

Postmodernism: Styles, Social Conditions & Aesthetic Reflexivity

Postmodern City Film & Global
Flows
2018 Fall



Carlo Maria Mariani: la mano ubbidisce all'intelletto (the hand which obeys the intellect)

Discussion Questions

- ★ **What is postmodernism?** How is it reflected in the films we have watched so far?
- ★ **What is postmodernity?** How is it reflected in the films we have watched so far?
- ★ **What is (aesthetic) reflexivity?** How are they reflected in the films we have watched so far?

City	Films w/ Postmodern Styles ① Postmodern Conditions ②
(+) more than one cities	Taipei Four-Way 《台北四非》 ① ② aesthetic reflexivity When Yesterday Comes ② Super Citizen Kuo ②
Taipei	The Cabbie 《運轉手之戀》 ① ② aesthetic reflexivity God Man Dog 《流浪神狗人》 ② -- (multiple plotline)
Taipei + Paris	What Time is it There? ② Lucy ②
Paris	Flight of the Red Balloon (+) ① ② aesthetic reflexivity Amelie (+) ① ② pastiche
New York	Fight Club(+) ① ② aesthetic reflexivity 11'09'01 September 11 (+) ② omnibus/ensemble film
Beijing	The World (+) ① ② aesthetic reflexivity
Toronto	Enemy ① ② aesthetic reflexivity Exotica ① ② -- (multiple plotline) aesthetic reflexivity
Montreal + Beirut	Incendies ① ② aesthetic reflexivity
Beirut	The Insult ②
Tel Aviv	The Bubble ②

Outline

1. Postmodernism & Postmodernity: General Definitions

2. Major Features: [Fredric Jameson]

(1). Flatness, desubjectivization, waning of affect:

e.g. Van Gogh vs. Andy Warhol,

“Scream” “Guernica” vs their parodies

(2). lack of history vs. some other views

(3) Image Society (music video) and Society as Spectacle (The Living Mall)

3. Aesthetic Reflexivity

Postmodernism (1): & Related Terms

- Postmodernism (後現代主義) : cultures (of a period) which challenge language and the other types of “Truth,” foundation and tradition. (Poststructuralism as one example.)
- Poststructuralism (後結構主義) : theories which challenge the stable structure of language (**binaries**) and traditional value systems; sees their meanings as slippery, multiple and contingent (因時而定的).
- Postmodernity (後現代狀況) : The **socio-economic and intellectual conditions** which make postmodernism possible.

What is Postmodernism? (2)

(Charles Jencks)

Textbook 568

Postmodern vs. Late-Modern

19

Modern (1920–60)	Late-modern (1960–)	Postmodern (1960–)
IDEOLOGICAL		
1 one international style, or “no style”	unconscious style	double coding of style
2 utopian and idealist	pragmatic	“popular” and pluralist
3 deterministic form, functional	loose fit	semiotic form
4 <i>Zeitgeist</i>	late-capitalist	traditions and choice
5 artist as prophet/healer	suppressed artist	artist/client
6 elitist/for “everyman”	elitist professional	elitist and participative
7 holistic, comprehensive redevelopment	holistic	piecemeal
8 architect as savior/doctor	architect provides service	architect as representative and activist
STYLISTIC		
9 “straightforwardness”	supersensualism/slick-tech/high-tech	hybrid expression

What is Postmodernism? (2)

(Charles Jencks)

10 simplicity	complex simplicity— oxymoron, ambiguous reference	complexity
11 isotropic space (Chicago frame, Domino)	extreme isotropic space (open office planning, “shed space”), redun- dancy, and flatness	variable space with sur- prises
12 abstract form	sculptural form, hyper- bole, enigmatic form	conventional and ab- stract form
13 purist	extreme repetition and purist	eclectic
14 inarticulate “dumb box”	extreme articulation	semiotic articulation
15 machine aesthetic, straightforward logic, circulation, mechanical, technology, and struc- ture	2nd machine aesthetic, extreme logic, circula- tion, mechanical, tech- nology, and structure	variable mixed aesthetic depending on context; expression of content and semantic appropri- ateness toward function
16 anti-ornament	structure and construc- tion as ornament	pro-organic and applied ornament
17 anti-representational	represent logic, circula-	pro-representation

What is Postmodernism? (2)

(Charles Jencks)

17 anti-representational	represent logic, circulation, mechanical, technology, and structure, frozen movement	pro-representation
18 anti-metaphor	anti-metaphor	pro-metaphor
19 anti-historical memory	anti-historical	pro-historical reference

e.g. Jewish Museum
in Berlin

What is Postmodernism? (2)

