On the Postmodern Condition

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Abstract

As a cultural movement, Postmodernism begun to solidify itself since the 1970s. Despite what some may say of its necessarily unstructured nature, coherent reflection about it is useful. While there is a growing literature on this topic, the present study, as suggested by David Harvey, seeks to use an historical, materialist framework, as developed by Karl Marx, to interpret postmodern culture. To do this, I began with the studies of the substructures of postmodern culture (political-economic and material conditions), and then sought to find reflective cohesion among its 'aesthetic' superstructures (social, philosophical, cinematic, literary, and musical) and their underlying conditions. As a result, from these studies, I found that the aesthetic sentiments of postmodern culture quite neatly map onto the material conditions, which inform its context. These sentiments imply a complicit disposition towards many aspects of late capitalism (such as consumerism and alienation). These findings are significant because it forces postmodernism to take a more honest look at itself, and become self-aware of its implications. My findings imply that if postmodern sentiments truly want to harbor an activism toward the status quo, it must first realign itself with more unifying attitudes. While a single resolution has yet to be concluded, the present study provides some general directions for positive change.

Introduction

Naming a movement, or an era, can be a complicit thing, but it is also the first step required to take up the opportunity for change. We say we live in a 'postmodern condition', and this seems to give us some confidence: that we have seemingly intellectualized something that is dynamic. I keep in mind two aims with the present study. First, what I intend to do is to make the reader aware of the postmodern condition in all its ramifications. Second, my optimism seizes me when I say that I hope to inspire in him or her *possibility* for change. If David Harvey, Frederic Jameson, or Jean Baudrillard have found no decisive way for moving forward (even less, if they have, they have failed to inspire a people to take action) in our current condition, far be it from me to claim "Eureka!" By illustrating the more unpalatable aspects of the state of affairs, one can at least make a conscious decision not to continue to perpetuate a certain way of life. This, I believe, is the true value of critique. I encourage the reader continually to reflect on the way things are when reading this study, as he or she may be in the midst of what I am describing, and the picture might become clearer.

How should one undergo such an exploration of this 'postmodern' condition? I believe that a historical materialist[1] framework might be quite useful. Through this framework, we will see the relationship between a culture's ethos and its underlying economic conditions as a mechanism. By 'historical materialism', I mean dividing our socio-political experience into two spheres—material substructures (economic systems and relations of production) and superstructures (ideology, cultural production, political realities, etc.)—and using the former as a way to understand the latter in its concrete, material terms. I believe this way, pioneered by Karl Marx and adapted by David Harvey in the project of exploring postmodernism, will serve as an excellent reference point.[2]

The organization of the paper is as follows: it has three primary sections with their respective sub-sections. The first section is concerning the economics and ideologies of Modernism and Postmodernism. This serves to give the cultural moment of Postmodernism some context. The next section explores socio-political experience of the current condition. Lastly, a section on culture, consumerism, and aesthetics is the most speculative section of the paper, arguing that postmodern aesthetics is largely a reflection of the culture of consumption. By dividing the paper into these sections, I hope to approach the issue from three general points: material, political, and aesthetic. Through these perspectives, we can take a more parallax view of Postmodernity and its cultural articulation.

Economics and Ideologies

A Definition of Postmodernism

The definition of any '-ism' is elusive—at best, it is reductive. With that said, the reach of a movement is determined through the "irresistible force of its influence" (Brann, 1992, p. 7). Thus, if we

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[1] This method of analysis was developed by Marx and Engels. It uses the development of material conditions as a way to ground the mechanism of cultural movement (rather than ideals or social attitudes).

[2] However, the author recognizes the limitations in this approach, and may at times perhaps suggest a flexible approach, as in the power of 'superstructures' to exert some influences in changing material conditions.

are to study Postmodernism, perhaps we should stray from static definitions, and look instead at its tendencies for particular cultural production (that is, the political-economic, social, and aesthetic manifestations). As such, I do not intend to define a cultural era; rather, I intend to locate the current cultural, productive forces in the broader movement of Postmodernism. Historically speaking, Postmodernism follows the mid-19th to mid-20th century Modernism. It began truly to grip the Western consciousness after the recession of 1973, but one can find traces of its roots further back in our cultural memory. Before we can begin to understand the tendencies and aspects of Postmodernism, it is of utmost importance that we first conceptualize Modernism.

Modernism

In the term 'postmodernism', there exists a prefix before its root, 'modernism': namely, 'post'. As such, it is understood, as noted above, as the movement *following* Modernism. However, it does more than simply *follow*, for it demands our recognition of its own autonomy. To understand how it demands identity *apart from* its predecessor, let us first recognize that the latter is a highly complex and complicated era in human history: mechanization, automobiles, new economic systems, wars of unprecedented scale—there is no conceivable way in which we could explore this era in its entirety of horizontal and lateral reach. However, it is vital that the reader understands at least the general cultural and social atmospheres of Modernism. I hope to illuminate the roots of

postmodern culture within the movement that preceded it.

The two intellectual and cultural moments immediately preceding modernism, the 18th century Enlightenment (the 'age of reason') and the 19th century Romanticism (in many ways, a revolt against the former), both exerted heavy influential pressure on modernism. The goal of the Enlightenment, to be unapologetically reductive, was to study and pursue the universality of mankind in order to construct societies predicated on these universalities for the productive development of well-being and emancipation for all. Alexander Pope's poem *An Essay on Man: Epistle II* articulates the entire movement in the opening lines, "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/ The proper study of man is man". Progress and improvement was *autotelic*: the inherent reality of things tended towards their progress (from sociality in Rousseau to Spirit in Hegel)[3]. Time and space, rationally and geometrically ordered (from Spinoza's God to Newton's absolute space and time), was too static for the modernists, however, and the Enlightenment movement gave way under the pressures of economic mechanization to the reign of Modernism. Romanticism was the artistic and literary project centered on the irrational aspects of reality, commanding movement, emotion, and force (think of Rachmaninoff or Mahler). As we explore the nature of Modernism, the reader will see how these two movements play roles in its formation—the dialectic of stasis and rationality against movement and irrationality.

