Guy Debord's Situationism: Theory, Politics, Ethics, Protest

by

Alex Corcos

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University of Warwick, School of Modern Languages and Cultures

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Declaration

I confirm that the material in this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

Guy Debord (1931-1994) was the director of the *International situationniste* journal and de facto leader of the group of artists, writers, filmmakers and political agitators who went by the same name. This thesis will consider his many articles, signed and unsigned, that he contributed to the journal alongside his films and the theoretical work for which he is best known, *La Société du spectacle* (1967) in order to analyse and critique his written, filmic and organisational contribution to the group. The notion of 'Situationism', one Debord and the Situationists disdained, will be examined in the course of an assessment of the Situationists' enduring relevance to contemporary debates in thought and politics as well as to the theory and practice of protest. In resistance to attempts to cast the Situationists as Romantic idealists who founded their critique of society upon a notion of unalienated human nature in need of freeing from the fetters of a capitalistic spectacle, it will be argued that the Situationists presented a radical rejection of such notions in elaborating their own conception of the capacities for egalitarian political subjectivation.

The first chapter deals with the formative influence of Marx and Marxism on Debord's *La Société du spectacle* and Situationist theory more generally. The second chapter examines the Situationist concept of *détournement*, the diversion or hijacking of pre-existing cultural elements in new works, with particular reference to Debord's films. A third chapter presents a particular conception of ethics which emerges from both the writings and the organisational practice of the Situationist International before a final chapter assessing the Situationists' pertinence to twenty-first century emancipatory politics.

Introduction

The term 'Situationism' is one Guy Debord and the Situationist International disdained in resistance to their work being read as a static theoretical dogma. In a series of dictionary-style definitions in the first issue of the *Internationale situationniste* journal, published in 1957, the entry for 'Situationnisme' ran as follows:

> Vocable privé de sens, abusivement forgé par dérivation du terme précédent ['situationniste']. Il n'y a pas de situationnisme, ce qui signifierait une doctrine d'interprétation des faits existants. La notion de situationnisme est évidemment conçue par les anti-situationnistes.[1]

A professed hatred of all such ideological '-isms', those which sought to provide a theoretical basis for and justification of practical action, lasted throughout the lifetime of the group but the scope of what was considered 'anti-Situationist' remained less consistent. After the group's fifth conference, in Gothenburg, in 1962, it was declared that all works of art produced by the Situationists would themselves be 'anti-Situationist'; that is, such works produced in the context of the art market, given their location within a capitalist mode of production, could not be considered as 'Situationist'. The eponymous term itself derives from the notion of the 'situation construite', the first of the entries in their series of parodic dictionary definitions, given as 'Moment de la vie, concrètement et délibérément construit par l'organisation collective d'une ambiance unitaire et d'un jeu d'événements.'[2] The very concept that would give the group its name, however, would in fact largely disappear from their writings after '62, as such a quasi-utopian idea of complete freedom from the fetters of capitalist conditioning became inconsistent with the totalising theory of spectacle, elaborated during the course of the '60s and eventually given its fullest articulation in Debord's *La Société du spectacle* (1967). It is this book, and the theory it put forth, which are most associated with the Situationist International today. In what follows, I will attempt to show how and why an impulse to

[1] Authorship unattributed, 'Définitions', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1957), 13-14 (p.13).
[2] Ibid.

redefinition and revaluation of foundational theoretical concepts animated the work of Debord and the Situationists.

The motivation behind this impulse, as well as the rejection of the term 'Situationism', lies in the resistance to what they called 'récupération', rendering dangerous ideas amenable to the cataloguing and commodifying imperatives of capitalism, neutralising their negative, disruptive potential. The sardonic connotations of healing and recovery allude to the dominance of the spectacle: that anything purporting to resist must eventually be subject to reconciliation with the forces of power. In the very first article of the Situationists' journal, 'L'amère victoire du surréalisme', reference is made to how the surrealist legacy has come to be 'recouvert et *utilisé* par le monde répressif que les surréalistes avaient combattu.'[3] In the context of the French state's recent canonisation of Debord — in 2009, the Bibliothèque nationale de France purchased his archive for over €1m, as Nicolas Sarkozy's then Minister for Culture, Christine Albanel, declared his work a 'trésor national'[4]— in addition to the concerted academic interest Debord has been subject to, particularly since his death in 1994 (the Situationists frequently paraded their contempt for the university), the recuperation of the Situationists seems near complete. Nevertheless, by revisiting the writings and films of Debord alongside the journal he directed, it is my intention to critically reassess the enduring pertinence of Situationist theory and practice to twenty-first century modes of resistance and emancipation.

In undertaking this task, it is helpful to reconsider the notion of Situationism in its contemporary context. While much of the existing literature loyally eschews the term in deference to the Situationists' cogent repudiation of it, given the repeated insistence that theirs was a project bound

[3] Authorship unattributed, 'Amère victoire du surréalisme', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1958), 3-4 (p.3). This title has been 'détourned' more than once in the critical writing on the Situationists. See Gianfranco Marelli, *L'Amère victoire du situationnisme: pour une histoire critique de l'Internationale situationniste (1957-1972)* (Cabris: Éditions Sulliver, 1998) and Peter Wollen, 'Bitter Victory: The Art and Politics of the Situationist International', in *On the Passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957-1972*, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), pp.20-61.

[4] Alain Beuve-Méry, 'Deux cents personnes dînent ensemble pour garder en France l'œuvre de Debord', *Le Monde*, 13 June 2009 <http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2009/06/13/deux-cents-personnes-dinent-ensemble-pour-garder-en-france-l-oeuvre-de-debord_1206504_3246.html> [Accessed 11 May 2016].

to a particular historical era,[5] it is worth employing not only for the heuristic purposes of referring to a particular group's activity during such a particular historical conjuncture, but in the critical endeavour of discerning what we might do well to leave behind of the Situationists' theory, practice and organisation.

The characterisation of Guy Debord as something of a *poète maudit* is a familiar trope in his popular reception and consistent with his entry into the pantheon of French literary greats. Philippe Sollers, one of the founders of the literary avant-garde journal *Tel Quel* in 1960, has championed this conception of Debord in his writings: 'C'est parce qu'il était un grand poète métaphysique d'un enfer social sans poètes que Debord reste, aujourd'hui même, révolutionnaire.'[6] This conception of Debord views Debord primarily as a great 'stylist' of the French language, and privileges his more melancholic post-Situationist work, as well as his eventual suicide, in establishing a mythology of a tragic hero. Vincent Kaufmann's biography of Debord, *Guy Debord ou la révolution au service de la poésie*,[7] follows this portrayal in emphasising Debord's 'singularité', and the cult of personality that Debord cultivated around himself. For Kaufmann, whose work's title succinctly establishes the relationship between politics and writing he understands from Debord's work, Debord's early film, *Hurlement en faveur de Sade* (1952) — made during his time in the company of Romanian poet Isodore Isou's Lettrists, which consisted only of a blank screen alternating black and white with an accompanying soundtrack — is emblematic of the Debord oeuvre. This provocation is taken by Kaufmann as a guiding thread, though in Chapter Two we will see that there is evidence to suggest that Debord viewed his first film as a mere prank, and barely conceived of it as a 'work' at all. A tactic of self-mythologisation and the rhetorical use of heroic figurations are certainly an important component of Debord's films and Situationist writings generally but this tendency to assert Debord's pre-eminence as a writer and stylist fails to acknowledge how such rhetorical bombast, during the

[5] Numerous instances of such assertions will be cited in what follows, particularly in association with Debord's Hegelianism and the concept of time and history at play in the Situationists' work. To give one example: 'Cela vaut-il la peine de le redire? Il n'y a pas de "situationnisme". Je ne suis moi-même situationniste que du fait de ma participation, en ce moment et dans certaines conditions, à une communauté pratiquement groupée en vue d'une tâche, qu'elle saura ou ne saura pas faire.' Guy Debord, 'A Propos de quelques erreurs d'interprétation', *Internationale situationniste*, 4 (1960), 30-33 (p.33).
[6] Philippe Sollers, *Eloge de l'infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p.571.
[7] Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord ou la révolution au service de la poésie* (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

course of what they were not shy of referring to as 'propaganda', served their self-consciously political project of the transformation of everyday life.[8]

Conversely, rather than fetishising Debord as a heroic figure at the centre of the S.I., there is a prizing of the extra-institutional location from which Situationist theory emerged, independent of academia and of conventional relations with publishing houses. The 'totale' in Eric Brun's *Les Situationnistes: une avant-garde totale* (2014), references this resistance to parcellisation; in employing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of field and demonstrating the extent to which the Situationists sought to refuse standard modes of ideological formation, Brun subsumes their activity under a quasi-scientific sociological rubric. A similar manoeuvre occurs in much of the art historical criticism of the S.I., of which Fabien Danesi's *Le Myth brisé de l'International situationniste: l'aventure d'une avant-garde au cœur de la culture de masse* (2008) is a prime example. The emphasis placed here on the S.I. as an artistic avant-garde who sought to translate their aesthetic activity into the realm of society and politics, despite the frequent assertion throughout the S.I.'s writings that such discrete compartmentalisation of aesthetics and politics mirrors only the commodity form of capital. This art-historical reading of the S.I. unsurprisingly privileges the early Situationist activity before the 'artists' split' in 1962, and the concepts developed in this period, particularly to do with the urban environment, *psychogéographie*, *urbanisme unitaire* and the *dérive*, as a means of demonstrating the practical application of aesthetic theory.[9]

In an altogether different reading of the what he calls 'Le Mouvement situationniste',[10] Patrick Marcolini's 'histoire intellectuelle' is a considerable work of scholarship not only on the

[8] To give one example here, Ivan Chetcheglov writes in the first issue of *I.S.*, 'Un revirement complet de l'esprit est devenu indispensable, par la mise en lumière de désirs oubliés et la création de désirs entièrement nouveaux. Et par une *propagande intensive* en faveur de ces désirs.' Ivan Chetcheglov (Printed under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain), 'Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1957) 15-20 (p.18). Italics in original. This conception of their work as serving a propagandist function will be examined in Chapter Two.

[9] The above cited *On the Passage…,* ed. by Elisabeth Sussman accompanied the exhibition of the same name which took place in the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Institute for Contemporary Art in London and Boston between February 1989 and January 1990. Other examples of this include: ed. Tom McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog, 2005). Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'The Situationist International, Surrealism and the Difficult Fusion of Art and Politics', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27.3 (2004), 367-87.

[10] Patrick Marcolini, *Le Mouvement Situationniste: une histoire intellectuelle* (Paris: L'Echappée, 2013).

diversity and breadth of the S.I. but on the 'trajectories' of their theory after the dissolution in 1972, tracing their influence on a diverse range of political movements. Marcolini's ultimate criticsm of the 'movement' rests on what he sees as their unquestioning reproduction of the progressivist spirit of the *trente glorieuses* underlying their technological optimism. This alleged progressivism is for Marcolini what accounts for Situationist theory's compatibility with capitalist recuperation. Marcolini subsequently goes as far as to advance a 'conservatisme révolutionnaire', which he describes as an 'activité de discrimination' involving a 'revolutionary choice' between which elements of the 'être social' merit conservation.[11] He markedly distinguishes his approach from what has been called 'accelerationist' theories in Anglophone theory, and its Francophone analogue, 'communisation'.[12] This attempt at a politically generative rhetorical manoeuvre in a time where neo-liberal capital has itself become 'revolutionary'[13] seems, however, to curtail, rather than energise, the experimentation or elaboration of emancipatory activity in the here and now.

Whilst Marcolini's *conservatisme révolutionnaire* is not quite espousing the return to a pre-spectacular, unalienated state of human social organisation, his final argument is reminiscent of what Jean-Luc Nancy has described as the Romanticism borne of the 'metaphysical assumptions' of Situationist theory. For Nancy, Situationist critique remains tributary to a Romantic conception of genius and therefore opposes the false reality of the spectacle by positing an underlying authentic reality.[14] This is a similar view to the one Jacques Rancière outlines in *Le Spectateur émancipé*, where he describes Debord's theory of spectacle as holding 'la vision romantique de vérité comme non-séparation.'[15] Both understand this as remaining within the Platonist tradition, betraying their subordination of Situationist theory to Debord's theory of spectacle (explicitly in Nancy's case, who describes 'la critique situationniste' as 'la dernière ressource critique dans un monde sans critique').[16] In this estimation, the theory of spectacle is a technologically updated version of Plato's allegory of

[11] Ibid., p.330.
[12] See *Communisation and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique and Contemporary Struggles*, ed. by Benjamin Noys (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011) and Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014).
[13] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neo-liberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).
[14] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être Singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p.70.
[15] Jacques Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008), p.12.
[16] Nancy, p.70.

the cave. This understanding of the theory of spectacle limits Debord to an analysis of the image form, a reading which is complicated by reading the I.S. journal in concert with *La Société du spectacle*, which, as I will endeavour to demonstrate, distances Situationist theory from such humanistic readings.[17]

It is this kind of interpretation which has led to the Situationists being understood as capital's avant-garde, a critical manoeuvre reminiscent of the historicisation of May '68: both oppositional currents forged a breach in the status quo which permitted the course of subsequent capitalist development incorporating the discontents of protesters.[18] Henri Lefebvre, a one-time collaborator with Debord before an acrimonious parting, described Situationism as 'a dogmatism without a dogma',[19] whether knowingly or not, precisely echoing the terms in which Debord describes the spectacle: 'Le spectacle est absolument dogmatique et en même temps ne peut aboutir réellement à aucun dogme solide.'[20] This thesis will also seek to show how what I argue is a rhetorical recourse to notions which invite this humanistic reading is constitutive of the seductive, mythologising and propagandistic side of their work.

Anselm Jappe's intellectual biography of Debord is widely considered to be one of the better books on his thought. Jappe discards the humanistic reading of Debord in favour of placing the emphasis upon his Hegelian Marxism. Jappe's analysis of how Debord departs from the labour theory of value, against 'workerist' currents of Marxism and posits a notion of history and community as essence of man.[21] This latter notion Jappe associates with the enduring notion of 'subject-object

[17] This is perhaps the most common misapprehension of Situationist theory. For a concerted reading of Debord in this vein, which casts the theory of spectacle as derivative of 'liberal individualism', see Richard Kaplan, 'Between Mass Society and Revolutionary Praxis: The Contradictions of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15.4 (2012), 457-78.
[18] This notion will be explored in Chapter Four. For an excellent account and critique of this tendency, see Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[19] Kristin Ross, Interview: 'Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International', *October*, 79 (1997), 69-83 (p.76).
[20] Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967), Thesis 71. As this book is referred to frequently throughout the thesis, subsequent quotations will be followed by the numbered thesis in parentheses in the main body of the text.
[21] Debord's Hegelianism, and particularly the importance of Debord's conceptualisation of time and history are the focus of Tom Bunyard's unpublished PhD thesis and subsequent article based on this research: see Tom Bunyard, 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2011) and Tom Bunyard, '"History is the Spectre Haunting Modern Society": Temporality and Praxis in Guy Debord's Hegelian Marxism', *Parrhesia*, 20 (2014), 62-86.

identity' which he identifies in Debord's theory. This Hegelian recasting of the humanistic reading is indicative of Jappe's allegiance to Debord's theory, whereas I contend that Situationist theory as a whole resists this epistemological foundationalism and subordinates purely theoretical exposition to a rhetorical 'prise de position'. Despite the avowedly propagandistic nature of this rhetorical bombast, I argue that the Situationists do not reproduce the hierarchical distinction between activity and passivity in their theoretical writings, but that the organisational practice of excommunication and denunciation betrays a conception of politics and 'the political' which goes against their stated desire to reproduce none of the workings of what they call 'le pouvoir hierarchisé'[22] in their everyday activity.

Where Jappe is scornful of linking the Situationists' work to postmodernism,[23] Sadie Plant has sought to recover the 'dangerous' aspects of Situationist thought from the politically agnostic work of Jean-Baudrillard and Jean-Francois Lyotard.[24] Plant's stated intent is to demonstrate the relevance of Situationist thought to the contemporary moment, by arguing that: 'Against doubtful poststructuralist and uncompromisingly negative postmodern responses to this question, the Situationists have left a legacy of assertive confidence in the possibility of the collective construction not only of a playful discourse but impassioned forms of living too.'[25] There is perhaps a flavour of the humanistic reading of the S.I. in what amounts to Plant's ethical distinction between postmodernism and the Situationists.[26] Rather, I will attempt to show that it is the uncompromising negativity of the Situationists' theory and rhetoric which offers readers the possibility of resisting the modes of normalisation and subjection which constitute Debord's spectacle. Plant also states that, 'It

[22] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base', *Internationale situationniste*, 7 (1962), 32-41 (p.41).
[23] Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.72 and pp.163-66.
[24] Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in the Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992). Plotting a similar course (though through a prolonged engagement with Baudrillard only), Richard Gilman-Opalsky has attempted a similar task almost twenty years later. See Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011).
[25] Plant, p.187
[26] As Gilman-Opalsky puts it: 'Baudrillard repudiates Debord for one of the main reasons I centralize the importance of his work — because Debord advances a critical theory of high-tech postindustrial capitalism without abandoning normative theory and praxis' (p.27). I would question whether Debord's theory can be said to directly deal with 'high-tech postindustrial capitalism'. In Chapters One (in association with the theory of spectacle) and Four (in association with contemporary theories of work, debt and the university), I will attempt to analyse how Debord's theory might well be updated and extended to this present conjuncture.

was the Situationists' identification of an antagonism at the heart of society — a central principle of dualism, separation, mediation or alienation — which enabled them to posit an unproblematised unified social experience as the goal of revolutionary practice.'[27] I will argue that this antagonism is not necessarily identified theoretically, but consists of a rhetorical tactic which alludes on the one hand to the inducement to revolt and resist and on the other, to a problematic understanding of politics. This will be explored in Chapters Three and Four.