Negative		Positive
Flattening of subjectivity; Pastiche	Ambiguity Eclecticism Pluralism	De-Centering & Boundary -crossing
Literature & Film: Surfiction, metafiction pastiche	Parody Ensemble film Sci-fi . . . ,etc	Historiographical metafiction & metafilm
Urban space Society as spectacle; overall commofication	Plural space; Multiple historical signs	De-zoning or democratization of urban space; re-creation of historical spaces

Postmodernism (3): Boundary-Crossing

★ Boundaries between –

- ★ fact and fiction
- ★ disciplines
- ★ the private and the public
- ★ high art and popular culture
- ★ nations
- ★ human and non-human

★ Why? To be explained later.

Postmodernism(3): Cultures

- ✴ postmodernism — Cultures (e.g. music, architecture, popular culture, politics, literature & theory, religion, ethics, etc.)

- ✴ **Features:**

depthless (無深度), pastiche (拼貼),
metafictional (後設), ambiguous (模擬兩可),
de-doxification (質疑大敘述／真理),
eclecticism (折衷), boundary-crossing (跨界),
pluralistic (多元), etc.

Postmodernism (4): Main Issues

1. **Definition:**

- “post”modernism – what is “post”?
- Period or style: Is it a description of a period or a style? Is it passe?
- Postmodernism and postmodernity (postmodern conditions) — the former reinforcing or critiquing the latter.

2. **Interpretation:** against interpretation or difficult wholeness

3. **Postmodern Identity:**

1. History, Memory, Capitalist culture and **Identity**
2. The role of the **author** – authority, originality and authenticity
3. The boundaries of **humanity** (posthumanism)



Postmodernism: Historical Background & Postmodernity

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

“The Second Coming” W. B. Yeats

Postmodernism: Historical Development in the West

1. Modern period:

- ✱ Expanding national capitalism
- ✱ The two W. Wars;
- ✱ theoretical challenges of human centers (God, Truth, Reason, Progress)—e.g. Darwinism, Freud, Marx, Nietzsche
- ✱ Art as religion

- ✱ Growing senses of uncertainties in the 50's and 60's

✱ Postmodern Period:

- ✱ Multinational capitalism
- ✱ Risks and disasters
- ✱ The turn to language and representation + minorities' challenge of center.
- ✱ Playfulness and Collage in Art

Postmodernism: Historical Development (2) –Transitions

- ✱ Growing senses of uncertainties in the 50''s and 60's *
- ✱ 50's – the beginning of Cold War, suburbanization of the U.S.
- ✱ 60's – the Civil Right Movement, the Hippie generation (The Beatles; communes, the alternative press, Eastern religions, and mind-altering drugs, freedom without responsibility), Feminist & Minorities Movement.

Historical Development (3) Three stages of capitalism

(Ernest Mandel *Late Capitalism*)

1. **Market capitalism** – 1700 – 1850;

(industrial capital in **national** markets)

2. **Monopoly capitalism**

(age of imperialism; **world** markets monopolized by a few nation-states.)

3. **Multinational capitalism**

(**international corporations** expand to transcend national boundaries & reach “hitherto uncommodified areas.”)

Ref. Historical Development (4)

From differentiation to de-differentiation:

1. *Differentiation*: Separation of capital from labor, exchange-value from use-value, and **sign from its referent (modernity)**
2. *Differentiation*: Separation of culture from social and economic life to allow critique and **utopian aspiration (modernism)**.
3. **De-differentiation: Everything is a sign for exchange**; expansion of the power of **capital** into the realm of the sign, of culture and representation. ➡ **Overall commodification or Aesthetic Reflexivity?**

(ref. "Postmodernism and the Video-Text")

Postmodernity (5): post-industrial society

-- as defined by Daniel Bell

1. a switch from goods - producing industry to **service economy**;
2. pre-eminence of professional and technical class; (**PMC**-professorial-managerial class) (Note: expert system according to Giddens)
3. **theoretical knowledge, technology and information** as the major mode of commodity.

Postmodernism in the third stages of capitalism (according to F. Jameson)

<u>capitalism</u>	cultural dominant	cultural logic
competitive capitalism	realism	
monopolist	<u>modernism</u> ↕	Utopian ↕
<u>multinational/ post-industrial*</u>	postmodernism	overall commodification (loss of critical distance, cognitive mapping)

Aesthetic Reflexivity



Carlo Maria Mariani: la mano ubbidisce all'intelletto (the hand which obeys the intellect)

Floating Signs → Reflexivity

- ✱ [reflexive modernity: conscious application of knowledge & self-monitoring]
- ✱ **flows of images and signs** → the possibilities of choice and aesthetic reflexivity in both artists and consumers.
- ✱ Aesthetic reflexivity: entails “**self-interpretation and the interpretation of social background practices**” (5 Lash & Urry) ; reflexivity in the sense of allegory and symbol as **a source of self in everyday life** is much more of a late twentieth-century phenomenon” (54 Lash & Urry).



