

Report to the SASC Concerning an Imperial Apparatus

(A report written in June 2001 on the basis of observations made in July 1999)

Every time I visit London I ask myself the same question: How can so many people still tolerate living in a city like this? Nothing that comprises the every day life of its inhabitants seems to work properly. Here, every day, millions of people absurdly risk their lives by taking near-defunct means of transport; if their trip doesn't come to an end in some grimy and overcrowded hospital, and they manage to arrive at their destination, it'll only be after an unavoidable sequence of delays; these transportees (to use a word that has in the past had other, even more hellish implications [transport. v. to send a convict to a penal colony]) have lost even the strength to complain; they make a mockery of their own misfortune and joke about the fact that in 1950, for example, going to York only took two and a quarter hours, and that now you need more than six. Along other celebratory lines, to mark the advent of the new millennium, a number of highly expensive festive and cultural events were held here; the result was quite edifying: a big Ferris wheel aptly called *The London Eye*, the one eye of the cannibal Cyclops the metropolis has become, was shut down *sine die* due to a construction defect on the eve of its inauguration; the *Millenium Dome*, that sagging scoop of custard with little



breadsticks sticking out of it sprawling out over the east side of the hipster neighborhood of the old docks, causes a general aesthetic repulsion and has proven so technically deficient that its designers had to admit shortly after its opening that its structure would not last more than fifty years and that then it would become necessary to demolish it; as for the *Millenium Bridge*, the new walkway over the Thames, the construction was so delayed that they've even been talking about just abandoning it [the bridge was eventually completed and then shut down not long afterwards due to its wobbling. – tr.] All these failures are reminiscent of the old countries of the East and a fatalist disenchantment overtaking minds. Will the legacy of Soviet humor one day soon give a second wind to English humor?

And yet, even amid this celebratory chaos, capitalism is more powerful and thriving than ever. The stock market's doing good, the population is working and consuming, revolts are rare and subdued. And although the trains fail a bit too often to stay on their rails a bit too often, the cell phones buried with their owners' corpses in their twisted steel coffins don't fail to ring. On the one hand you have the obvious chaos constantly pointed

out, baldly flaunted catastrophe, and on the other the bright shining horizon of capitalism. A doubt then arises, one that goes beyond merely the English example and concerns the whole of imperial society: perhaps we should not so much ask ourselves why it is that the railways or any other industrial or cultural infrastructure, like libraries, function so poorly these days, but rather why, for whom, and at what cost they were able to function correctly in the old days, and at the same time what that proper function really meant, which some people have such nostalgia for at present.

The reason is simple: as domination progresses, apparatuses transform and priorities change. Some, though they don't so much disappear, just lose their importance and their maintenance becomes secondary; others, over this time, get thrown out of order, and thus prove that this society has leeway to absorb its defeats; others still, without any scandalous effect but with general approval, take over for the old ones because of their greater effectiveness. Among the latter, a few are hardly cumbersome at all, and are immaterial even, but are extremely pervasive, and insinuate themselves even into the interstices of that space that it no longer makes any sense to call "private"; others, inscribed into the territory, exercise a powerful attraction on bodies, whose flows they densify and channel. This simultaneously permits enthusiasm to be injected into bodies, allows their tendency to inertia to be combated, and allows them to be controlled; among other things, these are the shopping malls, airports, highways, the high speed train lines. And one of these apparatuses will be the subject of the present report.

On March 16th, 1999, some thirty kilometers east of London, in the direction of the Chunnel, a vast commodity-circulation complex was inaugurated, a model that seems destined for export – with the necessary adjustments – to everywhere that the conditions of domination allow guaranteed safe passage to new levels of mass consumption. This new level corresponds to the spread of the social-democratic lifestyle of the imperial citizen-consumer, whose every moment of social life – work, shopping, entertainment – is decompartmentalized, and is rendered as undifferentiated as possible. We're not talking about a simple shopping mall here, like the Forum des Halles in Paris or the *malls* in the big American cities, but a new way of formatting space.

This complex was baptized with the lyrical name "Bluewater" by its promoters. Just the name announces to us that we are going to be entering into what Benjamin called a *phantasmagoria*; *blue water* – a designation referring to no pre-existing place name at all, which is but *the reflection of a reflection*, that of a pure open sky in calm water, permitting in one single word the invocation - by condensation - of a picture of peaceful, idyllic, primordial nature, and the evocation of a dream-world, a realized utopia.

