

# Avant-Garde, Aestheticization and the Economy

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I. Culture, as the predominant form of symbolic production in Europe, entered the final stage of mass cultural production in the 1950s. Unlike traditional, bourgeois-affirmative culture produced by a socio-structurally defined elite for precisely the same elite, mass-consumer culture is a form of culture geared to a country's entire population, regardless of class. Today, in an era of globalized media and markets, mass-consumer culture is reaching out to all people in capitalist industrialized nations. This culture is no longer driven by class, as it was in the past. Rather, it is driven by the overall system of capitalist commodity production, something the protagonists of the historical avant-gardes could not have objectively realized.

Moreover, mass culture is not only a media phenomenon, but is created by the overall production and market system of capitalist societies. That said, mass consumption is also imbued with a truly radical egalitarianism that the post-bourgeois societies of the West have taken on from preceding bourgeois societies as a form of political, social, and cultural self-interpretation and self-legitimacy. Mass culture is thus industrially produced, commercially disseminated, and consumptively appropriated as a differentiated and yet homogeneous universe of commodities that is egalitarian precisely in its consumption. It would very much seem that the contradiction accompanying modernity since its inception - namely, the antagonism of culture and modernization that possibly provided the most

important prompt for the avant-gardes, persuading them to generate an urban mass culture as a culture of synchronicity - has finally been resolved in today's mass culture.

## Culture and Modernization

Compared with earlier reforms *intrinsic* to the system, carried out in the second half of the nineteenth century in an effort to blunt the ever-sharper contradiction between culture and modernization, we can consider the programmatic demands by groups of artists made during and after the war, whose cultural thrust was in part revolutionary (and whom we shall treat collectively as the 'avant-garde'), to have been an opposition that *exploded* the system.

It is well known that the avant-gardes initially described the contradictions as a chasm between art and life, which they sought to bridge. This diagnosis refers both to the fact that artistic production was distant from life and to the circular-ownership elitism of cultural life itself. The latter excluded the larger public owing to its lack of special aesthetic qualifications, and this exclusion in turn strengthened elitism as a social form and reinforced it, above all, as an aesthetic self-awareness and a special way of life.

Members of the early modernist avant-garde movements were cultural revolutionaries, not only because this was their thrust, but, above all, because they came up against the firm propo-

nents of a traditional understanding of art and culture, an understanding that in Germany was also strongly tainted by nationalism, namely the so-called educated middle class, a stratum that with its ostentatious cultural flair enjoyed strong support in practically all developed European countries. Each and every cultural innovation that sought to promulgate disenchantment and cultural sobriety, to align culture with the living conditions of industrial modernity, had to be pushed through in the face of opposition from these advocates of a traditional culture. Obviously, these attempts always constituted a shock to society as a whole. And the strongest shock was doubtlessly experienced by the social stratum whose status and position in society were defined by the fact that it controlled society's most important cultural resources, which is why Bourdieu speaks of cultural capital. In case of doubt, they were the ones who stood to lose most.

Cultural change does not simply spell the introduction of new forms, e.g. in the case of the avant-gardes it involved abstract painting, collage as a technique, new literary methods, Dada happenings, or the use of glass, steel, and innovations in apartment construction and apartment typologies, but even change in the sense of replacing the dominant proponents of culture. Precisely during its late phase in Europe (when its social base had noticeably eroded), the classically educated middle class continued to lay claim counterfactually not only to its humanist educational thrust but also to the status of a self-transparent subject - as if the critique of a philosophy of the individual, as formulated by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, had simply not occurred.

### **Art and Life**

Overcoming the divide between art and life beyond the diagnostics aspect of art production always has a programmatic significance, namely to expand the audience and gain, through the artistic material, the aesthetic standards used in people's everyday lives.

Undoubtedly, none of the avant-garde movements could have seriously sought to bring about the oft-cited 'transfer' of art into traditional bourgeois life. There were, after all, reasons for the evolving contradictions between art and life; reasons to be found in the structure of bourgeois society in the first epoch of industrialization. The programme of linking the two spheres assumes not only a change in culture but also a change in society. Several paths could lead to it and I shall examine the three I believe are most important.

The *first* path is the inclusion of everyday life in art. This angle, in particular, led to the destruction of the concept of the artwork and made it reasonable to expect social change in the sense of aesthetization. This is a programmatic approach and, at least in terms of the destructive components, the path taken by Dada, Futurism and The New Objectivity.

The *second* path entails addressing artistic output and its links to a subject capable of change in a political way. This subject can be a social class, ideally thought capable of action (i.e. the proletariat), for which the left wing of Dada, for example, had opted. Or a socially revolutionary party, such as the one the Futurists and also prominent Rationalist architects in Italy were affiliated with. Or it could be the type of political/administrative figures with whom, for example, the Bauhaus around Walter Gropius or 'Das Neue Frankfurt' around Ernst May had cooperated.

The *third* path involves integrating the arts into the social process of reproduction. It is the route taken by architects, designers, graphic designers, and photographers in particular, although here, too, different options are available.

## **II.**

From the viewpoint of design, we can generalize the position of the politically focused avant-garde

of the Weimar Republic and say that it increasingly saw its artistic work as labour aimed at changing social conditions. Thus, the virulent culture at the Bauhaus, given its internationalism, also bore clear traits of a trans-class and essentially market-compliant culture. The roots of the aesthetic of the particular were severed in favour of transforming it into a medium for generalizing standards of living, utility, and residential life. Which is why the products of the Bauhaus, even in their most exclusive guise, still use the language of an industrially manufactured, typified, and standardized culture as *mass culture*.

