

or control. "I think that it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom."<sup>22</sup> All that architectural form can hope to achieve is to hinder or prevent a certain politics of use. Architectural form in itself cannot be liberating, although it can produce "positive effects" when the "liberating intentions of the architect" coincide with "the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom."<sup>23</sup> In the case of the panopticon, then, it is not the architectural form that conditions behavior, but the power differential between guard and prisoners. The efficient layout of the architecture merely supports the exercise of this power. Foucault thereby makes a crucial observation on the capacity for architecture to influence human behavior.

Returning to Woods, it is clear that he is naïve to expect his "free-spaces" to promote a liberal politics, since architectural form in itself cannot determine any particular politics of use. All that architecture can do is offer spaces that might—at best—"invite" certain spatial practices. Yet Woods has not investigated the spatial practices of a liberal society, nor what architectural forms might best accommodate those practices. His suggestions remain locked within an aesthetics of form. The work of Woods on Sarajevo can therefore be seen as an aestheticization of the world. Not only have the deeply political questions of reuse of damaged buildings been transported into the realm of architectural aesthetics, but the whole imagery of war-torn buildings has been appropriated as a point of departure for a new aestheticized view of the world. The warnings of Walter Benjamin, it seems, have not been heeded. Nowhere are the problems of aestheticization more pertinent than here in this superficial fetishization of the image of war.

If the destruction in Sarajevo can provide the starting point for a design aesthetic, and images of the Gulf War can be treated on the same level as basketball matches and advertisements, what hope is there for any meaningful discourse of architecture? The world has become aestheticized and anaesthetized, emptied of all content. And nowhere is this condition more marked, it would seem, than in the glossy pages of our architectural magazines and the fashion-conscious domains of our schools of architecture.

FROM NEIL LEACH, THE ANAESTHETICS OF ARCHITECTURE  
(MIT PRESS, 1999)

3

THE AESTHETICS OF INTOXICATION

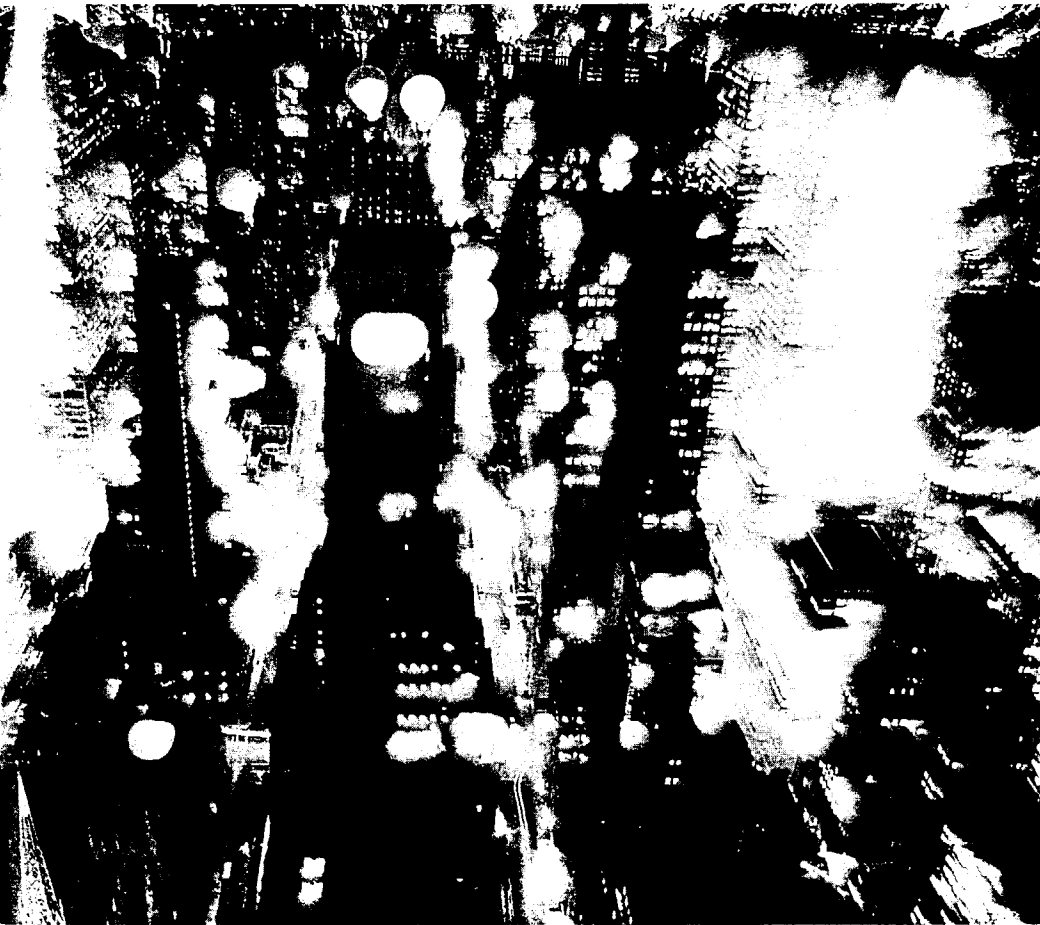
German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel was quick to associate new patterns of conscious behavior with the environmental landscape of modernity. In his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), Simmel offers us one of the most penetrating insights into the life of the modernist metropolitan individual. "The psychological foundation upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected," he observes, "is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli."<sup>1</sup> In contrast to those who lived in the towns or countryside, where life is characterized by a "slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm," the metropolitan individual has to accommodate and register the rapid bombardment of stimuli within the city, where even the crossing of the road would fray the nerves. The registering of the fragmentary and irregular impulses of city life has a marked impact on the psychological outlook of the metropolitan type. Whereas the steady and familiar patterns of rural life could be accommodated with little mental effort, the "rapid telescoping of changing images" in the city, the "pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli" call for a greater expenditure of mental energy. And whereas rural life somehow appeals "at a more unconscious level" to feelings and emotional relationships, metropolitan life could best be grasped at an abstracted, intellectual level. Accordingly, Simmel