If the mechanism for development in Enlightenment thinkers was the underlying reality inherent in the universe only to be

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[3] French philosopher Rousseau believed the development of society involved the gradual movement from savagery to civilization through

reasonable agreement among individuals. Similarly, German philosopher Hegel sees that human 'Spirit' develops toward a more self-conscious and absolute being, moved along in a teleological manner.

realized by human rationality, the mechanism for the Modernists was *movement*. What Harvey calls "creative destruction" (1989, p. 16) was the ideology whose influence on Modernism defined the very essence of the era. Nietzsche conceived of a universe whose structure was struggle and overcoming. In order to build more mechanized and efficient urban spaces, Haussmann and Moses restructured entire segments of Paris and New York (respectively) for a new rational ordering—demanding, first, destruction of the inefficient, outdated, and anachronistic. In the 1940's, General Motors proposed to restructure America's highway system for more efficient automobile movement, to elevate the priority of the automobile in the American social fabric (Walker, 2016). Faust's creative power predicated on desacralization took on a new meaning: to create, one must first destroy.

The material conditions of Modernism most certainly gave rise to these sentiments. Conditions of production (the factory and machine), circulation and transportation of capital (trains and automobiles), and consumption (mass markets and advertising) informed the cultural production of the early 20th century. Ford saw the capacity of machinery to revolutionize Western culture; Keynesianism provided the economic policy for it: man was thus mechanized. As a result of the "age of the automobile" (a movement defined by the dynamism of mechanization), there was a precedence of aesthetics over ethics—Romanticism was the immediate consequence of the fall of the

Enlightenment. What lay *beyond* mere "good" and "evil" was the law of reality: movement, flux, will (Darwin, Nietzsche)[4]. Underneath superficial rationality lay the muddled and messy reality of human thought (Freud, Breton)[5].

The Modernist era also saw the unprecedented movement from rural to urban modes of life. Louis Wirth, in his essay "Urbanism as a way of life" (Wirth, 1938) provides an erudite exploration into the sociological effects of this transition. Foremost, Wirth urges that the transition is a *process*, not a sudden change. As such, many aspects of urban life contain that of the rural experience. Impulses of localization (the "Chinatown" of New York and "French district" of New Orleans), in which more culturally intimate communal identities organize themselves are some examples. Additionally, Wirth argues that the economic structure of the modern city, with its introduction of mass produced goods, led to a depersonalization of the economy, and therefore of social relations: "there is virtually no human need which has remained unexploited by commercialism" (Wirth, 1938, p. 22). Karl Marx also illuminated this tendency in *Capital* in the discussion on use-value and exchange-value (we will revisit these ideas more extensively below).

There were two attitudes that attempted to cope with the uncertain and unstable reality of modernity. The first was our search for a universalism. Our internal need for narrative prompted the age of the Myth of the Machine.[6] Absolute faith in technological and mechanized progress to

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[4] Both Darwin (biologist) and Nietzsche (philosopher) argued that the essence of the universe, and humanity, is dictated by movement, not static ideals arrived at by the rational capacities of human beings.

[5] Similarly, Sigmund Freud (psychoanalyst) and Andre Breton (artist) saw that beneath the superficial aspects of humanity lay something much more dynamic and irrational.

[6] See Thomas Hart Benton's mural *Instruments of Power.*

propel humanity into brighter futures took hold. Through the architecture of Mies Van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, we see that progress no longer lay in our rational moral capacities, but in our inclination for industrialization and technological progress. "Form follows function" became the hymn of this new myth, placing efficiency above ornament in order to maximize welfare. Purity of language was to be the vocabulary of 'Man', which is seen in the art of Mondrian, the writing of Hemingway, and the architectural styles of the Bauhaus and De Stijl.[7]

The second attitude was the turn to the local. The increasing homogeneity of space required a deeper appreciation of the vernacular[8]. This was the attitude of William Morris, who called for a return to the noble guild system of a rather idealized medieval society. It was the urban sentiments of Camille Sitte and Christian Norberg-Schulz: "Vernacular architecture is at the origin of the art of the place as a response to the question of living, or inhabiting" (Schulz, 200, p. 231)—it is the reaffirmation of *place*. Communal identity was seen as the fabric of social relations, personal identity, and ethical conduct. "Archaeologists" (salesmen donning the name), such as Arthur Evans and Heinrich Schliemann, instilled the spirit of unearthing (and commodifying) the *local history* in the public's fantasies, which exemplified the attempt to constitute the West's identity in their local historical narratives.

The transition from Modernism to Postmodernism

The transition from Modernism to Postmodernism should be primarily located,

in a proper materialist fashion, in the economic relations and the material conditions. In the early 20th century, Henry Ford extended and advanced trends in production by organizing time spent in labor and standardizing wages. However, the true revolution of Ford was his insight that "mass production meant mass consumption," leading him to become the father of the reproduction of capital: his workers were trained on how to work *and* how to consume (Harvey, 1989, p. 126). This new highly modernized and rational economic praxis was called 'Fordism'. During the Great Depression, however, even the great Ford had to lay off his workers and lower production. He realized he could not single-handedly sustain an entire economy. The crisis was seen as a lack of demand for product. An economic model (pioneered by John Maynard Keynes) was introduced into the American economy, known as 'Keynesianism', to just flirt with government intervention all the while avoiding radical fascist and socialist outcomes evident in other countries. Basically put, Keynesianism advocated for increased government spending and management of the economy to stabilize capitalism against the ravishes of its (internal) irrationality and instability. Thus, the Fordism-Keynesianism model of economic organization was spearheaded by the American economy.

The economic transition that took place following Modernism was the dissolution of the Fordism-Keynesianism model that allowed for such rapid industrialization. This dissolution was a result of the adoption of 'flexible accumulation' models following, most

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[7] The author recognizes and concedes that some of these movements mentioned are conscious revolts *against* what they saw as the mindless culture-numbing capitalism. Nonetheless, the styles of these

movements cannot be denied to reflect many of these underlying ideologies.

[8] "Vernacular" is a term used to designate the local attitudes and cultural manifestations of a given place.

prominently, the recession of 1973. In short, flexible accumulation was "marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism" (Harvey, 1989 p. 147), truly emphasizing the instabilities of late capitalism (these instabilities are characterized by its tendency to devolve into crisis). Thus, the ephemerality and dynamism of modernist culture and aesthetics were carried into postmodern cultural production.