In the period after World War I, there were two dominant approaches to the transformation of the aesthetic core of bourgeois high culture (i.e. the improvement and also the beautification of life),<sup>1</sup> with the Bauhaus standing for the former. It was the *avant-garde project*: programmatically envisaging the politicization of art, and, vice-versa, imbuing everyday life with culture. The slogan that art and life be united, which stood for this mutual interaction, thus pointed, on the one hand, to a concept of the aesthetic that instilled the project with a strong epistemological, and, in the case of some avant-gardes, an explicitly rationalist thrust. On the other hand, culture was no longer construed as a generative process for trammelling the developed individual, and therefore as something special, but rather as something that was aesthetically mediated and in a non-institutional sense a political level of reflection on life. This was, as it were, a trans-bourgeois attempt to realize the bourgeois promise of cultural equality, one that bourgeois society could never redeem for structural reasons. On the one hand, this project spawned an immense volume of art, which we now paradoxically call classical modernism. On the other hand, its programmatic agenda essentially had no impact. It was conceptually (not yet) possible to the extent that it sought to de-differentiate spheres of society - challenging the key achievement of modernity: the differentia-

tion of spheres of society as autonomous function systems.

The *Fascist culture project*, which shared the critique of the bourgeois culture's elitism and solipsism with the avant-garde, substituted the idea of politicization with the real primacy of politics or, once power had been assumed, with the bureaucratic primacy of politics. Culture became fully integrated into state directives and was produced, distributed, and administered by state licence holders - which were part of the member lists of the *Einzelkammer*, which in turn was part of the *Reichskulturkammer*. It is well known that such a *political culture model* had a strong following in numerous European countries, but it was only fully put into practice in Italy and Germany, albeit in different ways. It was primarily in Germany where the mass-cultural transformations of bourgeois high culture took place. The Nazis, in particular, used the aesthetic centre of high-brow art in order to popularize it. Thereby, the aesthetic lost its critical function and its ability to bestow a certain particularity upon form. It becomes beautification. One can also say: mimesis becomes mimicry. The popularization of aesthetics is above all sustained through specially produced, immediate forms of technical mediatization. With this redefinition of what is aesthetic and its mediatization, the Nazis 'achieved' a mass-cultural modernization that was adapted in the post-Fascist era and, under the new conditions, could undergo further seamless development.

With the fall of its sovereigns, this power-dependent, political model of culture was completely compromised. A political model of culture, i.e. the governance of the social process of culture under the auspices of the state had become unthinkable, at least in Europe. The model did not fail because of the contradictions that de-differentiations supposedly represent in functionally differentiated societies. Rather, it failed like the totalitarian system, which due to the political primacy had bestowed legiti-

macy upon the cultural model; in return, the cultural model gained its legitimacy through the effectiveness of mass-cultural transformation.

### **Constraints**

If I referred above to sociality and non-determination, then I meant the avant-gardes' perspective with its fixation on technology, precisely defining the upheaval in the lifeworld of its day. Only if we construe it as a social process can the development of modernism be perceived as an open and flexible environment that affords artists the opportunity to relate their activity to this development. Only an open process can be nurtured by human action and can consequently also be given a human measure and be brought down to a human level.

From the viewpoint of today's observer, the conditions would, of course, appear to have been quite different. Let us not forget that the social process unfolding in the 1920s was that of a capitalist, industrialized society, essentially Fordist in structure. As such, it was not fully determined, but definitely not open. It bridged two currents: one characterized by the oft-cited rationalism of capitalist modernization, and the other by its counterpart, irrationalism. And, contrary to what the avant-gardes' euphoria over technology would have us believe, the market must have played a not insignificant role in terms of how it was perceived in the lifeworld.

Put differently, the openness of the social process and the related ostensible non-determination of modernization were economically constrained in two ways, firstly by the investment decisions for capital goods, and, secondly, by the rules of market movements.

For the avant-gardes, things appeared open and flexible by virtue of the fact that in the second half of the nineteenth century the consequences of a defined capitalist development, centred in conurbations, coincided with the partial destruction of these

two economic currents during and after World War I.

On the part of the artistic avant-gardes, the attendant experience of barbarism linked to modernity decisively reinforced the radical awareness of a modernity that shed all historical references. It was an awareness that once again considered itself to be in the right. Openness became the paradigm for change and experiment, and the will to a permanent intensification in the aesthetic processing of the cultural side of life anticipated a form of modernity that did not factually exist yet in the 1920s.

It would very much seem as if the avant-garde in post-war Germany had initially lost sight of the previously politically grounded programmatic narratives. Moreover, it seemed quite obsolete to insist on the destruction of the affirmative. After all, had it not been the Nazis who had pursued such destruction far more successfully than the avant-gardes before them, albeit with completely opposite goals in mind? For this reason, it seemed so compelling to regard the restoration of the avant-garde via the renewed recourse to the autonomy of art as an expression of an anti-fascist stance. The linkage of emancipation of individual subjectivity and radical social change called for by the avant-gardes now collapses once again. In the years that followed, the conservative cultural position repeatedly turned on attempts to closely link aesthetic innovation with social change. This taming of a recalcitrant art was followed in the early 1970s, after a brief intermezzo at the end of the 1960s, by talk of the failure of the avant-garde, before being subjected to outrageous defamation ten years later (particularly in architecture).

The question of whether today the universalization of the aesthetic has indirectly realized the hopes of the avant-gardes of an aesthetics of and in lived practice, will be the subject of my remarks below.

III.

