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POSTMODERN AESTHETIC THEORY WITH REFERENCE TO SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Architecture
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

Johannesburg 1989

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is the study of postmodern aesthetic theory, as it relates to architecture. Because it was not clear at the outset if the postmodern discourse were relevant to architecture in South Africa, examples in this country will be discussed.

Dealing, as it does, with the study of aesthetic theory, the discussion of buildings and the criticism of buildings are not the primary objectives of this study, although the importance of making arguments applicable to actual buildings as examples is acknowledged.

Broad principles in the theory of postmodernism are dealt with first, namely the shifts that have occurred on economic and cultural levels in Western societies during the last three decades. The re-evaluation of Western culture is discussed, as it relates to the criticism of the Enlightenment tradition and positivism by pragmatist philosophy and the Frankfurt School. In chapter four, which deals with 'culture industry', the observation that cultural goods are becoming consumer commodities, and the diminishing gap between 'high art' and popular culture, are discussed.

Chapter five consists of a discussion of the architecture and critical theory of modernism and the avant-garde, from the viewpoint of the postmodern aesthetical discourse. Postmodernist architecture is presented as a response to a perceived lack of content and meaning in modernist architecture. The concept of a transavantgarde is introduced within the postmodern framework to deal with the reactionary postmodern architects that have returned to styles of the past, repudiating architecture's moral rôle, often for commercial reasons.

It is found that the main characteristics of postmodernism are the reintroduction of meaning or content into architecture and the practice of the simulation and appropriation of earlier styles. These strategies are discussed in some detail in chapters six and seven. Finally, because of the attention currently devoted to it worldwide, deconstructivist architecture is examined within the context of the postmodern discourse, referring to its philosophical background.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Architecture in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Anton Coetzee

December 1989

PREFACE

After obtaining a degree in architecture from the University of Pretoria, I studied fine arts at the University of South Africa. I found that a much greater emphasis was laid on aesthetic theory in the fine arts course than in architecture, where it was practically ignored. It was felt that I could make a contribution in the architectural field by studying aesthetic theory and making it applicable to architecture.

I became interested in postmodern aesthetic theory while doing the dissertation required by the fine arts degree course, which was on the use of appropriation and simulation in Neo-Surrealist art. Leaving many aspects unresolved, I chose to do further research in this direction. Besides aesthetic theory and the criticism of art and architecture, philosophical, literary and sociological texts were consulted for this dissertation, disciplines that are strange to architects and artists by convention.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Prof. Dennis Radford, Marilyn Martin and Don Tindale for their help and guidance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although architects resisted the manifestation of postmodernism vehemently at first, it should be realized that it is found not exclusively in architecture, but in all the arts, including fine arts, music, dance and theatre. Not only that, but postmodernism is also prominent in discussions surrounding literature, philosophy, cultural studies and sociology. It is in these other fields that a great deal is being written that can and does illuminate the architectural discourse.

As have been pointed out by Jameson,[1] Hutcheon[2] and Chabot,[3] postmodernism has emerged with special clarity in architecture. The reason for this is possibly the remarkable agreement within the discipline about the nature of modernism, so that the new developments in architecture could be seen as a fairly homogeneous reaction against it.

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[1] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review, no. 146, July-August 1984, p. 54.

[2] HUTCHEON, LINDA. A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction. New York and London: Routledge, 1988, p. 22.

[3] CHABOT, C. BARRY. "The Problem of the Postmodern." New Literary History, vol. 20, no. 1, Autumn 1988, p. 14.

Developing a theory of contemporary aesthetics is fraught with difficulties. Bürger[4] has pointed out that the current pluralism of styles may not permit an aesthetic theory at all:

> Whether this condition of the availability of all traditions still permits an aesthetic theory at all, in the sense in which aesthetic theory existed from Kant to Adorno, is questionable, because a field must have a structure if it is to be the subject of scholarly or scientific understanding. Where the formal possibilities have become infinite, not only authentic creation but also its scholarly analysis become correspondingly difficult. Adorno's notion that late-capitalist society has become so irrational that it may well be that no theory can any longer plumb it applies perhaps with even greater force to post avant-gardiste art.

Conceptual problems arise from the fact that the label of postmodernism is attached to different preoccupations, and what might be true for one, might not be true for others. Postmodernism is understood to be a style or a mood that was born out of the exhaustion of and dissatisfaction with modernism in art, architecture and literature. It is also a trend in French philosophy, especially in post-structuralist theory. Postmodernism is further seen as the latest cultural era in the West. If one wants to discuss these inter-disciplinary developments, one has to guard

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[4]BÜRGER, PETER. Theory of the Avant-Garde. Trans: M. Shaw. Minsapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 94. Bürger is a contemporary critic who teaches at the *University of Bremen, where he holds the chair as* Professor of Literature. His interests are philosophy and art history.

against stripping ideas from their original context to force them into relationships with architecture.

A problem that the architect faces is that many texts, especially those in fields that are unfamiliar such as philosophy and sociology, are very hermetic and can only begin to be understood after research into the background of philosophy and sociology and reading secondary literature. Problems of interpretation arise, and one cannot help but think that the works of artists and architects are often based on a creative misunderstanding of these sources.

It is illuminating to note that Jane Jacob's The Death and Life of Great American Cities[5] was published in 1961, almost 30 years ago. It gave an analysis of the failure of the utopian ideals of modernism and summarized the popular dissatisfaction with corporate skyscrapers and public housing projects. In 1966 Robert Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture[6] was published, in which he condemned the minimal qualities of modern architecture. He advocated an architecture that is rich, ambiguous and

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[5]JACOBS, JANE. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. Great Britain: Pelican Books, 1977. (First published in 1961)

[6]VENTURI, ROBERT. Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. London: The Architectural Press, 1983. (First published in 1966)

complex. The Pruitt-Igoe housing estate was demolished in 1972, cited by Charles Jencks as an example of the insolvency of the modern movement in The Language of Postmodern Architecture[7] of 1977. The first large exposition of 'built' work by postmodern architects was the 1980 Venice Biennale, where Paulo Portoghesi curated the exhibition The Presence of the Past, the End of Prohibition.[8] The exhibition signalled a return to taboos like ornament and symbolism and consisted of twenty facades, based on a Renaissance stage-set, designed by leading postmodern architects. Seeing that postmodernism already is an historical fact, the next chapters will endeavour to show how it should be seen as a broad cultural category, rather than a transient style.

The structure of this dissertation is loosely based upon the perception of a cultural change in the West that distinguishes postmodernism from modernism, an analysis of the differences between aesthetic aspects of modernism and postmodernism, and the occurrence of appropriation and simulation of earlier styles in art and architecture, which is perceived to be the dominant feature of postmodernism.

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[7] JENCKS, CHARLES. The Language of Post-Modern Architecture. London: Academy, 1977, p. 9.

[8] Illustrated in Paulo Portoghesi. Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society. New York: Rizzoli, 1983, p. 22, 25 and 27.

2. POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

The concept of a post-idustrial society was made popular by authors such as Raymond Williams in his book Towards 2000[9] and Fredric Jameson in his article "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism".[10] It is also discussed in Paulo Portoghesi's Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society[11] and in Charles Jencks' What is Post-Modernism?[12]

The concept of a post-industrial society is an important one, because it should by realized that postmodernism is not only the description of a particular style, but that it is a periodizing concept that serves to illuminate the emergence of a new type of social life and economic order connected to late capitalism. Postmodernism expresses the internal truth of the new emergent cultural

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[9]WILLIAMS, RAYMOND. Towards 2000. London: Chatto & Windus, 1983, p. 87.

[10]JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review, no. 146, July-August 1984, p. 55.

[11]PORTOGHESI, PAOLO. Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society. New York: Rizzoli, 1983, p. 7.

[12]JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Post-Modernism? London: Academy Editions, 1987 (Second Edition), p. 43.

logic in post-industrial society. Jameson says that postmodernism replicates or reproduces, and thereby reinforces, the logic of consumer capitalism.[13]

The modern industrial age has developed since the fifteenth century with the rise of capitalism in France and Italy. Reinforced by the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century in England and Europe, it was characterized by the manufacturing industry and the polarization of social classes, namely the working class and the bourgeoisie. Typical of this era was the awareness of development and growth, a consciousness that also permeated the art of the period.[14] This developmental process is perceived to have reached its peak between the nineteen fifties and the nineteen seventies.

The changes that are observed to have taken place during the last two decades, are related to changes in work patterns, the development of a global financial market and

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[13] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In H. Foster, ed. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. 125.

[14] Clement Greenberg saw modernist painting as the progressive distillation and refinement of aesthetic quality relative to the past, for example in his article "Modern and Postmodern." Arts Magazine, vol. 54, no. 5-10, February 1980, p. 65.

technological developments in communications and the storage and retrieval of information.

The post-industrial society[15] is distinguished by a major decline in manufacturing employment, with a corresponding growth in the service industries. Service industries are understood to be those activities related to the collecting, processing and distribution of information. According to Jencks, 60% of the workers of America were employed in information-related occupations by the late 1970s,[16] with only 13% still involved in the manufacturing of goods. This is in contrast with industrial society's dependence on the mass-production of objects. The question arises if South Africa could be regarded as a post-industrial society. Figures for 1985 in South Africa[17] shows that the annual growth rates for those sectors of the economy that can be regarded as service industries are all above the average annual growth rate, excepting domestic

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[15]The phrase was coined by Daniel Bell in 1967, according to Fredric Jameson in "Postmodernism, or the *Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*," p. 55 *and Charles Jencks* in What is Post-Modernism?, p. 43.

[16]JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Post-Modernism?, p. 43.

[17]See Appendix 1 for a table illustrating the opportunities for work in South Africa according to economical sector in 1985, the projected opportunities for work in 1995 and the expected annual growth rate for the period 1985 - 1995, as published in H. C. Marais. Suid-Afrika: Perspektiewe op die Toekoms. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1988, p. 143.

servants, which shows zero growth. These sectors are trade, transport and communication, financial organizations, sundry services and public services. Manufacturing industry, except mining and building and construction, shows a below-average growth, and includes the sectors agriculture, manufacturing, and electricity, gas and water. Agriculture and electricity, gas and water are the only sectors of the economy that show negative growth. If not a post-industrial society, South Africa is certainly heading in the direction of becoming one. The result of this trend is that a new social grouping of office workers might be formed that will no longer be characterized by the dichotomy between the working class and the bourgeoisie, but will have the appearance of a classless society, as has happened in America and Europe.

The latest phase of the industrial revolution is based on the application of electronic systems, like computers and global communication systems, to wider areas of production and control than ever before. At present the most powerful organizations are those with the quickest access to the most information. Fast and effective systems of global communication have been developed in the form of an organized network of satellite communication, computer processing, telephone, world circulation magazines and newspapers. Jencks argues that the levelling of differences between different cultures is a result of instant world-wide communication. This has aesthetic consequences: there is no

longer an aesthetic avant-garde, because "there is no identifiable front line to advance in the world village, no group or movement that cuts across all the arts, no enemy to conquer."[18] There is a mass culture that is similar all over the world. This is the result of the creation of an interdependent and *interpenetrating* world market by multi-national capital, with the aid of improved communications , the effects of which are felt even in South Africa.

The Frankfurt School's concerns in its mature phase were firstly the critique of positivism or scientism in the social sciences, that will be dealt with in chapter *three*, secondly the concern with the culture industry, to be discussed in chapter four, and lastly, relevant to this chapter, the preoccupation with the fate of the individual in present-day society. This group originated in 1923 at the Frankfurt Institute *for Social Research* as a society of leftist intellectuals. Initially they functioned as a centre for the study of Marxist thought, but their relationship with mainstream Western Marxism has always been ambiguous.[19]

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[18]JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Post-Modernism?, p. 44.

[19]The Institute formed part of a wider movement of thought which has come to be known as 'Western Marxism', characterized on the one hand by diverse, predominantly philosophical and Hegelian reinterpretations of Marxist theory in relation to the advanced capitalist societies, and
(Footnote Continued)

The Frankfurt School developed a distinct 'critical theory' of society. Their mostly pessimistic cultural theories, criticizing the culture and intellectual thought of the bourgeoisie, were developed by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, and were revived by the contemporary representative of the School, Jürgen Habermas.

Of interest for the discussion of post-industrial society is the Frankfurt School's critical attitude towards the ideological influence of science and technology as a major factor in the creation of a new, technocratic-bureaucratic form of social domination. For example, Marcuse sees technological rationalization as an abstract force, beyond human control, which is shaping society.[20] Society is dominated by the impersonal power of scientific-technological rationality, instead of by the historical agents of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These classes have been assimilated and pacified through mass consumerism.

Habermas' central concern regarding the latest stage of our cultural development, is the isolation of expert

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(Footnote Continued)
on the other hand by an increasingly critical view of the development of society and the state in the USSR after the Bolshevik revolution. See T. Bottomore. The Frankfurt School. London: Tavistock Publications, 1984, p. 12.

[20] Ibid, p. 36.

cultures relative to each other. The holistic culture of earlier societies, dominated by ideologies, especially religion, gave people a global interpretation of social life. Ideology facilitated social integration in a positive way by providing some overall interpretative framework for social life. These beliefs gave way to the insulating of expertise which deformed everyday life to such an extent that professionals are increasingly necessary in even the simplest of matters. The increasing specialization of knowledge has caused that the majority of individuals' understanding of the world has become more limited. As a result people have become disenchanted with culture and they no longer have sustaining ideologies with power to convince.[21] In an aesthetical context, Habermas remarks that this specialization has caused the arts to become incomprehensible to those outside a relatively small circle of experts. This is one of the major criticisms against modernist architecture which will be discussed in chapter five.

To conclude: there is significant support for the assumption that we have entered a new cultural age, different from the modern industrial age which preceded it,

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[21]WHITE, S. K. The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 116.

an occurrence that may have significant implications for the aesthetics of architecture, for example the loss of the aesthetic avant-garde and the growing conformism of world-wide culture.

3. THE NEGATION OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT TRADITION

Postmodern theory claims to have gone beyond the rationalistic, humanistic and progressive framework of the Enlightenment tradition.[22] The project of the Enlightenment that Modernist culture undertook was based on the historical and sociological design, since the eighteenth century, to expand man's domination over nature, to develop an objective image of the world and to improve social conditions by critical reason and universal norms. It identified relationships between history and emancipation, techno-scientific advancement and social liberation, and between knowledge and social amelioration.

These principles are the target of postmodern criticism. Postmodern theory has come to the conclusion that the Enlightenment tradition is no longer suitable as a conceptual framework to evaluate the function of reason and the rôle of the subject in history in a meaningful way. The theory of postmodernism is characterized by the desublimation of reason, the decentering of the subject, the

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[22] KIRSTEN, J. M. "Wat is postmodernisme? 'n Kultuur filosofiese perspektief op die anti-estetika." South African Journal of Cultural and Art History. April 1989, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 134.

detotalization of history and the deconstruction of philosophy. This has radical implications: it means the repudiation of the intellectual tradition in which our understanding of modern man and the world is rooted.

The philosophical distrust of the epistemological enterprise of the Enlightenment tradition was formulated by Richard Rorty in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature[23] and Hilary Putnam in Reason, Truth and History.[24] They gave up the attempt at a God's eye view of things and the desire for objectivity, as was the traditional practice of analytical philosophy. Analytical philosophy had its origin with Locke and Descartes in the seventeenth century, and reached maturity with Kant's notion of philosophy as a tribunal of pure reason, upholding or denying the claims of the rest of culture.[25] The notion of philosophy as a fundamental discipline which 'grounds' knowledge-claims was consolidated in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in the writings of philosophers such as Russel and Husserl.

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[23]RORTY, RICHARD. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. Princeton, New Yersey: Princeton University Press, 1979.

[24]Referred to in Peter Dews. "From Post-Structuralism to Postmodernity." L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 12.

[25]RORTY, RICHARD. op. cit., p. 4.

Their concern was to keep philosophy rigorous and scientific. However, as Rorty notes,[26]

> the more 'scientific' and 'rigorous' philosophy became, the less it had to do with the rest of culture and the more absurd its traditional pretensions seemed. The attempts of both analytic philosophers and phenomenologists to 'ground' this and 'criticize' that were shrugged off by those whose activities were purportedly being grounded or criticized.

Objectivity, as discussed by Rorty[27], was a tradition that ran from the Greek philosophers through the Enlightenment, and centred around the notion of the search for truth. It envisaged a common goal for humanity, a goal set by human nature rather than a specific culture. As such it was distanced from specifical historical or social situations and was based upon the belief in an ahistorical human nature.

Rorty believes that a philosophy of pragmatism, or solidarity, is superior to one of objectivity, as described above. Life should be seen in relationship to specific societies and within a specific historical milieu. He suggests that 'true' might mean something different for different societies and that rationality is defined by local

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[26]RORTY, RICHARD. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, p. 4.

[27]RORTY, RICHARD. "Solidarity or Objectivity?" J. Rajchman and C. West. Post-Analytical Philosophy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 3-4.

cultural norms. Relativism and cultural determinism are important features of postmodern architecture as well, as will be shown in chapter five.

Rorty applies his pragmatic philosophy to literature and criticism, and he

> exhorts us to replace the Kantian image of a single fixed cultural framework or vocabulary with an image of many different corrigible and changeable vocabularies; he exhorts us to replace the values of foundation and system with those of proliferation and plurality.[28]

In the same way in which he advocates the refusal of privilege to one language, morality or society, he is in favour of pluralism in art, where various styles co-exist without one claiming to be superior to another. Furthermore Rorty is dubious about progress,

> and especially about the latest claim that such-and-such a discipline has at last made the nature of human knowledge so clear that reason will now spread throughout the rest of human activity ... this century's 'superstition' was last century's triumph of reason."[29]

This means that the latest vocabulary in philosophy, but also in architecture, may not express a privileged representation of essence, but may be just another of the potential vocabularies possible in the world.

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[28]RAJCHMAN, JOHN. "Philosophy in America." J. Rajchman and C. West. Post-Analytical Philosophy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. XV.

[29]RORTY, RICHARD. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, p. 367.

In contrast with analytical philosophy's belief in absolute truths, Rorty believes that there is always room for improved beliefs and that truth is not the correspondence to reality, but simply the term used for well-justified beliefs. Truth does not have an intrinsic nature and "each of us will commend as true those beliefs which he or she finds good to believe."[30] Knowledge should be seen as a matter of social practice, rather than an attempt to mirror nature. For the pragmatist, 'knowledge' is "simply a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed."[31] As will be seen in chapter five, modernist architects often believed that theirs were the only possible expressions of the 'truth' in buildings, a belief that is being challenged by postmodern architects.

Hilary Putnam supports a philosophy that is closer to life and that does not search for a 'true world'. According to him, analytical philosophy has reached a dead end.

> Like logical positivism (itself just one species of analytic philosophy), analytic philosophy has succeeded in destroying the very problem with which it started. Each of the efforts to solve that problem, or even to

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[30] RORTY, RICHARD. "Solidarity or Objectivity?" J. Rajchman and C. West. Post-Analytical Philosophy, p. 6.

[31] Ibid, p. 7.

> say exactly what could count as a solution to that problem, has failed.[32]

Like Rorty, Putnam notes that philosophy has lost interest to all outside the philosophical community. He further criticizes analytical philosophy because it is non-ideological: it is non-political and non-moralizing. Analytical philosophy is compared with the modernism of the nineteen thirties, because both were an extreme form of the rejection of tradition. Utopian modernist architects wanted to alleviate the inequities and inadequacies of the man-made environment and thought that the machine could put beauty and utility within the reach of everyone. Putnam uses Le Corbusier's 'machine to live in' and his 'radiant cities' as examples of modernist architects' attempts to reform human habitation.[33] In much the same way, analytical philosophy sought to deconstruct tradition in order to make way for the New Man and the perfect society. Carnap, for example, believed in Esperanto, socialism and ideal languages that would be used in scientific work.[34] But Putnam thinks that the attempts at a grand synthesis in epistemology have failed.

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[32]PUTNAM, HILARY. "After Empiricism." John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds. Post-Analytic Philosophy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 28.

[33]PUTNAM, HILARY. Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 180.

[34]Ibid, p. 181.

> In philosophy, as in everything else, we are at the beginning of a post-modernism. The great rejection of everything 'traditional', and the great hope that by rejecting tradition we could make possible either a utopian future for man (optimistic modernism) or a final recognition of the grandeur and terror of life, a final immediacy which scientism and progressivism robbed us of (quietistic modernism), are both beginning to look very tired.[35]

Putnam proposes a pluralistic view of the truth in postulating that there are many correct ways of representing the world and that any version of the world that we accept as right can be regarded as a correct description of it.

Horkheimer's essay of 1937, "Tradition and Critical Theory",[36] can be regarded as the founding document of the Frankfurt School. He saw the rôle of philosophy primarily as the criticism of modern positivism or empiricism. His 'critical theory' rejected the typical procedure of analytical philosophy of determining objective facts with the aid of conceptual systems, from a purely external standpoint. The idea of a universal scientific method, common to all the natural and social sciences, was criticized as well. According to him, positivism is an inadequate and misleading approach which cannot attain a true understanding of social life. Science should be seen as a social activity and its aim should be the transformation

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[35]PUTNAM, HILARY. Realism and Reason, p. 303.

[36]Referred to in T. Bottomore. The Frankfurt School. London: Tavistock Publications, 1984, p. 16.

of society and human emancipation. Although opposed to the scientism of modernism, the Frankfurt School can be seen to agree with modernism's project of techno-scientific advancement and social liberation. They are opposed to the positivist separation of 'fact' and 'value', but believe that knowledge and purpose, theoretical and practical reason, should be synthesized. Also in Marcuse's critical theory his demand for reason is a demand "for the creation of a social organization in which individuals can collectively regulate their lives according to their needs."[37] In aesthetical terms, this call is typically postmodern, because Marcuse wants to free art from its confinement of autonomy to unite the political and aesthetic dimensions: society should be made into a work of art by reintegrating art into life.[38]

Regarding the opposition of the Frankfurt School to social modernity, it criticized positivism on the grounds that the positivist philosophy of science, or the positivist 'world view', meant the acceptance and entrenchment of the status quo. Horkheimer's account of scientism treated it as a form of bourgeois thought which corresponds in some way

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[37]HABERMAS, JURGEN. "Psychic Therminor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity. Cambridge: Politi Press, 1985, p. 72.

[38]This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

with modern methods of production.[39] Technology and science, and the technological consciousness or instrumental reason which they diffuse throughout society, are seen as the principal factors in the maintenance of the domination of the status quo of a socially impotent mass society. By attending only to what exists, positivist philosophy sanctions the present social order, obstructs social change, and leads to political quietism.

The Frankfurt School's revolt against positivism is important for the study of postmodernism: it is associated with the questioning of the cult of material progress and a protest against the 'mechanization of life'. This attitude was a response to the destruction caused by the First World War, the Nationalist Socialist regime in Germany and the domination and the division of the world since 1945 by the superpowers who were increasingly involved in a nuclear arms race. All these factors contributed to a sense of mounting irrationality and cultural loss and decline. This critical attitude against positivism is related to postmodernism architecture's practice of the appropriation of historical styles, as will be discussed in chapter seven.

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[39] BOTTOMORE, T. The Frankfurt School, p. 34.

Habermas opposes the traditional rôle of philosophy as a theory of knowledge. Habermas wants to escape the snares of Western logocentrism, through "the analysis of the already operative potential for rationality contained in the everyday practice of communication."[40] According to his theory of communicative action, philosophy has to surrender its claim to be the sole representative in matters of rationality, and start a 'conversation' with the other principal disciplines of culture, namely science, morality and art: he is concerned with the separation of culture into these three spheres. Although Habermas is opposed to the practice of Western logocentrism, he does not advocate the overthrow of modernism as a whole: he believes that the potential of modernism has been realized one-sidedly and in an unbalanced way. Since the eighteenth century, when the unified world-view of religion and metaphysics fell apart, culture was subdivided into the domains of knowledge, justice and morality, and of taste, each handled by a specific cultural profession. Each of these domains was developed according to its own inner logic, with little cross-fertilization between them. This situation was also found in the autonomous character of modernist art. Habermas' solution to the inadequate realization of cultural

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[40]HABERMAS, JURGEN. "Questions and Counterquestions." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity. Cambridge: Politi Press, 1985, p. 196.

modernity is to break down this isolation between science, morality and art, and also between these expert cultures and the general public. He believes that the three different 'moments' of reason are incomplete in themselves and that there should be more interaction between the cognitive, the moral and the aesthetic-expressive. He sees the rôle of the philosopher not as claiming the position of 'highest judge' of culture, but as being the 'mediating interpreter' between the expert cultures themselves and between them and the discursive practices of everyday life. Although this could be a way of exploiting the full potential of cultural modernism, Habermas does not make it clear what his solution is to the actual course that social modernity is taking, specifically in the development of capitalistic modernism.

Habermas does believe that there are problems with the economical and political systems of Western industrialized countries, as seen in the failure of orthodox socialism and welfare-state liberalism[41], but he is adamant that the failure of social modernity is not as a result of the bankruptcy of cultural modernity, as is propagated by the neo-concervatives. He identifies the American neo-conservatives as the sociologists Daniel Bell, Peter

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[41]WHITE, S. K. The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 2.

Berger, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Nisbet and Edward Shils in his article "Neoconservative Culture Criticism in the United States and West Germany: An Intellectual Movement in Two Political Cultures"[42] and proceeds to analyze Daniel Bell's book The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism[43] of 1976. Like Habermas, Bell distinguishes between a modern society, that is unfolding in terms of economic and administrative rationality, and a modernist culture. What Habermas does not agree with, is Bell's view that modernist culture is contributing to the destruction of the moral base of rationalized society. According to Bell, the profane culture of modernity has evoked subversive attitudes that undermined the discipline of everyday life. Thus he blames the current ills of industrialized, capitalist society on the values of modern culture, which the neo-conservatives see as permissive secular hedonism. They believe that it is cultural degeneracy that is responsible for our present problems, and not the economic and political structures of capitalism.

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[42]HABERMAS, JURGEN. "Neoconservative Culture Criticism in the United States and West Germany: An Intellectual Movement in Two Political Cultures." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985, p. 79.

[43]Ibid, p. 81.

Wanting to shift the critical focus back to the economic and political systems, Habermas presents an interpretation of modernity that defends key aspects of modern culture, as was seen in his defense of cultural modernism being only partly realized. The real problem that is facing society today is the transformation of life and human relationships into commodities and objects of administration, and not aesthetic anarchism.

Habermas' attitude vis-à-vis foundationalism in philosophy is less clear. Foundationalism claims that philosophy can by some method demonstrate the absolute, universal validity of some conception of knowledge or morality. It presupposes the existence of an ahistorical conceptual or moral framework. This belief is increasingly falling into disrepute, as was seen in the discussion of the pragmatic philosophers above. Although he denies it, Habermas' work has often been suspected of harbouring some variant of foundationalism. For example, Habermas advocates the development of a philosophical theory of rationality to allow for the illumination of a modern understanding of the world.[44] Such a philosophy would infer to be a true representation of the modern world, something that the pragmatist philosophers think is unattainable.

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[44]WHITE, S. K. *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity*, p. 128.

Much has been made of the reported conflict between Habermas and the supposedly 'neo-conservative' Lyotard.[45] Lyotard is concerned with the way in which knowledge is legitimized through the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment tradition, such as the concepts of the liberation of humanity, progress, the emancipation of the proletariat and increased power. He feels that these 'grand narratives' have become absolute, especially the rôle of science itself.[46] As far as this is concerned, he seems to be in agreement with the Frankfurt School. However, Lyotard disagrees with Habermas' central concern which is the social hopes that have been important for liberal politics. Lyotard categorizes this as a 'metanarrative of emancipation' and as such unacceptable. Their differences are said to arise from Habermas trying to hang on to a universalistic philosophy in order to support liberal politics, and Lyotard's readiness

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[45] *See for example*
DEWS, P. "From Post-Structuralism to Postmodernity." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Ducuments 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 15,
RORTY, RICHARD. "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity. Cambridge: Politi Press, 1985, p. 161-164,
RAJCHMAN, J. "Post-Modernism in a Nominalist Frame." Flash Art, no. 137, November-December 1987, p. 50 and
BENNINGTON, G. "The Question of Postmodernism: Introduction." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Ducuments 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 5.

[46] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism." In H. Foster, ed. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. 64.

to abandon liberal politics in order to avoid universalistic philosophy.[47]

Habermas criticizes Lyotard, and the 'neo-conservatives' in general, because they offer no theoretical reason to move in one social direction rather than another. He says that they are taking away the dynamic which liberal social thought has traditionally relied upon, namely the need to be in touch with social reality.[48] In the end, though, the concerns of Habermas and Lyotard seems to be much the same as is evident in Lyotard's call:

> ... in the diverse invitations to suspend artistic experimentation, there is an identical call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security, or popularity (in the sense of öffentlichkeit, of 'finding a public'). Artists and writers must be brought back into the bosom of the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, they must be assigned the task of healing it.[49]

This seems to be evidence that Lyotard is socially concerned, and his call for order and unity he can even be seen as foundationalism.

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[47]Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity, p. 162.

[48]Ibid, p. 171.

[49]LYOTARD, J. F. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 73.

What is important for aesthetic postmodernism is the perception of a new relativism and pluralistic mood. As is shown in this chapter, life is seen closer to society and the real world by many contemporary philosophers and sociologists, rather than as an abstract system to be analyzed. It is to be expected that this new mood should also be felt in architecture, and indeed it is, as will be shown as this dissertation unfolds.

4. CULTURE INDUSTRY

Two of the concerns of the Frankfurt School have already been dealt with, namely its concern with the fate of the individual in present-day society and its criticism of philosophical positivism. Its third principal occupation was with the culture industry, which will be discussed in this chapter.

The Frankfurt School's ideas regarding the culture industry were introduced by Horkheimer and Adorno in their essay "The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception".[50] They argued that all culture became identical under capitalism and that culture became depraved as a result of the fusion between culture and entertainment. They characterized the culture industry by consumerism as a cultural feature. These thoughts have become relevant again in the discussions surrounding the commercial nature of contemporary art and architecture. An example of the confusion that reigns in the art world regarding the status of art relative to mass culture, is the German advertising

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[50] HORKHEIMER, M. and T. ADORNO. "The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception." Dialectic of Enlightenment. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.

director Michel Schirner's recent claim that 'advertising is art'.[51] Until recently, advertising has been seen as 'low art' and as part of mass culture. Although Pop Art has incorporated features of advertising in art, there has generally been a clear distinction between art and advertising. Now that the marketing mechanisms of art have become quite similar to the techniques employed in advertising, this distinction seems to be fading.

In his essay, "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening"[52], originally published in 1938, Adorno observed that cultural goods fell completely within the world of commodities and that they were produced for the market at which they were aimed. His discussion of music seems relevant to the consideration of contemporary architecture. He notes how classical music is subjected to a selection process that has very little to do with quality, but rather with popularity, and how "the most familiar is the most successful and is therefore played again and again

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[51] SKUPIN, BERND and KIRSTIN RUGE. "Art and Advertising." Flash Art News, Flash Art Supplement no. 143, November - December 1988, p. 4.

[52] ADORNO, THEODOR. "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening." In Arato, A. and E. Gebhart. The Essential Frankfurt School Reader. New York: Urizen Books, 1987, p. 270-299.

and made still more familiar."[53] Popular styles in architecture are the familiar ones: originality is not important, except when practiced within the confines of the familiar. The Squire's Loft Restaurant (1987) in Atholl, Johannesburg (figure 1) is obviously based on the style of Michael Graves, the popular American architect.[54] The 'trellis work' pattern on the wall, consisting of diamond shaped squares, is a device that Graves often uses.[55] Other features that are related to the work of Graves, are the massing of the building, with its high central gabled feature and spreading wings, the ochre colours, the stepped walls to the sides of the entrance and the square subdivisions of the window frames.[56] It is natural that architects become influenced by these buildings that are so well publisized in the architectural periodicals, and they

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[53]ADORNO, THEODOR. "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the *Regression of Listening*," *p. 276.*

[54]In 1981 Michael Graves has already received numerous awards, including nine Progressive Architecture Design Awards, eighteen A.I.A Awards from the New Yersey Society of Architects and three 'National Honor Awards' from the American Institute of Architects. His work has been widely published: see K. V. Wheeler, P. Arnell and T. Bickford, eds. Michael Graves: Buildings and Projects, 1965 - 1981. New York: Rizzoli, 1982, p. 299-303.

[55]For example in his design for the Corporate Headquarters of D.O.M.-Sicherheitstechnik, Bruhl, West Germany, 1980. Illustrated in Ibid., p. 217.

[56]See the entrance elevation of Graves' Environmental Education Center, Liberty State Park, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1980. Illustrated in Ibid., p. 235.

are also responding to a demand for these popular styles by their patrons.

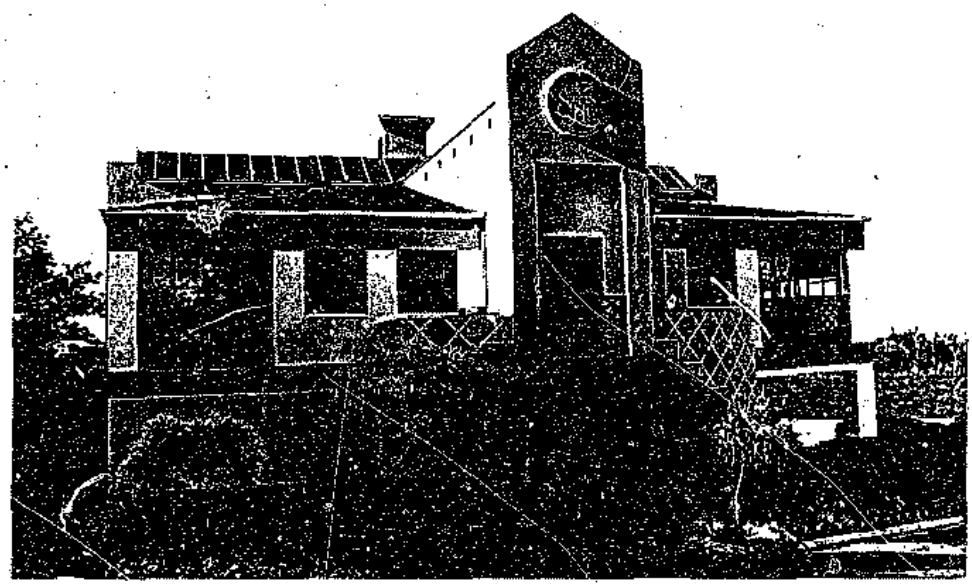

Figure 1: COOPER MESSARIS & LOUW. Squire's Loft, 1987. Corner of Greystone and Catherine Roads, Atholl, Johannesburg.

Adorno explains how consumerist culture requires the sacrifice of the individual, because everyone has to do what everybody else is doing, and the same products are being offered to everyone because of the standardized production of goods. This differs from vernacular cultures where the individual is responsible for the building of his or her own house to a greater degree, even if he or she does not build it with his or her own hands. In our consumerist culture the individual who wishes to aquire a home, can buy it already

completed, designed by an unknown person for the average taste and requirements and where the client has to choose from certain standard designs. The identity of these houses as standardized items should preferably be concealed: the pretense of individualism necessarily increases in proportion with the liquidation of the individual's freedom to influence his or her own destiny.[57] The fictitiously individual nuances are manifested in the choice of finishes that is often offered to the buyers of these houses. Furthermore the identical character of the goods which everyone has to buy is hidden behind the rigour of a universally compulsory style. As Farrelly declares, the popular culture of Western capitalist democracy "seems capable only of producing an endless sprawl of pastiche, sentiment and syntheticism - a truly International style whose banality even Venturi has failed to invest with any real architectural significance."[58] What Adorno suggests is that the cyclical changes in architectural styles are a foil to the banal character of speculative housing, and even act as an enticement for the consumer so that he or she feels compelled to buy a new house in order to be 'in fashion'.

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[57] ADORNO, THEODOR. "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," p. 280.

[58] FARRELLY, E. M. "Community Architecture: Contradiction in Terms?" The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXI, no. 1081, March 1987, p. 29.

Hauser sees the commercialization of art in terms of the increased objectivization or autonomy of artistic creations.[59] This observation is based on a study of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"[60] of 1936, which is also the subject of a text by Habermas.[61] In this essay Benjamin explored the destruction of the traditional cultural values of human societies and the effect this had on their perception of art. Within the traditional framework of society there was a fixed relationship between the artwork and the community, especially through their religious practices. A particular relationship existed between the people of those societies and the artwork, which was understood to be unique and valuable in cultural terms. This status of the artwork, which revolved around its cult function, was identified by Benjamin as its 'aura', the loss of which was his concern in this article. He said that technological progress led to the destruction of the traditional meaning of art. As the title of the essay indicates, Benjamin blamed modern techniques of

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[59] HAUSER, A. The Sociology of Art. Trans: K. J. Northcott. London: Routledge and Kegal Paul, 1982, p. 506.

[60] BENJAMIN, WALTER. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In Illuminations. Great Britain: Fontana/Collins, 1979, p. 219-253.

[61] HABERMAS, JURGEN. Philosophical-Political Profiles. Trans. F. G. Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983, p. 131.

reproduction for this loss of aura.[62] Habermas expands this argument in terms of the development of the autonomy of art, especially since the Renaissance. He stresses that art was deritualized as part of the social process of industrialization, the production ethic of which changed and rationalized social structures. Both Benjamin and Habermas come to the same conclusion, that as autonomous from its cult-religious function, twentieth century art has acquired commercial value, regardless of the historical avant-garde's resistance to being absorbed into the market system of art.[63] The commercial value of art is challenging the autonomy of art, to such a degree that Habermas believes that the 'artistic function' of art is being threatened.

It may be desirable that architecture should autonomous in terms of its aesthetic expression, independent from social concerns, architecture is free experiment with new forms and ideas, as has happened to an extent during this century. If architecture should be dictated to by the forces of the market, it would mean

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[62] As Bürger points out, the development of art in the twentieth century cannot be derived from changed techniques of reproduction, but should rather be seen as part of art's loss of social function in development of bourgeois society. See P. Bürger. Theory of the Avant-Garde. Trans. M. Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 32.

[63] Ibid., p. xv.

sacrificing part of this autonomy and less freedom for the architect to express himself or herself as he or she pleases. On the other hand, it might also mean that architecture would be a more accurate reflection of the market forces at work in capitalist societies and as such an accurate representation of our world.

