

The Aesthetics of Singularity

Jensen

I need to begin this discussion with a few brief propositions. I have argued that the texture as well as the structure of our present of time is best called postmodernity, and in what follows I want to expand that claim to include some items not generally thought of as postmodern: economics, for example, but also food; temporality, but also politics. But you'll see what I mean by all that soon enough.

^{initially} First, I need to specify a few basic features of the postmodern; and the first is the supercession in it of time by space. I have even gone so far as to argue that time is abolished in postmodernity, ~~I won't perform that idea now; but let's just~~ ^{research. I'll come back to that, for now,} say that for us today, in all kinds of ways, space and the spatial, ^{and aesthetic} the theme of space, the political/reality of space, has overtaken an older modernist emphasis on time.

^{however} But the principal spatial phenomenon ~~that~~ ^{on which I want to insist} is the that of globalization; indeed I want to say that for me postmodernity and globalization are one and the same. Postmodernity is ~~that~~ as it were the cultural, the superstructural face of what globalization ^{constitutes as} ~~appears to be~~ the infrastructure, the economic reality. The two terms are two codes which can be translated into one another, depending on the context in which they are needed.

^{now} To argue these presuppositions would require more than a lecture in itself, ^{so} and therefore let's just take them now ^(we can see both in the discussion) for granted and begin on our concrete topic, whose first stop will be art and aesthetics itself. We're going to see shortly,

as my title hints, that the postmodern involves something of a ~~replay of the medieval debate over nominalism~~ ^{Singularities} over universals, ~~versus particulars and the words for particulars.~~ ^{So let's begin that way.} ~~which is to say that their approach is not aesthetic.~~

much is to say, about new opposites, about universals.
So let's begin with Universals.

In art, universals are called genres; and it is clear enough that modernism took as one of its vocations to shatter the generic universals and to create works which were unique, one-time events not to be repeated, ^{texts} ~~is that they were~~ ^{by their nature} scarcely classifiable under the rubric of this or that genre, even though in many cases the fossilized traces of the ^{old genres} ~~genre~~ may here and there show through. In that sense, then, modernism was also ^{ready} ~~ready~~ ^{in its fashion} nominalist, and wished to substitute unique and unclassifiable objects for the standardized repetition of the formulaic and the practice of this or that specific genre: these last then sink to the level of mass culture and continue to be practiced (although themselves exhausted) to the present day,

How then is the postmodern and its nominalism any different from the modernist ^{kind} ~~vocation~~? Let's be fairly fairly general about this: the modernist still aims to produce or create a work, it is the work that is then unique and a one-time formal achievement. We may then draw two corollaries: first, that the creation of this work is also the creation of a style, it is style which is essentially unique about the one-time work (and when the possibilities of new styles are exhausted, then modernism will ^{have} ~~enter~~ ^{ed} ~~into~~ its terminal crisis). The second corollary lies in what may crudely be called the religion of art, or at least the sense that art is a total vocation, and that one enters into it as one enters a religious order; and that its practice in principle eventuates in a transcription of everything in the world. It is to be wholly complete and autonomous in itself, the well-known Book of the World, about which Mallarmé famously said that "tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir au Livre". There subsists in film, but also in a certain literature (like that of Sebald), a survival of all this, which I

on television,
in popular
novels and
films,
etc.

will call late modern, but which no longer concerns us here.

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Now, despite ^{its} ~~their~~ shared nominalism, postmodernism discards most of these ^{modernist} premises. It is no longer a religion of art, but in it the practice of art seems to regress to a kind of handicraft, albeit often a ^{post-} industrial one. It no longer has anything to do with style, and for a very good reason: style is the mark of the unique personality; how could it survive the famous death of the subject, how could it characterize the famous "man without qualities", the decentered or depersonalized subject, ^{the anonymous,} the end of individualism? Let's say that the Abstract Expressionists were the last to have style, to cherish brush-strokes: after them Warhol or even Damien Hirst. And what about the object, ^{itself} for that is the most important feature of the transition.