Most recently, McKenzie Wark has written widely on the legacy of the S.I. Having written two books he describes as 'détournements' (this is the most important of the Situationists' theoretical notions and will be encountered throughout the thesis, though most concertedly in Chapter Two) of Debord's *La Société du spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*,[28] he has published two studies of the S.I. In both, he has sought to de-centre the history of the S.I. from Debord, Paris, and the period between 1962 and 1972, what Debord called the second and third phases of Situationist activity.[29] Whilst Wark's endeavour to shed light on the contribution of women, the S.I.'s North African contingent and the activity of figures who have garnered only peripheral attention in the history of the S.I. is a valuable one, I have chosen precisely the opposite method. In this study, I have chosen to concentrate on the period of activity of the Situationist International, 1957-1972, with some leeway either side to account for the theoretical concepts elaborated in the pre-Situationist Lettrist and Lettrist International groupings which would come to play an important role in Situationist theory during the 60s and to consider Debord's later filmic work, which I consider to be the most interesting examples of Situationist détournement. This thesis will centre on Debord and the S.I.'s French section, with the hope of not further embroidering the myth of Guy Debord as master and tragic Situationist hero but to examine that myth, as well as how and why

[27] Plant, p.131.
[28] See Sam Cooper, 'The Unreturnable Situationist International: Berfrois Interviews McKenzie Wark', *Berfrois* (2011) <http://www.berfrois.com/2011/09/berfrois-interviews-mckenzie-wark/> [Accessed 11 May 2016]. The two books in question are: McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) and McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). His two books seeking to move away from the Parisian S.I. and the central figures of Debord and Vaneigem are: McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street* (New York: Verso, 2011) and McKenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2013).
[29] Guy Debord, 'La question de l'organisation pour l'I.S.', *Internationale situationniste*, 12 (1969), 112-13 (p.112).

they forged this mythology around themselves and their work. Though I will predominantly refer to Debord's writings and films, and where 'the Situationists' are invoked, I will often be referring to Debord's unattributed articles in the journal he directed and the organisational practices he (rather despotically) authored, this will be in the course of disturbing the orthodoxies of Situationist theory's reception and developing a critical account of the emancipatory potential and politically galvanising effects of reading the Situationists today.

This study then proceeds with the following questions in mind:

- How does Debord's theory of spectacle depart from Marx's work?
- If the theory of spectacle can be said not only to refer to images and the mass media, what else does it encompass?
- Can Debord's theory be updated given the extent of technological change since his time of writing?
- How can Debord and the Situationists be read in resistance to a humanistic interpretation?
- Is there a Situationist theory of the subject?
- What relationship can be discerned between the elaboration of a theoretical discourse and the rhetorical imposture which characterises so much of their work? What part do 'works', writing or film, play in Situationist politics?
- In what ways can Debord's filmic work be shown to enact in sound and image the 'dialectical theory' of détournement?
- What role do utopian figurations play in Situationist theory?
- Can the Situationists' writings on work and the university be of use to understanding the contemporary conjuncture?

In this reading of the pamphlets, journal articles, books, films, graffiti and other works the Situationists produced, I have chosen not to proceed chronologically but, in the first half of the thesis, by addressing the two key theoretical concepts the S.I. leave behind them: in Chapter One, the theory of spectacle, and in Chapter Two, détournement. In the second half of the thesis, Chapter Three

proposes a particular conception of ethics which emerges from the S.I.'s work and organisational practice, while Chapter Four examines the Situationists' responses to the 'events' of May '68 and what Debord saw at the time as the 'beginning of an era' of revolutionary contestation.

1

Marxism and the Theory of Spectacle

Alienation and the Commodity

Debord's first sentence of *La Société du spectacle* is a détournement of Marx's first line of *Capital* (1867). Where the French translation of the latter reads: 'La richesse des sociétés dans lesquelles règne le mode de production capitaliste s'annonce comme une "immense accumulation de marchandises"',[1] the final portion of the sentence quoting his own 1859 work, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Debord amends: 'Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de *spectacles*' (Thesis 1. Emphasis is Debord's). Debord signals both his enduring allegiance to — and first departure from — Marx's theory. Debord sets out his theoretical project to demonstrate how Marx's theory of the commodity reaches its apogee after a century's worth of technological development. That is to say, in the era of film, television, print and advertising, to take the spectacle at what Debord describes as its most immediately obvious and rudimentary form: the mass media. Debord unambiguously cautions against taking the spectacle to exclusively refer to the media. Instead, he describes the spectacle as a social relation between people mediated by these images (Thesis 4). In order to understand precisely what Debord means by this, we must first offer a brief explication of Marx's theory of the commodity as outlined in both his early and later work.

Marx defines a commodity as an object which fulfils a human need of some sort. As a result of this function, it can be traded in a market place, hence its French translation 'marchandise'.[2] In

[1] Karl Marx, *Le Capital: Critique de l'économie politique, Livre première*, trans. by Étienne Balibar and others (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p.17.
[2] Marx, *Le Capital*, p.40.

Capital, Marx describes the commodity in connection with two other important concepts: use-value and exchange value. The use-value of an object is manifest in its utility or consumption and is directly related to the commodity's physical properties. Exchange value, on the other hand, whilst appearing to be an objective function of an object's use-value, is a purely quantitative function and therefore renders all commodities potentially equivalent: 'En tant que valeurs d'usage, les marchandises sont principalement de qualité différente, en tant que valeurs d'échange elles ne peuvent être que de quantité différente, et ne contiennent pas donc un atome de valeur d'usage.'[3] It is this equivalence which deprives the commodity of its use-value as it also divorces it from its relationship to the particular human labour entailed in forging it or bringing a commodity to the market place, Marx states. Consequently, 'Si l'on fait maintenant abstraction de la valeur d'usage du corps des marchandises, il ne leur reste plus qu'une seule propriété: celle d'être des produits de travail.'[4] Marx's extensive theoretical elaborations on the concepts of value and labour do not appear to be of great concern to Debord, though we know from the reading notes present in his archive at the Bibliothèque nationale de France that he read *Capital*.[5] Rather, in *La Société du spectacle,* it is the Marx of the *1844 Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts* that Debord conflates with the appropriation of the language of *Capital*, by bringing the theory of alienation into relation with the commodity; both notions are of crucial importance to the theory of spectacle. Alienation, as we shall see in further detail below, is a concept redolent of what Louis Althusser referred to as the 'young' Marx's work:

> This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces — labour's product — confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour. Labour's realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labour appears as *loss of realization* for the workers;

[3] Ibid., p.42.
[4] Ibid.
[5] BnF, Guy Debord, *Notes et Projets*, Fonds Guy Debord, XXème siècle, NAF28603 (Paris).

> objectification as *loss of the object and bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*.[6]

This idea of alienated labour, a labour which no longer belongs to the worker and is inextricably linked to his survival but is bought from and sold to the producer, is one the Situationists make central to their theory. Debord described as his 'first work' a graffito on a wall on the Rue de Seine instructing the passer-by to 'ne travaillez jamais', such was his perception of labour under the conditions of spectacle as irrevocably alienated: 'L'institutionnalisation de la division sociale du travail, la formation des classes avaient construit une première contemplation sacrée, l'ordre mythique dont tout pouvoir s'enveloppe dès l'origine' (Thesis 25). In *Capital*, Marx distinguishes between the economic and the social division of labour. What he calls the economic division of labour is the result of technical expediency and not inherently exploitative, whilst the social division of labour are the result of a 'social control function' bound to class hierarchy.[7] It is this notion of exploitation and servitude Debord takes from the latter Marx, married with the analysis of alienation in the *1844 Manuscripts*.[8] It is Debord's contention that capitalist development has reached a level of accumulation at his time of writing that any labour recognised as productive to society and not deliberately hostile to it, served the perpetuation of what he calls the spectacle-commodity economy:

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[6] Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf> [Accessed 30.10.2014] (p.29).

[7] Marx, *Le Capital*, pp.47-48.

[8] Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*, p.30: 'What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?
First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates on the individual independently of him — that is, operates as an alien, divine or diabolical activity — so is the worker's activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.'

> Le caractère fondamentalement tautologique du spectacle découle du simple fait que ses moyens sont en même temps son but […] Le spectacle se soumet les hommes vivants dans la mesure où l'économie les a totalement soumis. Il n'est rien que l'économie se développant pour elle-même. Il est le reflet fidèle de la production des choses, et l'objectivation infidèle des producteurs. (Theses 13 and 16)

There is, however, no Situationist theory of labour. Debord does not attempt a structural analysis of human labour as Marx attempts in *Capital*, rather, alienation is what Debord takes from Marx and then describes its extension in the era of spectacle. Debord calls this 'separation': alienation from the individual's activity creates the passive role of spectator (we will see later that this extends to the realm of consumption, not just production in the form of alienated labour). 'Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation' (Thesis 1), as the first thesis ends after the above cited détournement of Marx. Chapter One of *La Société du spectacle*, 'La séparation achevée', delineates the processes by which the alienation perpetrated by a capitalism recognisable to Marx achieved a total separation between 'an actually lived life' and an existence structured according to the perpetuation of the economic and social status quo:

> Avec la séparation généralisée du travailleur et de son produit, se perdent tout point de vue unitaire sur l'activité accomplie, toute communication personnelle directe entre les producteurs. Suivant le progrès de l'accumulation des produits séparés, et de la concentration du processus productif, l'unité et la communication deviennent l'attribut exclusif de la direction du système. La réussite du système économique de la séparation est la *prolétarisation* du monde. (Thesis 26)

This idea of separation appears as the apogee of Marx's concept of alienation in the era of spectacle: 'La *séparation* est l'alpha et l'oméga du spectacle' (Thesis 25). The technological development set into motion under the social conditions of capitalism leads to an extension of alienation; separation is the culmination of this alienation facilitated by technological development. It is 'generalised' to the extent that the spectacle is capable of colonising not only labour relations but all communication between 'producers'. The result of this colonisation is what Debord describes as the proletarianisation

of the world: the category of the proletariat, alienated and exploited workers whose activity is divorced from their own ends encompasses all those who live under the conditions of this 'stage' of capitalism.

Debord does attempt to clarify that this separation is not a Manichean opposition between real, social life on one hand and a never-ending stream of images on the other:

> On ne peut opposer abstraitement le spectacle et l'activité sociale effective; ce dédoublement est lui-même dédoublé. Le spectacle qui inverse le réel est effectivement produit. En même temps la réalité vécue est matériellement envahie par la contemplation du spectacle, et reprend en elle-même l'ordre spectaculaire en lui donnant une adhésion positive. La réalité objective est présente des deux côtés. Chaque notion ainsi fixée n'a pour fond que son passage dans l'opposé: la réalité surgit dans le spectacle, et le spectacle est réel. Cette aliénation réciproque est l'essence et le soutien de la société existante. (Thesis 8)

Just as 'lived reality' is occupied by static contemplation, spectatorship, so the object of this spectatorship is forged by human labour and productive forces. The spectacle is, then, a social relation: 'Le spectacle n'est pas un ensemble d'images, mais un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisé par des images' (Thesis 4), again echoing the language of *Capital*, where Marx writes that: 'le capital n'était pas une chose, mais un rapport social entre les personnes médiatisé par des choses.'[9] The spectacle refers both to the forms of mediation and to the social relation between people engendered by this mediation. Debord's theory diagnoses the expansion of alienation under the aegis of economic development:

> Le spectacle dans la société correspond à une fabrication concrète de l'aliénation. L'expansion économique est principalement l'expansion de cette production industrielle précise. Ce qui croît avec l'économie se mouvant pour elle-même ne peut être que l'aliénation qui était justement dans son noyau originel. (Thesis 32)

[9] Marx, *Le Capital*, p.859.

Alienated labour, for Debord, referred to working for a wage, being used as a means to the ends of a self-perpetuating spectacular economy. The labour of writing books and journal articles, as well as compiling and distributing these journals, was viewed as not being in the service of the spectacular economy but in direct hostility to it. The Situationists clearly felt that the only acceptable form of labour was undertaken in defiance of the roles of the social whole determined by spectacular power relations.

Debord's spectacle describes a world of 'la marchandise dominant tout ce qui est vécu' (Thesis 37). The nature of this domination is expounded by Debord in connection with another concept taken from *Capital*, commodity fetishism. Debord states that: 'C'est le principe du fétichisme de la marchandise, la domination de la société par "des choses suprasensibles bien que sensibles", qui s'accomplit absolument dans le spectacle' (Thesis 36), here quoting Marx directly. The importance of this notion for Debord's spectacle demonstrates the significance of Hungarian Marxist György Lukács's influential 1923 *History and Class Consciousness*. Translated into French for the first time in 1960, the book forms an important lens through which to appreciate Debord's reading of Marx. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács underscores Hegel's influence on Marx's work and concentrates on alienation, reification (the name given to the result of the process of alienation that leads to social relations becoming relations between 'things') and commodity fetishism as the primary impediments to the realisation of a proletarian class consciousness. As Louis Althusser writes in *Pour Marx*, there is here present a notion of:

> 'L'humanisme de classe' au sens, repris des œuvres de jeunesse de Marx, où le prolétariat représenterait, dans son 'aliénation', l'essence humaine elle-même, dont la révolution devrait assurer la 'réalisation': cette conception 'religieuse' du prolétariat ('classe universelle' parce que 'perte de l'homme' en 'révolte contre sa propre perte'), a été reprise par le jeune Lukacs [sic] dans *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*.[10]

[10] Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris: François Maspero, 1966), p.228.

Lukács was unquestionably an important mediating influence on Debord's reading of Marx. Anselm Jappe, in his 'intellectual biography' of Debord, alleges that for both Lukács and Debord the preoccupation with alienation indicates that 'there must after all be such a thing as a substantially "healthy" subject, otherwise it would make no sense to speak of the "falsification" of a subject's activity.'[11] Richard Kaplan launches a similar critique of Debord in which he argues that the theory of spectacle is 'implicitly dependent upon liberal individualism, which abstracts individuals from the cultural traditions and social relations in which they are embedded.'[12] Indeed, at first glance, Debord's critique of the society of the spectacle appears to inherit a certain metaphysical bent — that is to say, a reliance on an essentialist, transhistorical notion of 'the human' — from the young Marx. Subsequently, for Debord, 'Le spectacle est la reconstruction matérielle de l'illusion religieuse' (Thesis 20). Althusser famously suggested that Marx's deep identification with Feuerbach as indicative of his 'young' period: *The German Ideology* and the departure from German idealism that heralds the beginnings of the 'epistemological break' is Marx's first work indicating a conscious and definitive rupture with Feuerbach's philosophy and his influence. He goes on to state that all of the expressions of Marx's idealist 'humanism' are Feuerbachian.[13] The adjectives the Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* employs to describe Feuerbach's 'positive, humanistic and naturalistic criticism',[14] demonstrate what Althusser criticises in favour of 'scientific' inquiry. Althusser brings a selection of Feuerbach's writings between 1839 and 1945 under this title of 'philosophical manifestoes'. He casts these texts in the following terms:

> Ce sont de vraies proclamations, l'annonce passionnée de cette révélation théorique qui va délivrer l'homme de ses chaînes. Feuerbach s'adresse à l'Humanité. Il déchire les voiles de l'Histoire universelle, détruit les mythes et les mensonges, découvre et rend à l'homme sa *vérité*. Les temps sont venus. L'Humanité est grosse d'une révolution imminente qui lui

[11] Jappe, *Guy Debord*, p.27.
[12] Kaplan, p.457.
[13] Althusser, *Pour Marx*, p.39.
[14] Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*, p.2.

> donnera la possession de son être. Que les hommes en prennent enfin conscience, et ils seront dans la réalité ce qu'ils sont en vérité: des êtres libres, égaux et fraternels.[15]

It would be easy to conclude that the Situationists can be characterised in this same manner: lyrical and passionate Romantics with a deep conviction in a concept of a creative and adventurous 'human nature' which social, cultural and political reality exists to obscure and stifle. By detractors and partisans alike, an understanding of the Situationist movement as espousing a belief in the revolutionary capabilities of this 'human nature' prevails. As Sadie Plant writes: 'It was the Situationists' identification of an antagonism at the heart of society — a central principle of dualism, separation, mediation or alienation — which enabled them to posit an unproblematised unified social experience as the goal of revolutionary practice.'[16]

Suggesting that an inheritance of Marx's concept of alienation necessarily entails the perpetuation of the concept of an inalienable human nature (by opposing directly the spectacle to what is 'true' and 'unalienated') fails to acknowledge the rhetorical function of such effusions. The reductive hyperbole of a sentence such as: 'Dans le monde *réellement renversé*, le vrai est un moment du faux' (Thesis 9. Emphasis is Debord's), which asserts that the world of spectacle is an upside down one in need of being righted, is of little substantive analytical importance. In its invocation of the words of Hegel, however, it serves the purpose of referencing Hegel to an erudite reader, conjuring the past two hundred years of European philosophy. To the uninitiated into this particular club, it provides an incisive critique of a perhaps recognisable environment. As we will see in the following chapter, this double function could be seen to rely on an appeal to authority in the form of unacknowledged quotation as well as a pedagogical manoeuvre of seduction, seeking to mystify in the same way as the spectacle, in Debord's analysis. What emerges here, however, is that by attempting to inspire action, Romantic notions of creativity and humanity serve a rhetorical purpose, not necessarily indicative of a belief which underpins their theory. Kaplan does not envisage such a

[15] Althusser, *Pour Marx*, p.37.
[16] Plant, p.131.

possibility, and assumes the Situationists must be hypostatising the concepts they take from the young Marx:

> In this tradition, the key model of action commencing from Marx's materialist turn was to conceive of humans as conscious, creative actors. People work on the natural world, and as they fabricate the object world around them, they culturally mould themselves. For Marx, this process of objectification helped unfold the essential attributes of the human species: its 'species being'. Labour created a multifaceted, rich cultural world in which we could unfold potential aspects of our personalities.[17]

The use of the words 'man's being' is enough for Kaplan to be satisfied that the Situationists retain a notion of human nature. However, Kaplan's assertion that Debord's critique of modern society rests on a 'liberal individualist' worldview belies an understanding of the Situationists' use of such a heritage, and the rather more refined critique present throughout *La Société du spectacle*:

> La technique spectaculaire n'a pas dissipé les nuages religieux où les hommes avaient placé leurs propres pouvoirs détachés d'eux: elle les a seulement reliés à une base terrestre. Ainsi c'est la vie la plus terrestre qui devient opaque et irrespirable. Elle ne rejette plus dans le ciel, mais elle héberge chez elle sa récusation absolue, son fallacieux paradis. Le spectacle est la réalisation technique de l'exil des pouvoirs humains dans un au-delà; la scission achevée à l'intérieur de l'homme. (Thesis 20)

Though appearing quasi-metaphysical in nature, it demonstrates that Situationist invocations of ideas of 'human nature' are a reflection of a notion realised by social processes and material objects: *la technique*. Just as previously man was conceived in relation to God and the heavens, now it is the reign of spectacle which proffers a particular conception of man which is necessarily dominant by means of its ubiquity. Any concept of human nature in Debord must be understood as bound to time and history, as the construction of what is recognised as 'human' is bound to social and cultural

[17] Kaplan, p.461.

organisation. In *La Société du spectacle*, Debord refers to Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim's concept of 'total ideology' with reference to the spectacle's suspension of history.