According to Raymond Williams[64], culture is threatened by new technical systems of production and distribution, such as cable television and satellite broadcasting. Certainly the architectural market relies on the advertising that the magazines offer. In South Africa there has been a marked increase in recent years in the number of articles in the popular press on architecture and the exposure that architects have enjoyed on television. This exposure serves to make architecture more popular with the public, but also more com al in its nature. Many architects are actively seeking the attention that is offered through the critic's review. This highlights the rôle of the critic in the process of the commodification of architecture. According to David Carrier, architectural criticism can be seen as an exercise in persuasion.[65] The value of a building depends

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[64]WILLIAMS, RAYMOND. Towards 2000. London: Chatto & Windus, 1983, p. 128.

[65]CARRIER, DAVID. "On the Possibility of Aesthetic Atheism: Philosophy and the Market in Art." Leonardo, vol. 18, no. 1, 1985, p. 37.

upon its perceived aesthetic significance, and the critic has to persuade the reader that the building he or she promotes does have this quality. Carrier proposes in effect that aesthetic value equals market value. He elaborates this view by showing that judgements about contemporary architecture are volatile and that it is impossible to verify the critic's claim regarding the actual value of a building. What does count is the popularity of the architect and there the critic does have a significant influence. Criticism shares the responsibility for the absorption of revolutionary kinds of architecture into the market: it defuses the architecture of its subversiveness by explaining it and making it marketable. The rôle of criticism is less prominent in South Africa. There are not so many architectural magazines in this country, and certainly none that are internationally distributed to the same scale as the The Architectural Review or Progressive Architecture. However, local architects are still keen to have their work published in Style, for example.

The diminishing gap between 'high art' and popular culture is felt in contemporary architecture. Many buildings are commissioned by large corporations and because architects are dependent on these patrons, they accept their money and prescriptions in a frankly commercial manner. Buildings always had to be realistic in financial terms, but the avant-garde had at least resisted the forces of

commodification.[66] It is felt that contemporary architecture is adapting with greater enthusiasm than before to the corporate capitalist culture. An extreme example of the ruthless commercial attitude of the contemporary architect is the words of Philip Johnson, as cited by Donald Judd:

> I'm for sale. I'm a whore. I'm a practicing architect. I work for money for whoever commissions a building from me.[67]

The commodification of buildings is most obvious in the housing market, where the traditional idea of a 'home' has changed to that of an affordable commodity. So called 'home builders' advertise that one can have a house built for a relatively small deposit and they even offer a ten year written guarantee. To quote from the advertisement in figure 2, these houses are promoted as "affordable investments", "the best value in Sandton from only R126 000!" and they assure the customer that "Not only will you be buying a home but a great investment."

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[66] For a discussion of the avant-garde's resistance against consumerism and bourgeois culture, and the subsequent demise of this adversial attitude in the nineteen seventies, see Hall Foster. "The Problem of Pluralism." Art in America, vol. 70, no. 1 - 5, January 1982, p. 13.

[67] JUDD, DONALD. "A long discussion not about masterpieces but why there are so few of them, part 1." Art in America, vol. 72, October 1984, p. 13.



Figure 2: Advertisement for Schachat Homebuilders. Property Guide supplement to the Saturday Star, August 1989, p. 104.

Postmodernism is part and parcel of the overwhelming forces of commodification in which the capitalist world is being gripped. The demands on architecture to be popular and profitable do have an influence on its practices. Whether one perceives these effects as negative or not, depends on one's critical position. Whether one believes that architecture should be free to express itself as it wishes to, or whether one feels that architecture should further the emancipation of man from poverty and suffering, the commercialization of architecture is a threat indeed. But certain critics, like Fredric Jameson, feel that this trend may be meaningful, because it is an accurate reflection of the economical forces at work in capitalist society. In his foreword to Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition Jameson writes that

> *aesthetics sometimes functions* as an unpleasant mirror; and we need perhaps at least momentarily to reflect on the peculiar consonance between Lyotard's scientific 'free play' and the way in which postmodernist architecture has taught us to 'learn from Las Vegas' (Robert Venturi) and 'to make ourselves at home in our alienated being' (Marx on Hegel's conception of Absolute Spirit). *This is, at any rate, the deepest,* most contradictory, but also the most urgent level of Lyotard's book: that of a narrative which - like all narrative - must generate the illusion of 'an imaginary resolution of real contradictions' (Lévi-Strauss).[68]

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[68] JAMESON, FREDRIC. Foreword to Jean-François Lyotard. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. *United* Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. xix.

5. POSTMODERNISM

5.1. Introduction

This chapter ruminates over the distinction between the avant-garde and modernism, which is seen to be crucial to the aesthetic theory of the twentieth century. Working within these guidelines, crises in the history of modernism and the avant-garde are observed during the latter half of the century, giving rise to postmodernism and the transavantgarde.

5.2. Modernism

The differentiation between modernism and the avant-garde is made by authors such as Bürger, Sandler and Gablik. In his Theory of the Avant-Garde,[69] Bürger defines the difference between modernism and the avant-garde in terms of their respective social rôles. Modernism is seen as the reaction against the traditional in art, manifested in the experimentation with techniques and materials, a search

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[69] BURGER, PETER. Theory of the Avant Garde. Trans. M. Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. xv.

for the new and in formalism. He shows the avant-garde to be the reaction against the bourgeoisie, the art market and the art institutions. The intentions of the avant-garde were nothing less than social revolution, according to Bürger. He sounds a note of warning, however, that it is impossible to distinguish clearly between modernism and the avant-garde. Many architects of the modernist period, for example Le Corbusier, were modernist in their search for new, reductive forms, but also avant-garde in their attempts to create a better, more wholesome environment for the proletariat.

Irving Sandler also distinguishes between modernism and the avant-garde.[70] He defines the avant-garde, which he calls "Inclusive Modernism", broadly as art that includes everything that is "progressive". He discerns "Exclusive Modernism" (modernism) as the development of art and architecture as a progression of quantitative jumps into the unknown, which looks inevitable in retrospect. In art, modernism is characterized by a reductive, non-objective, abstract style, for example Minimalist painting and colour field painting. According to him, modernist architecture is characterized by the functional, commercial grid pattern.

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[70] SANDLER, IRVING. "Modernism, Revisionism, Pluralism, and Post-Modernism." Art Journal, vol. 40, Fall/Winter 1980, p. 345.

The difference between modernism and the avant-garde is also noted by Suzi Gablik.[71] She distinguishes between an early or traditionalist modernism (modernism) and a late, anti-traditionalist or "schismatic" modernism (avant-garde). As she defines it, modernist artists saw their work as continuous with an indispensable and relevant past. They defended abstraction and art-for-art's-sake. Modernist theory claimed that art did not need to serve any social purpose, but that it could create its own independent reality. The only experience that art needed to communicate was an aesthetic one. *Seeing itself as autonomous, art* was not concerned about an audience. It had no prescribed social role to fulfill and it was not congruous with religious or social aims. According to Gablik, the avant-garde on the other hand saw itself as a mutation of the past and *therefore as discontinuous* with it. It resented the functional autonomy of art and believed that art should serve a social responsibility and purpose.

The differentiation between modernism and the avant-garde is a useful model in a study of contemporary aesthetic theory. Bürger sees this distinction as the central feature of the art of this century:

> Art in bourgeois society lives off the tension between the institutional framework (releasing art from the

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[71] GABLIK, SUZI. "Art on the Capitalist Faultline." Art in America, March 1980, p. 9.

demand that it fulfill a social function) and the possible political content (Gehalt) of individual works.[72]

The rest of this section will deal with the origin and nature of modernist aesthetic theory, the characteristics of modernist architecture and the concept of the autonomy of modernist architecture and aesthetic theory. The aesthetic theory of modernism was developed by critics such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry in England, and Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried in America. Clive Bell (1881 - 1964), for example, promoted an art in which any kind of representation was aesthetically irrelevant.[73] According to him, the objective of art was to create "significant form", which he understood to be an unique quality resulting from a certain combination of lines, colours and spatial elements.

The most influential critic in the development of aesthetic modernism was Clement Greenberg. His objective for art was to combat the infiltration of everyday life by "kitsch", which he understood to be the popular art of immediate assimilation, produced for mass consumption and entertainment and which compromised aesthetic standards

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[72]BURGER, PETER. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 25.

[73]RADER, M. A Modern Book of Esthetics. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973, p. 224.

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[72]BURGER, PETER. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 25.

[73]RADER, M. A Modern Book of Esthetics. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973, p. 224.

altogether.[74] Greenberg's concern about the growth of the "culture industry" echoes that of Adorno of the Frankfurt School.[75] The alternative to kitsch that Greenberg promoted was the striving for purity in painting. He believed that the essential quality of painting had to be rediscovered. His prescription to painters was that they had to emphasize the physical quality of their painting materials to enhance the quality of the painting as a two-dimensional object. Paintings had to be optically flat, so that they would resist referring to three dimensional objects in the world.

Greenberg distinguishes between the "the modern" and "modernism".[76] The modern is the contemporary which is ahead of its time. Modernism, on the other hand, is an historically specific period which originated in the mid-nineteenth century, for example with the paintings of Manet. Modernism presupposes certain standards of aesthetic quality relative to the past. It sees art as the distillation and refinement of aesthetic quality over time. Because of its perpetual search for quality, innovation and newness are important qualities in Greenberg's eyes. But

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[74]HERTZ, R. Theories of Contemporary Art. New Yersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985, p. v.

[75]See Chapter 4, p. 30.

[76]GREENBERG, CLEMENT. "Modern and Postmodern." Arts Magazine, vol. 54, no. 5 - 10, February 1980, p. 64.

paradoxically modernism was a retrospective, conservative theory: it tried to continue a level of excellence as it existed in the past.[77]

In architecture, Horatio Greenborough (1805 - 1852) was one of the first critics who propounded a "functionalist aesthetic".[78] He thought that the form of a building should be determined by its function, as he observed the case to be in the design of ships. In his words "...instead of forcing the functions of every sort of building into one general form, without reference to the inner distribution, let us begin from the heart as a nucleus, and work outward" in order to achieve "the external expression of the inward functions of the building."[79] He wanted the meaningless decoration of the architecture of his time to be stripped away in order to reveal the essential form, which would be an adaptation to the function of the building.

As it developed, the fundamental dogmas of the modern movement in architecture were: the use of functional analysis as the starting point for architectural research; the annihilation of the traditional grammar of architecture;

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[77] RADER, M. A Modern Book of Esthetics, p. 405.

[78] Ibid., p. 226.

[79] Greenborough quoted by M. Rader in Ibid.

the belief in progress and the use of new technologies.[80] These attributes are clearly visible in a building like the Standard Bank Centre (1970) in Johannesburg (figure 3). The plan shape was developed as a response to the requirements of the particular building type, namely flexible open office spaces arranged around a central service core. It caused much excitement at the time in Johannesburg, because of its novel structure consisting of cantilevering reinforced concrete beams from which the office floors were suspended. This structure is clearly expressed on the elevations. There is no decoration used on the building: all the forms are the result of functional and structural requirements.

These features correspond with Clement Greenberg's belief that art should reduce itself to the literal essence of its medium.[81] The Standard Bank Centre's repudiation of decoration concur with modernist art's renunciation of subject matter and illusion: it wanted to achieve pure materiality and desired to discover what architecture essentially is. It was designed through a process by which the building was stripped from almost all but its constituent or minimal elements.

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[80]PORTOGHESI, PAOLO. Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society. New York: Rizzoli, 1983, p. 32.

[81]KUSPIT, D. B. "The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism," Artforum, vol. 19, no. 5, January 1981, p. 54.

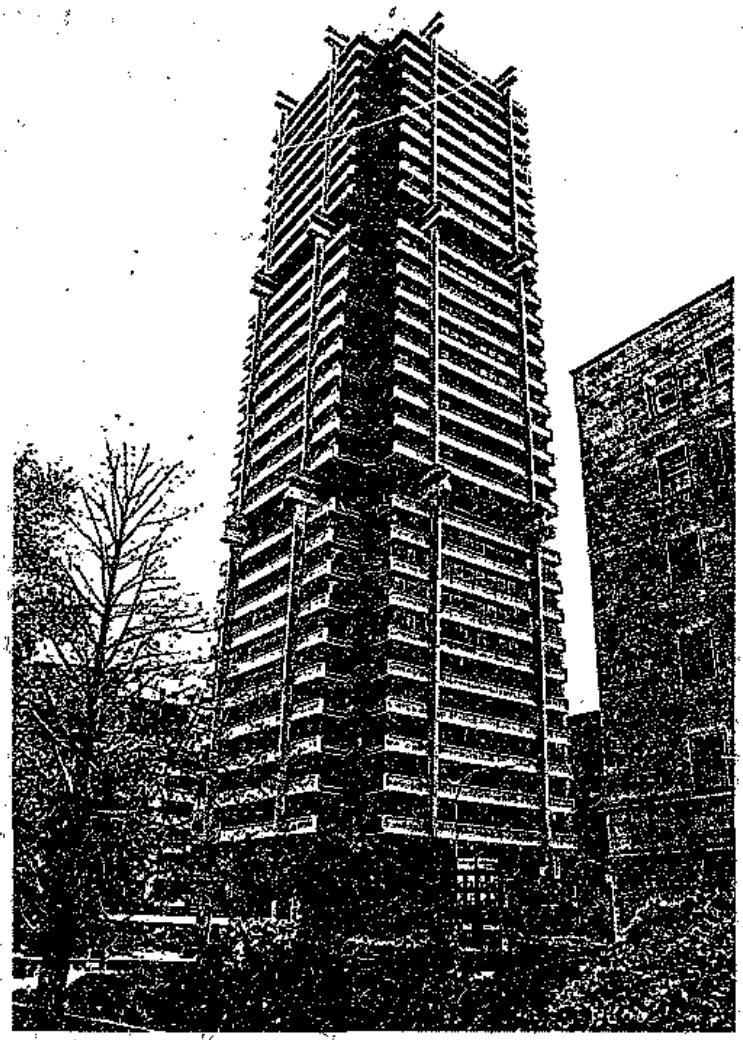

Figure 3: HENTRICH BERGS & ASSOCIATES. Standard Bank Centre. Johannesburg, 1970.

Greenberg refused to consider art as anything more than the materials and labour that went into it. The abandonment of history that is visible in this building is the result of the desire of the architects to think through the problems of building afresh. This attitude was dependent on the general belief that a better future was possible, and that architecture had a rôle to play in making this future attainable. Kim Levin writes that the modernist attitude was experimental and scientific: it was based on the trust in a technological future and the development of an objective truth.[82] It used the method and the logic of science, it believed in scientific objectivity and it strove for perfection, purity, clarity and order. Modernism was idealistic, ideological, optimistic, and believed in the new and the improved.

Greenberg's entirely visual approach to art criticism was matched in architectural criticism by authors such as Henry-Russel Hitchcock. According to Banham[83] Hitchcock viewed buildings as "discrete aesthetic objects". The formalism of modernist architectural criticism is visible in

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[82]LEVIN, KIM. "Farewell to Modernism." Arts Magazine, October 1979. Published in R. Hertz. Theories of Contemporary Art. New Yersey: Prentice Hall, 1985, p. 2.

[83]BANHAM, R. "A Set of Actual Monuments." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXV, no. 1106, April 1989, p. 89.

Alfred H. Barr's explication of modernism in the introduction of Hitchcock's The International Style, as quoted by Banham:[84]

> Emphasis on volume - spaces enclosed by their planes or surfaces, as opposed to the suggestion of mass or solidity.
>
> Regularity as opposed to symmetry or other forms of obvious balance.
>
> Lastly, dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions, as opposed to applied ornament.

Alfred H. Barr's conception of formalism in architecture is close to Clive Bell's understanding of formalism in relation to art.[85] In emphasizing volume, space, plane, surface, balance, materials and proportion he isolates the formal elements of architecture and reduces architecture to abstract forms in contrast with the representational style of an architecture which is based upon the classical Orders as codified by Vitruvius and Vignola, for example. In a classical building the load bearing function of a column is represented by the entasis in the shaft of the column. The transversal beams resting on the architrave, itself representative of the chief beam, are represented by the triglyphs in a Doric frieze, and so forth. The whole tectonic assemblage of column, architrave,

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[84]BANHAM, R. "A Set of Actual Monuments," p. 91.

[85]See page 44.

frieze and cornice, which constitutes the architectural Order, is representative of certain human qualities. The Doric Order, for example, is understood to be representative of masculine force, and the Ionic Order of feminine grace and beauty.[86] Formalist architectural critics, on the other hand, belief that the objective of architecture is to create 'significant form', which is a unique quality resulting from a certain combination of lines, shapes, forms, spaces, textures and colours, for instance. This emphasis on the formal elements of architecture makes modernist architecture essentially abstract. If architecture is representative of anything from the formalist viewpoint, it is of the functional distribution of spaces inside the building from which the external form derives. Other than the expression of the functional requirements of the building, architecture communicate only an 'aesthetic' experience, according to formalist critics.[87] The schism between the formalist approach to architecture, which det[illegible] aesthetic judgement from the concerns of everyday [illegible] nd the possibility that architecture can serve a [illegible] purpose

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[86]NORBERG-SCHULZ, CHRISTIAN. Meaning in Western Architecture. London: Studio Vista, 1974, p. 54.

[87]Aestheticism is defined as "A term applied to various exaggerations of the doctrine that art is self-sufficient, autonomous, and autotelic; that it need serve no ulterior purpose and should not be judged qua art by non-aesthetic standards, whether moral, political, or religious." (Harold Osborne. The Oxford Companion to Art. Oxford: The Claredon Press, 1979, p. 11.)

gave rise to the concept of the 'autonomy of architecture' which will be discussed below.

Banham is a typical example of the formalism of modernist architectural criticism. In his Age of the Masters[88] he characterizes modernist architecture by discussing function, form, construction and space. Like Greenberg, Banham describes the development of modernist architecture according to an evolutionistic theory, namely how it developed in "an apostolic succession from the great architectural moralists of the mid-nineteenth century, John Ruskin, Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper."[89] By reducing architecture to purely functional and aesthetical principles, Banham opens himself to criticism by authors such as Meredith Tax,[90] because he ignored the content or meaning of architecture to a large extent. Tax charges formalist criticism as a philosophy of art-for-art's-sake, that justifies art by its mere existence and does not seek any social purpose for it. Because modernist architecture is represented as the expression of the individual architect's

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[88]BANHAM, R. Age of the Masters: A Personal View of Modern Architecture. London: The Architectural Press, 1978. (First published in 1962.)

[89]Ibid., p. 12.

[90]TAX, MEREDITH. "Culture is not neutral." In L. Baxendal. Radical Perspectives in the Arts. Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1972, p. 18.

vision, the public is divorced from both the architect and the buildings which they are occupying.

It would be simplistic to say that all modernist aesthetic theory was as formalistic as that of Greenberg or Banham. Harold Rosenberg was a contemporary of Greenberg that believed that the critic should not only judge the artwork on its own terms, but that he or she should also take the artist's intentions into account. In architectural criticism, Stephen Gardiner's book on Le Corbusier[91] represents a reappraisal of Banham's purely visual approach. Gardiner tried to understand the complexity of all the influences on Le Corbusier, for example the images of French peasant architecture and Cubist painting. What he illustrates, is that Le Corbusier's architecture was in a way autobiographical, and thus filled with content and meaning. This is in contrast with Banham's discussion of Le Corbusier's house at Poissy[92], where he describes it only in terms of its forms, planning and structure.

Bürger explains the social process through which art and architecture became autonomous from the concerns of

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[91]GARDINER, STEPHEN. Le Corbusier. Great Britain: Fontana, 1974.

[92]BANHAM, R. Age of the Masters, p. 19.

practical life.[93] He analyses the development of art as a social institution, by looking at the changes in the function or purpose of art, its production and its reception, all of which did not develop in synchronization. His argument revolves around art, but the same is true for architecture. In the Middle Ages, architecture served a cult function and was wholly integrated into the social institution, which was religion. Architecture was produced collectively, without an architect as we know him or her today, and was seen as a craft. It was received collectively by the same public that had produced it.

Later, architecture became independent from its religious function, for example at the court of Louis XIV. It still had a precisely defined function, namely to serve the glory of the king and to portray courtly society in the splendour of Versailles. As such architecture formed a part of the praxis of life at the court. Yet, as Bürger notes, the detachment of architecture from its religious function was the first step in the emancipation of architecture. The mode of production of architecture changed during this time: Le Vau acted as an individual and had a consciousness of the uniqueness of his activity. He had a clearly defined rôle: he was commissioned by an individual to create something for

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[93] BÜRGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 37.

a specific purpose. The reception of architecture remained collective but its content had changed: it was no longer sacral, but social.

Bürger sees modernist architecture as the objectification of the self-understanding of the bourgeois class. In modernist architecture production and reception are no longer tied to the praxis of life. Both production and reception are now individual acts. The modernist architect is working independently. He or she is commissioned by a client whom he or she often does not know. Bürger sees the abstract relationship between the architect and his or her client as a precondition for the abstract architecture of modernism. He concludes that the decisive characteristic of bourgeois architecture is the separation of architecture from the praxis of life. Thus, when Bürger refers to the autonomy of art, he alludes to the status of art in bourgeois society. Here he disagrees with Greenberg, who believed that the autonomy of art was a result of the historical development of the 'essence' of art, which comprised of its gradual reduction in form. Bürger thinks that the autonomy of art was part of a social process in which the bourgeoisie found time for relaxation and "a

sensuousness could evolve that was not part of any means-end relationships."[94]

Systematic aesthetic theory as a philosophical discipline and the concept of art as autonomous only came into being during the eighteenth century. Referring to Max Weber, Habermas describes the rationalization of aesthetic theory as part of the process of the differentiation between the ontic, moral and expressive aspects of the world.[95] As part of this process, both art and aesthetic theory became autonomous along with science, technology, law and morality. According to Habermas, it was only since the eighteenth century that it was felt that the work of art called for interpretation or evaluation. The subject of Kant's Critique of Judgement[96] (1790) was the detachment of aesthetic judgement from the concerns of everyday life. Kant believed in the universality and disinterestedness of aesthetic judgement as opposed to the judgement of taste which is subjective.[97] The example that Kant uses is that of someone

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[94]BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 46.

[95]HABERMAS, JURGEN. "Questions and Counterquestions." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity. Cambridge: Politi Press, 1985, p. 199.

[96]KANT, IMMANUEL. The Critique of Judgement. Trans. J. C. Meredith. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1988. (First edition 1790).

[97]BURGER, P. op. cit., p. 43.

being asked if he considered the palace that he saw before him as beautiful. Such a person might answer that he did not care for things made merely to be gaped at, or he might reply in the same way as someone who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses, or he may complain that it is vain to spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. All these judgements are subjective. Aesthetic judgement seeks to know if the presentation of the object is to one's liking, the judgement of which is disinterested and universal. As distinct from mere *subjective preference, the disinterested judgement* of taste presupposes non-arbitrary standards for the judgement of art or architecture, and poses to be the arbitrator of "artistic truth". To be disinterested, the judgement of art must be detached from the practical concerns of everyday life. The formalist critical tradition of modernism, including Greenberg, Michael Fried, Sheldon Bodelman and others, ascribed to this philosophy of aesthetic theory. Because they believed that aesthetic judgement should be detached from the concerns of everyday life, and because they ignored content, the modernist critics were censured.[98] Fried, for example, said that painting addressed itself to eyesight alone and that it was of a purely visual nature.[99]

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[98]McEVILLEY, THOMAS. "Heads it's Form, Tails it's not Content." Art Forum, vol. XXI, no. 3, November 1982, p. 50.

[99]Ibid.

Greenberg is quoted by McEvilley as saying that "visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience and make no reference to anything given in other orders of experience."[100]

It is common for postmodern aesthetic theory to discredit modernist criticism as discussed above.[101] Generally speaking the main features of modernist theory that were criticized were its repudiation of tradition, its formalism and its want of content and meaning. The next section of this chapter will deal with the avant-garde, that went some way in addressing the question of the relationship between architecture and social reality.

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[100] McEVILLEY, THOMAS. "Heads it's Form, Tails it's not Content." Art Forum, vol. XXI, no. 3, November 1982, p. 50.

[101] For example, Newman challenges Greenberg by showing that modernist art never was autonomous, by illustrating its heteronomy. (M. Newman. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 33.) According to him, modernism is an expression of the Zeitgeist, representing the displacement and alienation in the city, for example. He also writes about the absorption of that which was extrinsic to the Western high-art tradition into modernist art, for example primitive art, the art of the insane and of children, commercial and mass media imagery, and subcultural forms such as graffiti.

5.3. The Avant-Garde

The avant-garde coexisted with modernism; it acted as the *social awareness of* the essentially formalist style of modernism. In this section the main characteristics of the avant-garde will be discussed, and they include the avant-garde's project of human emancipation, its resistance to the bourgeoisie and to the commodification of art, its negation of tradition and its opposition to the art institution.

According to Clement Greenberg, the avant-garde was created by Duchamp after 1912.[102] In 1917, for example, Duchamp exhibited a urinal, entitled Fountain and signed by him under the name of R. Mutt. Greenberg criticized this gesture because the shocking and scandalizing were used as ends in themselves. But by *inscribing his signature on* a mass-produced object, Duchamp questioned the category of the "work of art". The signature suggests that the work is both unique and individual, which it is not. By using a mass-produced object, he calls into question the autonomous *status of the artwork as* the creation of an individual

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[102] GREENBERG, C. "Counter-Avant-Garde." In M. Rader. A Modern Book of Esthetics, p. 435.

artist, as it has existed since the Renaissance. From this Bürger infers that the intention of the avant-garde was to abolish autonomous art and to reintegrate art into the praxis of life.[103] The value of the avant-garde was to make visible art as an institution and to reveal the inefficacy of art in bourgeois society. With the "institution of art" is meant the prevailing ideas about art of the time that determine the reception of the artworks, and the mechanism of the art market, including the galleries, the critics, collectors and the administrators of art, which formed the invisible substructure of modernist art.

The work of the Futurist and the Constructivist architects could be taken as examples of a similar attitude: that of the negation of the institution of architecture. Jencks writes about the demands of the proletariat after the October revolution of 1917 in Russia to create their own houses, streets and objects of everyday life.[104] This challenge to the authority of the architect as individual designer would continue to haunt twentieth century architecture, as will become clear in the discussion of postmodern architecture in the next section of this chapter. For Hilton Kramer, Vladimir Tatlin's Monument for the Third

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[103] BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 54.

[104] JENCKS, CHARLES. Modern Movements in Architecture. New York: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 82.

International of 1920 represents the climax of the union of radical aesthetics and revolutionary politics in Russia during the first five years of the Bolshevik regime, from 1917 to 1922.[105] According to Kramer, Tatlin's ambition was to remove architecture from the realm of pure aesthetics and to synthesize sculpture, architecture and engineering into a utilitarian art. For Tatlin, the modern factory at work was the culminating manifestation of his times, and he wanted architecture to be useful and constructive in order to act as incentive for the advancement of human culture - a social environment based upon the utopian visions of the Communist Party.[106] His monument signified the hope of a perfect world to come in which the aesthetic impulse would be indistinguishable from the practical tasks of social reconciliation.

The autonomous artwork of modernism was dependent on bourgeois society. Only if there is no demand that art should be socially useful, can the sphere of aesthetic experience crystallize, in the sense of Kant's conception of the disinterestedness of artistic judgement. The avant-garde movements were an attack on this autonomous status of art in

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[105] KRAMER, HILTON. The Age of the Avant-Garde: An Art Chronicle of 1956 - 1972. London: Secker & Warburg, 1974, p. 151.

[106] Ibid., p. 153.

bourgeois society. According to Bürger, what "is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men."[107] The avant-garde wanted art to function in a useful way in society.

Habermas also comments on the avant-garde movements' rebellion against being split off the "life-world".[108] He traces the questioning of the relation between the independence of art in a world of experts, and the cultural impoverishment of the life-world, back to Adorno's criticism of the esotericism of the exclusive, often hermetically sealed artwork. Habermas' belief is that art should illuminate the world and throw light on individual life-problems: "then art enters into a language game which is no longer that of aesthetic criticism, but belongs, rather, to everyday communicative practice."[109]

Architecture always had a twofold character in bourgeois society: on the one hand a noncommittal element of freedom in its distance from the social process, and on the other hand its attempt to reintegrate architecture into the

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[107] BÜRGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 49.

[108] HABERMAS, J. "Questions and Counterquestions," p. 202.

[109] Ibid.

praxis of life.[110] Jencks quotes Le Corbusier's belief in modern architecture's ability to change the world for the better:

> A great epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit. Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on towards its destined ends, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch, animated by a new spirit. Economic law inevitably governs our acts and our thoughts ... We must create the mass-production spirit. The spirit of constructing mass-production houses. The spirit of living in mass-production houses...[111]

Avant-garde architects like Le Corbusier believed that the social and human problems of their time were to blame on a defective environment, which architecture could change for the better, for example by the provision of safe and wholesome accommodation and by rationalizing urban planning.

The scientific attitude that reigned in the architecture of the twentieth century was manifested in the experimentation with new materials and methods in an attempt to find improved building materials and techniques. Hauser describes the avant-garde as the negation of that which is old and conventional.[112] It is characterized by a readiness to discover, it sees that which prevails as inferior to what

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[110] BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 50.

[111] JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Post-Modernism? London: Academy Editions, 1987, p. 40.

[112] HAUSER, ARNOLD. The Sociology of Art. Trans. K. J. Northcott. London: Rautledge and Kegal Paul, 1982, p. 681.

is coming in future. Avant-garde architects believe that the development of architecture should always start afresh, and that no existing solutions should be taken for granted.

In his discussion of the "new" in the avant-garde, Bürger distinguishes between the renewal of themes, motifs and artistic techniques as practiced before the advent of the avant-garde, and the new as practiced by the avant-garde.[113] According to him, newness before the avant-garde meant variations within the narrow, defined limits of a genre. Bürger thinks that the avant-garde is dealing with a break in tradition, not with the development thereof. This is in contrast with Greenberg's belief that modernism is a refinement and development of aesthetic principles, as discussed in the previous section on modernism. The "new" in avant-garde architecture was related to the new functional requirements set to the buildings of the industrial world. There was, for example, no satisfying models for the architect to follow in the process of designing a railway station. Furthermore new construction materials and methods had to be dealt with. However, Bürger points out the difficulty in distinguishing between arbitrary and historically necessary newness. Some avant-garde architects have used old fashioned construction

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[113] BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 59.

techniques to build forms that defied tradition.[114] He thus thinks that the category of the new is of limited usefulness when attempting to understand the avant-garde. But this pursuit of novelty was one of the crises that the avant-garde eventually had to deal with. As Beckett predicted, art would retire, "weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able of doing a little better the same old thing, of going further along a dreary road."[115] The avant-garde was also criticized by Greenberg because it placed so much emphasis on innovation. He felt that instead of valuing inspiration, the avant-garde resorted to ingenuity. It cherished contrivance instead of creation, and fancy rather than imagination.[116] He also predicted that the novel effects of the avant-garde would wear off with familiarity.

The following sections will explore the predicaments that modernism and the avant-garde would encounter during the latter half of this century, and how that gave rise to the concepts of postmodernism and the transavantgarde.

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[114] BANHAM, R. Age of the Masters, p. 30.

[115] Beckett as quoted by Susan Sontag in "The Aesthetics of Silence" in 1967. Published in Styles of Radical Will. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969, p. 12.

[116] GREENBERG, C. "Counter-Avant-Garde." In M. Rader. A Modern Book of Esthetics, p. 435.

5.4. Postmodernism

This section is intended to be a generalized characterization of postmodernism, dealing with its reaction against and resistance to modernism, and its distinguishing features, namely its desire for social engagement and meaning, and pluralism. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in the ensuing chapters. Chapter six will deal with the search for meaning in postmodern architecture, and chapter seven will discuss the use of appropriation and simulation.

As was shown in chapter two, postmodernism is best seen as a period concept. If modernism were the period of modernization in the West, postmodernism can be viewed as a response to the world of the last thirty years, during which relationships of social life and industrial production have changed.[117]

From about 1960 modernist architecture came under increasing fire because of the modern cities created thereby. It was negatively criticized because of its suburbs

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[117] See chapter 2, page 7.

without quality, its urban environment devoid of collective values, and the loss of local character and connection with place.[118] An anti-modernistic attitude came into being, now commonly called postmodernism. Joyce Kozloff describes this new approach to architecture in a rather long winded way as a series of negations, but to paraphrase her, it is anti-purist, anti-puritanical, anti-Minimalist, anti-reductivist, anti-formalist, anti-austere, anti-bare, anti-boring, anti-empty, anti-flat, anti-clean, anti-machine-made, anti-Bauhauist, anti-systematic, anti-cool, anti-absolutist, anti-dogmatic, anti-exclusivist, anti-programmatic, anti-dehumanized, anti-detached, anti-grandiose, anti-pedantic and anti-heroic.[119] An awareness of social and environmental issues like ecology, pollution, feminism, conservation and peace became prominent during the seventies, and this gave rise to a more introspective, personalized, anti-puristic kind of architecture, with a growing interest amongst architects in energy conservation in buildings, the use of appropriate

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[118] See for example Jane Jacob's The Death and Life of Great American Cities. London: Penguin Books, 1977. (First published in 1961.)

[119] SANLER, IRVING. "Modernism, Revisionism, Pluralism, and Post-Modernism." Art Journal, vol. 40, Fall / Winter 1980, p. 346.

technologies, social architecture and self-supporting settlements.[120]

Jencks cites the failure of modern architecture as the main motive for postmodernism. The examples he uses are the structural failure of the English residential tower block of Ronan Point, when some of the floors gave way after an explosion in 1968, and the demolition of the housing at Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis in 1972.[121] When visiting a residential tower block like the Ponte City Apartments in Johannesburg (figure 4), it is clear why this type of buildings caused the chagrin of critics. It was condemned because of the apparent cheapness of its fabrication, especially the off-shutter concrete finish, its lack of personal "defensible" space and the feeling of alienation that was emanated by it.[122] When built in more traditional

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[120]For examples of this kind of architecture, see Norma Skurka and Jon Naar. Design for a Limited Planet: Living with Natural Energy. New York: Ballantine Books, 1976.

[121]JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Post-Modernism? London: Academy Editions, 1987, p. 16.

[122]Postmodern complexes like Ricardo Bofill & Taller de Arquitectura's Les Arcades du Lac at St Quentin-en-Yvelines, 1974 - 1980 (illustrated in Charles Jencks, ed. Post-Modern Classicism. London: Architectural Design 5/6, 1980, p. 54 - 57) do not seem to solve these problems, regardless the use of a style derived from classical architecture. Its gigantic scale, the use of prefabrication and the extensive use of unfinished concrete persevere in the ills of modernism, creating a profound feeling of alienation, as illustraded in the film Brazil, directed by Terry Gilliam, which used Bofill's buildings as settings.

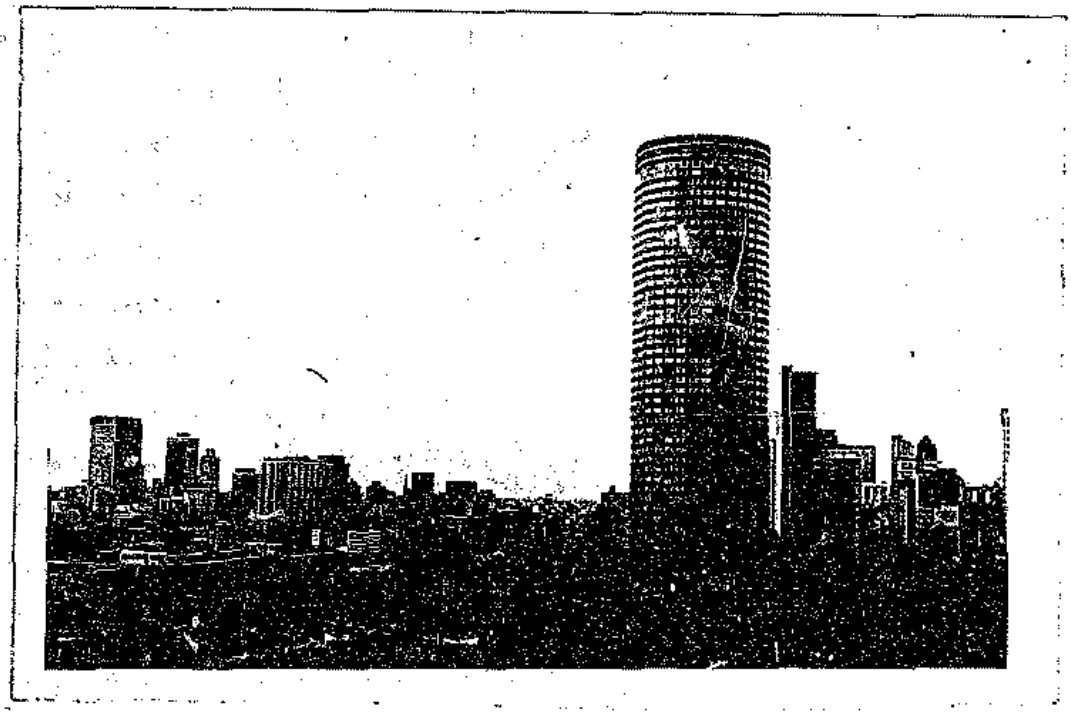

Figure 4: MANFRED HERMER & GROSSKOPFF C.C. Ponte City Apartments, Johannesburg.

European cities, these buildings were also accused of destroying the historical fabric of the cities.

One of the greatest complaints against modernist architecture, is about its lack of social commitment. Although it has been shown in the previous section that the avant-garde was concerned about social issues, modernist architecture per se is understood in terms of the gradual reduction of architectural forms to its essentials. Gablik blames this formalism upon the individualized relationship

of the modernist architect towards architecture.[123] She sees the development of the individualism of the modernist arts as a social process. Before modernism, art was involved with social and spiritual values, and hope and belief were part of the rôle of art. Modernist culture, on the other hand, is characterized by secularization and the development of individualism. As Gablik notes, individualism can only flourish to the detriment of social beliefs and in the face of a lack of communal reality.[124] She defends this individualism as the strong point of modernism. The only way in which art could retain its integrity in the modern capitalistic society was by conserving its purity and by keeping its distance from the world.[125] Art has resisted materialistic values after the collapse of the religious ideologies by internalizing itself. Gablik writes that modernist art was the artist's forced reaction to a world in which he or she could not believe: abstraction became an aesthetic philosophy and the artist became the last representative of spiritual values in a materialistic world. Much the same must have been true of modernist architecture. According to Gablik, modernist art's achievement was the expression of the most profound moral value of Western

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[123]GABLIK, S. Has Modernism Failed? London: Thames and Hudson, 1984, p. 14.

[124]Ibid., p. 30.