Many critics and aestheticians have indeed spoken of the volatilization of the ^{art} object today. This means not only ^{Walter} Benjamin's reproduceability, multiplication and standardization; it also means the end of the older ^{end-products,} ~~media~~ such as the oil painting or the statue. ^{I will take as an} A more positive example of the changeover ~~would~~ ^{what is called the} be the primacy of the installation, which includes a number of objects of different kinds, a painting perhaps, but also a ^{heap of pebbles,} rug, ^{an old-fashioned mail box} a piece of furniture, a text, a sample of graffiti, and so on. None of these objects is the objet d'art, it lies in their combination and their relationship, it is space rather than presence. And it is also ^{impersonal,} the space of an installation cannot have a style in the older sense. ^{wedding ring had to it later.}

But let me know try to characterize what it is the postmodern artist seeks to produce (if we still want to retain the word art for something which may also be seen as a very different kind of activity, I ^{here} ^{mark} a difference rather than a judgement ~~being~~). ^{simply ~~mark~~ express}

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Postmodern art seeks, not an object to be produced, but rather what I will call, without being altogether satisfied with the term, a strategy, and indeed a strategy of production. I don't mean by that a technology ^{process} although to be sure technology is involved. Warhol's silk-screens can have any kind of visual content you like, they are a strategy of production, the invention of a kind of production. They mark an innovation, but I would want to argue that it is not a stylistic innovation, it is not the creation of a style: you could call it a style of production but it is not in that sense expressive ^{older} the styles of the moderns, ~~seemed to be~~. I will give a more extensive example of this new process later on.

(maybe even, as we shall see, a recipe)

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~~Yet it was no doubt ^{already} anticipated in the logic of modernism at certain extreme moments. Beuys, for example, or Oiticka also invented something like production processes, and of course the writing of these histories is a creative process, one can ~~make~~ construct predecessors and even late survivals, it is unverifiable except for the light it sheds and the interest it generates. What I would want to observe here is that both Beuys and Oiticka also have themes, certain kinds of obsessive content runs through their works, in both cases perhaps, although very differently, a preoccupation with the body. I believe that it is such thematic content which is expunged from the postmodern, as time is expunged from space, as volume ^{is} expunged from the photographic.~~

of the tactile

And that becomes a fundamental difference: the end of themes, the end of content.

We can draw a few initial conclusions from these first observations. First of all, clearly enough the installation marks a significant disintegration of the old classical system of the fine arts, if not its complete restructuration. In a movement characteristic of the postmodern, the arts, which in modernity developed in a regime of differentiation, each tending towards a kind of autonomy or semi-autonomy in its own right, the arts now in the postmodern reverse that direction and conflate, falling back on one another in new and unexpected symbioses. So it is that photography, once a poor cousin of painting, has become a major art in postmodernity, but has also known all kinds of hybridizations and graftings with the other arts. This is something of an equivalent of the supercession of fiction by non-fiction in literature and it is of course an unsurprising development in the society of the spectacle, where we are already bombarded by thousands of images a day in real life. But it should also be remembered that photography is an abstraction of the visual and the tactile, the bodily (we have already mentioned the way it ~~launders concrete corporeality in Beuys~~ ^{and drains}); we ~~will come back to~~ ^{is crucial} this ~~crucial~~ matter of postmodern abstraction ~~later on~~. Meanwhile, the hybridization of the arts gives us yet another reason why the search for some unique density and perfection in any given art is no longer a viable ambition.

Two more developments need to be mentioned at this point. If the individual arts no longer have any telos or momentum of their own (as in the modern), then it also becomes somewhat more comprehensible why the avant-gardes should have ceased to exist in the postmodern. Clearly, this vanishing of the

avant-gardes as such (perhaps COBRA and situationism were the last of the species) has other determinants as well, and in particular the weakening of collective structures and *in particular* the crisis of politics - I mean of party politics (*inasmuch as* the vanguard party had *a fundamental* relationship to the vanguard artistic movements). But has anything taken the place of the avant-garde on the current scene?