Yesterday a friend and I took a trip to Bluewater. We left London in the morning and took the freeway towards Dover. Around twenty minutes later, a few miles before Dartford, the first billboards indicating our destination on a yellow background, quite different from the normal signage in the cities and villages, began to appear. A mile away from the M25, that super-beltway that wraps around Greater London, we took an off-ramp of a specially landscaped type. We arrived at the edges of a gigantic crater more than a kilometer in diameter, enclosed by white cliffs some fifty meters high. Its center was occupied by a disturbing glass and steel construction spiked with little conical

roofs. Its architecture is incomparable to that of any identifiable type of building. We hesitate to describe it as somewhere between a train station concourse, a tropical greenhouse, or a spaceship, or perhaps all three at once. The highway off-ramp led us into the bottom of the crater, from which we were ineluctably guided by arrows and signs into an immense parking lot where we left the car. It should be remarked that the building, with which we were now level, is surrounded by little artificial pools and a few bunches of trees.



About a hundred meters away, we saw an entrance, which we then moved towards. We were not alone. We weren't alone; that summer day, many dozens of citizens of all kinds dressed in basketball shorts or wearing suits and ties, entered, exited, and crossed paths; it was as if one were watching a ballet danced by little single-celled organisms in a jar. Penetrating into the building, I soon felt a contradictory sensation of suffocation and vertigo, but a somehow *horizontal* vertigo. Stretching out before us was a long, two level corridor with quite a high ceiling. Contrary to the atmosphere that reigns in the supermarkets and shopping malls that we are used to seeing, our ears were not offended by some falsely "lively" muzak or any announcements proffered in a hysterical tone to incite shoppers to hurry over to the cash registers. We were simply plunged into a kind of muffled murmur, the mingled sound of thousands of voices and thousands of footsteps. It was like we'd just entered a beehive or one of those industrial chicken-coops bathed in a diffuse light.

The second impression that grabbed us was of a visual nature: a kind of *déjà-vu*. We had already traversed these vast ambulatories of the commodity, but it was in another century. Obviously the Bluewater architects consciously slapped together the architecture of the passageways or "arcades" of Paris, the grand shopping corridors of the 19th century that one can see in Brussels or Milan, certain large shops, and palaces reserved for world's fairs, like the famous Crystal Palace built in London in 1851. But what comes quickly to your attention there is that this *déjà vu* feeling results from a kind of *era clash*: the general handling of the space is borrowed from the first half of the 19th century, but the ornamentation is inspired by banalities of the era of "modern style," where bourgeois

architecture from the Belle Epoque, profiting from the period of continuous prosperity preceding the war of 1914, attained its apogee. While the glass roofs of the Parisian arcades harbored all the severity of neo-classical architecture, here a more curved form and floral and vegetable motifs dominate, like in the guardrails running the length of the first floor corridor and the stairs that lead to it: they are adorned with the interlacing hop leaves typical of the Kent beer producing region. By the effect of *false recognition*¹ that these architectural elements borrowed from various eras aim to produce, but which everyone has at some time or other seen representations of, a soothing familiarity is created which compensates for the effects of the foreignness felt by visitors when they first observe the building from the outside.

However, these first impressions are still insufficient to reveal all the resources of the Bluewater apparatus. A very banal gesture ended up really showing us what was going on. Sensing that we stood a chance of observing an interesting environment there, we had brought a camera along with us. Since that foresight didn't fail us, we decided to photograph the area. My friend took out her camera and started taking a few pictures. Two minutes later, we were stopped – very courteously, in the English style – by a member of the security personnel who had come out of nowhere, and whose presence we had not even had the slightest inkling of: the behavior control teams are quite invisible here, as if they were melded in with the décor. And so, this full-fledged Bloom informed us, without the arrogance of an entry-level cop or even the barking of a supermarket security guard, that taking photos within the confines of Bluewater is strictly prohibited. Normally this kind of prohibition is applied in military areas, or is indicated by clearly visible signs. We should have been astonished by this, but enough time had already passed for the insidiously authoritarian *Stimmung* of the place to impose itself upon us; so we didn't feel surprised by this restriction foisted on our most basic rights as loiterers, since it was as if it were simply inscribed within the logic of things. Preferring evasion to a confrontation that would have been lost before it started, my friend gave the excuse that she was making some vague study of cultural geography. Against all expectations, the simple mention of the university apparatus opened a breach within the police apparatus. Soon enough we were politely requested to follow this benevolent Cerberus up to the second floor, where we were taken through a few unobtrusive doors and into his office. There, without asking for any proofs or identity cards, he soon issued us an authorization to do what he had forbidden us from doing five minutes before, as long as we wore a couple little badges that would ensure that his colleagues would not stop us again. We were furthermore given some documentation, an apologetic comprised of a luxurious looking color portfolio containing a description of the project and a sketch of its history.