> L'idéologie, que toute sa logique interne menait vers 'l'idéologie totale', au sens de Mannheim, despotisme du fragment qui s'impose comme pseudo-savoir d'un *tout* figé, vision *totalitaire*, est maintenant accomplie dans le spectacle immobilisé de la non-histoire. (Thesis 214)

An approving citation is a rarity in the writings of Debord and the Situationists, so frequent was their recourse to excoriation of their peers and rivals. Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) sought to extend the concept of ideology from the work of Marx into a totalising concept which inevitably bound knowledge to social class, location and generation.[18] He elaborated the concept of relationism, that the inevitable contingency of knowledge could only be cast as arbitrary in contrast to a disembodied, metaphysical conception of knowledge, one which relied on some form of essentialism, for example, that of a human nature. Debord's citing of Mannheim indicates a rejection of a Feuerbachian-Marxist theory of 'species-being', or 'natural' human consciousness.

The second chapter of *La Société du Spectacle,* entitled 'La marchandise comme spectacle', charts Debord's understanding of Marx's commodity's relationship with spectacle. In particular, Debord diagnoses the conservative nature of this phenomenon in its 'coagulation' of human activity, just as Marx repeatedly describes the commodity's coagulation of labour.[19] Debord extends this coagulation to the entirety of 'activity' owing to what he sees as capital's colonisation of desire and therefore so-called 'free time' in the form of spectacle. Though the commodity is a category essential to Marx's later 'scientific' theory, Debord continues to consider the commodity in terms of alienation.

> À ce mouvement essentiel du spectacle, qui consiste à reprendre en lui tout ce qui existait dans l'activité humaine *à l'état fluide*, pour le posséder à l'état coagulé, en tant que choses qui

[18] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2015). First published 1936.
[19] See Marx, *Le Capital*, p.45: 'En tant que valeurs, toutes les marchandise ne sont que les mesure déterminées de temps de travail coagulé.' Then also pp.58, 104, 213, 242.

> sont devenues la valeur exclusive par leur *formulation en négatif* de la valeur vécue, nous reconnaissons notre vieille ennemie qui sait si bien paraître au premier coup d'œil quelque chose de trivial et se comprenant de soi-même, alors qu'elle est au contraire si complexe et si pleine de subtilités métaphysiques, *la marchandise*.[20] (Thesis 35)

The opposition of the fluid state of human activity and the spectacle's coagulation could be read as describing the passage of history in the manner of a Marxist teleology of progress and development in the direction of communism.[21] It is this 'possession' of human activity, its enclosure within the instrumental laws of capital, which arrests any supposed advance of history. This concept of history need not, however, imply teleology. It is Debord's contention that the standardisation of human activity engineered by the exhaustive equivalence of the commodity controls the horizon of possible actions for the individual. Rather than indicating a historical process which ineluctably leads to a communist utopia that the spectacle impedes, this implies an infinitely open-ended process of making and remaking of human activity, labour and social organisation which the spectacle is designed to freeze; to maintain in stasis one particular incarnation of this activity. The Situationists hold no teleological concept of an inevitably or inherently progressive march of history: 'Cette histoire n'a pas d'objet distinct de ce qu'elle réalise sur elle-même, quoique la dernière vision métaphysique inconsciente de l'époque historique puisse regarder la progression productive à travers laquelle l'histoire s'est déployée comme l'objet même de l'histoire.' (Thesis 24) This rejection of teleology in the Situationists' work bespeaks (as we shall see in the final section of this Chapter) an acknowledgement of the inevitable necessity of communication, in all its imperfection, in human social organisation, rather than a utopian or essentialist notion of an attainable 'whole' or 'unalienated' human state.

[20] Again, here Debord has remained close to the words of Marx's *Capital*, where he describes the commodity as 'pleine de subtiltés métaphysiques', p.81.
[21] See Vladimir Illyich Lenin, 'Three Sources and Components of Marxism'. Available online here: <http://www.cpa.org.au/resources/classics/3-sources-n-3-component-parts-of-marxism.pdf> [Accessed 30.10.2014] (p.31).

Professional Marxism

Althusser's famous thesis of the 'epistemological break' holds, as mentioned above, that there exists an important divide between the 'young' and the 'mature' Marx. Marx's early writings are, for Althusser, bound to German idealism: their humanistic and Romantic emphasis on alienation is largely outgrown after *The German Ideology*, written in 1845-6, in favour of the economic-scientific study which would become known as historical materialism. Althusser argues that the latter is Marx's enduring theoretical contribution. For Althusser, Marx breaks radically with any theory that founds history and politics on notions of the essence of man. The works of the pre-1845 'young' Marx are here characterised by Althusser, with reference to the *1844 Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts*, as the basis of an inferior, immature brand of Marxism with which his scientific approach sought to dispense:

> Le manuscrit économico-philosophique a nourri toute une interprétation soit éthique, soit (ce qui revient au même) anthropologique, voire même religieuse, de Marx — *Le Capital* n'étant alors, en son recul et apparente 'objectivité' que le développement d'une intuition de jeunesse qui aurait trouvé son expression philosophique majeur dans ce texte, et ses concepts: avant tout les concepts d'*aliénation*, d'*humanisme*, d'*essence sociale de l'homme, etc.*[22]

Althusser rejects the proposition of Landshut and Mayer's preface to their 1931 translation of *Capital* that it constitutes an ethical theory, the beginnings of which are present in the young Marx, in such a way as he describes the narrative of maturation of his work in breaking with the concepts of alienation, humanism and the 'social essence of man'. He decries the tendency to seek to defend Marx en bloc, by tracing the theory of *Capital* to his earlier work:

> Philosophes, idéologues, religieux, se sont lancés dans une gigantesque entreprise de critique et de *conversion*: que Marx revienne aux sources de Marx, et qu'il avoue enfin que l'homme mûr n'est en lui que le jeune Marx déguisé. Ou, s'il persiste et s'entête dans son âge, qu'il

[22] Althusser, *Pour Marx*, p.156.

> avoue alors son péché de maturité, qu'il reconnaisse qu'il a sacrifié la philosophie à l'économie, l'éthique à la science, l'homme à l'histoire.[23]

Humanism and related concepts are ideological constructs, where socialism is 'scientific'.[24] The antipathy towards 'anthropological Marxists' who sought to trace the theories of *Capital* to his earlier works and thus retained the above listed concepts is repeatedly asserted in the lectures which make up *Pour Marx*, as well as in earlier essays such as 'A propos du marxisme'.[25] Gregory Elliot emphasises Althusser's insistence that his writings were to be understood in response to the theoretical and political context of their time, which he calls 'Althusser's moment'.[26] Althusser's opposition to humanistic interpretations of Marx took place in the political context of the crisis in the international Communist movement and the response to this crisis of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 and the subsequent policy of de-Stalinisation saw the beginnings of conflict between the USSR and the Communist Party of China. The Soviets' policy of 'communism in one country' saw them adopt a more gradualist, constitutional approach of 'peaceful coexistence' with the West whilst the Chinese embarked on their 'great leap forward' and, in 1965, released a pamphlet entitled *On the Question of Stalin.* This pamphlet defended Stalin's memory and service to the revolutionary cause, hailing him as a great Marxist-Leninist. Khrushchev had meanwhile dubbed the party program of the twenty-second party congress of 1961 as a 'document of true communist humanism'.[27] The Russians stood accused of revisionism — of pursuing goals for the good of the state rather than for the good of the revolution — by the Chinese. In France, the PCF was forced to respond to this schism. Having emerged from the Second World War with enhanced prestige following their role in the Resistance and its mythologisation after the Liberation, the PCF boasted half a million members in 1945, polled 28% in the 1946 elections and dominated political and intellectual discourse on the left. Althusser chose to remain within the PCF as a member, rather than opting for the 'fellow-traveller' approach, as did Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice

[23] Ibid., p.48.
[24] Ibid., p.229.
[25] Louis Althusser, 'A propos du Marxisme', *Revue de l'enseignement philosophique*, 3.4 (1953), 15–19.
[26] Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Boston: Brill, 2006), p.2.
[27] Quoted in Gregory Elliot, *Althusser*, p.5.

Merleau-Ponty, criticising the party line from without. Though he was, therefore, duty-bound to follow the PCF in accepting the Khrushchevite line, he sought to oppose theoretically what he saw as a shift to the right.[28] His condemnation of humanistic interpretations of Marx constituted a theoretical attack on what he perceived as a political regression.

Another key figure in French Marxism of the period, Henri Lefebvre, had left the PCF in 1959, having joined in 1928 and been active in the Resistance. Though both Lefebvre and Althusser espoused their fidelity to the concept of dialectical materialism, Lefebvre took precisely the opposite position to Althusser on the subject of the 'wholeness' of Marx's work, particularly in relation to alienation. Alienation is a central concept in Lefebvre's reading of Marx. As Stuart Elden states in his study of Lefebvre: 'Lefebvre read Marx as a total thinker, with equal stress on the early writings and the late ones. He was interested in how concepts such as alienation were central throughout Marx's career.'[29] Lefebvre had Althusser's early writings on the young Marx in his sights in the foreword to the second edition of his *Critique de la vie quotidienne Vol.1*, written in 1958:

> Why was the concept of alienation treated with such mistrust? Why was the Hegelianism in Marx's early writings rejected? Where does the tendency to separate Marx from his roots, and his mature scientific works from his early writings, come from? Or the tendency to date and determine the formation of Marxism from his political writings? Analysis shows that behind all this lies that murky mixture of simplistic empiricism, pliant subjectivism and doctrinaire, authoritarian dogmatism which is the philosophical basis of the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism.[30]

He would later describe Althusser as 'a neo-Stalinist ideologue',[31] his attitude to alienation as 'ridiculous',[32] whilst he saw Structuralism as 'an ideology of the dominant class, a scientific travesty

[28] See Gregory Elliot, *Althusser*, p.18.
[29] Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.7.
[30] Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 1991), p.53.
[31] Elden, p.25.
[32] Ibid., p.41.

of progressive thought'.[33] Lefebvre sought to rescue Marx from 'economism' and an economistic reading which suggested political economy had subsumed or superseded philosophy entirely. In an interview with Kristin Ross, Lefebvre acknowledged that Constant Nieuwenhuys's thought on the city expressed an affinity with his early volumes of *La Critique de la vie quotidienne* in their preoccupation with the environments encountered during the course of everyday existence. It was a transformation of this urban space in which both saw the possibility of a transformation of the social environment. Constant's writing on the situation would inform Lefebvre's theory of 'moments' as set out in *La somme et le reste* (1959).[34] In the third issue of the S.I.'s journal, an article entitled 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art' cited a text Lefebvre had written for the journal *Arguments* praising his critique of the art world whilst reproving the journal itself for 'neo-reformism' and being incapable of producing material of any novelty.[35] Though the article in *Internationale situationniste* also criticised what they saw as Lefebvre's naïve call for the supersession of philosophy — something they stated was an axiom of revolutionary thought since Marx wrote that philosophers had only interpreted the world, the point was to change it, in his *Theses on Feuerbach*[36] — such critical engagement was far more constructive than the unsubstantiated insult accorded the like of Althusser. In 1960, a short journal article sought to establish a relationship between the concept of the situation and Lefebvre's theory of 'moments'. 'Théorie des moments et construction des situations' begins by stating its intention to examine 'quel usage peut-on faire entre ces concepts pour réaliser les revendications communes?'[37] and proceeds into a largely sympathetic description of the 'moment' which nevertheless illustrates the distinction they sought to make between Lefebvre's concept and their notion of the constructed situation. For the Situationists, 'le "moment" est principalement temporel, il fait partie d'une zone de temporalité, non pure mais dominante. La situation, étroitement articulée dans le lieu, est complètement spatio-temporelle.' A situation was not only deemed to be specific to a

[33] Ibid., p.23. Elden refers to Lefebvre's collection of essays *Au-delà du structuralisme* (Paris: Anthropos, 1975).
[34] Kristin Ross, 'Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International', p.72.
[35] Authorship unattributed, 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art', *Internationale situationniste*, 3 (1959), 3-8 (p.5).
[36] Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, trans. by Cyril Smith, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/> [Accessed 30.10.2014].
[37] Authorship unattributed, 'Théorie des moments et construction des situations', *Internationale situationniste*, 4 (1960), 10-11 (p.10).

period of time but to the place in which it occurred. The situation is, by its very nature, unrepeatable whereas Lefebvre's concept was defined by the intervention of moments of 'jouissance' into the everyday. The Situationists illustrate this difference with reference to an example of one such moment of Lefebvre's, love:

> Lefebvre parle du 'moment de l'amour'. Du point de vue de la création des moments, du point de vue situationniste, il faut envisager le moment de tel amour, de l'amour de telle personne. Ce qui veut dire: de telle personne en de telles circonstances.[38]

Lefebvre conceives of the moment as instances of revelation of a recovered unity of life which the alienating forces of capital obscure. The situation, however, is constructed and defined by its resistance to the particular circumstances of the environment in which it takes place: 'Ce qui caractérisera la situation, c'est sa praxis meme, sa formation délibérée.'[39] Despite the apparent convergence on the two concepts, a convergence which permitted a critical exchange and Debord and Michelle Bernstein's friendship and collaboration with Lefebvre, a crucial difference is signalled in this early piece. Lefebvre's 'moment' is animated by the recovery of a lost unity of the everyday, as much of his work was instructed by the study of traditional, rural, ways of life.[40] This recovery, or return of an absolute value, a 'jouissance de la vie naturelle et sociale',[41] contrasts with the situation as something 'inséparable de sa consommation immédiate, comme valeur d'usage essentiellement étrangère à une conservation sous forme de marchandise'.[42]

Lefebvre and Debord collaborated and were friends between 1957 and 1962 before an acrimonious falling out amid accusations of plagiarism from the Situationists relating to a piece they had written together on the Paris Commune and other tumult of a more personal nature. Lefebvre himself described their association as a 'love story that ended badly, very badly'.[43] This description draws attention to the more personal nature of their friendship: theirs was not the typical relations of

[38] Ibid., p.11.
[39] Ibid.
[40] See Elden, pp.127-47.
[41] Henri Lefebvre, *La Somme et le reste* (Paris: La Nef, 1959), p.609.
[42] 'Théorie des moments et construction des situations', p.11.
[43] Kristen Ross, 'Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International', p.69.