I believe that here again the installation gives us a clue: for does this assemblage of heterogeneous objects and items in a momentary constellation not have its ~~macro~~ macro equivalent in the very contemporary museum itself, with its heteroclete shows and its ingeniously themed (and equally ephemeral) exhibitions? The conclusion is inescapable: the collective avant-garde has in our time and in postmodernity been replaced by the single figure of the curator, who now becomes the demiurge of those floating and dissolving constellations of strange objects we still call art. It would be worth our while to pursue the *Social and even political* significance of the emergence of this new figure, the postmodern curator, who may be expected to have his or her equivalent in other realms of the information society, such as medicine, the university, business administration, government, and the like. ~~Unfortunately that is speculation we cannot pursue any further here.~~

But if, still pursuing the idea of the installation to which we now momentarily return, we see this newly emergent form as a kind of descendent of the old happenings of the 1960s, then we can observe yet another feature of interest for us, one related to that ephemerality of the installation or indeed of the exhibition which we have just touched on. It is indeed

this, that the new form of art is not an object but an event. It is made, not for posterity, or even for the permanent collection, but rather for the now and for a temporality which may be rather different from the old modernist kind. This is indeed why it has become appropriate to speak of it not as a work or a style, not even as the expression of something deeper, but rather as a strategy (or a recipe) - a strategy for producing an event, a recipe for events. (Jumping ahead to politics for a second, can we not see the great mass demonstrations - what are they called in "texting" language? ^{the flash crowds - as} - the equivalent of just such events, rather different from the old-fashioned revolutionary conspiracies? Symptoms of a different temporality, rather than signs of the emergence of something like the people or ^{even direct} democracy...)

~~Edkdkdkdikdkdkd~~ One final observation before we try to say what kind of an event these postmodern ~~kkdkd~~ artistic happenings might be. I mentioned technology a while back; did I add that in our postmodern age



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we not only use technology, we consume it, and we consume its exchange value along with the rest of its more symbolic essence. Just as in an older period, the automobile was consumed as much for its libidinal value and its symbolic overtones as for its practical use-value, so today, but in a far more complex way, the computer and the Internet and their ramifications - already well integrated into Utopian political fantasies - and cultural have replaced an older artistic/consumption, which they have both modified and supplanted. We ^{now} consume the very form of communication along with its content.

But this distinction - between form and content - now brings me to the essentials of what I wanted to observe about art today, in what is not only a postmodern but also a theoretical age. The great SF writer Stanislaw Lem once wrote a series of book reviews of imaginary books, books from the future which neither he nor anyone else would ever write. It was a prophetic gesture, and demonstrated that you could consume the idea of a book with as much satisfaction as the real book itself.

How then to characterize the spirit of the newer works? I want to go back to that older category of art criticism which invoked the inspiration, the Einfall, the "idea" for a work, and to adapt it to this newer production for which the "idea" is a kind of technical discovery, or perhaps an invention in the sense of the contraptions of the lonely crackpot inventors or obsessives. Art today

1-1 ~~paper~~ ^{the German} call it ~~Einfall~~ -1 ~~Handwritten notes and signatures~~

would be convenient to take the installation as the most useful form of this new paradigm; but I also want to try to catch the spirit of so much of contemporary or postmodern visual art which

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is generated by a single bright idea which, combining form and content, can be repeated ad infinitum until the artist's name takes on a kind of content of its own. Thus Xu Bing conceived the idea of making up conjunctures of lines ^{or strokes} that looked like real Chinese characters but were utterly without meaning: we might think of nonsense words or even zeum or Khlebnikov's made-up language, yet these Western phenomena really have no equivalent for the ^{visual} dimension of the Chinese system. This was thus a remarkable conception or Einfall, a discovery of genius, if you like - provided it is understood that it constitutes neither ^{formal} innovation, nor the elaboration of a style, nor is it autoreferential in the modernist sense or even aesthetic in the sense of altering ^{or estranging} perception or intensifying ~~kekakakakakak~~ it. The question that interests me is whether we can call this art "conceptual" in a now older and ^{henceforth} more traditional sense. I understand conceptual art as the production of physical objects which flex mental categories by pitting them against each other (as with Hegel's "determinations of reflexion" in the Logic). Yet these categories, whether we can express them or not, are somehow universal forms like Kant's categories or Hegel's moments; and conceptual objects are therefore a little like antinomies or paradoxes ^{or koan} in the verbal-philosophical realm - occasions for a meditative practice.