Aestheticizations - as they have become manifest in medial transformations of architecture and city space - are, in their universal expressions, the dominant tendency of contemporary cultural developments. And it should be pointed out that since the 1970s, the interplay of economy, culture, and aesthetics has not only greatly accelerated, but has also changed considerably in a qualitative sense. Previous delimitations were abandoned, resulting in a delirious extension of the aesthetic in almost all areas of everyday life. It is this obviously *visible*, aesthetically rather incomplete, discursively communicable fact that significantly sustains our impression that the city has changed vis-à-vis previous forms of urban life. And it did so in one decisive aspect: unlike the Fordist city, it is no longer merely an object which we animate with our subjectivities - albeit often against the city's resistance. Instead, nowadays the urban embodies such a degree of substance that it appears to us as being the result of its own creation. Hence, we no longer experience the city as a human product, but as creation and creator in one. Compared to previous states of modernity, the urban is the medium of aestheticization, in which today's city fully represents the visibility of modernity. At the same time, in what is veiled, the city reserves infinite possibilities for the emergence of something that has been hitherto completely unknown - an aspect that we associate with hope, illusions, and a considerable measure of anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

**The Economic Model of Culture**

Ever since the reconstruction phase of capitalist industrial societies during the post-war era, we have experienced a third cultural model creation process, a process that is becoming increasingly visible. I have coined this 'the economic model of culture'. This process began much earlier in the United States, where the quarrels about definitions have never or hardly ever taken place. While these conditions were only established in Germany after

the war, they had already been in place in the USA a long time ago. At first glance, this approach roughly refers to a cultural system that is differentiated by sector. The historical agents of this differentiation were often - yet not exclusively - avant-gardist and rebellious groups, which today are marketed as subcultures. And these sectors are commercialized step by step from the outside to the inside, i.e. from the subcultural fringes to the centre of traditional high culture. I define commercialization here as a supply side of cultural commodities for a diversified, yet potentially unlimited, market of solvent consumers. The economic system and the cultural system, reciprocally interpenetrated. In that sense, this process was more or less congruent with what today is called globalization.

Just like the social model of culture, this model of culture was again an autonomous and self-steering model. However, here, self-control was not the consequence of an autonomous cultural socialization and of an aesthetic education, both of which would eventually culminate in the increasing perfection of a cultural type of habitus. It is the economic model of culture that exerts power over reality via the market. In this way, the cultural process loses its imperative vis-à-vis the political model as well as the forcibly asserted aestheticization of the force itself. But the process does not gain autonomy, or at any rate, only a limited autonomy, which nonetheless permits the subject to comfortably adapt. Because only in liberal theory, markets are autonomous negotiating entities. In practice, these markets increasingly oligopolize through a supply-oriented policy, not least because of the strategic influence that conservative-liberal governments exerted in almost all Western countries during the last decades. And almost nowhere else do markets have a stronger supply side-oriented power position than in the important sectors of the culture economy, where the dynamics of concentration of the large, globally active media and telecommunication groups have taken control of all branches of

material culture-production.

Let's recall Frederic Jameson's hypothesis about postmodernism being the cultural logic of late capitalism.<sup>3</sup> It is not only in conceptual terms that he refers to Ernest Mandel's theory of late capitalism.<sup>4</sup> Like Mandel, he argues that since the early 1960s, i.e. since the heyday of the Fordist-Keynesian regimes of accumulation, cultural production has penetrated the general production of goods. The constraint to differentiate the outer appearance of mass-produced products - Jameson speaks of 'fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods'<sup>5</sup> - which in principle are standardized, has led to aesthetic experiments and innovations. In those years, Fritz Haug coined the term 'commodity aesthetics' in describing the same process.<sup>6</sup>

This tendency became more radicalized during the 1970s. It occurred through the emergence of new, flexible methods of production, especially based on newly developed computer-based process control technologies, which permitted limited-lot production, and even the production of prototypes in a mass-scale industrial manner. This is an essential component of what we consider the aestheticization of the everyday. But, of course, this is not all. If aestheticization would be limited to the surfaces of industrially produced commodities, it would stop half-way before reaching our everyday lives. It also has to affect the individual, his or her exterior and interior self, by way of the flexible generation of an image and through a continuous physiognomic and psychic refreshment. But there is more to it. Wolfgang Iser pointed out that today's processes of aestheticization are not merely surface phenomena of the world of commodities or of human-body design, but that they penetrate into the deep structures of both matter and objects.<sup>7</sup>

Aestheticization is hence a universal and holistic phenomenon that has both a surface dimension *and* a deeper dimension. In this case, aestheticization

cannot only refer to the distribution of goods and their consumption, even though these areas lead to comprehensive cultural transformations. Inside an increasingly artificial world, i.e. inside a fabricated and produced world, culture can no longer claim to remain in an autonomous zone for the production, transmission, and acquisition of aesthetic objects. Culture is integrated into the entire world system of production. Culture participates in the production of the world. This must mean, however, that the concept of production exceeds the conventional, purely economic sense of producing. This *can* mean that the limits of the economy in today's society are no longer definable. In any case, one may conclude that production today entails more than fabrication according to purely economic imperatives.

In the economic model of culture - which during the 1960s began to replace older models of culture dating back to the Renaissance, without causing them to disappear entirely - the economy becomes a vehicle, and even an innovator and a producer of cultural developments. What I mean to imply here is that it does not only embrace the often-cited culture industry, but also the entire economy ranging from today's dominant finance industry and the differentiated sectors of the service industry to the extremely heterogeneous segments of commodity production. One can even say that, due to these developments and the cultural shifts, the culture industry loses or, at least, diminishes its formerly autonomous status as a discrete cultural and culture-economic segment. Instead, it penetrates at different points into zones of the general economy. This does not necessarily entail an increasing economic functionalization, although it is a non-negligible factor. The overall production becomes more complex. Because of the ensuing institutionalized obligation to experiment, one can expect growing ambivalences, which continue to characterize the economic production under the imperative to actualize, and which also, at the same time, exceed the conception of production as I explained above.