[125]Ibid., p. 21.

civilization, namely personal freedom.[126] According to her, individualism is an accurate reflection of the social situation in the modern world.

In 1980, when Gablik wrote the article "Art on the Capitalist Faultline",[127] there was a general questioning of abstract art. Burnham, for example, wrote that it was naive to think of art in terms of the small scale production of decorative objects in the light of the development of the electronic media and two hundred years of industrial vandalism.[128] It was felt that modernist art had lost its power to communicate, that it had no rôle to play in society, and that it had no audience beyond an elitist one. This criticism came mainly from marxist critics, who believed that the idea of purity and detachment of art was spiritually sterile and corrupt. They, for example Peter Fuller and Richard Cork,[129] believed that art and architecture should have a social function, rather than being a private activity. Fuller, for example, declared that the fine art tradition has fallen into "a malignant

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[126]GABLIK, S. "Art on the Capitalist Faultline". Art in America, March 1980, p. 13.

[127]Ibid., p. 9.

[128]BURNHAM, J. Great Western Salt Works - Essay on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art. New York: George Brazilier, 1974, p. 16.

[129]GABLIK, S. op. cit., p. 11.

decadence under monopoly capitalism".[130] True art and architecture should examine social and political realities, and should help the public to recognize and change social reality. To be a social force, art and architecture should have a wide audience and should pass judgement on the phenomena of life. Marx stressed that art had a social reality and that it had to be integrated into the world of meaning.[131] This call for the popularization of art came during a time when art was not cared for by the general public, simply because they could not understand it, and felt insulted by it.

In an effort to mend the shortcomings that existed in modernist architecture, many individual architects in South Africa have become involved in community development, for example Mark Feldman, Rodney Harber and Jo Noero. Arguably, the most work regarding informal housing, the upgrading of informal housing and community development has been done by the National Building Research Institute of the CSIR. In Graaf-Reinet, for example, they became involved in the rehabilitation of the squatter area.[132] As a result of

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[130] GABLIK, S. "Art on the Capitalist Faultline", p. 11.

[131] Ibid., p. 9.

[132] According to a lecture by K. A. Finlayson in June 1981 at the National Building Research Institute, CSIR, Pretoria.

questionnaires and interviews with the inhabitants, they discovered that 50% of the inhabitants could not afford the cheapest housing that was proposed by the local authority in their relocation plan for the area. The CSIR decided on a strategy of upgrading the existing squatter housing. By surveying the community, they discovered that housing was often not the greatest need, but rather services like water and drainage. To implement the improvement of the area, they facilitated the establishment of community councils and street committees. By using local labour, and so keeping the resources of the community within the area, the improvements were gradually implemented, involving for example the erection of canopies over existing houses to waterproof them, so that the inhabitants could gradually improve their homes and make it more permanent by building walls of more durable materials.[133]

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[133]The Goverment often did not take to these projects very kindly. What they had in mind for squatter settlements, was the relocation of the inhabitants to new towns like Atlantis and Mitchels Plein. These new towns looked much more impressive to appease international opinion in contrast with rehabilitation which is a slow process and does not show such immediate physical and orderly results. Upgrading the existing squatter homes also means that minimum standards as set out by building regulations are often not met, otherwise the inhabitants would not be able to afford the housing. The Government resents the political involvement of street committees during the unstable political climate that the country has been experiencing the past decade.

The desire of postmodern architects to become involved in community design and advocacy planning is in contrast with the architectural determinism of the avant-garde as it coexisted with modernism. Clovis Heimsath discusses how architects of the "traditional avant-garde" such as Le Corbusier believed that the forms of his buildings could directly influence human behaviour, rather than basing designs on thorough social analysis of the community concerned.[134] Still, postmodernism could be seen as a continuation of avant-garde social projects initiated in the modernist period.

The search for a social rôle for architecture since the end of the sixties has been part of a general manifestation in the profession of the desire to re-introduce meaning into architecture. This was a reaction against the perceived abstraction of the forms of modernist architecture. In their search for meaning, architects started to look for clues in traditional and historical architecture. Charles Jencks understands postmodern architecture in terms of a "double coding", which consisted of a style that could communicate both to the public and to a "concerned minority, usually

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[134] HEIMSATH, C. Behavioral Architecture: Toward an Accountable Design Process. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977, p. 35.

other architects."[135] The return to styles of the past revived the interest in the symbolism of architecture. Robert Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture of 1966,[136] for example, was based to a great extent on a discussion of Renaissance and Baroque architecture, which reflected a new, and to most modernist architects, a shocking development in criticism. As Venturi wrote in his preface to the second edition of this book

> In the early '60's ... form was king in architectural thought, and most architectural theory focussed without question on aspects of form. Architects seldom thought of symbolism in architecture then, and social issues came to dominate only in the second half of that decade.[137]

Bürger sounds a note of warning regarding the popularization of architecture. He says that the endeavour to reintegrate architecture into the life process could lead to an "art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it" which will "lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance."[138] He also notes that if the avant-garde's intention of abolishing autonomous architecture succeeds, architecture might cease to be an

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[135] JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Post-Modernism? p. 14.

[136] VENTURI, ROBERT. Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. London: The Architectural Press, 1983. (Second edition, fourth printing.)

[137] Ibid., p. 14.

[138] BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 50.

instrument of emancipation and might become one of subversion. In a capitalist society, an architecture that becomes practical might well become part of advertising. It has become established practice to adorn buildings with the name of the company that occupies it. In Johannesburg, the offices of the United Building Society (figure 5), the South African Airways and Wesbank (figure 6) are examples. On the corner of Claim and Pretoria Streets in Hillbrow, (figure 7) the building seems to dematerialize behind the profusion of advertisements. In such a case it could be argued that the building becomes a billboard or an advertisement. In any case, corporate buildings have always functioned as advertisements for their companies, lending status to it and making it visible in the city. Ottman writes about a similar situation in art:

> For the first time there is an art that leaves the positions of Nineteenth century theory behind and keeps step with today's simulative technoscience, moving rather in a circular or spiral motion than in a rectilinear progression and mixing itself with advertisement, television and video.
>
> It replaces shock with assimilation: originality with simulation. It has no need to transform advertisement and consumer goods into art: art is advertisement, consumer goods and vice versa.[139]

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[139] OTTMANN, KLAUS. "Mannerism, Anti-Mannerism." Flash Art, no. 131, December 1986 / January 1987, p. 65.

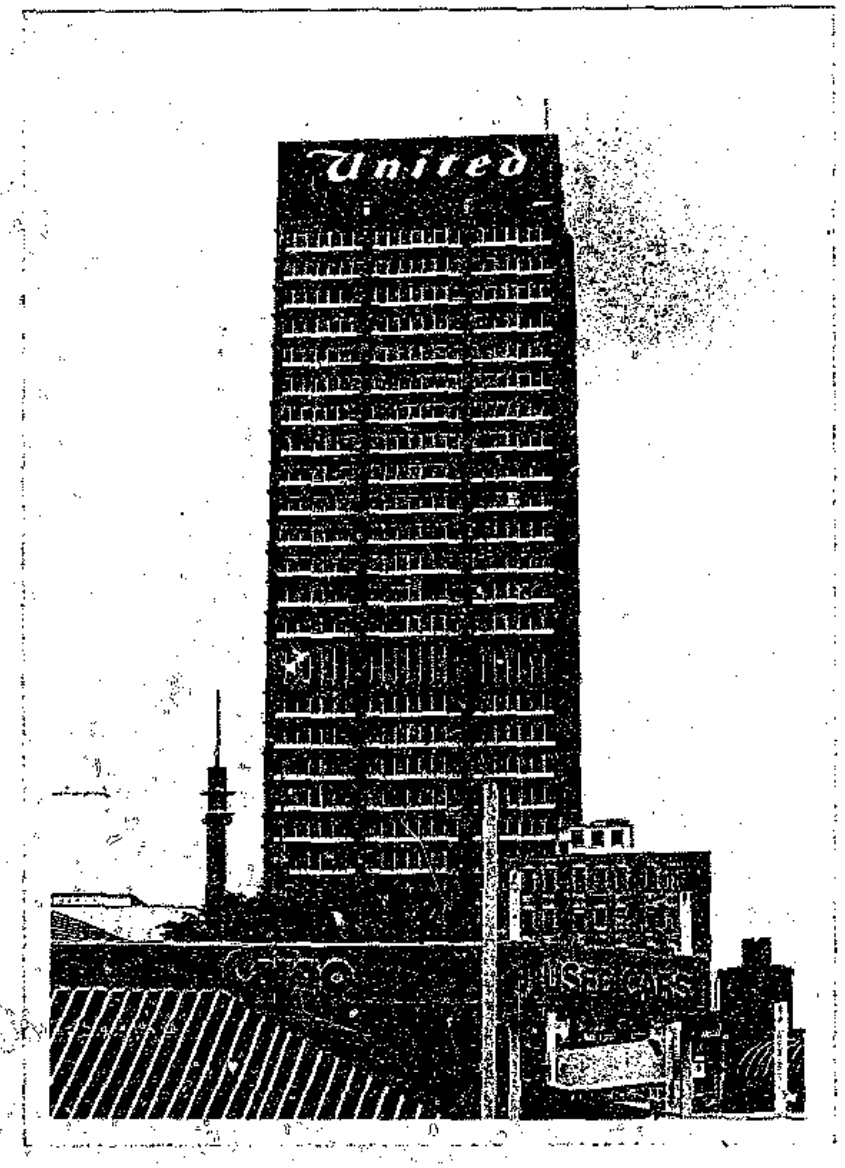

Figure 5: United Building Society Building, Johannesburg.



Figure 6: South African Airways and Wesbank, Johannesburg.



Figure 7: Corner of Claim and Pretoria Streets, Hillbrow.

As was shown in chapter four, cultural critics like Horkheimer and Adorno see this commercialization of art as a problem, causing the deprivation and impoverishment of culture.[140] Other critics, like Fredric Jameson, feel that this trend is meaningful as an accurate reflection of capitalist society.[141]

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[140] See page 29.

[141] See page 40.

The phenomenon of pluralism is another feature of postmodernism. In contrast with the believed universal validity of the "International Style" in modernist architecture, many different styles coexist in postmodernism. As Bürger observes:

> The historical avant-garde movements were unable to destroy art as an institution; but they did destroy the possibility that a given school can present itself with the claim to universal validity. That 'realistic' and 'avant-gardiste' art exist side by side today is a fact that can no longer be objected to legitimately. The meaning of the break in the history of art that the historical avant-garde movements provoked does not consist in the destruction of art as institution, but in the destruction of the possibility of positing aesthetic norms as valid ones. *This has consequences* for scholarly dealings with works of art: the normative examination is replaced by functional analysis, the object of whose investigation would be the social effect (function) of a work, which is the result of the coming together of stimuli inside the work and a sociological definable public within an already existing institutional frame.[142]

The pluralism in postmodern architectural styles thus is, according to Bürger, ascribable to loss of faith in any one architectural style as the valid one. This trend corresponds to the criticism of positivism in pragmatic philosophy, as described in chapter three. The consequence of this is that the judgement of taste, as was applied and relevant in modernist criticism, is substituted by a judgement of the usefulness or social effect of the architecture in question.

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[142] BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 87.

Pluralism in architecture was manifested in the simultaneous emergence of many different styles, with the awareness that all these styles were of equal importance and that architects were free to choose whichever one they wanted to. Jencks could be said to be the main promulgator of pluralism in architecture, forever discovering new styles and permutations of styles. In his Modern Movements in Architecture,[143] for example, he distinguishes between architectural approaches such as Parametric (Alexander), Metaphysical (Louis Kahn), Academic, Bourgeois, Pragmatic, Neo-Classicism, Megalopolis, Supersensualism (Hollein), Adhocism and others, all coexisting around 1970. Because quality is no longer easily definable in postmodern architecture, designers are competing to see who can produce the most radical or new forms of architecture. As Alan Wilde notes,[144] postmodernist architects do not press to impose order, instead, the contingent world is simply accepted. This vision of architecture lacks the heroism of the modernist enterprise. Whereas modernist architects believed that some essential truth could be recuperated so that order could be restored to the world, Alan Wilde's postmodern theory perceives and accepts a world whose disarray exceeds

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[143]JENCKS, CHARLES. Modern Movements in Architecture, p. 28.

[144]CHABOT, BARRY. "The Problem of the Postmodern." New Literary History, vol. 20, no. 1, Autumn 1988, p. 5.

and defies resolution,[145] an attitude that corresponds to that of the transavantgarde, which is the subject of the next section.

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[145]WILDE, ALAN. "Postmodernism and the Missionary Position." New Literary History, vol. 20, no. 1, Autumn 1988, p. 28.

5.5. The Transavantgarde

The term "transavantgarde" was made popular by the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva.[146] He saw the transavantgarde as following upon the death of the avant-garde and the failure of conceptual art. The transavantgarde is characterized by him as using material from different geographical locations and historical periods in an eclectic way, often asserting the local and national identity of the artist. This section of this chapter will describe the transavantgarde as seen by different authors, as following upon a crisis in the avant-garde movements at the end of the seventies.

A sharp dividing line between postmodernism and the transavantgarde cannot be drawn. The transavantgarde should be seen as a category within postmodernism, with a more commercial attitude. The transavantgarde signals a rel ation of the avant-garde attitudes that have persisted into postmodernism, for example its social projects, its attempts to improve the world and its search for the new. Postmodern architects' appropriation of historical styles,

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[146] OLIVA, ACHILLE BONITO. The Italian Transavantgarde. Italy: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1981.

for example, was meant to make architecture more accessible to the public, to give it a greater social impact. Since about 1980 a different attitude to architecture has started to make itself felt; that of appropriating historical styles for financial gain, for example. This is the subject of this section.

The transavantgarde should be seen in the context of the changed economic systems of late-capitalism, and the transformations this caused in the culture of contemporary societies. These cultural changes have been discussed in chapters two, three and four. Oliva, for example, sees a relationship between the crisis in philosophical positivism as discussed in chapter three, and the demise of the importance of technological experimentation and the "hysteria" of the new, as was relevant in the avant-garde: the "optimism of the avant-garde - the idea of progress inherent in its experimentation with new techniques and new materials - collapses."[147] What he says about art is true of architecture as well: it "no longer dramatizes anything, since it lacks the historical energy to do so."[148] It lacks the heroic attitude of the historical avant-garde movements.

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[147] OLIVA, A. B. Avantguardia Transanvantguardia. Italy: Electa, 1982, p. 149.

[148] Ibid., p. 150.

Suzi Gablik argues that the transavantgarde involves the repudiation of the moral role of art since the 1980s.[149] This new attitude sees art (and architecture) as the product of the liberation from its direct social role and function. It entails a recognition that art and architecture will not change the world. According to Gablik, this *loss of hope* changes art and architecture from ethic to aesthetic movements. She sees the cause of this as the unbounded liberty of pluralist expression, which undermined the importance of any one style.[150] The overwhelming choice of *styles available in architecture* during the seventies muffled the profession's enthusiasm for further change and development. It was no longer radical to deviate from the norm. There were so many claims to authority from different architects that it hurt architecture's integrity and credibility: architecture could no longer claim to be absolute and true.

Gablik further argues that the emergence of the transavantgarde is a result of the difficulty of believing in yet another stylistic breakthrough.[151] According to her, there is a feeling amongst many artists (and architects)

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[149] GABLIK, S. Has Modernism Failed? p. 74.

[150] See page 80 to 82 for a discussion of pluralism.

[151] GABLIK, S. op. cit., p. 11.

that the limits of the arts have been reached. The overthrow of conventions has become meaningless: when everything is accepted as architecture, renewal becomes difficult. It has become difficult for the architect to render an image that does not remind him or her of something already drawn or built.[152]

Oliva starts his argument by representing the avant-garde as an attitude that strove for purity in art, and that related art to its social rôle.[153] The avant-garde was symptomatic of a period that offered hope for a better future.[154] The view of history as a progression towards conditions of greater social and economic equilibrium, was typical of the avant-garde. It thought that architecture could possibly control the course of events by modifying reality and transforming the social world. Oliva says that according to the transavantgarde perspective, the plan for social transformation no longer exists. He blames the historical situation for this loss of faith, with the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the energy crisis which brought Western economies to their knees. "Thus the prospects of

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[152]SONTAG, SUSAN. "The Aesthetics of Silence." (1967) In Styles of Radical Will. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969. p. 12.

[153]OLIVA, A. B. The International Trans-avantgarde. Italy: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1982. p. 46.

[154]The avant-garde has been discussed in chapter 5.3.

progress outlined by various social systems and their corresponding cultures collapsed and a state of political uncertainty was accentuated in which there were no longer any sure bearings or comforting sense of direction."[155] The use of quotations from previous styles or periods in contemporary architecture is also blamed on the disappearance of the idea of progress by Lyotard.[156] Another author who has noted the growing sense of catastrophe in the world, is McGreevy in his article "Chiliastic Reflections on the old adage 'Three's the Charm'".[157] Artists and architects could not remain untouched by this situation of political, moral, economic and cultural deterioration: it caused a new, less dogmatic attitude on their part.

Zurbrugg criticizes Oliva's theory, according to which the situation of catastrophe peculiar to our time has caused the historical optimism of avant-garde and the idea of progress to collapse, and with it the experimentation with

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[155] OLIVA, A. B. Avantguardia Transavantguardia. Italy: Electa, 1982, p. 148.

[156] LYOTARD, JEAN FRANCOIS. "Defining the Postmodern." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 6.

[157] McGREEVY, L. F. "Chiliastic Reflections on the old adage 'Three's the Charm'". Arts Magazine, no. 59, January 1985, p. 93 - 102.

new techniques and macerials.[158] According to Oliva's reasoning, art can no longer be evaluated in terms of progress, advancement and its currentness. But Zurbrugg feels that Oliva ignores the technological advancements that are being made, for example in architecture.[159] However, as Zurbrugg himself notes,[160] there has been a conceptual shift in the way in which transavantgarde architects employ technology. Their buildings generally consist of the simplification, amplification or systematization of the formal and technical innovations of modernism. In the *nineteen eighties, we possess the materials and construction* methods to build what the modernists of the first half of the century could only envisage. But these buildings are not necessarily new in their conception and form, but are often the fulfillment of the innovatory c pts of modernism. The transavantgarde's contribution to architecture should thus be seen as the methodical consolidation of the tentative aspirations of modernism. A building like 11 Diagonal Street (1986, figure 8) could be seen as an example of the

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[158] OLIVA, A. B. The International Trans-Avantgarde, p. 8.

[159] For example the "High Tech" Architecture of Norman Foster.

[160] ZURBRUGG, N. "Postmodernity, Métaphore manquée, and the Myth of the Transavantgarde." Leonardo, vol. 21, no. 1, 1988, p. 65.

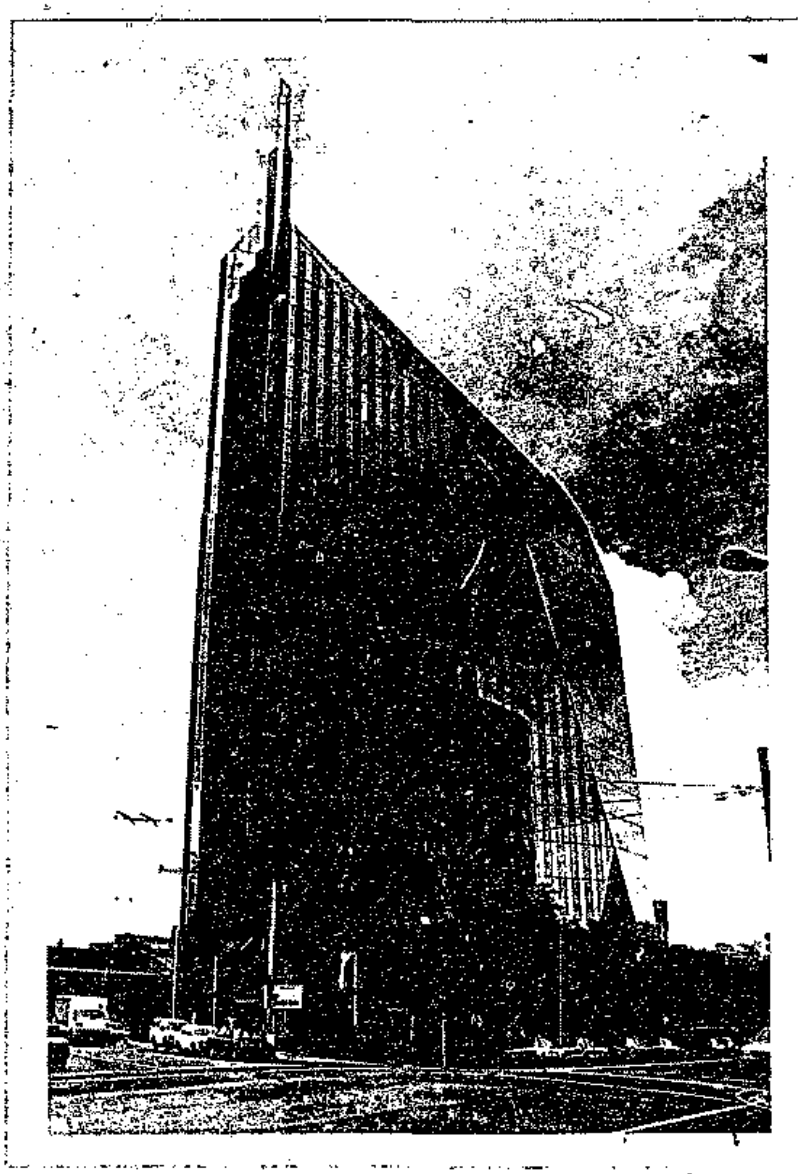

Figure 8: MURPHY JAHN in association with Louis Karol Architects, Inc. 11 Diagonal Street, 1986, Johannesburg.

fulfillment of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Project for a Glass Office Building for Berlin of 1920.[161] Mies van der Rohe did not possess the technological means to clad this building with glass, but with today's flush glazing techniques it has become possible. But 11 Diagonal Street is not necessarily very original: the origin of its form can be traced back to 1920.

One of the most visible characteristics of transavantgarde architecture is its use of the appropriation and simulation of older styles. This feature will be discussed in detail in chapter seven. According to Oliva, transavantgarde architecture has overcome the fear of non-currentness.[162] Architecture becomes a product of a network of recoveries and renewals. A South African example of this is Samuel Pauw's HSRC Building in Pretoria (1987, figure 9). The classical forms are not quoted in their pure form, but are transformed by exaggeration and stylization. This was necessitated by the modern fabrication methods employed: the building is clad in fibre reinforced concrete panels. If transavantgarde architecture is not true to the

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[161]As illustrated in Christian Norberg-Schulz. Meaning in Western Architecture. London: Studio Vista, 1974, p. 366.

[162]OLIVA, A. B. The International Trans-avantgarde, p. 54.

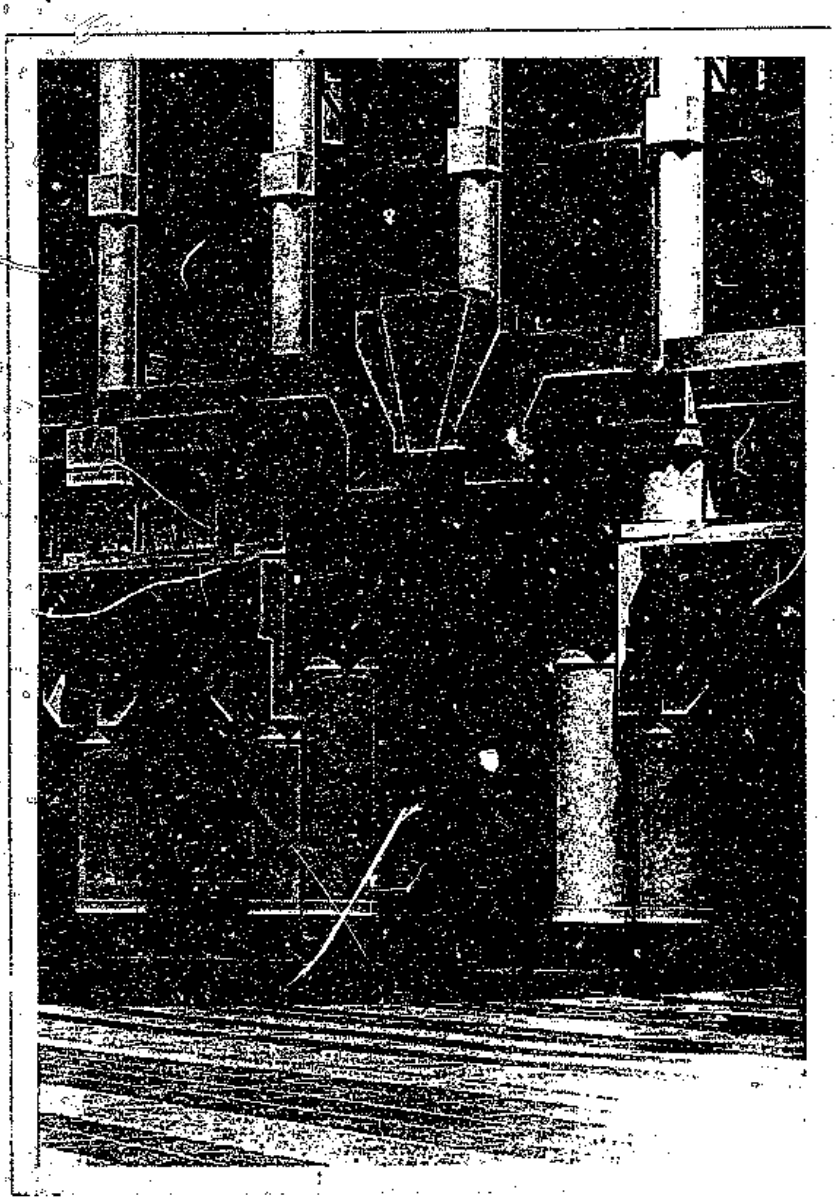

Figure 9: SAMUEL PAUW ARCHITECTS. Human Sciences Research Council Building, 1987, Pretoria.

sources that it quotes, it is also not true to the present, according to Hall Foster.[163] It is not bound to any historical moment. He characterizes transavantgarde architecture as sleepwalking in a museum: it uses historical styles without becoming part of it. He reasons that contemporary architecture cannot be seen as a return to history but that it should be seen as an ahistorical enterprise. The values that are being revived are those necessitated by a market based on taste, namely style. Contemporary architecture is very stylish: "everyone had to be different ... in the same way".[164] Often the styles that are marketed so aggressively as "new" in the architectural magazines are just recombinations of familiar elements. Contemporary architecture plays on the desire of people to be mildly shocked by the already assimilated, dressed up as the new.

Oliva also writes about the fact that transavantgarde architects do not revive previous styles in their original forms. This revival does not mean that the architect identifies with those styles of periods that he or she copies, but he or she only simulates their surface appearances with the awareness that "in a changing society

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[163] FOSTER, H. "The Problem of Pluralism." Art in America, vol. 70, no. 1 - 5, January 1982, p. 10.

[164] Ibid., p. 10.

whose final form has yet to be defined, one has no option but to adopt a nomadic and transitory outlook."[165]

Transavantgarde architecture is an architecture of indifference. Referring to Baudrillard[166], Zurbrugg writes about the fact that our age is one which has witnessed the dissolution of TV into life, and the dissolution of life into TV. The real life tragedies on television are played out in front of the indifferent eyes of the viewers, who see it as spectacular images which have lost almost all dramatic depth and is flattened out on the screen as pure appearance.[167] However, as Zurbrugg points out, Oliva misjudged the effect that transavantgarde art would have, because he believed that it would restore semantic depth to the images it used.[168] Oliva repeatedly contradicts this view of his, by stating that transavantgarde art, like images from the mass media, is an art of uninhibited superficiality, in which the image is relieved from any

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[165]OLIVA, A. B. The International Trans-avantgarde, p. 6.

[166]BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulations. New York: Foreign Agents Series, 1983, p. 149.

[167]ZURBRUGG, N. "Postmodernity, Métaphore manquée, and the Myth of the Transavantgarde." Leonardo, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 66.

[168]OLIVA, O. B. op. cit., p. 148.

weight it may have borne.[169] Artists that are regarded as transavantgarde by Oliva includes Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria, Mimmo Paladino, Julian Schnabel and David Salle.[170] Transavantgarde architecture has lost the emphasis on content or meaning that was important for postmodern architecture by often becoming a play of surface qualities: architects that practise this type of architecture include Jon Jerde[171] and John Portman & Associates.[172]

The transavantgarde is a response to the absorption of dissenting art and architecture into the market system. As Susan Sontag noted:

> In modern culture, powerful machinery has been set up whereby dissident work, after gaining an initial semi-official status as 'avant-garde' is gradually absorbed and rendered acceptable ... fortified by its insatiable appetite for novel commodities, the educated public of the great cities has become habituated to the modernist agony and well skilled in outwitting it: any negative can be turned into a positive.[173]

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[169] OLIVA, A. B. The International Trans-avantgarde, p. 68.

[170] OLIVA, A. B. The International Trans-avantgarde.

[171] GOLDSTEIN, BARBARA. "Context Consumerism." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXIV, no. 1099, September 1988, p. 82 - 86.

[172] For a discussion of Portman's Bonaventura Hotel, see Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review, no. 146, July-August 1984, p. 80.

[173] As quoted in A. Searle. "Past Presence." Artscribe, no. 43, October 1983, p. 42.

Avant-garde architecture was intended as a refusal of the commodity status of a ...itecture.[174] The erosion of the distinction between high cu...ure and mass or popular culture is a distinctive feature of the transavantgarde. This is visible in the fascination of architects by the whole landscape of advertising and of the Las Vegas Strip.[175] Commercial architecture is not only quoted at present, but it is incorporated into architecture to such a point that the lines between architecture as high art and commercial forms are increasingly difficult to draw. The Crack Restaurant (1986) in Pretoria, for example, has obviously been designed to appeal to popular taste, with its comic strip imagery (figure 10). This building, which combines the functions of a restaurant, night club and roadhouse, is crowned by a speech balloon with the words "Crack" displayed in neon within it, mounted above a huge, graphic fissure in the wall. With its gay colours and the ambiguous meaning of its name,[176] it is meant to exert a seductive attraction to the public.

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[174] See chapter 5.3.

[175] VENTURI, ROBERT, DENISE SCOTT BROWN AND STEVEN IZENOUR, eds. Learning from Las Vegas. Cambridge, 1977.

[176] "Crack" is the popular name of a derivative of cocaine.

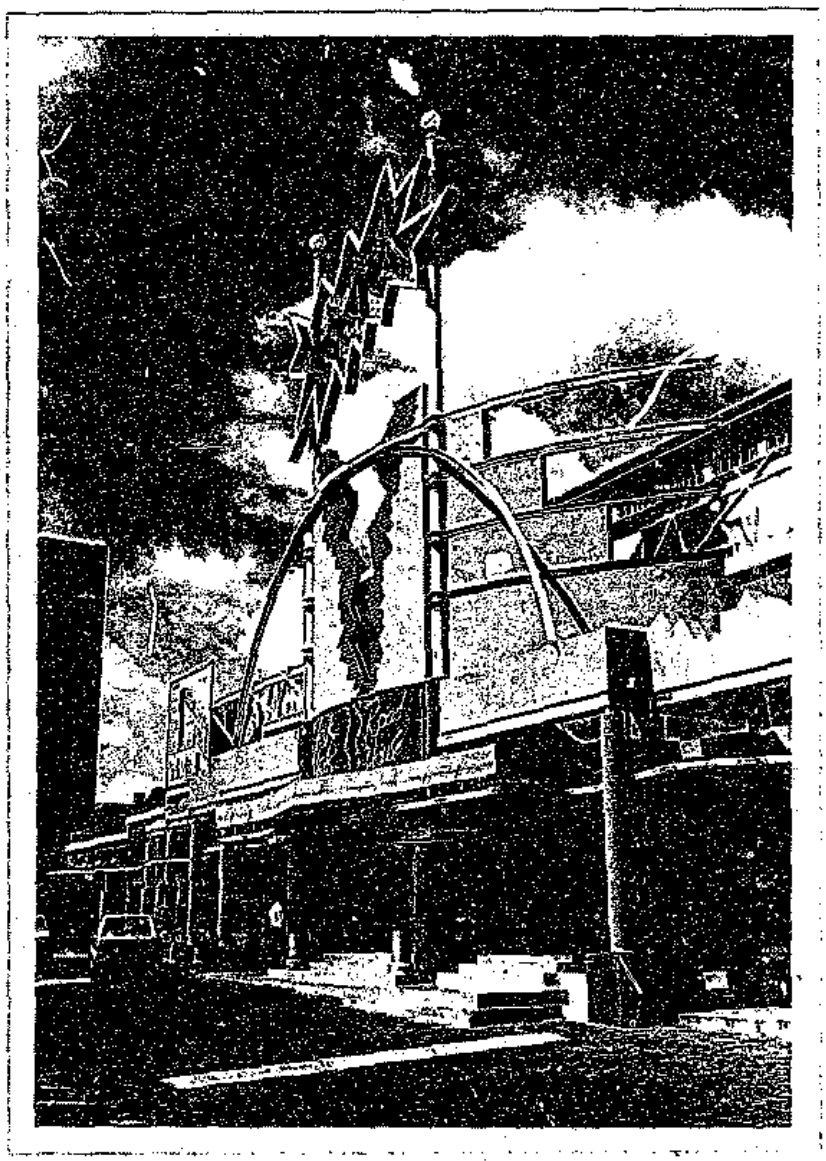

Figure 10: FRAME & LAMPROPOULOS ASSOCIATES. The Crack Restaurant, 1986, Pretoria.

The demise of the avant-garde came about because it no longer had any radical function to perform. Avant-garde architecture could not affront bourgeois values any longer: in fact, it became the accepted style f corporate headquarter buildings. Searle feels that it was assimilated by the same culture that it tried to criticize.[177] The International Style of Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, that was once felt to be scandalous and shocking, is thought of as stifling, dead and canonical by the generation that has started studying architecture since the nineteen eighties. As a result of the increasing popularity of architecture amongst the general public and the proliferation of popular and academic teaching of architectural history, the avant-garde has become accepted and conventional. Because it has become familiar, avant-garde architecture is no longer considered to be ugly. Jencks exemplifies a critic who thinks that the reason for the emergence of the transavantgarde is the acceptance of avant-garde art by the institutions, such as the museums and the market place. The avant-garde has made peace with mass culture.

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[177] SEARLE, A. "Past Presence," p. 42.

Craig Owens considers an interesting paradox in the status of the postmodernism vis-à-vis modernism.[178] If a contemporary architect works within the modernist idiom, he or she is conventional. If he or she repudiates the modernist norm, he or she confirms the avant-garde challenge of authority. But Owens does not develop his argument in terms of the avant-garde and the transavantgarde. The transavantgarde attitude is exactly the refusal to defy the norm: the transavantgarde architect is conventional, even reactionary in his or her conservatism.

According to Charles Jencks, the significance of transavantgarde architecture is that it acknowledges the fact that it is bourgeois.[179] It recognizes class-based taste as valid: the result of this is an eclectic style, based on the philosophy of pluralism. Jameson sees the pastiche, free play of styles and historicist allusions of the transavantgarde in much the same context,[180] namely as the schizophrenic celebration of commodity fetishism and as

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[178] OWENS, C. "Honor, Power and the Love of Woman." In R. Hertz. Theories of Contemporary Art, p. 135.

[179] JENCKS, C. "The Post-Avant-Garde." In A. C. Papadakis , ed. The Post-Avant-Garde: Painting in the Eighties. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1987, p. 17.

[180] JAMESON, F. "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology." In J. Ockman. Architecture - Criticism - Ideology. Princeton, New Yersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985, p. 75.

the moment in which the logic of media capitalism penetrates the logic of advanced cultural production itself, and transforms the latter to the point where the distinctions between high and mass culture lose their significance.

> "Therefore whatever avant-garde or architectural aesthetic utopias thought they were intent on achieving, in the real world of capital and in their effective practice, those ends are dialectically reversed, and serve essentially to reinforce the technocratic total control of the new system of the bureaucratic society of planned consumption."[181]

Avant-garde architects wanted to change the world in the image of art and architecture, according to J. M. Kirsten.[182] They believed that the reconciliation of culture and material life was only possible when the latter has been transformed by architecture. Transavantgarde architects, on the other hand, have reconciled the aesthetical dimension with the political, social and economical status quo. The architects of the nineteen eighties adopt an attitude of reaction, affirmation and eclecticism, reconciling themselves with the world of consumption. This commercial attitude of transavantgarde architects was severely

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[181]JAMESON, F. "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," p. 78.

[182]KIRSTEN, J. M. "Wat is Postmodernisme? 'n Kultuurfilosofiese perspektief op die anti-estetika." South African Journal of Cultural and Art History. April 1989, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 139.

criticized, for example by Donald Judd.[183] He blamed contemporary architects for being ambitious and ruthless, like their businessman clients.

It seems as if transavantgarde architecture is a way of building that reflects the superficiality and commercialism of our time. It is only possible because of the suppression of the avant-garde's social awareness, which, if true, signals a warning for our current and future collective values.

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183 JUDD, DONALD. "A long discussion not about Master-Pieces but why there are so few of them." Two part article. Art in America, vol. 72, September and October 1984.

5.6. Postmodernism of Reaction or of Resistance

A distinction is often made[184] between a postmodernism of reaction or one of resistance. Hal Foster defines postmodernism of reaction as a repudiation of modernism, and a celebration of the status quo.[185] He calls the practitioners of reactionary postmodernism the "neo-conservatives" and criticizes them for confusing cause and effect by blaming the ills of social modernization on the practices of cultural modernism. This reactionary postmodernism is typical of some aspects of the postmodernism discussed in chapter 5.4, which criticized the cities created by modernist architecture.[186] As Foster points out, to blame the social ills of modern cities on the reductivism of modernist architecture, would be a misconception, namely to believe that architecture can

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[184]For example:
FOSTER, HAL. "Postmodernism: A Preface." In H. Foster, ed. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. xii.
FRAMPTON, KENNETH. "Some Reflections on Postmodernism and Architecture." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism, p. 26 - 29.
KIRSTEN, J. M. "Wat is Postmodernisme?" p. 139 - 142.
PRINSLOO, J. DR. "Post-Modernism: the Architecture of Reaction and Resistance." ADA, no. 3, 1987, p. 22 - 23.

[185]FOSTER, HAL. "Postmodernism: A Preface," p. xii.

[186]See page 68 to 69.

change or influence social conditions. Modernist culture's universalistic morale and individualistic self-expression is condemned by reactionary critics in the same breath as condoning the economical and political status quo. The solution they propose is equally misconstrued, namely to conceive of postmodern architecture in therapeutic, cosmetic terms by returning to the "truths" of tradition: to art, the family and tradition.[187] Stylistically this is represented by the appropriation and simulation of older styles.