With Xu Bing and the rest of a postmodern artistic production for which I take him to be paradigmatic, it seems to me that the situation is wholly different. His "texts" are as it were soaked in theory, they are as theoretical ^{they are} as visual.

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but they do not illustrate an idea, nor do they offer material for a meditation or a mental or conceptual exercise. A concept is there, but it is singular, and this conceptual art is nominalistic rather than universal. I want to recall an encounter I found suggestive: asking a younger artist whether anyone still copied the old masters, as Picasso still did, or Jackson Pollock, I received the following response, no, we get our ideas from theory, from reading Baudrillard or Deleuze or whoever. "Getting our ideas": I want to use this expression to drive home my point here, namely that when we look at works of this kind, we are engaged in a theoretical process, that is: what we "consume" is no longer a purely visual or material entity, but rather the idea of such an entity. What the artists now create is not the "work" in whatever older or newer sense, but rather the idea of the work.

And in the same way

Today we consume, not the work, but the idea of the work, as in ^{imaginary} Lem's/book reviews; and the work itself, if we can still call it that, is a mixture of theory and singularity. It is not material - we consume it as an idea rather than a sensory presence - and it is not subject to aesthetic universalism, insofar as each of these artifacts reinvents the very idea of art in a new and non-universalizable form, so that it is in that sense even doubtful whether we should use the general term art at all for such singularity-events.

I have not forgotten that I promised to ~~kkkkkkkk~~ draw some analogies and indeed relationships between this new kind of art ^{other contemporary practices, such as} and some new kind of postmodern economics. But I cannot resist/
^ inserting here a different kind of example of the postmodern aesthetic event: it will be brief, as the portions are in any case so small. I refer to postmodern cuisine, as it is exemplified in Ferran Adria's now famous restaurant El Bulli in what is sometimes called (he doesn't like the term) "molecular" bookings. The thirty-five courses that make up a meal at El Bulli are all unfamiliar looking (or if they look familiar you are in for a shock when you taste them). They are no longer natural objects, or perhaps I should say they are no longer realistic objects: rather, they are ~~abstractions~~ ^{abstractions} of the natural - the ^{texture} taste of asparagus for example, or of eggplant or of persimmon, has been separated from the body of its natural container and incarnated in a new texture and form; not only the famous foam (whose heyday at El Bulli goes back to an earlier period, I believe) but little caviar shapes, or sauces, or cocktails and the like. Meanwhile the new form is important in and of itself, and each new item is recorded and registered (not only by a written and then computerized recipe, but I think they are rarely cooked again after that season) ^{and then} by photography: it is the image that is preserved, and you consume the image, along with the idea; and indeed ^{you consume} ~~at~~ the conjunction of elements, in what is, just like ~~the~~ postmodern art itself, a unique event. The older foods, whether in the realism of classical cuisine or the modernism of the nouvelle variety, were still classifiable under the great universals of seafood, meat, vegetables, spices and the like. These "astronauts' snacks" of El Bulli -

as someone has called them - have radically escaped the domination of the universal and its naming system; they are in other words singular in all the heightened significance postmodern philosophy has given to that term and which we will eventually confront.



Now in all of this I have not lost sight of ~~our~~ ^{my own} starting point, which was ^{actually} not aesthetic but economic, and indeed turned on that peculiar form of the singularity which is called the derivative. The postmodern text - to use a more neutral term than work - the postmodern artistic singularity-effect, if you prefer, is of the same unique type as ~~that~~ that unique one-time financial instrument called the derivative - such is what I have wanted to ^{argue} ~~affirm~~ here. Both are at least in part the result of the situation of globalization, in which multiple determinants, in constant transformation at different rates of speed, henceforth make any stable structure problematic, unless it is simply a pastiche of forms of the past. The world financial market is mirrored in the world art market, thrown open by the end of modernism and of its Eurocentric canon of masterworks along with the implicit or explicit teleology that informed it. Now, to be sure, anything and everything is possible, but only on condition it embrace ephemerality and consent to exist but for a brief time, as an event rather than as a durable object.