To begin with, there are two considerations that immediately become apparent. On the one hand, there are the mergers of companies from the fields of media, information technology and telecommunications industries that took place during the first half of the 1990s. These mergers were politically supported and made possible through industrialized countries' politics of deregulation, especially in the last-mentioned sector. As is commonly known, this results in an enormous concentration of cultural distribution industries, which at the same time operate in entirely different sectors of the economy, especially in the infrastructural expansion of communication technology and its commercial utilization. On the other hand, we can discern a decreasing vertical range of manufacturing for the production of cultural commodities among these distribution industries. For the most part, this happens in their different branches: publication industry, film and television industry, as well as the music industry. Increasingly, these industries outsource to independent, predominantly small and mid-size production and service companies.<sup>8</sup> The result is that the large companies' real net gain is often limited to the product's final assembly or its mediatized distribution.

To summarize: through its process of concentration, the culture industry repeats the pattern of vertical disintegration of its productive structures that are typical of the entire economy. Even though the culture industry is increasingly integrating into other economic sectors and expanding into different areas of the general economy, that does not mean that its significance decreases. On the contrary, the enormously increased economic potential of this fully globalized industry shows its increased significance. It only goes through a process of transformation. By penetrating into the pores of the economic body, the culture industry's importance is no longer restricted to a single (economic or cultural) sector, but becomes increasingly universalized.

### **De-Differentiation**

Yet this development of the culture industry is only *one* aspect of the economic model of culture. Inside this model, the economy functions simultaneously as a creator of meaning, a material-objective point of reference, and as vehicle and agent of cultural development. This results in the reciprocal, exclusively internal programming of the intertwined elements of economy and culture, as well as the dynamization of its processes. In addition, the recursive design of programming and processes secures a high degree of adaptability to exterior conditions, e.g. to changes in social structure, fashion, and technologies to transformations of spaces and cities. Yet, even these 'external' conditions are increasingly produced or co-produced by the economy/culture combination. Through the process of interactive learning, both perception and circumvention or assimilation lead to a reprogramming of the relation of interdependence between economy and culture, whose active agents, in the broadest sense, are companies.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, this means that the two core systems of modern societies are once again in the process of *de*-differentiation. They are no longer separate environments but they grow into 'one single world'. Consequently, the century-old tendency towards an increased autonomization of these (and certainly also other) partial systems of society has been turned into its opposite in a short time-span of twenty to thirty years: instead of differentiation and autonomization we now see *de*-differentiation and interpenetration.

Somehow, one is able to sense the issue at stake. In one way or another, everybody is conscious of it. This issue is labelled as the commercialization of culture, and is often rejected by cultural critique - whether 'progressive' or conservative - as being detached from culture. Such a reaction, however, misjudges the direction in which the development is leading: it is not the economy that penetrates

into the realm of culture. On the contrary: it is the economy that is charged with culture.

Through the introduction of aesthetics into society's economic system of distribution, the society itself gains an air of luxurious opulence. Society itself is affected by the aesthetic surplus of its circulating commodities. Aesthetics, as a part of the circulating capital, has hence become an entity whose interaction with the world is entirely incorporated by means of the appropriation of this world through acts of gratifying consumption. That way, interaction congeals into a non-cumulative experience. The need to interpret the cultural sphere, which has historically become autonomous, amalgamates with a brimming economy deficient in meaning into a state of reciprocal legitimation. This is achieved through the increasingly rapid incorporation of the cultural sphere into this very economy.

### **Commercialization**

It is true that in the past, commercialization has been a mechanism of transformation for affirmative culture. The same occurs on a mass scale in popular culture. The apparatuses of production want to be fed; the turnover has to meet expectations. There is no doubt that today, culture is subject to the same profit constraints as strawberry yoghurt. Yet, to define culture solely along those lines would only be half the truth. However, one can be clearer: after all, Fordist, standardized mass culture with its huge apparatuses does not simply disappear. Today and in the foreseeable future, it continues to satisfy too many desires; just like the transformation of the culture industry, despite its speed, could not be completed in one go. And possibly this process will never reach a state of completion. Even if this should happen, the capacities of production and distribution have not diminished, but, following capital's principle of accumulation, have multiplied. What is clear is that the development of creative human potential for feeding the capacities has been lagging behind the expansion of these capacities.

As a consequence, the exploitation of what exists for the cultural markets will not decrease but increase. This is because the cultivation of such potential with respect to market considerations is, first of all, too cost-intensive and, secondly, too long term, given the conditions of today's dominant time-preference economy.

Let us state the following: the post-Fordist economy produces its own culture. As a whole, it becomes a cultural economy. At least four interwoven and culminating processes can be distinguished: first, the aforementioned integration of the traditional culture industry's different sectors and their integration into overarching correlations; secondly, the economy's structural mediatization has to be mentioned; the third process is that of the already referred to general aestheticization; and fourthly, social structural changes can be observed that lead back to economic restructuring processes. It is mostly in the high-income segment of the new service elite that the demand for culturally charged commodities and services is co-produced for its own supply. These demands for cultural consumption are highly differentiated, just as this professional category exhibits a high degree of differentiation with respect to their qualifications: among members of the middle classes, this phenomenon continues in the form of a differentiation of expectations.

But what are we dealing with, if not the synchronization of these expectations with supplies? Bourgeois culture was concerned with other things, and we know how limited the success was. This means that the purely economic functionalization of culture might be destined for a post-Fordist economy; but, by no means, does this economy signal the end of its empirical functioning. To return to Jameson's initial statement, it may be well formulated, but the cultural logic of late capitalism has quite a few cracks in its façade.