Time and space

We have thus discussed the general attitudes of Modernism and its "force of influence." Next, we will explore the relationship between time and space to discern how these cultures' attitudes are grounded in its material condition, and vice versa. As such, to understand the material conditions of Postmodernism (which influences its cultural production), we should understand how time and space have been grasped by the Western consciousness, and trace the lineage into our own time. To do this, it is most effective to trace out the picture described in part three of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). The following is the argument laid out in his account.

There are many things we take for granted: that we are (you and I) both conscious; that you are awake and not dreaming; that memory is accurate; that you have free will of choice; that time is linear and that space is geometrical and homogenous. These are "facts" we tell ourselves in our culture so that we can communicate effectively about many things. We conflate these beliefs with objective reality, forgetting their cultural foundations. Here, I would like to focus on the contemporary understanding of the spatio-temporal order. Every culture has a slightly

varied understanding of these two terms. In feudal Europe, the local view that people had was reflected in their cartographical practices: their maps depicted relatively limited perspectives, featuring primarily tangible objects and reference points that the naked eye could see along one's travels. Monsters and gods of mythical proportions inhabited the unexplored spaces. Cartography slowly evolved as more information was gathered. Mercantile systems of economics expanded trade in the 16th and 17th centuries, so that geographical information had to be understood more rationally than personally (as was evident during the guilds, restricted transportation, communication, and therefore the economic practices during the feudal ages). The more that was understood about the global geography, the more effectively trade, natural resources, and other economic advantages were understood and maneuvered. Thinkers such as Descartes began applying geometric principles to space, developing what we would call today Cartesian geometry, which organized space on a coordinate system. The belief in God's rational ordering of the universe allowed us to conclude that if we can understand this rationality, we can deduce the general spatial ordering all across the globe. Trading was also continually growing, as more nation-states began opening up their borders for economic interconnection.

With the advent of industrializing economies in the West, space was slowly subsumed by time. Movement and progress was the ethos of the era. Being, as a subject for philosophical enquiry, gave in to

Becoming.[9] The world was being compressed, space 'temporalized'. Bong Joon-ho's 2014 film *Snowpiercer* is an excellent example of this inclination. The mighty train, upon which the last remaining survivors on earth following an apocalyptic war reside, keeps time by its rotations done throughout the world—the 'spatialization of time' through movement. In a capitalist system, the primary goal of a producer is to increase turnover rate. Therefore, every decision made on the side of the producer will include decreasing the time it takes for a product to be made, delivered, and consumed. If the producer can increase turnover and efficiency, business will be profitable. Thus, early capitalism was ridden with the motive to speed up social processes and to decrease time horizons for decision making (space was seen as subordinate to time). Spatial barriers were met with technological innovation: trains, automobiles, and more efficient highways. Following the Second World War, there was an incentive by the developed nation-states to increase output, so the global market was vastly expanded. Countries that were unaffected by the capital market were being seduced into the globalizing economy; accurate geographical *information* and its representation become highly important assets, and the decompression of transportation and communication barriers became a means to these assets.

It might have become increasingly evident to the reader that a given culture's understanding of time and space are largely determined by (or at least related to) the material practices of that culture. Feudalism in Europe needed only perspective cartography; mercantilism, a more geometric representation of space;

Modernism's compression of time and space valued technological innovation above all else and the ideology of *progress as always good* was woven into the social fabric.

Postmodernism has strong roots in Modernism's treatment of time and space: growing technological innovation allows for higher turnover rates in production, and information becomes even more important for controlling and representing this compressed space to the public. An important shift, however, has taken place. The 1940's and 50's saw an increase in union power in the United States. Large factories with many people working in it who saw each other day in, day out for basically their entire lives could form real social bonds with each other—even across generations. This allowed for the grounds to be cultivated for a unified class consciousness, allowing them to organize for social change. In the 1970's and onward, there was the dispersal of large factories and increasing fragmentation of all the economic sectors in the West. Factories were made smaller, more spread out, and more mechanized, making realistic union efforts on a notable scale almost impossible. This command of space that the organizers of capital have is a marked difference—but perhaps the necessary logic from the space-time compression in the era of Modernism.

Political and economic ground of postmodern culture

Given our understanding of postmodern time and space, the political and economic 'ground' of cultural production might be made more lucid. Kurt Vonnegut, in his 1952 novel *Player Piano*, depicts a

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[9] Before this era of Modernism, things were conceived of as more static and consistent. 'Being' was the study of the universe *as it is*. 'Becoming' was the study of the universe whose existence was *in motion*.

highly advanced urban landscape. The story follows a certain Paul Proteus in the Ilium district of New York City. The year is undisclosed to the reader, but we understand that the story takes place after a war (perhaps a third world war) and onset of a third industrial revolution. The majority of labor, by this time, is mechanized. Very few factory workers remain, and the economic spectrum is bifurcated (physically, by the spatial separation of the two, and fiscally) into those whose work has been displaced by machinery and the engineers and bureaucrats. The characters in the novel are quick to realize the overriding importance of "know-how" (information and a particular aptitude for technological work) in their economy. There are three modes of labor left. First, one can place high enough in I.Q. and aptitude tests to become an engineer or manager in the Works (the last major productive corporation whose factories are entirely mechanized—similarly to the Tyrell corporation in the 1982 *Blade Runner* film); second, one could work in the government assigned positions in the army or "Reeks and Reclamation Corps"; finally, one could begin his or her own small business in the Homestead (the quarter of the city for the non-elite).

The temporal and spatial understanding in Modernism has only been exaggerated. The compression of this order has created a hyper-globalization in recent years, and has allowed for an unprecedented diffusion of ideas (typically economic, but we'd also like to add "democratic and enlightened")—i.e.: the third industrial revolution. The insatiable appetite of a system whose primary goal is increased turnover rate necessarily results in instability. Decreased "core group" labor (9-5, long term, geographically secure) and increased "periphery group" labor (part time, short term, specialized, and dispensable) has reduced unionization

capacity among the working class and has resulted in more fragmentation. $77 billion was spent on corporate mergers in 1977; in 1988, the number rose to $198 billion—i.e.: The Works. On the other side of the flexible economy, self-employment and highly specialized businesses and consultant firms have also seen dramatic swells (increasing 25% from 1973 to 1982)—i.e.: Homestead. What this signifies, Harvey (1989) tells us, is that the "tension that has always prevailed within capitalism between monopoly and competition" has led to increased centralization of corporate power"—i.e.: bifurcation of economic system. This is done in two ways. First, the increased value of information—i.e.: "know-how"— privileging those who have access to it, has allowed for further reaching corporate influence and response in the tastes of the masses. The second, combatting the rigidities of Fordism, was the deregulation of the financial system (e.g.: global stock markets, global commodity futures markets—including debt, and increased geographical mobility of funds and products). All of this leads to increased autonomy of paperless financial systems and less regulative capacity of national or international organizations. This was symbolized in the dissolution of the Bretton Woods agreement of 1971 in which the major nation-states abandoned the project of grounding its dollar in gold. Harvey concludes, "The structure of this global financial system is now so complicated that it surpasses most peoples' understanding" (1989, p. 161).

