

Research group: Meditations on Immediacy

Sources:

Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.

Wasser, F. (2023) *Split (Zero-Hour Fragments)*. London: MA Bibliothèque.

Cohen, J., (2002) *Protestantism and capitalism: The mechanisms of influence*. Taylor & Francis.

This report explores the presence of immediacy in contemporary capitalist architecture and transitional spaces, using Frank Wasser's 2023 *Split (Zero-Hour Fragments)* as a central theoretical reference. Drawing on the perspectives of Federici and Cohen, I aim to analyse how our built environments and visual culture influence public identity and opinion. Through this exploration, I will reflect on the growing difficulty of sustaining independent agency as public spaces for critical thought continue to be privatized and commodified.

Immediacy has permeated contemporary life, structuring experience into digestible categories of reference and subsuming images, commodities, and labour into extensions of the self rather than channels for existential inquiry. The current environment no longer supports self-referential agency but manages it into predefined collectives (gender, financial status, and cultural context), each bound by the market structures that define their limitations. The acceleration of exposure over production quality, driven by economic imperatives, has reconfigured the relationship between product and consumer into one of perpetual exchange, where identity is dictated through regulation and categorisation. The boundary between labour and leisure dissolves, as professional and personal life fold into a continuous stream of curated self-branding. This helps us understand Wasser's writing, which highlights the absence of the contemporary self. Our sense of identity is continually shaped by monopolies that seek to control it. Whether through daily visuals in transitional spaces, branding within the domestic sphere, work affiliations, or targeted entertainment and advertising, our sense of self remains deeply entangled with our role as consumers.

Meanwhile, our ever-modernising physical environment (from a westernised perspective) presents itself as apolitical - large, monolithic structures framed as symbols of progress, devoid of social dogma. Their emptiness is presented as ergonomic efficiency, economically driven and dismissing aestheticism as superfluous. Architecture recedes into an indistinct backdrop, echoing the liminal spaces of Gregor Schneider (fig. 1), where built environments cease to engage and instead deflect our focus onto ourselves. This shift repositions our attention as a competitive resource, increasing our vulnerability to 'market-level' branding, algorithmic advertising, and social validation economies, which become the primary lenses through which we navigate the world.

The transformation of public space under capitalism echoes a historical continuum in which ideological structures assert dominance through the visual and spatial. As Silvia Federici (2004) argues, the transition from feudalism to capitalism necessitated the erosion of communal life and the restructuring of belief systems, shifting authority from religious doctrine to economic rationalism. This shift did not eliminate symbolic governance but reconstituted it within capitalist frameworks. Just as the angelic sculptures found within the Roman Forum, e.g., *the Arch of Titus relief depicting the spoils of Jerusalem* (fig. 2), functioned as instruments of imperial ideology (affirming divine right and consolidating collective identity), modern advertising employs similar visual strategies to normalise economic hierarchies. The omnipresence of corporate imagery, from Adidas billboards to algorithmically targeted digital campaigns, operates as a pervasive force, embedding commercial narratives into the social psyche. Both historical and contemporary visual economies rely on repetition, spectacle, and spatial dominance to create consensus, guiding public perception not through explicit coercion but through aesthetic immersion. In this sense, capitalism does not merely appropriate religious iconography; it perpetuates its function, aligning mass belief systems with marketing-driven ideals.

"Religious institutions historically utilised architectural grandeur and ritualistic imagery to convey divine authority and moral order, thereby reinforcing their influence over societal norms." (Cohen, 2002, p. 67)

"In the modern capitalist context, advertising and brand imagery similarly create compelling narratives that align consumer desires with economic growth, effectively shaping public perception and behaviour." (Cohen, 2002, p. 89)

As public art, once integral to communal spaces and civic reflection declines, it is increasingly occupied by private interests. Spaces that once fostered public discourse and cultural engagement are repurposed as vehicles for commercial messaging, embedding corporate ideology into the urban landscape. This transformation not only alters the function of public space but also reconfigures the mechanisms through which collective opinion is formed. "The possibility of a relational art... points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 14). Through the state's retreat from cultural investments, market forces have been allowed to dictate public expression, replacing civic dialogue with commercial persuasion. In this environment, consensus is not achieved through debate or collective agency but through the passive absorption of consumerist narratives. The erosion of publicly funded cultural initiatives signals a broader shift: authority over public thought is no longer rooted in governance or democratic discourse but in the omnipresent influence of capital.

However, capitalism functions as a self-consuming system, altering its advertisement methods from suggestive to direct instruction, reducing ambiguity to mitigate misinterpretation and potential profit loss. This move away from religious institutions' use of the visual, inadvertently reduces the space for independent thought. For example, Charles Saatchi's *Silk Cut* campaign (1983) (fig. 3) engaged audiences through ambiguity and symbolism, whereas contemporary advertising, such as KFC's *Believe in Chicken* (2024) and McDonald's *A Little More Mmm* campaign (fig.