¹ In his essay *The Memory of the Present*, Paolo Virno makes a few enlightening remarks on the phenomenon of déjà vu as an integral aspect of the antiquarian sensibility of the modernariat; “déjà vu is certainly a pathology, but it must also be added that it is a *public* pathology... ‘modernariat’ means the systematic development of an antiquarian sensibility concerning the *hic et nunc* [here and now] that each of us lives out in turn. On the one hand, the modernariat is a symptom of the split of the present into an illusory ‘something that’s already been’; on the other it actively contributes to always re-effectuating such split.”

This incident can be likened to the definition Walter Benjamin gives of the “dialectic of the loiterer”: “on the one hand, you have the man that feels he is being watched by everything and everyone, like a real suspect; on the other you have the man that manages not to be found, the man that’s totally inconspicuous, concealed. It’s probably this dialectic that’s elaborated by ‘mass man.’” (*Paris, Capital of the 20th Century*). What we experienced was that with the control techniques in force in Bluewater, concealment among the crowd becomes impossible and this dialectic is reduced to its first term: the loiterer is *a priori* a high-risk individual. The difference is that today, the indifference of all towards each greatly reduces the feeling of being the object of anyone else’s attention. In the end, the only gaze the loiterer is subject to is that of the hidden panoptical machines and their watchers.



Bluewater was built with a triangular layout: two corridors of equal length forming a right angle are connected by a longer corridor, bent like an arch. It is a circuit closed in on itself where the mode of displacement quite obviously has nothing to do with that of the abovementioned arcades, which were linear and passed through an urban ensemble: here on the contrary we are underhandedly invited to *go around and around endlessly*. Each of the corridors has a name: the first two are called the Grand Hall and the Rose Gallery, and the third is called Thames Walk, where the gray marble walking surface on the ground floor has a picture of the layout of the Thames river, going from its source to its mouth, with the names of the different places it flows past written in copper lettering. On the second floor folk song *Old Father Thames* is written on the wall in immense characters. The documents we received specify the different types of clientele expected

in these corridors: Guild Hall is for the “informed and demanding consumer,” that is, the man of the Old Regime, who stocks up on quality products, only trusts a sure value, eats his lunch in high end restaurants, and here can finish out the day in a reconstructed traditional pub with a real fireplace, not at all surprising in such a locale. The Rose Gallery, on the other hand, is intended for “families, with toy shops and children’s clothing, a play area and family dining.” This zone is obviously frequented by those members of the middle class with the lowest income. Finally, the third corridor, the most popular, boasts a high concentration of bars and hipster cafes, and the branches of King’s Road and Covent Garden boutiques: it is “intended for a young clientele with a fancy for fashion.” These three corridors were not named at random; their semiotics conceal a range of emotional effects as broad as it is consensual. Glorification of the diversity of professions, romantic naturalism, rootedness in the local area. It is a watered down, citizenist version of the old Vichy fascist slogan “work, family, fatherland,” acceptable by both the conservative voter and the gay liberal or environmentalist who appreciates fine work. The perfection of the apparatus is likewise expressed in the specific attention paid to the masculine YoungGirl, now handled as a special target market, similar to 19th century female clientele: “around 90 retail outlets were specially chosen to attract male clientele; from sporting boutiques to men’s clothing outlets, music and books to computers and gadgets.” To expand the clientele into more the modest sectors of the populace, there are big “anchor stores” from chains well-known in England and even in the rest of Europe located at each corner of the triangle: Marks & Spencer, John Lewis, and House of Fraser. By gathering in the same place three non-specialized stores and three hundred and twenty specialized boutiques, Bluewater inscribes into its geography a cyberneticized equilibrium between the contradictory tendencies towards concentration and dissemination that have been at work since the beginning of the history of capitalism. Entertainment, culture, and leisure comprise the second pole of attraction at Bluewater, and they are all arranged into one last ternary compound which completes the apparatus. In the image of the mall corridors, these places have names that make explicit their specific nature: Village, Water Circus, and Winter Garden. From Guild Hall, an alley bordered by luxury boutiques, emulating the famous Burlington Arcade in London leads to the Village, where bookstores and fine groceries can be found, in quite a “middle class” symbiosis of literature and the stomach. Bluewater’s designers clarify that they wanted to recreate a villager atmosphere here, “the opposite of a mega-mall ambiance.” From the outside, said Village looks like a provincial casino of some kind, bridged over by a triangular pediment and a pointed turret, and opens out onto a rose garden and a little lake where our duly reinvigorated Bloom can go boating. The Water Circus, which looks out onto another pool, spotlights the mass arts: music, with the inevitable Virgin Megastore; cinema, with a twelve theater multiplex; and public performances, with an open air theater. Finally, you have the Winter Garden, an atrium inspired by the greenhouses of Kew Gardens, and is the biggest greenhouse built in the United Kingdom in the 20th century. To top off this construction, a whole tropical forest, embellished with ponds and waterfalls, was imported from Florida. It is in this area that parents can rid themselves of their cumbersome progeny and go enjoy the whole fine program: “Great dining, entertainment, and shopping to make your day with an ideal outing.” I almost forgot to mention the most important thing: a space for conviviality like this, whose triangular floor plan itself symbolizes steadfast panoptic tracking, must at all times