The authors writing about a postmodernism of reaction are vague as to whom they group within this category. Kirsten implies some critics falling within this group: according to her, Hassan, Huyssen, Jameson and Foster see postmodernism as a radical break with the cultural past.[188] They regard postmodernism as a general cultural transformation which signifies a crisis in modernism. A typical example of the reactionary attitude in criticism is the article by Professor D. Holm of the University of Pretoria, entitled "Nuwe gebou van die Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing in Pretoria as tydverskysel."[189] He blames the modernist movement for

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[187]FOSTER, HAL. "Postmodernism: A Preface," p. xii.

[188]KIRSTEN, J. M. "Wat is Postmodernisme?", p. 140.

[189]HOLM, D. "Nuwe gebou van die Raad vir
(Footnote Continued)

disregarding the environment and history and the designer for being self-centered, with a prima-dona attitude. Postmodernism is an attempt to solve these and other problems, according to Holm, by being more aware of its historical and environmental context.

As far as buildings go, the architecture of the transavantgarde seems to fit within the category of reactionary postmodernism, because of its allegiance with the current economic system.[190] Frampton describes this kind of architecture as "wholesale commercial developments, featuring cannibalized skin-deep masks drawn over the normative skeleton of optimized production".[191] The tendency In reactionary postmodernism is to reduce architecture to surface images that are oriented towards marketability and towards the optimization of the production and construction of buildings. The Headquarters Offices for Gold Fields of South Africa (figure 11) is a building wi[illegible] thin skin of precast concrete panels seemingly float[illegible] layer of black granite cladding. The concrete pane[illegible] visibly thin (figure 12), adding to the sparse quality of the building.

(Footnote Continued)
Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing in Pretoria as tydverskysel." South African Journal of Cultural and Art History, vol. 2, no. 3, July 1988, p. 185 - 190.

[190]See page 94 to 95.

[191]FRAMPTON, KENNETH. "Some Reflections on Postmodernism and Architecture," p. 26.



Figure 11: LOUIS KAROL ARCHITECTS. Headquarter Offices for Gold Fields of South Africa, Johannesburg, 1987.



Figure 12: LOUIS KAROL ARCHITECTS. Headquarter Offices for Gold Fields of South Africa, Johannesburg, 1987. Detail of cladding.

In the citation for its award of merit it is stated that "this building was designed within the parameters of the

hardnosed commercial world".[192] Taking into account the above mentioned considerations, it seems that this building is an example of a postmodern building of reaction.

Postmodernism of resistance could be seen as a critical attitude both to the official culture of modernism, and to the "false normality" of the postmodernism of reaction.[193] As such it could be seen as similar to the avant-garde aspect of postmodernism.[194] This attitude sees the project of modernism as being incomplete, and wishes to continue changing architecture and its social content. The approach of an author like David Dewar is in marked contrast with that of Holm discussed above. In his three part article "Urban Poverty and City Development"[195] he discusses very real South African architectural problems like poverty and inequality in political and social opportunities. He evaluates contemporary urban designs in terms of factors like ease of access to shelter and essential utility services and access to work opportunities, commercial

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[192]COOKE, J. ed. "1987 Awards of Merit." Architecture SA, November / December 1987, p. 22.

[193]FOSTER, HAL. "Postmodernism: A Preface," p. xii.

[194]See pages 71 to 74.

[195]DEWAR, DAVID. "Urban Poverty and City Development." Three Part Article. Architecture SA, Part 1: March / April 1984, p. 27 - 29; Part 2: May / June 1984, p. 48 - 51; Part 3: July / August 1984, p. 49 - 52.

opportunities, education and transport. The bleak picture that he paints, namely of the conditions of the urban poor being imposed on them by an authoritarian government, differs drastically from that of Holm who enjoys architectural forms as "professional inside jokes".[196]

The authors advocating a postmodernism of resistance joins the reactionary postmodernist critics' condemnation of the reductive formalism of modernist architecture. But rather than returning to historical forms, it advocates the abandonment of formal concerns in favour of renewed social engagement. Kirsten criticizes the concept of a postmodernism of resistance because she could not find concrete examples to validate it.[197] An example of this strategy, where architecture becomes involved in community housing, has been discussed on pages 72 to 73: it seems that there are no shortage of architectural examples of this approach. Kirsten further questions the supposed break of a postmodernism of resistance with the modernist tradition.[198] But even if the postmodern philosophical discourse, which Kirsten is primarily interested in, is embedded so deeply in

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[196]HOLM, D. "Nuwe gebou van die Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing in Pretoria as tydverskyse1," p. 190.

[197]KIRSTEN, J. M. "Wat is Postmodernisme?" p. 141.

[198]Ibid.

the modernist tradition that the supposed break with modernism does not make sense to her, the same could not be said about architecture. There is a clear break between the political and social awareness of the postmodernism of resistance, and the formalism of modernist architecture. However, the avant-garde project of modernism, namely its attempt to reconcile architecture and the needs of society, does continue in the postmodernism of resistance that has been sketched above.

6. MEANING IN ARCHITECTURE

6.1. Introduction

As has already been discussed in chapter 5.4, the search for meaning is a central feature of postmodern architecture. This is especially true for postmodernism, as opposed to the transavantgarde, which has a more commercial and ruthless attitude.

What is under discussion in this chapter, is a shift from the more formalist art and architectural criticism of modernism to the contextualist interpretation typical of postmodern criticism. Whereas an art critic such as John Kemp (born 1920) believed that one should judge the work of art independently from what the artist has intended, other critics such as Lucien Goldmann (born 1913) advocated that the work of art should be seen in the context in which it has been made.[199] Goldmann wrote about a "world vision" which acted as an ideological screen through which the influence of the economy and class status is filtered to the artist. What is at stake here, is a concern with the meaning

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[199] RADER, M. A Modern Book of Esthetics. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973, p. 404.

or content of the artwork.[200] The work of art, or a building for that matter, should not only be judged in terms of formal criteria such as line, shape, texture and proportion, but also in terms of the degree in which the complexity of the contemporary social relationships are reflected in the work of the artist or the architect. According to Goldmann, the value of architecture is measured according to the extent to which it manages to reflect a coherent and integrated view of the values of society. This view corresponds to that of a postmodern critic such as Jameson's.[201]

A contextualist critical approach like that of Goldmann can give a totally new perspective of architectural history compared to that of the conventional formalist approach of Banham for example. The latter describes the Weissenhof Exhibition in Stuttgart, 1927, as the stirring moment when the International Movement stood united in form and intentions before the world.[202] Jameson, on the other hand, sees the exhibition as an absolute failure as an urbanistic

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[200] RADER, M. A Modern Book of Esthetics, p. 405.

[201] For example Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review, no. 146, July - August 1984, p. 83.

[202] BANHAM, R. Age of the Masters: A Personal View of Modern Architecture. London: The Architectural Press, 1978, p. 35.

project of workers' housing.[203] This project caused financial speculation in the area, with a resultant rise in land and property values, so that the workers, for whom the housing was designed, could no longer afford to live there. In Banham's interpretation of architectural history factors like these were largely extrinsic and accidental.

6.2. Marxist Criticism

From the postmodern critical viewpoint, the modernist architect saw architecture as a private, individualized activity.[204] The most significant content of modernist architecture is the expression of the liberation of the architect from traditional restrictions such as social and cult function.[205] "Marxist" art critics[206] attacks modernist architecture as being art-for-art's-sake: for them the idea of an architecture that is functionally pure, aesthetical and individual, is spiritually corrupt and sterile. These

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[203] JAMESON, F. "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology." In J. Ockman. Architecture - Criticism - Ideology. Princeton, New Yersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985, p. 64.

[204] GABLIK, S. "Art on the Capitalist Faultline." Art in America, March 1980, p. 9.

[205] For a discussion of the process through which architecture became autonomous from religious and social concerns, see chapter 5.2, p. 53 - 55.

[206] As called by Suzi Gablik in op. cit., p. 9-15.

critics think that true architecture should investigate the social and political reality behind appearances and that architecture *cannot* be autonomous as modernist critics wished it to be. According to Marxist architectural criticism, architects should illuminate social relationships and help the general public to *observe social realities* in order to change them. The Marxist viewpoint is that architecture should be used as a social weapon: it is not a separate reality, as modernist criticism would often have it,[207] but should be integrated with the world of meaning.[208] These concerns are not unique to postmodern theory, but have already surfaced during the nineteen twenties: *Hannes Meyer*, labeled a Marxist architect by Jencks, said in 1938

> Remember: architecture is a weapon which at all times has been wielded by the ruling class of human society.[209]

What is unique to the postmodern situation, is the changing social condition influenced by new modes of processing information, as explained in chapter two. Marcuse, for example, perceives the rôle of art to be the imaginary

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[207] For a description of the *modernist* critics' belief in the detachment of aesthetical concerns from everyday life, see page 57, chapter 5.2.

[208] GABLIK, S. Has Modernism Failed? London: Thames and Hudson, 1984, p. 25.

[209] JENCKS, CHARLES. Modern Movements in Architecture. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 88.

construction of a new reality, in opposition to the "advanced barbarism and brutality" of today's world.[210]

Postmodernism's attempt to open up architecture to a larger audience, can be seen as an attempt to reunite the spheres of architecture and society. Possibilities that exist for architects to become more involved socially include advocacy planning, community design, concern with environmental protection and responding to contextual issues such as maintaining the local character of neighbourhoods.[211] Attempts at social and contextual involvement in architecture is common in South Africa. The Building Research Institute's involvement in community housing in South Africa has been discussed in chapter 5.4, pages 72 and 73. Groups within the architectural profession, for example Architects Against Apartheid, have tried to mobilize architectural opinion against the political situation in South Africa.[212] The interest in architectural conservation is manifested in projects like the failed

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[210]MARCUSE, HERBERT. "Art in the One-Dimensional Society." In L. Baxendal, ed. Radical Perspectives in the Arts. Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1972, p. 57.

[211]According to Beyhan Karahan. "Some Observations on Writing and Practice." In J. Ockman. Architecture - Criticism - Ideology, p. 92.

[212]For part of the debate surrounding this issue, see H. J. Schirmacher. Letter to Architecture SA. Architecture SA. November / December 1986, p. 14 and 15.

attempt to save the Colosseum Theatre in Johannesburg from demolition, and the successful conservation of the West Facade of Church Square in Pretoria. The response to contextual issues, for instance the use of regional characteristics in order to maintain the local characters of neighbourhoods, is another example of what architects can do to become socially engaged. Stephanie Mills, for instance, has reacted to the changes in Parktown which have irreparably damaged the sense of place that the suburb once had.[213] South African architectural criticism and practice seem to be part of the world-wide sympathy for the postmodern concerns noted above.

Jo Noero's Alexandra Township Community Housing project is typical of architects' renewed search for relevance in their architecture. Here the architect was concerned with issues such as the quality of life, archetypal activities and spaces and visual language.[214] Built-in seating is provided along the perimeters of the courtyards formed by the houses, and the entrances to the houses are emphasized by architectural elaborations around the door (figure 13). The end users were involved in the decision making

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[213]MILLS, STEPHANIE. "We have withdrawn into our fortresses." Architecture SA, January / February 1986, p. 14 - 17.

[214]NOERO, JO. "Alexandra Township Community Housing." Architecture SA, July / August 1988, p. 11 - 13.

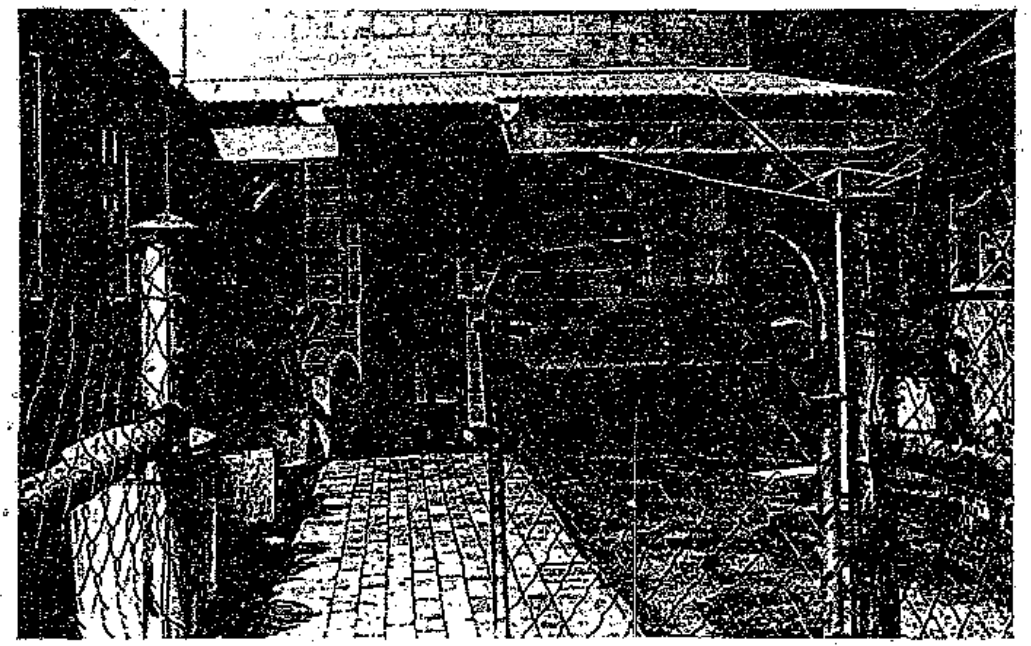

Figure 13: Jo Noero Architect. Alexandra Township Community Housing, Alexandra, 1988.

process[215] and the inhabitants of the community built the project themselves in order to upgrade local skills and to keep their capital within the community. The housing was designed in such a way that informal economic activities would be encouraged, for example by providing areas for shops, crèche, community centre and workshops in future. Architecture like this neither searches for the gratification of the architect as individual, nor for new architectural forms, but to be of assistance to the

[215] NOERO, JO. "Alexandra Township Community Housing," p. 11.

community at large.[216] In the article he published on this project, Noero also addresses the question of making the public aware of the political problems reigning in the South African townships, to help them observe social realities in order to change them. However, as Jameson points out,[217] architecture can never be of immediate political benefit. Architects, like other individuals, can be political, but not their architecture. The architectural critic, however, has the responsibility to be socially and historically vigilant.

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[216] This point can be debated. Noero's intentions, for example, are not entirely clear. During a lecture at Northwards, Johannesburg, where he presented this project, he acknowleded that he did receive remuneration for his work on it. Furthermore, the publicity he receives from this type of work has meant a lot to his architectural practice and academic standing.

[217] JAMESON, F. "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," p. 55.

6.3: The End of Art

The end of art has been announced at regular intervals for the past two decades, by Heidegger, Adorno and Hegel, for example.[218] To quote Heidegger:

> At the historical moment when aesthetics achieves its greatest possible height, breadth, and rigor of form, great art comes to an end. The achievement of aesthetics derives its greatness from the fact that it recognizes and gives utterance to the end of great art as such.[219]

This notion of the 'end of art' is related to the Greenbergian concept of the autonomy of art, as discussed in chapter 5.2, page 57, and as will be explained below. As Newman says,

> Adorno extrapolates from Hegel the thought that the absolute aspect of art, its non-identity with the dimension of life and death as content, "might precisely be art's mortality"; so that, from Adorno's modernist point of view, "The revolt of art which programmatically defined itself in terms of a new stance towards the objective, historical world has become a revolt against art" such that "Aesthetics today is powerless to avert its becoming a necrologue of art."[220]

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[218] NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 32.

[219] HEIDEGGER, M. "The Will to Power as Art." In Nietsche, Vol. 1. London: RKP, 1981, p. 84. Quoted from Ibid., p. 32.

[220] Ibid., p. 32. Quotations from T. W. Adorno. (Footnote Continued)

From these two quotations it emerges that the perceived "end of art" is a modernist critical response related to the way in which modernist art had developed, resulting in minimalism with its severely reduced forms, for example. Adorno believes that it is art's refusal to act socially and its insistence on its autonomous status that leads to its reaching a dead end. The development of modernist art had reached a cul-de-sac: it could not be reduced any further formally, and the public saw art as of no consequence. Postmodernism can be seen as an attempt to break this deadlock, by reintroducing content and social meaning back into art and architecture.

Lyotard divides the history of the philosophy of art into three stages.[221] The first, up to the end of the seventeenth century, which he calls the classical approach, believed that art and architecture could be produced according to rules. The proportion systems of Renaissance architects like Alberti can be used as an example.

From the end of the 17th century until now, a new approach, called aesthetics, was developed by critics such

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(Footnote Continued)
Aesthetic Theory. London: RKP, 1984 (first published in German in 1970), p. 5.

[221]LACOUE-LABARTHE, P. "On the Sublime." In L. Appignanesi. *ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism*, p. 9.

as Baumgarten, Burke and Kant. Their main preoccupation was with the question of the sublime, which made a conception of artworks without rules necessary. They dealt with art and architecture in terms of criteria such as taste and genius. Kant's formulation of the aesthetic as the fundamentally subjective realm of the judgement of taste, indicated the freedom of the individual artist, architect or critic to be autonomous from social concerns. In terms of his belief in the autonomy of the individual artist Greenberg could be named as an art critic that followed this approach. As Hauser notes, this modernist approach fell into disrepute, mainly because the public felt alienated by the art and architecture that they could not understand.[222] The geometrically pure form of the Ponte City Apartments (figure 4) is an example of architecture that has developed to be so abstract that the 'end of architecture' was pronounced and the demand arose, as discussed in the previous section, that architecture should engage in a social function.

Today, in Lyotard's third period and after the 'end of art', criteria such as genius and taste have become irrelevant. It can, for instance, be inappropriate to judge a project such as Noero's Alexandra Township Community Housing, as discussed above, in terms of beauty, taste or

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[222]HAUSER, A. The Sociology of Art. Trans. K. J. Northcott. London: Rautledge and Kegal Paul, 1982, p. 667.

the architect's genius, because the intentions of the project were of a functional nature. The question of art has not ended, but aesthetic theory, as conceived of by Kant, has to some extent terminated. Thus 'the end of art' does not mean that art is going to cease to exist: according to Hauser[223] the notion of 'the end of art' indicates the end of an epoch in art. Art and architecture shall continue, but in a changed form and with different aesthetic functions than it had in modernism.

[223] HAUSER, A. The Sociology of Art, p. 661-674.

6.4. Death of the Author

The notion of the death of the author has originated with the post-structuralists,[224] and is related to the renewed concern with the content and social aspects of architecture, as well as with the interest in the appropriation of older styles that has marked postmodernism. The term was adopted from Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author".[225] Other sources of the concept are the texts of Lacan, Althuser, Foucault and Derrida.[226]

Barthes believes that the author is a modern figure, created by modern society. In traditional societies, the responsibility for narrations was never that of the individual, but of a mediator, for example the shaman. His performance was not appreciated for its 'genius', but for

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[224]The post-structuralists are French philosophers, including Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Lacan, Althuser and Lyotard, who have forced questions of moral and political interest back onto the agenda, that had been evaded in structuralist philosophy. They will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

[225]BARTHES, ROLAND. "The Death of the Author." In Image-Music-Text. Trans. Stephan Heath. New York: The Noonday Press, 1977, p. 142-148.

[226]NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism, p. 39.

its cultic function.[227] In modern societies, however, much importance is attached to the person of the author: literary criticism, for example, is centered around the author and his or her life, taste and passions. The explanation for the work is sought in the person who has produced it. As an example in architecture, much importance has been attached to the fact that Frank Lloyd Wright had played with Froebel blocks in his youth, for the development of his architecture in later life.[228] But Barthes believes that the view of art history as the history of the artist and the influences on him or her has been an obstacle to the proper understanding and analysis of art. The prestige attached to the individual artist as creator is a result of modern positivism, the primacy of which is waning at present, as was shown in chapter three.

Writers who have attempted to loosen the "sway of the Author", according to Barthes, were Mallarmé, Proust and the Surrealists' experiments with automatic writing.[229] Barthes

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[227]BARTHES, ROLAND. "The Death of the Author," p. 142.

[228]JENCKS, C. Modern Movements in Architecture. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 125.

[229]The Surrealist text The Magnetic Fields (1922) by André Breton and Philippe Soupault is discussed in P. Waldberg. Surrealism. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, p. 14. It was written "at the dictation of the unconscious" and it was impossible to distinguish which author wrote what. They were indifferent to the individual work of prose, signed by an individual author.

sees the text as not being the signification of a single meaning, which the author has intended, but as

> a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn form the innumerable centres of culture ... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.[230]

Thus Barthes touches on two issues, which are important for a study of postmodernism. The one is the diminishing importance of the author, and the other is the refusal of originality, or appropriation and simulation, to which chapter seven will be dedicated. The author becomes a 'scriptor', according to Barthes, who does not express passions, humours, feelings, or impressions, but merely imitates the art of the past. A typical example of this attitude is the Kippies Bar at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg (figure 14) by Meyer Pienaar and Partners Inc. This building is an exact replica of the old ablution block behind the Market Theatre (figure 15). Following Barthes' critical model, it can be said that by so dramatically refusing authorship of the building, the architects confirm Barthes' thesis that the individual architect is becoming less important, and that the building develops as a tissue of quotations drawn from the past. This abstract structure of appropriations and refusal of authorship become the

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[230] BARTHES, R. "The Death of the Author," p. 145.

content of this architecture, with no meaning underneath it. Barthes means that the new rôle of criticism is to follow and disentangle this structure, but that there is no meaning other than this self-referential one to architecture to decipher.

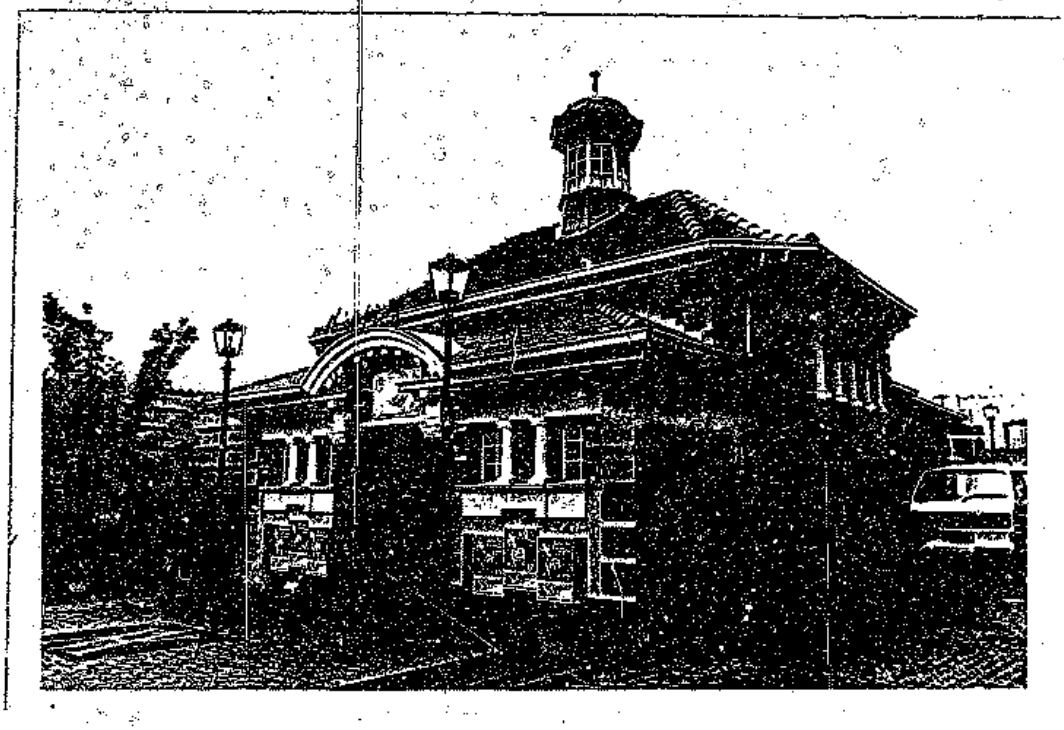

Figure 14: MEYER PIENAAR AND PARTNERS INC. Kippies Bar at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, 1987.

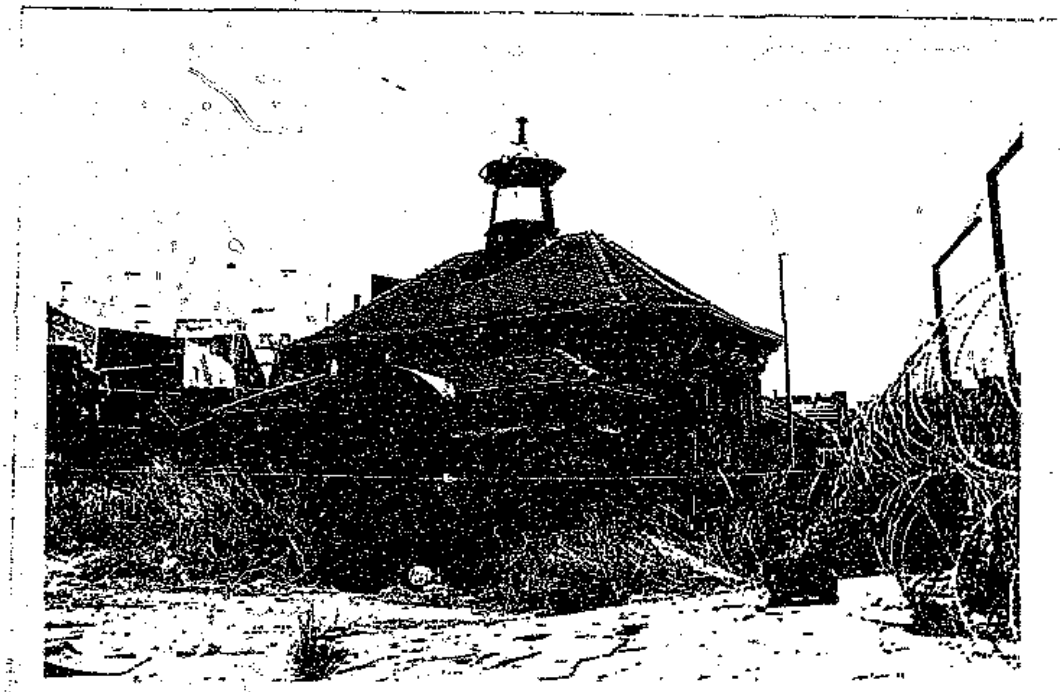

Figure 15: Old ablution block at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg.

Of course the situation is much more complicated than made out above. The architects remain important: the rôle of the architect may be growing into something approaching the status of a pop-star. The building is also not simply a quotation of the old ablution block, but can be seen as an attempt at the conservation of the old building. The question remains, however, why nothing is being done to restore the old building, which is still dilapidated and unutilized (figure 15).

Barthes advocates that the modernist emphasis on the author was unfounded, and that the real value of a work lies in the beholder:

> A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relationships of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focussed and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author ... A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination ... The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the Author.[231]

An architectural work should be seen as a dialogue between the architect and the observer. Because the viewer does not know exactly what the intentions of the architect were, his or her interpretation will be provisional and specific to his or her background and personal circumstances. Wolff shows how the meaning that the artist has intended will not always be the same as that which is perceived by the onlooker.[232] Architecture is related in a systematic way to the social and economic structures in which an architect operates. The ideas, beliefs, attitudes and values expressed in buildings are always ideological. The perspective of the individual architect is not only biographically constructed, but is also his or her personal mediation of the group consciousness. Even if ideology is not directly reflected in architecture, the building is always mediated by an

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[231]BARTHES, R. "The Death of the Author," p. 148.

[232]WOLFF, JANET. The Social Production of Art. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981, p. 118.

aesthetic code consisting of styles and conventions that determines how buildings in that region might look. Even if he or she is not conscious of it, the architect is restrained by the existing rules of form and representation.

From the viewpoint of the observer, it is impossible to determine a fixed meaning for a building. Wolff calls texts, which can include architecture, polysemic, which means that it provides the opportunity for multiple readings by different viewers.[233] Samuel Pauw's intention with the HSRC Building in Pretoria was that it should express a humane corporeity, for example by having a definite front and back, crown and base, to respond to the way in which people perceive buildings.[234] The classicism of the building is an attempt at the representation of this idea. However, it is likely that the observer will feel dominated by this building, with its heavy, imposing architecture, instead of feeling reassured by the human touches that the architect has intended. Not only has the classical language used by the architect authoritarian connotations, but the building is situated opposite the police headquarters building in Pretoria, which is itself the seat of the South African government. As can be seen in figure 16, the building often

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[233]WOLFF, J. The Social Production of Art, p. 123.

[234]PAUW, SAMUEL. "Mensgerigtheid in die RGN-Gebou." Architecture SA, November / December 1988, p. 24 - 28.

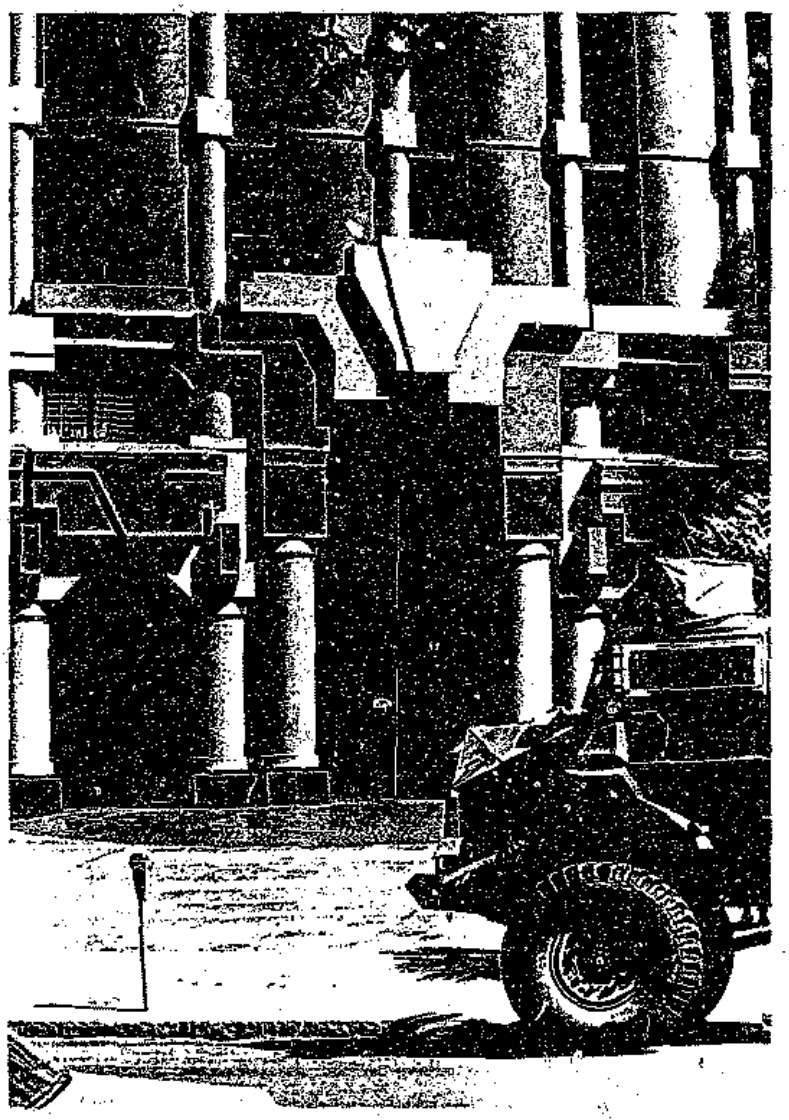

Figure 16: SAMUEL PAUW ARCHITECTS. HSRC Building, Pretoria, 1988.

acts as backdrop for armoured military vehicles parked alongside the road. The architect was powerless to do anything about the location of the building, but as Wolff notes, cultural products contain and express meanings beyond those intended by the author.[235] When using existing architectural codes and conventions, the architect is unconsciously reproducing aspects of ideology encoded in these. A second reason why cultural products do not reflect the intention of the author, according to Wolff,[236] is the complicated way in which individuals are situated in society. Whether he wants it or not, Pauw is working within an oppressive society that practices apartheid, and his buildings will be understood in that context. Wolff points out that some Marxist theorists believe that architects are more or less free to engage in cultural politics.[237] But, as slaves of history, they may merely be acting out their predetermined rôles.

The nature of architectural production is collective, and it is a misrepresentation that the 'architect' alone should be credited for a building, as Wolff observes.[238] The

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[235] WOLFF, JANET. The Social Production of Art, p. 124.

[236] Ibid., p. 127.

[237] Ibid., p. 131.

[238] Ibid., p. 118.

architect and his or her building are completely dependent on the existence of the structures and institutions of architectural practice, including external innovators of style, his or her teachers, critics, his or her assistants, professional consultants, contractors, local authorities and patrons. Architecture is a social act: this is especially apparent in community housing projects, such as the one by the National Building Research Institute in Graaf-Reinet.[239] The architects' contribution is invisible in a project like this, when their rôle was purely to facilitate upgrading by the installation of services like water and drainage to the existing houses, which would gradually be improved by the inhabitants' own initiative. What happens here is what Barthes advised, that the architect becomes less prominent to the advantage of the end users. It is seldom that the architect will not be recognized at all: an architect like Jo Noero, who's Alexandra Township Communil Housing has been discussed above, has such a high p.. le in the architectural world that his projects seldom go unnoticed. But as Wolff notes, Barthes is maybe too radical in his views: although the rôle of the author may have been overemphasized in the past, it still has some relevance in the discussion and understanding of architecture.[240]

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[239] As discussed in chapter 5.4, pages 72 and 73.

[240] WOLFF, JANET. The Social Production of Art, p. 123.

Foucault, in The Order of Things[241], says that the humanist subject 'man' is the product of the discourses of a particular historical moment, and if these discourses were to disappear, "that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[242] As part of his questioning of the individual subject, he believes that the text is more important than the author himself. He illustrates the importance that has traditionally been accorded to the author, by discussing the impact it would have if it were to be discovered that the sonnets that are attributed to Shakespeare were not in fact written by him.[243] This would have greater significance than if it were to be disclosed that Shakespeare was not born in the house now visited by tourists. Out of this example it emerges that the important relationship has been between the author and the text. But also only to particular 'artistic' texts: his letters and shopping lists are regarded as of less importance than his sonnets. The peculiarity that we accord to the author's name only applies to certain spheres of our culture, for example in what we understand to be art and architecture. The author or architect is less important in

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[241] FOUCAULT, MICHEL. The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences. (1966) New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

[242] Ibid., p. 387.

[243] Discussed in J. Wolff, The Social Production of Art, p. 121 - 123.

speculative housing and squatter housing than in large scale public buildings, for example. The decision of which work would be considered as important in an architect's career, is determined by historical and cultural factors, which change over time. With the current growing interest in low cost housing and socially oriented architecture, it is to be expected that the architectural history of South Africa would be seen in a different light. Indeed, in the past only the more monumental part of an architect like Sir Herbert Baker's work was discussed. This situation seems to be changing: now Radford, for example, found it worth the while to do research into Baker's mining houses, which were not considered to be of enough importance for historical consideration before.[244]

Wolff further comments on the fact that the author's name often unites a variety of texts which may reflect a great difference of style and approach over time. Revel Fox's career reflects such a ange, supposedly determined by fashion, from the modernist BP Centre of 1975 in Cape Town[245] to the postmodern classicist First National Bank

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[244] RADFORD, D. "Baker and the mining houses - an initial investigation into this aspect of his architecture." South African Journal of Cultural and Art History, vol. 3, no. 3, July 1989, p. 257 - 267.

[245] MOMBERG, C. ed. "Revel Fox - the Architect and his Work." Architecture SA, no. 7, Summer 1979, p. 26.

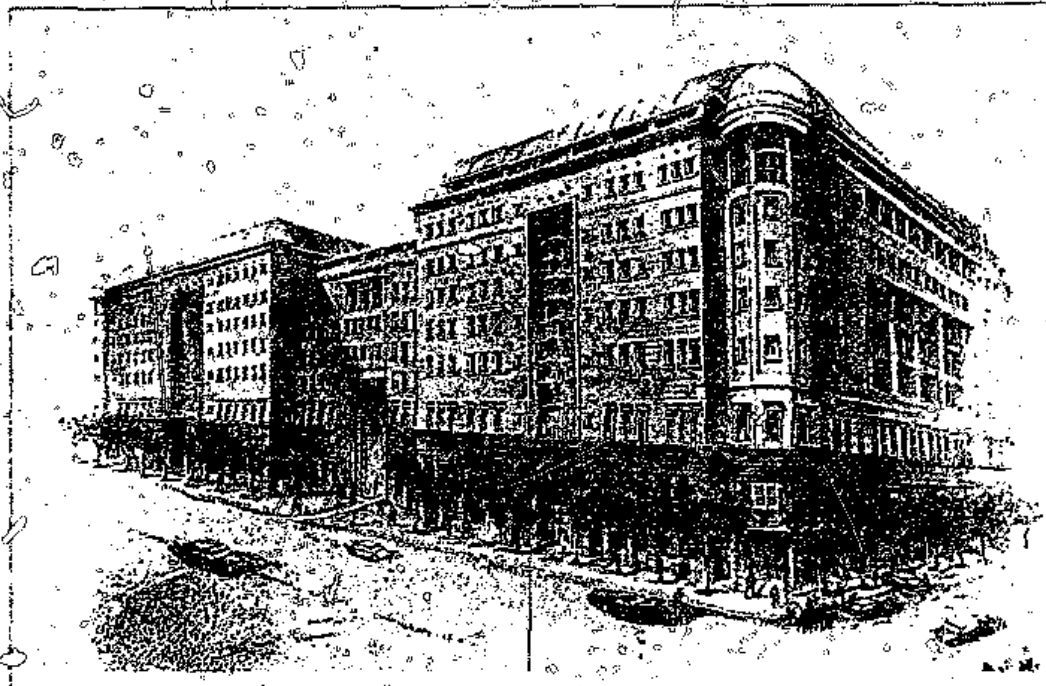

Figure 17: REVEL FOX AND PARTNERS; GALLAGHER ASPOAS POPLAK SENIOR; MEIER PIENAAR SMITH MOREN INC; RHODES-HARRISON FEE FOLD CHALLIS ROY, First National Bank City, Johannesburg, construction started 1989. Perspective photographed from notice board on site.