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~~the economic.~~ No description of the postmodern can omit the centrality of the postmodern economy, which can succinctly be characterized as the dominance of finance capital over old-fashioned production. I follow Giovanni Arrighi in seeing the emergence of a stage of finance capital as a cyclical development; as Braudel famously put it, "reaching the stage of financial expansion" every capitalist development "in some sense announces its maturity", finance capital "is a sign of autumn". Arrighi's three cyclical stages can be described as implantation of capitalism; production and development; saturation and financial speculation. After which capitalism moves on to fresh territory.

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So Any satisfactory account of postmodernity ^{would} requires us to read a proper description of finance capitalism onto the record, something we have no time for here. Suffice it to say that the displacement of old-fashioned production and profit by speculation on a kind of futures market in stocks - and stocks which have very little concrete content at that, which have but the most tenuous links with the actual production whose value they used to represent - is the source and context of those myriad theories of the simulacrum, the image, spectacle society, immateriality of all kinds, including the various ~~kkk~~ current ideologies of communication. Finance capital can be seen as a new kind of second-degree abstraction quite different from the older ~~modernist~~ kind; as a kind of meta-signifying system quite different from older practices of the sign - and ^{naturally enough} such developments have fundamental consequences for artistic and cultural production as well as for conceptuality and daily life.

I must here however limit myself to a single illustration of this process, albeit a very significant one indeed, and that is the strange and unique mutation of traditional insurance and

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investment in what is called the derivative of ~~postmodern economics~~, that is to say, in finance capital.

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It is not possible to project a concept of the derivative for reasons that will shortly emerge; any example of the derivative will thus be non-exemplary and different from any other one, and yet perhaps a very over-simplified model from Lipuma and Lee can give a sense of it, along with its indissoluble relationship to globalization. They imagine a U.S corporation contracting to provide ten million cellular phones to a Brazilian subsidiary of a South African corporation. Its interior architecture will be produced by a German-Italian corporation, its casings by a Mexican manufacturer, and a Japanese firm will also provide other components. Here we have at least six different currencies, and their exchange rates are in perpetual flux, as is the standard norm in globalization today. The relationship of each of these exchange rates to the others will then be guaranteed by a kind of insurance, ¹⁻¹ that makes many different insurance contracts, maybe six or seven; and it is this entire package of ~~kkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk~~ distinct insurance contracts which will make up that "financial instrument" which is this unique derivative in question. Obviously the situation (and the "instrument") will be ^{always in result} far more complicated than that. But what is clear is that, even taking the old-fashioned ^(an orpo) futures market as a kind of simplified and primitive ancestor, there can never be another derivative quite like this one in its structure and requirements. Indeed, it is more like a unique event than it is a contract (something with a stable structure and a juridical status). Meanwhile, as ^{Lipuma and Lee that authorize} they point out, it only can be inspected and analyzed after the fact, such that, for knowledge, this "event" exists only in the past. The authors conclude, pessimistically, that there can never be genuine

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regulation of such a transaction since each one is radically different: in other words there can really be no laws to moderate the ~~kind~~ dynamics of this kind of instrument (which no less than ^{an authority} Warren Buffett has called the financial equivalent of the nuclear bomb).

~~BNLB~~ Whatever the political implications of such a phenomenon (and there are many), we may acknowledge the invention of a new kind of concept to deal with it, it is the idea of the "singularity", a term that has known enormous fortune in the postmodern period (even though its philosophical origin goes back to Duns Scotus). In postmodernity, singularity can be used in at least four different contexts.

First, no doubt, would come the scientific use, where it does not seem clear (to me) whether the term means something beyond physical law as we know it, or something anomalous which has not yet been explained by scientists (but which will eventually fall under an enlarged scientific law of some kind, yet ~~to~~ to be theorized). What is useful here is then the notion of a singularity-event, ^{like a black hole} which, as in the financial dynamics of derivatives we have just outlined, lies on the border between an unrepeatable event in time of some sort and a unique structure which may come together just once but which is nonetheless a structure of some kind and susceptible to structural analysis.