be presentable, clean, and pacified. The brochure that was obligingly furnished to us by the cop we were hassled by clarifies this quite soberly: “A police station with six officers permanently present. No blind spots nor dead angles, for optimal surveillance.”

For us, since we’d only come to this shopping center to observe the place and soak up its *Stimmung*, the most striking thing was the massive presence of decorative elements in the form of ornaments, bas-reliefs, and statutes which configure space at Bluewater as a kind of theater where every day the profane drama of retail commerce is played out again and again. And so, shortly after our momentary arrest, we entered into the western corridor, the Guild hall (that is, the Hall of Corporations), and gazed upon the stupefying spread of bas-reliefs in reconstituted stone covering either wall, representing bodies in various different professions, each designated with an inscription, where in the benevolent unity of the postmodernized universe, one can see a mix of the professions of traditional artisanship, and more contemporary occupations: airline pilots, referees, manufacturers of scientific instruments, computer technicians, or ...janitors! One hundred and six bas-reliefs in an art-deco style, described by the project promoters themselves as “austere” – clearly what one sees here does not fall within the realm of eulogies for festive values, but rather has to do with a certain protestant strictness corresponding to the ethos of that particular shopping mall corridor’s consumer-type – which “celebrates the history of commerce,” and contributes to giving a *museum style presentation* to the commodities exposed.



At the end of the Guild Hall we entered into an area devoted to dining, where a pizzeria bumps elbows with a handful of luxury restaurants. There is a large inscription like a headband around the entrance to these various eateries, written in the historical language of Empire, reading UBI PIRANDIUM IBI PRETIUM (which can be translated as “lunching is a sacred thing”), doubtless put there to stir up in their Cambridge or Oxford educated clientele some vague memory of their Humanities. Beneath this there is a long frieze sculpted in white stone representing the contemporary everyday emptiness, where, between the traditional symbols of Alpha and Omega, in the greatest imaginable disorder there appears a skull, a telephone, some musical instruments, a clothespin, some pens, various animals like insects, a rat, rabbits, a parrot, some watering cans, dice, a rolling pin, a horseshoe, teacups, a pair of scissors, a candlestick, a knife and fork, some oysters, and a pie tin. It’s an ironic inventory, where everyone can find the particular objects assigned to their singular bloomitude.

Inside the building we counted some fifty works of art in all. There are sculptures of wildlife, a curious automaton clock in the form of a puzzle, a zodiacal rotunda centered around a pastiche of the Carpeaux Fountain, holding not a terrestrial globe, but a celestial

sphere; there are also phrases and poems engraved in the walls in monumental letters, amongst which certain Shakespeare sonnets can be found.