The *general* conclusions to make of our current flexible economic practice is the increased diffusion of products, emphasis on knowledge as a commodity, farther reaching corporate influence, increased turnover rates, and fragmentation of working class and consumer society. I should like to add that the two most influential of these aspects

on postmodern cultural production are the commodification of knowledge and fragmented class relations. These are two the aspects whose sociopolitical ramifications are explored directly below.

The Postmodern Socio-political Experience

Postmodern political ontology

The political ontology of postmodernism can be generally understood as one of "pluralism". In the fragmented postmodern universe, there is no objective reality, no unification of narrative, and, therefore, no unification of voice. Every person inhabits an entirely different universe. It is very possible that the woman sitting on the bus beside me exists in an entirely different reality than I do, governed by its own laws, structured by its own architecture. The only medium of communication between us is language, but even that is a tricky territory, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out. One thing remained certain, however, from modernist metanarratives like Hegelian and Marxian dialectics: there is an 'othering' aspect of this political ontology. In Marxism, there is simply the 'Other': the outside of political power, the proletarian. Its role is defined and maintained by the bourgeois class. In postmodern political ontology, which is devoid of meta-theory, there are many 'others', each fragmented in their own idiosyncratic way—not only from political power, but from each other, as well (Harvey, 1989). It might even be more acceptable to say, "Postmodern ontolog*ies* are of pluralistic relation." Four tendencies follow from this 'othering' that I would like to

illustrate here. First, what lies implicit in this ontological fragmentation is the tendency to fetishize one's marginalization. It seems that, increasingly, the validity of one's voice is the degree to which it is peripheral to political power. Since these degrees seem to be arbitrarily designated (one can break one's group identity up into innumerable categories, if one likes), any kind of coherence or organization between these groups seem highly unlikely. There is, in a sense, a satisfaction—indeed, a glorification—with one's periphery as *more peripheral* than another's periphery. There is a brutal honesty that has been lost in the transition from modern political ontologies to postmodern political ontologies. As horrific as the 20th century project of communism was, there was an honesty in its belief and articulated rhetoric: "I do *not like* being weak." It demanded that its peripheral position be rectified in action: it demanded to be the centrality of political power. In short, it seems to me that postmodern political ontology lacks an initiative for any true change—any substantial reorganization of power.

Second, the fragmented, incoherent voices of 'othering' busy themselves with fracturing more and more, building impenetrable walls in these gaping fissures. What they are really doing is allowing the exploitation of this political fracturing. As Harvey (1989) points out, while, for a time, place might be commanded by the 'others', space certainly remains out of reach. Sub-groups develop as people, increasingly filled with the feeling of alienation, search for a grounded social identity. We are sold innumerable group images—Christian, liberal, conspiracy theorist, mindfulness practitioner, photographer, Indy music listener—to entertain this craving for identity and solidarity among others. What is happening, at a material level, is the commercializing of these identities that we

buy into. We can join any group—as long as we have the means, of course. It would be difficult to be a part of the Indy music group without our music tastes informed by the media, without making regular trips to the local music venue, and without purchasing a music subscription service to wet our diverse and unique musical palate. In Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the only thing uniting Deckard and the replicants is their oppressed stature to the elite class, yet that is never realized. A similar scenario in Bong Joon-Ho's 2019 film *Parasite*, in which two beggarly families scramble over and under each other just to inhabit the space *below* (physically represented with the basement and the mansion's placement on a hill) that of the opulent family: when the vein of unification is severed, true action becomes very limited. The wealthy, on the other hand, remain hopelessly naïve to the goings-on underneath their floorboards: the powerful need not cultivate instincts if the weak cannot even shout together.

Third, while it is pleasant to think that the more fragmented the public is—the more political ontologies there are—the more balanced and democratic our voice as a nation is, there is no shortage of external influence that floods our political consciousness, making it difficult to discern what is authentic political and social opinion and action. Implicit influences on our world views, like advertising, construct within us needs and wants that are irrelevant (or even authentically wanted, in some cases). (See Kassin, Fein, Markus, 2016, pp. 189-218). More explicit—and deeply unnerving—cases, like direct constructing of political sentiments and sowing activism by forces operating behind the scenes undermine the validity of this "democratic" voice. Practices

such as astroturfing[10] undermine NGO's and other seemingly authentic media of political voice. Astroturf practices weaken communication and democratic opinion with "'manipulated authenticity,' which undermines the credibility of civil society engagement" (Lock, Seele, Heath, 2016; See also Durkee, 2017).

Fourth, along with an increasingly alienated populace in a pluralistic political body is the task to communicate across these barriers. The woman on the bus sitting next to me is living in an entirely different ontology than I am, unique with its own set of laws and natural tendencies. As Borges writes, "Though but a few paces from me, [s]he seemed immensely distant" (Borges, 1998, 189). There is no possible way for me to understand her reality, and there is no way for her to understand mine. R.D. Laing illustrates the problem from a psychoanalytic perspective that I think might shed some light on the political dilemma: "All men are invisible to one another. Experience is man's invisibility to man." It is thus the task of social phenomenology, he continues, to relate two alienated peoples' experiences together (Laing, 1967). It seems self-evident to us that language is the most straightforward method of communication, even across barriers as such. However, the issue arises when we consider for a moment the immense complexity of language—it isn't so straightforward. Derrida explores the culturally fluctuating and inter-referential nature of language. Jean-Francois Lyotard's "language games" illustrates the implicit boundaries that define particular social groups according to their signs. That means communication across these barriers of 'others' becomes much more muddled than

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[10] Astroturfing, further explained in Lock, Seele, Health(2016) and Durkee (2017), is the act of a

corporation artificially creating political sentiments or sowing social activism through the veil of grass-roots campaigns.

we initially assumed. As a very elementary example, how often are we misunderstood when we speak to another, even if it is someone we consider relatively close to? As soon as our words leave our mouth, they are to be interpreted by the listener(s), entirely independent of their original meaning.