presents a model of the modern metropolitan type as one whose intellectualized and unemotional patterns of behavior within the capitalist metropolis match the movement of capitalism itself. The metropolitan individual has developed, for Simmel, an abstracted, disinterested form of movement that echoes the circulation of money.

Central to Simmel's thesis is the concept of the blasé outlook. The modern metropolitan individual has to develop a defense mechanism against the overstimulation of mental life in the city, and the blasé outlook is both a product of and a defense against this condition. The blasé outlook, for Simmel, "is at first the consequence of those rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts and from which it seems to us the intensification of metropolitan intellectuality seems to be derived."<sup>2</sup>

Just as an immoderately sensuous life makes one blasé because it stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all, so, less harmful stimuli, through the rapidity and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, rear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength and, remaining in the same milieu, do not have the time for new reserves to form.<sup>3</sup>

To become blasé therefore constitutes an inability to react sufficiently to the mental impulses of the city. But the crucial point is that this condition is essentially a defensive one. By underreacting to external stimuli, the metropolitan individual develops a form of defensive cocoon against overstimulation. The blasé outlook reveals how that individual has learned to survive within the conditions of the modern metropolis. The blasé attitude is therefore an adaptive phenomenon "in which the nerves reveal their final possibility for adjusting themselves to



3.1 Manhattan. Francisco Hidalgo.

the content and the form of metropolitan life by renouncing the response to them."<sup>4</sup>

Similar themes might be found in the work of Walter Benjamin, who looks at the modern metropolitan type through the lens of Charles Baudelaire. Indeed it was Baudelaire who had articulated, long before Simmel, the trancelike state that lay at the basis of the blasé individual.

Baudelaire, who had himself experimented with drugs of various kinds, presents life in the metropolis as a narcoticlike trance, and it is a life shrouded in a mythic dimension. For Baudelaire, as Benjamin observes, the metropolis was the mesmerizing site of a religious intoxication.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Narcotics of the City

The Surrealists had likewise recognized the intoxicating nature of the metropolis. For them the city was above all an enchanting dreamscape that fired and fueled the imagination. The very cacophony of the city with its blaring horns and flashing neon lights—the fragmentary, kaleidoscopic impulses of the modern metropolis—provided them with a continual source of stimulation and intoxication. This they achieved by raising their aesthetic consciousness and deliberately playing upon the phenomenon that Simmel had observed. Their receptivity to the sensory stimulation of the city induced a form of narcotic trance that allowed one to “surrender oneself to such enticements, to roam the enchanted metropolis in pursuit of desire and distraction.”<sup>6</sup>

While the Surrealists explored the potential of alcohol and drugs as a means of enhancing their perception of the city, Surrealism itself could open them to that “intoxication.” “Today I bring you a narcotic originating at the limits of consciousness, at the very edge of the abyss,” writes Louis Aragon. “This is the entrance to the realms of the instantaneous, the world of snapshot.”<sup>7</sup> It is under the narcotic of Surrealism that Aragon entreats readers “without even an instrument in your hands . . . [to] find yourselves evoking the hitherto incomplete gamut of [the hashish eaters’] pleasures . . . casting a spell over yourselves by piercing the mortal cross-piece of your heart not with a pin but with an enchanting image.” And it was under such an intoxication that Aragon himself conceived of his mythology of the modern: “Walking tipsily among so many divine concretions . . . I set about forming the idea of a mythology in motion. It was more accurate to call it a mythology of the modern. And it was under that name that I conceived it.”<sup>8</sup>