Such a dedication to ornamentation, which must have incurred quite the significant additional cost for such a vast project, breaks with the miserly focus on functionality of the typical shopping centers built around the world over the last half-century. When Adolf Loos, in his 1908 essay *Ornament and Crime*, said that “the evolution of culture moves towards the expulsion of ornamentation from the useful object,” that affirmation – which inscribed itself within the metaphysics of Progress that dominated at that time – was only avant-garde inasmuch as it anticipated the productivist rationalism that became



de rigueur after the destruction wreaked by World War One. In the end it was the cold, efficient, functional style that was to triumph after the fifties; and it quickly began to be felt as an intolerable uniformity quite conducive to depression and boredom. However, ornamentation, that is, the aesthetic but useless, was not always incompatible with capitalist rationality, in its liberal or statist versions. Indeed it is even the sign of its imperial affirmation. The triumph of the neo-gothic in England and in its colonies marks the apogee of Victorian sovereignty, much like the magnificence of the Moscow Metro illustrates the all-powerful nature of the Stalinist dictatorship. Closer to home, it was in the Reagan era, with its reaffirmation of American power after the years of recession after the Vietnam war, that *atriums* – those immense landscaped spaces at the bases of the skyscrapers - began to be built in the big cities, the most famous of which is the atrium at Trump Tower in New York. In such atria, power is symbolized by “lost” space;

the immense ceiling height that likens it to some kind of profane cathedral; the use of a profusion of aristocratic materials like marble or bronze; the presence of artwork and water fountains. Pierre Missac, who analyzed this new architectural concept, justly highlights that it is “it not necessary to travel in thought to archaic or utopian worlds in order to render homage to uselessness. That kind of rehabilitation appears right in the very heart of the capitalist world.” (P. Missac, *Walter Benjamin’s Passages*) We should add that it appears *as a manifestation of its imperial hegemony*.

So now we can see more clearly that what is called postmodern architecture is only ever merely the return of a tendency that was already present over the course of the Industrial Revolution and that in France for example is illustrated by the eclectic kitsch of Napoleon III or the style of the world’s fairs, which was already playing on this mania for citation and patchwork. “The *Arcades Project* suggests that it makes no sense to divide the era of capitalism into formalist ‘modernism’ and historically eclectic ‘postmodernism,’ as these tendencies have been there from the start of industrial culture. The paradoxical dynamics of novelty and repetition simply repeat themselves anew. Modernism and postmodernism are not chronological eras, but political positions in the century-long

struggle between art and technology.” (Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*). The difference is that today this aesthetic reinvestment isn’t an expression of the whim of some patron of the arts, or a celebration of personal sovereignty. It is first and foremost the product of a market psychology that took a lesson from the defeat of an international style that limited itself to planting everywhere buildings that all looked the same without the slightest concern for what effect they would have on the general conditions of existence, one where the primary objective is to tend to the visitor’s capacity to consume while polarizing all of his or her inclinations in that direction: “At Bluewater, our concern is to find out the consumers’ real desires. Marketing research has contributed the response elements that allow us to create a feeling of comfort and community. A recent quantitative poll carried out by Gallup, and qualitative surveys run by Alistairs Burns Research and Strategy showed that a mediocre design discourages consumers. More than 50% of youths interviewed between the ages of 16 and 24 say they are distracted from making purchases by mediocre aesthetics... The qualitative research has brought to the foreground the role that aesthetics play in mood management... According to the consumer behaviorist David Peek, clients want to feel like they’re in a natural environment, an experience that all our ‘villages’ offer.”

Ornamentation plays a decisive role in this: it permits *the imperial apparatus*, by nature an expression of global domination by Capital, *to take root* in the very local traditions that are destroyed by that selfsame mode of domination. And so, the curious conical roofs all aligned at the building’s summit are replicas of the Kentish hop fields, whose ancient local breweries have now all fallen into the hands of the beer multinationals. It’s not insignificant that this technique of aesthetic conditioning with pacification as its goal was baptized with the name *Civic Art*, a kind of art specifically intended to silhouette citizens: “with *Civic Art*,” clarifies Eric Kuhne, Bluewater’s architect, “we tried to grasp the spirit of the region rather than imposing an international concept... First and foremost we had to build something functional; then we added on the leisure component, and only then did we add what for us was the most important thing – the cultural component.” The aesthetics of proximity, for efficiency’s sake, here rediscovers the favored themes of citizen culturalism, where it’s ever so pleasant to “live and work in the country.” In both cases, the values *fed to you* are those of packaged tradition.