What used to be the unifying factor for the marginalized and displaced has become, at best, passive. I am not entirely pessimistic, however. I do think there are two potentially constructive social and political implications of this process of 'othering'.

First, it is evident that with the falling of reductive metanarratives that necessarily displace one group as peripheral and the other as central (often leading to great amounts of suffering: e.g. 19th century's "Manifest destiny"), and the filling of this absence with many micronarratives, we can begin to cultivate a ground of more empathetic understanding towards our fellow human beings. To understand, at the very least, that another culture or group of people inhabit a reality so vastly distant from one's own (yet only miles away) can begin to break down the hardened sensibilities and dogmatic aspects of one's narrow perspective. When we are confronted with another universe, oftentimes contradicting our own, we have two choices before us: harden our own vision in an attempt to preserve what we perceive is falling apart; or open ourselves up to a broader understanding of people and ourselves. While this has the potential to be a wonderful thing, what could be its undermining is the cultivation of *false empathy*: the recognition of other peoples' realities and the praising of their idiosyncrasy, periphery, and displacement, to the degree that this empathy becomes nothing more than passivity and fetishism of the *act* of 'othering', and nothing more. If

this newly found empathy is not used as a tool for expanding the power and autonomy of the 'other', then it remains useless, and we will find ourselves back at the core of the issue: "Once the poor have been aestheticized, poverty itself moves out of our field of vision" (Deutsche and Ryan, 1982).

Second, with new media (social media, the internet, more responsive markets, etc.), there opens up a possibility of more vocal power given to the consumer: the people. As access to the internet increases globally, people become more connected than ever on this planet: the world is getting smaller. One has access to ideas through modes of communication that one has never had before. Sociopolitical change engendered by regular citizens is suddenly within reach; a more democratic reality is tangible in a way that has never been realized in recent human history through the consumer's command of the market and media (Kvidal-Røvik, 2018). There are, of course, limitations and obstacles to this potentially emancipating practice (e.g.: the four observations above). If these can be overcome—and this would require a much deeper, systematic change—perhaps the expanding lines of communication might indeed cultivate a new era of unprecedented emancipation and democratic autonomy. Of course, given some years with experience with this new media, we have found less empathic and productive discourse, the rise of needless provocateurs, and more access to nicely disguised fabricated content.

In *New cultural politics of difference* (1990), Cornel West addresses the complicity of the postmodern political landscape. The fragmented groups (typically articulated by educated contributors working within a given system) lack the fundamental *striving* for true political change. There must be a "crisis of civilization" in which people

put their "bodies and lives on the line" (p. 66). Otherwise, West asserts, the status quo will continue without obstacle—and regress in most cases. While one can plainly see that the origins of this difference (in historically oppressed peoples) may very well rest in a group's urge to establish a stable and communal identity for survival purposes, we must be able to move past that to truly progressive solutions. As such, West proposes a "new cultural politics of difference", comprised of three solution-oriented goals: first, to locate the structural causes of unnecessary social misery; second, to depict accurately the plights of demoralized individuals (opiate use, alcoholism, consumerism, etc.); third, to draw on the moral and political connectedness (while avoiding the universalism of Modernism) between groups. It is, in my estimation, a manifesto for a new reorganizing of postmodern political ontology. While one can see the strengths of West's proposition in its ability to potentially solve the first two issues addressed above, the last two remain behemoths of insurmountable challenge.

Without diving into the messy territory of political theory too intensively in this paper, I would like to give some credence, once again, to Harvey's use of historical materialism for analysis, and, perhaps more optimistically, a framework for working towards solutions to the issues presented in our current fractured ontology. When we are all alienated from one another, the seductiveness of becoming individuals through what we consume is more enticing. When we are faced with—not only the coldness of reality—the cold indifference of others, corporations with their wide open arms of motherly acceptance and capacity to give us anything we desire fill that longing. While I am far from suggesting any solution here, Harvey seems to have intense faith in Marxist tools for unearthing concrete social

relations behind all the glamorous—and fleeting—commodity fetishism of modern capitalism. I shall explore these social relations below.

Culture, Consumerism, and Aesthetics

Consumerism

There is much literature on consumerism. I have in mind that the reader is somewhat aware of the nature of consumerism—if not in theory, then most certainly by his or her own actions. What we shall discuss here is an introduction into the causes and implications of such a cultural system.

C. G. Jung, regarding 20th century totalitarianism, writes that the "dictator State, besides robbing the individual of his rights, has also cut the ground from under his feet psychically by depriving him of the metaphysical foundations of his existence" (Jung, 2010, p. 17). I think this observation serves as an excellent diagnosis of any such practices that attempt (explicitly or otherwise) to replace foundational systems of belief with superficially constructed ideologies. The analysis continues when he urges the reader to realize that such nihilistic attitudes will come with an unconscious reaction. "Slavery and rebellion are inseparable correlates" (Jung, 2010, p. 9.). The reaffirmation of place in the modern (and postmodern) context now seems more tenable—realistic, at least—as people search for that firm footing that was once beneath them. It wouldn't be too much trouble to extend this diagnosis to consumerist tendencies.

With all foundations blown asunder (by many years of the meticulous surgical hand of the Western consciousness), what takes its place today, as hinted at above, is

consumption—particularly of images. Our field of vision, and our perspective horizon which directs our decision making, is imbued with consumerist imperatives. What makes these imperatives particularly effective is, as drawn from Jung, our lack of foundation. With our discussion above of the instability of our current system, its emphasis on "know how", and its respective influence on cultural formation, we can make a vivid case for the underlying causes of the consumption of images. The volatility of the market and the disposability of labor become the blood and bones of the dynamic nature of the market. To the producer, turnover rate of imagistic capital becomes more important than material capital. These attitudes become inherent in all things today: fashion, tastes, relationships, and all other things that form who we are as individuals. The insistence on the depthlessness of language, of history, of politics, of art, and of music lead to the individual floating on a raft across the vast ocean, drifting here and there, never dipping past the first layer of water, unconcerned with what lies beneath: in memory we find "only words" (Borges, 1998, *The Immortals*, p. 194).