Postmodernisms: Flat, Playful or Self-Reflexive

Some Examples

1. Identities and Parodies

- ☀ Shoes;
- ☀ Screams
- ☀ Guernica

2. Loss of History or Presentness of histories.

3. Image Society (music video) and Society as Spectacle (The Living Mall; ROM in Toronto)

Major Feature 1: flatness & desubjectivization

- = 1. the waning of affect (感情消失).
- 2. the end of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal

Example?

e.g. Van Gogh's "A Pair of Boots" vs.
Andy Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes"

《後現代主義與文化理論》, : pp. 192- 221

Van Gogh's "A Pair of Boots"

- a desperate Utopian compensation for capitalist division of labor;
- evoke a whole world which is semi-autonomous.



Vincent Van Gogh, "A Pair of Boots"

Andy Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes"

1. Flat images of some shoes on a **negative**, separated from their context.
2. **fetishes**

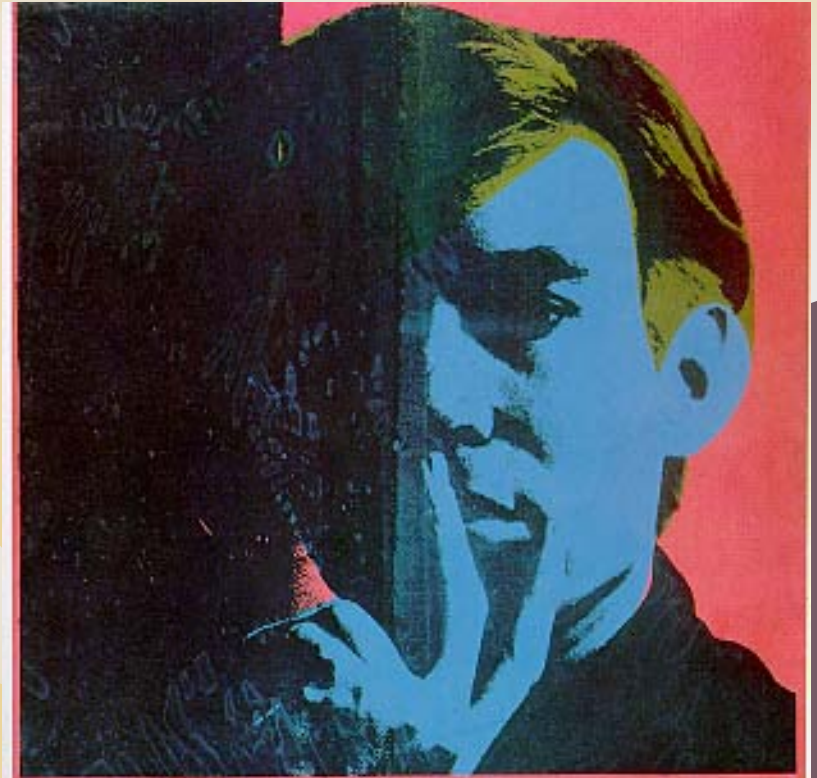


Andy Warhol, "Diamond Dust Shoes"

Andy Warhol as an “artist”

"If you want to know about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."

"I don't want it to be essentially the same--I want it to be exactly the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel." (qtd in Foster in MacCabe 118-19)



Possible interpretations of Warhol

His use of kitsch, commodities and celebrities:

1. Underneath the glamorous surface of commodity fetishes and media stars is 'the reality of suffering and death.'
2. Superficial embrace of commercialism; (**fetishism**)
3. **Traumatic realism:** repetition of flat images to show the “traumatic real”: loss of meaning.



From Modern to Postmodern: The “Scream” paintings

1. Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, 1893

(1937 [source](#))



Jameson's comments & Munch's diary

1. The figure without ears or hair, hearing a scream or emitting one? The scream's wave-like echo envelopes the whole world (the red sky and swirling, menacing sea.)
2. The priest-like figures are of no help. The bridge leads to nowhere.

Ref. In Munch's literary diary, the entry for 22 January 1892 reads:

"I was walking along the road with two friends.

The sun was setting.