'knowledge transfer' in lectures and seminars under the prism of the university but a more passionate, rather than professional, relationship. The piece on the Paris Commune that was to at least partly provoke their divorce was written with Debord and Bernstein during a countryside walk at Navarrenx, where Lefebvre owned a property, during a stay in which Lefebvre recalled considerable alcohol consumption. Despite Lefebvre's desire in the above cited interview to blame their falling out on Debord's penchant for purging as well as complicated private relations, there is scope for understanding the antipathy later displayed in writing as an expression of the Situationists' critique of institutional Marxism and academia. Simon Sadler argues that their fundamental disagreement was a question of revolutionary praxis.[44]

We have seen above how the Situationists distinguished between the situation and the moment is the former's construction as a coincidence of theory and practice, rather than a passively experienced 'moment'. Similarly, in an article in the first issue of *Internationale situationniste,* 'Thèses sur la révolution culturelle', Debord denounces Lefebvre's theorisation of a tendency he termed the 'revolutionary romantic' in a book co-written with Lucien Goldmann, Claude Roy and Tristan Tzara.[45] Lefebvre referred to an artistic response to the conflict between the 'progressive individual' and the world. This Romanticism was revolutionary, as opposed to its traditional association with bourgeois thought, owing to its reference to the 'possible' of the future. Debord criticised this notion for asserting that the identification of this conflict was sufficient to constitute revolutionary action in the cultural domain: 'Lefebvre renonce par avance à toute expérience de modification culturelle profonde en se satisfaisant d'un contenu: la conscience du possible-impossible (encore trop lointain), qui peut être exprimée sous n'importe quelle forme prise dans le cadre de la décomposition.'[46] Once again it is the relationship between theory and practice that Debord takes issue with in Lefebvre's work. That this tension can be simply expressed within the existing forms of cultural production means that it cannot constitute revolutionary action on its own. The university

[44] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (London: MIT Press, 1998), p.45.
[45] Henri Lefebvre, Lucien Goldmann, Claude Roy and Tristan Tzara, *Le romanticisme révolutionnaire* (Paris: La Nef, 1958). For an account of the Situationists engagement with Lefebvre which eagerly endorses the Romantic conception of the S.I., see Patrick Marcolini, 'L'Internationale situationniste et la querelle du romantisme révolutionniare', *Noesis*, 11 (2007), 31-46.
[46] Guy Debord, 'Thèses sur la révolution culturelle', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1958), 20-21 (p.21).

was another body which constituted this 'cadre de la décomposition'. Lefebvre invited Debord to speak at Le Centre d'études sociologiques on the topic of Surrealism, an incident recounted in the second issue of the journal under the title 'Suprême levée des défenseurs du surrealisme à Paris et révélation de leur valeur effective'.[47] Though present, Debord chose to address the crowd via a pre-recorded message which insulted the assembled surrealist sympathisers whilst the sound of a guitar played in the background. Sadler is correct to suggest that this tactic carries the implication that the academic arena and the form of address in this context was not the place in which Debord and the Situationists saw meaningful work in the direction of the revolution of everyday life. Lefebvre was ill and therefore absent that day, the *I.S.* article recounts. By 1964, however, after their rancorous split with Lefebvre, the ninth issue of *I.S.* began with an editorial entitled 'Maintenant l'I.S.' in which the group targeted heralded figures on the left:

> La critique révolutionnaire de toutes les conditions existantes n'a certes pas le monopole de l'intelligence, mais bien celui de son emploi. Dans la crise présente de la culture, de la société, ceux qui n'ont pas cet emploi de l'intelligence, n'ont, en fait, aucune sorte d'intelligence discernable. Cessez de nous parler de l'intelligence sans emploi, vous nous ferez plaisir. Pauvre Heidegger! Pauvre Lukàcs [sic]! Pauvre Sartre! Pauvre Barthes! Pauvre Lefebvre! […] Les spécialistes de la pensée ne peuvent plus être que des penseurs de la spécialisation.[48]

Lefebvre finds himself among the list of those castigated as specialists of thought. Specialisation is here inevitably linked with the above discussion of the social division of labour; when oppositional thought permits itself to become yet another realm of this division of labour, it functions comfortably within the spectacle, to be bought and sold as a commodity. This recuperation or co-option occurs in the realm of publishing when revolutionary ideas are expressed without the intention or endeavour to pursue these ideas in actions. Equally, the role of the academic, the teacher and researcher is implicated in this specialisation and division of labour for the Situationists. Lefebvre taught

[47] Authorship unattributed, 'Suprême levée des défenseurs du surréalisme à Paris et révélation de leur valeur effective', *Internationale situationniste*, 2 (1958), 32-33.
[48] Authorship unattributed, 'Maintenant l'I.S.', *Internationale situationniste*, 9 (1964), 3-5 (p.4).

throughout the sixties at the Universities of Strasbourg and Nanterre. It was at Lefebvre's former institution, Strasbourg University, a year after he had left for Paris, that a group of students who had read *Internationale situationniste* were elected to the students' union and commanded the yearly budget. After contacting the Paris-based Situationists, a tract entitled *De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier* (1966) was printed and disseminated around the university. The entire annual budget of the Strasbourg U.N.E.F was spent on the publication. The resulting scandal and court case has gone down in Situationist lore, a tale told frequently in accounts of the group's activities.[49] The text was a vitriolic attack on the institution of the university which rehearsed key elements of Debord's critique as it would appear a year later.

The above problematizing of the concept of 'intelligence' in connection with specialisation and the social division of labour calls to mind Jacques Rancière's *Le Maître Ignorant* (1987), in which he presents nineteenth century schoolmaster Joseph Jacotot's teaching style as presuming intellectual equality between the students and the teacher. Jacotot saw the traditional method of explanation by a 'knowledgeable' master to the uninitiated student as an unnecessarily hierarchical approach: 'Avant d'être l'acte du pédagogue, l'explication est le mythe de la pédagogie, la parabole d'un monde divisé en esprits savants et esprits ignorants, esprits mûrs et immatures, capables et incapables, intelligents et bêtes.'[50] Rancière instead proposes presupposing all human intelligence as equal, where proclamations of incapacity on behalf of the student, 'demonstrate a commitment on behalf of the student to the same logic as that of the arbitrary Platonic injunction that forbids the shoe-maker from thinking, the principle of specialisation.'[51] Intelligence therefore seems to be understood as a phenomenon bound to other social categories: one can demonstrate intelligence, the capacity to excel, within the realm of any specialisation but the 'use' of this capacity can only be demonstrated by opposing this specialisation of knowledge and activity that constitutes 'existing conditions'. The

[49] See for one example: Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), pp.200-06.
[50] Jacques Rancière, *Le Maître Ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle* (Paris: Fayard, 1987).
[51] Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.26.

Situationists and Rancière share this opposition to the principle of a socially distributed specialisation of activity, as well as the antipathy towards the instructive pedagogical mode: teaching under the hierarchical form of the university merely served to induct the student into the ways of the university itself and consequently in the ways of the 'existing conditions', in that the sole purpose of such an education is to prepare the student for 'work'. In *De la misère en milieu étudiant*, the disciplinary segregation of the university was first attacked as implicated in this specialisation: 'Toutes les analyses et études entreprises sur le milieu étudiant ont, jusqu'ici, négligé l'essentiel. Jamais elles ne dépassent le point de vue des spécialisations universitaires (psychologie, sociologie, économie), et demeurent donc: fondamentalement erronées.'[52] The Situationists here decry the narrow scope and methodologies which are dictated by the very social, economic and institutional forms that research should be critically examining. In an article on interdisciplinarity, cultural studies and queer theory, Lisa Downing refers to Michel Foucault's work on the disciplinary:

> The dissemination of a scholarly discipline, then, parallels the means of disciplining the population, since both operate by means of segregation, categorization, division — and divisiveness. In this sense, knowledge is implicated in, and works through, the operations of power.[53]

Whilst the Situationists took this relationship between power, knowledge and disciplinarity to be a function of specialisation, the social division of labour and capital, Downing seeks to defend the notion of interdisciplinarity against the relatively recent trend of its becoming an omnipresent platitude in the academia of today. Her call for a meaningful interdisciplinarity to be undertaken in its 'mobile, transformative and politicized forms'[54] echoes the Situationists' resistance to the tyranny of the commodity form's convention and orthodoxy. During the 1960s, whilst those such as Althusser attempted to acknowledge this state approved transmission of knowledge and critique these

[52] Mustapha Khayati, *De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier* (Strasbourg: U.N.E.F Strasbourg, 1966). Available online here: <https://infokiosques.net/lire.php?id_article=14> [Accessed 13 May 2016].
[53] Lisa Downing, 'Interdisciplinarity, Cultural Studies, Queer: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Contentions in France', *Paragraph*, 35.2 (July, 2012), 215-32 (pp.216-17).
[54] Ibid., p.218.

institutions from within, the Situationists saw institutionality itself as the cause of alienation. The process of a university education is held to be a mere induction into the obedient submission to the commodity form, rather than the opportunity for 'independent thought' it pretends to be. The function of the university is to train future functionaries for their future posts as managers in factories or offices. The Situationists cast the university as a training ground for future functionaries, where professors herd them into their eventual jobs. This instrumentalist notion of the university entails a similar concept of the alienation of knowledge as Debord describes in terms of labour. Rather than a study which can affect and improve the life of the student, the university provides a system of knowledge dissemination based on strict hierarchies and conventions. It is concerned with the reproduction of the same, according to the Situationist analysis. As labour serves the category of the economy, so the student's accumulation of knowledge serves to succeed in their exams. The sole purpose of these exams is to secure a role in the specialised division of labour above described and therefore perpetuate the logic of spectacle. The Strasbourg tract further denounces the students who continue to prize their education in these circumstances:

> Que l'Université soit devenue une organisation — institutionnelle — de l'ignorance, que la 'haute culture' elle-même se dissolve au rythme de la production en série des professeurs, que tous ces professeurs soient des crétins dont la plupart provoqueraient le chahut de n'importe quel public de lycée — L'étudiant l'ignore; et il continue d'écouter respectueusement ses maîtres, avec la volonté consciente de perdre tout esprit critique afin de mieux communier dans l'illusion mystique d'être devenu un 'étudiant', quelqu'un qui s'occupe sérieusement à apprendre un savoir sérieux, dans l'espoir qu'on lui confiera les vérités dernières.[55]

The Situationists abhor the student's capacity to romanticise, or to merely accept, his or her role as 'student'. Henri Lefebvre, for all his early affinities with the Situationists, remained in academia throughout the sixties and the Situationists' uncompromising condemnation of the 'professor', made him easier to break with. The above mocking description of 'serious' knowledge is reminiscent of

[55] Khayati, *De la misère en milieu étudiant.*

another of the figures of the intellectual left, Jean-Paul Sartre. In *L'Être et le néant* (1943), Sartre described what he termed, 'l'esprit de sérieux qui saisit les valeurs à partir du monde et qui réside dans la substantification rassurante et chosiste des valeurs.'[56] The Situationists appear to inherit Sartre's conception of bad faith in their condemnation of the unquestioning identification with one's role in the social whole. This 'spirit of seriousness' is a pernicious form of bad faith, a flight from man's inevitable freedom, as Sartre has it. The Situationists identify this seriousness as an internalisation of the values of the spectacle; in the case of the student, this means enthusiastically subscribing to their duty to inherit the knowledge passed down to them by their professors.[57]

The implied necessity of the relationship between teacher and student for the pursuit of this 'knowledge' creates what Oliver Davis calls a 'pedagogical temporality of delay: the time to act would never come, the inequalities which were to be eliminated would always remain in place.'[58] For Rancière, the primary aim of Althussser's criticism of humanistic readings of Marx was to ensure the institutional privilege of intellectuals by asserting the political necessity of his own 'scientific' work to workers' struggle.[59] His notion of 'theoretical practice' appealed to a great many Marxist scholars as it offered them a place within the revolution precisely as intellectuals.[60] Althusser held that *Capital* sought to understand social relations of production under capitalism within the context of the economic system and was therefore not a matter of interpretation but a scientific process of discovery. Such a process thus requires not only 'serious' study but the figure of the pedagogue able to instruct and pass on such scientific knowledge. Debord here outlines his critique of structuralism:

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[56] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p.75.
[57] This analysis has concentrated on Debord and the Situationists' critique of the alienation of knowledge in the university owing to the context of 1960s France. It should perhaps be obvious that such concerns seem prescient in the context of the neo-liberal university of the twenty-first century. Higher education, notably in the United Kingdom, has adopted with increasing vigour under consecutive governments of both the right and the left, a policy that prizes return on investment above all else. The success of a university is today measured financially or by league tables based on student numbers, number of graduates securing well-paid jobs etc. These league tables are designed to attract further students to the universities, in an essential tautology reminiscent of Debord's critique ('Le caractère fondamentalement tautologique du spectacle découle du simple fait que ses moyens sont en même temps son but'). This commodification and subsequent marketization, and the response to it, will be examined in Chapter Four as one arena of twenty-first century contestation.
[58] Davis, p.7
[59] Ibid., p.15.
[60] Ibid., p.6.

> L'affirmation de la stabilité définitive d'une courte période de gel du temps historique est la base indéniable, inconsciemment et consciemment proclamée, de l'actuelle tendance à une systématisation structuraliste. Le point de vue où se place la pensée anti-historique du structuralisme est celui de l'éternelle présence d'un système qui n'a jamais été créé et qui ne finira jamais.

The time for action would not come, for Debord, because structuralism is a symptom of the social conditions it endeavours to understand. It is the institutionality of structuralism, its reliance on the academy for a fertile ground to be read, taught, and reproduced that makes it a complacent form of middle class thought, one he further describes as: '[une] pensée intégralement enfoncée dans l'éloge émerveillé du système existant, ramène platement toute réalité à l'existence du système' (Thesis 201). Debord's presentation of dialectical theory emphasises fluidity in contrast to this perceived rigidity:

> Dans son style même, l'exposé de la théorie dialectique est un scandale et une abomination selon les règles du langage dominant, et pour le goût qu'elles ont éduqué, parce que dans l'emploi positif des concepts existants, il inclut du même coup l'intelligence de leur fluidité retrouvée, de leur destruction nécessaire. (Thesis 205)

Debord again alludes to Marx, but here 'fluidité' replaces 'négation' in the postface to the second German edition of *Capital*. This fluidity is in contrast to the 'temps gelé' that the spectacle engenders and structuralism, in Debord's analysis, mimics. Rather than relying on a notion of history as a progressive process that the spectacle impedes, this notion of fluidity implies recognition of the contingency and particularity of the spectacle's construction at the same time as urging action in the present. This is not necessarily done in the name of any 'Human' or unalienated 'being' but in acknowledgment of the potential of infinite other possibilities. It is in the work of Raoul Vaneigem that we see the rather more Romantic image of the Situationists borne out. He is less reticent than Debord to make mention of human nature and his lyrical prose provides a stark contrast to the icily clinical tone of *La Société du Spectacle*. Vaneigem frequently discusses the project of a 'homme

total',[61] issues rallying cries around notions of 'humanité' and 'créativité', and demonstrates a passionate and poetic style:

> La barque de l'amour se brise contre la vie courante. Es-tu prêt, afin que jamais ton désir ne se brise, es-tu prêt à briser les récifs du vieux monde? Il manque aux amants d'aimer leur plaisir avec plus de conséquence et de poésie… Nous voici quelques-uns épris du plaisir d'aimer sans réserve, assez passionnément pour offrir à l'amour le lit somptueux d'une révolution.[62]

Such passages exemplify the Situationists' predilection for putting forth galvanising ideas in an attractive fashion and asserts their status not as a philosophical 'movement' or tendency within academic Marxism but as a revolutionary avant-garde who sought to change the world in which they lived. This can be contrasted directly with Althusser, as we have seen in connection with Rancière. Perhaps the best examples of the Situationists' effective sloganeering and incitement to revolt surround the events of May 1968, whilst *les événements* proved equally significant for Althusseriansim in a very different way. Many of Vaneigem's phrases adorned walls in Paris throughout the month of May: 'Nous ne voulons pas d'un monde où la certitude de ne pas mourir de faim s'échange contre le risque de mourir d'ennui', ran one such graffito.[63] Another such popular refrain at the time, it would not be unreasonable to surmise, saw Althusser as one of its targets:

> Ceux qui parlent de révolution et de lutte de classes sans se référer explicitement à la vie quotidienne, sans comprendre ce qu'il y a de subversive dans l'amour et de positif dans le refus des contraintes, ceux-là ont dans la bouche un cadavre.[64]

Indeed, it is the events of May which are often associated with the discrediting of Althusserianism. Many members of the Situationist International took part in the occupation of the Sorbonne and formed the Conseil pour le Maintien des Occupations, holding various debates, attempting to form

[61] Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p.104.
[62] Ibid., p.52.
[63] Ibid., p.20.
[64] Ibid., p.32. Althusser only referred explicitly to 'everyday life' critically in 'Marxisme et humanisme' as an example of where ideological concepts such as humanism and ethics lead Marxist theory. See Althusser, *Pour Marx*, p.239.

some kind of organisation among the students before Debord became frustrated with what he perceived to be the student movements' inherent conservatism, as we shall see in Chapter Four. Whilst Debord's *La Société du spectacle* may be a work of jargon heavy 'high theory', it carried none of the institutionally-mortgaged baggage of salary and prestige, therefore none of the attendant air of hypocrisy in the context of the May events. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following chapter on détournement, Rancière levels a similar charge of pedagogic didacticism at the Situationists.[65]

The turn of phrase employed repeatedly by Debord and the Situationists, in describing the 'essentially scandalous truth' of their writings and here the 'scandal' of dialectical theory, reveals a great deal about the manner in which they saw their thought acting in practice. The word 'scandale' derives from the Septuagint Greek *skandalon*, a rendering of the term for 'stumbling block' in the Hebrew Bible, *mikshowl*.[66] In an idiomatic usage in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, a stumbling block is a behavior or attitude that leads another person into sin. As noted above, the Situationists saw the social orthodoxy established under the spectacle as the modern incarnation of the religious worldview. They sought to lead others into 'sin' in resisting the hierarchies and orthodoxies to which the individual is submitted in everyday life. Understood as this inducement to sin, Situationist theory becomes radically different in conception to the work of Althusser, Lefebvre, or Sartre. The Situationists' critique of professionalised Marxism emerges from their inducement to 'sin' against all varieties of given social roles. This raises the question of the Situationists' expectation of those within the established hierarchies. What of the student? What, for that matter, do they expect of the proletariat? Debord's final 'thesis on cultural revolution' perhaps demonstrates how their uncompromising notion of the necessity of political praxis ultimately condemns the Situationists themselves: 'Nous serons des "romantiques révolutionnaires", au sens de Lefebvre, exactement dans la mesure de notre échec.'[67] Their failure to 'surmonter notre désaccord avec le monde' and to bring about the 'destruction extrême de toutes les formes de pseudo-communication,

[65] Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé*.
[66] Collation of online dictionary definitions and etymologies for 'Stumbling block'. Availabe online here: <http://www.memidex.com/stumbling-block> [Accessed 30.10.2014].
[67] Debord, 'Thèses sur la révolution culturelle', p.21.

pour parvenir un jour à une communication réelle directe (dans notre hypothèse d'emploi de moyens culturels supérieurs: la situation construite)',[68] potentially affords their writings an ongoing pertinence to cultural critique but it also testifies that the Situationist International itself 'failed' as a revolutionary group. What amounts to Debord's eventual admission of his and the group's Romanticism demonstrates an eschatological approach to their praxis: had they succeeded, had those weeks in May fulfilled their promise and brought revolution to fruition, then their project could hardly have been conceived as mere academic or aesthetic contemplation of the possible. This early declaration comes across as a utopian commitment, justifying their actions in the name of a liberating moment to come. Moreover, any labour not deemed by their judgment to be immediately intended to bring about this utopia is condemned. In the following section, I will attempt to elucidate this seemingly intractable sectarian zealotry in connection with the critique of modernity formulated by the Frankfurt School.

Art, Leisure, Consumerism

One important elaboration of Marx's theory Debord would attempt in *La Société du spectacle* and which formed a mainstay of Situationist criticism throughout the group's existence was the extension of the rule of the commodity and concomitant alienation of the individual subject into the realm of 'leisure'. That is, time not engaged in production but that which is supposedly 'free'. Writing in the context of the *trente glorieuses* — the thirty or so years of post-war economic growth in France and much of Western Europe which saw the automobile and television in particular increasingly identified as the spoils of a burgeoning consumer society — the Situationists decried the direction of this economic and technological development as antithetical to human desires.[69] Ivan Chtcheglov's

[68] Ibid.
[69] For one account of the post-war economic boom in France, see Maurice Larkin, *France since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1996* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), Ch.10, 'Economic Growth and Social Change 1947-1973', pp.176-223.

Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau, originally written in 1953 and reprinted in the first issue of *I.S.* lamented that:

> Une maladie mentale a envahi la planète: la banalisation. Chacun est hypnotisé par la production et le confort — tout-à-l'égout, ascenseur, salle de bains, machine à laver.
>
> Cet état de fait qui a pris naissance dans une protestation contre la misère dépasse son but lointain — libération de l'homme des soucis matériels — pour devenir une image obsédante dans l'immédiat. Entre l'amour et le vide-ordure automatique la jeunesse de tous les pays a fait son choix et préfère le vide-ordure.[70]

Chtcheglov's words appear to espouse a repudiation of modern technologies which is uncharacteristic of the early Situationist enthusiasm for technical advance and its emancipatory potential. What is here important for Situationist theory as it would develop throughout the sixties however, is the idea of the course of this advance far exceeding its goal of liberating mankind from material hardship. Fourteen years later, Debord theorises this excess in an era which affords greater independence from the struggle to survive, but does so only by condemning the individual to a different form of enslavement:

> La croissance économique libère les sociétés de la pression naturelle qui exigeait leur lutte immédiate pour la survie, mais alors c'est de leur libérateur qu'elles ne sont pas libérées. [...] L'économie transforme le monde, mais le transforme seulement en monde de l'économie. La pseudo-nature dans laquelle le travail humain s'est aliéné exige de poursuivre à l'infini son *service*, et ce service, n'étant jugé et absous que par lui-même, en fait obtient la totalité des efforts et des projets socialement licites, comme ses serviteurs. L'abondance des marchandises, c'est-à-dire du rapport marchand, ne peut être plus que la *survie augmentée*. (Thesis 40)

[70] Ivan Chtcheglov (under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain), 'Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau', *Internationale situationniste,* 1 (1958), 15-20 (p.17).

This notion of an augmented or heightened level of survival suggests the extension of Marx's theory of commodity relations according to the technical capabilities of capitalism a century on from the first publication of *Capital*. Debord diagnoses a solicitous spectacle which entreats the individual to become complicit in his or her exploitation. The rewards of consumerism afford the worker the trappings of luxury in the form of the commodity. It is a seductive ruse when the technological means at the disposal of the society of the spectacle permit a near permanent saturation of everyday life.

This aspect of the theory of spectacle has distinct affinities with the critique Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) formulated of the 'culture industry' in their classic of twentieth-century Marxian critical theory, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Adorno and Horkheimer were two of the most prominent members of the Frankfurt School for Social Research, with which Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich and Walter Benjamin were also associated. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they contended that the rational project of enlightenment thought comprised self-destructive tendencies from its very inception. The identification of these inherent contradictions constituted Adorno and Horkheimer's project 'to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.'[71] Like Debord, Adorno and Horkheimer criticized the domination of the commodity over mankind, having 'extended its arthritic influence over all aspects of social life'.[72] This was nowhere more in evidence than in the realm of what they called the culture industry, which as early as the 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer identified as the commodification of cultural forms submitted to the instrumental logic of capitalism. They argued that the industrialisation of culture necessitates the homogenisation of the forms of artistic production. Whilst what Adorno and Horkheimer call 'autonomous art' has a critical capacity owing to its independence from the rationality of society, film, television and magazines come in pre-packaged consumable units which function seamlessly within the capitalist status quo. The predictable and formulaic character of the culture industry is its defining attribute: in the same way that Debord would

[71] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.xiv.
[72] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), p.28. Translation selected above previous version, all further citations are from Stanford version.

contend that the spectacle sought to reproduce the existing society, Adorno and Horkheimer proclaim that 'culture today is infecting everything with sameness'.[73]

The culture industry, the production and dissemination of art forms as commodities, comes to dominate capitalist production in both the Frankfurt School analysis and Debord's. As Anselm Jappe points out, however, this concurrence cannot be considered in terms of 'influence' as there can be no question of Debord having read Adorno and Horkheimer's work before the publication of *La Société du spectacle*: no book of Adorno's was translated into French before 1974, two years after the dissolution of the Situationist International.[74] Debord nevertheless describes the shift towards an economy of cultural production in a distinctly similar manner to Horkheimer and Adorno:

> La culture devenue intégralement marchandise doit aussi devenir la marchandise vedette de la société spectaculaire […] la culture doit tenir dans la seconde moitié de ce siècle le rôle moteur dans le développement de l'économie, qui fut celui de l'automobile dans sa première moitié, et des chemins de fer dans la seconde moitié du siècle précédent. (Thesis 193)

This development necessitates a modification in the role of the proletariat in the commodity economy: 'À ce point de la "deuxième révolution industrielle", la consommation aliénée devient pour les masses un devoir supplémentaire à la production aliénée' (Thesis 42). The continued growth of the economy, an indispensable precondition of capitalist organisation, now requires a further service of workers: this is the Situationists' account of the emergence of the consumer society. Debord quotes Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* directly in expounding his elaboration of the latter's theory of the proletarian as exploited during the process of production:

> Alors que dans la phase primitive de l'accumulation capitaliste 'l'économie politique ne voit dans le *prolétaire* que *l'ouvrier*', qui doit recevoir le minimum indispensable pour la conservation de sa force de travail, sans jamais le considérer 'dans ses loisirs, dans son

[73] Horkheimer and Adorno, p.94.
[74] See Anselm Jappe, 'Sic Transit Gloria Artis: The End of Art for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord', *SubStance*, 28.3 (1999), 102-28 (p.127). Furthermore, the Bibliotheque nationale de France's archive features an extensive catalogue of Debord's reading notes in which Adorno is nowhere to be found.

> humanité', cette position des idées de la classe dominante se renverse aussitôt que le degré d'abondance atteint dans la production des marchandises exige un surplus de collaboration de l'ouvrier. Cet ouvrier, soudain lavé du mépris total qui lui est clairement signifié par toutes les modalités d'organisation et surveillance de la production, se retrouve chaque jour en dehors de celle-ci apparemment traité comme une grande personne, avec une politesse empressée, sous le déguisement du consommateur. Alors l'*humanisme de la marchandise* prend en charge 'les loisirs et l'humanité' du travailleur, tout simplement parce que l'économie politique peut et doit maintenant dominer ces sphères *en tant qu'économie politique*. Ainsi 'le reniement achevé de l'homme' a pris en charge la totalité de l'existence humaine. (Thesis 43)

Herein lies the specificity of the era of spectacle over and above Marx's analysis of a capitalism which deprives the workers of the spoils of their labour. The spectacle requires the cooperation of a proletariat whom it continues to deprive of participation in the organisation of their everyday life which would constitute, for Debord, their fulfillment. It is therefore, 'une guerre de l'opium permanente pour faire accepter l'identification des biens aux marchandises' (Thesis 44). This notion of the spectacle which seeks to engender identification on behalf of the individual suggests an attempt to influence and to manipulate their consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer offer little or no concept of what a human consciousness free of the commodity's domination might look like, instead prizing intellectual independence as their ultimate pursuit, an independence the culture industry impedes: 'the countless agencies of mass production and its culture impress standardised behaviour on the individual as the only natural, decent, and rational one.'[75] They describe this 'impression' of behaviour in greater detail at the end of the Culture Industry essay:

> The way in which the young girl accepts and performs the obligatory date, the tone of voice used on the telephone in the most intimate situations, the choice of words in conversation, indeed, the whole inner life compartmentalised according to the categories of vulgarised

[75] Horkheimer and Adorno, p.135.

> depth psychology, bears witness to the attempt to turn oneself into an apparatus meeting the requirements of success, an apparatus which, even in its unconscious impulses, conforms to the model presented by the culture industry. The most intimate reactions of human beings have become so entirely reified, even to themselves, that the idea of everything peculiar to them survives only in extreme abstraction: personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions.[76]

It is the ubiquity and the uniformity of the culture industry which creates the possibility of this colonisation of the 'inner life'. The culture industry is responsible for distributing the criteria of 'success', of the exemplary mode of conduct between people (just as we have seen Debord describe the spectacle as 'un rapport social entre des personnes médiatisé par des images' (Thesis 4)). This concept of the manipulation or conditioning on behalf of the culture industry is a problematic one as the question of an individual's identification with a 'falsehood' could imply an entirely subjective and immeasurable concept of 'truth'. Indeed, Jappe takes this further by contending that the critique of alienation in Debord is such that it precludes understanding the spectacle as a form of influence which elicits the collaboration of the individual by concocting enticements, instead portraying a total perversion of consciousness, reducing the 'spectator' to nothing more than an instrument of capital:

> What seems entirely to be absent from either *History and Class Consciousness* or *The Society of the Spectacle* is any hint that the subject might be under attack, within itself, from forces of alienation capable of conditioning its unconscious in such a way as to cause it to identify actively with the system in which it finds itself.[77]

The implication being therefore that neither Debord, nor the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* 'doubt for a moment that a "healthy", non-reified subjectivity could exist' in opposition to the alienated and that 'Debord's critique of the spectacle seems to resuscitate the need for an identical subject-object, as when he evokes "life", understood as a fluid state in

[76] Ibid., p.136.
[77] Jappe, *Guy Debord*, p.27.

contradistinction to the spectacle's "congealed form" or its "visible freezing of life"'.[78] Debord certainly has frequent recourse to describing the spectacle as a 'falsification' owing to the totalising nature of his rhetoric. This notion of an 'identical subject-object' comes from Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Jappe accuses Debord of inheriting this idealism. Despite acknowledging Debord's conception of the human as irrevocably bound to time and history, Jappe stops short of acknowledging that this precludes any unification of 'subject' and 'object', by conceiving of human knowledge as constantly to be remade:

> Sans doute, le pseudo-besoin imposé dans la consommation moderne ne peut être opposé à aucun besoin ou désir authentique qui ne soit lui-même façonné par la société et son histoire. Mais la marchandise abondante est là comme la rupture absolue d'un développement organique des besoins sociaux. Son accumulation mécanique libère un artificiel illimité, devant lequel le désir vivant reste désarmé. La puissance cumulative d'un artificiel indépendant entraîne partout la falsification de la vie sociale. (Thesis 68)

'Pseudo-needs' the spectacle conjures to induce the spectator's fidelity to the rule of the commodity (be they actual physical commodities, a car or the latest fashionable item of clothing, or abstract notions of social standing and 'success') are explicitly not the reverse of 'authentic desires' borne of a healthy, unalienated consciousness. All desires, Debord concedes, are socially and historically constructed but, where they coincide with the perpetuation of the hierarchisation of the commodity economy, they must be opposed. In some respects, Debord is here far closer to Adorno than to Lukács. Susan Buck-Morss argues, in her analysis of Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School that this subject-object identification is the point at which Adorno broke with Lukács's conflation of the proletarian consciousness and 'truth'.[79] Reading Debord as preserving this identification permits the characterisation of Situationist theory as idealist and therefore open to charges of a reductive humanist essentialism or a teleological 'faith' in the process of 'History' as agent. Buck-Morss also describes how Adorno rejected the traditional Marxist conception of the

[78] Jappe, 'Sic Transit Gloria Artis', p.115.
[79] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p.23.

proletariat as motor of history, which leads us to consider the role of the proletariat in Debord's theory, which is perhaps less clear cut than it would initially appear.

Debord and the Situationists explicitly invoke the proletariat as the revolutionary class whose ascent onto the historical stage would overcome the rule of the commodity.[80] Debord, as Jappe rightly notes, however, is prone to vacillation in his characterisation of the proletariat: at once casting it the traditional Marxist sense of the workers who sell their labour and as the entirety of humanity who are deprived of 'activity' and 'life', enslaved to the commodity by the spectacle.[81] The notion of proletarianisation as an expansive process suggests that *all* individuals find themselves in the proletarianised state by living their life under the totalising dominion of the spectacle. The proletariat traditionally defined derived their identity from their labour: it was they who produced the material transformation of nature under capitalist relations of production only to have the fruits of this labour expropriated by the bourgeoisie. What was expropriated from the proletariat was their access to 'life' itself owing to the domination of the commodity economy over all human activity. If this is the case, then those previously designated the bourgeois must also have their activity equally expropriated: 'Ce prolétariat est objectivement renforcé par le mouvement de disparition de la paysannerie, comme par l'extension de la logique du travail en usine qui s'applique à une grande partie des "services" et des professions intellectuelles' (Thesis 114). Urbanisation incorporates the peasantry into the proletarait, whilst the extension of the logic of the factory to the office (as this formulation of Debord's might be updated) reiterates the process of 'proletarianisation' described in the earlier thesis. The Situationist analysis of class, then, seems fluid and it is therefore difficult to understand revolution as conceptualised by the Situationists in terms of class warfare, despite their frequent invocation of the proletariat.

The question of consumerism further obscures the identity of the proletariat. If their (albeit 'falsified') consciousness leads them to participate in the prolongation of the reign of the commodity, then their inherent antagonism to capitalism is called into question:

[80] See Chapter Four of *La Société du spectacle*: 'Le prolétariat comme sujet et comme représentation'.
[81] Jappe, *Guy Debord*, p.38.

> Dans ce développement complexe et terrible qui a emporté l'époque des luttes de classes vers de nouvelles conditions, le prolétariat des pays industriels a complètement perdu l'affirmation de sa perspective autonome et, en dernière analyse, *ses illusions*, mais non son être. Il n'est pas supprimé. Il demeure irréductiblement existant dans l'aliénation intensifiée du capitalisme moderne: il est l'immense majorité des travailleurs qui ont perdu tout pouvoir sur l'emploi de leur vie, et qui, *dès qu'ils le savent*, se redéfinissent comme le prolétariat, le négatif à l'œuvre dans cette société. (Thesis 114)

This proletariat, which seems fungible in its constituents of any and all classes as previously defined, is opposed to the society of the spectacle as a whole. What Debord declares necessary is a *prise de conscience* on behalf of this broadly conceived proletariat: they must realise the need to resist the alienated consciousness of the spectacle. The implication that the contemplative step of 'knowing' or realising their proletarian state sees the worker ascend to the historical stage somewhat bypasses the question of practice and organisation. This conception of the proletariat seems to largely ignore the existence of real material poverty and inequality; the discussion of 'survival' being surmounted and privation existing predominantly in its 'enriched' guise equally fails to take this into account. Theirs is something of a complacent disposition towards a phenomenon which unquestionably remains a social ailment today, both globally and within the 'developed' world itself.

This contemplative notion of the proletariat also problematizes the Situationist endorsement of workers' councils as a post-revolutionary form of government. The incongruence of the rhetorical invocation of a traditionally conceived proletariat and the abstract theorisation of a proletarianised population renders the question of post-capitalist organisation difficult. The most extensive theoretical meditation on the workers' council in Debord's *La Société du spectacle* runs as follows:

> C'est le lieu où les conditions objectives de la conscience historique sont réunies; la réalisation de la communication directe *active*, où finissent la spécialisation, la hiérarchie et la séparation, où les conditions existantes ont été transformées 'en conditions d'unité'. Ici le sujet prolétarien peut émerger de sa lutte contre la contemplation: sa conscience est égale à

> l'organisation pratique qu'elle s'est donnée, car cette conscience même est inséparable de l'intervention cohérente dans l'histoire. (Thesis 116)

Specialisation, hierarchy and separation are obliterated by the workers' council; in 'direct', 'active' communication, the council provides 'unitary conditions' for the 'proletarian subject' to emerge from the fight against 'contemplation' and ascend to the plane of 'historical' action. The thesis brings together a considerable catalogue of the terms used by Debord to denounce the spectacle and proclaims their obliteration in favour of an equally lengthy résumé of the affirmative categories of Debord's theorisation. Though we may seem once again to be in the presence of a Lukácsian subject-object, the kingdom of the 'healthy subjectivity', passages such as this, and characterisations of Debord and the Situationists such as this which ultimately reduce them to this position, disregard the extent to which Debord saw his work not as a theoretical framework for revolutionary action, but as a prelude to this revolutionary action itself by seeking to provoke such a *prise de conscience*.

Debord's theses on détournement (which will be looked at in detail in Chapter Two) saw him attempt to establish a theoretical basis for an 'insurrectional style'. Debord's description of critical theory states that, 'il n'est pas une négation du style, mais le style de la négation.' This chiasmus, particularly in the form of the inversion of the genitive, was a rhetorical device employed frequently by the Situationists. Chiastic structure is a literary technique which dates back to the ancient Greek study of rhetoric and was also common in the ancient Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Qur'an.[82] Debord describes how this device was used by both Hegel and Marx, its purpose being to demonstrate the fluidity of words and their meanings as well as ideas and the concepts behind them. The negation described above in terms of style and this demonstration of the perpetual pliability of words and concepts seeks to oppose the spectacle by exalting everything the spectacle is not, any desire or action which is destructive to the preservation of existing hierarchies. Even the concept of situation and most especially the endorsement of councilism are mere vestiges of a theory, the former constituting no more than the negative of spectacle, casually theorised in some

[82] See *Chiasmus and Culture*, ed. by Boris Wiseman and Anthony Paul (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014).

Lettrist and early Situationist writings then virtually jettisoned altogether by the mid-sixties. Debord states that 'La *vérité* de cette société n'est rien d'autre que la *négation* de cette société' (Thesis 199), by which we should understand that his model of intellectual and political activism begins exclusively negatively, that is to say, critically. In this way, it recalls apophatic, 'negative' theology, the *via negativa* that sought to describe the existence of God by virtue of what He is not. Jacques Derrida describes negative theology, a concept with which his thought came to be associated, as 'a language that does not cease testing the very limits of language, and exemplarily those of propositional, theoretical, or constative language',[83] in a formulation reminiscent of Debord on the insubordination of words and the Situationists' uncompromising critique of academic theory. In the same essay, Derrida describes negative theology as 'paradoxical hyperbole',[84] which is perhaps an interesting perspective on Situationist theory; a theoretical discourse which denounces the spectacle in its entirety whilst acknowledging that nothing can exist independently or outside of social and cultural mediation and does so with a frequent and extravagant rhetorical violence.