City (figure 17) currently being constructed in Johannesburg. According to Wolff's theory, breaking the unifying bond which the importance attached to the architect as author imposes on his or her production facilitates the exposure of the crucial differences between his or her buildings.[246] Fox's style has changed in response to changes in the social and economical structures in his environment, which have influenced the styles and conventions expressed

[246] WOLFF, J. The Social Production of Art, p. 122.

in his architecture. The architect is so constrained by the existing rules of form and representation, that his or her identity as author is sacrificed in the process of designing. His or her assistants are catalysts in this proces[illegible] very few architectural practices manage to produce buildings of a consistent nature because of the changes in their design staff. As Wolff concludes:

> What is under attack is a *concept of* 'author' as a determinate and fixed source of artistic works and their meanings.[247]

Because the *architect* is not free as a creative person, it is a *mistake* to see him or her as an autonomous, monolithic entity. Unfortunately, for too much attention is still given to the architect who acts as principal in the office, and the contribution of his or her staff and consultants are still often ignored. This tendency is perpetuated by architects who still want the status of designer for themselves, often for reasons linked to financial factors or personal ego.

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247 WOLFF, J. The Social Production of Art, p. 123.

6.5. Semiology

As a reaction to the formalism of modernist architecture, postmodernism has been marked by a search for meaning or content, rather than seeking ideological justification in programme, function or structure. Architects were not alone in this quest for meaning: by the nineteen sixties the French sociological movement called structuralism was studying the theory of signs, or semiology.

Semiology originated in the studies of Ferdinand de Saussure of 1959.[248] His theoretical work on the nature of language lies behind all modern structuralism in France. It is based on the study of the nature of the basic unit of language, the linguistic sign. He identified the two components of the sign as the signifier and the signified. In language the sound of the spoken word would be a signifier and the conception or mental component the signified.

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[248]BROADBENT, G., R. BUNT AND CHARLES JENCKS. Signs, Symbols and Architecture. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980, p. 1.

Architects found the systematic evaluation of architecture as a system of signs useful to validate meaning as a design objective. In 1969 Charles Jencks and George Baird edited the book Meaning in Architecture.[249] Their intentions were to encourage the study of architecture as a legitimate subject for semiotic studies and to encourage the production of an architecture which carries relevant meaning. In architecture the signifier would be the building form by which the sign is made physically manifest. The signified is the concept, idea or thought that the signifier or building stands for. The architectural sign is however arbitrary in two ways.[250] Firstly the signifier is arbitrary because there is no natural, but only a conventional meaning for architectural elements. Different building forms can mean 'entrance', for example. The classical pedimented entrance has been superseded by simple glass doors in many contemporary buildings, which have come to signify "entrance" for many urban dwellers. As soon as a building form becomes conventional, it is generally understood by the public. The signified is also arbitrary, because concepts differ from one culture to another. For a Western person, a hole in a wall will signify a window. For the Navajo

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[249] JENCKS, CHARLES and George Baird, eds. Meaning in Architecture. London: Barrie & Rockliffe, 1969.

[250] STURROCK, J. Structuralism and Since. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 9.

Indian, however, such a hole represents a visual barrier, and he would rather walk outside to view the landscape without the intervening barrier of the opening.[251] Even within a monolithic culture, the same building form can mean different things to different people. One person may feel attracted to pitched corrugated sheet metal roofs, because of the associations they have with homeliness and security, while another person may be averted by the connotations such roofs have for him of cheapness and poverty. The units of the signifier and the signified are not meaningful in themselves as essences, but only when seen in a relationship of mutually conditioned elements. The sign system is thus fundamentally arbitrary.

Architects such as Michael Graves and Charles Jencks often used semiological terms to explain buildings because of their association with semiology, for example by referring to the 'semantic' or 'syntactic' dimensions of architecture.[252] Mary McLeod criticizes the semiological approach for being too obscure and contrived. The translation of linguistic principles into the language of

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[251] PAPANEK, VICTOR. "Vernacular Architecture: What to Learn." Architecture SA, July / August 1989, p. 17.

[252] McLEOD, MARY. "Architecture" in Stanley Trachenberg, ed. The Postmodern Moment: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovation in the Arts. London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 31 - 32.

architecture is a formidable task. It has been shown above how difficult it was for Samuel Pauw to design the HSRC Building in such a way that his intentions would be clear to the observer.[253] McLeod notes that contemporary architecture's capability to communicate has become more limited than in past epochs. Buildings' ability to communicate is dependent on whether the general public knows the codes that are used. During the medieval period it could be assumed that everyone knew exactly how to interpret a Gothic cathedral, but because architectural codes have fallen into disuse, the same cannot be said for contemporary society. Leon Krier, for example, comments on the fact that architects often fail miserably to make their buildings communicate their proper function: the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts[254] is for example n "the hanger" and Queens College residences, Oxfor illed "the car park".[256] Geoffrey Broadbent's defense the semiological

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[253]See page 127.

[254]FOSTER ASSOCIATES. Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, Unive sity of East Anglia, Norwich, 1977. Illustrated in Colin Da ies. High Tech Architecture. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 58 - 61.

[255]JAMES STIRLING. The Florey Building. Student Residence, Queen's College, Oxford University, Oxford, England, 1966 - 71. Illustrated in Arthur Drexler. Transformations in Modern Architecture. London: Secker & Warburg, 1980, p. 108.

[256]PORPHYRIOS, DEMETRI. Léon Krier: Houses, Palaces, Cities. London: Architectural Design, 1984, p. 109.

approach is that these complaints are evidence of how poverty-stricken the intellectual environment has become in which architects are working.[257] This might be true, but few architects or others have the time or the motivation to reacquaint themselves with the semiology of traditional architecture. According to Hal Foster, the semiological approach to architecture is an act of bad faith to the public that it professes to serve.[258] It plays on social levels, in deciding who will get what: the response to the signs that are employed is based on a hierarchy of class and education. Jencks, for example, bases his definition of postmodern architecture upon the dual code of meaning: one which speaks to architects and other specialists interested in architecture, and another communicating with the public at large.[259] By pronouncing the social differences along with the privileges that underlie them, architectural signs are not the 'democratic signifiers' that they claim to be.

McLeod further comments on the fact that contemporary architecture is a poor competitor against the electronic media, such as television and computers, as means of

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[257]BROADBENT, G., R. BUNT AND CHARLES JENCKS. Signs, Symbols and Architecture, p. 4.

[258]FOSTER, HAL. "The Problem of Pluralism." Art in America, vol. 70, no. 1, January 1982, p. 14.

[259]McLEOD, MARY. "Architecture," p. 26.

communication.[260] Without even the technology to mechanically reproduce books, the pre-industrial societies had a need for representative artforms and architecture. But, according to McLeod, with the media as we know them today, buildings' communicative rôle is at best a momentary communiqué of status or wealth.

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[260] McLEOD, MARY. "Architecture," p. 32.

7. SIMULATION AND APPROPRIATION

7.1. Introduction

Recent times have seen the collapse of notions like originality and newness in architecture. Architects are often adopting attitudes that take into account architectural languages of the past. In this chapter the author will try to show that this is not just a passing fashion, but that it is caused by certain cultural changes in the second half of this century. What will be discussed, for example, is the fact that postmodern architects no longer have the trust in progress that their modernist predecessors had, and this opens up new possibilities for adopting past styles. Other issues that have become important within this context are the use of bricolage, parody and the renewed interest in allegory.

7.2. Originality

One of the most important questions of twentieth century aesthetics has been that of the originality of the artwork. The avant-garde's questioning of the institution of art is typified by Duchamp's ready-mades, for example the urinal that he exhibited under the title of Fountain in

1917.[261] Instead of making an original artwork, he chose a standard factory made object and exhibited it as art, thereby negating his rôle as creator and artist and questioning what could be accepted as art. In the nineteen seventies it has become common for artists to appropriate artworks: Malcolm McLaren, for instance, composed the album Duck Rock (1983) by making a musical collage of pre-existing records. He had no qualms about his acts of appropriation:

> All I can say is that accusations of plagiarism don't bother me. As far as I'm concerned it's all I'm useful for; but if people don't want me to plagiarize I'll have to stop to work ... I can't sit down and write a tune. I'm not interested. I can't write a tune as good [sic] as Puccini, so why bother?[262]

Postmodern architecture is also characterized by the appropriation of pre-existing styles. Samuel Pauw's HSRC Building of 1987 (figure 9) is an example of the appropriation of classical building forms in a contemporary building. Christopher Alexander's pattern language exemplifies a different architectural approach to the renunciation of originality.[263] His book, A Pattern Language, is a practical manual describing how to build

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[261] CAMERON, D. "Art and its Double." Flash Art, no. 134, May 1987, p. 58.

[262] TAYLOR, PAUL, ed. Impresario: Malcolm McLaren and the British New Wave. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1988. p. 16.

[263] ALEXANDER, C., S. ISHIKAWA & M. SILVERSTEIN. A Pattern Language. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

using elements that are commonly and traditionally used in the environment. By doing this, he made it possible for virtually anyone to construct a decent building, thereby excluding himself from being the author of the building. He negates the importance that the traditional avant-garde has attached to originality[264] by firstly using almost exclusively pre-existing patterns, and secondly by allowing people to use his 'pattern book' to design their own buildings. The use of pattern books in architecture was common in the past. Andrea Palladio's I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura (1570) could be seen as an early example of an architectural pattern book of a similar kind as Alexander's.[265] It also deals with techniques and materials and the rules for their implementation in the correct design of buildings. The book exerted tremendous influence over architecture up to the nineteenth century because it illustrated a universally applicable vocabulary of architecture that would result in beauty when followed judiciously. It was only since the start of the modern movement in architecture in the nineteenth century that architects started to 'reinvent' architecture, disregarding the past to a greater extent and expressing modern

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[264]For a discussion of the importance of originality for the avant-garde, see pages 63 to 64.

[265]PALLADIO, ANDREA. The Four Books of Architecture. New York: Dover Publications, 1965.

technology and materials in the forms of buildings. The significance of the work of Alexander and other architects such as Ralph Erskine in his housing at Byker in Newcastle[266] is their repudiation of the rôle of the modernist architect as formgiver. Since about the nineteen seventies architects have become willing to relinquish this rôle in favour of one which facilitates building without prescribing the appearance of the end result. This represents a renunciation of the traditional definition of the architect as the designer of buildings who supervises the erection thereof.

Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"[267] of 1936 is often used to explain why originality in art and architecture has become progressively less important in the twentieth century.[268] The mechanical reproduction of art was something new in the time of Benjamin. He wrote that art first became

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[266] WATES, NICK. "Co-op Consolidation." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXVII, no. 1058, April 1985, p. 57-61, where more examples are mentioned.

[267] Published in BENJAMIN, WALTER. Illuminations. Great Britain: Fontana/Collins, 1979, p. 219-253.

[268] For example:
CRIMP, DOUGLAS. "On th\ Museum's Ruins." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1978, p. 51 - 53.
HABERMAS, J. "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique." (1972) In Philosophical-Political Profiles. Trans. F. G. Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983, p. 129 - 163.

reproducible with the woodcut. During the middle ages the techniques of engraving and etching were added to the woodcut, but it was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century that lithography made it possible to illustrate everyday publications such as newspapers.[269] Shortly thereafter photography accelerated the process of pictorial reproduction, because illustrations no longer had to be drawn by hand. Benjamin's thesis was that the reproduction of artworks by photography had a profound influence on the public's view of art. Before photography the experience of the artwork was dependent on the observer's presence in time and place in front of the original artwork's unique existence. The photographic reproduction, however, allows the viewer to look at it in a location removed from the original, thereby substituting the copy for the unique existence of the original. Thereby the original artwork sacrifices its spatial temporal individuality and its aura[270] of uniqueness is destroyed. Habermas notes that this

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[269] BENJAMIN, WALTER. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 221.

[270] Benjamin explains the "aura" as follows: "Experience of aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and human beings. The person who we look at, or who feels that is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object means to invest it with the capacity to look at us in turn." (W. Benjamin. Illuminations, p. 298.)

is a contributing factor to the growing sense of sameness all over the world.[271]

The uniqueness of the original artwork is inseparable from the tradition in which it is embedded.[272] Benjamin uses the example of the statue of Venus, which was an object of veneration for the Greeks, but was seen as an ominous idol by the clerics of the Middle Ages. For the Greeks the emphasis was on the cult function of this statue and it was not necessarily recognized as a work of art. It came to be recognized as a work of art only when the cultic function was regarded as less important than its beauty: this was already the case when Roman artists began to copy Greek sculptures. Benjamin started to develop a theory of the historical process by which the work of art was emancipated from its cultic function, a theory that would later be elaborated by Habermas.[273] But Benjamin fails to develop his theory to its logical consequences, and blames the modern idea of art-for-art's-sake, where the social function of art is denied, on the mechanical reproduction of art.

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[271] HABERMAS, J. "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique," p. 135.

[272] BENJAMIN, WALTER. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 225.

[273] HABERMAS, J. op. cit., p. 139.

The mechanical reproduction of artworks may well have been a contributing factor causing the loss of the unique aura of the artwork. But it seems to be erministic to suggest that new technologies would cause the autonomous status of the modern artwork. The autonomy of modernist art is best seen as the result of a socio-historical process.[274] Habermas develops Benjamin's theory by describing the deritualization of art.[275] He argues that the economic, political and cultural systems have become divorced with the rise of civil society. Whereas economic, political and cultural affairs were experienced as a totality in traditional cultures, they are all handled by specialists in modern society. The traditional integrated view of the world was undermined by the logic of industrial production. Through this process art and architecture were freed from the context of ritual and became more autonomous.

Art, when stripped of its aura by being reproduced indiscriminately, moves closer to mass culture simply because of its increased availability. What concerns Habermas in this regard, is that this means that art becomes more and more commercialized. Before the Renaissance, architecture was not necessarily seen as art, but it was

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[274] See pages 53 to 55.

[275] HABERMAS, J. "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique," p. 139.

closer to the reality of everyday life. With the loss of its cultic value, however, the emphasis moved to art and architecture's commercial value.[276] As autonomous from practical concerns, the purpose of architecture increasingly became the personal enjoyment of either the designer or the viewer. "As autonomous, art is set up for individual enjoyment; after the loss of its aura it is geared to reception by the masses."[277]

Douglas Crimp uses Benjamin's essay as a lead to explain how the notions of originality, authenticity and presence have been undermined by the frank confiscation, quotation and repetition of already existing images in contemporary art.[278] He blames this phenomenon, which is also felt in postmodern architecture, on the effect of reproductions in books and magazines. The difference between various architectural styles gets eroded by their all being reduced to 'colour-plates' that are often superimposed without regard for period or style. These images are available for indiscriminate use by contemporary architects. Modernist architects such as Le Corbusier also referred to past styles and buildings for inspiration and guidance:

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[276]HABERMAS, J. "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique," p. 139.

[277]Ibid., p. 132.

[278]CRIMP, D. "On the Museum's Ruins," p. 53.

there have been studies of the correspondences between his Villa Stein-De Monzie and Palladio's Villa Malcontenta.[279] However, Le Corbusier's house only appropriated certain compositional principles and proportions. The product of this process is a modernist house with no direct quotations of forms that have been used in the Palladio building. It is not uncommon, on the other hand, to find a new postmodern building that is indistinguishable from the old buildings surrounding it. Quinlan Terry, for example, appropriates historical forms, without transforming it in any way, in his Richmond Riverside Development.[280] The project consists of the renovation of the existing buildings near Richmond Bridge in London and the erection of new buildings in the vacant lots between them. As Jones notes, even the trained eye has difficulty distinguishing new from old. The preservation of the scale of the area and the contribution that the project make to the city's public spaces, especially the generous riverside terrace, are positive features of the project. However, Terry had problems dealing with the services peculiar to modern buildings, for example housing the air-conditioning equipment and designing the underground car-park. The interior is modern, making it

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[279] DUBOIS, MARC. "2 into 1." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXI, no. 1079, January 1987, p. 33.

[280] JONES, P. B. "Richmond Riverside: Sugaring the Pill." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXIV, no. 1101, November 1988, p. 87 - 90.

incongruous with the external appearance of the building. Meyer Pienaar and Partners' Kippies Bar (figure 14) has been discussed above as a South African example of a building of this type. This type of historical quotation is entirely different from that employed by modernist architects, who would have considered it as immoral to blatantly copy other buildings' forms. It would be difficult to prove that it is entirely mechanical reproduction's fault that architects now feel entitled to do this. It should rather be seen as a cultural phenomenon, related to the questioning of the modernist culture of material progress, as was discussed in chapter three.

7.3. Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard is a sociologist at the University of Paris and is, according to Gablik, the "seminal theoretician orchestrating the whole Post-Modern scenario."[281] He seldom writes about cultural products such as art and architecture. Most of his texts are prosaic descriptions of bourgeois culture in post-industrial society.[282] Baudrillard's main emphasis is on the nature of modern sign systems, which include aesthetical and political considerations and advertising. He popularized the term 'simulation' in his book Simulations.[283] This term is used to indicate the domain of reproduction. According to Baudrillard's theory, the historical search for truth has progressively separated truth from reality. This has happened during several stages.[284] During the first stage, basic reality was simply

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[281]GABLIK, S. "The Aesthetics of Duplicity." In A. C. Papadakis, ed. The Post-Avant-Garde: Painting in the Eighties. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1987, p. 36.

[282]CAMERON, D. "Art and its Double." Flash Art, no. 134, May 1987, p. 63.

[283]BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulations. New York: Foreign Agents Series, 1983.

[284]NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 46.

reflected, for example in Feudal Christianity, where the image, for instance the icon painting, was fixed as real by the religious system. During the second phase, from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, basic reality was masked and perverted. Baudrillard calls the images produced by these cultures "counterfeit" or false images.[285] This is because these images were no longer bound by obligation.[286] Whereas Gothic artists were compelled to produce their art according to convention, Renaissance artists were more free to do what they wanted to, but they were free only insofar that they did no longer believe that their art was the only possible way of working. They were no longer working out of obligation, but from reason. According to Baudrillard, their art and architecture were simulations of the symbolic obligation under which the artists of the Middle Ages worked. They were not ready to declare themselves independent from the bond of religious function.

The third phase of simulation marked the absence of a basic reality. Neither God, nor any other professed reality is expressed, but only the "imminent logic of the operational principle."[287] This stage is represented by the

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[285] BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulations, p. 83.

[286] Ibid., p. 86.

[287] Ibid., p. 95.

Capitalist epoch of industrialization, which is characterized by the seriality of production, Mass manufactured goods are marked by equivalence, rather than uniqueness. A new generation of signs accompanied the Industrial Revolution: signs "without the tradition of caste, ones that will never have known any binding constrictions."[288] The relation between objects is no longer that of an original to a counterfeit, but that of indifference and equivalence. "In a series, objects become undefined simulcra one of the other."[289]

The last stage of Baudrillard's theory involves the situation when there is no relationship left to any reality whatsoever, when the image becomes its own simulcrum. The situation is, according to Baudrillard, typical of postmodernism, where production is superseded by simulation.[290] This happens when forms are no longer merely mechanically reproduced, but when they are conceived in terms of their very reproducibility. The resultant object is no longer the counterfeit of an original as in the Renaissance, or one in a pure series such as in industrial manufacturing. Baudrillard calls this condition, where the

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[288]BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulacions, p. 96.

[289]Ibid., p. 97.

[290]Ibid., p. 100 and 101.

distinction between reality and fiction no longer exists, "hyperreality". Hyperreality is a reality that is always already reproduced, where the real and the copy become identical in a world without originals. This is best explained by using an architectural example.

Baudrillard uses Benjamin's theory of technological reproduction as the foundation for his argument.[291] The dangers of using technological changes as the cause of cultural changes have already been commented on[292] but Baudrillard's scheme has interesting implications for a study of the changes of architectural production seen in relation to the use of simulation. In primitive architecture, a tree trunk would be used as a post. As Terry demonstrates, simple columns like these could have been the origin of the classical orders of architecture.[293] The primitive column was a 'real' column, in the sense that it did not simulate anything else, but acted as support in its raw form.

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[291]BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulations, p. 98.

[292]See page 147.

[293]TERRY, QUINLAN. "Canons of Classicism: Origins of the Orders." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXIII, no. 1032, February 1983, p. 29 - 33.

In ancient Greek architecture, however, marble columns were carved in order to simulate the timber ones from which they originated. Classical architects were still bound to the form of the original tree trunks, although by transforming these into marble counterfeits their architecture became more independent of practical concerns.

Similar to Baudrillard's third phase of simulation, architectural components were mass produced since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Initially, they removed simulation a further step from the original source by making cast iron buildings to look like stone ones: some of these buildings still exist in SoHo in New York. In due course, however, the demands of prefabrication caused building components to become strictly utilitarian, and the relationship between building components stopped being that of original to a counterfeit, and became that of one object being a simulcrum of the next identical one in an indefinite series.

In contemporary architecture, it could be argued that building elements are no longer dependent on the necessity that it should be mechanically reproducible as a series. This is made possible by computer technology. In the

Hongkong & Shanghai Bank by Foster Associates[294] for example, the complete structure was clad in aluminium panels of bewildering complexity and number of varieties. Using conventional techniques would have meant months of work on the drawing board and repeated re-jigging of machines. It was, however, manufactured by computerized pressing and welding machinery that could easily cope with the geometrical complexities and variations of the cladding made up out of thousands of pieces, mostly of different shapes and sizes. This freed the designers from the tyranny of standardization. The implications of this are extensive:

> Picture programmable, adaptable machines turning out small batches of high technology components, tailor-made for specific buildings in specific places, and for specific clients, at economic rates previously thought feasible only with mass-production methods.[295]

In terms of Baudrillard's theory, the means of production of this building negates any relationship to reality: the building components no longer refer to the original tree trunk used as example above, nor to the marble simulation made thereof. Nor are they any longer simulations of other, identical components in a production line:

> Here we are in the third-order simulcra; no longer that of the counterfeit of an original as in the first-order, nor that of the pure series as in the second. Here are the models from which proceed all

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[294] ABEL, CHRIS. "A Building for the Pacific Century." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXIX, no. 1070, April 1986, p. 54 - 61.

[295] Ibid., p. 60.

> forms according to the modulation of their differences.[296]

The question of the real and the copy no longer exists when dealing with these building components.

Baudrillard's book is open to interpretation: as Ottman notes, much recent American art has been based on a creative misreading of him.[297] His writings have been used to explain the work of artists such as Sherrie Levine. Her acts of simulation consist of, for example, rephotographing the photographs by Edward Weston of his young son Neil, and exhibiting them as her own.[298] These acts of theft have become common in various forms of art, for example in the work of Richard Prince, Jeff Koons and Heim Steinbach, who either rephotograph other people's work, or simply use found, or bought objects in what approaches the Dada attitude of Duchamp.[299] To validate this kind of work, the following description of hyperrealism by Baudrillard could be quoted: it is

> the minute duplication of the real, preferably on the basis of another reproductive medium - advertising,

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[296] BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulations, p. 100.

[297] OTTMAN, K. "True Pictures." Flash Art, no. 132, February / March 1987, p. 90.

[298] KRAUSS, ROSALIND. "The Originality of the Avant-Garde." In B. Wallis, ed. Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, p. 27.

[299] See page 59.

> photo, etc. From medium to medium the real is volatized; it becomes an allegory of death, but it is reinforced by its very destruction; it becomes the real for the real, fetish of the lost object - no longer object of representation, but ecstasy of denegation and of its own ritual extermination.[300]

Baudrillard's book does not deal specifically with art, and it is very rare that he illustrates his arguments referring to art and architecture. But his texts suggest ways of representing contemporary culture, which is dominated by the media and information based activities, in art. Photography especially has benefitted from this approach. In architecture this type of reproduction can also be shown to have taken place. As Baudrillard notes, the duplication should preferably not be of the real, but on the basis of something that is already reproduced. It has become common for architects to appropriate elements from photographs of distant, and often historical buildings. Architecture certainly approaches the hyperreal, when architects quote well known architects' work, which is in itself already quoted from historical sources. A case in point has already been discussed, namely Squire's Loft restaurant by Cooper Messaris & Louw (figure 1). This building is a collage of elements used by the well known American architect Michael Graves, whose buildings the architects must have seen in the architectural press. Graves himself bases his designs on

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[300]BAUDRILLARD, J. Simulations, p. 141.

historical models: he thinks that it is crucial that architects

> re-establish the thematic associations invented by our culture in order to fully allow the culture of architecture to represent the mythic and ritual aspirations of society.[301]

For Baudrillard, this type of representation for its own sake signals the end of the old illusions of belief and of spatial and psychological perspective and depth. The real has become an empty myth.[302] This restaurant corresponds to his definition of hyperreality, which is not what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced.[303] This is in contrast with the past, where aesthetic pleasure was found in discovering the "natural" in the artificial or the counterfeit, for example by recognizing the representation of a face in a painting.

Baudrillard notes that the arts and mass culture are being merged in contemporary society. "Today, when the real and the imaginary are confused in the same operational totality, the aesthetic fascination is everywhere."[304] Our

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[301] Michael Graves quoted from K. V. Wheeler, P. Arnell and E. Bickford, eds. Michael Graves: Buildings and Projects 1966 - 1981. New York: Rizzoli, 1982, p. 13.

[302] BAUDRILLARD, J. Simulations, p. 142.

[303] Ibid., p. 146.

[304] Ibid., p. 150.

lives have become aestheticized, especially by the mass media and advertising, all produced by artists. Art and production have become aesthetically interchangeable.

> Art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. And so art is dead, not only because its critical transcendence is gone, but because reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been confused with its own language. Reality no longer has the time to take on the appearance of reality.[305]

Gablik has warned that art had to remain independent from the concerns of everyday life, in order to be able to adopt a critical stance towards society.[306] Baudrillard senses that contemporary art and architecture have become absorbed by commercial life and as such have lost their autonomy and their critical stance towards the political and economic status quo.[307] This is reflected by the perception of architecture in terms of its "exchange value" or its investment value, a theme that emerges repeatedly in this dissertation.

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[305] BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. Simulations, p. 151.

[306] GABLIK, S. "Art on the Capitalist Faultline." Art in America, March 1980, p. 12.

[307] See for example Jean Baudrillard. "The Ecstasy of Communication." In H. Foster, ed. Postmodern Culture, p. 129, where he discusses architectural "super-objects" such as Beauborg and the Forum des Halles, but without illustrating exactly what features he regards as the "demonstration of the operation of culture, commodities, mass movement and social flux."

7.4. The Decay of Confidence in the Idea of Progress.

This chapter will develop the argument started in chapter three, especially or page 16 to 21, about the waning of the confidence in progress that is currently being experienced in many cultural fields. Postmodernism is based upon the perception of the existence of a modern era that dates from the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century and has now run its course. Since this "Age of Reason" it was thought certain that progress in the arts, technology, liberty and knowledge would be to the benefit of all. As was discussed in the chapters on modernism[308] and the avant-garde[309] modernist architecture was based on this belief in progress and the use of new technologies. However, as Lyotard points out, there has lately been a demise of the confidence traditionally placed in progress: progress continues to take place without leading to the modern movement's dreams of the emancipation from poverty, despotism and ignorance. Lyotard thinks a major aspect of the failure of the modern project is that mankind is still

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[308] Chapter 5.2, page 49.

[309] Chapter 5.3, page 63.

divided into the advanced and complex Western World on the one hand and the Third World which is struggling to survive on the other hand. He criticizes the failure of the Western World to alleviate the suffering in the underdeveloped countries as follows:

> The development of techno-sciences, has become a means of increasing disease, not of fighting it. We can no longer call this development by the old name of progress.[310]

Modernist architects believed that they would be able to produce a better environment using functional and technical parameters such as efficiency and economy. By the nineteen fifties, after the tragedies of the second world war, these goals were seen as having failed. Mary McLeod mentions the social problems that were created by mass social housing as an example of the deficiency of the modernist project.[311] Oliva shares this view of the collapse of the idea of progress inherent in the modernist movement being caused by the situation of catastrophe peculiar to our time.[312]

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[310]LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. "Defining the Postmodern." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 6.

[311]McLEOD, MARY. "Architecture." In S. Trachenberg. The Postmodern Moment: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovation in the Arts. London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 30.

[312]See pages 86 to 90.

The loss of confidence in a better future, linked to the perceived failure of modernist architecture, are reflected in the appropriation of historical styles in postmodern architecture. If progress is no longer held to be an asset, then there are no longer any moral dilemmas in using styles of the past. Compared to the Standard Bank Centre, with its confident, unadorned expression of structure (figure 3), the Reeva Forman Building in Johannesburg looks retrogressive with its cornices, arched windows with cottage frames and tiled pitched roof (figure 18). In this building structural clarity is not considered important: everything is simply plastered. The materials used are not expressive of our times being the most advanced technologically. That is not to say that all contemporary buildings adapt this reactionary attitude: 11 Diagonal Street (figure 8) is an example of the converse. But as discussed on pages 88 to 90, the building in Diagonal Street is also not necessarily new in its conception, but could be seen as a refinement of the technologies and forms developed during the first half of this century.

Lyotard's views on the bankruptcy of modernism has been contested by Haberma-. The central preoccupation in their debate has been the

> question whether we are currently experiencing the final exhaustion of the project of the Enlightenment, or whether our present discontents and disillusionments

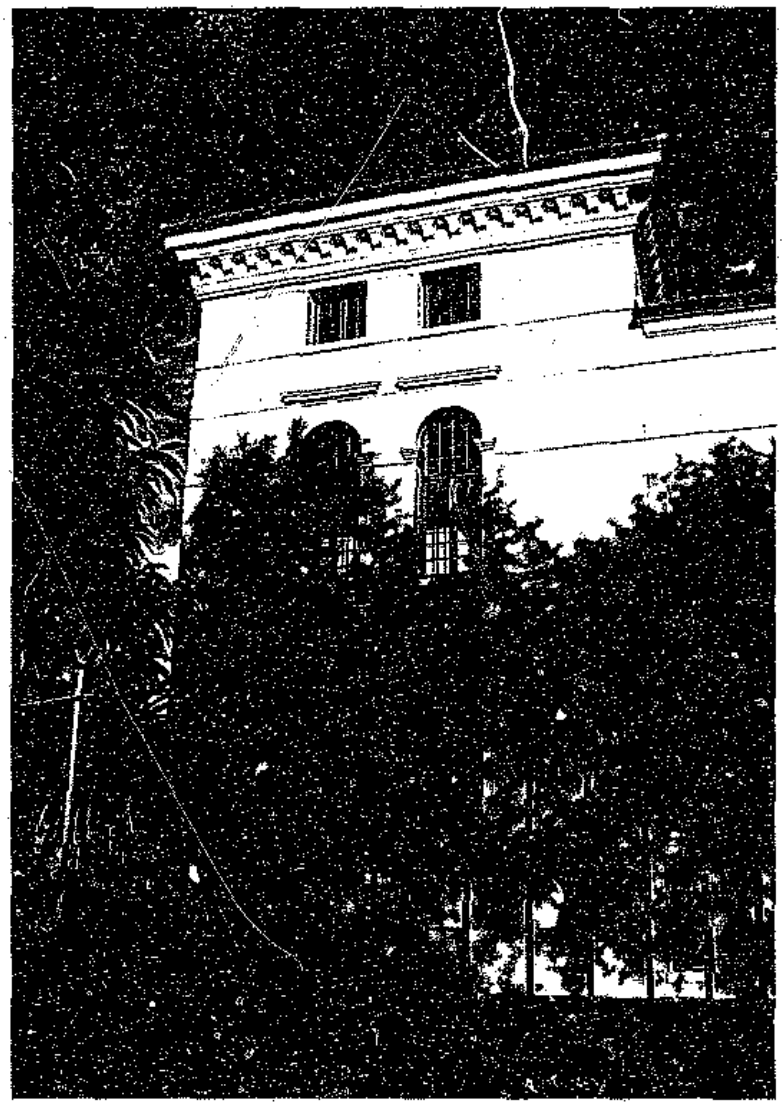

Figure 18: LOUIS KAROL ARCHITECTS. Reeva Forman Building, Johannesburg, 1989.

> stem from the fact that this project has only been one-sidedly and inadequately realized.[313]

As was discussed in chapter three[314] Habermas thinks that the modernist project of Enlightenment has not been fully realized and he remains committed to this project. It might be that the particular model of Utopia that modernism wished to fulfill is outdated but not invalid, and that it has to be updated to fulfill the needs of contemporary and post-industrial society. There are authors who agree with Habermas on this point, for example Zurbrugg, who laments the fact that technological advancements in art, which testify of the potential of new techniques and materials, are ignored by critics.[315] An example of technological advancements in recent architecture has been discussed above,[316] namely the production methods employed in the construction of the Hongkong and Shangai Bank, using computerized manufacturing techniques.

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[313]DEWS, P. "From Post-Structuralism to Postmodernity." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 14.

[314]Page 22 to 27.

[315]ZURBRUGG, NICHOLAS. "Postmodernity, Métaphore manquée, and the Myth of the Trans-avant-garde." Leonardo, vol. 21, no. 1, 1988, p. 66.

[316]Pages 155 to 157.

7.5. Bricolage

Bricolage in architecture is the combination of fragments of quotations from other buildings into a design, something that has become common in contemporary architecture, as illustrated above.[317] The term was lifted from Lévi-Strauss' The Savage Mind.[318] The concept of bricolage is useful in the discussion of postmodern art,[319] although Lévi-Strauss' text was not concerned with postmodernism at all, but with the difference between mythical and scientific thought. He used the bricoleur as an example of a mythical thinker and the engineer as an example of a scientific thinker. A bricoleur is a sort of professional do-it-yourself person who makes do with

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[317] For example Squire's Loft, figure 1, as discussed on page 31, and the HSRC Building, figure 9, discussed on page 90.

[318] LÉVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE. The Savage Mind. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974, p. 16-22.

[319] See, for example
NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism, p. 45.
ULMER, GREGORY L. "The Object of Post-Criticism." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture, p. 84.
ROWE, COLIN & FRED KOETTER. Collage City. London: MIT Press, 1988, p. 102 - 105, which advocates a more multivalent view of city form rather than the grand utopian visions of "total planning" and "total design."

whatever is at hand when constructing or repairing something. In contrast with the engineer, who designs new tools for each job, the tools and materials of the bricoleur bear no relation to the current job, but are the result of all previous projects that he had worked on. In the same way the postmodern architect turns back to an already existing set of tools and materials when he or she designs. He or she engages in a dialogue with all the heterogeneous ideas and memories in the 'treasury' of his or her mind to discover what each of them could 'signify' and so contribute to the impending design, which will differ from the original sources only in the disposition of its parts.[320] The design is limited by the references available to the postmodern architect: the possible design combinations are restricted because they are drawn from an aesthetic language, which is limited. This is in contrast with the engineer, or modernist architect, who could question the universal sciences for solutions, free from cultural and social restraints. The modernist architect sought to make his or her way out of the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization in order to go beyond it. Postmodern architecture, on the other hand, tends to remain within the constraints of civilization by inclination or out of necessity.

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[320] LEVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE. The Savage Mind, p. 18.

Lévi-Strauss notes that the qualities that are claimed to be peculiarly scientific by scientific thought (of which modernist architecture forms part of) were those that formed no part of living experience. Characteristic of mythical thought (and postmodern architecture) is that it seeks the incorporation of a certain amount of human culture into reality.[321] Mythical thought is "imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and reordering in its search to find them a meaning."[322]

Fredric Jameson relates postmodern bricolage to the architect's loss of confidence in his or her ability to design anything original.[323] With the loss of the high-modernist ideology of style and the belief in the inevitability of the appearance of mass produced buildings, architects had nowhere to turn but to the past and stylistic play.

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[321] LEVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE. The Savage Mind, p. 20 - 22.

[322] Ibid., p. 22.

[323] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review, no. 146, July-August 1984, p. 64.

7.6. Allegory

The concept of allegory in aesthetic theory has recently been revived by Craig Owens.[324] In contrast with modernist art critics, who favoured the formal element, the revaluation of allegory revives discursiveness, textuality and arbitrariness of meaning. It is this discursive nature of art and architecture, whereby cultural products partake of meaning, that is important in the aesthetic theory of allegory. An example of an architectural allegory, according to Owens, is the ruin, which stands for "history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay; a progressive distancing from origin."[325]

Owens narrates how allegory has been condemned as aesthetic aberration "for nearly two centuries"[326] and for being an outmoded device only of historical interest. The negative associations of allegory in art were based on the connection of allegory to history painting that

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[324] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." In B. Wallis, ed. Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, p. 203-235.

[325] Ibid., p. 206.

[326] Ibid., p. 203.

traditionally represented images of the present in terms of the classical past. Allegory is beneficial, however, in rescueing historical styles from disappearing. According to Owens, allegory functions in the gap between the present and a fast disappearing past.[327] Postmodern architects attempt to heal this rift between the present and the past by appropriating styles from the past.[328]

> Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter.[329]

The original meaning of the appropriated building is however not restored; another meaning rather replaces it: Owens conceives of allegory as a replacement, taking the place of an earlier meaning. It could be argued that the Reeva Forman Building (figure 18) is an appropriation of an Italian Renaissance palazzo. Renaissance palazzo's were, however, residential buildings housing the nobility, and Forman's building is an office building. Besides its function, there are a myriad of differences between the modern building and its source in terms of social and historical differences and their dissimilar settings in the city. The original palazzo was either located in the countryside or cheek by jowl with

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[327] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 203.

[328] Ibid., p. 204.

[329] Ibid., p. 205.

other urban buildings. The Forman Building is more like a detached suburban house: it is clear that this building differs fundamentally from its source of quotation.

Owens' postmodern view is that allegory is an essential part of the meaning of any building. This is in contrast with modernist aesthetic theory which distinguished between the artwork as the product of aesthetic intuition, and allegory as aesthetic convention.[330] Allegorical meaning was seen by modernist art as something that can only be added to an artwork consciously. In order to preserve the intuitive character of the work of art, the allegorical was conceived of as being a supplement, externally added to another expression. The modernist or formalist aesthetic theorists' vehement attacks against allegory were based on the possibility of mistaking that which they thought was merely appended to the work of art for the artwork's essence. Owens' opinion is that it was a fault of modernist aesthetic theory to ignore the allegorical aspects of art and architecture, because it is a possible ingredient of any cultural product.[331]

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[330] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 214.

[331] Ibid., p. 221.

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[330] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 214.

[331] Ibid., p. 221.

Referring to Paul de Man[332] Owens distinguishes between two levels or usages of language: the literal and the rhetorical or metaphoric. The modernist way of thinking was that these two levels are mutually exclusive, because the entire schema set up by one reading can be undermined or deconstructed in terms of the second. According to Owens, however, there exist two meanings side by side for a building: the literal or formal reading and the discursive reading of its content. Although neither reading can be given priority over the other, none can exist without the other.