I felt a breath of melancholy -

Suddenly the sky turned blood-red.

I stopped, and leaned against the railing, deathly tired -

looking out across the flaming clouds that hung like blood and a sword over the blue-black fjord and town.

My friends walked on - I stood there, trembling with fear.

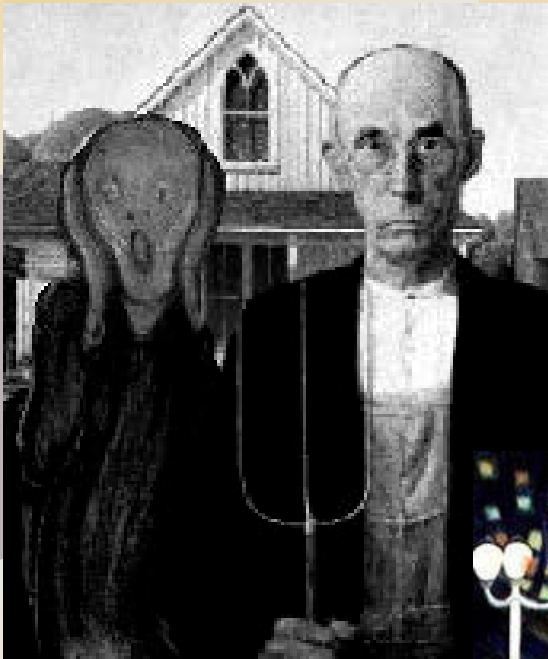
And I sensed a great, infinite scream pass through nature."

Picasso's "Guernica" (1937)



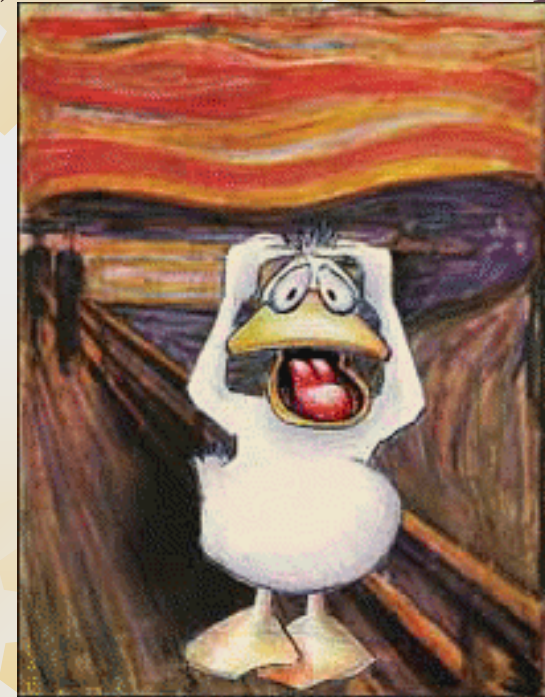
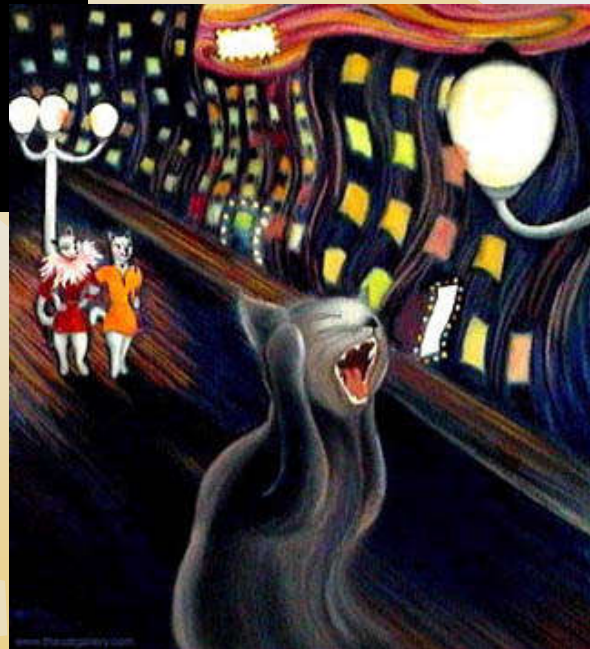
Chinese text: 176- 86 Cubism, offering new perspectives, attempting to **present symbolic meanings** (e.g. the cow, the horse, against perspectivism, eliminate the boundaries between inside and outside.

