

Question (Darko Suvin)

I would like to take a position halfway between Franco Moretti and Colin McCabe. The way to deal with an important process such as modernism is dialectically, to identify its contradictions and the dominant moment within them. This is also a problem of deciding what is the true canon of modernism. Marxists have too often accepted the canon of bourgeois theoreticians which moves from Kafka to Joyce. The proper canon of modernism would be the one significant for us today. What is the dominant contradiction in *this* canon? It is the tension between those who tried to have their work intervene in history and those who despaired of it, the tension between Brecht and Joyce. We also need to consider the place of mass literature *within* modernism.

Moretti

"Modernism" is a portmanteau word that perhaps should not be used too often. But I don't think I would classify Brecht as a modernist—perhaps the young Brecht, but then several of the problems I have identified in other modernists might also apply to the young Brecht. I certainly would not include *Saint Joan*, the *Lehrstucke*, or *The Measures Taken* within modernism. I just cannot think of a meaningful category that could include, say, surrealism, *Ulysses*, and something by Brecht. I can't think of what the common attributes of such a concept could be. The objects are too dissimilar.

Comment

You maintain the reflection theory of culture when you deny the conflictual status of modernism and assert its complete harmony with the goals of capitalism in the age of the big department store. And then, by way of an essentialist and moralistic invocation, you argue that our need for stories is fulfilled by mass literature once modernism abandons plot. Finally, your call for a modernist irony connected with decision is based on no ground that I can identify except voluntarism.

Moretti

When I say we all need stories, that is not a moralistic invocation; it is a statement of fact. We all need to have stories in our heads, plots that give meaning. But the main question concerned irony and decision. You object that there is no ground for my reconnection of irony and decision, that it is ultimately voluntaristic. You are absolutely right. It is a choice we have to make. I'm not saying No to modernism—it is certainly a great cultural development. The point is that it has a reverse side, one I have been trying to elucidate. And I wonder whether this great development, which is modernist irony, can be put to use by combining it with other values. I have proposed that irony be joined with decision. But I am not at all sure it is a connection that can be worked out. While at present I don't see any ground for their combination, it would be a pity if it proves impossible, because either way you lose something that could be very important for human culture.

Cognitive Mapping

Without a conception of the social totality (and the possibility of transforming a whole social system), no properly socialist politics is possible. It involves trying to imagine how a society without hierarchy, a society that has also repudiated the economic mechanisms of the market, can possibly cohere.

I am addressing a subject about which I know nothing whatsoever, except for the fact that it does not exist. The description of a new aesthetic, or the call for it, or its prediction—these things are generally done by practicing artists whose manifestos articulate the originality they hope for in their own work, or by critics who think they already have before their eyes the stirrings and emergences of the radically new. Unfortunately, I can claim neither of those positions, and since I am not even sure how to imagine the kind of art I want to propose here, let alone affirm its possibility, it may well be wondered what kind of an operation this will be, to produce the concept of something we cannot imagine.

Perhaps all this is a kind of blind, in that something else will really be at stake. I have found myself obliged, in arguing an aesthetic of cognitive mapping, to plot a substantial detour through the great themes and shibboleths of post-Marxism, so that to me it does seem possible that the aesthetic here may be little more than a pretext for debating those theoretical and political issues. So be it. In any case, during this Marxist conference I have frequently had the feeling that I am one of the few Marxists left. I take it I have a certain responsibility to restate what seem to me to be a few self-evident truths, but which you may see as quaint survivals of a religious, millenarian, salvational form of belief.

In any case, I want to forestall the misapprehension that the aesthetic I plan to outline is intended to displace and to supercede a whole range of other, already extant or possible and conceivable aesthetics of a different kind. Art has always done a great many different things, and had a great many distinct and incommensurable functions: let it continue to do all that—which it will, in any case, even in Utopia. But the very pluralism of the aesthetic suggests that there should be nothing particularly repressive in the attempt to remind ourselves and to revive experimentally one traditional function of the aesthetic that has in our time been peculiarly neglected and marginalized, if not interdicted altogether.

"To teach, to move, to delight": of these traditional formulations of the uses of the work of art, the first has virtually been eclipsed from contemporary criticism and theory. Yet the pedagogical function of a work of art seems in various forms to have been an inescapable parameter of any conceivable Marxist aesthetic, if of few others; and it is

the great historical merit of the work of Darko Suvin to repeatedly insist on a more contemporary formulation of this aesthetic value, in the suggestive slogan of the *cognitive*, which I have made my own today. Behind Suvin's work, of course, there stands the immense, yet now partially institutionalized and reified, example of Brecht himself, to whom any cognitive aesthetic in our time must necessarily pay homage. And perhaps it is no longer the theater but the poetry of Brecht that is for us still the irrefutable demonstration that cognitive art need not raise any of the old fears about the contamination of the aesthetic by propaganda or the instrumentalization of cultural play and production by the message or the extra-aesthetic (basely practical) impulse. Brecht's is a poetry of thinking and reflection; yet no one who has been stunned by the sculptural density of Brecht's language, by the stark simplicity with which a contemplative distance from historical events is here powerfully condensed into the ancient forms of folk wisdom and the proverb, in sentences as compact as peasants' wooden spoons and bowls, will any longer question the proposition that in his poetry at least—so exceptionally in the whole history of contemporary culture—the cognitive becomes in and of itself the immediate source of profound aesthetic delight.