The infatuation with the signifier (sign, surface) over the signified (material, depth) maps quite nicely onto Marx's commodity fetishism, in which money becomes the objective sign of exchange value, muddying and disregarding the social and labor value of a thing. Thus, the mere signifier of labor becomes, for the consumer, the object of desire. This is the direct concern with mere appearances that conceal the underlying meaning of things. According to the logic of this symbolic capital[11], the meaning that is concealed is the socio-economic status assigned to us in the order of things. We all must partake in the

suspension of belief that a brand or fashion, upon examination, does not mean anything. That polished leather shoes mean business or that local coffee shops mean indie are not chosen by us, who consume such things. Thus, the underlying meaning is *not* chosen, it is *not* authentic, and is only, as the raft, floating upon ephemeral brands, hoping to stake its flag of individualism into something firm and communal.

Here the reader may raise the objection that if the idolatry of the signifier is an aspect that even that old modernist Marx identified, in what sense is postmodernism responsible for depthlessness? Of course, this is a fair observation. Obsessions and interactions with symbols themselves (as if they were the 'things' themselves) have always existed (e.g., the crown of the king). Have we always, then, been interacting with surfaces and experiences? Perhaps, but nowhere else has it been commodified—and in some cases *consciously glorified*—to the degree that it is today.

Jean Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary culture is particularly useful at this juncture. The increasing abstraction in this image oriented society seemed evident to Baudrillard. As we become more alienated from the signified, we move further toward a simulacral society: a simulation. A simulacrum is a "state of such near perfect replication that the difference between the original and the copy become almost impossible to spot" (Harvey, 1989, p. 289). As such, it "is a false claimant to being which calls into question the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented" (Camille, 2003, n.p.). In Modernism, representation was structural: there was a real, and there was a symbol of

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[11] A term coined by Pierre Bourdieu to articulate the treatment of capital described above.

that real. This is the birthing grounds of ideology and masks. This is the fertile soil in which capital grew its symbolic superstructures. It (representation) leaves the "principle of reality intact"; the postmodern simulacrum has a much more chilling effect: it "threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3).

This lays the ground for the *precession* of simulacra: the map that once reflected and followed the land it conveyed now *precedes* that land's reality (Baudrillard, 1994). Indeed, perhaps the iconoclasts' despair came not from their concern with the *inability to represent* God—it came from their anxiousness that underneath the image there was nothing at all (Baudrillard, 1994). The film *Blade Runner* explores the question of authenticity in the existence of replicants (immensely advanced robots) that have gained an almost sentient level of consciousness, complete with suffering, despair, self-awareness, and the capacity for love. Now Baudrillard's question is raised: at what point do we differentiate between the replicants and human beings, their 'land' of which they are the 'map', so to speak? The waters become more muddled when Deckard (the human replicant hunter) falls in love with the replicant Rachel. Similarly, in *Her* (Spike Jonze's 2014 film), the artificially intelligent OS, Samantha, declares to Theodore (the consumer), that she has discovered her ability "to want": desire, craving, resentment, fear, and hope have all become accessible to this 'image' that is advertised to Theodore at the beginning of the film as a "consciousness" that "listens to you, understands you, and knows you." What else could an alienated individual want in this world of fragmentation where the woman on the bus next to you is "immensely distant"?

We inhabit a 'house of mirrors' in which we inform image, and image informs us: "[Media] looks at you, you look at yourself in it" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 17). Media has become its own message, and no longer requires a 'real' underneath. Indeed, the very idea of a 'reality TV show' is absurd. Would these families and moments occur if the cameras were not present, the director was not ordering, and the makeup crew not there to make our heroes look presentable for their endearing fans? If Baudrillard is correct in describing current society as a simulation, it would be difficult to draw the line of reality from un-reality. We consume the reality TV shows, romantic comedies, situational comedies, social media, and advertising and are influenced by them; they are, in turn, chosen for their 'relatability' and watched by us—rated and supported with viewer count, of course. Do you see the cyclical nature of this social production? The precession of simulacra raises the question, "who manipulates whom?" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 76). Social production and media are in an intimate symbiotic relationship. And yet we subscribe, every day, to this simulation. When Truman, in Peter Weir's 1998 *The Truman Show*, begins to question his childhood friend Marlon about the seeming depthlessness of life, his friend reminds him, "Look at that sunset, Truman. It's perfect… That's the big guy, quite a paintbrush he's got." The artificially simulated sunset in Truman's hyperreal world usurps questions of depth and reality.

Mass culture

What does Baudrillard's analysis of image and simulation mean for the postmodern culture? We have, by and large, already addressed the issue throughout the paper, and I should now bring together some

observations we've made thus far. A more fragmented spatial organization leads to more fragmented political ontologies, inducing chaotic and volatile social relations—Indeed, Borges suggests a "god in delirium" as the creator of this universe (Keiser, 1995): that the God of grounding and coherence has given in to the God of reference and chaos. There are more isolated groups than we've seen before in the West, each with their own language games to play and symbolic capital to buy into. As a result, what we have is an historical apotheosis of high turnover rates (particularly of images) on the side of production, instilling an unprecedented age of fast consumption on the side of consumers. In short, mass market leads to fast fashion. Tastes and attitudes of consumers reach increasing ephemerality and volatility (reminiscent of the underlying economic conditions). We are taught to define ourselves in terms of what we consume: our shoes, car, phone, and music we listen to are how we articulate ourselves. This teaching is magnified in the alienated and fragmented consumer, thirsty for individualism and unique group identity.