Parodies of “The Scream”



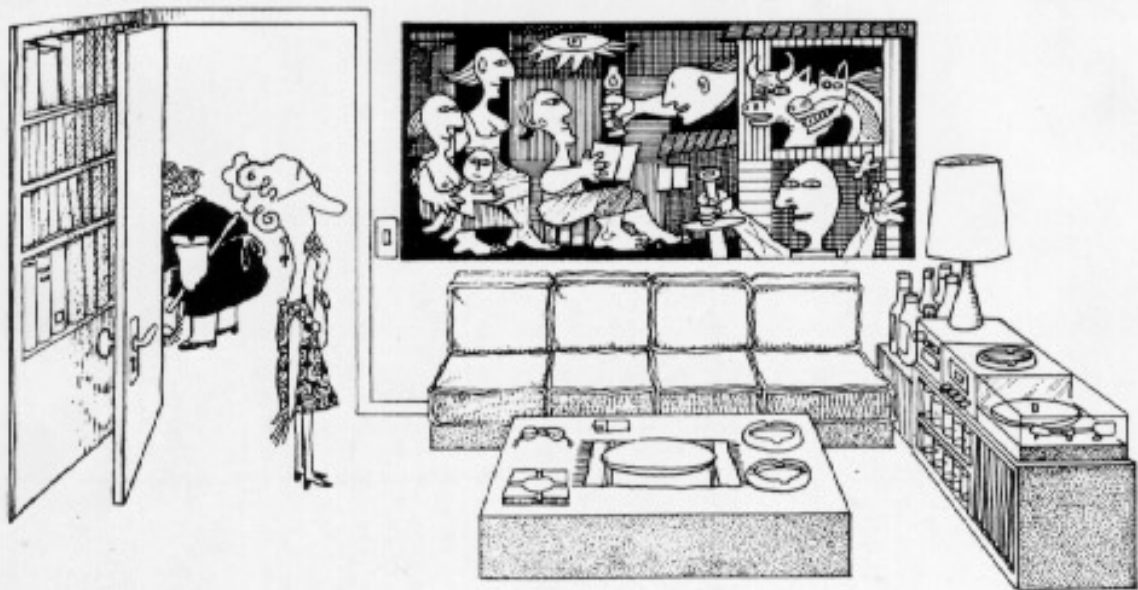
“**American Scream**” by Jeremy Campbell; Parody also of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930)