Buck-Morss describes how philosophy was criticism and negation for Adorno, whilst 'both philosophy and art had a moral-pedagogic function, in the service of politics not as manipulative propaganda, but rather as teaching by example.'[85] For Adorno, writing itself was praxis, in a self-legitimising formulation much like Althusser's 'theoretical practice'. Just as he contended that the true work of art derived its critical capacity from its complete independence from material concerns — praising its status as a separate sphere — he espoused 'non-participation': he insisted on the freedom of the intellectual from Party control, indeed from all direct concern as to the effect of his work upon the public, while at the same time maintaining that valid intellectual activity was revolutionary in itself.'[86] Adorno did nothing to stop police evicting students occupying the Frankfurt Institute in 1969; he had little or no hope in the students' political activism, in contrast to the Situationists' frequently stated revolutionary ambitions and their involvement in May '68. Whereas,

[83] Jacques Derrida, 'Post Scriptum: Aporia, Ways and Voices', in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1992), pp.283-322 (p.299).
[84] Ibid., p.305.
[85] Buck-Morss, p.124.
[86] Ibid., p.31.

for Adorno, an 'autonomous' art and independent intellectual inquiry were the limits of possible resistance to the status quo, the Situationists' denunciation of all forms of spectacular knowledge held that art and philosophy were no different: both required 'suppression and realisation' and thus no concept of 'validity' could avoid implying a spectacular hierarchisation of knowledge. Though both Adorno and Debord criticised Lukács' commitment to the Communist party — as Debord wrote: 'Lukàcs [sic] vérifie au mieux la règle fondamentale qui juge tous les intellectuels de ce siècle: ce qu'ils *respectent* mesure exactement leur propre réalité *méprisable*' (Thesis 112) — Adorno, in his fetishisation of 'intellectual independence', upheld the validity of philosophy and art as separate, autonomous realms. The writings of Debord and the Situationists respected or affirmed nothing other than the rejection of all pre-established cultural forms and set about a project of engendering such a *prise de conscience* on behalf of everyone else. The Situationist definition of détournement, presented in the first issue of their journal, declared that there could be no Situationist painting or music, only a Situationist use of these means in the form of 'educative propaganda'; it is tempting to consider their theoretical writings in these terms. In Chapter Two I wish to examine the pedagogic and propagandistic elements of détournement, whilst in Chapter Three I will seek to examine the ethical nature of the *prise de conscience* that their theory seems to imply.

Jappe contends that the S.I. refused to proselytize, in contrast to this characterisation of their works as best understood as propaganda and seduction: 'In sharp contrasts to organisations of "militants", the S.I. not only refused to proselytize, it also made entry into the group particularly difficult: one of the conditions required was to be "possessed of genius" (IS, 9/43)!'[87] Though they did not seek to recruit members in ever greater numbers, they certainly proselytised their cause and were not shy of referring to their work as propaganda in pursuit of this goal. Lukács famously repudiated *History and Class Consciousness*, in a preface to the 1967 edition, where he described the identical subject-object that Jappe sees Debord as inheriting as a 'fundamental and crude error' which he says 'certainly contributed greatly to the book's success'.[88] Such notions, along with those such as

[87] Jappe, *Guy Debord*, p.94.
[88] Gyorgy Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1971) p.xliv.

'humanity' and 'life', which Jappe criticises in Situationist theory, are often employed as rhetorically expedient: attractive notions that clothe their writings within the intellectual history of the past just as the barricade served as an emblem of previous revolutionary struggles during May.[89] By understanding Situationist theory first and foremost as a provocation rather than an exposition in coherent theoretical discourse, what Jappe discerns as this inheritance from Lukács might better be explained as an opposition to that which exists. As Debord writes:

> Les 'sociétés froides' sont celles qui ont ralenti à l'extrême leur part d'histoire; qui ont maintenu dans un équilibre constant leur opposition à l'environnement naturel et humain, et leurs oppositions internes… Dans chacune de ces sociétés, une structuration définitive a exclu le changement. Le conformisme absolu des pratiques sociales existantes, auxquelles se trouvent à jamais identifiées toutes les possibilités humaines, n'a plus d'autre limite extérieure que la crainte de retomber dans l'animalité sans forme. Ici, pour rester dans l'humain, les hommes doivent rester les mêmes. (Thesis 130)

What Debord denounces is the return of the same, the perceived immutability of economic and cultural organisation. The idea of 'human possibilities' need not seek to designate an identical subject-object or 'unalienated', 'healthy' consciousness but rather seek to name a desirable concept in the direction of social change. Likewise, Debord's condemnation of 'le temps général de la société, ne signifiant que les intérêts spécialisés qui le constituent, n'est qu'un temps particulier' (Thesis 146) need not invoke a Hegelian teleology of history, but instead denounces a particular form of social organisation which serves particular interests. To quote Henri Lefebvre's account of 'dialectical method', it is possible to read his assessment of the infinite task of criticism as the ultimate conclusion that Situationist theory presents but cannot allow itself to admit owing to the avowedly 'political' nature of their goals:

[89] See Keith Reader, 'The Symbolic Violence of the May 1968 Events in France', in *Violence and Conflict in Modern French Culture*, ed. by Renate Gunter and Jan Windebank (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 57-69.

> Dialectical method excludes the possibility that there can be nothing more to say about the human or about any domain of human activity. On the contrary, it supposes that the knowledge of man and his realization are mutually inseparable and constitute a total process. To penetrate ever more deeply into the content of life, to seize it in its shifting reality, to be ever more lucid about the lessons it has to teach us — this is the essential precept of research.[90]

Whilst this may indeed be the aim of research, it constitutes an implicit renunciation of praxis, of action and of the struggle for immediate social change (as opposed to a pedagogy of delay). The tactical invocation of a rhetoric of a revolutionary utopianism carries with it a galvanising potential for action in the here and now, and it is this which the Situationists saw their work as pursuing.

Technology and Desire

In order to better understand this mode of theory-as-rhetoric, it is worth examining the Situationists' writings on the technological and its role in the shaping of desire. Debord's embellishment of Marx's work hinges on the technological development which took place over the intervening century between their respective times of writing. By examining Debord and the Situationists' understanding of the technological, we can better understand both Debord's relationship to Marx and the theoretical propositions made. The acceleration of scientific progress and concomitant technical development was rapid during the first half of the twentieth century and has, of course, continued since Debord's time of writing. Debord and the Situationists' analysis of this changing environment reveals both a striking pertinence of their thought to the contemporary moment and, inevitably, certain limits to the theory of spectacle's enduring relevance. This section will offer a critique of the Situationist conceptualisation of the technological alongside consideration of Marx and the more recent

[90] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p.182.

theorisations of philosopher Bernard Stiegler's technics, further demonstrating the incompatibility of Situationist theory with metaphysical or humanistic readings.

There is a distinct ambivalence throughout the Situationists' corpus towards the question of technology. The Situationists' writings demonstrate an equivocal prognosis concerning the emancipatory potential of technological advance. In the 1950s, the early and pre-Situationist movement was characterised by experimentation within the urban milieu in the form of the *dérive*, *psychogéographie* and *urbanisme unitaire*. These investigations reach their futuristic apogee in Constant Nieuwenhuys's plans, sketches, manifestos and models for 'New Babylon'— a utopian city of the future where 'constructed situations' could be realised. Helicopters were to fly above as road and rail operated beneath a city-on-stilts.[91] In the first issue of the journal *Internationale situationniste*, an article entitled 'Positions situationnistes sur la circulation' went as far as to assert that:

> Ceux qui croient l'automobile éternelle ne pensent pas, même d'un point de vue étroitement technique, aux autres formes de transport futures. Par exemple, certains des modèles d'hélicoptères individuels qui sont actuellement expérimentés par l'armée des États-Unis seront probablement répandus dans le public avant vingt ans.[92]

This is perhaps one of Debord's less prescient assertions yet displays a belief in the radical potential for the transformation of everyday life in the second half of the century.[93] More explicitly optimistically, Debord would go on to write in the next issue: 'L'automatisation de la production et la socialisation des biens vitaux réduiront de plus en plus le travail comme nécessité extérieur, et donneront enfin la liberté complète à l'individu.'[94] He posits that technological development not only

[91] Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon: art et utopie, textes situationnistes* (Paris: Editions Cercle d'Art, 1997).
[92] Guy Debord, 'Positions situationnistes sur la circulation', *Internationale situationniste*, 3 (1959), 36-37 (p.36).
[93] This quotation also prefigures a now widely held view that technologies first developed for military uses are later harnessed for consumerism and the manufacture of consensus while still retaining the coercive militarism of their first form. For example, see Jonathan Crary, *24/7* (New York: Verso Books, 2013) and Armand Mattelart and André Vitalis, *Le Profilage des populations: du livret ouvrier au cybercontrôle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014).
[94]Authorship unattributed, 'Manifeste', *Internationale situationniste*, 4 (1960), 36-38 (p.36).

has the capacity to, but in fact will, liberate the individual from an alienated labour born of social necessity via automation. The same Debord, however, wrote contemptuously of 'la puérilité de l'optimisme technique' three years earlier.[95] By the same token, the Situationists railed against the post-war *trente glorieuses* era renovations of Paris and the *sarcellisation* of the banlieue. They took inspiration from the middle ages,[96] from the Native-American gift-giving ceremony of 'potlatch', to which the name of the International Lettrists' journal was given, as well as lauding the nomadism of gypsy peoples as an anthropological model to emulate for a post-revolutionary society. Debord's later filmic work and in particular his memoir *Panégyrique* (1989) carry a mood of elegiac nostalgia redolent of a writer-director fatigued of his times and pining for a bygone era.[97]

Patrick Marcolini rehearses these contradictions at length in his chapter on the 'Romantisme' of the S.I.[98] His contention is that the Romantic inspiration of the critique of spectacle and the Situationists' technological-utopian declarations can be likened to the latent and manifest content of a dream in Freudian analysis. Marcolini alleges that progessivist and productivist ideology of the post-war era was profoundly embedded in the consciousness of the time and that owing to this any critique of modernity was bound necessarily to defend this modernity itself. He alleges that this injunction was:

> redoublée par le marxisme régnant dans l'*intelligentsia* française d'après-guerre: un marxisme portant encore les stigmates des orthodoxies social-démocrate puis stalinienne, économiciste, productiviste à outrance, et vecteur d'une idéologie du progrès fatal de l'humanité. […] De

[95] Guy Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale' (1957), *Inter: art actuel*, 44 (1989), 1-11 (p.4).
[96] One particularly formative influence was the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's 1939 work *Homo Ludens* (London: Routledge 2002), an exploration of how 'play' had throughout human history formed a crucial part of societal organisation.
[97] Guy Debord, *Panégyrique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). Chapter Three, on his relationship with alcohol and the passing of time carries this mood in particular. However, this is not necessarily to be understood in line with Marcolini's accusations of an anti-technical Romanticism: his lamentation as to the deterioration of the quality of widely available wine and beer owes more to profit-maximising corporate industrialisation processes than technological advance in and of itself. For an account which emphasises Debord's mournful nostalgia, see Andy Merrifield, *Guy Debord* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).
[98] Marcolini, *Le Mouvement situationniste*, pp.173-202.

> façon assez étonnante, les situationnistes sont restés tributaires de ce marxisme-là, en dépit des critiques qu'ils lui ont dressés.[99]

Accusing the Situationists of such a profoundly incongruous automatism — that they were guilty of internalising the fundaments of an intellectual climate they so explicitly denounced — attributes great significance to the dubious question of influence. Marcolini's characterisation of Debord's post-Situationist output as anti-industrial and rather more 'mélancholique'[100] is less problematic than his desire to trace this unquestioningly to the Debord of *La Société du spectacle* and the *I.S.* journal, particularly as the smooth timeline between the 'young' and the 'mature' Debord is complicated by the latter's vacillation between embrace and denunciation of the technical throughout the fifties and sixties, rather than moving gradually from one to the other. Though Marcolini rightly identifies the common idealism between the two seemingly contradictory paths of a Romanticism bound to the notion of an inalienable human nature and utopian technical determinism, his attempt to impute both of these positions to the S.I. belies a more elusive and complex understanding of the human and the technical that can be drawn out from their work. Marcolini is quite accurate in describing Debord and the Situationists' critique of technology as 'inachevée',[101] less so in his reductive Freudian analogy of why this is:

> Les contradictions qui apparaissent dans la théorie et la pratique situationnistes peuvent donc être lues comme des formes imparfaites de compromis ou de conciliation entre ce tempérament romantique, pour lequel les formations sociales prémodernes servaient de repère imaginaire, et les interdits posés à ce type de sensibilité par le surmoi progressiste de leur temps.[102]

Rather than leaving the question of this ambiguity to insubstantial notions of temperament, sensibility or superegoic injunctions, it is the contention of what follows that the manifest tension present in Situationist writings on the technological can be traced to a theoretical impasse within Marx's work.

[99] Ibid., p.201.
[100] Ibid., p.202.
[101] Ibid., p.191.
[102] Ibid., p.201.

In order to explore this tension, then, it is necessary to once again return to Marx, this time via contemporary discussions of the philosophy of technology.

Derrida has described Marx as 'le premier penseur de la technique',[103] and in his book on 'originary technicity' — that is, the notion of the human and the technical as inseparable from the former's inception and that biological evolution occurs in a mutually shaped process alongside the technical — Arthur Bradley describes an aporia in Marx's thinking between this notion of originary technicity, moving beyond the Aristotelian notion of the technical as a tool employed by the human in the pursuit of pre-determined ends and the residual humanism of his German Idealist education.[104] Bradley refers to *Capital*'s meditations on thermo-dynamic theory, on workers' bodies being themselves technical entities, how labour and the transformation of our external environment in the development and use of machines in turn modifies our bodies. He argues that whilst Marx is the first to think the human and the technical together, the notions of a collective human essence of labour, a philosophy of alienation and a politics of emancipation prevent him from understanding the human in any other way than preceding or exceeding the technical.[105]

Bradley argues against philosopher Bernard Stiegler's contention that Marx simply upholds the Aristotelian instrumentalist conception of technics. Stiegler similarly accuses Debord of having overlooked the role of the technological in the process of proletarianisation.[106] Stiegler's primary contention is that the human and technics are constitutive of one another. What distinguishes the human is evolution by means other than genetics, the recording and distribution of experience in the form of technics, or 'la matière inorganique organisée'.[107] Stiegler calls this process of external evolution epiphylogenesis (as opposed to biological evolution: phylogenesis). Importantly, this externalisation signals, for Stiegler, the invention of the human. It is impossible, therefore, for

[103] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).
[104] Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: the Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.21-41.
[105] Ibid., p.40.
[106] Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.27.
[107] Bernard Stiegler, *La Technique et le temps I: La faute d'Epithemée* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).

Stiegler, to speak of any notion of the human which is not inherently bound to technics, whether in terms of consciousness or biology. It is the concept of tertiary memory, which emerges towards the end of the first volume of *La Technique et le temps* series, that is most crucial for Stiegler's relationship to Debord's spectacle. Referring to the recording and distribution of experience inscribed upon external objects, as opposed to primary memory (genetics) and secondary memory (lived experience), tertiary memory becomes a dominant theme, notably in the third volume, *Le Temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être.* The externalisation of memory — beginning with the written word and culminating in the digital technologies of today — establishes an historical context into which the individual is thrust. It is the industrialisation of these tertiary retentions which constitutes his understanding of proletarianisation — a disenfranchising estrangement from knowledge, as Stiegler defines it. He argues that this constitutes a process of 'the loss of knowledge(s): *savoir-faire, savoir-vivre,* theoretical knowledge (*savoir théoriser*), in the absence of which all savor [sic] is lost.'[108] It is the industrialisation of tertiary memory which broaches the possibility of political disenfranchisement in the hands of monopolistic and self-interested corporations, rather than the originary process of exteriorisation itself. The industrialisation of tertiary memory becomes close to the culture industry of the Frankfurt School analysis in Stiegler's account, without the pessimistic outlook for the future.[109] Indeed, Stiegler borrows from his mentor Derrida by discussing technics as *pharmakon* — that is, poison, cure and scapegoat for contemporary social conditions: 'a *technology of the spirit* which, as tertiary retention, can just as well lead to the proletarianisation of the life of the mind as it can to its critical intensification.'[110] These technologies then, have the capacity to stultify and enchain the consciousness of the individual but also to engender critical responses towards the status quo. Stiegler suggests that new technologies are equally capable of realising new desires, new social and political configurations outside of those which already exist.

[108] Stiegler, *For a New Critique*, p.30.
[109] See Mark B.N. Hansen, 'Media Theory', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23.2-3 (2006), 297-306. Stiegler does also make this comparison himself.
[110] Stiegler, *For A New Critique*, p.21.