I mention Brecht to forestall yet another misunderstanding, that it will in any sense be a question here of the return to some older aesthetic, even that of Brecht. And this is perhaps the moment to warn you that I tend to use the charged word "representation" in a different way than it has consistently been used in poststructuralist or post-Marxist theory: namely, as the synonym of some bad ideological and organic realism or mirage of realistic unification. For me "representation" is, rather, the synonym of "figuration" itself, irrespective of the latter's historical and ideological form. I assume, therefore, in what follows, that all forms of aesthetic production consist in one way or another in the struggle with and for representation—and this whether they are perspectival or *trompe l'oeil* illusions or the most reflexive and diacritical, iconoclastic or form-breaking modernisms. So, at least in my language, the call for new kinds of representation is not meant to imply the return to Balzac or Brecht; nor is it intended as some valorization of content over form—yet another archaic distinction I still feel is indispensable and about which I will have more to say shortly.

In the project for a spatial analysis of culture that I have been engaged in sketching for the teaching institute that preceded this conference, I have tried to suggest that the three historical stages of capital have each generated a type of space unique to it, even though these three stages of capitalist space are obviously far more profoundly interrelated than are the spaces of other modes of production. The three types of space I have in mind are all the result of discontinuous expansions or quantum leaps in the enlargement of capital, in the latter's penetration and colonization of hitherto uncommodified areas. You will therefore note in passing that a certain unifying and totalizing force is presupposed here—although it is not the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, nor the party, nor Stalin, but simply capital itself; and it is on the strength of such a view that a radical Jesuit friend of mine once publicly accused me of monotheism. It is at least certain that the notion of capital stands or falls with the notion of some unified logic of this social system itself, that is to say, in the stigmatized language I will come back to later, that both are irrecoverably totalizing concepts.

Fredric Jameson

I have tried to describe the first kind of space of classical or market capitalism in terms of a logic of the grid, a reorganization of some older sacred and heterogeneous space into geometrical and Cartesian homogeneity, a space of infinite equivalence and extension of which you can find a kind of dramatic or emblematic shorthand representation in Foucault's book on prisons. The example, however, requires the warning that a Marxian view of such space grounds it in Taylorization and the labor process rather than in that shadowy and mythical Foucault entity called "power." The emergence of this kind of space will probably not involve problems of figuration so acute as those we will confront in the later stages of capitalism, since here, for the moment, we witness that familiar process long generally associated with the Enlightenment, namely, the desacralization of the world, the decoding and secularization of the older forms of the sacred or the transcendent, the slow colonization of use value by exchange value, the "realistic" demystification of the older kinds of transcendent narratives in novels like *Don Quixote*, the standardization of both subject and object, the denaturalization of desire and its ultimate displacement by commodification or, in other words, "success," and so on.

The problems of figuration that concern us will only become visible in the next stage, the passage from market to monopoly capital, or what Lenin called the "stage of imperialism"; and they may be conveyed by way of a growing contradiction between lived experience and structure, or between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience. Too rapidly we can say that, while in older societies and perhaps even in the early stages of market capital, the immediate and limited experience of individuals is still able to encompass and coincide with the true economic and social form that governs that experience, in the next moment these two levels drift ever further apart and really begin to constitute themselves into that opposition the classical dialectic describes as *Wesen* and *Erscheinung*, essence and appearance, structure and lived experience.

At this point the phenomenological experience of the individual subject—traditionally, the supreme raw materials of the work of art—becomes limited to a tiny corner of the social world, a fixed-camera view of a certain section of London or the countryside or whatever. But the truth of that experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people.

There comes into being, then, a situation in which we can say that if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience. It is evident that this new situation poses tremendous and crippling problems for a work of art; and I have argued that it is as an attempt to square this circle and to invent new and elaborate formal strategies for overcoming this dilemma that modernism or, perhaps better, the various modernisms as such emerge: in forms that inscribe a new sense of the absent global colonial system on the very syntax of poetic language itself,

a new play of absence and presence that at its most simplified will be haunted by the erotic and be tattooed with foreign place names, and at its most intense will involve the invention of remarkable new languages and forms.