Sources (left to right) 1; 2; 3

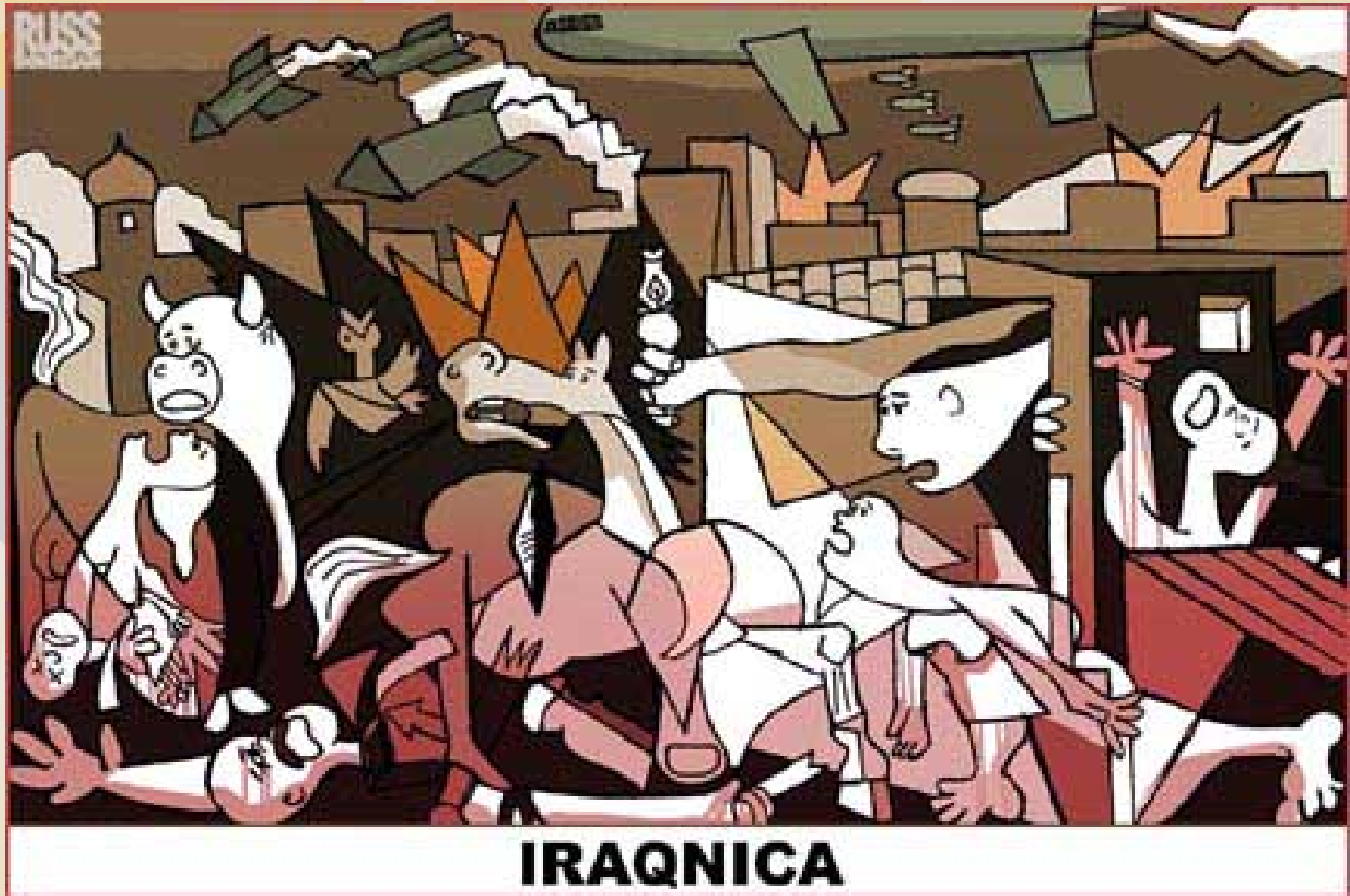


Parodies of “Guernica”

Source



Parodies of “Guernica”



Sources



Feature 2: Loss of history

“ . . . we are now, in other words, in ‘**intertextuality**’ as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a **new connotation of ‘pastness’ and pseudohistorical depth**, in which **the history of aesthetic styles displaces “real” history.**”

--e.g. **nostalgia films**: the past becomes a composite of stereotypes, spectacles; no stars (with 'personality' in the older sense),

--e.g. **historical novels**

Another view: Co-existence multiple histories

1) Popularity of history

1. retro chic in fashion: Film (《人間四月天》、《夜奔》、*Back to Future*, *Blue Velvet*, *Hot Shot*)
2. Simulated history : *Forrest Gump*, *Blade Runner*
3. “presentness” of history: SNG, Today in e.g. Presentation of types or stereotypes.

2) Postmodernism problematizes official history and historical knowledge, and opens history to multiple narration.

3) City as forgetful, tourist-oriented or an archive



Feature 3: image society & “hyperspace”

A. Music video’s self-reflexive uses of video images

“Money for Nothing” (1985)

“Losing my Religion” (*Out Of Time* 1991)

“If” (Janet 1993)

“MTV’s and Channel V’s commercials –
in 1999 (9:15).

→ Gradual loss of meanings?

1. Dire Straits

- took their name from their early financial status
- "**Money for Nothing**"- chanting that pop stars get their "**money for nothing, and their chicks for free**"
- "But rather than causing a stir in the music industry or unleashing a backlash by the video community, **MTV embraced the song as their new anthem.** The video, which featured sophisticated (for the time) 3-D computer animation, went into heavy rotation, and the band became international superstars. **The message of the song, meanwhile, was evidently lost on everyone.**"

2. “Losing My Religion”: video as **metonymic** expressions of the lyrics

1. Lyrics: struggle by oneself to communicate;

“That's me in the corner

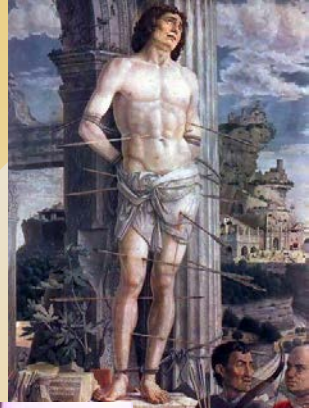
That's me in the spotlight

Losing my religion

Trying to keep up with you

And I don't know if I can
do it

Oh No, I've said too much
I haven't said enough”



2. Video -- a collage of “spotlight scenes”: St. Sebastian & various cross-dressed or costumed identities

2. “Losing My Religion”

1. Lyrics: struggle by oneself to communicate;

Consider this

The hint of the century

Consider this

The slip that brought me

To my knees failed

What if all these fantasies

Come flailing around

Now I've said too much

I thought that I heard you
laughing

I thought that I heard you sing

I think I thought I saw you try



2. Video: parody of
“Icarus scene” or “A
Very Old Man with
Enormous Wings”

“Losing My Religion”: parodying the Icarus myth

“Everything is just a dream.”