Lévi-Strauss believed that the engineer or scientific thinker of modernism was close to nature because of his or her abstract way of thinking. The bricoleur, who has affinities with the postmodern architect, works by means of signs, addressing the public, and is thus closer to culture.[333] Owens also detects a shift from nature to culture in postmodernism. "In postmodern art, nature is treated as wholly domesticated by culture: the 'natural' can

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[332]DE MAN, PAUL. Allegories of Reading. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Referred to in OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 221.

[333]LEVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE. The Savage Mind, p. 20.

be approached only through its cultural representation."[334] Through the acts of simulation and appropriation, the content of architecture has become influenced by the architecture it quotes. By placing the emphasis of postmodern architecture on its discursive nature, a more central rôle is assigned to the observer.[335] However, reading the architectural work has become more problematic than ever before: the piecemeal combination of images in a building initially impels reading but also eventually blocks it. An example of this has been seen in the attempt to determine what the meaning of Samuel Pauw's HSRC Building could be.[336] It was seen that the architect's intentions are not always perceived correctly by the onlooker, because of external social and political factors beyond the designer's control. The complications that arise in the interpretation of artworks have been analyzed by Barthes, and will be discussed below.

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[334] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 223.

[335] See chapter 6.4. Death of the Author (page 126) for a discussion of the new, more active rôle the observer has to play in postmodern art and architecture.

[336] For a discussion of the difficulty in judging what the content of this building is, see pages 127 to 129.

Barthes proposed an allegorical schema with three levels of meaning, as referred to by Owens.[337] The first level of meaning is the literal, where the sign is informational, referential and certain, and when it assumes the reality of what it denotes. Greenbergian modernism preferred to see art in this way, in terms of the materials used to make a painting. Literal architectural criticism analyses buildings purely according to function and form.

The second level of meaning, according to Barthes, is the symbolic or the rhetorical, where an obvious meaning presents itself quite naturally to the mind. A Gothic cathedral, for example, is explicit in its spiritual and religious intentions and was understood as such by the public for which it was built.

Barthes' third meaning is difficult to formulate: it is when there is a signifier without a signified, when the meaning is suspended between the image and its description, when the image does not represent anything.[338] The function of the third level of meaning is to expose the image as

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[337]BARTHES, ROLAND. "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills." In Image - Music - Text. Trans. Stephan Heath. New York: The Noonday Press, 1977. Referred to in Craig Owens. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 231.

[338]OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 231.

fiction. Communication and signification is complicated by the presence of this obtuse third meaning. It depends on the previous two levels of meaning, the literal and the rhetorical, but then nevertheless undoes them. It "exposes the literal level of the image to be a fiction, implicating it in the web of substitutions and reversals properly characteristic of the symbolic."[339] Owens uses the self portraits of Cindy Sherman, a well known American artist, as example of this third level of meaning.[340] An example of her work is where she photographed herself to resemble female stereotypes, for example in the typical poses and settings of the cinematic culture of the nineteen fifties and sixties (figure 19). The posed effect of these pictures prevents the photograph being read on the literal level, for example by mistaking it for a particular human subject caught up in a human drama. Instead it compels a rhetorical reading, that of a critical attitude towards the image of femininity as projected by the media. However, the perfection of her impersonations leaves an unresolved margin of incongruity in which the image deconstructs critique of the supposed

Theory of Postmodernism," p. 232

[340] Ibid., p. 233. gorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 232.

[340] Ibid., p. 233.



Figure 19: CINDY SHERMAN. Untitled, 1982. Metro Pictures, New York. Reproduced from a postcard published by Fotofolio, New York.

innocence of the images of woman projected by the media. Her images were so painstakingly reconstructed, that it becomes

impossible to distinquish her from her rôle models. It was, however, the intention of her work to make this distinction. Owens concludes that Sherman found it unavoidable to partake in the very activity she sought to denounce.

Modernist architecture's content was its autonomy and self-sufficiency, as was seen in chapter 5.2. In a postmodern project such as the First National Bank City (figure 17) the building obviously refers to styles of the past. However, like the work of Sherman, the reading of the building is problematic. The building resembles buildings of the past, of a type that is often found in the city centre around this building's location. It has a tripartite vertical division with a heavy rusticated base and a cornice element to terminate the building against the sky. The corners have been treated as round 'towers', another device that was often used in the area (figure 20 and 21). The massing and the proportions of the building, with its small windows of upright proportion, give the building a distinctive classical feeling. But the original meaning of

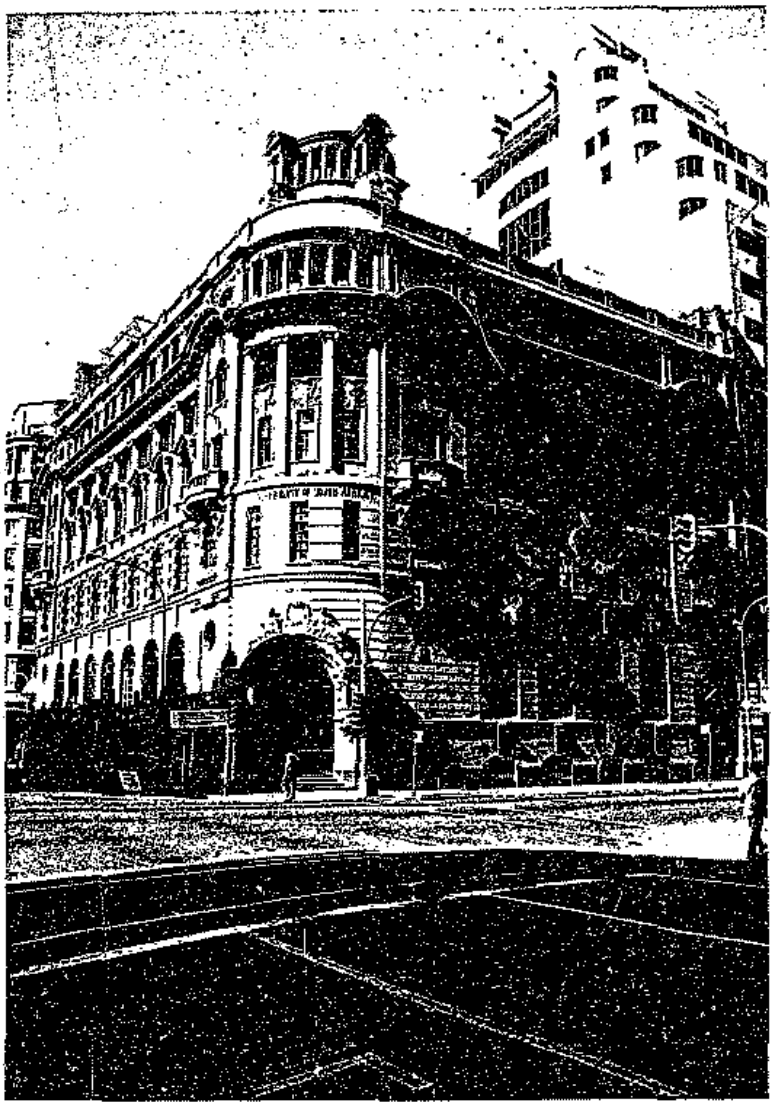

Figure 20: STUCKE & BANNISTER. Standard Bank Building, 1907. 33/5 Harrison Street, Johannesburg.

the historical source cannot be restored, and it is not the intention of the architects to do so. Because of the absence

of any classical columns and mouldings, the building will not be mistaken for an historical one from the beginning of the century by someone who is architecturally informed. Instead it compels a typological reading as corresponding to the popular architectural styles promoted by architectural magazines. One can nevertheless imagine that an observer might pass by the finished building without noticing that it is new and contemporary, thinking that it is an old building. It was however the intention of the architects to make the distinction between their building and the original source that they quoted from. In order to be in fashion and 'modern', the designers appropriated an historical style, but by not simulating it too closely, they assured that their building would not become indistinguishable from an old building. The desire of postmodern architects for their work to be of a contemporary nature is perpetually frustrated, and the ambition for the new is constantly deferred, by the practice of simulation. If the architects wanted to adopt a critical stance towards the popular architecture published in the periodicals, the situation is made even more complex. There is little to distinguish this building from those of Rob Krier, for example the Ephraim Palais (figure 22), which was designed to match the proportions and general composition of the rebuilt part of

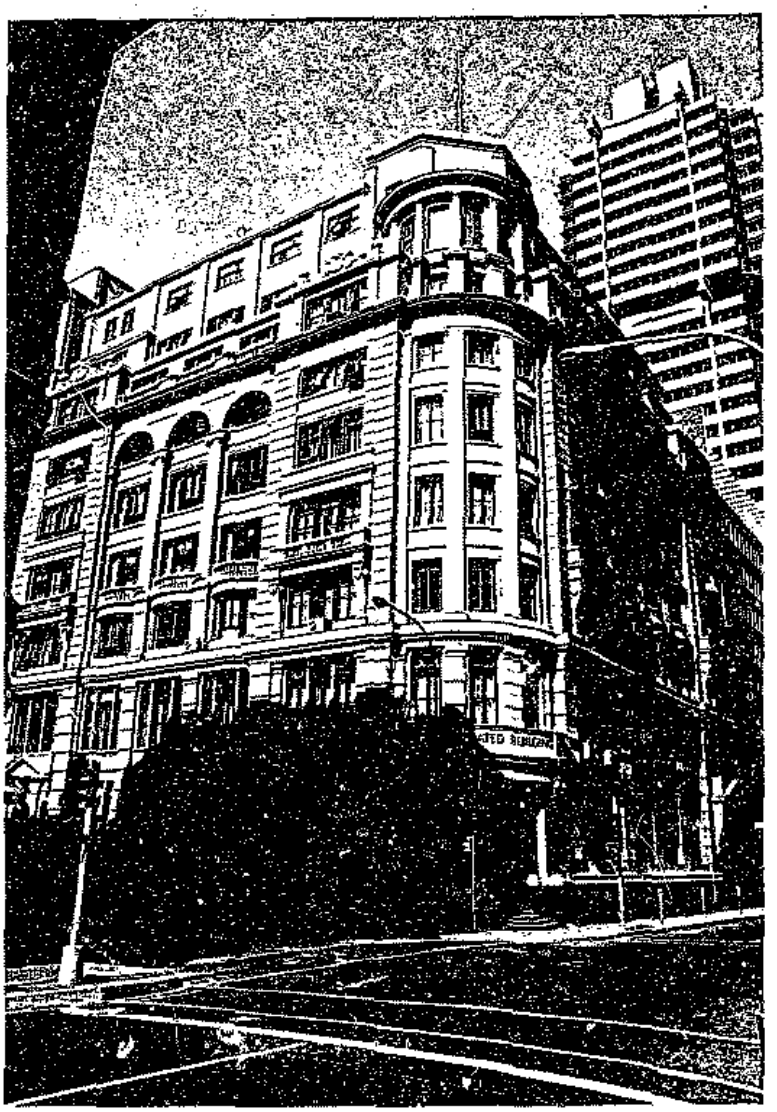

Figure 21: T. H. SMITH (London). Consolidated Building, 1904-6. 84/6 Fox Street, Johannesburg.

the palace. It becomes difficult to decide if the building is an appropriation of a historical predecessor in

Johannesburg, or if it is a copy of a popular architect's work. The architects certainly would prefer to see their building as a response to the built context, rather than in relation to international architectural trends, in order to be able to justify their intentions. But exactly in order to be responsive to the historical surroundings, they had to engage in a style that is currently very popular internationally. This situation of indetermination is typical of postmodernism as seen by Owens, complicating the activity of reference, and frustrating the yearning for finality.[341]

According to Newman, postmodern architecture allows both the critical credibility of architects, for example by justifying the appropriation of styles as designing 'in context', and complicity in fashion mongering.[342] Postmodernism does not allow the clear avant-gardism of radical modernism, and its critical comment is difficult to disentangle from careerism and an opportunist complicity. Newman sees the weakness of postmodernism as being too great

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[341]OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," p. 235.

[342]NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism, p. 44.

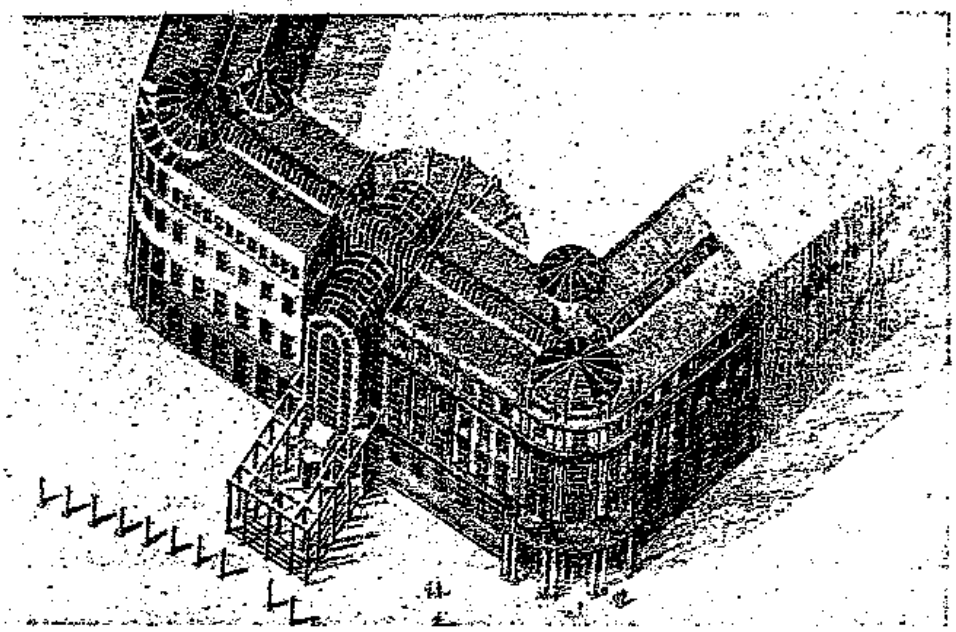

Figure 22: ROB KRIER. Ephraim Palais, Lindenstrasse, Berlin, 1979. Published in Rob Krier. Rob Krier on Architecture. London: Academy Editions, 1982, p. 70.

a degree of complicity, of being too commercial in its practices. This is not true of all contemporary architects, but looking at western cities, one has to agree with Newman that materialism seems to be shaping them to an ever-increasing degree.

7.7. Fascination and the Uncanny

Newman describes the fascination that consumer items hold for the public.[343] When a person is fascinated by a consumer item, he or she does not see what he or she thinks is seen. "Rather it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes him and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance."[344] Barthes refers to the fascination that words hold as bliss or as the erotic, and suggests that the word can acquire this quality employing one of two means: "both excessive: if it is extravagantly repeated, or on the contrary, if it is unexpected, succulent in its newness."[345] The bliss that Barthes is describing is similar to the concept of the sublime; a feeling of transcending and overpowering dimensions, of delight, ecstasy and enchantment. Using Barthes' model, architecture can cause a sensation of transportation if repeated excessively, almost in the same

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[343] NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses in the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi. *ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism.* London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 45.

[344] *Ibid.*

[345] BARTHES, ROLAND. *The Pleasure of the Text.* Trans. R. Miller. London: Jonathan Cape, 1976, p. 42.

way that obsessive rhymes and incantatory music can create bliss. Some of the projects of Aldo Rossi fall into this category, for example his competition design for a Student Hostel in Chieti, Italy.[346] Each module, consisting of a student's room, is expressed by a gabled wall, repeated incessantly along the expansive elevation. Rossi calls the design "non-finite"[347] which gives an indication that his intention was to create a feeling of transcendence by the excessive repetition of forms.

More to the point for the disgussion of fascination as it relates to appropriation and simulation, is the bliss created by the condition of newness: "bliss may come only with the absolutely new, for only the new disturbs (weakens) consciousness."[348] The new is a value: our evaluation of the world depends on the distinction between new and old. That which is new is seen as superior to the old. Everything that is repeated becomes old and undesirable. As was discussed before, at the end of the seventies it was felt that nothing new was possible in architecture.[349] The architecture of popular culture is characterized by mass banalization,

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[346] ARNELL, P. & T. BICKFORD, eds. Aldo Rossi: Buildings and Projects. New York: Rizzoli, 1985, p. 154 - 159.

[347] Ibid., p. 154.

[348] BARTHES, ROLAND. The Pleasure of the Text, p. 40.

[349] See page 85 - 86.

linked to the repetition of styles.[350] The appropriation of architectural styles of the past can be seen as a desperate attempt to revive the new in architecture, by disguising unfamiliar styles of the past as new ones, in "an attempt to reproduce in historical te: s the bliss repressed beneath the stereotype."[351] This bliss is aimed at giving pleasure or at popularity: given the identity of the transavantgarde architect as an appropriator of styles and the designer of commodities, Newman notes that desire-arousal is the interface between appropriation and consuming. It is not the architectural style's physical form that exerts the pressure on the consumer, but the fact that it appears new in its unfamiliarity and that it is fashionable. The fascination that postmodern architecture holds for the public lies in fashion and the pressure that fashion exerts on the consumer. These effects do not remain enchanting indefinitely, because with repetition a style becomes stereotypical, and a new style has to be appropriated for the same effect. The illusion of newness is essential to create this f eling of bliss, and therefore new styles have to be marketed all the time.[352] The life-span of postmodern

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[350]Compare with the discussion of speculative housing on page 33.

[351]BARTHES, ROLAND. The Pleasure of the Text, p. 41.

[352]Roland Barthes discusses this phenomenon in Ibid., p. 40.

styles is approximately three years, as is confirmed by the rapid succession of postmodern architectural styles such as Postmodern Classicism, Rationalism and Deconstruction.

Because of the use of appropriation, postmodern buildings have a strange feeling of déjà vu, an uncanny quality of being at once strange (new) and familiar. The best postmodern architects manage to imbue their designs with a certain opacity which promises a sudden revelation or mystical illumination. The forms employed by them are suggestive of meaning, but if an attempt is made to discover this meaning, it is frustrated, as was shown in the previous section.[353]

This section discussed what many contemporary architects refuse to acknowledge, namely the way in which architecture functions economically. This aspect of architecture should no longer be ignored. In a capitalistic society, commercial architecture is a true reflection of the values of society and is valuable as such.

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[353] See pages 174 to 181.

7.8. Parody

This last section of this chapter will discuss parody, which is another aspect of appropriation and simulation. This concept is the subject of discussion in the books of Linda Hutcheon, Professor of English at the University of Toronto, Canada.[354] Her discussion of parody as used in postmodernism is particularly useful because she bases her text on architecture. To her postmodernism in architecture seems to refer to a generally agreed upon corpus of works, more than other disciplines.[355]

Parody is not exclusive to postmodernism: if Jencks is to be believed, Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel may be a parodic reference to praying hands, for example.[356]

Postmodernist theory questions the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of

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[354] This section is based on Linda Hutcheon's A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

[355] Ibid., p. 22. Her discussion of postmodern architecture is indebted to Charles Jencks and Paolo Portughesi.

[356] JENCKS, CHARLES. The Language of Post-Modern Architecture, p. 49.

culture from the inside.[357] It allows both a critical attitude towards culture and one of complicity. Parody is the perfect postmodern strategy because it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it treats as a parody. It works from a position within the world, yet keeps its critical distance from it.[358]

Both the detachment and involvement demanded from the postmodern architect and observer are permitted by parody: it allows both distance and identification.

> Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows the artist to speak to a discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it.[359]

Hutcheon understands parody as "repetition with critical distance", which marks the difference between the original and the simulation, rather than their similarities.[360] Parody is the capitalization on the uniqueness of an historical style and the seizure of its idiosyncrasies to produce an imitation which mocks the original; but with the

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[357] These aspects have been discussed in chapter 2. Post-Industrial Society which dealt with late capitalism, and chapter 3. The Negation of the Enlightenment Tradition, where the problems concerning modernist and postmodernist ideologies have been examined.

[358] HUTCHEON, LINDA. A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 23.

[359] Ibid., p. 35.

[360] Ibid., p. 6.

understanding that some sympathy for the original still exists.[361]

In postmodern architecture, a concern for being understood replaces the modernist concern for the purism of form. Like Jencks, Hutcheon is interested in the double coding of postmodern architecture.[362] According to this theory, postmodern architecture is designed to address the uninformed public on the one hand with its use of popular and well known references, and the architectural cognoscenti on the other hand by means of more sophisticated allusions to styles of the past. Parody of the classical tradition offers a set of references to architects that are meaningful to the public, and also allows architects to incorporate elements of the history of architecture into buildings. In this way parody enables architects re-establish the link between architecture and the social world. Hutcheon sees the essence of postmodernism as the formation and recollection of a generally shared and collective aesthetic code. The language of architecture has to be learned in detail by designers before they can use it effectively as a communicative tool. As was discussed in

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[361] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In H. Foster, Postmodern Culture, p. 113.

[362] For a discussion of Jencks' theory of the double coding of postmodern architecture, see pages 74 to 75.

chapter 6.5, problems arise with this theory because the codes necessary for the comprehension of postmodern architecture are not shared by the encoders and decoders: members of the public are often not capable of interpreting the codes used by architects, and architects themselves often cannot be bothered to learn this language.

An important aspect of postmodern architecture, according to Hutcheon, is the social discourse in which it partakes. Postmodern architecture is a response to a demand for new architectural forms that will reflect a changed social awareness. This is done through the return to forms that have been rejected by the International Style of modernism, such as the vernacular and the decorative, as a response to local needs and traditions. Postmodern architect[illegible] has returned to history and parody to give architectu[illegible]ck its traditional social and historical dimension. Hutcheon argues that parody brings about a confrontation between the aesthetic world of art and architecture on the one hand and the political and historical dimension on the other.[363] Parodic references to the history of architecture reinstate the dialogue with the past, as well as with the social and ideological context in

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[363] This renewed interest of architecture in matters of social concern has been discussed in chapter 5.4, pages 69 to 72.

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[363]This renewed interest of architecture in matters of social concern has been discussed in chapter 5.4, page 69 to 72.

which architecture is produced, by means of its renewed concern with the meaning of buildings. Postmodern architecture wants to work towards a public discourse "that would overtly eschew modernist aestheticism and hermeticism and its attendant political self-marginalization."[364] Hutcheon notes the strong appeal that Post-Saussurian semiology had for postmodern architects.[365] An important, but often neglected aspect of the Saussurian model is language as social contact: "everything that is presented and thus received through language is already loaded with meaning inherent in the conceptual patterns of the speaker's culture."[366] She stresses that architecture is a social art that engages in the environment and in people's lives.

Hutcheon sees the kitsch in postmodernism, for example the tacking of classical arches onto otherwise stereotypical modernist skyscrapers, as an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of postmodernism. 5 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg (figure 23), for example, is basically a modernist building, without historically derived decoration. The form of the

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[364] HUTCHEON, LINDA. A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 23.

[365] The semiological approach to architecture is discussed in chapter 6.5.

[366] HUTCHEON, LINDA. op. cit., p. 25.

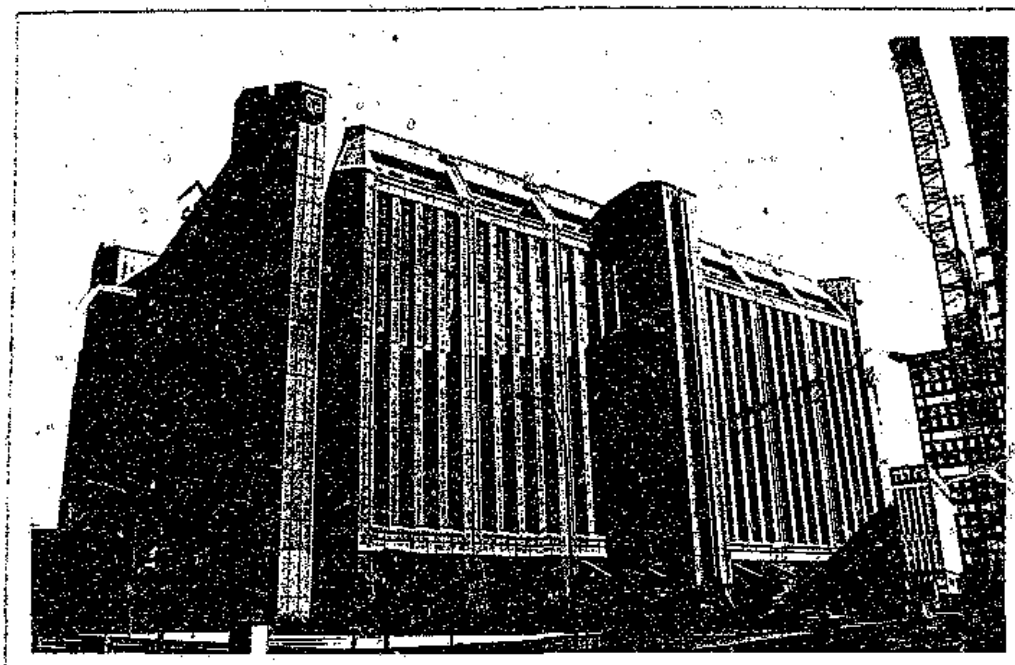

Figure 23: MLH & PARTNERS. 5 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 1989.

building is determined by functional considerations: the 'columns' on the elevation act as vertical air ventilation ducts, and the fire escape stairs are located in the vertical masses that relieve the elevations.[367] However, the entrance to the building is in the form of a classical portico, with stylized classical columns and a pediment crowning it (figure 24). Hutcheon does not regard a building like this as postmodern but as a sign of its commodification, dilution and debasement. This type of commercialization of styles is not unique to postmodernism,

[367] The building is discussed in detail in Planning, no. 101, January 1989.

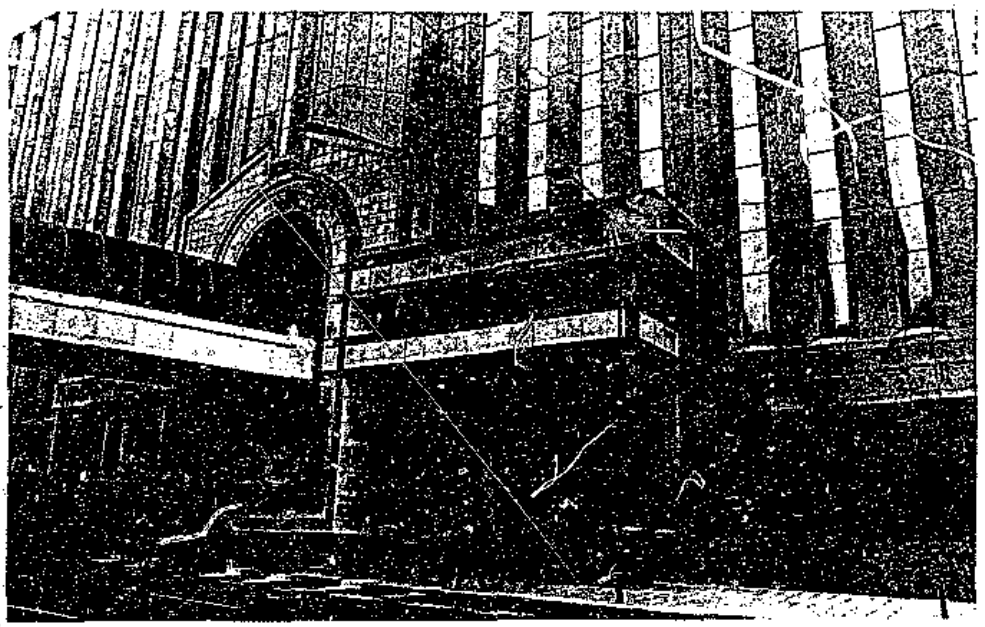

Figure 24: MLH & PARTNERS. 5 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 1989. Detail of entrance.

but also happened to modernist styles, as was visible in many office developments that found the stripped, minimal forms of the International Style an economical way to build. The essence of postmodern architecture is its engagement in the search for meaning, and for a shared aesthetic code, and not its alleged depthless character as trivial kitsch. Hutcheon does not agree that any recall of the past must, by definition, be sentimental nostalgia. "Postmodern ironic recall of history is neither nostalgia nor aesthetic cannibalization."[368] Postmodern architecture averts being

[368] HUTCHEON, LINDA. A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 24.

kitsch by its parodic nature of involvement and by its ambiguous and ironic attitude,[369] for example the HSRC Building's stylization and distortion of its classical sources, with the objective to communicate with the public using its familiar forms (figure 9).

Lyotard, however, does not see postmodernism in the same light. He regards the commodified version of appropriated architecture as postmodernism proper. He notes the increasing distance and estrangement between the *contemporary architect and the end users of the building*, and alleges that parody, irony and quotation are used to cover up this failure of architecture. Lyotard accuses postmodern architecture of 'political quietism', by which he means its apolitical attitude and its posture of "don't talk to me about the addressee of architecture".[370] Hutcheon thinks that parody assists architecture to become socially more involved, by reinstating the dialogue with the past, as well as with the social and ideological context in which architecture is produced, by means of its renewed concern with the meaning of buildings. But obviously Lyotard does not agree with her: for him the detachment of architecture

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[369] HUTCHEON, LINDA. A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 30.

[370] LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. "Response to Kenneth Frampton." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 30.

from social life is postmodern architecture's dominant feature.

Hutcheon's distinction between an authentic postmodernism and its commodification is similar to Clement Greenberg's distinction between the unique quality of art and the debasement of kitsch. It is difficult to determine which postmodern buildings are sincere in their intentions to re-establish the relationship between architecture and the community, and which are capitalizing on the style's popularity. A distinction like this may also not be in the spirit of postmodern aesthetic theory: Rorty for example points out that the 'truth' does not have an intrinsic nature, and that it should rather be seen as a matter of social practice.[371] To try to distinguish which buildings are truly postmodern, and which are adulterated versions thereof, is a very precarious undertaking. Postmodernism is best seen as an all inclusive cultural process, rather than a fixed stylistic definition, as Hutcheon herself notes.[372]

Similar to Lyotard, Fredric Jameson disputes Hutcheon's conviction that postmodernism signals an identification with

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[371]RORTY, RICHARD. "Solidarity of Objectivity?" J. Rajchman and C. West. Post-Analytical Philosophy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 6.

[372]HUTCHEON, LINDA. A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 14.

the social dimension. Jameson feels that pastiche is the typical postmodern device, rather that parody. Parody, according to him, has some sympathy for the original source, whereas pastiche, which is also the imitation of a particular style, is neutral in its practice of such mimicry.[373] He explains that modernist aesthetic theory was linked to the concept of a unique self and a private identity: for example the architect as a unique personality that could create his or her own unique version of the world in his or her own, unique and unmistakable style. Jameson says that contemporary aesthetic theorists regard this kind of individualism and personal identity as a thing of the past,[374] and because of this it is no longer clear what the contemporary architect is supposed to be doing: he or she no longer has a unique private world or style to express. It is in this light that Jameson sees the incapability of postmodern architects to invent new styles. He believes that there are only a limited number of formal combinations possible in architecture, and they have all been thought of already. This is where the rôle of pastiche presents itself: "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer

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[373] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In H. Foster, ed. Postmodern Culture, p. 114.

[374] Compare with chapter 6.4 The Death of the Author.

possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles."[375] The essential content of postmodern architecture is the failure of the new, and of being imprisoned in the past.

The theory of Linda Hutcheon certainly offers more hope for the social redemption of architecture than those of Lyotard and Jameson discussed here. But it offers a more restricted view of postmodern architecture, because it does not include the more mercantile manifestations of architecture that are common in our cities. If one wants to develop a general cultural theory of postmodernism, these commercial buildings are important as a reflection of the economic forces at work in western societies.

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[375] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," p. 115.

8. DECONSTRUCTION

8.1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to explain the philosophical background of deconstructivist architectural theory, to discuss deconstructivist architecture and to indicate what relationships exist between deconstructive architecture and postmodern architecture as a whole.

Because deconstructivist architecture developed out of existentialist and post-structuralist philosophy, a brief overview of these theories will be given, followed by a discussion of deconstructivist architecture itself. Deconstructivist architecture is represented as a style falling within the postmodern epoch, sharing some of postmodernism's attitudes and resisting others, as will be shown below.

8.2. Post-Structuralism

Post-Structuralism refers to the philosophical and intellectual discourses of French authors such as Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and Lyotard[376] during the last twenty years. Their contribution to the architectural discourse has been to demonstrate to architectural critics how the study of the structure of language could be used as a critical method for aesthetic theory.

Deconstructivist philosophy should be seen against the background of the existential phenomenology of, for example, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.[377] Their theories were against the distortions caused in philosophy by the trend, *from Descartes onwards*, to interpret reality according to scientific and technological models of thought. The

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[376] There does not seem to be unanimity in who belongs to the grouping of post-structuralists, and who not. The authors discussed here are a selection of those labeled as post-structuralist by J. Rajchman. "Postmodernism in a Nominalist Frame." Flash Art, no. 137, November - December 1987, p. 49.

[377] According to
CROWTHER, PAUL. "Beyond Art & Philosophy: Deconstruction and the Post-Modern Sublime." In A. C. Papadakis, ed. The New Modernism: Deconstructionalist Tendencies in Art. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 48, and
MACFARLANE, JAMES. "Jean-Francois Lyotard on Adami, Buren and Arakawa." In A. C. Papadakis, ed. The New Modernism, p. 77.

existentialists asserted the primacy of "being-in-the-world", meaning that our knowledge of the world "is constituted from the totality of our practical, emotional, social and linguistic interactions with it."[378] In comparison with the scientific rigour of the conventional philosophy which they opposed, the existential philosophers' texts were idiosyncratic and metaphorical: by introducing an artistic dimension of style into their work, it enabled them to fuse the sensuous and the intellectual in a play of language, to illustrate the complexity of our being-in-the-world.

a. Barthes

Barthes did not set out to develop a theory of deconstruction, but many of his ideas are applicable to the deconstructivist discourse. He has been influenced by Sartrean existentialism in his belief in the freedom of the individual to change constantly in order to escape determinism.[379] He is opposed to essentialism, which is the belief that some ultimate essence exists which does not change and which causes people to behave within predictable

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[378] CROWTHER, PAUL. "Beyond Art & Philosophy: Deconstruction and the Post-Modern Sublime," p. 48.

[379] STURROCK, J. Structuralism and Since. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. p. 53.

limits. He pits the fluidity, or even the anarchy, of existence against the rigor mortis of essentialism. Barthes professes a philosophy of disintegration: his philosophy is pluralistic and centrifugal, which makes it attractive for aesthetic thinkers of deconstruction and postmodernism.

Barthes' grievances against modernist aesthetic criticism are explained by Sturrock.[380] Firstly, Barthes is concerned because formalist criticism is essentially ahistorical, assuming that the values of an artwork are timeless and independent of the society in which they were created. He believes that literature, which is his main concern, plays a rôle in society and that the rôle of the critic is to try to grasp the dialectical relationship between literature and the society that produced it, or between the one literary period and the next. This is a common attitude in postmodernism, as was shown in chapter 5.4.

In isolating the text from the author, as was shown in the discussion of the "death of the author",[381] Barthes respects the ambiguity of the relationship between the author and what he or she writes. He believes that it is

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[380] STURROCK, J. Structuralism and Since, p. 55.

[381] See chapter 6.4.

possible to analyze a text without psychoanalyzing the author.[382]

Barthes believes in the ambiguities of language and in the coexistence of various meanings in texts. He argues that the more meanings a text can have, the better, and that *no* meaning should be granted precedence over others. He is also more concerned about the system by which meaning is produced, than about what the text means. This emphasis on the process of *signification*, rather than on the significance of the text itself, is typical of deconstructivist architecture, as will be shown later in the chapter.

Lastly, Barthes criticizes modernist critics because they do not believe that criticism is ideologically motivated: they want to create the illusion that their values are universal and beyond challenge.[383] Barthes wants

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[382]This critical attitude of Barthes has an ambivalent relationship with the former point of discussion, namely his belief in the historical specificity of the text. It is not only the text that is related to society and the historical period, but also the author. Janet Wolff, for example, finds Barthes too radical in this regard: although the rôle of the author may have been overemphasized in the past, he or she still has some relevance in the discussion and understanding of his or her work. (J. Wolff. The Social Production of Art. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981, p. 123.)

[383]The modernist notion of the detachment of aesthetic judgement from the concerns of everyday life was discussed on page 56.

to demystify criticism by using it as a means of social and political enlightenment. Again this attitude is typical of postmodern criticism.[384]

One of the occupations of deconstructivist architects that will be discussed later is their belief that architecture is purposeless. This seems to be in opposition to the search for meaning that is exemplified by postmodernism, as was shown in chapter six. Barthes is opposed to art as representation of the existing and the use of art to convey a purpose and a meaning. This is because Barthes believes that representing the prevailing view of things entrenches the common unexamined assumptions operative in society, thus alienating the public from the real world in which signs are ambiguous rather than intelligible, and where many incompatible views coexist.[385] This attitude can be seen as critical of the way in which belief systems operate in society, rather than the refusal to evaluate art in terms of content, as was prevalent in modernist criticism.

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[384]See chapter 6.2.

[385]STURROCK, J. Structuralism and Since, p. 61.

b. Foucault

Douglas Crimp describes the philosophy of Michel Foucault as the "replacement of those unities of humanist, historical thought such as tradition, influence, development, evolution, source and origin with concepts such as discontinuity, rapture, threshold, limit and transformation."[386] Foucault's philosophical position is difficult to determine: in his perception of the madness of all wisdom and the folly of all knowledge, he is close to the nihilism of Nietzsche.[387] In the discourse of the natural sciences, which Foucault resists, the 'natural' always conceals within it the aspect of a 'norm', so that any 'law' that is derived from a study of the natural can always be shown to be nothing more that a 'rule' or a convention by which to define the 'normal'. According to White, there is no centre to Foucault's discourse: it is all on the surface, willfully superficial, and intended to be so.[388] Foucault resists the impulse to seek an origin or

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[386] CRIMP, DOUGLAS. "On the Museum's Ruins." In Hal Foster, ed. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. 45.

[387] WHITE, H. "Michel Foucault." In J. Sturrock. Structuralism and Since, p. 81.

[388] Ibid., p. 82 - 85.

transcendental subject that would confer any specific meaning on human life. He delights in the discoveries of paradoxes, and his essays consist of nothing but negations. The authority of both logic and conventional narrative' is rejected. His discourses are suggestive of stories, but the events that they comprise of do not permit the reader to understand some as causes, and others as effects. They are fraught with discontinuities, raptures, and gaps and deny a coherent explanation or interpretation. He rejects the notion that there is a 'reality' which precedes discourse.

This philosophical attitude proved to be influential on deconstructivist architecture, for example that of Peter Eisenman, whose designs are explained as symbolizing the overcoming of knowledge, taking place somewhere between the rational and the irrational.[389] According to Foucault, the purpose of a discursive event, like architecture, is to mark the arbitrariness of its existence as a simple utter Architecture's rôle is to reveal, in the free play of the wilful nature of every rule and norm.