At this point I want to introduce another concept that is basic to my argument, that I call the "play of figuration." This is an essentially allegorical concept that supposes the obvious, namely, that these new and enormous global realities are inaccessible to any individual subject or consciousness—not even to Hegel, let alone Cecil Rhodes or Queen Victoria—which is to say that those fundamental realities are somehow ultimately unrepresentable or, to use the Althusserian phrase, are something like an absent cause, one that can never emerge into the presence of perception. Yet this absent cause can find figures through which to express itself in distorted and symbolic ways: indeed, one of our basic tasks as critics of literature is to track down and make conceptually available the ultimate realities and experiences designated by those figures, which the reading mind inevitably tends to reify and to read as primary contents in their own right.

Since we have evoked the modernist moment and its relationship to the great new global colonial network, I will give a fairly simple but specialized example of a kind of figure specific to this historical situation. Everyone knows how, toward the end of the nineteenth century, a wide range of writers began to invent forms to express what I will call "monadic relativism." In Gide and Conrad, in Fernando Pessoa, in Pirandello, in Ford, and to a lesser extent in Henry James, even very obliquely in Proust, what we begin to see is the sense that each consciousness is a closed world, so that a representation of the social totality now must take the (impossible) form of a coexistence of those sealed subjective worlds and their peculiar interaction, which is in reality a passage of ships in the night, a centrifugal movement of lines and planes that can never intersect. The literary value that emerges from this new formal practice is called "irony"; and its philosophical ideology often takes the form of a vulgar appropriation of Einstein's theory of relativity. In this context, what I want to suggest is that these forms, whose content is generally that of privatized middle-class life, nonetheless stand as symptoms and distorted expressions of the penetration even of middle-class lived experience by this strange new global relativity of the colonial network. The one is then the figure, however deformed and symbolically rewritten, of the latter; and I take it that this figural process will remain central in all later attempts to restructure the form of the work of art to accommodate content that must radically resist and escape artistic figuration.

If this is so for the age of imperialism, how much more must it hold for our own moment, the moment of the multinational network, or what Mandel calls "late capitalism," a moment in which not merely the older city but even the nation-state itself has ceased to play a central functional and formal role in a process that has in a new quantum leap of capital prodigiously expanded beyond them, leaving them behind as ruined and archaic remains of earlier stages in the development of this mode of production.

At this point I realize that the persuasiveness of my demonstration depends on your having some fairly vivid perceptual sense of what is unique and original in postmodernist space—something I have been trying to convey in my course, but for which it is more difficult here to substitute

a shortcut. Briefly, I want to suggest that the new space involves the suppression of distance (in the sense of Benjamin's aura) and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places, to the point where the postmodern body—whether wandering through a postmodern hotel, locked into rock sound by means of headphones, or undergoing the multiple shocks and bombardments of the Vietnam War as Michael Herr conveys it to us—is now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed. There are, of course, many other features of this space one would ideally want to comment on—most notably, Lefebvre's concept of abstract space as what is simultaneously homogeneous and fragmented—but I think that the peculiar disorientation of the saturated space I have just mentioned will be the most useful guiding thread.

You should understand that I take such spatial peculiarities of postmodernism as symptoms and expressions of a new and historically original dilemma, one that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself. Not even Einsteinian relativity, or the multiple subjective worlds of the older modernists, is capable of giving any kind of adequate figuration to this process, which in lived experience makes itself felt by the so-called death of the subject, or, more exactly, the fragmented and schizophrenic decentering and dispersion of this last (which can no longer even serve the function of the Jamesian reverberator or "point of view"). And although you may not have realized it, I am talking about practical politics here: since the crisis of socialist internationalism, and the enormous strategic and tactical difficulties of coordinating local and grassroots or neighborhood political actions with national or international ones, such urgent political dilemmas are all immediately functions of the enormously complex new international space I have in mind.

Let me here insert an illustration, in the form of a brief account of a book that is, I think, not known to many of you but in my opinion of the greatest importance and suggestiveness for problems of space and politics. The book is nonfiction, a historical narrative of the single most significant political experience of the American 1960s: *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, by Marvin Surkin and Dan Georgakis. (I think we have now come to be sophisticated enough to understand that aesthetic, formal, and narrative analyses have implications that far transcend those objects marked as fiction or as literature.) *Detroit* is a study of the rise and fall of the League of Black Revolutionary Workers in that city in the late 1960s.¹ The political formation in question was able to conquer power in the workplace, particularly in the automobile factories; it drove a substantial wedge into the media and informational monopoly of the city by way of a student newspaper; it elected judges; and finally it came within a hair's breadth of electing the mayor and taking over the city power apparatus. This was, of course, a remarkable political achievement, characterized by an exceedingly sophisticated sense of the need for a multilevel strategy for revolution that involved initiatives on the distinct social levels of the labor process, the media and culture, the juridical apparatus, and electoral politics.

