuntary transparency. I am a nihilist (1994, p.160).

## CONCLUSION

Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask ‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘whither?’

Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 1994

This distance is as much that from those stars which are dead, but whose light still reaches us, as from those which have been shining now for a long time, but whose light has not yet reached us. This is to say that there is still hope.

Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories III*, 1995

Only for the sake of the hopeless is hope given to us.

Walter Benjamin, Goethe’s ‘*Elective Affinities*’, 1924-25

Throughout the thesis I have argued for a constellatory understanding of the relationship between the conceptual repertoire of Benjamin and Baudrillard and the way such concepts play out in the buildings under analysis. The constellation also constitutes a navigational strategy with which to approach the reading of the thesis.

I have argued that these buildings as contemporary ‘dreamhouses’ are illuminated by such an approach. Equally, the buildings demonstrate both the interrelations of Benjamin and Baudrillard’s critical projects as well as many points of dissonance and divergence, prompting the recognition that they do not fit seamlessly together. Whilst Benjamin’s ideas repeatedly offer transformative potential, Baudrillard’s serve to constantly wrest that potential away. The constellation of their concepts, then, is not static, but in continual flux, and constantly deceptive. Their concepts, like stars, are perpetually in a cycle of becoming other, of reversing themselves, of imploding, becoming loaded with too much mass and collapsing under the weight. Perhaps the Baudrillardian concept of simulation might be charged with such a fate. Its obligatory presence in contemporary culture renders some of its critical

power impotent or obvious – it is not radical enough – reflecting rather than portending cultural experience. Baudrillard recognised this. His critical project sought to outplay, not reflect, reality. Equally, Benjamin’s faith in the transformative potential inherent in modes of collective spectatorship can appear naïve and utopian given both the society of the spectacle and the fate of media-technico capitalism which render the notion of collectivity – as a physically-shared embodiment – increasingly irrelevant. At times, Benjamin is *too* romantic, *too* utopian. At times, Baudrillard is *too* critical, *too* sneering. Yet, as I have argued, read together, in constellation, they offer a dynamic and intriguing critical armature. Benjamin and Baudrillard, as Kracauer might have said, are ‘companions in misfortune’ (1995, p.129).

Not all the buildings offer up their moments in conjunction with this conceptual repertoire as easily as others. The Lowry, is perhaps, the least interesting building, its spaces are perfectly pleasant, open, airy and traversable, but its gallery spaces cramped, appearing as an afterthought. Yet, I have argued that it is this afterthought, the inclusion of L.S. Lowry’s art that prevents the complex from being a completely antiseptic cultural space. Lowry’s presence haunts the space as a ‘destructive character’. Other buildings teem with possible connections to Benjamin and Baudrillard’s critical interplay. The Deep, for example offers a panoply of conceptual juxtapositions as vivid and striking as the fish that swim within its plexiglass walls. The threat to Hull posed by rising sea levels offers a final ominous and timely image. The Sage strikes a particular chord because of its proximity and propinquity to mine and my family’s past, exposing personal associations, through which I frame my reading of the space. That this personal excavation of memory triggered by The Sage is not applicable to every of its visitors though, is, I argue, what redeems it. It points to the subjective, symbolic and affectual power of the cityscape. The Public is, in

some ways, the exemplary form of these iconic projects of cultural regeneration with which I have been concerned. It serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of the cityscape and the critical potential of premature ruination.

Certainly, the ambivalent responses I have registered throughout the thesis proceed from a sense that it is still better for these spaces to exist than not. There is no mourning for an industrial past, but rather a continued questioning of its legacy in the post-industrial locations it once occupied. For Baudrillard, the alien craft which now inhabit these sites are where the silent majorities go to be silent. They mark out an urbanity emptied of its passionate intensities and energies, and instead carefully manage and contain experience, encouraging empty fascination under their iconic, spectacular canopies. For him, these are the spaces of the end of the social *as* spectacle. Cultural regeneration, as the latest mode of capitalist urban transformation is already fading. The financial events of 2008 marked the end of its current formation, even as the wane of public and political enthusiasm preceded them. But this fact, that these buildings have already had their moment, is a cause for a poignant, dissatisfied, critical response to that recognition: that they are examples of what Benjamin called, the 'ever-same' in the guise of the new.

In the end, it comes down to a leap of faith, a recognition, that whilst contemporary urban life is eternally transient, transformative, evanescent, simulated, depthless and spectacularized, the generational responsibility of the 'messianic' offers it a fragile hope. This is, following Benjamin, a hopeless hopefulness, which, I argue, might still outplay the hopeless hopelessness of Baudrillard. The spectres of the past and the future still remain, as both haunting reminders and ghostly promises.

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