Stiegler states that 'what Marx was unable to forsee […] was the way in which consumption would be reconfigured in the twentieth century in an essential relation to desire and to the economy.'[111] Stiegler acknowledges that Debord extends the concept of proletarianisation to the consumer, but 'Debord was unable, however, to connect this change in the capitalist system to the pharmacological question of the exteriorisation techniques.'[112] Where Stiegler alleges he moves beyond Debord is in comprehension of these technical apparatuses' irrevocable modification of what constitutes the human itself, rather than as a tool of a class of producers over a class of spectators.[113] Debord and the Situationists certainly did not form a critique that examines the intrinsic and fundamental entwinement of life and technicity: this is perhaps partly why we see such conflicting and confused pronouncements regarding the technological. The inheritance of Marx's aporetic understanding of technology, however, lends an ambiguity that is not immediately apparent to Debord's contribution in *La Société du spectacle*:

> Mais le spectacle n'est pas ce produit nécessaire du développement technique regardé comme un développement *naturel*. La société du spectacle est au contraire la forme qui choisit son propre contenu technique. Si le spectacle, pris sous l'aspect restreint des 'moyens de communications de masse', qui sont sa manifestation superficielle la plus écrasante, peut paraître envahir la société comme une simple instrumentation, celle-ci n'est en fait rien de neutre, mais l'instrumentation même qui convient à son auto-mouvement total. Si les besoins sociaux de l'époque où se développent de telles techniques ne peuvent trouver de satisfaction que par leur médiation, si l'administration de cette société et tout contact entre les hommes ne peuvent plus s'exercer que par l'intermédiaire de cette puissance de communication instantanée, c'est parce que cette 'communication' est essentiellement *unilatérale*; de sorte que sa concentration revient à accumuler dans les mains de l'administration du système

[111] Ibid., p.11.
[112] Ibid., p.27.
[113] Stiegler's full articulation of his understanding of the relationship between 'la technique' and the human comes in Bernard Stiegler, *La Technique et le temps I: La faute d'Épiméthée*.

existant les moyens qui lui permettent de poursuivre cette administration déterminée. (Thesis 124)

This passage initially seems to place Debord back in the realm of the anti-technological thinker. He begins by cautioning against the notion of 'natural' technological development — that an objective scientific knowledge develops for its own sake according to its own logic — locating this passage far away from any notion of technical determinism. The next sentence takes a vast stride in the direction of cultural constructivism, ascribing the spectacle an agency which 'chooses' its technical content. Debord similarly refutes the notion of the neutrality of technical apparatuses with which the spectacle constitutes itself materially. The unilaterality of these apparatuses is what maintains the subordination of the spectator: the mediation of communication sees it 'flow' only one way, hierarchically. Certainly, during the 1960s, French radio and television were centrally controlled by the state in the guise of the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (ORTF), instituted in the Assemblée nationale on the 26th June 1964, which preserved a near monopoly over broadcasting.[114] Luminaries of the left such as Sartre and de Beauvoir refused to appear on the radio and television, as well as refusing permission for productions of their work to be broadcast, owing to this monopolistic state control. This conception, however, of technological apparatuses appears undermined today by Stiegler's more anti-deterministic theorisation, not to mention the multilaterality of the digital media. It is obvious that the capacity to not only select between virtually infinite forms of information and images as well as uploading material oneself — in addition to the omnipresence of this material in the age of the smartphone and twenty-four hour connectivity — is indicative of a media landscape which has changed beyond recognition from the late 1960s. Yet whilst the growth of digital technologies has certainly permitted a greater participation in the creation of 'content' consumed, what is nevertheless apparent is that this more often than not takes place on websites such as YouTube or Facebook, owned by global multinational corporations far more powerful and influential than the ORTF — the new 'administration du système existant'. Indeed, in the above thesis of Debord's, if we consider the spectacle as closer to Stiegler's industrialisation of tertiary memory, rather than

[114] See Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.42.

'technics' or 'contenu technique' per se, then Stiegler's conception of of proletarianisation, in its equally nebulous and totalising character, seems to differ little from Debord's, despite his claim have better understood the nature of technicity.

Of this corporatism between state and industry, Armand Mattelart and André Vitalis chart a genealogy of technologies of control from the nineteenth century 'livret ouvrier', via Fordism, to the modern day user profiling by companies and nation states alike who track the every movement of entire populations online.[115] The 'livret ouvrier' was a compulsory document introduced under Napoleon in 1803 in order to track the movements of workers; Mattelart and Vitalis track the phenomenon of the ever-growing registration and classification of populations in accordance with the advance of technological capabilities culminating in Edward Snowden's revelation of the NSA's PRISM surveillance program of 2013. Though they do not use the term itself, their argument evokes the notion of proletarianisation in its description of techniques used initially to control workers being extended and perfected to encompass entire populations. Such surveillance techniques demonstrate the capacity of governments and industry to employ new technologies to this end, however, an arguably far more insidious form of control requires the willing submissive co-operation of the individual. This co-option of the individual into his or her own subjugation has been the focus of the Western Marxist tradition since the Frankfurt school's conflation of Freud and Marx. Debord's theory of spectacle considers this internalisation of society's values and standards both aesthetically and technologically, in a manner which does not preclude the possibility of new technologies engendering progressive and emancipatory outcomes. In this light we can partly redeem Debord's notion of unilaterality, even in the context of the apparent multilaterality of our contemporary digital technologies. Internet-focused utopianism surrounded the advent of the 'Web 2.0'in 2003: the notion of the supposedly emancipated 'prod-user' who both consumes and produces was heralded as a democratic development.[116] Mattelart and Vitalis quote Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg describing how although advertisers can come up with the most original material imaginable, there is

[115] Mattelart and Vitalis, *Le Profilage des populations*.
[116] For a critical examination of this phenomenon, see Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: How Not To Liberate The World* (London: Penguin, 2011).

no greater recommendation to purchase a commodity than seeing one's friends consuming it.[117] Mattelart and Vitalis concentrate on the clandestine commercial interests of the company, but the most interesting aspect of the Zuckerberg quotation is the implication that individuals are now supposed to act as advertisers to those in their social circle. It is incumbent upon the spectator to produce the images which ensure their continued submission to the commodity. Indeed, the emulation of the fashions, tastes, even facial expressions seen in more traditional forms of media by individual users of social media websites such as Facebook, Instagram or YouTube users is an observable phenomenon.[118] This identification with and internalisation of the values of the commodity — recognisable in Debord's theory of spectacle where he describes the 'imposture de la satisfaction' (Thesis 70) and the 'fabrication ininterrompue des pseudo-besoins' (Thesis 51) — is also thought by Stiegler. In the third volume of *La Technique et le temps*: *le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être* (2001), Stiegler argues through a discussion of tertiary memory (a recorded temporal object, the technology of the moving image generally) and its ineluctable modification of primary retention, or perception, that consciousness is essentially structured cinematically. This explains why, for Stiegler, cinema can be understood as a singularly persuasive force, going as far as describing cinema as having 'persuaded the whole world to adopt the American way of life'.[119] Consequently, as Stiegler contends elsewhere, the political question is an aesthetic question. As Daniel Ross has described:

> [Stiegler] specifies that aesthetics, here, is to be taken in the widest sense, that is, as sensation in general, not only 'perceptibility' but taste, feeling, sensibility. The point here is that perception, sensation, feeling, taste, are not only individual but immediately social phenomena, and thus that the question of living together, of becoming together, of living in

[117] Mattelart et Vitalis, p.175.
[118] As Nina Power writes in her review of Tiqqun's *Premiers Matériaux pour une théorie de la jeune fille*: 'While Tiqqun focus on women's magazines, much as Mary Wollstonecraft did two hundred years before, it is easy to expand their analysis to encompass developments in social media that have taken place since the book's original publication: the direct facial and self-valorising imperatives of Facebook, the endless mimetic repostings of tumblr, fashion blogs and so on.' See Nina Power, 'She's just not that into you', *Radical Philosophy*, 177 (Jan/Feb 2013), 33-34 (p.34).
[119] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time III: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. by Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p.35.

> common with the other through a process of common becoming, is something which can only occur through an understanding of, and a feeling for, one another, and which can therefore only occur via a medium which makes this possible, that is, an aesthetic medium.[120]

The industrialisation of tertiary memory then — that is, the cinematic image broadly considered, encompassing television in particular — constitutes an aesthetic form of mediation which is able to harness consciousness. Debord comments in the above cited thesis 24 that 'Le spectacle est le discours ininterrompu que l'ordre présent tient sur lui-même, son monologue élogieux. C'est l'auto-portrait du pouvoir à l'époque de sa gestion totalitaire des conditions d'existence.' Debord's understanding could also be read as far more relevant to today's new media landscape if we consider his notion of spectacle as the result of this industrialisation of tertiary memory.

If, as I have attempted to demonstrate, we can free Debord's theory from the yoke of a Romantic evocation of 'human essence' in the form of an avowal of unalienated life and understand Situationist theory as tactical intervention aimed at critiquing the dominance of a particular form of social organisation, then it is possible to view the critique of spectacle as acknowledging the inevitability of mediation and communication, and consequently exteriorisation and alienation, in the construction of human society. Indeed, it is tempting to read Debord's earlier enthusiastic comments on the technological in a more ambiguous and pragmatic (rather than Romantic) manner: 'Une nouvelle force humaine, que le cadre existant ne pourra pas dompter, s'accroît de jour en jour avec l'irrésistible développement technique, et l'insatisfaction de ses emplois possibles dans notre vie sociale privée de sens.'[121] Firstly, it is an 'untameable' human force which grows with an 'irresistible' — that is to say, inevitable and impossible to reverse — technical development. The vocabulary of the animal is here as one with the technical in the description of this human force, blurring the boundaries between life and technics. Though such utopianism unquestionably receded as the 1960s wore on, this conflation of the human and the technical demonstrates a willingness to understand the two together, if not perhaps outside of the Aristotelian schema of technics as tool

[120] Daniel Ross, 'Politics and Aesthetics or, Transformations of Aristotle in Bernard Stiegler', *Transformations*, 17 (2009) <http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_17/article_04.shtml> [Accessed 30.10.2014].
[121] Authorship unattributed, 'Manifeste', p.36.

which Stiegler accuses Marx of upholding, then at least in a rather less formally deterministic (that is, technological advance is 'chosen' by the agency of the spectacle which then determines future social relations) conception of social relations that Marcolini's reading of the Debord and the Situationists yields. There is no question that Debord fails to think the human and the technical as mutually constitutive, yet as Bradley notes, charges of anthropocentrism have been levelled at Stiegler, as have accusations of technological determinism. Indeed, Bradley critiques the concept of originary technicity, from Marx to Derrida, as itself failing to be truly '*technical all the way down*':[122]

> Perhaps this aporia at the heart of Marxian philosophy of technology — man versus matter; idealism versus materialism; anthropocentrism versus technological determinism — is what really makes Marx our contemporary because […] it is nothing less than the aporia of originary technicity itself.[123]

What Bradley fails to adumbrate is why such a philosophy is desirable, let alone whether it is in fact achievable. As we have seen above, he describes Marx's adherence to a politics of emancipation as an impediment to a thoroughgoing theory of technicity. Stiegler's denunciation of the proletarianisation propagated by the industrialisation of tertiary memory is at once the anthropocentric and attemptedly politically galvanising aspect of his thought on technics. Similarly, for Debord and the Situationists, whether their critique of technology can be considered 'achevée' (in Marcolini's terms) or not is of secondary importance to the insight their writings can offer in the construction of a politics of emancipation. The inheritance of Marx's contradictions regarding technology invite a reading of the Situationists' ambiguous attitude towards the technological in a more interesting and productive manner than Marcolini's diagnosis of a suppressed Romanticism combined with a technophilia born from an ambient epochal optimism of the *trente glorieuses*.

For the Situationists, writing, filmmaking, and indeed the idea of politics exist in order to fashion a better society based on the goals and aims deemed 'possible' at the time. This takes place in opposition to a spectacle which seeks to perpetuate the return of the same, the engineering of

[122] Bradley, p.15. Emphasis is Bradley's.
[123] Ibid., p.41.

consensus via a stultifying consumerism based on the consumption of images and the congelation of history. Nevertheless, as Debord writes: 'vous savez que la création n'est jamais pure',[124] there is no possibility of desire that can be enacted which comes from outside this spectacle. The spectacle is 'le moment historique qui nous contient' (Thesis 11), the inevitable context in which our desires and identities are forged. In the last instance then, the spectacle should be understood not as the instrumentation, the means of its production, nor merely in terms of the media, it's 'most immediate and superficial representation', but as the social relations between people enacted according to the desires and possibilities which are themselves inseparable from the mediation of spectacle. Desire, politics and everyday life are irrevocably bound up in this mutually reinforcing feedback loop with the systems of communication and mediation at any given point in history. It is the role of a critical theory and praxis to attack the dominance of the particular forms of social organisation: a consumer capitalism which was observable in the 1960s and in a distinct but recognisable form today. In Chapter Three I wish to argue that Situationist theory comprises an ethical understanding of how we respond to this irrevocable mediation, after looking at the concept of détournement in the next chapter: this tactical intervention which best encapsulates their model of oppositional activity.

[124] Debord, *Rapport sur la construction des situations,* p.22.

2

The Theory and Practice of Détournement

The Situationist practice of détournement translates variously as diversion, hi-jacking, re-routing, subversion, derailment or overturning, and refers to the appropriation of 'spectacular' forms in the service of oppositional ends. The Situationists never claimed to have invented the practice of employing pre-existing aesthetic elements in their works and acknowledged the role collage and montage played in movements such as Dada and Surrealism, as well as the considerable use already made of such techniques by the advertising industry of their time.[1] Today, the recycling of cultural artefacts, references and conventions is abundant on a quotidian basis, from the sampling (and its frequently consequent legal battles) in popular music, to the seemingly inexhaustible capacity for 'reboots' in mainstream cinema and television, to mention only two of the most obvious incidences of this practice. The particularly Situationist character of this phenomenon most noticeably endures in the form of 'culture jamming' — the irreverent modification of advertisements or other forms of mass culture — a term made popular by the (predominantly) North American collection of writers, artists and academics Adbusters, whose founder Kalle Lasn describes the group as 'students of the Situationist movement'.[2] In one of the emblematic images of the Occupy Wall Street movement, with which Adbusters sought to align themselves, Wall Street's 'iconic' bull statue — the symbol of the supposed energy and dynamism of the financial sector — is counterposed with an elegantly poised ballet dancer perched on top: this juxtaposition is designed to confront the cultural and social dominance of high finance in the name of a contrasting form of beauty and virtue. Similarly,

[1] Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement', *Les Lèvres nues*, 8 (1956).
[2] Justin Elliot, 'The Origins of Occupy Wall Street Explained', *Salon* (4 October 2011) <http://www.salon.com/2011/10/04/adbusters_occupy_wall_st/> [Accessed 25/11/13].

California police officer Lt. John Pike found unwanted notoriety when he pepper-sprayed peaceful protesters during a demonstration at the University of California, Irvine; the photograph 'went viral' and was appropriated in many forms. In one he attacks the personification of Liberty in Eugène Delacroix's famous 1830 painting *La Liberté guidant le peuple*. What the Situationists attempted to provide was a theoretical programme for how détournement should be employed in the service of new cultural and artistic practices that took aim at the functioning of the spectacular status quo.

This chapter will begin by examining the concept of détournement elaborated in the Situationists' first theoretical meditation on the subject, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement', written in 1956 by Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman when they were both members of the pre-Situationist International grouping, the Lettrist International, in tandem with examples of Situationist détournements, as well as the further contributions to the theory published in the *Internationale Situationniste* journal and Debord's *La Société du spectacle*. Subsequent analysis of the relationship between the theory and practice of détournement will lead on to an assessment of the strengths and limits of the technique. First, this will take the form of a critique of the achievability of détournement's stated intention to remake a society 'sans reproduire'[3] the power relations inherent within the status quo, an extravagant pronouncement which though certainly problematic leads on to a further appraisal of the role of rhetoric in Situationist writing, particularly their journal. Following on from this line of inquiry, Jacques Rancière's critique of Debord's theory of spectacle will be examined in response to his assessment of Debord's *La Société du spectacle*. Finally, an analysis of the dialectical and strategic nature of détournement as exhibited in Debord's film will be undertaken, acknowledging its explicitly propagandist nature.

[3]Authorship unattributed, '"Je suis forcé d'admettre que tout continue" (Hegel)', *Internationale situationniste,* 9 (1964), 20.

Plagiarism and *le communisme littéraire*

The Situationists took the concept of détournement from the nineteenth-century poet Isidore Ducasse, who wrote under the pseudonym of the Comte de Lautréamont, a figure whom they and their Lettrist precursors held in great esteem and whom Debord détourns[4] in thesis 207 of *La Société du spectacle* in order to justify this notion of appropriation: 'Les idées s'améliorent. Le sens des mots y participe. Le plagiat est nécessaire. Le progrès l'implique. Il serre de près la phrase d'un auteur, se sert de ses expressions, efface une idée fausse, la remplace par l'idée juste.' Lautréamont wrote the exact words in his *Poésies*, a work itself made up of many 'developed' or 'modified' uncited maxims of Pascal and Vauvenargues,[5] yet this is not mere quotation as the demarcation of the inverted comma is eschewed: Debord plagiarizes a eulogy to plagiarism. Lautréamont's words did not, in Debord's estimation, require the adaptation of a word or phrase, the replacement of a bad idea with a better one. This is a détournement which operates by relocating a fragment within a new whole. In the context of *La Société du spectacle*, Lautréamont's words are given new meaning.

A hostility to the notion of private property underpins this conviction that plagiarism is crucial to oppositional activity in the realm of aesthetics: 'A vrai dire, il faut en finir avec toute notion de propriété personnelle en cette matière.'[6] Creative endeavour is conceived as individualistic under capitalism; ideas are owned by those who put their name to them. This is why 'intellectual property' is enforced by law and why plagiarism is seen as an immoral theft of another's labour. The Situationists, following Marx, denounced the capitalist axiom of private property and extrapolated that opposition into the realm of aesthetics, understanding cultural creation as a form of social practice and advocating a 'literary communism':

> Non seulement le détournement conduit à la découverte de nouveaux aspects du talent, mais encore, se heurtant de front à toutes les conventions mondaines et juridiques, il ne peut

[4] Throughout this analysis, as is now customary in the related literature, the French noun and verb will be anglicised in order to speak of the notion of détournement the Situationists avowed due both to the inadequacy of the various translations and the specific meaning the word has attained as a theoretical concept.
[5] Lautréamont, 'Poésies II', in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p.281.
[6] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.