Yet it is equally clear—and far clearer in virtual triumphs of this kind than in the earlier stages of neighborhood politics—that such strategy is bound and shackled to the city form itself. Indeed, one of the enormous strengths of the superstate and its federal constitution lies in the evident discontinuities between city, state, and federal power: if you cannot make socialism in one country, how much more derisory, then, are the prospects for socialism in one city in the United States today? Indeed, our foreign visitors may not be aware that there exist in this country four or five socialist communes, near one of which, in Santa Cruz, California, I lived until recently; no one would want to belittle these local successes, but it seems probable that few of us think of them as the first decisive step toward the transition to socialism.

If you cannot build socialism in one city, then suppose you conquer a whole series of large key urban centers in succession. This is what the League of Black Revolutionary Workers began to think about; that is to say, they began to feel that their movement was a political model and ought to be generalizable. The problem that arises is spatial: how to develop a *national* political movement on the basis of a *city* strategy and politics. At any rate, the leadership of the League began to spread the word in other cities and traveled to Italy and Sweden to study workers' strategies there and to explain their own model; reciprocally, out-of-town politicians came to Detroit to investigate the new strategies. At this point it ought to be clear that we are in the middle of the problem of representation, not the least of it being signaled by the appearance of that ominous American word "leadership." In a more general way, however, these trips were more than networking, making contacts, spreading information: they raised the problem of how to represent a unique local model and experience to people in other situations. So it was logical for the League to make a film of their experience, and a very fine and exciting film it is.

Spatial discontinuities, however, are more devious and dialectical, and they are not overcome in any of the most obvious ways. For example, they returned on the Detroit experience as some ultimate limit before which it collapsed. What happened was that the jet-setting militants of the League had become media stars; not only were they becoming alienated from their local constituencies, but, worse than that, nobody stayed home to mind the store. Having acceded to a larger spatial plane, the base vanished under them; and with this the most successful social revolutionary experiment of that rich political decade in the United States came to a sadly undramatic end. I do not want to say that it left no traces behind, since a number of local gains remain, and in any case every rich political experiment continues to feed the tradition in underground ways. Most ironic in our context, however, is the very success of their failure: the representation—the model of this complex spatial dialectic—triumphantly survives in the form of a film and a book, but in the process of becoming an image and a spectacle, the referent seems to have disappeared, as so many people from Debord to Baudrillard always warned us it would.

Yet this very example may serve to illustrate the proposition that successful spatial representation today need not be some uplifting socialist-realist drama of revolutionary triumph but may be equally inscribed in a narrative of defeat, which sometimes, even more effectively, causes the whole architectonic of postmodern global space to rise up in ghostly profile behind

itself, as some ultimate dialectical barrier or invisible limit. This example also may have given a little more meaning to the slogan of cognitive mapping to which I now turn.

I am tempted to describe the way I understand this concept as something of a synthesis between Althusser and Kevin Lynch—a formulation that, to be sure, does not tell you much unless you know that Lynch is the author of a classic work, *The Image of the City*, which in its turn spawned the whole low-level subdiscipline that today takes the phrase "cognitive mapping" as its own designation.² Lynch's problematic remains locked within the limits of phenomenology, and his book can no doubt be subjected to many criticisms on its own terms (not the least of which is the absence of any conception of political agency or historical process). My use of the book will be emblematic, since the mental map of city space explored by Lynch can be extrapolated to that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms. Drawing on the downtowns of Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles, and by means of interviews and questionnaires in which subjects we asked to draw their city context from memory, Lynch suggests that urban alienation is directly proportional to the mental unmapability of local cityscapes. A city like Boston, then, with its monumental perspectives, its markers and monuments, its combination of grand but simple spatial forms, including dramatic boundaries such as the Charles River, not only allows people to have, in their imaginations, a generally successful and continuous location to the rest of the city, but in addition gives them something of the freedom and aesthetic gratification of traditional city form.

I have always been struck by the way in which Lynch's conception of city experience—the dialectic between the here and now of immediate perception and the imaginative or imaginary sense of the city as an absent totality—presents something like a spatial analogue of Althusser's great formulation of ideology itself, as "the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence." Whatever its defects and problems, this positive conception of ideology as a necessary function in any form of social life has the great merit of stressing the gap between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated, a gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience; but this ideology, as such, attempts to span or coordinate, to map, by means of conscious and unconscious representations. The conception of cognitive mapping proposed here therefore involves an extrapolation of Lynch's spatial analysis to the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of class relations on a global (or should I say multinational) scale. The secondary premise is also maintained, namely, that the incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience. It follows that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping in this sense is an integral part of any socialist political project.