In 1956, plans drawn up by the American architect Victor Gruen were the basis for the construction of the Southdale Shopping Center in Minneapolis, the first modern shopping mall. This was a decisive mutation, where mass distribution definitively left behind the model of the large department store, which since then has only survived in a residual manner in historical urban centers. The “mall” grew into the big “forums,” multiple story commercial centers, like the Forum des Halles in Paris, or the duty free shopping areas in

the big international airports. From the arcades of the first half of the 19th century to the big department stores of the Second French Empire, to the malls of the last fifty years, the general tendencies in shopping involved – with the setup of a private public space – a kind of cutting yourself off from the outside world, and enclosing yourself in ever more confined spaces, separated from the circumstances of nature and urban life, both considered as sources of trouble. The glass roofs of the arcades protected consumers from bad weather, plus they could avoid the inconvenience of dealing with vehicles in circulation; with the development of artificial lighting, with gas and then with electricity, the limits of the traditional boutique could be surpassed, and the surfaces for the display of products on sale could be expanded to cover many floors, with the dimensions of a vast building. In the large shops thus created, the “department stores,” windows were no longer useful, since artificial light could replace natural light everywhere and even add a fairyland ambiance conducive to the creation of the final enchantment permitted under capitalism: the enchantment produced by an abundance, variety, exoticism, and novelty of commodities. On the ground floor, the windows, turned inside out like a glove, took the form of the storefront window, where the street itself becomes the inside. Everyone knows the kind of power of attraction an animated Christmas storefront window has exercised on generations of children, educated thus from the youngest age in the fairyland of consumption. Finally, thanks to the invention of air conditioning, which Le Corbusier called “correct air,” a new and final stage in this process of cutoff from the outside world was reached. This is what favored the creation of malls: climate control techniques permitted the organization of very vast surface areas, sometimes underground like in Montreal, in shopping zones which are totally independent from the outside world. Although they are often situated on the periphery of cities, malls offer no escape to nature. Between 1960-1970, PEOPLE compensated for that with fake plastic plants before new illusionist techniques (called *Replascap*) permitted the installation, in the earth itself, of real trees, embalmed and rootless, placed in gardens, which then didn’t need any watering.



With Bluewater this tendency has been radically reversed. The interior was designed as a function of the exterior. The shopping space generally opens out onto a fully recreated nature. The borders between the inside and outside are attenuated thanks to a system of glass roofs and walls and light shafts. Above all, the spaces intended for passage and for entertainment, the café and restaurant terraces, picnic areas, lakes – there are seven, where one can go boating – and wooded zones passed through by a network of paths that can be traveled on bicycle, closely circumscribe the whole of the building. It is a matter of regulating people’s strolling passage *as strolling passage*, not so much just consuming a lot, but *spending a lot of time there as a consumer*, and feeling good while you’re there. Today’s “luxury” is what one might call *situational luxury*: it is no longer defined by the quality or originality of this or

that product, but by the possibility of enjoying (one's) time, space, and calm. Blooms are not treated like ordinary consumers, like in traditional shopping centers; here, rather, micro-apparatuses proliferate to persuade the Blooms of their humanity, make them believe that they are not commodities, and – supreme luxury – that they are not integrated from the get-go into the overall apparatus: “Bluewater’s philosophy is simple: to make shopping a pleasant, stress-free experience, and treat our customers as guests... Every visitor is a invited guest.” Two hundred and fifty employees are especially devoted to this noble task. As a social phantasmagoria, Bluewater pursues the dreamed-of unity of the commodity world and the non-commodity world, market values and values of authenticity, the metropolis and the village, the individual and the community. This dream of unity only expresses the Empire’s fantasy of a final harmony, which integrates into itself, in its construction of a cybernetic utopia, the essential aspects of citizen democracy’s favorite themes of protest. Now, in order to optimize the circulation of commodities, moments, spaces, situations, and products stamped as “non-commodity” need to be allowed to subsist, be recreated, and be invented. The imperialist tendency towards total commodification finds its total fulfillment in that imperial “good behavior,” *self-controlled commodification*: certain things have to be *proclaimed* as non-commodity, such as bodies for example, even while the organs themselves are subject to all kinds of trafficking and even in spite of the blatantly obvious universal prostitution. It is certain that drumming out, in the tone of radical demand, the affirmation “I am not a commodity” is only possible in a world entirely colonized by the commodity. Hardly a half century ago, when the majority of products had entered into the commodity circuit already even, such a slogan would have been unthinkable or would not have echoed at all in human relations, the ethos of the great mass of the population still largely escaped it. Today the slightest gesture betrays its commodity essence: in the YoungGirl’s question “do you love me?” it’s necessary to hear a preliminary “how much are you worth?”