White's discussion of the nature of Foucault's discourse seems to come very close to a description of the

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[389] PAPADAKIS, A. C. "Deconstruction at the Tate Gallery." *In* A. C. Papadakis, ed. *Deconstruction in Architecture.* Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 7.

deconstructivist style in architect[390]. It is difficult to distinguish between Foucault's style and the content of what he writes, because it is the act of saying, the utterance, that constitutes the content of his discourse. Similar to Barthes, Foucault is interested in the *process* of signification, rather than the final meaning of cultural products. The object of his discourse is the play of signifiers which are their own signifieds; no distinction is made between the signifier and the signified, between subject and object and between sign and meaning; Foucault's "discourse eludes all determination, logical, grammatical, or rhetorical".[391] He does not want to duplicate the reality of the world, but wishes to discover an unsuspected meaning or "space" by means of the spontaneous redoubling of language. Foucault takes the "absence" in the heart of language to be evidence of "an absolute vacancy of being, which it is necessary to invest, master, and fill up by pure invention."[392] The purpose of Foucault's texts is to leave something verbal in the place of the nothing which preceded it, to fill the absence which occasioned it by a certain constant manner of utterance which circles words back unto themselves without producing any meaning other than the

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[390] WHITE, H. "Michel Foucault." In J. Sturrock. Structuralism and Since, p. 86.

[391] Ibid.

[392] Ibid., p. 87.

modality of its articulation. This abstract way of writing, which takes itself as the only iconology possible, exerted an attraction for architects who wished to resist Postmodernist Classicism's historical appropriations.

c. Lacan

Lacan's work consists of an exploration of Freud. His task is firstly to detach Freud's ideas from the banal explanations given by later commentators, who have lost the sense of the weight and innovative power of Freud's ideas. Lacan makes psychoanalysis turn back upon itself to re-examine itself from the vantage-point offered by its own discoveries. Lacan further sets out to correct certain parts of Freud's work, which he believes are incorrect, by using the unconscious as conceptual tool.[393] For Lacan, Freud's central insight was not that the unconscious exists, but that it has a structure, and that by effecting what we say and do, this structure betrays itself and becomes available for analysis.

In a selection of Lacan's writings which were published in 1966, called Ecrits,[394] his ideas are presented in a consciously ragged and inconsequential form, bearing the marks of free association. Lacan wrote like this to allow the energies of the unconscious to become palpable and to

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[393] BOWIE, M. "Jacques Lacan." In J. Sturrock. Structuralism and Since, p. 117.

[394] Referred to in Ibid., p. 121.

discourage the reader from building premature theoretical constructions upon the text: collaboration in the inventive work of language is rather encouraged. In believing that the unconscious is structured like a language, Lacan has given language a rôle of unprecedented importance within the field of psychoanalytical enquiry. This spontaneous style of Lacan's was attractive to deconstructivist architects, not because of the ends that Lacan employed them for, but as a stylistic mode.

Lacan believes that the unconscious is created by language. Drawing on structuralist linguistics, he discovered that the linguistic sign, defined as signifier and signified in arbitrary association, corresponds neatly to certain antithetical pairs of concepts within Freud's thinking. The proper subject of Lacan's attention is the signifying chain, which is the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning. He believes that the study of this signifying chain can illuminate the psychical structure of the human subject. His insight that structural linguistics may be used to reorganize the psychological account of the unconscious, suggested ways in which intellectual rigour might become possible in branches of psychology that have always been vague and relied on guesswork.

d. Jameson

There is a tendency in post-structuralist theory to feel that the signified, or the referent, was a kind of myth, that one cannot talk about the "real" in an objective way.[395] Lacan, for example, questions the model of language as based upon the relationship between a signifier (a material object) and a signified (the meaning of that material object). Fredric Jameson finds a useful aesthetic model in Lacan's account of the signifying chain, according to which meaning is not a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, *but is generated by the* relationship of signifiers among each other. Jameson is especially interested in the situation when this relationship between signifiers breaks down, a situation he identifies as schizophrenic, characterized by the remains of *distinct and unrelated signifiers.*[396]

When the signifying chain is intact, language can be credited with the experience of temporality, where the human

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[395]JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. 118.

[396]Ibid., p. 72.

can experience the persistence of personal identity over time. If the signifying chain is broken, however, a person cannot experience temporal continuity and then is condemned to live in a perpetual present, experiencing acute alienation and isolation. If discontinuous material signifiers refuse to bind up in a coherent sequence, as in the world of the schizophrenic, the world is not seen in differentiated vision, but is experienced in a heightened way because the meaning of signifiers are lost and their materiality becomes obsessive.[397] Jameson draws a parallel between the experience of the schizophrenic and the way in which we experience the age of multinational capitalism. We have begun to live in the perpetual present, characterized by a sense of loss of history. Even if architects appropriate styles from the past, the kind of traditions that existed in earlier societies are lost forever. The discontinuities that Jameson observes in contemporary existence, are expressed by what he calls the "hyper-space" *of our cities.*[398] *He thinks that the contemporary experience* of urban space is very different from that of historical cities:

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[397]JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture. London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. 119.

[398]STEPHANSON, ANDERS. "Interview with Fredric Jameson." Flash Art, no. 131, December 1986 / January 1987, p. 70.

> What is striking about the new urban ensembles around Paris and elsewhere in Europe is that there is absolutely no perspective at all. Not only has the street disappeared (that was already the task of Modernism) but all profiles have disappeared as well. This is bewildering and I use existential bewilderment in this new postmodern space to make a final diagnosis of the loss of our ability to position ourselves within this space and cognitively map it.[399]

Jameson sees this hyper-space of the city as indicative of our inability to position ourselves within the decentred global multinational culture. Postmodern space

> has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. And I have already suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment ... can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.[400]

Jameson's perception of a new urban spatial experience is related to the changes that have occurred in modern cities. As can be seen in Parktown in Johannesburg, new office developments are now often being built in the form of isolated buildings, situated as islands in landscaped areas surrounding them (figure 25). This is in contrast with

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[399] STEPHANSON, ANDERS. "Interview with Fredric Jameson," p. 70.

[400] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 83.

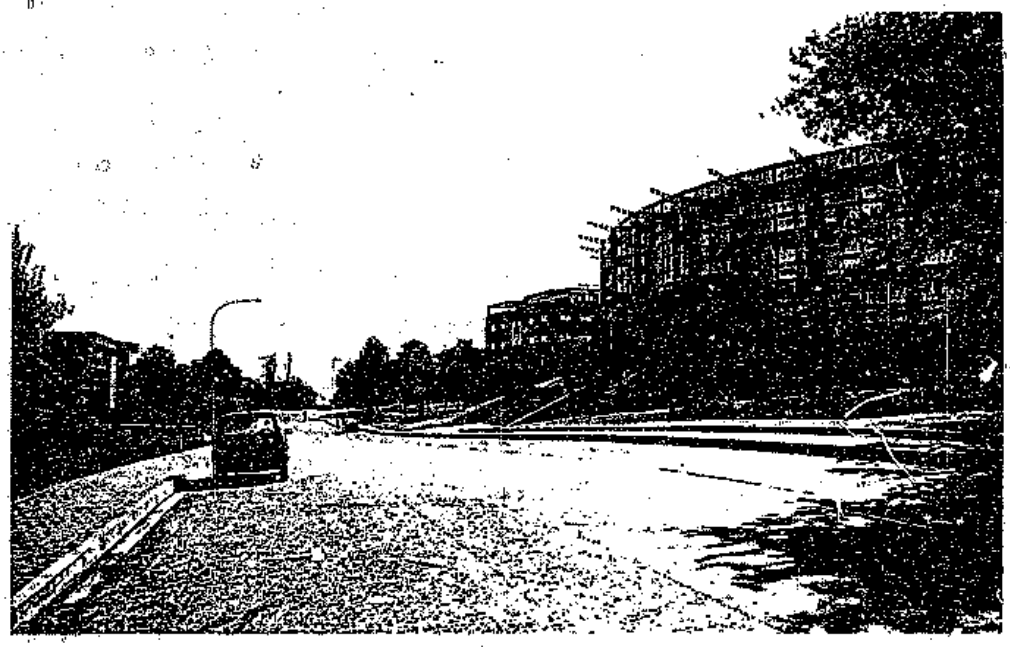

Figure 25: Parktown, Johannesburg.

traditional cities like Berlin, where the buildings fronted directly onto the street, which was formed by the space between the buildings.[401] According to this traditional pattern cities were made of the forms of buildings set in the spaces of streets and squares. In Parktown, however, there is an ambiguous experience of space: the landscape consists of isolated buildings within an overall, formless space, which includes the roads. It is more difficult for

[401] See for example Kreuzberg, West Berlin, as illustrated in Peter Davey. "STERN Work." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXI, no. 1082, April 1987, p. 87-89.

the individual to orientate himself or herself within an undifferentiated space like this.

Jameson's strategy to overcome this problem of alienation in the city is based on Kevin Lynch's The Image of the City.[402] He proposes that architecture should have a didactic function as an aesthetic of "cognitive mapping,"[403] involving the practical reconquest of a sense of place. The cognitive map of the city should enable the individual to form a situational representation of himself in relation to the city as a whole. This suggestion of Jameson's is intended to be relevant to the orientation of the individual in the larger national and global spaces of society as well: there is

> a most interesting convergence between the empirical problems studied by Lynch in terms of the city space and the great Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as "the representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence".[404]

The spatial dilemma of contemporary life is a result of the increasing incompatibility or incommensurability between

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[402]LYNCH, KEVIN. The Image of the City. Cambridge: M.I.T Press, 1974.

[403]JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 89.

[404]Ibid., p. 90.

individual experience and existential experience.[405] Jameson sees his call for a strategy of cognitive mapping as a political move, calculated to regain the capacity to struggle and act in a world in which the individual is at present neutralized by social confusion.

For Jameson the postmodern experience of form is one of profound discontinuity: architecture is no longer unified or organic but *consists of* disjointed subsystems "whose reading proceeds by differentiation rather than unification."[406] It would not be true to state that all postmodern architects' intentions were to constitute their buildings in terms of a signifying chain: in chapter 6.5 it was shown how architects such as Charles Jencks went to great lengths to try to bestow meaning on architecture according to the structuralist model of the sign, comprising of the signifier and the signified. As Rajchman points out, Jameson's philosophical project consists of trying to resolve the opposition between French structuralism and the semiological approach to aesthetics on the one hand, and philosophers like Lacan's conception of the artistic work as expressive of the contradictions of society as a whole on the other

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[405] CHABOT, C. B. "The Problem of the Postmodern." New Literary History, vol. 20, no. 1, Autumn 1988, p. 13.

[406] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 75.

hand.[407] Jameson tries to dissolve this polarity by seeing the sign in a broader context: instead of, for example, restricting himself to discussing a specific building form as a signifier of a certain functional meaning, he analyses contemporary architecture as representative of the new culture of an advanced stage of capitalism, associated with America's multinational financial networks and the mass-media. As an example of this, Jameson writes about the mirroring of the urban chaos in reflective flush-glazed buildings: in South Africa this is exemplified by 11 Diagonal Street (figure 8). In this case, it is not so much the building that is an expression of the ad-hoc growth of modern cities, but the mute reflection of the city in its glass skin is seen by Jameson as a unique opportunity to represent something that cannot be readily depicted otherwise. According to Jameson, the new technologies that developed during the modernist era were relatively easy to represent in buildings, for example Le Corbusier's early work which was often based on the shapes of streamlined ships and aeroplanes.[408] Contemporary technology, however,

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[407] RAJCHMAN, J. "Postmodernism in a Nominalist Frame." Flash Art, no. 137, November - December 1987, p. 50.

[408] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 78.
Richard A. Etlin shows Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1928-31, to be influenced by the ocean liner Aquitania and the Farman Goliath "Air Express" aeroplane, both of which are illustrated in Le Corbusier. Vers une
(Footnote Continued)

no longer possesses this capacity for representation. The computer's outer casing, for example, gives no indication of its processing capabilities, other than carrying the flattened image of its output on its monitor. Jameson feels that the aesthetic devices of reproduction and simulation come closest to representing contemporary information technology, and in this architecture has a privileged rôle, because "the distorting and fragmenting reflections of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central rôle of process and reproduction in postmodern culture."[409] These reflective glass skins, for example in figure 26, offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping the network of power and control in the world of multinational capitalism, that is very difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp otherwise, according to Jameson.[410] This capacity to represent what is otherwise so difficult to depict, causes a feeling of exhilaration, described as the "hysterical sublime" by Jameson.[411] The term is derived from Edmund Burke's

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(Footnote Continued)
Architecture. Paris, 1923. (Richard A. Etlin. "A Paradoxical Avant-garde: Le Corbusier's Villas of the 1920s." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXI, no. 1079, January 1987, p. 21-32.)

[409] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 79.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid., p. 76.

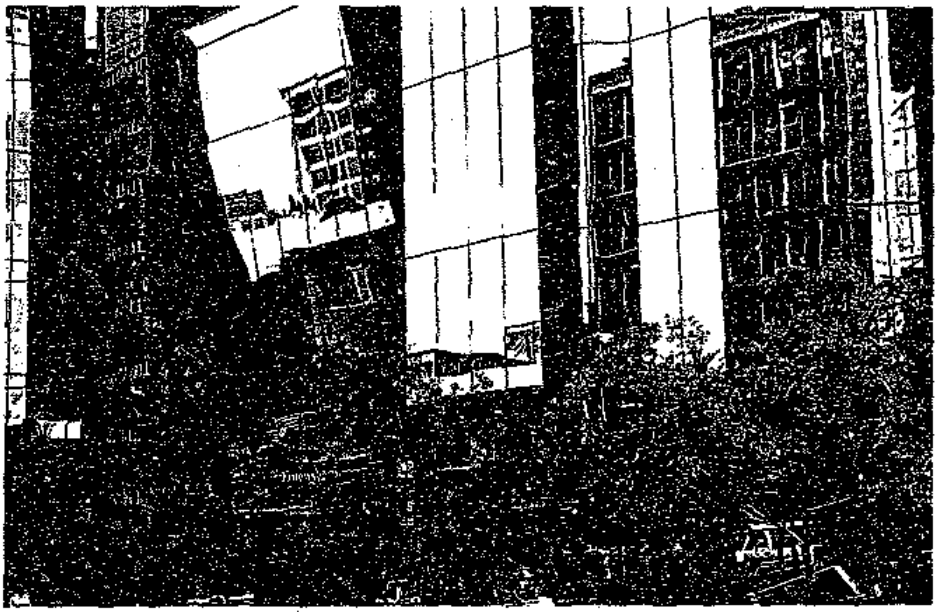

Figure 26: Reflections in 66 Sauer Street, Johannesburg.

definition of the sublime as "an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor and awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether."[412] Jameson's use of the term is closer to Kant's refinement of it: "the object of the sublime is now not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature, but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous

412 JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 77.

forces."[413] The value of postmodern architecture, according to Jameson, is its capability to represent the culture of multinational or consumer capitalism, something that is on the limits of figuration and of the *capacity of* the human mind.

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[413] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. [illegible]

e. Lyotard

Jean-Francois Lyotard's concern is with questions of knowledge and its legitimization in 'advanced' societies. His book The Postmodern Condition[414] led to his fame and caused his name to be associated with postmodernism. The book is a broad characterization of the present age, which Lyotard distinguishes by the loss of the grand récits of modernity. These grand récits, or master narratives, whose demise Lyotard describes, are concepts like the liberation of humanity, progress, the emancipation of the worker, the accumulation of wealth, increased power and a classless society, the function of which was to legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the world to his or her own image.[415] He says that postmodernity signals a crisis in these master narratives' legitimizing function,[416] especially in the rôle and ultimate legitimacy of science itself. As an example of the crisis in the master

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[414] LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. The Postmodern Condition: A Report in Knowledge. United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1984.

[415] JENCKS, CHARLES. What is Postmodernism? London: Academy Editions, 1987, p. 36.

[416] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture, p. 64.

narratives he observes that the social classes, of the classical type as defined by Marxism, no longer function as such today, but that they have been replaced by different, non-class formations such as bureaucracy and technocracy.[417] A further change has been the shift from older industrial technologies to newer informational ones, as discussed in chapter two.

Lyotard is not directly concerned with questions of aesthetics. In the appendix of The Postmodern Condition he does however address questions relating to art.[418] He sees postmodernism as a new social and economic moment corresponding with the media society, consumerism and post-industrialism. His understanding of postmodernism is based on the decay of the confidence in progress and the idea that the avant-garde is over.[419]

Like Jameson, Lyotard is using the idea of the sublime, which he defines as a feeling of pleasure and displeasure,

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[417]LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. The Postmodern Condition, p. xiv.

[418]See the apendix, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in Ibid., p. 71-82.

[419]LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. "Defining the Postmodern." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 6.

experienced simultaneously.[420] Postmodern culture functions as an unpleasant mirror in the same way as postmodern architecture has taught us to learn from popular architecture, for example Venturi's studies of Las Vegas, in order to make ourselves at home in this alienated world.[421] Lyotard sees contemporary architecture as a schizophrenic ethic, again employing a term that Jameson uses, that is a way of surviving under capitalism. Lyotard's displeasure in capitalist c society is clear, but he feels that this negative feature of contemporary society is reconciled with the aesthetic dimension in postmodern architecture by the use of aesthetic play and the commitment to the surface and to the superficial. For Lyotard the sublime in postmodern art and architecture consists of the illusion that it creates of reconciling the interests of both consumeristic society and the aesthetic dimension:

> it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield. Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all 'needs', providing that the tendencies and needs have purchasing power.[422]

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[420]LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. "Complexity and the Sublime." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism, p. 10.

[421]LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. The Postmodern Condition, p. xix.

[422]Ibid., p. 76.

f. Derrida

Derrida is a key figure in the post-structuralist movement. As will be shown in the next section, he is also one of the main influences on architectural deconstruction. Derrida questions the ability of the individual to have knowledge of universal matters, as well as the status of the universal itself.[423] Instead of proposing a comprehensive philosophy, Derrida explores the impossibility of such an all-embracing theory. He believes that one cannot know a definite, concrete reality.

His well known deconstructions of philosophical and other writings brought to light internal contradictions in seemingly perfectly coherent systems of thought. What he does with texts is to demonstrate that the author's argument undoes itself by becoming involved in paradoxes and contradictions.

> Deconstruction thus undertakes a double reading, describing the ways in which lines of argument in the texts it is analyzing call their premises into question, and using the system of concepts within which a text works to produce constructs, such as différance

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[423] MORLEY, SIMON. "A Differance." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructivist Tendencies in Art. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 28.

and supplement, which challenge the consistency of that system.[424]

The reason for doing this, is to uncover accepted concepts and assumptions and to make its presuppositions and limitations more apparent. He wants to reveal the impossibility of a unified meaning in a text, by opening it up to reveal its basic incoherencies. If the meaning of a text is accepted as self-evident and natural, its meaning is restricted unfairly: more often than not meaning is institutionalized through historical processes.[425] His theories claim to open up new ways of thinking about language: for him both meaning and the impossibility of meaning is inherent in language.

Like Lacan, Derrida believes that verbal meaning is not carried by the relationship between a particular physical sound and thing, but by the relationship between one word and all others. Meaning consists of the endless free play of signifiers that circulate in the closed system of language. Typical of post-structuralist philosophy, it is the signifier, and not the signified, to which importance is attached. The term that Derrida uses for these endless

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[424]CULLER, J. "Jaques Derrida." In J. Sturrock. Structuralism and Since. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 172.

[425]BENJAMIN, ANDREW. "Derrida, Architecture and Philosophy." In A. C. Papadakis. Deconstruction in Architecture. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 10.

possibilities of play of different meanings became synonymous with deconstruction, namely différance.[426]

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[426]GHIRARDO, DIANE, "News and Reviews." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXIII, no. 1096, June 1988, p. 5.

8.3. *Deconstructivist Architecture*

Hauser explains the relationship between existentialist *philosophy* and the art of the same category, which forms a *link* with deconstructivist art. According to existentialist *theory*, art should correspond to the facts of existence, for example by acknowledging that we are living in the period after Auschwitz and by considering the "nonredemption" of the world.[427] Art should not gloss over the difficulties of existence or falsify truth. The images of the artists whose work are resulting from this attitude are characterized by obviously angst-ridden, bloody, cynical or solitary topics, such as the work of Francis Bacon, Francis Gruber and Lucian Freud, and the books of Beckett, Céline and Malcolm Lowry.[428] According to Hauser, there is a link between this type of art and literature and existentialist thought, which revolves around aspects such as death and existence, fear and care, hope and desperation, decisions and

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[427]HAUSER, ARNOLD. The Sociology of Art. Trans. K. J. Northcott. London: Rautledge and Kegal Paul, 1982, p. 671.

[428]GRIFFITHS, JOHN. "Deconstruction Deconstructed." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructionist Tendencies in Art. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 12.

renunciations.[429] This seemingly negative attitude is in contrast with the prevailing temper that existed in modernist art and architecture, that was *one of confidence* and wonder.[430] Deconstructivist architecture seems to be a continuation of the existentialist tradition, characterized by evocations of chaos, incoherence and disintegration, for example in the work of Coop Himmelblau (figure 27).

Deconstructivist theory involves a criticism of structuralist philosophy's view that a text or a work of art can be understood on the assumption of a set of fixed relationships between signs, as was discussed in chapter 6.5. Deconstructivist aesthetic theory opposes this view in favour of one in which sets of relationships between signifiers are seen as contingent structures constructed by the imaginative play of the human mind.[431] The deconstructivist critics feel that structuralist theorists have encapsulated signs within a structure that isolated the

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[429]HAUSER, ARNOLD. The Sociology of Art, p. 670.

[430]ZURBRUGG, NICKOLAS. "Postmodernity, Métaphore manquée, and the Myth of the Trans-avant-garde." Leonardo, vol. 21, no. 1, 1988, p. 64.

[431]DEGENAAR, JOHAN. "Writing and Re-Writing." In The South African Association of Art Historians, eds. Re-Writing the Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa. Papers of Conference held from 10 to 12 September 1987. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 1987, p. 2.

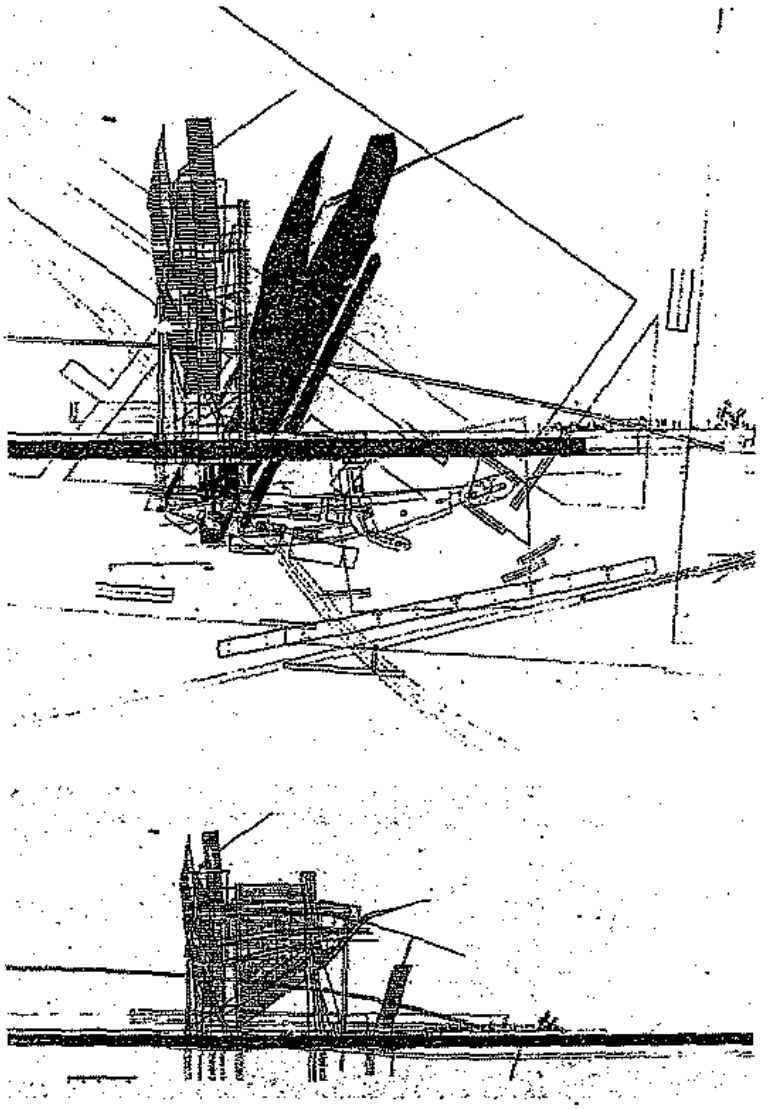

Figure 27: The project which Coop Himmelblau did during the "Hamburg Bauforum" urban planning symposium, 1985, called Skyline: Silhouette for a city like Hamburg. Above: plan; below: elevation. Illustrated in A. C. Papadakis. Deconstruction in Architecture. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 64.

artwork from the rich texture of human experience and the political, social and economical conditions which co-determine both the creation and understanding of artifacts.

During the modern period the authority of the work of art was seen to be vested in its claim to represent some authentic vision of the world, based on Kant's demand that the judgement of taste is universal.[432] Part of deconstructivist art's project is to uncover accepted concepts and assumptions like these in art and to make its presuppositions and limitations more apparent. It claims no such authority as modernist art did, but it actively seeks to undermine such claims. Deconstruction is a highly refined system of double-takes:

> It suspects not only the declared aims, apparent narrative structure, obvious ethos, and so on, of the phenomena it is used on, but also whatever anything, even its own on-going Deconstruction, may suggest is the actual substrate of the object of analysis.[433]

The critical method of deconstruction regards the attempt to reveal an innermost or fundamental principle in art or architecture as a blunder.

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[432] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture, p. 58.

[433] GRIFFITHS, JOHN. "Deconstruction Deconstructed," p. 9.

In trying to determine what influence deconstructivist authors had on deconstructivist architecture, one discovers that their discussions of art are meant only for the initiated and are involved in practicing philosophy rather than being explanatory of the art that it purports to discuss. Derrida in his Truth in Painting,[434] for example, practises what he preaches by writing in a fragmented and difficult style, refusing to discuss art in the conventional art-historical sense. Derrida's resistance against clarity in his writing is as a result of his attempt to always defer the signified in his texts, to refuse a finite meaning.

As Lacan does, Derrida accords great importance to language in its rôle to constitute the world.[435] Because, according to Derrida, writing constitutes language, writing should be seen as the activity that constitutes the world. It is revealing that Derrida bestows importance on writing, instead of speech. He uses speech as metaphor for the 'objective' truths supposedly revealed by analytical philosophy, that is such truths that are construed as embodying a perfect coincidence of meaning and signification with thought. In the same way that writing is once removed

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[434]Referred to in James Macfarlane. "Jean-Francois Lyotard on Adami, Buren and Arakawa." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructivist Tendencies in Art, p. 77.

[435]DEGENAAR, JOHAN. "Writing and Re-Writing," p. 5.

from speech, Derrida believes that a person's relationship with reality is always deferred because he or she is at the mercy of a background network of elements like culture and ideology, over which he or she has little control. The term 'writing' is used metaphorically by Derrida, to refer to all human activities.[436] The world is seen as being continually written through human activities, by means of signs, and thus architecture could also be included within this activity of writing. 'Writing' or acting in the world is a social process, because man's acts and experiences are never innocent but are always preconditioned by a variety of mediations, for example the political dimension, culture, context, power-relations, history and ideology: "the world is always already interpreted."[437] According to Paul Crowther, Derrida manages to make evident the ungraspable network of relations operational in the world. He manages "to offer an insight into, or partial presentation of, a totality which as a totality, is unpresentable."[438] This revelation of the unpresentable imparts a feeling of sublime pleasure to the reader or the observer, because of the representation of what is normally unrepresentable. This

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[436]DEGENAAR, JOHAN. "Writing and Re-Writing," p. 6.

[437]Ibid., p. 10.

[438]CROWTHLER, PAUL. "Beyond Art and Philosophy: Deconstruction and the Post-Modern Sublime." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructionist Tendencies in Art. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 50.

concept is related to Lyotard's and Jameson's concept of the sublime.[439]

The process of writing should remain dynamic, according to Derrida. He feels that the way in which the philosophy of logocentrism tried to find a privileged position which will guarantee fixed meanings and final interpretations, reduces human activities to a static way of life.[440] Certain signs *should not be privileged* to the detriment of others, suppressing the contribution the latter could make to understanding. Derrida is intent on exposing all hierarchies in order to illuminate the hidden assumptions in man's thinking. Reason is often seen in the privileged position of being universal, instead of seeing it as a convention, for example the centrality that was traditionally accorded to white domination in South Africa.[441] Deconstructivist philosophy involves the overturning of these hierarchies, for example Derrida's essay "Racism's Last Word",[442] which is a critique of South Africa's practice of apartheid.

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[439]See pages 217 and 221.

[440]*DEGENAAR, JOHAN. "Writing and Re-Writing,"* p. 6.

[441]Ibid.

[442]*DERRIDA, JACQUES. "Racism's Last Word." Trans.* P. Kamuf. Critical Inquiry, vol. 12, Autumn 1985, p. 290 - 299.

To prevent the process of 'writing' from becoming static, Derrida introduces the term différance, by which is meant the chain or system in which elements in a text are interwoven, and where each element carries within it the trace of the other elements in the chain or the system.[443] Différance, differentiation, or differing, which may also and simultaneously be understood to mean deferment or postponement,[444] is an ongoing process of thought in a play of differences. The elements of this process are interrelated by their distinctions, by their 'removes', 'distances' or 'intervals' from the reality that they represent, and by previous acts of representation whose 'traces' they bear.[445] These interactions, differences, deferments and traces deprive all texts, including architecture, of an ultimate 'external' and immutable meaning.[446] The artwork is seen as a network or texture of intervals and delays:

> the trace of each difference appears in every other difference. There is no absolute general 'origin' of meaning. Each trace exists by virtue of another.[447]

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[443] ULMER, G. L. "The Object of Post-Criticism." In H. Foster. Postmodern Culture, p. 84.

[444] GRIFFINS, JOHN. "Deconstruction Deconstructed." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructionist Tendencies in Art, p. 16.

[445] Ibid.

[446] Ibid.

[447] Ibid., p. 17.

One of the implications that Degenaar sees in the theories of Derrida, is that the work of art can never be autonomous, because it functions in the context of society and history. Furthermore the work of art cannot be interpreted 'innocently', because the world of mediated presuppositions of an economic, aesthetic and political nature intervenes between the artwork and the observer and shapes the observer's response accordingly. Because texts and artworks can be read in many ways, each of which containing within itself the possibility of an infinite set of structures, it will be an ideological move to privilege one reading by setting up a system of rules of interpretation.[448]

Simon Morley traces the deconstructive attitude in art back to Marcel Duchamp's exp' ions of the myths of art.[449] Duchamp questioned the whole category of the "work of art" by his ready-mades such as Fountain of 1917.[450] Morley continues by mentioning some of the characteristics of deconstructivist art, which are also relevant to deconstructivist architecture, namely that the idea that the

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[448]DEGENAAR, JOHAN. "Writing and Re-Writing," p. 11.

[449]MORLEY, SIMON. "A Differance." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructionist Tendencies in Art, p. 31.

[450]See chapter 5.3, page 59.

subject or author is a fallacy, that there can be no knowledge of universals, that it is impossible to intend any meaning in art, that the signs that artists use do not originate with them, and that the artist cannot control the use of these signs, and the expression of doubt regarding the traditional notions of creativity.[451] These influences have affected architects and artists in varying degrees.

As Griffiths notes, many critics, writers, architects and artists who profess to adhere to the deconstructivist movement are very wide of the Derridian mark, and almost any interested party will be able to find fault with any account of the concepts and history of deconstructivist art or architecture.[452] The situation is further complicated by the fact the deconstruction is not a unified philosophical method, but that it has split into many schools and factions that are often not in agreement.[453] However, according to Griffiths, it is of merit that the impetus of the usually vaguely correct or mistaken quotations of deconstructivist philosophy gave rise to such appealing [illegible] in art and

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[451] MORLEY, SIMON. "A Differance", p. 31.

[452] GRIFFITHS, JOHN. "Deconstruction Deconstructed." In A. C. Papadakis. The New Modernism: Deconstructivist Tendencies in Art, p. 9.

[453] Ibid.

architecture, even if it is based on an incorrect interpretation of its sources.

The popularity of deconstructivist architecture has been endorsed by the exhibition Deconstructivist Architecture from June 23 to August 30, 1988, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The style has also spread to South Africa: most of the work exhibited in the students' exhibition of the architectural departments of Pretoria University and the University of the Witwatersrand in Northwards, Johannesburg on the evening of 20 September 1989, was in the deconstructivist style. Leonard Steiner's sixth year thesis at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1986 was one of the earlier examples of the utilization of the style in South Africa. He designed a multipurpose building under and between elevated highways in Johannesburg, in a blighted semi-industrial area. The plan form of his building is purposely fragmented, without a visible ordering principle (figure 28). In contrast with traditional architecture, the idea of stability and order of form is contaminated in this design. It is meant to challenge the values of harmony, unity and stability. The form of the building is determined by its dynamic structure, which is unconventional, judging from Steiner's description of it as being based partly on a vertical crane construction, and another part as having a "vertical leg

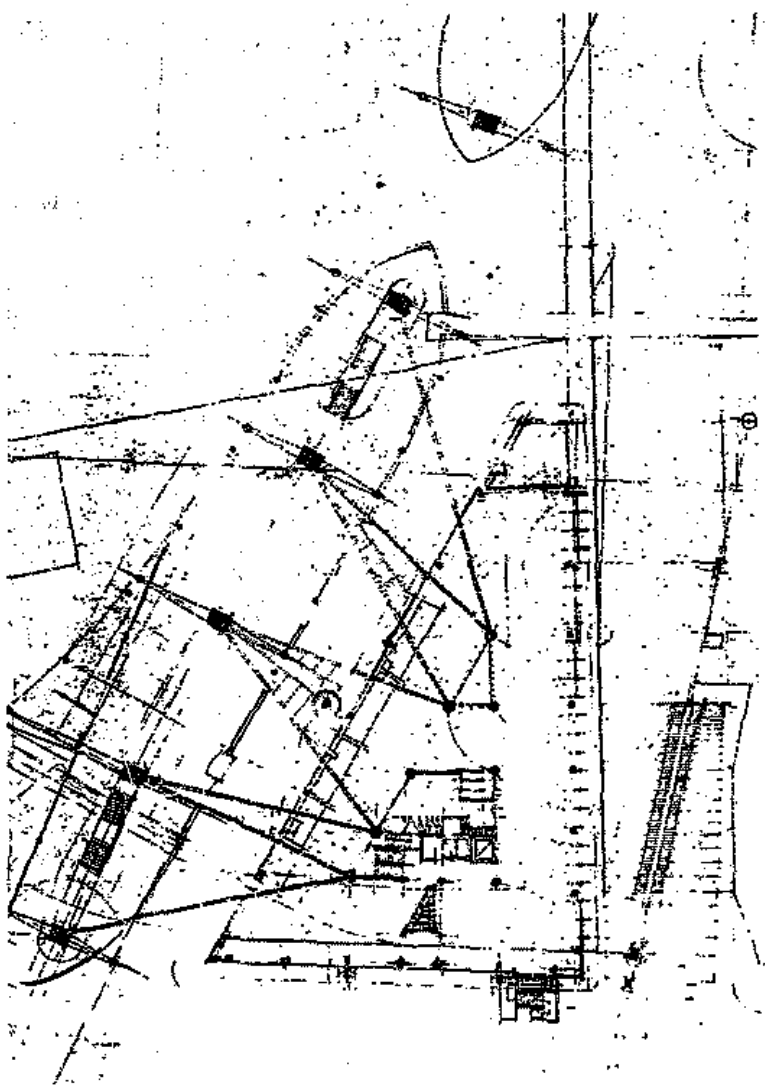

Figure 28: LEONARD STEINER. *Untitled Thesis*, Plan, Johannesburg: Department of Architecture, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986.

support (trunk) and a cantilever counterbalanced by a weight",[454] pivoting around a structural node. Instead of being based upon an orderly structural principle, his building consists of many incongruous structures that are superimposed and intertwined.

Ulmer sees collage and montage as ideal strategies to stimulate signification that is neither univocal nor stable.[455] As an example of montage he discusses Derrida's text Dissemination, which consists of nearly equal portions of a novel by Phillippe Sollers, called Numbers, and Derrida's own text.[456] The appropriated text does not operate as a simple quotation, but the two texts transform and deform each other, contaminating each other's content. It is interesting to note that Leonard Steiner's thesis is intersticed with references to and illustrations of work by Joseph Beuys. These citations do not clarify Steiner's intentions in a straightforward manner, but they do inseminate his text, suggesting a possibility of meaning in

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[454]STEINER, LEONARD. Untitled Thesis. Johannesburg: Department of Architecture, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986, p. 27.

[455]ULMER, G. L. "The Object of Post-Criticism," p. 88.

[456]DERRIDA, J. Dissemination. Trans. B. Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981. Referred to in G. L. Ulmer. "The Object of Post-Criticism," p. 89.

his *esoteric project*, a meaning which is however meant to be difficult to pin down in a definite way.

Johan Degenaar, in his discussion of deconstructivist philosophy, notes two important *shifts* that have taken place in the way in which our understanding of the world is described.[457] Firstly, a shift has occurred by which the paradigm of perception has been replaced by the paradigm of language. If language fulfills the rôle of the *basis of understanding*, it *means* that our relationship with the world is not as immediate as it was through perception. This argument offers a new way of looking at aesthetic theory: it enables us to look at the work of art as something that has to be interpreted in an *historical context*. The act of understanding an artwork became more mediated and no longer simply consists of the process of observation. Steiner's thesis, for example, has to be read 'through' Joseph Beuys' work and in the context of Russian Constructivist *architecture and contemporary* deconstructivist architecture. Without taking these mediating influences into account, Steiner's design will degenerate into being purely sculptural indulgence.

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[457] DEGENAAR, JOHAN. "Writing and Re-Writing," p. 2.