The fact that standardized culture production, especially its mechanisms of distribution, still projects like a massive block into what is new, only shows that, even in a differentiated demand structure, the homogeneous large-scale aggregates persist. It is also evident that the post-Fordist transformation of the economy (and of the culture industry) itself is neither a condition nor an economic or cultural era but an open process, which also implies a very concrete likelihood of collapse.

It is this fact that simultaneously opens up two empirical windows. On the one hand, the eminent block will still remain with us for a very long time. Even architecturally, it will continue to solidify and to decline qualitatively. The growing impoverishment *inside* society (rather than *of* society) inevitably entails a standardization of consumption and leisure habits at an ever-lower level, which is dependent on the re-financeability of individuals' and families' means of reproduction. On the other hand, one can conclude that culture today is produced in different temporal layers. Hence it exists as a non-contemporaneous functional complex. I am not referring here to historical sedimentations that we find in images of the city and museums but to present realizations. I am not directly thinking of differences in style, i.e. what postmodern historicism is directly concerned with. Neither am I referring to the endless wave of nostalgia, which is produced on very different technical levels and in almost all industries.

When we speak of historical striation in today's culture, we mean something quite similar: the simultaneity - and in this simultaneity, the reciprocal relativization - of cultural products made by industries that are historically constituted in different ways: hence, the simultaneity of a mass cultural block and post-Fordist segmentation. Moreover, we still have to add the handcrafted and manufactured production of the traditional arts.<sup>10</sup> This means that post-Fordist culture, which is primarily differentiated through fashion, embodies a widely appreciated

phenomenon of difference. The culture of the block also holds a position of difference, which is further reinforced through the fact that it acquires an increasingly heterogeneous constitution through the processes prompted by its own economic foundations and structures.

So much for the first aspect of the commercialization of culture, which is the often criticized de-differentiation of the economic and cultural system. It becomes obvious that we are dealing with a terminology that, in view of the conditions of the contemporaneous cultural transformations and its much broader correlations, requires a much more differentiated consideration. This impression is reinforced once one begins to discuss the qualities of the transformed products.

### **Time-Space Compression**

Let us discuss another aspect that advances the process of aestheticization, 'time-space compression', which David Harvey places at the centre of his analysis of present-day society and its culture.<sup>11</sup> This aspect functions as a fundamental transformative mechanism of modern societies, often presented in the form of tables and charts. These space-time relations are symbolized through the inventions of new technologies of transportation and communication: ranging from sailboats, trains and aeroplanes to contemporary digital technologies with their real-time transfers of information and data.<sup>12</sup>

The reasons for a qualitative acceleration, which began in the 1970s, can be found in the collapse of the Fordist model of mass production during a crisis of accumulation that was coupled with symptoms of persistent stagflation. The consequence of such a crisis inevitably resulted in a massive annihilation of capital, visible in the worldwide de-industrialization of formerly flourishing industrial regions and the desertification and impoverishment of cities.

Space-time compression is an increasing acceleration of capital turnover. As we were already able to discern in the 'block' of industrial mass culture, some Fordist industries remain, for example its prototypes, the chemical and automobile industries. However, these have become restructured and adopted many of the instruments of flexibilization.

Considered from at least three points of view, these shifts and changes, illustrating the restructuring of the economy on the basis of flexibilization, have a decisive cultural efficacy. First, the principal motivation for change actually shows its result: the densification of space-time. Its most colourful effects are achieved through the distribution and consumption of commodities and services. This complex of effects is habitually labelled *aestheticization*. Secondly, aestheticization is incorporated into services and products, present in its use and its materiality and through an increasing symbolic grounding not only of its non-material but especially of its material goods. Lash and Urry point out that a paradigmatic shift has been taking place in the post-Fordist era, moving from a material foundation to a cultural foundation.<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, the flexibilization of the economy entails a rather fundamental revolution of the social structure. And this structure determines all cultural practices, differentiations, forms of learning and idiosyncrasies, styles of behaviour or ways of representation, forms of exchange, and distinctive symbolizations.

All these measures, intended to increase the mass production of commodities and services, rely on two basic mechanisms summarized in the idea of aestheticization. On the one hand, they receive an ever stronger symbolic charge. Its symbolic promise, which is integrated into value systems that need to be regenerated continuously, has to exceed the pure promise of a use-value. This is attributable to the fact that symbolic systems of signification can be altered faster through the concentrated deployment of modern media technologies than through

the duration of an object's actual use-value - despite the programmed decay and with its ever-decreasing half-lives. What we discard in a 'throw-away society' is therefore not only the packaging turned utilitarian artwork, but also the still usable objects along with the symbolic systems, convictions, and lifestyles through which these objects were meaningful for a brief period of time. Baudrillard points in the right direction when he claims that the Marxist analysis of commodities is obsolete because of contemporary capitalism's primary occupation with the production of signs and sign systems and less with the production of commodity values.<sup>14</sup> In fact, aside from the use- and exchange-value, a growing part of the sign-value is commodified in all goods and services. The aesthetics of light becomes an almost exemplary symbolization of this very immaterial ephemerality with which we consume the incessantly changing symbolic systems.

The other principal mechanism is the differentiation of the product. Though, in order to be able to relate differentiated service identities and product identities to the pluralized or heterogeneous needs of consumer groups - which ensures differentiated consumption - it is necessary to also stabilize these differences symbolically. Product identities are often merely simulated in a symbolic way. Hence, this mechanism contributes to the symbolic change as overall evidence and, thereby, to the aestheticization of the produced and serviced world.

However, these symbols cannot be simply attached to the objects like labels. Even though it happens on a large scale, it does not stand the test of the market. Consequently, the objects, objective symbolism, and lifestyles - which are synchronized in an accelerated, downright fluid process of reproduction - possess such a stability and capacity of interpretation. In the past, one might have called this authenticity. For this reason, a short test can be applied for identification and expulsion purposes that differentiates between what is fake and what is

'true' symbolism, which is typical of such a voting process or socio-cultural space.

