The Dialectics of Modernity and Mass Culture

Coupling or deriving architectural notions from societal motives is a politic of form. As such, the question of modernity and mass culture is often now explored in its relation to consumption. However, siting modernity as a vehicle upon which mass culture operates is a problematic that can be exemplified through bodies of systems and oppositions.

“As we constantly undergo changes to annihilate the materiality of the body – we implicitly speak of a body released from its physical restrictions, a body excavated, devastated, disintegrated, and disappearing.”

It is through such a theory as that cited above that one might begin to explore the relation of modernity and mass culture in non-consumption based contexts. The dialectic of body and materiality becomes a vehicle for both the ethos of the modernists, and the consumption of the masses. However, such a separation cannot refer to the theories that broke with modernism and their subsequent reincorporation into cultural context. These theories have until now reinterpreted the body not as a combination of systems, but as removed non-material devices. The re-incorporation of materiality into the dietetic becomes the question not of mass culture, but rather of the dialectical “other.”

The separation of bodies and forms into systems expresses this dialectical “other” first through the rejection of the whole and its relations, and second through the replacement of these reinterpreted systems onto displaced “sites” of reconstruction. Modernity as such becomes not a reflection of mass culture, but a reinterpretation and separation from that culture. This separation and annihilation must now not only be acknowledged, but must also be reintegrated into a composite structuring that simultaneously excavates and covers itself.

“In the interstices of these differences, in the simultaneity of breakdowns, that the matrices of domination might be cracked open and, in the pollution that results, a new political and social practice opened up.”

It is through this notion that mass culture now is forced to accept and reject the issues of modernity. Singularly, it allows nothing for the contemporary. When coupled with itself, the contradictions of modernity can become the site of contemporary mass culture. A place in which everything is separated through its integration.

“The newly dense and abundant interlinkage provided by growing numbers of smart places embedded in the expanding digital telecommunications infrastructure is already changing the spatial distribution of economic and social activities.”

Now modernity has become the simultaneous separation and reintegration of mass culture. Bodies can no longer become analogies for systems, but rather separated nodes that emerge as self-referential systems. Place is no longer referential to cultural constraints, and form is no longer sublimated to the separation of systems. Place has become the site of mass culture. It is at one time everywhere and nowhere. Through the eyes of modernity, such notions cannot exist. Modernity’s places that appear to disappear are no longer enough to contain mass culture. Rather, mass culture has rejected the architecture of form and replaced it with a body of nowhere.

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