“If” by Janet Jackson

Lyrics:

“Oh the things I'd do to you

I'd make you call out my name

I'd ask who it belongs to

If I was your woman

The things I'd do to you

But I'm not

So I can't

Then I won't

But

If I was your girl”

Video: desiring and
rejecting the male dancer



“If”: Orientalism & desiring the images on the screen



Multiple choices of virtual sex: single, double, trio, two couples.

Janet Jackson still the central object of desire

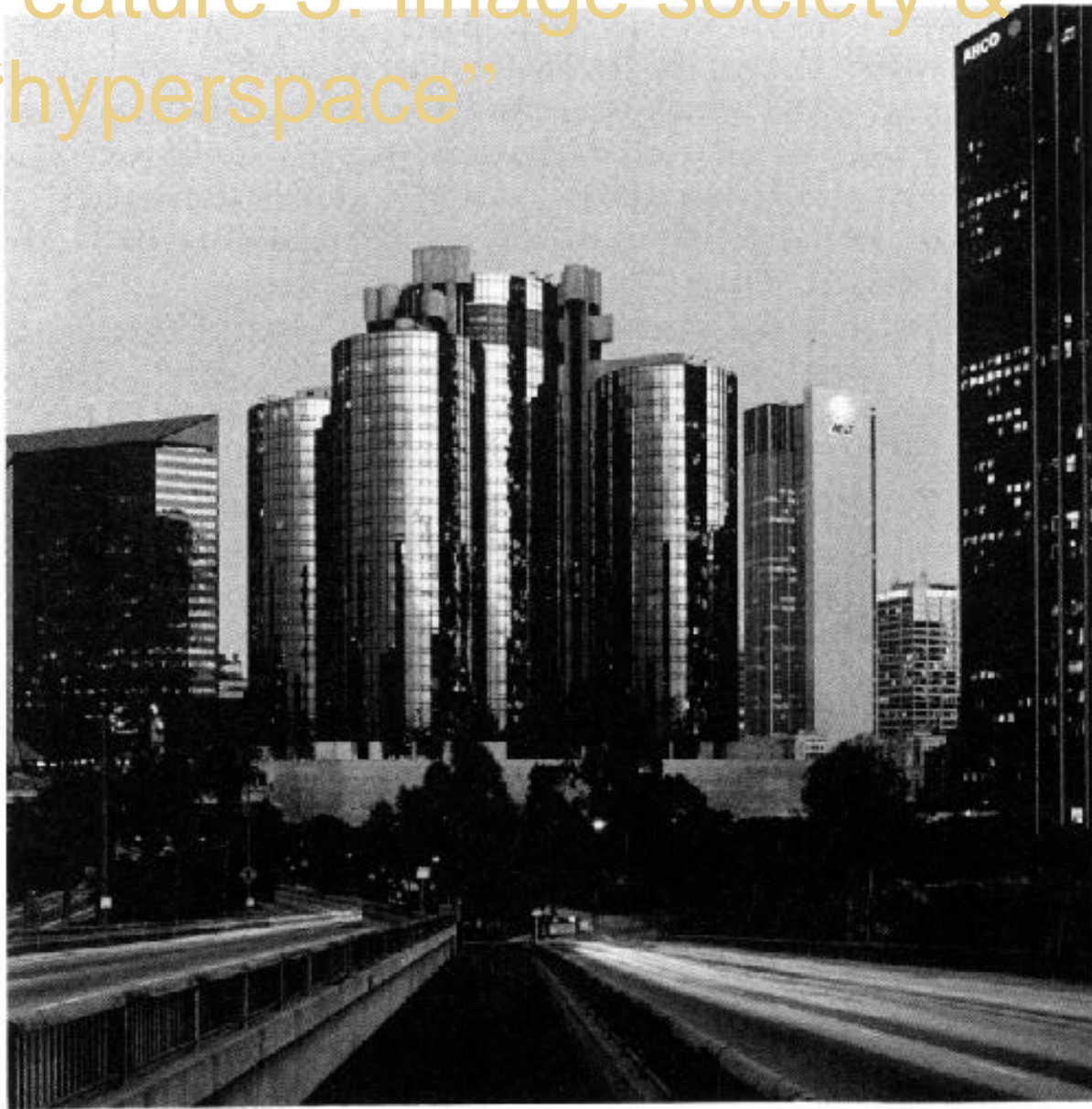


Implosion of images? Loss of History?