An apparatus of the Bluewater type functions both as a space of consumption and as a moment of biopolitical production. This cathedral of good buys is equally a bloom factory, a machine to produce beings strangely capable of showing the same

juvenile enthusiasm for a portable phone, a new line of perfumes, DHEA, or a pizza served in hip surroundings where you wait on leather stools for some sales rep to call you by your first name when he’s found you a table. Here it’s not commodities that are exposed to consumers, but the opposite. It’s not that people are exposed to commodities through their material appearance as market objects, they are exposed to the commodity essence of those objects; they are exposed in all their nudity to the market itself. Exposure of bare life to the sovereign commodity is the dominant form taken today in the exposure of bare life to sovereignty. And this is possible to the extent that Biopower, the Spectacle, and the market are three differentiated but inseparable moments of this





sovereignty. The commodity is not a mere social relationship crystallized in an object stirring consumer desire, and susceptible to purchase by consumers, as if the latter were still formed of some non-commodity substantiality of their own: the commodity, today, is the very being itself of Bloom, whose life is cut up into slices of time that can be exchanged for moments, emotions, or objects. Bluewater is a utopian apparatus where the citizen-democratic ideal of non-class (which puts all substantial distinctions into parentheses) is being tested out. It's utopian because it is built in a non-place, an old open-air limestone quarry, a zone which by definition is absolutely deserted, vegetation-free, and where all animal and human habitats have been eradicated. The use of abandoned quarries to create artificial landscapes with phantasmagoric effect (the term "magic" is brought in as a leitmotif in the

promoters' presentation of Bluewater) is nothing new. The famous Buttes-Chaumont park in Paris was laid out by the engineer Alphand in a gypsum quarry, and a slick-looking landscape architecture made it possible to inspire strollers, even with means that were totally artificial and obviously so, with a feeling of nature as profound as it is evanescent, like certain dreams whose impression remains indelibly marked on the mind, but which are obviously unreal. As a *realized* apparatus, utopia here denies itself as utopia and enters into the vast category of those "other" spaces that Foucault called *heterotopias*. Among these, there are certain spatial configurations of the Empire that act on Blooms as powerful attractors, and by contrast make the rest of the space they traverse into something indifferent or repellent to them. I call these attractors *hypertopias*, places where *one simply must* go, such as Bluewater or Disneyland. The relationship that political utopias in literature had with travel was the translation into spatial terms of the time that separates the utopian project from its realization. Unlike utopias the voyage to which is imaginary, but nevertheless still a voyage, hypertopias signify the impossibility of all voyage, of all travel whether real or imaginary. There is, in effect, no travel, just transfer, a destination to be reached. Furthermore, distance figures into hypertopias themselves as a primary constituent. To get to them you have to make use of some kind of apparatus: the automobile, or public transit. Even if a train station is specially set up for them, and shuttle buses assigned, their distance is a deterrent to those modern plebeians, the vagabonds and beggars; if they do show up, of course, they'll be gently removed. Such remoteness has the advantage of reducing costs for surveillance and repression, and is an integral part of managing control.

Bluewater is an establishment solely devoted to the *temporary* harboring of commodities, but it's one that was designed *to last*. People cannot inhabit it, but commodities have taken up lodging there. The true Bluewater guest is the authoritarian commodity. Bluewater is a city built exclusively for the authoritarian commodity, and in this regard its monumentality excludes, by vocation, all expression of the political. The

Parisian arcades were designed as galleries for showing off merchandise, set among residential buildings; they were where Fourier got his idea for the phalanstery, but he entirely dismissed the commodity from it and gave primacy to residence. “In the arcades, Fourier recognized the architectural characteristics fundamental to the phalanstery. The arcades, which primitively found themselves to serve commercial ends, became in Fourier’s conception houses for living in. The phalanstery is a city made of arcades. In this ‘city of passageways’ the engineer’s construction gives the effect of a characteristic of phantasmagoria. The city of passageways (the city in passing) is a dream that attracted the gaze of men even long before the second half of the century.” (Benjamin, *Paris, Capital of the 19th Century*). Whereas the arcades were laid out in the heart of the urban tissue, the fourierist phalanstery is an urban unity of its own, where the various passions that structure the harmonian society arrange themselves. At Bluewater, on the other hand, there are all sorts of insignificant activities, but no passion. Any form of intensity has been preventively banned. Since nothing can live there, we can’t sleep or dream there either. Whereas Fourier demanded that the harmonians have a maximum intensification of the passionate, a permanent erethism of desire, places like Bluewater are places for the channeling and attenuation of passions. No more than one could make love there could one be able to play the flit-about, the composite, or the cabbalist. We don’t even have the right to be ostensibly bored there. All you can do is extinguish yourself, and melt into the décor in turn. Whereas the so-called “private” space is supposed to operate as a wrinkle in public space, a wrinkle that permits condensation or, contrarily, a desertion of the self in a relationship with the other, and thus a possible desubjectivation, here everything takes place under the tireless eye of the surveillance cameras; that is, *nothing can happen*. A place with no wrinkles is a *place with no possibility for ecstasy*. It’s not that ecstasy can only come about in the “sphere of private life” or in the intimacy of the wrinkle, but that in order to find the sources of its potential it needs a withdrawn, opaque situation to erupt and surge forth from. Places with no wrinkles are created to ward off chance, to do away with events, and as we saw with the micro-event discussed above, to absorb it if one happens to arise. It operates as a conditions, emotion, and behavior smoothing apparatus.