In Science Fiction, this clearly becomes the dominant ambiguity, but ~~kind~~ rather than with the black holes and sub-atomic peculiarities of the physicists, it is linked to computers and artificial intelligence. Here the singularity is projected as a leap or evolutionary mutation of some sort, something that can be dystopian or Utopian according

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to the context. Dystopian singularity would be the emergence of a mechanical species that transcends the human in its intelligence (and malignity) as in ~~the~~ Terminator series or Battlestar Galactica. Utopian would then be the emergence of the posthuman in/hitherto human species, a kind of mutation of the human in a new hybrid or android type of superhuman intelligence within our own human nature. This use seems the farthest from the usage that interests us here, save that its visionary notion of a period or evolutionary leap does somehow correspond to the old modernist teleology of art, - make it new, invention, destruction of the past, emergence of new perceptions and new forms of experience, and even new kinds of humanbeings as in avant-garde politics. This Utopian strain is then still very much at least a subterranean current in contemporary or post-contemporary Science Fiction, and thus testifies to the on-going awareness of a historical change, as well as the stirrings of some deeply buried and feeble sense of history and the future.

Clearly it is the philosophical notion of singularity which is the crucial one for us, insofar as it steadfastly repudiates traditional philosophical notions of universals, and of the traditional scheme of those particulars or individuals which are subsumed under universals. The concept of singularity (but can one/^{even} call it a philosophical concept in that sense?) breaks with all that and posits a focus on the absolutely unique. In this sense we are indeed back in medieval philosophy and the quarrel of nominalism against universalism; and to that degree Adorno is right ~~kkkkkk~~ to identify/nominalism as a fundamental feature of modernity (and presumably therefore also of postmodernity). Adorno's

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The concept of Singularity breaks with all that and
posits a focus on the absolutely unique,

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This is in fact a return to the old quarrel between realism and nominalism in the Middle Ages where universals and platonic ideas are considered mere empty words designed to bring order to a world of absolutely unique and ungeneralizable things and substances. Universals are thus mere flatus vocis, empty sounds which have little enough to do with reality.

18.

I want to ^{should} pause here to observe that I do not consider the description I have been giving here to be some properly postmodern philosophy. There is such a thing nowadays, there are philosophers who endorse what they call postmodern philosophy as their slogan. I believe that such a philosophy is associated with two specific causes, namely anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism. These may be described as the struggle against any normative idea of human nature, and the repudiation of any ultimate metaphysical system (any idea of nature as such). I'm perfectly willing to endorse these principles, to which I would add constructivism and also a certain historicism (often called relativism by the philosophical enemies of so-called postmodern philosophy). But all these principles were already inherent in Sartrean existentialism, and so their compression into a single program is scarcely surprising (at least to me, who was always a Sartrean in the first place).

But I am now not in the process of proselytizing or advertising for this system; rather I take so-called postmodern philosophy as yet another symptom of postmodernity as such, along with the other features I have been describing, such as the work of art, food, derivatives, and so forth. Indeed, in order to grasp the significance of postmodern philosophy and of Singularity in it
we must move from the philosophical

level to the socio-political one, in which the struggle against universals inherent in the very concept of singularity is a struggle against hegemonic norms and institutional values, whether cultural or juridical. Universals are here felt to be normative and thereby oppressive and binding on minorities and individuals. If you posit some universal human nature, in other

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words, you are already affirming a norm from which all deviations, whether collective or individual, can be denounced and condemned.

And to denounce such norms ~~and~~ becomes a burning political issue, as in identity politics and the politics of secessionist groups and marginal or oppressed cultures. For at their outer limit the hegemonic or oppressive norm can reach genocide and the ideals of ethnic cleansing, something we witness everywhere as a reaction against ~~the~~ the plebeianization I have already described as a world-wide phenomenon, but also against ~~the~~ imperialism, deterioration of national autonomies under globalization.

standardization, and against the

Yet even this seemingly legitimate resistance to oppressive norms and universals remains dialectically ambivalent.

The most dramatic examples are to be found in the areas of feminism and gender preference: for to assert ~~and~~ universal rights for women is also necessarily to challenge cultures in which another status of women is prescribed; the doctrine of universal human rights is still a doctrine of universals. Yet the repudiation of such universals is equally contradictory: for just as individual cultures can challenge the universal norm of ~~an~~ ascribed human nature (nowadays generally an American one), so also women can challenge the universalizing norm inherent in this or that cultural custom or "law".