In what has preceded I have infringed so many of the taboos and shibboleths of a faddish post-Marxism that it becomes necessary to discuss them more openly and directly before proceeding. They include the proposition that class no longer exists (a proposition that might be clarified by the simple distinction between class as an element in small-scale models of

society, class consciousness as a cultural event, and class analysis as a mental operation); the idea that this society is no longer motored by production but rather reproduction (including science and technology)—an idea that, in the midst of a virtually completely built environment, one is tempted to greet with laughter; and, finally, the repudiation of representation and the stigmatization of the concept of totality and of the project of totalizing thought. Practically, this last needs to be sorted into several different propositions—in particular, one having to do with capitalism and one having to do with socialism or communism. The French *nouveaux philosophes* said it most succinctly, without realizing that they were reproducing or reinventing the hoariest American ideological slogans of the cold war: totalizing thought is totalitarian thought; a direct line runs from Hegel's Absolute Spirit to Stalin's Gulag.

As a matter of self-indulgence, I will open a brief theoretical parenthesis here, particularly since Althusser has been mentioned. We have already experienced a dramatic and instructive melt-down of the Althusserian reactor in the work of Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, who quite consequently observe the incompatibility of the Althusserian attempt to secure semiautonomy for the various levels of social life, and the more desperate effort of the same philosopher to retain the old orthodox notion of an "ultimately determining instance" in the form of what he calls "structural totality." Quite logically and consequently, then, Hindess and Hirst simply remove the offending mechanism, whereupon the Althusserian edifice collapses into a rubble of autonomous instances without any necessary relationship to each other whatsoever—at which point it follows that one can no longer talk about or draw practical political consequences from any conception of social structure; that is to say, the very conceptions of something called capitalism and something called socialism or communism fall of their own weight into the ash can of History. (This last, of course, then vanishes in a puff of smoke, since by the same token nothing like History as a total process can any longer be conceptually entertained.) All I wanted to point out in this high theoretical context is that the baleful equation between a philosophical conception of totality and a political practice of totalitarianism is itself a particularly ripe example of what Althusser calls "expressive causality," namely, the collapsing of two semiautonomous (or, now, downright autonomous) levels into one another. Such an equation, then, is possible for unreconstructed Hegelians but is quite incompatible with the basic positions of any honest post-Althusserian post-Marxism.

To close the parenthesis, all of this can be said in more earthly terms. The conception of capital is admittedly a totalizing or systemic concept: no one has ever seen or met the thing itself; it is either the result of scientific reduction (and it should be obvious that scientific thinking always reduces the multiplicity of the real to a small-scale model) or the mark of an imaginary and ideological vision. But let us be serious: anyone who believes that the profit motive and the logic of capital accumulation are not the fundamental laws of this world, who believes that these do not set absolute barriers and limits to social changes and transformations undertaken in it—such a person is living in an alternative universe; or, to put it more politely, in this universe such a person—assuming he or she is progressive—is doomed to social democracy, with its now abundantly documented treadmill of failures and capitulations. Because if capital does not

exist, then clearly socialism does not exist either. I am far from suggesting that no politics at all is possible in this new post-Marxian Nietzschean world of micropolitics—that is observably untrue. But I do want to argue that without a conception of the social totality (and the possibility of transforming a whole social system), no properly socialist politics is possible.

About socialism itself we must raise more troubling and unsolved dilemmas that involve the notion of community or the collective. Some of the dilemmas are very familiar, such as the contradiction between self-management on the local level and planning on the global scale; or the problems raised by the abolition of the market, not to mention the abolition of the commodity form itself. I have found even more stimulating and problematic the following propositions about the very nature of society itself: it has been affirmed that, with one signal exception (capitalism itself, which is organized around an economic mechanism), there has never existed a cohesive form of human society that was not based on some form of transcendence or religion. Without brute force, which is never but a momentary solution, people cannot in this vein be asked to live cooperatively and to renounce the omnivorous desires of the id without some appeal to religious belief or transcendent values, something absolutely incompatible with any conceivable socialist society. The result is that these last achieve their own momentary coherence only under seige circumstances, in the wartime enthusiasm and group effort provoked by the great blockades. In other words, without the nontranscendent economic mechanism of capital, all appeals to moral incentives (as in Che) or to the primacy of the political (as in Maoism) must fatally exhaust themselves in a brief time, leaving only the twin alternatives of a return to capitalism or the construction of this or that modern form of "oriental despotism." You are certainly welcome to believe this prognosis, provided you understand that in such a case any socialist politics is strictly a mirage and a waste of time, which one might better spend adjusting and reforming an eternal capitalist landscape as far as the eye can see.