In this spirit of abandonment the world could become mythologized, and even the most technical and seemingly rational of objects could be transformed into mythic creatures. For Aragon even the modern petrol pump could metamorphose into some mythic form:

Painted brightly with English or invented names, possessing just one long, supple arm, a luminous faceless head, a single foot and a numbered wheel in the belly, the petrol pumps sometimes take on the appearance of the divinities of Egypt or of those cannibal tribes which worship war and war alone. O Texaco motor oil, Esso, Shell, great inscriptions of human potentiality, soon shall we cross ourselves before your fountains, and the youngest among us will perish from having contemplated their nymphs in naphtha.<sup>9</sup>

For the Surrealists, as for Baudelaire, the metropolis was the source of perpetual intoxication. It had a narcotic effect, the capacity to induce a blasé attitude in the individual. And like Simmel, Baudelaire based this condition on the principle of the “shock.” As Benjamin observed, modernity for Baudelaire is characterized by sudden sharp movements such as the triggering of the shutter in the camera, and other visual equivalents:

Tactile experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper or the traffic of a big city. Moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks or collisions. At dangerous crossings, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd, as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of the shock, he calls this man “a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness.”<sup>10</sup>

Benjamin picks up on these themes in Baudelaire. He acknowledges the appeal of the metropolis for the Surrealists, and while he is critical of the “mythology of the modern” that Aragon and others espoused, he claims—rather surprisingly—to recognize an emancipatory potential in Surrealism through what he terms the “dialectics of intoxication.” In this sense, somewhat paradoxically, the intoxication of the city might provide a form of “profane illumination,” a momentary glimpse of the reality behind the myth.<sup>11</sup> The problem of modernity,

for Benjamin, is precisely that of myth, as understood within the context of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, where myth and rationality comprised the two opposite poles of Enlightenment culture held in a reciprocal tension. Myth—that magical “other” to Enlightenment rationality—constituted a form of false consciousness. It effectively obscured reality. While modernity has generally been viewed as the obviation of myth, the disenchantment of the world, the modern metropolis for Benjamin is entangled with myth, a form of dreamworld, the intoxicating site of the phantasmagoric, the kaleidoscopic, and the cacophonous. The modern metropolis does not escape myth but is precisely *enslaved* by myth, a myth that has adopted new guises in the supposedly progressive, fashionable world of the commodity. Thus the very abstraction of modern manufacturing allows its products to appear to be “conjured up”—as if by magic—to constitute the phantasmagoria of this dreamworld. This process is fueled by the fashion system, “the always-the-same dressed up as the ever-new.”<sup>12</sup> Fashion, for Benjamin, acts as a “tireless agent” that contributes to the false consciousness of this dreamworld. All this is veiled by the deceptive doctrine of progress that underpins modern existence and masks the continuing barbarity of history. “There is no document of civilization,” as Benjamin notes, “which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”<sup>13</sup>

If the modern metropolis is enshrouded in myth, as if by some form of false consciousness, for Benjamin it is the task of the responsible individual to see through this myth—to demythologize the world. It is here that Surrealism may hold some revolutionary potential. Even though Surrealism would itself appear to be based on the principle of myth, it contains the potential for political change through its “profane illumination” which, for Benjamin, could penetrate this layer of myth. Through a “dialectics of intoxication,” which was not dependent on narcotics but bore similar characteristics, the “profane illumination” offered a flashlike glimpse of a world free of myth. “The true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics,” writes Benjamin. “It resides in a profane illumination, a materialist, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or

whatever else can give an introductory lesson.”<sup>14</sup> Surrealism therefore held the promise of emancipation through its revolutionary insights. “To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution”: this was for Benjamin the “most particular task” of Surrealism.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise Benjamin recognized the narcotic effect of the city. In the swirling crowds of the modern metropolis the subject, for Benjamin, becomes enveloped in a form of aesthetic cocoon as though drugged. Benjamin’s primary subject is the flaneur, the urban dawdler, who, like the prostitute and the ragpicker, inhabits the left-over spaces, like the arcades, at the threshold of modernity, as one era passes into the next. The flaneur, then, is quite historically specific. And if, for Benjamin, it is in their obsolescence that objects reveal their potential, so the flaneur, the last gasp of a previous order, comes to embody the prehistory of the modern. The flaneur in Benjamin, this disinterested observer, famed for taking tortoises for walks and other strategies aimed at resisting the onslaught of the modern world, yet equally content to sell his wares in the modern marketplace, has certain similarities with the blasé individual in Simmel’s writing. The flaneur may indeed be blasé, but unlike Simmel’s blasé individual he is not a creature of the crowd. The flaneur is a student of modern life, more at home observing the crowd from the window of some café. But equally the flaneur may become intoxicated by the crowd and swept up blissfully by it, like a commodity enveloped in a stream of customers:

The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. The *flâneur* is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity. He is not aware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him and it permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the *flâneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers.<sup>16</sup>

It is perhaps no coincidence that Benjamin himself experimented in taking drugs as a means of engaging with the city. In “Hashish in Marseilles” he reports how, under the effects of hashish, “space can expand, the ground tilt steeply, atmospheric senses occur: vapor, an

opaque heaviness of the air; colors grow brighter, more luminous; objects more beautiful."<sup>17</sup> The narcotic heightens Benjamin's sensitivity to everything around him, to the point where he feels as though a shadow falling on a piece of paper threatens to harm it.<sup>18</sup> At the same time it distances him from reality and distorts his experience of the city, so that the blaring of car horns is mistaken for a brass band. It is as though the intoxication allows him to make sense of the fragmentary impulses of the city.<sup>19</sup> The city becomes a comforting, almost religious fiction, so that Benjamin can compare the Surrealist experience of the city with the "opium" of religion.<sup>20</sup>

What Benjamin adds to the accounts of the modern metropolis in Simmel, Baudelaire, Aragon, and others is a certain psychoanalytic dimension. While recognizing similar symptoms, Benjamin offers a somewhat different analysis. While Simmel describes the blasé individual in straightforwardly neurological terms, as someone whose nerve endings had been desensitized by overstimulation, in Benjamin's account the *mind* is what is anaesthetized by the continual shocks of contemporary existence.<sup>21</sup>

#### The Shock of the Modern

Certainly, for Benjamin, it is shock that lies at the heart of modern existence, where technology not only creates an environment fundamentally different from any previous era but also conditions human behavior and engenders a predominant mental outlook. For Benjamin, the human psyche is in essence an organic mechanism, which is constantly adapting to its physical surroundings. This adaptation has to be seen as a defensive mechanism predicated on survival. The human being, in this sense, is like a chameleon, governed by an instinctual urge to find similarities in the external environment, and, where none exist, to adapt itself to that environment. The term that Benjamin uses for this process is *mimesis*. Through the mimetic impulse the human being seeks to replicate aspects of the external world. This process appears to be governed by the death instinct—the urge to be at one with the environ-

ment—but is premised on survival and not on death.<sup>22</sup> Hence we might recognize a sacrificial theme in mimesis. For just as sacrifice in religious terms aims to continue life through death—by in effect transcending death—so the chameleonlike instinct at the heart of mimesis uses mimicry as a mechanism of survival. This can be recognized when humans, like so many animals, freeze when confronted with a life-threatening situation. The very process of freezing—of adopting a lifeless form—is a mechanism of feigning death for the sake of survival. By appearing inert, a creature attempts to camouflage itself and blend in with its surroundings, as though it were invisible.

This principle, for Benjamin, underpins all human activity. The mimetic principle would therefore dictate that human beings are constantly adapting to their surroundings. The fragmentary impulses of the city, the jolting, jarring experiences of modern life, would be replicated in human beings' own behavior. Humans would develop reflexes and responses to match those of their external environment. For Benjamin, the archetypal example of this could be found in crowd behavior. In Poe's tale of the man in the crowd, Benjamin notes how the individual, when jostled, would bow profusely to the jostlers like some form of automaton.<sup>23</sup> It is in this very gesture, a gesture as empty as the token smile, that Benjamin recognizes the essence of modernity.

Through such abstracted patterns of behavior, articulated so clearly in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*, human beings have taken on some of the attributes of machines. The German architect and social theorist Siegfried Kracauer makes an explicit comparison between the mechanized labor practices of modernity and the corresponding aesthetic practices. In his analysis of the Tiller Girls dance troupe he offers an incisive account of how the depersonalized patterns of their dance routines are emblematic of the abstract rationality that pervades culture at large:

Everyone does his or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality. . . . Like the pattern in the stadium, the organization . . . is conceived according to rational principles which the Taylor system merely pushes to their ultimate conclusion. The hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls. . . . The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires.<sup>24</sup>

For Benjamin, these patterns are a mechanism of survival in an age dominated by the jolting, jarring repetitive action of the machine. Benjamin makes his comparison quite specific: the mechanization of human movement replicates the movement of the machine. "The shock experience which the passerby has in the crowd," he notes, "corresponds to what the worker 'experiences' by his machine." He adds that Baudelaire had been "captivated by a process whereby the reflecting mechanism which the machine sets off in the workman can be studied closely, as in a mirror, in the idler."<sup>25</sup> But what makes Benjamin's analysis of modern life so telling is the psychological account he offers of this process, an account that is based on the work of Sigmund Freud:

For a living organism, protection against stimuli is an almost more important function than the reception of stimuli: the protective shield is equipped with its own store of energy and must above all strive to conserve the special forms of energy operating in it against the effects of the excessive energies at work in the external world.<sup>26</sup>

Here Benjamin is making an explicit comparison between Proust's *mémoire involontaire*—involuntary memory—and Freud's notion of consciousness, as articulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Benjamin notes the opposition between the two. *Mémoire involontaire* depends on an event not entering consciousness, which leads him to conclude that consciousness serves as a reservoir of energy to dampen the energies outside, and therefore to act as a protection against stimuli.