This cultural, reinterpreted 'authenticity' - which stands in the context of strongly heterogeneous, individual references, relatively rapidly changing self-constructions, and fluid identities - demonstrated that the symbolic charges apply at a deeper level. They seem to have penetrated into the objects' deep structures, into their matter. In fact, they are the true appearance of things, not merely its put-on appearance. This only works if they are produced with and 'inside' the objects, if they have a true and not only an ascribed value; in other words, if the semiotic process has become the basis not only of consumption but also of the production of consumer goods. And this is increasingly the case.

In summary, one can say that it is certainly a mistake to assume that the economic model of culture is a closed context of determination, exclusively defined in economic terms. This would have further perfected, possibly through differentiation, the ideological context of deception, presupposed by Horkheimer and Adorno,<sup>15</sup> resulting from a Fordist mass culture. Without a doubt, cultural production has increasingly become part of the economic process of reproduction ever since the Fordist phase. In addition, this development has accelerated during the past twenty years. The development can be attributed to the fact that the economy's flexibilization and globalization led to an improved capacity to adapt to market conditions. This has been accomplished through its ability to determine these conditions on a long-term basis by inducing an abrasion of the symbolic in practically all commodity groups. Hence, one can assume that the produced 'objective culture' has reached an extent that is probably larger and more overwhelming than Georg Simmel assumed at the beginning of the previous century.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, we are dealing with a tendency that is becoming increasingly stronger. But by no means are we confronted with the final state imagined by the older proponents of critical theory. The economic model of culture is, like every past cultural model, a work in progress. The arts, i.e. the realm of traditional high culture, penetrate more and more into economic contexts of exploitation and merge with individual areas of mass culture. Its most advanced representatives, media and computer artists, become pioneers of industrial development, a fact that further underlines the significance of the process of symbolic construction. Nonetheless, it is the 'high cultural' field that time and again produces its own difference. While, overall, one might speak of a strong tendency towards a de-autonomization of art, it is also true that limits of this autonomy are constantly shifting, and not only backwards. In a field that is heterogeneous, complex, and contested by numerous interests, these limits are constructed, demolished, and reconstructed at different sites. The reason for this is that the conditions of autonomy, as well as its potential for posing a threat, have increased compared to the classical period of autonomous art. At the same time, the possibilities of causing an effect have become more ambiguous and more in need of interpretation.

### **Space-Images**

Let us once again return to the question of the space-images and their corresponding models of culture. To begin with, there is the *historic space-image of the city* defined as a centred, social, and architectural *well-ordered entity* that strongly defines its boundary and secludes itself within.

The *classical industrial city*, described by Simmel for its specific, traffic-related culture, offers the impression of a nervous *agitation*, which oscillates spatially around its centre in a centrifugal and centripetal way. This fundamentally expansive movement incessantly shifts the boundaries towards the outside. Through its predominantly

centrifugal *mobility* the *Fordist city* is characterized from the perspective of an increasingly blurred centre. Here, the boundaries do not simply shift but dissolve in the environs.

The mode of movement of the *post-Fordist* or *postmodern city* is *fluid* - the industrial city no longer knows a stable condition. The boundary is no longer a spatial element of the city because the centre and periphery of its territory form a flowing sequence, both temporally and spatially, a sequence that can change its position. The classical urbanistic and urban-sociological idea of continuity, still tied to the material character of the built environment, loses both evidence and plausibility.

The new mode of movement is re-examined through the fact that the traditional planning authority of the industrial city has been transformed by the processes discussed above into a contingency of decisions and events. Urban development becomes more and more dependent on discussions concerning the location of delocalized, supra-regional, and increasingly globalized businesses. Moreover, it depends on events that are produced through the fact that poverty and wealth are not only growing enormously inside the boundaries of cities, but also through the fact that they are no longer spatially segregated, in a traditional sense (West End/East End) and organized by specific cultures. Rather, these zones become entwined inside single inner-city areas and become ethnicized through the global migration of the poor - an indirect consequence of the internationalization of the circulation of capital. It is a phenomenon no longer limited to the United States, which will increasingly become a reality in Europe as well. We are dealing here with potential constellations of a conflict with different possibilities of realization, as experiences in the United States have demonstrated, which are subject to a constant imperative of restructuring - either in the form of a consequence (of the events caused by the conflicts) or as a prohibition (in order to prevent the realiza-

tion).<sup>17</sup>

### **Critical Production of Space and Subjectivity**

What is important here is what Georg Simmel understands as the opposite of everything discussed above:<sup>18</sup> 'subjective culture' - the social form of many individual subjectivities.<sup>19</sup> It is certainly the case that the already mentioned supply parameters partake in forming individualities by structuring lifeworlds through assigning meaning to objects. But neither the lifeworlds nor the individuals become absorbed in economic reproduction.

The opposite is the case. Through the macroeconomic lowering of the wage rate and, particularly, of the income of the masses, the practices of the new regime of accumulation lead to a strong polarizing tendency of the social structures in all Western societies. This has abrogated the semblance of a middle-class levelling, which was a consequence of the Fordist mass culture of the 1960s. With its high-quality and luxury goods, the post-Fordist and increasingly differentiated mass culture targets first and foremost either the *nouveau riche* or those parts of the population still capable of maintaining a middle-class income. The growing remainder of the population is (still) supplied with low-quality and cheap goods of mass consumption. That way, through a highly scaled range of products and extremely diverse repertoires of symbolizations, an accumulation in different sectors of the economy is (still) possible - and this despite decreasing demand.