In reality this dilemma is, to my mind, the most urgent task that confronts Marxism today. I have said before that the so-called crisis in Marxism is not a crisis in Marxist science, which has never been richer, but rather a crisis in Marxist ideology. If ideology—to give it a somewhat different definition—is a vision of the future that grips the masses, we have to admit that, save in a few ongoing collective experiments, such as those in Cuba and in Yugoslavia, no Marxist or Socialist party or movement anywhere has the slightest conception of what socialism or communism as a social system ought to be and can be expected to look like. That vision will not be purely economic, although the Marxist economists are as deficient as the rest of us in their failure to address this Utopian problem in any serious way. It is, as well, supremely social and cultural, involving the task of trying to imagine how a society without hierarchy, a society of free people, a society that has at once repudiated the economic mechanisms of the market, can possibly cohere. Historically, all forms of hierarchy have always been based ultimately on gender hierarchy and on the building block of the family unit, which makes it clear that this is the true juncture between a feminist problematic and a Marxist one—not an antagonistic juncture, but the moment at which the feminist project and the Marxist and socialist project meet and face the same dilemma: how to imagine Utopia.

Returning to the beginning of this lengthy excursus, it seems unlikely that anyone who repudiates the concept of totality can have anything useful to say to us on this matter, since for such persons it is clear that the totalizing vision of socialism will not compute and is a false problem within the random and undecidable world of microgroups. Or perhaps another possibility suggests itself, namely, that our dissatisfaction with the concept of totality is not a thought in its own right but rather a significant symptom, a function of the increasing difficulties in thinking of such a set of interrelationships in a complicated society. This would seem, at least, to be the implication of the remark of the Team X architect Aldo van Eyck, when, in 1966, he issued his version of the death of modernism thesis: "We know nothing of vast multiplicity—we cannot come to terms with it—not as architects or planners or anybody else." To which he added, and the sequel can easily be extrapolated from architecture to social change itself: "But if society has no form—how can architects build its counterform?"²

You will be relieved to know that at this point we can return both to my own conclusion and to the problem of aesthetic representation and cognitive mapping, which was the pretext of this essay. The project of cognitive mapping obviously stands or falls with the conception of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality that was to have been mapped. I have spoken of form and content, and this final distinction will allow me at least to say something about an aesthetic, of which I have observed that I am, myself, absolutely incapable of guessing or imagining its form. That postmodernism gives us hints and examples of such cognitive mapping on the level of content is, I believe, demonstrable.

I have spoken elsewhere of the turn toward a thematics of mechanical reproduction, of the way in which the autoreferentiality of much of postmodernist art takes the form of a play with reproductive technology—film, tapes, video, computers, and the like—which is, to my mind, a degraded figure of the great multinational space that remains to be cognitively mapped. Fully as striking on another level is the omnipresence of the theme of paranoia as it expresses itself in a seemingly inexhaustible production of conspiracy plots of the most elaborate kinds. Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content.

Achieved cognitive mapping will be a matter of form, and I hope I have shown how it will be an integral part of a socialist politics, although its own possibility may well be dependent on some prior political opening, which its task would then be to enlarge culturally. Still, even if we cannot imagine the productions of such an aesthetic, there may, nonetheless, as with the very idea of Utopia itself, be something positive in the attempt to keep alive the possibility of imagining such a thing.

Notes

¹ Dan Georgakis and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying. A Study in Urban Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).

Fredric Jameson

2

Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).

3

Quoted in Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 276-77.

Question (Nancy Fraser)

First, I want to say something, for the record, about the implicit political gesture built into your presentation of the question of totality, which seemed to me rather irresponsible, given that there have been many discussions of the issue and that many nuanced positions have been expressed. You essentially conflated many differences and subtle positions on this question. But I do have a more constructive question to ask, because I am also sympathetic to a certain kind of totalizing thought, namely, a critical social science that would be as total and explanatorily powerful as possible. Thus, I wonder why you assume that cognitive mapping is the task of the aesthetic? Why wouldn't that be a task for critical social science? Or are two different kinds of tasks conflated in your paper?

Jameson

The question of the role of the aesthetic as opposed to that of the social sciences in explorations of the structure of the world system corresponds, for me, to the orthodox distinction (which I still vaguely use in a somewhat different way) between science and ideology. My point is that we have this split between ideology in the Althusserian sense—that is, how you map your relation as an individual subject to the social and economic organization of global capitalism—and the discourse of science, which I understand to be a discourse (which is ultimately impossible) without a subject. In this ideal discourse, like a mathematical equation, you model the real independent of its relations to individual subjects, including your own. Now I think that you can teach people how this or that view of the world is to be thought or conceptualized, but the real problem is that it is increasingly hard for people to put that together with their own experience as individual psychological subjects, in daily life. The social sciences can rarely do that, and when they try (as in ethnomethodology), they do it only by a mutation in the discourse of social science, or they do it at the moment that a social science becomes an ideology; but then we are back into the aesthetic. Aesthetics is something that addresses individual experience rather than something that conceptualizes the real in a more abstract way.