The threat from these energies is one of shock. The more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely they are to have a traumatic effect. Psychoanalytic theory strives to understand the nature of these traumatic shocks, "on the basis of their breaking through the protective shield against stimuli."<sup>27</sup>

Freud situates the protective shield within "wakeful consciousness," located in part of the cortex that is "so blown apart by the effect of the stimulus" that it offers "the most favorable situation for the reception of stimuli."<sup>28</sup> By "parrying" the shock, consciousness prevents it from entering into the realm of experience and being retained

within the memory. Consciousness therefore acts as a form of shock absorber, which limits the long-term damage of the shock by isolating it within a particular moment: "The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour of one's life (*Erlebnis*)."<sup>29</sup> In presenting consciousness as though it were some form of "fencer" attempting to "parry" the shocks of modern existence, Benjamin adopted an image used by Baudelaire to represent contact with the metropolitan masses: "the blows he deals are designed to open a path through the crowd for him."<sup>30</sup>

It is in this context that we might understand the role of consciousness, for Benjamin, in dealing with the shock of the aesthetic. What have to be "parried" by the modern metropolitan individual are not so much the masses in the street as the fragmentary, kaleidoscopic sensations of the metropolis—the neon lighting, the flashing lights and blaring horns, the intoxicating cacophony of the street. These bring about the numbing effect of the modern metropolis, where neon advertisements "sink into the mind," as Siegfried Kracauer observes, leaving a "reddish gleam that lingers . . . like a cloak over one's thoughts."<sup>31</sup>

#### Aesthetics and Anaesthetics

Benjamin himself focuses on the phantasmagoria of nineteenth-century Paris in his analysis of this condition, as Buck-Morss notes. The original phantasmagoria took the form of the private fantasy worlds of bourgeois interiors with their luxurious display of furnishings. The principle then extended to the shop windows of the arcades, and thence to the "panoramas and dioramas that engulfed the viewer in a simulated total environment-in-miniature" and finally to the world's fairs, "which expanded this phantasmagoric principle to areas the size of small cities."<sup>32</sup>

It is the principle of the phantasmagoria, the sensory bombardment of techno-aesthetics, that illustrates the potential of the aesthetic for inducing a form of anaesthesia. The emphasis on visual display overwhelms and intoxicates the viewer. The aesthetic experience thus serves as a form of narcotic: "It has the effect of anaesthetizing the organism, not through numbing, but through flooding the senses. These stimulated sensoria alter consciousness, much like a drug, but they do so through sensory distraction rather than chemical alteration."<sup>33</sup>

The intoxication of the aesthetic may therefore anaesthetize the subject. The paradox of all this, as Buck-Morss observes, is that the term "aesthetic" is seemingly associated with its opposite, "anaesthetic." Some explanation might be found in the way the term *aesthetic* has changed and lost its original meaning. The ancient Greek term, *aesthesis*, refers not to abstract theories of beauty but to sensory perceptions.<sup>34</sup> It involves a heightening of feelings and emotions and an awakening of the senses, the very opposite of "anaesthetics." This original meaning is precisely what is evoked here. The process of aestheticization heightens awareness toward sensory stimuli. This in turn triggers a compensatory anaesthetization as a protection against overstimulation. Anaesthetization therefore works in tandem with aestheticization; the one feeds into the other. Just as hashish increases Benjamin's aesthetic awareness of the city of Marseilles, so too the bombardment of images may prove to have a narcotic effect, heightening one's aesthetic receptivity to further visual stimulation. But this flooding of the senses in one domain blots out the reception of impulses in another. The raising of one's consciousness of sensory matters—smell, taste, touch, sound, and appearance—allows a corresponding indifference to descend like a blanket over all else. The process generates its own womblike sensory cocoon around the individual, a semipermeable membrane that ensures a state of constant gratification by filtering out all that is undesirable. To aestheticize is therefore to sink blissfully into an intoxicating stupor that serves to cushion the individual from the world outside like some alcoholic haze.

The response that Simmel describes is a largely involuntary one, brought on by the conditions of the modern metropolis. For it is the

kaleidoscopic and fragmentary impulses of modern life that engender the blasé attitude, as the nerves attempt to defend themselves. But the response that Benjamin describes depends upon a certain receptivity toward those conditions. For those not disposed to such an outlook, the city may be the site of irritation and annoyance. Indeed Benjamin's own account is a receptive, largely aesthetic one—the view from a café, rather than from the factory floor. Crucially, then, aestheticization depends upon an active engagement on the part of the viewer, and a deliberate raising of one's aesthetic awareness.