Singularity would in that sense seem to remain a purely individual affair, and untranslatable to a collective equivalent unless that collectivity affirms its own uniqueness and singularity (an affirmation that generally seems to take the form of religion).

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We have already implied, however, that singularities or their concept exist on two other levels: the economic level of the derivatives and finance capital; and that aesthetic level to which we ~~and~~ now come.

20.

Now we have very little time ~~to~~ to deal with what are perhaps our most important topics - the transformations of subjectivity and lived experience in the postmodern, and the transformation of politics. You understand that as with philosophy I have my own opinions, my own judgements, my own preferences, about all these things, but I am trying as much as possible to give a relatively neutral description of ~~the~~ historical change, a historical transformation on all levels, which I believe to have happened or to be in the process of happening. It is not a transition from one mode of production or even from one society to another, we are still ^{very} much within capitalism: but it is at least a change from one ^{moment} of capitalism to another, and has momentous consequences for all kinds of structures and experiences, as I have tried to show.

As for subjectivity itself, and personal experience, I've already mentioned a kind of displacement from the ^{experience} of time to that of space: but surely the center of our subjective experience, our phenomenological or existential, experience, remains temporal. We would then in that case need to see what temporality ~~feels~~ feels like under the regime of space, and I think this involves something more drastic than the old Bergsonian critique of spatial experience in terms of some deep time of the *élan vital*. I think it could be argued that all the fascination of modernism with deep time - not only in Bergson, but also in Thomas Mann or Proust - ^{that} such fascination

future thinking and research as it does conclusions from past work.

21.

It seems appropriate enough to begin with space and time: for postmodernity can certainly be characterized as the increasing predominance of the spatial over the temporal, in literature and art for example. Think of the importance of deep time in the modern classics, in Proust or in Thomas Mann, in Platonov or in D.H. Lawrence. I think it could be argued that all that temporal fascination derived from the unevenness of the modernizing world - the coexistence of slower village or rural temporalities with the dizzying rapidity of the big cities and of industrialization. But modernism is in that sense the expression of incomplete modernization, and we can draw the conclusion that the postmodern is what we get when modernization is complete, when the countryside is abolished (that is to say ^{when} the peasantry have ~~become~~ become wage workers and the older agriculture has been transformed into agribusiness). Now, in ^{more} this/complete modernization, even the differences between industrial labor and the life of the city bourgeoisie is effaced, everyone has become a consumer, ^(or everyone is unemployed) everything has become a shopping mall, space has become ~~an~~ infinite extension of surfaces which are images; and Difference - a temporal phenomenon - has given way to Identity and standardization. You will observe that this is still only true in a few privileged spaces and countries in the world: but that makes my point, namely that today what constituted uneven development locally and nationally has now been projected onto a global scale, culture itself has become a space of uneven development, as we find reflected in such works as Pascale Casanova's World Republic of Letters. The connection to globalization is ^{now} clear: this sense of a

everyone is middle-class

global or world scale could not have been possible in the modern period, the period of imperialism, of metropolises and colonies; it could only have become possible after decolonization, and will come back later to other results of that immense process.

But in our present context, it is rather of business that we have to speak than of national liberation; and it is not even of immense new multi-national corporations (vastly beyond anything Lenin had in mind by monopoly in an older modernist period). We must speak of the communications technologies that make these gigantic business transnationals possible, and this is a topic which leads in many directions. MacLuhan would certainly have identified the computer and the Internet with fundamental modifications of subjectivity, and he would have been right; but we'll talk about that later on under that specific rubric. The cultural specialists in ^{medic} technology would then have their own word to speak on its transformation of the body and of the phenomenology of the object world: it seems to me no accident that cultural theory today has been so radically transformed by the technological perspectives of the new media.

We've already underscored the significance of finance capital; in this context, however, it remains to stress the way in which, in computerization,



of the past as ^{either} failed or successful modernization (it simply means getting rich), and ^{either by} a conception of the future as impending natural and ecological disaster. Such are only some of the consequences of a primacy of space over time in postmodernity.

