Jameson's Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

1. The Problem of Culture in Marxist theory

- arises when it appears that the working class will not make a revolution - culture is one answer to the question of why radical consciousness and politics has not emerged - the Frankfurt School begins this line of thought in the 1920s -
- problem of the revolutionary subject - Marx conceived the subject as centered but oppressed

- the worker (as individual or collective) was rational enough to recognize oppression - and fully capable of developing his essence (gattungswesen) into socialist man through the process of making a revolution, building socialism -
- the problem of culture as a mediation of a changing subject was not raised by Marx and this continues with the neo-Marxism of the 20th century - even when culture is granted "semi- or relative autonomy" it is not theorized as a problem of subject constitution -
- in Marx there was little recognition of the need for a socialist culture among the working class, no sense that an important component of bourgeois experience was its urban culture - a distinct culture which opposed that of the aristocracy, serving as a point of contestation and providing norms for critique -
- the question of technology - Marx's inadequate conceptualization of socialist technology as having a different logic from bourgeois technology - this is another aspect of Marx's theoretical failure -
- in the 20s Antonio Gramsci began to speak of "ideology" as having a political role in defusing working class radicalism - but this was still not theorized in relation to "culture"

- in this theoretical context the Frankfurt School begins to retheorize the problem of culture (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin): role of culture as divided into two:
  1- high culture as a point of critique - the aesthetic as the space of critical distance, as the prefiguring of negative, utopian forms - Kantian aesthetics
  2- low culture as a crucial, hegemonic, stabilizing force as Marxist politics wanes - from Weber, thru Lukacs, the notion of reified commodity culture as a degraded world that mystifies the working class and short circuits the revolution

  the radical position of Brecht and Benjamin is that aspects of popular culture are or can be critical: Adorno and Lukacs take the opposite position, that only high culture (realism for Lukacs, modernism for Adorno) are liberatory

- this is the theoretical context in which Jameson attempts to theorize postmodern culture and its relation to politics

2. Postmodernism as male alternative to feminism and subaltern discourse -
- in the 1970s, feminism, poststructuralism and anti-colonial discourse claimed to take radical political and cultural positions
- politically this was embarrassing to Marxism as considering itself the only true negation of capitalism
- culturally the new social movements called into question the position of the subject in patriarchal, white society - the point of autonomous, centered rationality was seen as the pivot of this culture - the problem is that the Frankfurt School had not really called this
subject position into question but instead theorized the need for politics as making the true realization of this subject possible -
- so Marxism and neo-Marxism were outpositioned by these critiques - it is possible then to argue that the theme of postmodernism is precisely the effort of critical theory by white males to reappropriate a radical stance as a critique of the centered subject without fully accounting for the critiques of feminism and anti-colonial, anti-racist discourse -
- for example, the book Jameson/Postmodernism/Critique has not a single article by a woman and only mentions two works by women in its large bibliography, even though, as we can see from Feminism/Postmodernism there are numerous works by women on this subject

3. Jameson's essay

1- terrific characterization of postmodern culture (as opposed to postmodern knowledge in Lyotard)
2- terrible explanation of postmodern as culture of late capitalism
3- admission of confusion - postmodern culture disorients him - so the dialectic and radical politics function as an imposition of order on chaos, an order that recuperates the ordering function of the Cartesian theoretical subject

Jameson wants to present a Marxist analysis of contemporary culture by accepting the thesis that this culture is radically new or postmodern but that it may be understood or be explained by the current phase of the capitalist mode of production - multinational or late capitalism - one issue is to what extent postmodern culture is accounted for by the analysis of the mode of production - Jameson hesitates here - he warns that positions on postmodern culture, are also political stances on capitalism so the mode of production is crucial (p.3)

postmodern culture p.2 effaces the high/low culture distinction - it appears to be a high culture movement with "new kinds of texts infused by" the Culture Industry *** [explain term: from Dialectic of Enlightenment] - "degraded landscape of schlock" Beavis and Butthead ?