- The commercials are like the music videos themselves with fast-changing images, only the the commercials are shorter and even faster in pace.
- self-reflexive collage of recognizable images, such as Munch's Scream.
- self-reflexive showing of frames of TV set and the multiple space in TV.
- not completely without a sense of history: e.g. 阿妹看MTV & *Forrest Gump* (including how it encouraged Taiwanese high school students)



Feature 3: image society & “hyperspace”



The Westin Bonaventure (Portman)

a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city.

→ Like 京華城 Living Mall

Jameson's example:
The Bonaventure Hotel in LA

The Living Mall

Mall: a spectacular and self-enclosed space

which either hide or naturalize its commercial reality by capturing the shoppers' attention with its multitude of signs.

the Living Mall ↔ 京華城

“natural”?

Capital as the Center of cultures, celebrities and talents
→ Supported by its spectacular design

Commodification and Enclosure of Everyday Life: Spectacle & Hyperspace

The Society of the Spectacle

by Guy Debord, 1967 The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images. ([source](#))

→ *We live out the spectacle according to someone else's design, like actors following a script.*

The mall: “commodification of everyday life”

to make it work:

- 1) **retail mix** – to attract the desired mix of consumers;
- 2) **“seductive” spatial design** –to keep the shoppers there. → maze-like structure, special design (of hallway and food court).
- 3) **“ a surfeit of signs**, each of which, . . . , serves to actively **hide** or mask the mall’s function, which is to make money. Or if it doesn't hide that function, then it certainly **naturalizes** it, such that the ‘commodification of reality’ becomes simply “God-given” ([Mitchell](#) 134-35)

京華城: a self-enclosed & spectacular world
1. Appearance; 2. Entering by “ascending”



2. Allegories re-written

- showing its story of construction
- street names for each floor
- “a space ship”? → soccer



京華城: a self-enclosed & spectacular world
3. The basement eating court-- like a theatre



京華城: space of the spectacle =
maze-like routes of
ascension



京華城: a self-enclosed & spectacular world
(4): Circular structure supports the shoppers' inward and mutual gazes



京華城: space of the spectacle =
commercial space



京華城: space of the spectacle =
commercial space

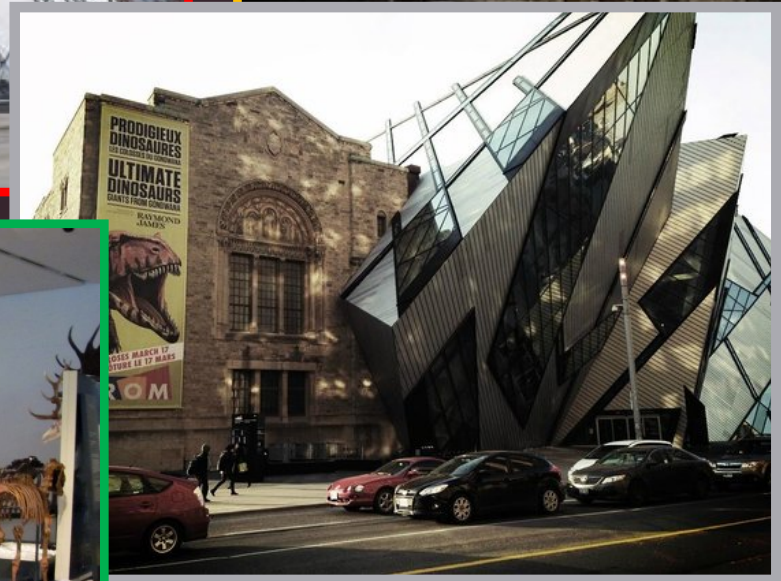


京華城: space of the spectacle =
commercial space



Royal Ontario Museum (ROM)

☀ (more postmodern architecture [here](#))



Next Time

Exotica – by Atom Egoyan

Why & how is it “postmodern”?



References

A. internet:

1. Outline and links
2. Jameson Article's online version: (complete E-Text [with pictures] ; another E-Text excerpt; a multimedia text from MMT)

B. Books:

1. 詹明信 (Fredric Jameson) . 《後現代主義與文化理論》, 唐小兵譯, 台北: 合志, 19906
2. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* (1984). Also in version in Docherty, Thomas, ed. Postmodernism: A Reader. New York: Harvester, 1993
3. *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique*. Ed. Douglas Kellner,. Maisonneuve P, 1989.
4. MacCabe, Colin, et al, eds. *Who Is Andy Warhol?* Pittsburgh, PA: The British Film Institute and The Andy Warhol Museum, 1997.
5. Mitchell, Don. Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000.