Question

Your paper suggests that cognitive mapping is an avenue by which we might proceed at this point in time. Is this a tactical or a strategic choice? If it is tactical, then how do you conceive the question of strategy? And if it is strategic, what do you consider the problem of tactics today? The reason I raise such a question is that there seem to be opportunities now to create an interconnected culture that might allow real political problems to be discussed. If that's true, the question of strategy and tactics seems central.

Jameson

That's an important question. I would answer it by trying to connect my suggestion with Stuart Hall's paper, in which he talked about the strategic possibilities of delegitimizing an existing discourse at a particular historical conjuncture. While I haven't used it, the language of discourse theory is certainly appropriate here (along with my own more dialectical language). My comrade and collaborator Stanley Aronowitz has observed that whatever the Left is in this country today, it has to begin by sorting out what the priorities really are. He takes the position that our essential function for the moment is pedagogical in the largest sense; it involves the conquest of legitimacy in this country for socialist discourse. In other words, since the sixties, everybody knows that there is a socialist discourse. In the TV serials there's always a radical; that has become a social type, or, more accurately, a stereotype. So while people know that a socialist discourse exists, it is not a legitimate discourse in this society. Thus no one takes seriously the idea that socialism, and the social reorganization it proposes, is the answer to our problems. Stuart Hall showed us the negative side of this struggle as the moment in which a

Fredric Jameson

hegemonic social democratic discourse finds its content withdrawn from it so that, finally, those things that used to be legitimate are no longer legitimate and nobody believes in them. Our task, I think, is the opposite of that and has to do with the legitimation of the discourses of socialism in such a way that they do become realistic and serious alternatives for people. It's in the context of that general project that my more limited aesthetic project finds its place.

Question (Darko Suvin)

First of all, I would like to say, also for the record, that I agree with your refusal to equate totality with totalitarianism. I want to remind people of the strange origins of the connotations of the word "totalitarianism." They arose after the war, propagated by the Congress of Cultural Freedom, which was associated with such names as Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol and with journals such as *Encounter*, funded by the CIA as it turns out. This is admittedly not a conclusive argument; even people funded by the CIA can come up with intelligent ideas now and then. But it should make us wary of such an equation. So I think your rebuttal is well taken and not at all irresponsible.

Now to my question. I have a major problem with this idea of postmodernism, even though your elaboration of it is more sophisticated than Ihab Hassan's. I would like to try to suggest a way out of this problem. Rather than thinking of your three stages of capitalism—which I gather are coextensive with realism, modernism, and postmodernism—as closed, Hegelian world-historical monads subsequent to each other in time, so that at some point (around 1910 or 1960) one begins and the other ends, couldn't we think of capitalism as a whole (beginning whenever you wish), and then a series of movements (such as realism, modernism, postmodernism) that have become hegemonic in a given subphase of capitalism but that do not necessarily disappear. After all, most literature and painting today is still realistic (e.g., Arthur Hailey). In other words, we have shifting hegemonies, although I think it is still a question of how one proves that a shift of such major dimensions (e.g., the shift associated with the names Picasso, Einstein, Eisenstein, and Lenin) really occurred in the 1960s. But in that case, postmodernism could emerge as a style, even become hegemonic in the United States and Western Europe, but not in India and Africa, and then lose its dominant position without our having to shift into a new episteme and a new world-historical monad. And you would have a subtler interplay between a simultaneously coexisting realism, modernism, and postmodernism, on various levels of art and literature.

Jameson

The questions of periodization, coexistence, and so on, are difficult and complex. Obviously, when I talk about such periods they are not sealed monads that begin and end at easily identifiable moments (beginning in 1857 and ending in 1913, or beginning in 1947 or 1958, etc.). And there are certainly survivals and overlaps. I would, however, like to say something about the problem people have with the concept of postmodernism. For me, the term suggests two connected things: that we are in a different stage of capital, and that there have been a number of significant cultural modifications (e.g., the end of the avant-garde, the end of the great auteur or genius, the disappearance of the utopian impulse of modernism—about which I think Perry Anderson was both eloquent and extremely suggestive). It's a matter of coordinating those cultural changes with the notion that artists today have to respond to the new globally defined concrete situation of late capitalism. That is why it doesn't bother me too much when friends and colleagues like Darko Suvin or Perry Anderson or Henri Lefebvre find this concept of postmodernism suspicious. Because whatever Perry Anderson, for example, thinks of the utility of the period term—postmodernism—his paper demonstrates that something really fundamental did change after 1945 and that the conditions of existence of modernism were no longer present. So we are in something else.