Concerning the consequences for the postmodern city, this post-Fordist scenario of determination ignores - besides the social form of subjectivities - issues that have to undergo a more detailed analysis, namely: To what extent do local and regional cultures counteract, modify, or, in certain cases, accelerate this scenario? To what extent do such things influence the character of the discussed events? And to what extent do these events influence those decisions, also discussed above, as

adaptive parameters?

In other words, one can assume that the decisive factors of urban developments remain operative, both politically and culturally - notwithstanding the seemingly inexorable growing social importance of the economy to which virtually everything, including the land of the cities, has to be subordinated. Yet, as always, this is also a question concerning the institutions capable of carrying out such an operation. If one excludes them from the analysis, one submits oneself to the idea of the naturalness and, hence, the inevitability of dominant processes. Consequently, one accepts the great narratives about the inherent necessity of economic survival, a narrative that supposedly has rendered obsolete and destroyed the functional potential of all great past narratives that spoke of human happiness and the progressive humanization of the world.

To this end, I will make a few remarks about the processes of the subjective production of space in the sense of a creation of place.

### **Creation of Place**

From our inside perspective, the city generally appears as the utmost point of reference of all social relations. This applies to localized as well as inter- and supra-urban relations. The city becomes an abstract *space* of the concurrence of all events. It is therefore overly complex and, in spite of all the stereotypes about one's own city, it essentially remains unfathomable to most of its inhabitants. As a consequence, many time zones inside the city become emotionally connoted in different degrees, which can lead to an alleged un-inhabitability, an assertion fabricated to a large extent by the media. In a modern society, the media, through their reporting, determine the hierarchy of topics treated. This impacts the emotional classification of urban zones or entire cities.

The immanent places in this abstract space of simultaneous events are, however, non-contemporaneous. The non-contemporaneousness of points of view, from a particular place, subjectively reduces the complexity of urban space through the classification of urban space into a particular order of individual preferences. That way, places are secured for individual habits and integrated into a 'subcultural' system of experiential knowledge. Abstract space consequently has a double structure: both *through* different lifeworlds and for each individual *in* different lifeworlds, which rarely correspond to the entire city's point of reference. Hence, the city has different boundaries for its inhabitants. For them, space has different extensions depending on the spatial order and organization of the places of their everyday lives. And this causes the perception of the city to always contain a temporal structure consisting of the conquest of space and the realization of place.

The *creation of place* thus presumes the interactive relations of each individual. Moreover, it opens individual possibilities of distantiating from distantiations, as, for example, in a *flâneur*-like, urban 'universalism'.

### **In-Between and Over-and-Beyond**

One can characterize space as abstract only in relation to the complexity of events within the urban point of reference. In fact, the biographically constituted interconnection of places defines at least two clearly distinguishable qualities of urban space: an *in-between* and an *over-and-beyond* extending towards the horizon.

The system of place is historically and fundamentally determined for every individual through the functional spatialization of the social division of labour. But, in a post-Fordist economy, more and more people are permanently excluded from this division of labour. They have to make a living despite diminishing transfer payments. In addition,

the spatial effects of a flexible division of labour are experienced by the majority of those who still have employment in the form of pulsating displacements. And finally, for the new middle classes of high-income producers of symbolic commodities, it becomes possible to freely choose places according to lifestyle and milieu considerations. In our cities, all this leads to the beginning of a disintegration of a system of places that was established and evolved during the period of industrialization. Even inside the city, and partly even between cities, this system becomes flexible. Accordingly, the social housing policy and state-side support - which, as important elements of a particular socio-economic regime of regulation, are always in sync with the dominant social imaginary - act almost inevitably as agents of a neoliberal dissolution of places for the working or unemployed underclasses (radical cutbacks for construction of social housing). This is also true for the partial re-localization of particular middle-class groups, especially those with a life orientation revolving around a family (support for private housing). Its effects are known: land-consuming suburbanization, negative energy balance and elevated, traffic-related emissions.

One of the most interesting zones is the *in-between*. Although it is not as well secured as the traditional place, it is the mediating link between this and other places. Almost everything that happens, happens here. Place is the individual and social unit of *reproduction*, and its routine is the basis for its security. By contrast, everything that happens as mediation in the in-between zone takes the form of social and cultural *production* and is therefore, in a sense, also an individual creation of form.

This is probably the reason why Michel de Certeau deals preferably with this type of space.<sup>20</sup> For him, the in-between is not simply the negation of space. Upon close inspection, negation happens only in the over-and-beyond. Rather, de Certeau conceives of the in-between as a construction in motion, where

movement vectors and time are linked. This movement, which is not able to subjectively stabilize the in-between space, but which affects a constant transformation, contains the mediation of places and differences. By contrast, in the above-and-beyond this difference is refuted. Here, movement has to be understood in a double sense: space moves inside a process of transformation, which, in turn, is caused by the movement of human beings in space. Once we leave this self-generated system of places and move inside the field of the above-and-beyond, our ability to constitute place inevitably decreases and becomes almost nil: space expands into the unknown and into the total image of the city as a point of reference for all kinds of events.

### Outlook

If local and regional traditions, in which the subjective constitution of space is inscribed, should play a role, they will only have the opportunity to burgeon, I believe, in the *in-between* space. This is also meant in the sense of a conscious processing of social and cultural experiences made therein. For this, we need urban public space: this is inevitable and a worthwhile pursuit.

Architecture will have to bear this in mind and should deal with this idea! However, the question that remains completely open is to what extent and in what way criticism has to be inscribed in architectural praxis.