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All of this has much to do with the transformation of the individual subject today: at the first stirrings of postmodernity, the structuralists and poststructuralists spoke of the "death of the subject", by which they meant, in less melodramatic language, the increasing fragility and vulnerability of the older bourgeois individualism, its deterioration under conditions of large-scale institutions and the decline of that capitalist competition which brought ^{individualism} it into being in the first place as a ^{acquisitive and aggressive} defensive ego and a powerful and Oedipal identity. All of the features I have attributed to some properly postmodern subjectivity are to be understood in terms of that process - the reduction to the present, the body as some last reality to survive the exhaustion of bourgeois culture, the mutability and changeability, variability, of mood replacing the self-confident stances of an older emotional system.

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How much more so, then, will not subjectivity be transformed when opened to the vicissitudes of that even vaster landscape which is globalization itself? No longer protected by family or region, or even by the nation itself and national identity, the ~~emergence~~ ^{vulnerable} of the ~~subject~~ into a world of billions of anonymous equals is bound to bring about still more momentous changes in human reality. This is the moment when we pass over from postmodern subjectivity to the new social conditions of postmodernity, which have been characterized politically by what is often called identity politics. But we have to be more precise about ~~such terms~~ such terms, ~~whose dialectic~~ whose dialectic ~~confronts us~~ confronts us with an unexpected paradox. For ~~me~~

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it is a noteworthy and revealing, symptomatic social fact that the term identity politics is also just as appropriately and just as often termed the politics of difference; and this almost Hegelian equivalence of Identity and Difference affords a significant insight into the nature of this new political phenomenon, which is not to be confused with an older nationalist or ethnic or religious dynamic.

^{hind sight}
Indeed, we can look at globalization, or this third stage of capitalism, as the other side or face of that immense movement of decolonization and liberation which took place all over the world in the 1960s. The first two stages of capitalism, the period of national industries and markets, followed by that of imperialism and the acquisition of colonies, the development of a properly colonial world economy - these first two moments were characterized by the construction of otherness on a world scale. First, the various nation-states organized their populations into competing national groups, who could only feel their identities by way of xenophobia and the hatred of the national enemies; who could only define their identity by opposition to their opposite numbers. But these nationalisms quickly enough took on non-national forms as, particularly in Europe, ~~the~~ various minorities and other language speakers evolved their own national projects.

Then, in that gradual enlargement which is not to be confused with a later globalization, the systems of imperialism began to colonize the world in terms of the otherness of their colonized subjects. Racial otherness, and a Eurocentric or Americanocentric contempt for so-called underdeveloped or weak or subaltern cultures, partitioned so-called modern people from those who were still pre-modern, and separated

advanced or ruling cultures from the dominated. With this moment of imperialism, modernity, the second stage of capitalism, a world-wide system of Otherness is established.

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It will be clear, then, that with decolonization all that is gradually swept away: those subaltern others - who could not speak for themselves, let alone rule themselves - now for the first time, as Sartre famously put it, speak in their own voice and claim their own existential freedom. Now suddenly the bourgeois subject is reduced to equality with all these former others, and a new kind of anonymity reigns throughout world society as a whole.

Billions of real people now exist, and not just the millions of your own nation, your own language.

Now what does all this have to do with politics? I will conclude with a few remarks on the political in postmodernity, remarks which are descriptive and do not pretend to offer any solutions or even my own personal opinions and positions on the subject. But since we were talking about space, I will ~~perhaps~~ put a very simple proposition to you, namely that today, all politics is about real estate. Postmodern politics is essentially a matter of land grabs, on a local as well as a global scale. Whether you think of the question of Palestine, the settlements and the camps, or of the politics of raw materials and extractions, whether you think of ecology (and ~~the~~ ^{your own} rain forests) or the problems of federalism, citizenship and immigration, or whether it is a question of gentrification ~~and~~ in the great cities as well as bidonvilles, the favelas and the townships - today everything is about land. In Marxist terms, all these struggles result from the commodification of land and the dissolution of the last

and of course the movement of the landless