p.4 - Jameson periodizes with idea of a cultural dominant - allows for the coexistence of a range of different features within one culture - aesthetic production is now integrated into commodity production

p. 5 pomo culture is superstructure of new American domination **** EXPLAIN
** even if high modernism and pomo are identical in traits they would be different by virtue of (1) new positioning in relation to late capital and (2) change of sphere of culture in relation to society

Defines the Postmodern:

features of the postmodern:
1. depthlessness
2. ahistoricity
3. saturated emotional intensities
4. new technology
5. p.14 from alienation to fragmentation of subject
6. pastiche

discussion on p.7 of Warhol vs. Van Gogh - Warhol is inauthentic (because commodified) but authentic (because expressive of postmodern) - [p.12 theory itself is postmodern since it is depthless] and p.49 authenticity of postmodern it is genuine historical reality

explain FETISHISM of commodities
p. 11 Munch's "Scream" is expressionist which presupposes a split within the subject, and an inside/outside metaphysics
p. 14 from alienation to fragmentation EXPLAIN
- Marxist hypothesis: (1) aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production - proof is that postmodernism is first and best expressed in architecture which requires great capital - it is a "superstructural" expression of a "new wave of American military and economic domination" (p.5) - question: ** only American? - is domination flourishing re Japan? - general theoretical question of totalization, reductionism - but points where Jameson seems to go beyond this schema, as near the end when he calls for new categories of "cognitive mapping" p.51 ff as "a new radical cultural politics" BUT - p.418 cognitive mapping is code word for class consciousness

(2) p.36 capitalism is now pure, eliminated enclaves of pre-captialism, i.e., Nature and unconscious - now 4th machine age of the computer & television (Ernest Mandel) - p.37 sees these as "reproduction" machines **THIS IS WRONG - misses the unique discursive configuration and effect of new machines (their ability to "produce" subjects) seeing instead a "sublime" - and misses the fact that computers are essential to production, not simply to reproduction; and insists on explaining this sublime new technology by multinational capitalism - reductionism: "It is therefore in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that in my opinion the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized." p.38

(3) p.46 logic of simulacrum not only replicates but intensifies logic of late capitalism - here Jameson allows for relative autonomy - simulacrum abolishes sense of future and collective project - [but is this only for white male theory?] but

(4) logic of late capitalism (p.48) destroys semi-autonomy of the cultural sphere [here Jameson is a modernist, looking to high culture for the realm of freedom] - everything is now cultural - this challenges older cultural politics of culture as critical distance

BUT - sense of confusion
new space - p.38 we don't have "perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace" - male subject who wants to control -
but dialectics is an "attempt to think our present time in history." p. 46 and so its a method of controlling the uncontrollable
- p.21 ff theme of waning historicity of "our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" - "a situation in which we seem increisngly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience." [index for me of collapse of metanarrative of Marxism and difficulty of white, male theory to discern new politics and take it as such]
ROLE OF NEW ART AND POLITICS
p.54 new political art by new "mode of representing" the "truth of postmodernism" or multinational capital - this will allow us to "grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial and social confusion" - this is old function of high art for Frankfurt School -

p.348 new "agency" of groups in which individuals are not "subjects" BUT p. 330 "new social movements" are only effects of late capitalism

*Pastiche*

- p.17 pastiche vs parody: complains about micro-politics as lack of norm - both imitate an idiosyncratic style, but in pastiche it is neutral, without comment or satire; blank parody

  p. 18 the turn to the past for imitations - to simulations because exchange value is everywhere

  p. 19 nostalgia films - destroys authentic (p.21) historicity - impossibility of representing our present

*Sublime* p. 34 ff

  technology --- the computer (p.37 machine of reproduction (wrong!) - sees global capitalism as the basis of internet and the pomo sublime

*Bonaventure Hotel* p. 38 ff

  "we don't have the perceptual equipment" for this space

  p. 44 pomo hyperspace transcends "the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself" - [instead of to locate itself in "modern" space/time coordinates]