The strength of a (new) critical architecture, defined as the aesthetic objectification of localization, would consist in actively inscribing itself into the in-between. Architecture should reflect the in-between and even become the place that is brought into a state of oscillation through the cultural dynamics and productivity of the in-between. This is true especially since the built object not merely symbolizes space, but also fills the space between the different places. An architecture could be called critical once it conceives of itself as a production



of space which is co-produced by subjective experiences. This space is contingent and filled with differences that are not only relentlessly processed but also have to be mediated. Keeping this gap - defined as the tension between different but indivisible desires for a place-bound sense of belonging and its incessant transgression - architecturally open, would be the aesthetic actualization/symbolization of the simultaneity of the critical and the projective.

Moreover, the role architectural practice plays in the relentless flow of aestheticization might be indeterminate but by no means indifferent. That makes it hazardous. The last three decades have shown the tremendous force with which architecture can be transformed into a matrix (among others, the *Bilbao effect*).

In conclusion, this brings me back to the definition of subjectivity and present-day culture. The German cultural sociologist, Andreas Reckwitz, has recently shown how the culture of modernity is already a hybrid entity. As a late modern culture, it presents itself as a hybrid combination of two semantics: 'A general aesthetic that considers everything under the aspect of creativity and expressivity, and a general economy that approaches everything under the aspects of optionality and selectability.' In full accordance with our previous thoughts, Reckwitz speaks of a profound cultural transformation of Western subjectivity. The subject: a 'cultural hybrid' and an 'aesthetic-economic double'. That's why the 'role model of this subject culture is no longer the extraverted, objective employee but the successful artist, the artist-entrepreneur'.<sup>21</sup>

Hence, the subject is a hybrid montage. Modern (contemporary) culture is incapable of satisfying the modern subject in its quest for unity. Both are the critical points of reference for every architectural practice. Yet, in order to understand this practically, we need theory and the willingness and capacity to

criticize in both architectural and urban discourse.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes

1. Involved, alongside the avant-gardes, was the *fascist cultural project* driven by the Nazis. It shared the avant-garde's critique of the elitist, solipsistic nature of bourgeois culture, dropping in the process the notion of politicization in favour of a real primacy of politics, which entailed a very real apparatus of domination after Hitler had seized power. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Franz Dröge & Michael Müller, *Die Macht der Schönheit. Avantgarde und Faschismus oder die Geburt der Massenkultur* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995).
2. See Stephen Read, 'The Urban Image: Becoming Visible', in Deborah Hauptmann (ed.), *The Body in Architecture* (Rotterdam: 010, 2006), p. 52.
3. Frederic Jameson, 'Postmoderne. Zur Logik der Kultur im Spätkapitalismus', in Andreas Huyssen & Klaus R. Scherpe (eds), *Postmoderne. Zeichen eines kulturellen Wandels* (Reinbek: 1994), pp. 45-102.
4. Ernest Mandel, *Der Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973); translated as *Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978).
5. Frederic Jameson, p. 48.
6. Wolfgang F. Haug, *Kritik der Warenästhetik* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971); translated as *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, trans. by Robert Bock (Cambridge: Polity, 1986).
7. Wolfgang Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990); translated as *Undoing Aesthetics*, trans. by Andrew Inkpin (London: Sage, 1997).
8. Scott Lash & John Urry, *Economies of Signs & Space* (London: Sage, 1994), pp. 111-44.
9. In the mid-1980s, one refers for the first time to the

- 'lead user' as a strategy of innovative management. Here, the consumers' behaviour is examined by focusing on the advanced use of commodities of particular consumers. See, among others, E. v. Hippel & G. I. Urban, 'Lead user analyses for the development of new industrial products', in *Management Science*, 34, 5/1988, pp. 569-82; C. Herstatt, C. Lütke & C. Lettl, 'How customers stimulate innovations', in *Harvard Business Manager*, 24, 1/2002, pp. 64-68.
10. Although by now it has attained truly industrial dimensions, one has to take into account that in New York alone there are currently 150,000 artists producing more than 15 million works of art per decade. See B. Taylor, *Modernism, Post-modernism, Realism: a Critical Perspective for Art* (Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987), p. 77, quoted from David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), p. 290.
  11. David Harvey, 'Die Postmoderne und die Verdichtung von Raum und Zeit', in A. Kuhlmann (ed.), *Philosophische Ansichten der Kultur der Moderne* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), pp. 48-78.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 49. Also see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 241.
  13. Scott Lash & John Urry, *Economies of Signs & Space*, pp. 111-44.
  14. Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: 1973); translated as *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Grant (London: Sage, 1993).
  15. Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947); translated as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974).
  16. Georg Simmel, 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', in: G. Simmel, *Brücke und Tor*, (Stuttgart: K.F. Koehler, 1957), pp. 227-42; translated as 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in T. Alpers, (ed.) *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press), pp. 265-73.
  17. See M. Müller, *Kultur der Stadt. Essays für eine Politik der Architektur* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010).
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
  19. See M. Müller & F. Dröge, *Die ausgestellte Stadt. Zur Differenz von Ort und Raum* (Basel; Boston; Berlin: 2005), p. 79.
  20. Michel de Certeau, *Die Kunst des Handelns* (Berlin: 1988), p. 218; published in English as *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
  21. Andreas Reckwitz, 'Wir sind immer schon hybrid gewesen', in: *Frankfurter Rundschau, Forum Humanwissenschaften*, 24 April 2007, p. 27.

### Biography

Michael Müller is a Professor and Chair for art history and cultural studies at Bremen University. His most important books are: *The Villa as Hegemonic Architecture* (1992, first German edition 1970); *Die Verdrängung des Ornaments* (1977); *Funktionalität und Moderne* (1984); *Architektur und Avantgarde* (1984); *Die Macht der Schönheit* (1995); *Die ausgestellte Stadt. Zur Differenz von Ort und Raum* (2005); *Kultur der Stadt. Essays für eine Politik der Architektur* (2010).