This is precisely the sort of outlook common among those who work within the realm of visual images. Good design obviously depends upon a strong sense of visual awareness, but this emphasis on the image has certain negative consequences; and it is in a discipline like architecture, which is so directly involved with social concerns, that these negative consequences are likely to be most keenly experienced. The aestheticization of the world induces a form of numbness. It reduces any notion of pain to the level of the seductive image. What is at risk in this process of aestheticization is that political and social content may be subsumed, absorbed, and denied.<sup>35</sup> The seduction of the image works against any underlying sense of social commitment. Architecture is potentially compromised within this aestheticized realm. Architects, it would seem, are particularly susceptible to an aesthetic that fetishizes the ephemeral image, the surface membrane. The world becomes aestheticized and anaesthetized. In the intoxicating world of the image, the aesthetics of architecture threaten to become the *anaesthetics* of architecture.

#### The Intoxication of the Aesthetic

One of the realms in which the links between intoxication and the aesthetic have been exploited most successfully has been advertising. What this reveals most clearly is that advertising relies upon a certain aesthetics of intoxication. For advertising does not simply depend upon a set of glamorous associations in order to sell a product—as in the often exploitative use of women in car advertisements. Rather it plays

upon a certain narcotic quality within the aesthetic itself. It is precisely the aesthetic that operates as a form of drug to intoxicate and entice the viewer.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in advertisements for alcohol and other forms of narcotic, such as cigarettes. A constant trope in this form of advertising is an almost hyperreal displacement into a different world. An advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes, for example, seeks to persuade viewers that by smoking that particular brand, they will be transported into "Marlboro country," the rough barren landscape of the wild west. Likewise an advertisement for Southern Comfort bourbon whiskey will invariably draw upon the exotic, mysterious world of the deep South. By drinking the product, it is suggested, one might be transported to the intoxicating world of New Orleans. Alcohol is invariably presented as though it offers some form of ecstatic escapism—a displacement of the mind from the body—and it is precisely the narcotic quality of the advertising image that feeds this impression.

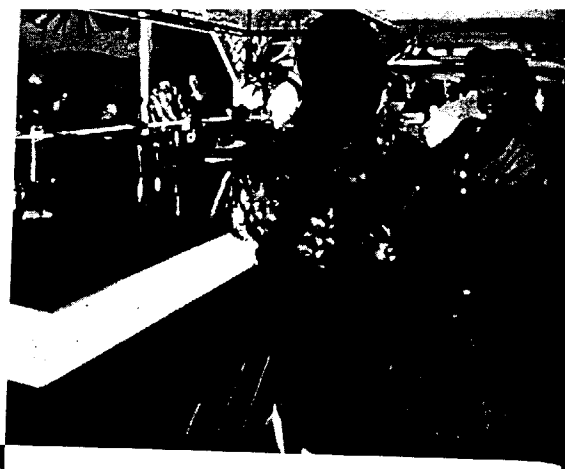
One of the most successful advertisements from this point of view has been a recent commercial for Bacardi rum by Gray Advertising. The commercial opens with a voice-over with a London cockney accent describing a seemingly humdrum night at the pub, with phrases such as: "Peckham on a Monday night," "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street," "Aunty Beryl," and "Catching the last bus home." This voice-over is intended to evoke an all too familiar set of images from everyday life in Britain, but what is remarkable is the contrast it establishes with the accompanying visual images. These depict glamorous scenes from a desert island. The visual images contrast sharply with the all too unglamorous world of inner London, and yet, strikingly, they are precisely connected with it.

The voice-over "Peckham on a Monday night," which for many people would summon up the grim reality of a traffic-congested part of inner London at the start of the working week, is paired with an image of a palm-fringed, sun-drenched beach lapped by the waters of an azure-blue sea. "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street," which again



3.2 Bacardi commercial, "Peckham on a Monday night." Gray Advertising.

would evoke an all too stuffy, smoke-filled pub on a busy main road, is linked with a bar on that beach, where suntanned customers in colorful beachwear sip cocktails cooled by a gentle breeze blowing in from the sea. "Aunty Beryl," who would conjure up for many a familiar, slightly aging barmaid—no doubt with a fuller figure—becomes a beautiful, lithe, exotic young lady with dark, mysterious eyes. There is deliberate irony at play here. The young woman is described as "Aunty Beryl" precisely because she is not "Aunty Beryl." Meanwhile "Catching the last bus home," which might well evoke a rather mundane trip on a double-decker bus through the diesel fumes of London traffic, turns into a group of young men in light linen suits running down a jetty and leaping into a speedboat. The contrast between the voice-over with the London cockney accent and the exotic beach images could not be greater.