The surface level treatment of capital and society leads to the same treatment of history and art. The biography of past, present, and future are all crammed into this overwhelming *now* as we become "unstuck in time" (Vonnegut, 1991). The reduction of experience to atemporal scenes becomes the stuff of consciousness. This is productive of what Frederic Jameson (1982) calls the 'schizophrenic experience'.[12] Regarding identity (personal and social), signs and images become the determinant. In a capital-centered economy, the infatuation of postmodern attitudes with signifier, sign,

and veil seem only to ennoble commodity fetishism.[13]

Collage and intertextuality

In Plato's philosophy, there is a realm of Ideas, or Forms. It is a kind of ether 'behind' or 'underneath' material reality. In the realm of Ideas, there exists God, pure and complete. In this realm, there is an 'idea' of 'chair', similarly pure and complete. When we see a 'chair' on earth, we are seeing an imperfect reflection of this truer, nobler reality, which is only accessible through our rationality. An artist's work, then, is twice removed from the Idea, for he only *represents* this reflection, increasing his imperfect distance from that of the Idea (*Republic*, Bk. X). The artist, therefore, "knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only" (Plato, 1901, p. 306). While it is obvious not all philosophers or art critics are Platonists, this idea of an image corresponding to a truer reality ("logocentrism") is the beating heart of Western thought. Our belief that there is indeed a truthfully objective reality "beyond" that of our representations stems from this philosophy. Postmodernism, in perhaps its most powerful anti-aesthetic force, seeks to undermine this belief of a commonly-accessed reality behind images, asserting this to be a Western-centric view of the world, necessarily oppressive (or, at least, leaving the implication for oppression). Suppose we were to remove the idea of a commonly-accessed reality altogether, where would this leave art? The validity of a work of art (literature, painting, architecture, etc.) is in its distance from reality. Suppose there were no reality?

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[12] Here, he is speaking of Jacques Lacan's linguistic schizophrenia, in which the linear structure of language is never achieved in the schizophrenic's mind, and she is left in complete narrative disarray.

[13] Signifier, sign, and veil are all terms used by critical theorists, linguists, and psychoanalysts alike to conceptualize 'images without reference points'—similar to Baudrillard's 'simulacrum'.

Images now only reflect images (Baudrillard's simulacrum): "reality will no longer exist when it is transaestheticized and what is left is an aesthetic realm only" (Jin, 2008, p. 2).

Fragmentation in the economic-politico-social realm has seen its reflection in artistic practices. To the postmodern artist, the dissolution of a referential means the emancipation of the text from "reality"—that dreadfully boring and tyrannical anachronism. Platonic anxiety dissolves into a Dadaist attitude of self-affirmation in the face of nihilism. The triumph of the present over the future and past now allows for the architect, musician, or author to dance across time in a rapturous *now*, extracting what he or she desires to gain simply a *jouissance*[14] from the consumer of the spectacle. As art loses its temporal roots, it becomes increasingly depthless; there is no longer a lasting impact of a work of art that unfolds over time. Cubism, with its emphasis on surfaces and its interest in exploring the same image stuck in place from many perspectives, can be seen as a forerunner to this artistic attitude. As a result of the loss of referentiality, "[t]he postmodernist image is regarded as entirely cut off from any original, from any supporting base. Images images images" (Brann, 1992). Collage, intertextuality, pastiche, and superficiality become the primary responses to the depthlessness that now confronts art.

In the 1960's, a young graduate from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, James Tenney, began to use his studies in sound and electronic composition to produce a series of pieces comprised of bytes plucked from popular songs and

blended together. His *Collage #1* is the assemblage of such bits from Elvis Presley's *Blue Suede Shoes* (Grimshaw, n.d.). When one listens to this collage, one hardly recognizes the original. In the subsequent two decades, DJ's became increasingly interested in clipping and mixing different songs together to produce more entertaining effects for their crowds (the depth of music is giving in to the *jouissance* of the spectacle). Contemporary artists today are now perhaps more enraptured than ever before with practicing genre-bending as the newest evolution of "collage" music composition. Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015) and R.A.P. Ferreira's *Purple Moonlight Pages* (2020) intricately combine traditional hip-hop with jazz, leaving some moments in both albums' genres indiscernible. John Adam's *City Noir* (2014) is a jazz-infused symphonic composition inspired by complicated and nuanced urban life. Jim James' *Eternally Even* (2016) is a project that blends psychedelic rock and electronic synth music with moments that give way to jazz riffs throughout the album (most notably in the track *True Nature*). The music collective *The Avalanches* has created multiple dizzying albums comprised entirely of samples leaving almost no genre or era untouched.

While all these projects are unique and have voices "of their own" (if one can excuse this un-postmodernist phrase), there seems to be a favored music of genre-bending artists. Across all albums and tracks mentioned above, one might have noticed the overrepresented presence of jazz sampling. In an aesthetic movement, which consciously rejects all traditional modes of structure and analysis, jazz seems to be the

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[14] *Jouissance* is a term developed by Lacan. It is the drive in the human psyche to undermine constantly the achievement of its own aims and focus on

continual enjoyment from the process of the drive. Because there is no depth, no goal, to this art, we are satisfied simply with the *act* of its presentation to us.

least constrained mode of musical communication. Its proclivity for improvisation and resistance to rational ordering (pardon for a moment that the fundamental essence of jazz is predicated on rationally and mathematically structured scales and octaves that are merely manipulated by the musician to synthesize a seemingly organic sound) makes jazz—at least, its *attitude*—a popular palate to choose when blending and collaging genres and sounds. Using musical mechanistic language ("theme", "variation", "development", "transition") and material language ("high", "low", "dissonance", "harmonious") makes music dependent on references, rather than being intertextual[15]. Postmodern music, in rejecting this analytical vocabulary, cuts the link to any grounding (which it does with content that escapes this vocabulary: improvisation, chance, atonality, open and flexible forms, serialization of dynamics) (Lewis, 2016).

In addition to collage and intertextuality, pastiche is a chosen favorite of postmodern artists to deal with the problem of representation. What Jameson (1982) calls the "death of the subject" in art is the aesthetic reflection of unstable personal identities, incapable of original production cultivated from an inward, private life. While it is naïve to say that Western art is not "the biographical passion from one artist to another" and that something "totally new…*can* be created" (De Kooning, 1955) (one only need to see Titian's *Venus* (1548) and Manet's *Olympia* (1863) to affirm this belief), we are in an age where subjectivity has been entirely dirempted from creation. Compare Titian's *Venus* and Manet's *Olympia* to Rauschenberg's *Persimmon*(1964) in which

the basic form remains intact (and maybe even the narrative), but seemingly random objects have been placed almost arbitrarily in the text. Whether or not there was ever truly a 'subject' is irrelevant; we are now facing the repercussions in artistic production of a movement consciously and emphatically rejecting the notion altogether. Jameson notes that the "pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history" results in nostalgia (1982, p. 113). Because we have been driven back into Plato's cave, only seeing images and reflections, the artist is compelled, and in fact *constrained to*, the appropriate other eras (because he has no referent of his own), leaving only simulacral production available.