4), dictates emotional responses outright. This shift extends to visual art, notably in David Lynch's drawings, where graphic text does not complement imagery but instructs the viewer on its meaning (fig. 5) (Rodley, 2015). Both cases exemplify late capitalism's corrosion of independent thought, replacing interpretative agency with pre-determined responses. As public spaces for discourse shrink and advertising infiltrates every aspect of daily life, even contemplation becomes commodified, transforming critical engagement into passive consumption. Like Wasser's portrayal, we find ourselves caught in an ongoing struggle against a force far greater than ourselves, trapped between work and leisure, overwhelmed by the constant hum of commercial influence.

[Video link: [https://youtu.be/iAu6SITl2o?si=KFU4tsFFljF3I\\_b1](https://youtu.be/iAu6SITl2o?si=KFU4tsFFljF3I_b1)]

To this, I ask: how can we practice independent contemplation within the modern landscape? The very idea of meditation (the act of stepping back) is itself absorbed and repackaged as a productivity hack. As spaces for independent thought erode and advertising increasingly dictates emotional responses, we find ourselves caught in a cycle of self-branding and market-driven identities. In this overstimulating environment, true independence becomes an increasingly rare and difficult pursuit.

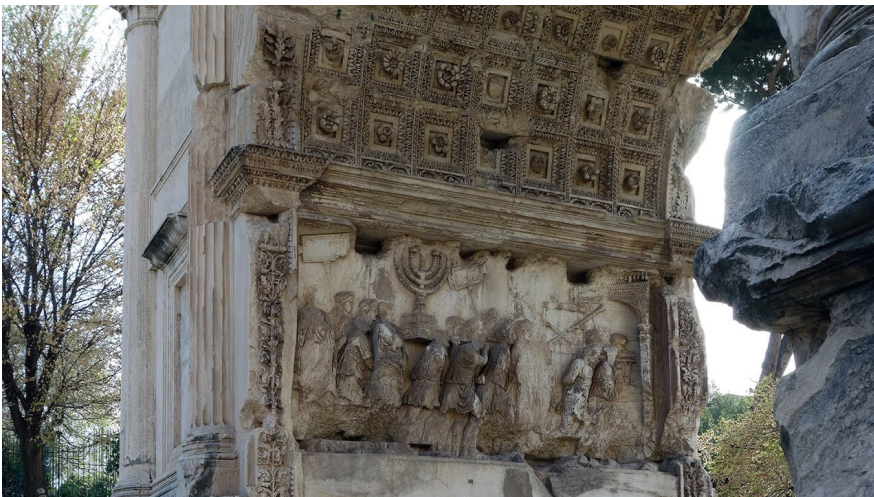
## Figures

Figure 1



Gregor Schneider's (2007) 'Weisse Folter' (White Torture). Installation.

Figure 2



Claridge, A., 2010. *The Arch of Titus: The Spoils of Jerusalem*. In: *Roman Sculpture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 215.

Figure 3



SMOKING CAUSES CANCER

Chief Medical Officers' Warning  
5mg Tar 0.5mg Nicotine

Saatchi & Saatchi, 1983, *Silk Cut Advertisement*, [image] Available at <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/best-ads-50-years-silk-cut-showed-paul-ardens-genius/1496678> (Accessed: 2 February 2025).

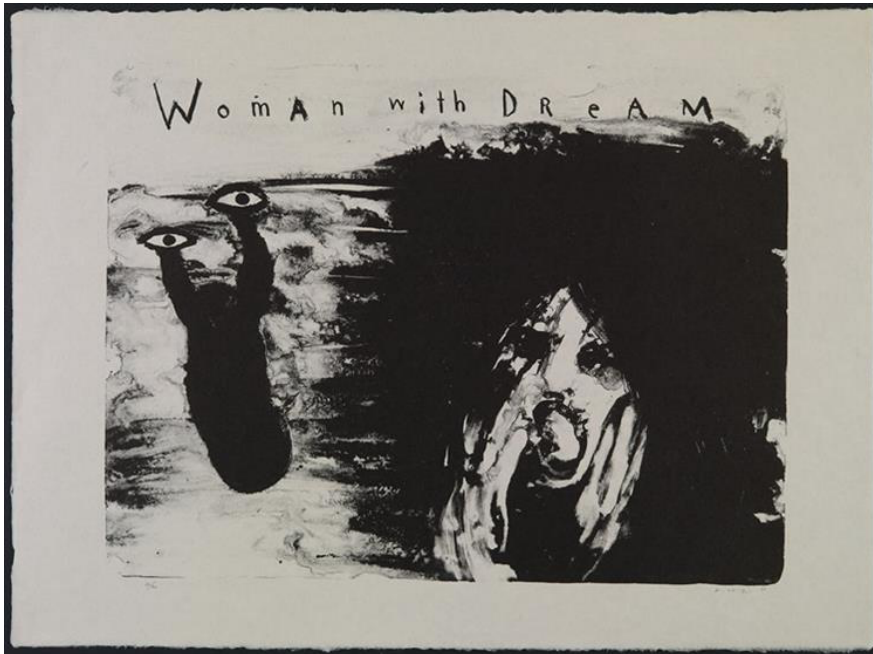
Figure 4



Creative Salon, 2023. McDonald's and Leo Burnett's 'A Little More Mmm' campaign.



Figure 5



David Lynch (2008) Woman with dream of man, 182.9 x 152.4 cm, oil on canvas.

Figure 6



Christian Jankowski (\*1968) The Hunt, 1992/1997

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