The impossibility of intimacy, the prohibition on opacity and withdrawal, give rise to the impossibility of secession and thus of all forms of politics. The citizen, here, appears for what he always already was: a being that is devoted to *total availability*. Under the watchful eye of the surveillance camera, all human presence becomes exposable like an animal perpetually exposed in its natural nudity. This is doubtless why, over the course of my visit, thrust on by this feeling of foreignness to what surrounded me, a disturbing daydream came over me: suddenly these passageways had nothing to do with the 19th century arcades, the Crystal Palace, the waiting lounges of ancient train stations. No, on

the contrary, here every step you take is recorded, accounted for, even the most useless; it's more like an immense *equating* lounge.² Spreading out before my eyes I could see it as the great gallery of the Natural History Museum, with all its naturalized animals. And the animals were moving about in all directions, but each of them, thinking they were going in a specific direction, were only traversing a tiny segment on the axis of time, guided from the indifferent point of their birth to the equally indifferent point of their death; there they go, in the zoological park of postmodernity, reduced to no more than bare life, constantly invited to change skins at all the ready-made designer clothes shops, graze at the restaurant feedlots, drink at the troughs of the cafes and bars, and frolic about like sea lions on the seven little pools of water laid out around the site.



The installation of apparatuses like Bluewater is inscribed in the imperial logic of differentiated territorial control. The Keynesian project that aimed to realize its Capital-utopia *in vivo*, by propping itself up on the myth of progressive access by all to a society of abundance where inequalities would be corrected by state interventionism, has today been replaced by the Empire's cybernetic project propped up on an optimum management of chaos. The Empire realizes the same Capital-utopia *in vitro*, in limited spaces, nodes of exception in the biopolitical tissue, a process it has already initiated with the reconquest of the historic city centers by the neo-bourgeoisie, with the colonization of zones decreed as "hipster" areas, or with the Californian 'gated communities' model. High surplus-value Blooms who live or can get themselves into these "privileged" zones cannot fail to be aware that *if they don't play the game* they'll be pitilessly thrown out,

because at the same time the unmanageable portions of the territory (the sizes of which range from "difficult" neighborhoods to region-wide, or even the size of whole countries) are now set up as national places of exile ruled by the brute authority of the police. But Bloom's sociologically unassignable nature of makes it so one can find Blooms on both sides of these borders. Blooms can even be told that they are "guests" at Bluewater, that they can feel at home there; they remain nonetheless *nowhere*, both there and everywhere else, and above all in their own homes. And this exile, this ostracism, is reconstituted in the Empire's "privileged" zones just as much as anywhere, because they cater to Bloom's fundamental reversibility.

² This line is a play on words: a waiting lounge is called, literally translated, a hall of lost steps, referring to the fact that since there's a waiting room you don't have to pace back and forth, you can sit down. The author(s) write, 'it is not a hall of lost steps, it is an immense hall of counted steps.'

Thanks to their rapid commodity disqualification, in the twenties, nearly a century after their construction, the Parisian arcades became places charged with a singular aura, mythical enclaves re-enchanted by surrealist wandering. Because Bluewater is not inscribed within an urban tissue, it will never be able to be subject to any kind of a similar reappropriation by wandering or loitering [dérive or flânerie]. It won't grow old like the arcades did, falling under the spell of enchantment cast by a long escheat or abandonment of such property. Only a decisive reversal of Empire could change its fate. It is to be expected that, during the next qualitative leap forward into chaos, a horde of offensive nomads will most definitely take possession of it. And by their mere act of taking up lodging and habitual presence in it, in brief, *squatting* it, they'll be giving it an uncivil, ecstatic usefulness. They'll whimsically, unpredictably devastate the facilities, and they will not fail to transform the whole place into a joyous and formidable playground of miracles.