3.3 Bacardi commercial, "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street." Gray Advertising.

3.4 Bacardi commercial, "Aunty Beryl." Gray Advertising.

3.5 Bacardi commercial, "Catching the last bus home." Gray Advertising.



It is here that the subtlety of this commercial becomes most apparent. For it is by exposing and playing upon the contrast between the real and the imaginary that the commercial achieves its force. The ecstatic displacement suggested by the contrast between the voice-over and the images is one that is replicated—so the viewer is led to believe—by Bacardi rum. The commercial plays upon a certain narcotic quality in the drink itself. It presents Bacardi as though drinking it will transport you out of the grim reality of the local pub and into the exotic utopia of some desert island. But the commercial is all the more effective for constantly reminding the viewer of the real world. In some senses, then, the viewer remains within the actual space of the real, but is transported emotionally out of that space—as though in some mode of ecstasy—into a paradisaic world beyond. The narcotic quality of the drink will allow you to escape the humdrum world of everyday life.

What also makes this particular commercial so relevant to the present discussion is the way in which it was exploited by an architectural firm, T P Bennett Associates, who have adapted it for their own recruitment advertisement, openly playing upon its central theme. The Bacardi commercial is cleverly reappropriated for different ends. The second advertisement adopts the voice-over slogans as part of its text, but replaces the images of the exotic utopia by images of the designer world of an architectural office. What is significant here is that this second advert does not need to resort to the utopian escapism of the Bacardi advert. "Peckham on a Monday night," far from being transformed into its opposite—the remote idyll of an island paradise—remains within the space of London and is actually represented by an image of the most frenetic part of the city. While Peckham itself is a suburb trapped within the vast conurbation of greater London, the advert shows an image of central London, where the traffic is all the more busy and the sensory bombardment all the more intense. One is reminded of Simmel's comments on the fragmentary, kaleidoscopic impulses of the city that fray the nerve endings of modern metropolitan individuals, rendering them blasé. The very "shock" of the modern world is deliberately played upon here in order to induce an anaesthetized, narcotic condition.

TP Bennett Associates is based in High Holborn, the minutes walk from the tube station, with Cowie, Gordon, O'Leary Street and Lynch's his fields Monday on the doorstep.

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Our schemes use both high tech and traditional materials in commercial and office developments, refurbishments and residential projects.

**Peckham on a Monday night**

**Auntie Beryl!**

**Next door's loft conversion**

**IF YOU'RE WORKING FOR T P BENNETT!**

**The Dog 'n' Duck down the High St**

**Catching the last bus home**

**Final Completion**

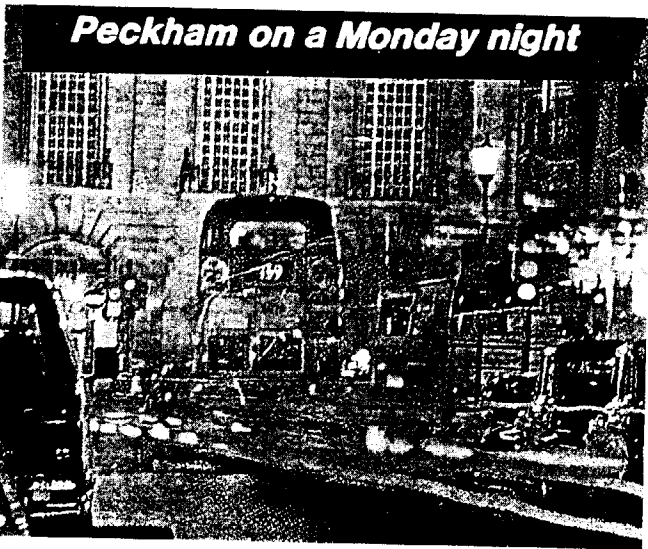
The practice combines interior design, architecture, town planning and landscape of terms you the opportunity to work at any stage of design from concept to fit out.

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Send your CV and a few recent examples of work before 04/04/95 to Richard Deaneall TP Bennett Partnership 267 High Holborn London WC1V 7DU

PART I VACANCIES

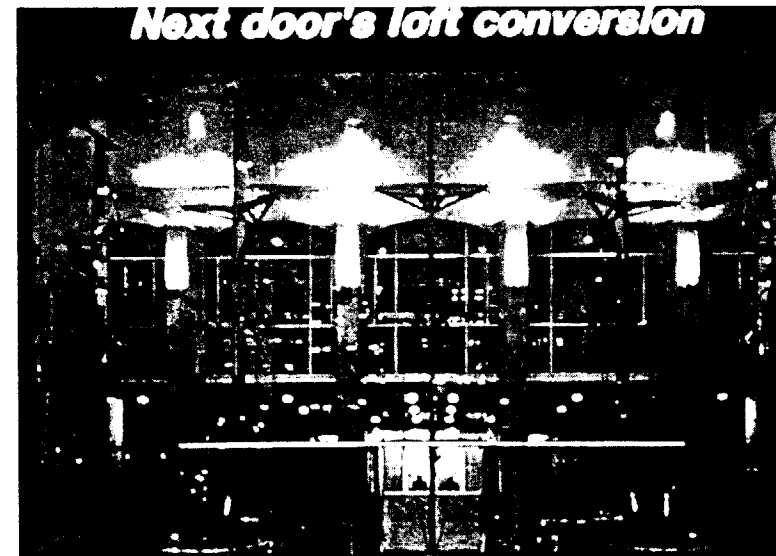
3.6 Recruitment advertisement, T P Bennett Associates.