To make pastiche and nostalgia more tangible, it's best that we look at a couple of examples. In *The Truman Show*, the setting of Seahaven is stuck in the 1950's, while the viewing audience is (presumably) in 1998. The vision and comfort of a more peaceful and idealized version of the mid-20th century is quite popular in postmodern film. Woody Allen's 2011 *Midnight in Paris* is an excellent illustration of such nostalgia (making it the center of its story). A romantic writer, Gil is in France with his fiancé. Enraptured by the spirit of the city, he finds himself on a street corner after an evening stroll, and is called over by a 1920's automobile. Adventurous—and a slight bit drunk—he joins the celebratory Parisians. Suddenly, he finds himself at a cocktail party, speaking directly with F. Scott Fitzgerald. Gil finds himself coming back again and again to 1920's Paris, developing relationships with the likes of Hemmingway, Picasso, Dali, and the other great artists of that era. It is evident that Gil's attitude is

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[15] I include 'intertextuality' with collage because I believe that one implies the other. If art was 'intertextual', meaning it relied on its reference to other texts for meaning (not some external referential), it would follow that collage is necessary to articulate the given piece.

one of disillusionment with his own era. He often says in the film that he "was born into the wrong era", noting the inability to cope with the fluidity of his postmodern simulacral 'reality'.

Robert Venturi's "Vann Venturi House" (built for his mother in 1964) is predicated on reorganization of architectural orthodoxy: incorrect Palladian geometry, caricatures of traditional window panes on the façade, emphasis on the external presence of the hearth; and a distorted external representation of the floor plan that contradict the Modernist "quest for simplicity and resolution" (Unwin, 2014, p. 284). Could Venturi have designed this house without such nostalgic pastiche? I think not. Furthermore, I would agree with Jameson's rather damming assessment that our only understanding of the past is through our own pop art images of such, thus greatly limiting the creative potential (Jameson, 1982).

The third and final aspect I think is important to identify in postmodern aesthetic sentiments is superficiality (i.e.: infatuation with surfaces). We see this tendency beginning with Picasso's and Braque's attempts to take an object out of reality, place it on a canvas, and emphasize *only* its surface, exploring the object simultaneously from different angles. This experiment was strengthened as cultural production that merged with postmodern material conditions. Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), a series of photographs of the artist in multiple outfits, keep the observer at a distance: we are not able to know the deeper aspects of Sherman, only her appearances, which, as Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Dyptich* (1967) illustrates, is the current mode of society (Gompertz, 2013). Without knowledge of the depth of these people,we are restricted to interacting with simulacra of their identities.

Postmodern composition is a wonderful example of superficiality. In Luciano Berio's *Signfonia* (1969) and John Cage's *Variations I* (1958), there is no development of music: no swelling to the apex of the musical moment. There is no receding of this moment into its more thoughtful, reminiscent, and gentle nuances. Gustav Mahler offered a different understanding. As one might find in his 9th symphony, a power is developed and followed through in first movement; it begins to break down in the second moment, where the listener is brought into Mahler's mind, into his intimate and reposed thought. It withdraws into itself, leading the listener into this beautiful moment of introspection with himself and the relationship with the composer: the subject is *unapologetically alive.* This power can be traced like a narrative. This nuanced musical intercourse is lost on postmodern ears; rather, there are fleeting moments here and there of explosive energy that do not give way to thoughtful repose, but are merely followed by it, and again by energetic moments: one is confronted with fragmentation of consciousness as music keeps its distance as a superficial façade from the listener.

I am far from condemning the artists, filmmakers, musicians, and architects of the creation of this artistic attitude (although some might take credit for these 'leaps of innovation'). I invite the reader to recall our discussions earlier in the paper on the political-economic and consumerist tendencies of our postmodern condition and use it as a framework to locate the roots of such aesthetic sentiments. Eclecticism in the market: the average citizen now has access to entire globalized markets advertising their 'cultural authenticity' and 'localized products'. Our adventurous and global palates can be conveniently satiated by walking down the block, or browsing the web. San Antonio, where I am writing this,

offers the River Walk—an authentic Mexican culinary and cultural experience—devoid of true depth and authenticity (it's more practical this way, you see). The aesthetic sentiment of collage does just this: plucking, with no concern for originality or historical depth, fragments of visuals and sounds and mashing them together in increasingly eclectic albums and works of art. Pastiche, the habit of reproducing forms in unoriginal contexts, leaves us bereft of art that is nothing other than simulacra—for the subject is 'dead' (or never was), declare the postmodernists; and there is no referential for art, leaving the artist with nothing other than *other images* to relate to. Underneath this is the tendency for media to produce society and for society to produce media (i.e.: image produces image). Finally, with reality emptied of significance and words emptied of the signified, our personal identity becomes as fluid as the market, and our consciousness becomes saturated with imperatives to be an individual—again, through what we consume. Thus, infatuation with surfaces: the lack of depth in a given form or entity allows us to don any veil and masquerade in images *that conceal nothing*.

Conclusion

What I have presented here is a picture of our current condition. I began by discussing the roots of Postmodernism in Modernism in an attempt to use hindsight as a tool to examine the present. Next, I sketched the political and economic substructures of this condition to establish what I argued is a valuable way to examine today's cultural production: historical materialism. With this under our feet, we explored postmodern culture in its many aesthetic guises: social, commercial, artistic, cinematic, and so on. What I intended to do was provide a critique of postmodern

culture, and its apparent complicity with the more distasteful and ignoble aspects of late capitalism. I deeply feel estranged from this culture, and I am sure some others might feel the same. Why is so much of this cultural production indigestible to us? I believe it is because of its underlying conditions: the ingredients that, together, create a relatively distasteful cocktail of superficiality, image-obsession, and mass-produced and consumed art. A path forward to me seems vague and indiscernible. Perhaps, there are more authentic, cultural practices we must return to. The 'return to' has to require a 'towards': I am not suggesting that we must revisit an already attempted system of belief that has failed us. I am in agreement with Duchamp, when he said of Dadaism that nihilistic movements are "serviceable as a purgative" (Duchamp, 1946). Indeed, a purgative! That is to say, a temporary laxative for the rigid conscience of Western Modernism: one does not build societies on Nietzsche's individualism or art movements on the Dadaists' questioning of art itself or even identity on the fleeting allegiances of postmodernity. They serve as necessary, but temporary, developments in our cultural consciousness.

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