The second shift that occurred is one within the paradigm of language itself, namely the transition from *speaking to writing*, again a move from immediacy to mediacy. Some importance is attached to this perceived denigration of the primacy of vision, as it relates to art and architecture.[458]

Traditionally sight enjoyed a privileged rôle as the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and the world.[459] This special rôle accorded to vision was not restricted to the actual observation of the world with the eyes, but included the monocular vision represented in *painting*. As is clear from common English words such as insight, perspective, overview, farsighted, survey and point of view, the visual contribution to knowledge has been credited with far more *importance* than the other senses on a metaphorical level.

With the start of mechanical reproduction techniques like *photography*, the problemizing of the rôle of vision

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[458] For example:
JONES, P. B. "From the *Neo*-Classical axis to Aperspective Space." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXIII, no. 1093, March 1988, p. 19 - 27, and
JAY, MARTIN. "In the Empire of the *Gaze*: *Foucault* and the Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought." In L. Appignanesi, ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 19 - 25.

[459] JAY, MARTIN. Ibid., p. 19.

began. Instead of the imagistic representation of the world by painting, it was alleged, for example by Baudelaire,[460] that photography viewed things in a scientific, disinterested manner. The time-honoured nobility of sight is called into question by twentieth century French thought: especially Foucault records the shift in which the denigration of vision supplanted its former celebration.[461] In The Order of Things[462] Foucault describes the assumed unity between the word and the image in antiquity, when there was no distinction between what was seen and the word: observation and relation formed a single, unbroken unit.[463]

Foucault describes the breakdown of the unity between word and image that occurred before the end of the sixteenth century: a growing awareness of the binary nature of the sign gave rise to the distinction between the word and the image that it referred to.[464] Visio is however still privileged as the sole means of ascertaining reliable knowledge of the external world: during the sixteenth

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[460] JAY, MARTIN. "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought," p. 19.

[461] Ibid., p. 20.

[462] FOUCAULT, MICHEL. The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences. (1960) New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

[463] JAY, MARTIN. op. cit., p. 22.

[464] Ibid.

century there was a new faith in the power of direct and technologically improved observation, to the detriment of other senses such as touch and hearing.[465]

With the rise of humanism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the end of visual primacy was signalled, with the biological stress on invisible, anatomic and organic structures.[466] Yet, according to Martin Jay, the primacy of vision was preserved in the rise of the human sciences: the Enlightenment's dream was of a transparent society, visible and legible in all its parts.[467] Jay does not describe the status of vision in contemporary society, or indeed its final demise. As was shown above, however, authors such as Fredric Jameson do feel that the new urban developments in the Western world are characterized by the disappearance of perspective, giving rise to existential bewilderment and the loss of our ability to position ourselves within space.[468] Jameson projects this feeling of uprootedness and alienation back on the emergence of a global multinational culture which is decentred and in which

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[465] JAY, MARTIN. "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought," p. 23.

[466] Ibid.

[467] Ibid., p. 24.

[468] STEPHANSON, A. "Interview with Fredric Jameson." Flash Art, no. 131, December 1986 / January 1987, p. 70.

one cannot position oneself. He sees the loss of spatial perspective in contemporary cities as a reflection of the estrangement of the individual in the society of the late twentieth century.

Peter Blundell Jones makes the above argument applicable to architecture.[469] He explains how the use of axes in buildings, where the rectangular rooms each has a major and a minor axis, has political implications in its differentiation of social rank. The nature of the axis is hierarchical, associating it with authoritarian political systems. The example that Jones uses is of the change from Asplund's symmetrical Lister county courthouse of 1920 to his Gothenburg law courts extension and reconstruction of 1937 with an asymmetrical spatial arrangement, which reflected Sweden's conversion to a social democracy.[470] He also describes Garnier's Opéra (1861-74) with its emphasis on the use of axes in terms of its acute differentiation of social rank, in contrast with Hans Scharoun's Philharmonic, (1963) the 'aperspective spaces' of which is not designed to be read statically from a privileged position, which makes

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[469] JONES, P. B. "From the Neo-Classical axis to Aperspective Space," p. 19 - 27.

[470] Ibid., p. 20 and 21.

it expressive of communality in Jones' eyes.[471] The disruption of the conventions of perspective in the work of architects like Hans Scharoun (born 1893), Hugo Häring (1882-1958), Alvar Aalto (born 1898) and Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940) is resisting normal modes of perception and could be seen as indicative of the denigration of the primacy of vision in the architectural context. This is a seductive theory to explain the occurrence of deconstructivist architecture's severe spatial disruptions, for example as is visible on the plan of Leonard Steiner's thesis project (figure 28). But the notion of the denigration of the primacy of vision as applied to architecture is based on a highly selective view of twentieth century architecture and ignores the greatest part of the architectural production of this century. Most of the architectural examples discussed up to now in this dissertation are symmetrical in their arrangements, for example the First National Bank City (figure 17), 5 Simmonds Street (figure 23), 11 Diagonal Street (figure 8) and Squire's Loft (figure 1). It thus seems as if the notion of the primacy of vision being eroded is of limited value in the discussion of contemporary architecture.

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[471] JONES, P. B. "From the Neo-Classical axis to Aperspective Space," p. 27.

Phillip Johnson, in the preface to the book that was published on the occasion of the exhibition Deconstructivist Architecture[472], refuses to see the work on exhibition as representative of a new style, but prefers to think of it as an exhibition of the work of seven architects with a similar approach to design, namely Frank O. Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Zaha M. Hadid, Coop Himmelblau and Bernard Tschumi. He does not mention the influence of the post-structuralist philosophers or of Derrida on deconstructivist architecture at all, but sees it as the revival of Russian Constructivism of the second and third decades of this century. Johnson evaluates deconstructivist architecture in formal terms: the forms of these buildings, according to him, derive from the expression of their unusual structures. No mention is made of the political content of the Russian Constructivists' work. Like most formalist critics, Johnson wishes to remain apolitical. Diane Ghirardo sees the references to the Russian Constructivist work that was also on exhibition as incongruous, because the work is supposed to be understood as having derived from the theories of Jacques Derrida.[473] But the appropriation of Russian Constructivism is seen by

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[472] JOHNSON, PHILIP and MARK WIGLEY. Deconstructivist Architecture. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988.

[473] GHIRARDO, DIANE. "News and Reviews." The Architectural Review, vol. CLXXXIII, no. 1096, June 1988, p. 4.

some critics as a continuation of the strategies of postmodern architecture. Stephanson, for example, notes that

> the return to Minimalism, blank surfaces looking rather like '60s and early '70s, seems to indicate that the postmodern cannibalization of styles has been 'revved up', conceivably ending in some furious, vertigious act of biting its own tail.[474]

Wigley also states that deconstructivist architecture "is not a rhetoric of the new. Rather, it exposes the unfamiliar within the traditional. It is the shock of the old."[475] As in postmodernism, deconstructivist architects appropriate the forms of an earlier style, while they are distancing themselves from the intentions of the original Russian Constructivists.

Charles Jencks traces the origins of deconstructivist architecture back to its historical Constructivist sources. According to him, Zaha Hadid and her tutor, Koolhaas, revive the work of Leonidov, and Bernard Tschumi is influenced by Chernikov.[476] Gregory Ulmer sees one of the most important innovations in Derrida's critical practices as the miming of

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[474]STEPHANSON, A. "Interview with Fredric Jameson." Flash Art, no. 131, December 1986 / January 1987, p. 73.

[475]JOHNSON, PHILIP and MARK WIGLEY. Deconstructivist Architecture, p. 18.

[476]JENCKS, CHARLES. "Deconstruction: The Pleasure of Absence." In A. C. Papadakis. Deconstruction in Architecture, p. 20 - 23.

the text which was his object of study.[477] In this process the commentary of a text is a simulcrum of the primary text. Because he questions the notion of truth, Derrida does not choose between different interpretations of a text, but rather reflects on the circularity which makes the one line of thought pass into the other indefinitely. Deconstructivist criticism traces the surface of the text it studies, looking for flaws and opening the joints and articulations where the text may be dismembered.[478] The strategy for miming that Derrida uses is to utilize the same means and structuring processes that were used by the host work itself, and then detaching them from one conceptual set or semantic field and reattaching them to another. The implication of this is that knowledge of an object of study can be obtained without conceptualization or explanation, but rather through performing or miming the compositional structure of the referent, resulting in another text of the same kind. The example that Ulmer uses, is Derrida's text "Cartouches",[479] which is an attempt to mime a visual work, namely Gérard Titus-Carmel's The Pocket-Size Tlingit Coffin (1975-76). The artwork consists of a mahogany box containing

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[477] ULMER, G. L. "The Object of Post-Criticism," p. 91.

[478] Ibid. p. 93.

[479] Published in J. Derrida. La Vérité en Peinture. Paris: Flammarion, 1978. Referred to in G. L. Ulmer. "The Object of Post-Criticism," p. 93.

127 drawings of the box, each from a slightly different angle. Derrida's strategy for miming the Tlingit Coffin is to ignore the plastic artwork and to mime the structuring process of the work. His text refers to the artwork in a way resembling the relationship between the drawings and the box. His text is different form the artwork on which it depends in the same way as the mahogany box is different from the drawings of which it forms part. Derrida mimes the dated drawings by arranging his text in a journal, each entry being a variation on the same theme, coming to an end after a predetermined, arbitrary number of pages. With this text Derrida illustrates how another work can be simulated by a mimicry of its structure, rather than its content. Miming as a critical practice is used by deconstructivist architects as well. Bernard Tschumi, whose architecture is very abstract, is quoting earlier Constructivist styles, in order to criticize the modern movement. By using the abstract forms of modernism, he hopes to be able to illustrate his opposition to the idea that meaning is immanent in architectural structures. He wants to dismantle meaning to show that it was socially construed.[480]

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[480] TSCHUMI, BERNARD. "Park de la Villette." In A. C. Papadakis. Deconstruction in Architecture. Great Britain: Academy Group, 1988, p. 38.

Craig Owens points out the inherent danger in deconstructivi architecture.[481] By miming the modernist styles which it ants to denounce, it is unable to avoid the very errors that it set out to expose. In the end, deconstructivist architecture affirms the meaningless formalism of modernist architecture, perpetuating what it set out to uncover.

Tschumi believes that the absolutely new, the completely unique that avant-garde architecture strove for, is an impossibility and that the search for it formed part of logocentrism's desire for a self-enclosed totality.[482] Deconstructivist architects do not search for novelty, but their architecture is dependent on that which was previously constructed for its content. "It always posits an orthodoxy

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[481] OWENS, CRAIG. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." In B. Wallis, Art After Modernism. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, p. 228.

[482] BENJAMIN, ANDREW. "Derrida, Architecture and Philosophy." In A. C. Papadakis, Deconstruction in Architecture, p. 10.

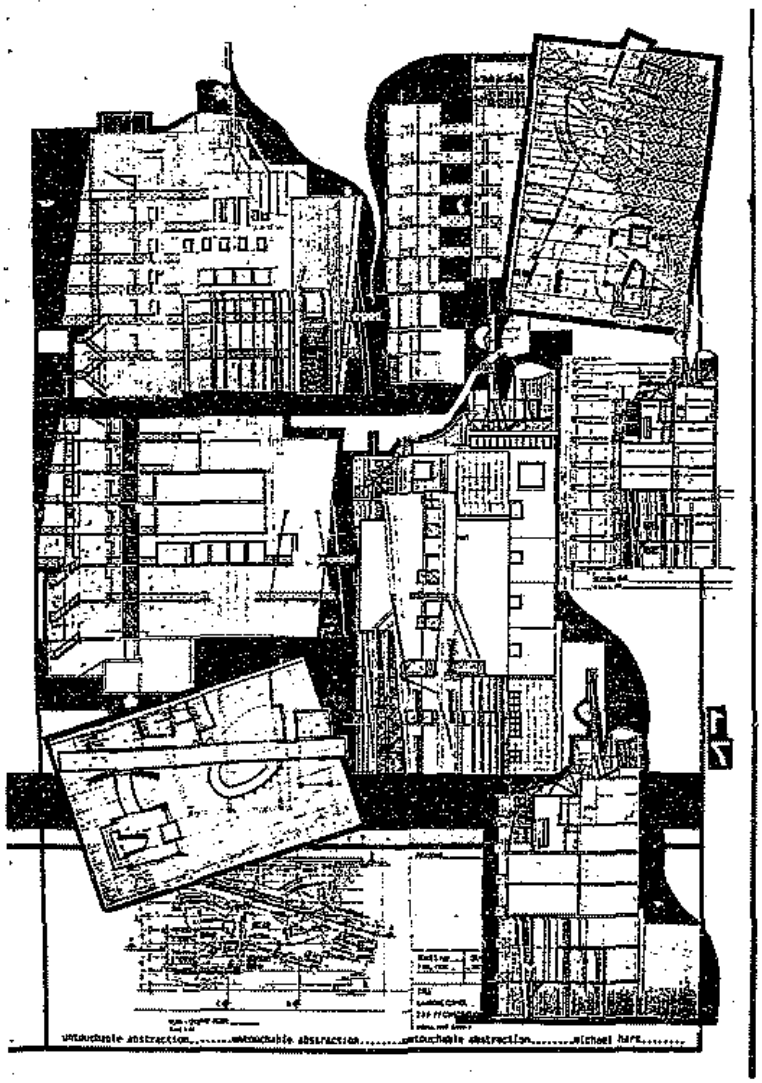

Figure 29: MICHAEL HART. Untouchable Abstraction, 1986. Student Project, University of the Witwatersrand. Published in Re-Mould, February 1986, p. 16 and 17.

which it 'subverts', a norm which it breaks, an assumption and ideology which it undermines."[483]

Michael Hart's project, entitled Untouchable Abstraction,[484] (figure 29) was designed for a small urban site. The building appears fragmented, being a collage of different materials and shapes. The massing is deliberately picturesque, striving for the three dimensional sculptural expression of form. Tough, industrial materials are used, like off shutter concrete walls, steel columns, corrugated sheet metal cladding and metal grills. The plan consists of elliptical, rectangular and curved shapes that are randomly superimposed, with the strong linear shape of the corridor slashing through and clear of both ends of the building.

Hart's project has been designed with the knowledge of the theory of Bernard Tschumi's deconstructivist architecture.[485] It is therefore apt to analyze his design in the light of these theories. In his discussion of the

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[483]JENCKS, CHARLES. "Deconstruction: The Pleasure of Absence," p. 17.

[484]HART, MICHAEL. Untouchable Abstraction. Student project, University of the Witwatersrand. Published in C. Elk and P. Kollenberg, eds. Re-Mould, February 1986, p. 16 and 17.

[485]Lindsay Bremner, a lecturer in the Architectural Department of the University of the Witwatersrand, was instrumental in interesting her students in deconstructivist architecture.

work of OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture), headed by the architect Rem Koolhaas, Jencks lists the characteristics of their deconstructivism.[486] Like in Hart's building, the forms employed by OMA are randomized and indeterminate, and the plan has no overall figural shape. Looking at the Untouchable Abstraction is disorientating for someone not accustomed to the style, because of the disjunctive forms used and the deadpan collisions between the different parts of the building. The building seems to attempt to defy gravity, using suspension cables to support parts of the structure, and with walls leaning over towards the street. The building has similarities with the work of Zaha Hadid as well, for example her Peak Club Competition (1983) in Hong Kong.[487] Hart's design has a comparable feeling of explosive, warped dynamism, coming from the acute angles used in the composition of the plan shape. Furthermore he also uses elements that are exaggerated in length, such as the corridor of the building, which is rotated off the grid and is combined with slight curves and dissonant angles.

It is, however, Bernard Tschumi who exerts the greatest influence on designers like Michael Hart. Tschumi's design

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[486] JENCKS, CHARLES. "Deconstruction: The Pleasures of Absence," p. 20.

[487] Ibid., p. 22.

for the Parc de la Villette (1983-) in Paris is one of the first, and the largest in scale, of the built manifestations of deconstructivist architecture.[488] By combining architectural forms of the old modernism, he creates a style with an exhilarating feeling of being new. The layout of the park favours chance and coincidence, when the three compositional structures of a point grid, the lines of the major circulation routes and the shapes of the main spaces are layered randomly and at angles to each other. Michael Hart follows much the same approach in his design, where different structural systems and forms are haphazardly superimposed. The results of this compositional technique are incongruities and discontinuities which are meant to destabilize meaning. Tschumi intends his designs to be interpreted as emptiness and as a reflection of the kind of urban reality that was created by modernism.[489] This kind of architecture is a representation of the uprooted, anarchic and confused nature of the society created by mass-culture.

Bernard Tschumi gives a detailed account of his approach to architecture in his essay "Parc de la

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[488] JENCKS, CHARLES. "Deconstruction: The Pleasures of Absence," p. 23.

[489] Ibid., p. 24.

Villette."[490] His architecture is meant as a resistance to the conventional image of the architect as form-giver, who fuses form and function, programme and context, structure and meaning into hierarchical structures. He thinks that a belief in the unified, centered, and self-generative subject underlies work that is formally autonomous.[491] Tschumi feels that the importance attached to synthesis, harmony and the composition of elements in architecture is estranging buildings from contemporary cultural conditions. His strategy to rectify what he perceives as being wrong with conventional architecture is explained in terms of the concepts dis-structuring, order, disjunction, limits, notation, deconstruction and non-sense / no-meaning, each of which will be discussed in more detail below.

The concept of dis-structuring encompasses the notion that contemporary cultural circumstances, that of alienation and disorientation, which cause the "dispersion of the subject", should be reflected by an architecture in which the unified, coherent form should be decentred.[492] This decentring of architecture takes the form of the disruption

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[490] TSCHUMI, BERNARD. "Parc de la Villette." In A. C. Papadakis. Deconstruction in Architecture, p. 32 - 39.

[491] Ibid., p. 33.

[492] Ibid.

and disjunction of architectural form in the work of Tschumi and his followers.

Tschumi questions the traditional notion of order in architecture, partly because he believes that too much emphasis is placed on the final, unified product of architecture, instead of concentrating on the techniques and the process of design. According to him the process of design should have no beginning or end. This approach is related to that of Joseph Beuys, who believed that life and the world should be made into a work of art: as mentioned above, Leonard Steiner has drawn on Beuys' ideas in his thesis project. This approach puts the limits of architecture into question, which is another of Tschumi's concerns: he wants to analyse the historical concepts of architectural theory to see what unexplored presuppositions are repressed and hidden behind them. Tschumi is indebted to Derrida's deconstructivist techniques in this approach.

The "notations" of architecture, namely the forms traditionally used in buildings, are also questioned by Tschumi.[493] He wants to renew the forms of architecture, without the regression to classical forms as practised by the Postmodern Classicist architects. Here Tschumi ties

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[493] TSCHUMI, BERNARD. "Park de la Villette," p. 34.

himself up in knots, because, as shown above, his architecture can be seen as a revival of Russian Constructivism and of the modernism of the nineteen fifties and sixties. Tschumi sets himself the task of developing a new vocabulary of forms, something that few architects and critics believe is easy to achieve.

Tschumi's concept of disjunction implies that a design should not be allowed to achieve synthesis or a self-sufficient totality. The fragmented forms of the student projects discussed above should be seen in this light. The function of the fragmentation, superimposition and arbitrary combination is to try to transcend the traditional limits of architecture, in search for a new architectural vocabulary that will be expressive of Tschumi's "new concept of the city", which is a celebration of the status quo.[494] This sentiment is echoed by E. M. Farreley:

> Contemporary architecture ... will be honest and true when streets, open spaces and infrastructures reflect the image of urban reality ... The important thing won't be the grass you can't walk on, but the asphalt you can.[495]

Tschumi's concept of an architecture of disjunction is incompatible with the traditional view of architecture as

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[494] TSCHUMI, BERNARD. "Parc de la Villette," p. 35.

[495] FARRELEY, E. M. "Song of Innocence and Experience." The Architectural Review, no. 1074, August 1986, p. 18.

static and autonomous. Using Derrida's concept of différance Tschumi promotes an architecture that is based on a constant operation that will systematically produce dissociation. This design technique leads to an undecided product, the opposite of the concept of a building as a complete totality.

Lastly, Tschumi is opposed to the idea that meaning is immanent in architectural forms. This brings him in conflict with the architects that believe in the semiological approach to design.[496] Tschumi aligns himself with post-structuralism's assault on meaning: he wants to dismantle meaning by showing that it was socially construed and is based on convention rather than objective truth. His claims that the architectural forms employed in La Villette means nothing, that it is an architecture of the signifier rather than the signified, should be seen in this light. There is, however, a differer[illegible]twen Tschumi's denial of meaning and the formalism [illegible]st architecture, which analyzed buildings in terms o[illegible] formal elements and in functional terms, thereby avoiding the possibility that architecture can constitute meaning. For Tschumi architecture is meaningful as a representation of the uprooted culture of contemporary society. He uses the

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[496] As discussed in chapter 6.5.

abstract forms of modernist architecture to depict this "meaningless" culture and to represent the chaotic nature of post-industrial cities.

It is often said that deconstructivist architecture will be suffocated by the publicity given to it, which has turned it into another fashionable architectural style.[497] Buildings like the Crack Restaurant (figure 10) can be seen as commercialized versions of the style, capitalizing on the seductiveness of the forms of deconstructivist architecture without sharing its philosophical concerns. Many of the deconstructivist projects seen in universities and in the architectural press are merely uncritical translations of Constructivist forms into an elegant design ethic. Because the deconstructivist approach in architecture has become so popular, it is foreseen that the novelty of the style will quickly wear off and loose its abrasive intentions to become merely another popular, commercialized style.

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[497] GHIRARDO, DIANE. "News and Reviews," p. 4.

9. CONCLUSION

Doubt was expressed in the introduction to this dissertation whether the postmodern discourse is relevant to South Africa as 'Third World' country. South African architects generally seem to share the concerns of international Western architects: the mass media in the forms of, for example, film and periodicals have overcome physical boundaries and distances between countries and are contributing to a culture becoming increasingly similar in all Western countries. Although the same can be said of the architecture of the first half of this century, the process of cultural levelling was then more or less restricted to the West, with large parts of Africa and the East little affected thereby. The use of modern communication systems and computer technology has changed this to a large extent. Little attention has been paid in the literature studied for this dissertation to the ways in which the cultures of Third World communities and the urban and rural poor are reflected in their buildings. This field of study has not been neglected as is illustrated by the examples below.

Rapoport studied the ways in which Third World communities have adapted to technological progress in their countries. The Nubians, for instance, customised the new

housing provided for them when they were displaced by the Aswan Dam by using traditional patterns to decorate their houses.[498] Trying to respond to the needs of black clients, the South African architect Peter Rich has researched traditional black settlements.[499] These studies served as foundation for his architecture, for example his Elim Shopping Centre,[500] which is meant to be representative of a transitional architectural response to South African conditions. His references include both Third World and First World forms, for example traditional mural decoration and the bright Shangaan colours on the one hand and the lean-to roofs of trading posts with parapet walls on which advertisements were placed and the central roof ventilators of colonial dwellings on the other. An in-depth critique of this attempt to enhance the status of black art forms cannot be undertaken here, but Franco Frescura, for example, points out that 'traditional' black architectural forms are often the product of the last forty years or less, as is the case with Ndebele wall decorations.[501] As can be seen in the new

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[498]RAPOPORT, AMOS. The Meaning of the Built Environment. London: Sage Publications, 1982, p. 142.

[499]See for example Peter Rich. "The Bantwane Settlement at Kwarrielaagte." Architecture SA, November/December 1982, p. 38-43.

[500]RICH, PETER. Elim Shopping Centre, Gazankulu, 1986. Published in Building, no. 6, August 1986, p. 13-17.

[501]FRESCURA, FRANCO. "The Plascon 'Living use of
(Footnote Continued)

privately owned houses in Alexandra and Soweto, black people do not aspire to 'traditional' homes: on the contrary, their homes are indistinguishable from houses in white suburbs.[502] Anitra Nettleton showed that so-called 'traditional' art forms often are the result of the influence of the white-dominated market for black art.[503] David Dewar seems to have a less paternalistic critical approach because he does not look back to tradition in searching for solutions for Third World architecture.[504] Instead he explores the problems of the poor in a very pragmatic way, for example by studying the problems caused by the insistence on high standards in building, zoning into mono-functional activities and the power of housing as a tool of social control. His solutions for the housing problem in South Africa revolve around notions such as the ability of families to generate income within and around the housing process, the multi-functional use of urban spaces and elements, the subsidizing of

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(Footnote continued)
Colour' Exhibition." South African Journal of Cultural and Art History, vol. 3, no. 3, July 1989, p. 275.

[502] See Rodney Harber. "The Countdown." Architecture SA, July/August 1988, p. 52-53, for illustrations of Black Housing preferences, which include 'Cape Dutch', 'Morrocan' and 'Space Frame' houses.

[503] NETTLETON, ANITRA. "Myth of the transitional: black art and white markets in South Africa." South African Journal of Cultural and Art History, vol. 2, no. 4, October 1988, p. 301-310.

[504] DEWAR, DAVID. "Self Help Housing in South Africa - A Redefinition of the Problem." Architecture SA, July/August 1983, p. 16-19.

housing, the decentralizing of decision-making and financial networks and the freedom of small builders to innovate with non-standardized and unconventional materials.

Cees Hamelink is another critic who blurs the distinction between the Third World and the First World. A stage has been reached where the problems of the Third World have to be solved using resources in the way that the First World does in terms of financing and the availability of sophisticated communication and information systems. Although Hamelink is critical of the exportation of Western cultural goods to the Third World because it threatens cultural diversity,[505] he points out that Third World countries often argue for a more equitable distribution of information and communications in the world at large. To enable Third World countries to keep afloat in commodity markets, they have to be able to compete against multinational corporations who have access to international digital data communication networks.

Many architects still believe that postmodernism is only an ephemeral style. They are correct, if the definition

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[505]HAMELINK, CEES. Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications. New York and London: Longman, 1983.
and HAMELINK, CEES. Finance and Information: A Study of Converging Interests. New Yersey: Ablex, 1983.

of postmodernism is restricted to Postmodern Classicism,[506] for example. Max Hutchinson, in his inaugural address as President of the Royal Institute of British Architects on 11 July 1989, urged architects to forget postmodernism, which he explicitly defines as "neo-Classicism", and embark on a new architecture, which he calls a "new Modernism". He acknowledges, however, that "There is nothing new under the sun" and that the new architecture will have to be a "neo" style, namely "neo-Modernism".[507] But this dissertation strove to demonstrate that postmodernism should be seen in a broader context, namely as the "cultural dominant" of late capitalism, to use Jameson's words.[508] It was shown how philosophers and cultural critics perceived a cultural shift during the last twenty years to a "post-industrial society" in America and Western Europe.[509] This new development in culture is related to changes in work patterns, for example the increasing number of office workers relative to factory employees, and the technological advancements in the fields of data processing and communication. Parallel to this shift

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[506]As illustrated in Charles Jencks, ed. Post-Modern Classicism. London: Architectural Design, 1980.

[507]HUTCHINSON, MAX. "Towards the Next Millenium." RIBA Journal, vol. 96, no. 9, September 1989, p. 42.

[508]JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review, no. 146, July-August 1984, p. 85.

[509]See chapter two.

a new pragmatism in philosophy has developed, with a more flexible view of the constitution of truth and knowledge than the earlier philosophical systems of the twentieth century.[510] The practices of post-industrial society caused certain changes in general culture. Improved communication systems such as television, radio and the press made advertising into one of the big industries of the Western World, bridging the gap between art and mass culture. Jameson argues that culture has expanded throughout the social realm, to the point where everything in our social life can be said to have become 'cultural'.[511] According to Stephanson, postmodernism can be seen as the collapse of art and social life into one: design has become pervasive in our world to such an extent that life itself is becoming aesthetic.[512]

Many of the characteristics of modernism and the avant-garde were continued in contemporary art. If modernist architecture is criticized because it was too formal, it should be remembered that it is impossible to create any artwork or building without resorting to the formal elements

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[510] See chapter three.

[511] JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 87.

[512] STEPHANSON, ANDERS. "Interview with Fredric Jameson." Flash Art, no. 131, December 1986/January 1987, p. 71.

of the specific discipline, for example line, form, shape, texture and space. The discussion of these formal features form an intrinsic part of any analysis of the arts. The view that modernist art criticism was exclusively interested in the formal elements of art is due to the importance attached to Clement Greenberg's critical attitude. Greenbergian formalism is but one facet of the art historical discourse of the twentieth century, the avant-garde being another side of the same coin. In chapter five it has been shown that postmodernist architecture was a continuation of the avant-garde attitude of modernist architects, but simultaneously a repudiation of the reductionalist aspect thereof. But these avant-garde efforts of cultural resistance were eventually disarmed and absorbed by the late capitalistic systems, and architecture is currently seen as becoming an accomplice in the commodification process experienced in all facets of contemporary culture.[513]

Although modernist art was not without meaning or content, a greater emphasis has been placed on the meaning of art and architecture since about 1960. As was shown in chapter six, the renewed concern with meaning is attributed to Marxist art criticism and structuralist linguistics in particular. The importance attached to content led to the

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[513] *JAMESON, FREDRIC. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,"* p. 87.

virtual disappearance of form in some instances, as was visible in 'performances art' and the interest in community housing projects amongst architects. Where architects were designing buildings, the forms had to be meaningful, by being a response to communal values, for example. Again, these popular forms were often changed into pastiche and absorbed by mass culture.[514] It has been said that the weakness of postmodernism is too great a degree of complicity in mass culture, careerism and opportunism.[515] There are different answers to this charge: Lyotard, for example, views postmodern architecture in its debased commercialized forms as representative and illustrative of the economic and political forces at work in Western societies, and as such a valuable 'mirror' of society.[516] It is difficult to determine which of the attempts made by

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[514]The term "mass culture" is used here as explicated by Harold Rosenberg in Discovering the Present. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 15 - 28. He explains that the basis of the concept of mass culture lies in the concept that an experience can be recognized as common to many people. Mass culture can be made when the cultural producer can detect the element of sameness in large groups of people. However, as Rosenberg points out, mass culture operates according to laws that cause it to be potentially true of the mass but inevitably false to each individual, because each person's experiences are unique to himself.

[515]NEWMAN, M. "Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 44.

[516]See page 222.

architects to design their buildings as more responsive to the needs of the public are honest, and which not. The whole question of honesty in architecture has proved to be rather arbitrary: Philip Johnson, for example, may feel that he is perfectly honest towards both himself and his client when he declares that he is for sale and that he will work for whoever has money and commissions a building from him.[517] But his attitude smacks of deceit when compared to Marcuse's proclamation, quoted by Habermas: "...I know wherein our most basic value judgements are rooted - in compassion, in our sense for the suffering of others."[518]

The characteristic that typifies postmodern architecture in the most apparent way is the use of simulation and appropriation. Styles of the distant or recent past are appropriated for different reasons: it may be done to make buildings visually more accessible to the general public, or to capitalize on popular taste or fashion. 'Popular taste' is not an innocent feature of society that is constituted spontaneously. The term itself is an aberration: 'popular' seems to denote the universal,

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[517] JUDD, DONALD. "A long discussion not about masterpieces but why there are so few of them, part 1." Art in America, vol. 72, October 1984, p. 13.

[518] HABERMAS, JURGEN. "Psychic Therminor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity." In R. J. Bernstein. Habermas and Modernity. Cambridge: Politi Press, 1985, p. 77.

at least in a specific society, while taste is subjective and individual; according to Kant.[519] According to Hauser, popular taste can be seen as a consciously developed and carefully orchestrated creation of entrepreneurs who finance the production and distribution of cultural products, and it is conformist by nature.[520] A better term for popular taste may be 'popularized taste'. The conflict between the search for a social relevance for architecture and the commodification of buildings as part of the materialistic culture that we are living in, is a constant theme in postmodernism. This conflict was also felt in modernist architecture, but the forces of commodification now seem to be more overpowering than ever before.

The styles that are quoted are often chosen, or used in such a way, that the resultant buildings look novel, because of the unfamiliarity of the appropriated style. It is imperative that 'new' styles must be created to fulfil the induced public demand for new fashions. But, if repeated often enough, these styles become outmoded and have to be substituted by others. Architects' imaginations do not seem to be able to cope with the persistent demand for new

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[519] KANT, IMMANUEL. The Critique of Judgement. Trans: J. C. Meredith. Oxford; Claredon Press, 1988, p. 56.

[520] HAUSER, A. The Sociology of Art. Trans: K. J. Northcott. London; Rautledge and Kegal Paul, 1982, p. 643.

styles, and they are groping in the past for design clues. The concept of appropriation is related to the denigration of the trust in technological progress, as was shown in chapter seven. Although technological development continues to take place, for example in the field of computerized production methods in architecture,[521] it is often felt that contemporary buildings are more the fulfilment of the potential of modernist architecture, than a formal renewal of architecture.[522]

Many of the critics discussed in this dissertation, for example Marcuse, Jameson and Lyotard, do not really make value judgements by pronouncing which buildings they regard as 'good', and which as 'bad'. They are interested in buildings as manifestations of culture, and do not judge them as architectural compositions.[523] And critics who feel that there still is a place for the judgement of quality, for example Linda Hutcheon,[524] are open to the criticism that they perpetuate Greenberg's insistence on quality in

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[521] See page 156.

[522] As was discussed on pages 88 to 90.

[523] See for example Jameson's discussion of the Los Angeles Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, California, by John Portman and Associates. Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 80.

[524] See page 191.

art.[525] The architectural critic will always have to weigh the manner in which the formal elements of architecture have been utilized against the rôle that the building plays in society at large, if he or she is to give a balanced evaluation of architecture. Most architects still value a well designed building more than a 'bad' one, simply because there still is the latent possibility of quality in architecture. But the nature of architecture might have changed to such a degree that buildings are already no longer seen as discrete aesthetic objects. The influence that design exerts on all aspects of everyday life like advertising, the packaging of merchandise, clothing fashions and the built environment is impossible to ignore. Baudrillard maintains that the aesthetic fascination of design is felt everywhere in contemporary societies.[526] In this dissertation the author's argument is that architecture is increasingly making the complete material world part of the aesthetic experience. The appearance of buildings is still regarded as important, that is why they are designed by architects, but for reasons related to the marketability of the building or the economic function performed in it. The forms of buildings, for example, are increasingly seen as transient and can be altered every few years to ensure

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[525] See page 45.

[526] BAUDRILLARD, J. Simulations. New York: Foreign Agents Series, 1983. p. 150.

that the buildings remain "new" and fashionable. Everite House in Braamfontein and Killarney Shopping Centre are building complexes that have recently undergone such transformations. These buildings give one the idea that they have become less autonomous as aesthetic entities and that in them the aesthetic dimension is being reconciled with the economic impulses operative in society. This trend has always been part of the architecture of capitalistic societies, but the author feels that it is now becoming more pronounced and that it could be seen as characteristic of postmodern architecture in general.

If architecture is becoming part of mass-culture it is accomplishing the long cherished dream of the merging of architecture and the social dimension, however in a different form than that wished for by the social critics of the Frankfurt School, for example. As was discussed in chapter 5.4, the Marxist critics' ambition was that architecture should be integrated into the world of social reality.[527] What might be happening, though, is what Bürger has warned against, namely that the endeavour to integrate architecture into the life processes is leading to an architecture no longer distinct from the praxis of life, but wholly absorbed by it, thereby loosing its critical capacity

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[527] See page 71.

towards the status quo.[528] The modernist era of architecture has seen the architect in the rôle of the critic of society and the built environment. Partly because of the perceived failures of architects' attempts to solve the architectural problems of the world[529], the recent trend has been that architects abandoned this rôle to become accomplices in consumer culture. This step seems to be retrogressive and morally degenerate, even if it is the logical thing to do in a culture based on the exchange of commodities. The critical task vis-a-vis the commodification of cultural goods in contemporary societies fell mainly on the shoulders of Marxist critics.[530] In the face of the crises of socialism experienced recently during the 1989 spring democracy uprisings in China, the opening of the Berlin Wall and the perestroika policy in Russia the resistance against consumerism seems to have little effect. Thus the architectural profession is likely to continue to become more commercialized. As individuals architects can remain sceptical and critical about prevailing social values and urban conditions, but the profession as a whole has adopted a much more business-like attitude than in the past.

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[528] BURGER, P. Theory of the Avant-Garde. Trans. M. Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 50.

[529] See page 162.

[530] See pages 71 and 72.

Symptoms of this trend in South Africa, that are felt in America and Europe as well, are the deregulation of the profession in the forms of the abandonment of minimum fee scales, the sanctioning of advertising of professional services and the possibility of voluntary membership to the Institute of Architects. Architecture seems to be moving out of the domain of the arts, becoming more business oriented and merging with the world of commodities.

What are the options available to the contemporary architect? One is to simply join the world of commercial architecture and design buildings as commodities as well as one can. There is a certain realism in this 'reactionary' attitude.[531] It means that architecture will be integrated into the material processes of life. Then architecture may be the embodiment of reality, the experience of which can be gratifying. Another possibility will be to try to resist the commodification of architecture, if one believes that the social and economic status quo should not simply be accepted. Lyotard suggests a strategy of resistance open to contemporary architectural practices.[532] The approach that

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[531] See chapter 5.6 for a discussion of postmodernism of reaction and of resistance.

[532] LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANCOIS. "Brief Reflections on Popular Culture." In L. Appignanesi, ed. ICA Documents 4: Postmodernism. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p. 58.

he suggests is one of subtle subversion or deconstruction, namely to produce cultural products that will induce a feeling of uncertainty or disturbance in the viewer or the client. He hopes that, if the architect can manage to agitate his or her audience in this way, it will be followed by reflection on their part. In this way architects can, by their inventiveness and artistic skills, help the public to examine, recognize and change social and political realities.

APPENDIX 1

Opportunities for work according to economical sector in 1985, the projected opportunities for work in 1995 and the expected annual growth rate for the period 1985 - 1995.

Source: National Commission of Manpower

Economic Sector	1985 N	1985 %	1995 N	1995 %	Annual Growth Rate
Agriculture	868 147	11,4	802 133	9,0	-0,8
Mining	796 358	10,4	952 430	10,6	1,8
Manufacturing	1 409 926	18,4	1 594 189	17,8	1,2
Electricity, Gas & Water	92 049	1,2	87 000	1,0	-0,6
Building & Construction	338 623	4,4	417 860	4,7	2,1
Trade	954 622	12,5	1 284 438	14,3	3,0
Transport & Communication	510 619	6,7	633 564	7,1	2,2
Financial Organizations	381 136	5,0	454 209	5,1	1,8
Sundry Services	273 933	3,6	344 490	3,8	2,3
Public Services	1 139 685	14,9	1 504 990	16,8	2,8
Domestic Servants	877 230	11,5	877 305	9,8	0,0
TOTAL	7 642 328	100,0	8 952 608	100,0	1,6

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Author Coetzee Anton
Name of thesis Postmodern Aesthetic Theory With Reference To South African Architecture. 1989

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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