3.7 Recruitment advertisement, "Peckham on a Monday night." T P Bennett Associates.



3.8 Recruitment advertisement, "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street." T P Bennett Associates.



3.9 Recruitment advertisement, "Next door's loft conversion." T P Bennett Associates.



3.10 Recruitment advertisement, "Aunty Beryl." T P Bennett Associates.

This aestheticized image of the city is reinforced by others. Emblems of everyday life such as "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street" and "Next door's loft conversion" are represented as seductive images of high-tech buildings. The suggestion is that the high-tech bar in "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street" is an equivalent to the bar on the palm-fringed beach in the Bacardi commercial. In other words, their *effects* are similar. "Aunty Beryl" remains an exotic, beautiful young lady, but she is displaced from a desert island to behind a reception desk. The palm-fringed beach makes way for a stylish reception area. The ethos of this image-conscious office is clear. "Aunty Beryl" is a young, attractive icon for a youthful, dynamic firm of architects, purveyors of seductive images. For a firm of architects, the receptionist sets the tone for a celebration of the image that governs the whole ethos of the office. It is the image that is celebrated here, a calculated stage set in which glossy brochure, vase of flowers, and smiling, pretty receptionist all play their part.<sup>36</sup> The glamorous world of the designer office is treated at the same level as the exotic world of a desert island paradise.

What are we to make of these parallels? The Bacardi commercial, on the one hand, plays upon a contrast between the real world and a dream world. The message is clear enough: the narcotic effect of Bacardi will provide a form of ecstatic escapism from the tedium of everyday life. The architects' recruitment advertisement, on the other hand, plays upon a different contrast. The humdrum image of "The Dog 'n' Duck down the High Street," for example, is contrasted not with an exotic beachside bar from a dreamworld, but with the chic high-tech interior of an eminently real designer bar. There is a secondary mechanism at work. The highly aestheticized world of a designer interior, by implication, is not only comparable to the intoxicating world of Bacardi but also produces a precisely similar effect. The advert highlights the anaesthetizing effect of the aesthetic. Just as the bombardment of sensory stimulation sets up a defensive mechanism in the individual, as Benjamin had observed, causing consciousness to act as a form of buffer to the external world and engendering a desensitized,

blasé outlook, so too the heightened aesthetic environment of the world of design creates its own sensory cocoon.

What is at work here is aestheticization in its most potent form. An implicit parallel is drawn between the effects of Bacardi and the intoxicating effects of working in the aesthetic environment of an architectural office. It is as though the anaesthetizing effect of the aesthetic moment—the numbing that Benjamin had observed—replicates the narcotic effect of alcohol. Just as Bacardi is purported to transport the drinker into an imaginary realm displaced from the grim reality of “Peckham on a Monday night,” so the second advert, while remaining within the space of the High Street, seeks to transport the viewer into an aestheticized version of the real. The aesthetic environment of an architectural office will provide you with an ecstatic experience comparable to drinking alcohol. Aestheticization has a similar effect to Bacardi.

#### THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CATWALK

If aestheticization induces a form of *anaesthesia*, the effects will be particularly pronounced in a culture that has already become heavily aestheticized. A society awash with images will experience a consequent reduction in social and political sensibilities, as the intoxication of the image leads to a lowering of critical awareness. The saturation of the image will therefore promote an uncritical acceptance of the image. Saturation, intoxication, complacency. And this process will loop back on itself as complacency permits further saturation. The intoxication of the aesthetic creates an aesthetics of intoxication. Blue Lagoon, Tequila Sunrise, Black Lady. It is a culture of the cocktail, an addictive obsession with the narcotics of the image, with an ever-decreasing sense of critical awareness. Aestheticization leads to anaesthetization leads to further aestheticization in a dizzying spiral whose only apparent respite lies in the total collapse of the system under its own intoxication. It is this addiction to the image that marks late capitalist society.

The French artist and critic Guy Debord was one of the first to recognize and address this emerging obsession with the image. Debord noted how by the 1960s the image had displaced reality. While Baudrillard was to extend this thesis for our contemporary moment, observing that we have now entered a culture of complete simulation, Debord captured with remarkable lucidity the early developments in this process. His 1967 book *La société du spectacle*, subsequently