Now the relative merit of competing terms—postmodernism or high modernism—is another matter. The task is to describe that qualitatively

different culture. By the same token, I trust that people who have some discursive stake in other terms, such as totality or its refusal, do not take my remarks on the subject too narrowly. For example, I consider the work of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau an extremely important contribution to thinking about a future socialist politics. I think one has to avoid fighting over empty slogans.

Comment (Cornel West)

The question of totality signals an important theoretical struggle with practical implications. I'm not so sure that the differences between your position and Perry Anderson's, and those put forward by Stanley Aronowitz, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, and a host of others can be so easily reconciled. And it seems to me that if we continue to formulate the question in the way that you formulate it, we are on a crash course, because I think that holding on to the conception of totality that you invoke ultimately leads toward a Leninist or Leninist-like politics that is basically sectarian, that may be symptomatic of a pessimism (though that is a question). If we opt for the position that Mouffe, Laclau, Aronowitz, and others are suggesting, the results are radically anti-Leninist as well as radically critical of a particular conception of totality. It is important to remember that nobody here has defended a flat, dispersive politics. Nobody here has defended a reactionary politics like that of the *nouveaux philosophes*. Rather, their critiques of totality are enabling ones; they are critiques of a totality that is solely a regulative ideal we never achieve, never reach. And if that is the case, I really don't see the kind of reconciliation that you are talking about. I think you were very comradely in your ritualistic gestures to Chantal and Ernesto and others, but I am not so sure that we are as close as you think. Now that means we're still comrades within the Left in the broad sense, but these are significant differences and tendencies within the Left, and I didn't want to end the discussion with a vague Hegelian reconciliation of things when what I see is very significant and healthy struggle.

Jameson

I don't understand how the politics I am proposing is repressive, since I don't think I have yet even proposed a politics, any more than I have really proposed an aesthetics. Both of those seem to be all in the future. Let me try to respond by expanding on the distinction that came up in the second question, the notion of tactics versus strategy. It is not a question of substituting a total class/party politics for the politics of new social movements. That would be both ridiculous and self-defeating. The question is how to think those local struggles, involving specific and often different groups, within some common project that is called, for want of a better word, socialism. Why must these two things go together? Because without some notion of a *total* transformation of society and without the sense that the immediate project is a figure for that total transformation, so that everybody has a stake in that particular struggle, the success of any local struggle is doomed, limited to reform. And then it will lose its impetus, as any number of issue movements have done. Yet an abstract politics that only talks socialism on some global level is doomed to the sterility of sectarian politics. I am trying to suggest a way in which these things always take place at two levels: as an embattled struggle of a group, but also as a figure for an entire systemic transformation. And I don't see how anything substantial can be achieved without that kind of dual thinking at every moment in all of those struggles.

The New Sentence and the Commodity Form: Recent American Writing

The proposition that language is not *about* the world but is *in* the world itself has had as many serious political and epistemological ramifications in recent years as Marx's famous thesis on Feuerbach, which it both resembles and, perhaps, supersedes. Yet the problem of the intellectual's weary anxiety about co-optation persists: How do we tell the real thing from its simulation? The point is, there is no "real thing." Writers have been saying it, and Marxism will have to speak to it.

We imagine that there is a gap between the world of our private fantasies & the possibilities of meaningful action & so it becomes easy to talk & talk on what is lacking, to discourse on end, & yet feel impotent. "What's to do." But this gap is a measure not so much of desires or depression or impotence but of ourselves. It has been the continual failure of Marxist aesthetics to insist that this gap is simply another illusory part of our commodity lives. It is at the root of our collectivity.

Charles Bernstein

"Three or Four Things I Know about Him"

The train ceaselessly reinvents the station.

Barrett Watten

1-10

Of all the "casualties" sustained by American writing in the volatile cross fire of political imperatives that prevailed in the thirties, George Oppen's case is, perhaps, the most exemplary. Barely though successfully launched as a poet in New York, and too much of a formalist to sustain his convictions, artistically, in that time and place, he shunned the available alternatives like the *New Masses*, stopped writing in 1932, and dropped out of literary circles for over twenty-five years, at first organizing the unemployed and then living in itinerant "exile" in California and Mexico. In her autobiography, his wife, Mary, describes their return from a trip to France as "the momentous winter of 1932 . . . when we began to see and understand what was happening."¹ For Oppen himself, forty-five years later, the imperative of that year was still painfully clear (though italicized, which is to say mediated): "*we wanted to know if we were any good / out there*" ("Disasters," *Primitive*). Here is the poet on trial again, and in Oppen's case somehow called on to *explain* where the politically irresponsible, like Pound, had long since been pardoned for their "aesthetic" crimes. Indeed, Oppen