> manquer d'apparaître un puissant instrument culturel au service d'une lutte de classes bien comprise. Le bon marché de ses produits est la grosse artillerie avec laquelle on bat en brêche toutes les murailles de Chine de l'intelligence. Voici un réel moyen d'enseignement artistique prolétarien, la première ébauche d'un communisme littéraire.[7]

Conventional notions of 'talent' or 'genius' correspond to what they considered a bourgeois notion of creativity: the reverence for individual labour which can therefore be owned by its creator. Debord and Wolman comment in the same article, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement', 'l'idée d'expression dans l'absolu est morte, et il ne survit momentanément qu'une singerie de cette pratique, tant que nos autres ennemis survivent.'[8] The reference to 'nouveaux aspects du talent' serves almost as a concession to readers with a more conventional understanding of artistic practice, luring them in with a concept of originality comfortably in keeping with an orthodox understanding of 'talent' before describing at length what they consider the aspects of détournement with revolutionary implications. Confronting head-on social and legal conventions — that is, both copyright law and the conventional moralistic denunciation of plagiarism as 'wrong' — is, for Debord and Wolman, the first step in any creative act. This negation of the status quo, the critical dismantling of one of the foremost existing rules of cultural production (and what we might call cognitive or immaterial labour in the information age) is presented as a weapon in the service of class struggle due to both its explicitly oppositional character and its opening up of alternative horizons of artistic and social practice. The cheapness and ready availability of détournable texts and images such as paperback novels, magazines or comic strips which the above quotation goes on to mention is a reference to the explosion of mass culture in the post war era.[9] The reference to artillery breaking down Chinese Walls is an unacknowledged quotation of Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto.[10]

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] For an account of post-war French history emphasising this phenomenon see Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
[10] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Selected Works, Volume 1* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1962), p.38: 'The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls.'

The problematic notion of 'enseignement artistique prolétarien' will be examined below in connection with Jacques Rancière's critique of Debord's theory of spectacle. For the moment, however, this 'first sketch' of a literary communism here invoked testifies to the influence of Lautréamont, who wrote that 'la poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un.'[11] 'Le Communisme littéraire', the potential creation of new aesthetic, theoretical and political realities was for the Situationists a collaborative, social activity and as such the concept of private ownership of an individual work is unviable, serving only to perpetuate capitalist hierarchies. Each issue of *I.S.* included a notice inciting others to reproduce its contents as they saw fit, assuring the reader that copyright laws did not apply and insisting upon the collaborative character of the journal:

> *La règle dans ce bulletin est la rédaction collective. Les quelques articles rédigés et signés personnellement doivent être considérés eux aussi comme intéressant l'ensemble de nos camarades, et comme des points particuliers de leur recherche commune. Nous sommes opposés à la survivance de formes telles que la revue littéraire ou la revue d'art.*
>
> *Tous les textes publiés dans Internationale Situationniste peuvent être librement reproduits, traduits ou adaptés, même sans indication d'origine.*[12]

This declaration makes clear the centrality of détournement to the project the Situationists saw the journal as articulating. Printed on the inside of the cover, it would be the first words those who picked up the journal would read as they opened it. First, the importance of the collective and collaborative form of the work put into the various articles is emphasised: cultural production as social practice. In the second short paragraph, readers are urged to reproduce, translate and adapt (i.e. détourn) the material at will. These two corollary notices establish two key justifications for détournement: as any form of work is a social and collaborative endeavour, concepts of authorship and ownership are outmoded; this being the case, the Situationists assert no such rights towards their own texts and encourage their détournement.

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[11] Lautréamont, 'Poésies II', in *Œuvres complètes,* p.327.
[12] Printed on the inside page of the first issue (and in the subsequent eleven issues) of *Internationale Situationniste* (June, 1958). Italics in original.

In ‘Mode d’emploi du détournement’, Debord and Wolman also signal that merely intending to cause outrage by impertinent appropriation is not alone sufficient criterion for successful détournement. Acknowledging Surrealism’s attempted negation of bourgeois conceptions of genius, it is nevertheless argued that Marcel Duchamp’s addition of a moustache on the Mona Lisa can no longer be seen as an ‘interesting’ gesture. Debord and Wolman counsel that ‘il faut maintenant suivre ce processus jusqu’à la négation de la négation’:[13] such is the chameleonic nature of spectacle, it adapts according to the march of time. Thus détournements must themselves be détourned when they come to be revered as authoritative. Détournement necessitates, in most cases, the adaptation of a work in order to reveal its pertinence to the current historical moment and to demonstrate *how* the original notion must be modified for this to be achieved. Debord clarifies in thesis 208 of *La Société du spectacle*:

> Le détournement est le contraire de la citation, de l’autorité théorique toujours falsifiée du seul fait qu’elle est devenue citation; fragment arraché à son contexte, à son mouvement, et finalement à son époque comme référence globale et à l’option précise qu’elle était à l’intérieur de cette référence, exactement reconnue ou erronée. Le détournement est le langage fluide de l’anti-idéologie. Il apparaît dans la communication qui sait qu’elle ne peut prétendre détenir aucune garantie en elle-même et définitivement. Il est, au point le plus haut, le langage qu’aucune référence ancienne et supra-critique ne peut confirmer. C’est au contraire sa propre cohérence, en lui-même et avec les faits praticables, qui peut confirmer l’ancien noyau de vérité qu’il ramène. Le détournement n’a fondé sa cause sur rien d’extérieur à sa propre vérité comme critique présente. (Thesis 208)

There is no possibility of a definitive détournement: détournements themselves are necessarily always open to later détournement. Détournement as a concept resists being wholly in the service of a particular cause or ideology precisely because it attains purpose only from *sa propre vérité comme critique présente*; it is a process that is constantly in need of re-making and re-working in accordance

[13] Debord and Wolman, ‘Mode d’emploi du détournement’. It should be acknowledged that Debord and Wolman’s is a rather restrictive reading of what they call Duchamp’s ‘gesture’.

with time and historical circumstance. The most eloquent of détournements — in theory — both presents a critical analysis of the détourned element and an expression of an alternative, contestatory meaning that can be imparted to it given its relation to the contemporary moment:

> Il va de soi que l'on peut non seulement corriger une œuvre ou intégrer divers fragments d'œuvres périmées dans une nouvelle, mais encore changer le sens de ces fragments et truquer de toutes les manières que l'on jugera bonnes ce que les imbéciles s'obstinent à nommer des citations.[14]

After this fashion, and as we have seen in Chapter One, Debord's détournement of Marx constitutes the very first sentence of *La Société du spectacle*: 'Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de *spectacles*', where Marx wrote, in (the French translation of) *Das Kapital*: 'La richesse des sociétés dans lesquelles règne le mode de production s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de marchandises.' As we have seen, Debord demonstrates his departure from Marxist theory, his updating of Marx's work in the context of a century of capitalist development. Marx's wording is recognisably maintained but the sentence is modified in accordance with his assessment of the 'society of the spectacle': '*spectacles*' replaces 'marchandises' as 'toute la vie' does 'la richesse' in expression of the omnipresent aesthetic and political form of organisation which now governs all of social and political life, the apotheosis of Marx's commodity, rather than just the means of economic production to which Marx refers here. Debord and Wolman suggest that this is the only way of staying loyal to Marx's writings against the Marxisms of others on the left: Stalinists, Trotskyists, parliamentary socialists. These currents, for the Situationists, demonstrate critical theory's petrification into ideology. Détournement is described by Debord as the *langage fluide d'anti-idéologie*, as the détournement exists in a dynamic relation to the original rather than the static form of citation. This approach requires a critical distance from the work détourned, a resistance to the authority that is implied in direct quotation, as Debord goes on to explain in thesis 209, there is a

[14] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'

violence in this refusal to accept the autonomy and authority of any theoretical discourse. There is violence in the act of appropriating and re-contextualising a fragment from one whole into another that creates fissures in the original meaning of this fragment, permitting a new message to be communicated. This violence is similarly directed at the conventions and orthodoxies of intellectual property and by extension the very notion of private property itself, as well as at the individual détourned elements.

Debord and Wolman's 'Mode d'emploi du détournement' begins with what would come to be a characteristically Situationist belligerence: a condemnation of the art world turns into an unrestrained call to arms:

> Tous les esprits un peu avertis de notre temps s'accordent sur cette évidence qu'il est devenu impossible à l'art de se soutenir comme activité supérieure, ou même comme activité de compensation à laquelle on puisse honorablement s'adonner. La cause de ce dépérissement est visiblement l'apparition de forces productives qui nécessitent d'autres rapports de production et une nouvelle pratique de la vie. Dans la phase de guerre civile où nous nous trouvons engagés, et en liaison étroite avec l'orientation que nous découvrirons pour certaines activités supérieures à venir, nous pouvons considérer que tous les moyens d'expression connus vont confluer dans un mouvement général de propagande qui doit embrasser tous les aspects, en perpétuelle interaction, de la réalité sociale.[15]

The art world is, for Debord and Wolman, inherently mortgaged to the productive forces of the spectacle and so alternative creative practices must be sought which contest the status quo. Cultural production that takes place according to these rules, that is, recognisable 'artistic practices', is condemned by Debord and Wolman 'parce qu'ils dépendent en réalité des formations idéologiques d'une société passée qui a prolongé son agonie jusqu'à ce jour' and which 'ne peuvent avoir d'efficacité que réactionnaire'.[16] The contention is that a 'civil war phase' in which apparently superior activities to come will come together in a general movement of propaganda, which 'in

[15] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.
[16] Ibid.

perpetual interaction', will encompass all aspects of social reality. This is, then, a distinctly ambitious programme. Towards the end of 'Mode d'emploi', Debord and Wolman declare that, 'les procédés que nous avons sommairement traités ici ne sont pas présentés comme une intention qui nous serait propre, mais au contraire comme une pratique assez communément répandue que nous nous proposons de systématiser.'[17] This proposed systematisation never really came to fruition in the work of the Situationists. Indeed, 'Mode d'emploi' is the closest they come to articulating a method presenting the objectives and parameters of détournements.

Debord and Wolman distinguish between two major forms of détournement: what they call 'mineur' — the appropriation of an element with no political significance in and of itself until its recontexualisation: a photograph of a random subject, a press clipping, an innocuous phrase — and 'abusif', or 'détournement de proposition prémonitoire' — the adaptation or invocation of an author's phrasing which is 'significatif en soi' and acquires new scope in an updated context — as we have seen with Lautréamont and Marx above. Debord had earlier in that year collaborated with his friend Asger Jorn — the Danish artist who founded the avant-garde collective COBRA (COpenhagen, BRussels, Amsterdam: named for the cities from which its members came), one of the groups who came together in Cosio d'Arroscia in 1957 to form the Situationist International, and who would later fund the Situationists' activities with proceeds from his art sales — on a book composed entirely of détourned elements and Jorn's abstract daubings entitled *Mémoires*. *Mémoires* comprised détournements of Marx, Baudelaire, a Dutch historian and particular favourite of the Situationists' Johan Huizinga (among many others) in addition to extracts taken from advertisements, popular magazines, travel writing, sociological tracts and other sources. As the title suggests, it purported to offer a biographical account of a particular period of Debord's life, in which he broke from Romanian poet Isidore Isou's Lettrist group and formed his own Lettrist International, the immediate precursor to the S.I. The book was bound in sandpaper, with the intention of rubbing abrasively against other

[17] Ibid.

books it would be placed next to on a shelf, whilst the text itself was composed of a series of détournements, both 'mineurs' and 'abusifs'.

The next claim that Debord and Wolman make is that the principal strength of a détournement is its recognisability:

> Les déformations introduites dans les éléments détournés doivent tendre à se simplifier à l'extrême, la principale force d'un détournement étant fonction directe de sa reconnaissance, consciente ou trouble, par la mémoire. C'est bien connu. Notons seulement que si cette utilisation de la mémoire implique un choix du public préalable à l'usage du détournement, ceci n'est qu'un cas particulier d'une loi générale qui régit aussi bien le détournement que tout autre mode d'action sur le monde.[18]

Debord would, in 1964, remark to similar effect in his annotations accompanying the scripts of his first three films, published as 'Contre le cinéma':

> D'autres aspects sont à considérer dans l'optique des positions situationnistes qui se sont définies depuis: au premier rang, l'usage des *phrases détournées*. Entre toutes les phrases étrangères — venues des journaux ou de Joyce, aussi bien que du Code Civil — mélangées au dialogue de ce film, c'est-à-dire à l'emploi également dérisoire de différents styles d'écriture, la présente édition de l'Institut scandinave de Vandalisme Comparé n'a retenu l'usage de guillemets que pour quatre d'entre elles, considérées comme des citations conventionnelles du fait de la difficulté que présenterait probablement leur reconnaissance.[19]

This recognisability is a necessary criterion for a détournement, a fluency with the codes and conventions of the existing cultural regime is required not just on behalf of those responsible for the détournement but its intended targets also. This introduces the question of the intended target's breadth of reading; this requisite erudition implies a certain kind of reader. To take Debord's *La Société du spectacle*, a reader would have to have close knowledge particularly of the works of Marx

[18] Ibid.
[19] Guy Debord, 'Fiches Techniques', in *Contre le cinéma* (Aarhus: Institut Scandinave de Vandalisme Comparé, 1964).

and Hegel in order to recognise Debord's uncited quotations and modified passages. If recognition of a détourned element is necessary for a détournement to have been 'successful', then we must conclude that this is a highly problematic notion: a discriminating requirement of knowledge excludes those who are not familiar with the intellectual horizons of Debord's work. It is not a reductive assumption to conclude that this exclusion operates to disenfranchise those without access to education. *La Société du spectacle* can still be read and understood effectively without appreciating each of Debord's détournements (of which there are hundreds) but it unquestionably loses this rich allusiveness which demonstrates both the scope of Debord's scholarship and the skill involved in redeploying the maxims of past critique. This demonstration of a wit at once erudite and mischievous again serves an important role in Debordian and Situationist writing: it is a seductive device used to convince and engage the reader.

Certainly then, Debord and Wolman argue in 'Mode d'emploi' that recognisibility is a pre-requisite for a 'successful' détournement. The second half of the above quotation, however, can allow us to understand an important theoretical axiom of détournement which can elucidate the concept. In making explicit their recognition that any action in the world necessarily takes place within a particular context — and that in the case of a détournement, this context necessarily includes those who are the intended targets — it is apparent that for the Situationists, this context determines the effectiveness of the action, as we have seen above 'l'idée d'expression dans l'absolu est morte'.[20] A Situationist conception of time and history recognises all social, political and cultural forms of organisation as contingent upon this context. The concept of 'absolute' expression is therefore understood as reactionary. This is why appropriation is the Situationist tactic of choice: there is no hope of transcending the spectacle, so it must be détourned. Their goal, in excavating the spectacle's own materials is, as Tom McDonough has argued, to 'throw themselves into every kind of filth […] in order, by way of its appropriation, to make it speak otherly.'[21]

[20] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.
[21] Tom McDonough, 'Guy Debord, or the Revolutionary without a Halo', *October*, 115 (2006), 39-45 (p.45).

In the ninth edition of their journal, in 1964, the Situationists declared their intention to act 'effectivement, à tous les niveaux, contre la société dominante: pour la détourner intégralement, sans la reproduire en rien'. A practice which employs, and indeed relies on, the signs and messages of the society it seeks to oppose cannot possibly succeed in this stated aim to never reproduce the logic of this society. There is an inherent danger of retaining and perpetuating certain assumptions within the détourned object. The employment of sexualised pictures of young women in various states of undress, taken from unacknowledged popular 'men's' magazines are interpreted by Kelly C. Baum as representing the 'alienation of desire', in her article 'The Sex of the Situationist International'. Baum seeks to refute the argument that the depiction of scantily clad women in sexualised poses constitutes mere titillations. Nevertheless, it is only masculine desire denounced here as alienated and the reproduction of such images clearly demonstrate how the Situationists were in no small part guilty of misogyny.[22] This space for interpretation can potentially lead to a détournement's failure to impress its critical message, as the residual remainder — that which is *undétourned* within an appropriated work — prejudices the extent to which a détournement can be said to be successful in its stated aim of not reproducing the society it seeks to détourn, given that it is primarily a practice of partial reproduction.

Détournement, as a theoretical concept, derives its coherence from its fluidity. Certainly, any détournement must seek to offer an intelligent and constructive riff on the chosen element; it must do so in a fashion recognisable to its intended public; it must endeavour to not overlook pernicious aspects of the détourned element which reproduce the status quo. It is, by design, difficult to respond to the question 'what *is* a détournement?' as it is impossible to describe as a unified theory: 'Le détournement n'a fondé sa cause sur rien d'extérieur à sa propre vérité comme critique présente' (Thesis 208). The Situationist technique of détournement is a ludic concept, linked to the spirit of playfulness, wit and intellectual mischievousness.

[22] Kelly Baum, 'The Sex of the Situationist International', *October*, 126 (2008), 23-43.

During the May 1968 *événements*, the Situationists were responsible for establishing a Conseil pour le Maintien des Occupations who released several posters and other forms of communiqué. One such provocation, dated the 30th May 1968, sees the tiles of a comic book strip depicting a scene from an unspecific action-adventure, entitled *Adresse à tous les travailleurs* in which the captions related that a revolutionary movement had come to pass. A revolutionary movement that 'ne manque plus que la conscience de ce qu'il a déjà fait'. The popular form that is the *bande dessinée* is here imbued with the force of a political treatise. This is a détournement first of all of form: appropriating the genre of the comic and attributing to it words of (as it was intended) revolutionary import. It was designed to attract the eye: there is no coincidence that Debord and Wolman acknowledge the advertising industry's use of détournement. There is humour in this juxtaposition of genre but it is a humour which conceals a profound seriousness:

> Le parodique-sérieux recouvre les contradictions d'une époque où nous trouvons, aussi pressantes, l'obligation et la presque impossibilité de rejoindre, de mener, une action collective totalement novatrice. Où le plus grand sérieux s'avance masque dans le double jeu de l'art et de sa négation; où les essentiels voyages de découverte one été entrepris par des gens d'une si émouvante incapacité.[23]

Both 'Mode d'emploi' and 'Le Détournement comme négation et prélude' — a short article from the third issue of the journal — invoke this notion of play. Debord and Wolman refer to 'ultra détournement', which they describe as the capacity for détournement to play a role in everyday life, not just aesthetic creation, arguing that 'le besoin d'une langue secrète, de mots de passe, est inséparable d'une tendance au jeu', thereby extending even further the definition of what constitutes détournement.[24] It is 'la sphère du jeu' which is similarly invoked in 'Le Détournement comme négation et prélude'. This playfulness seeks to seduce the reader: it is the key to understanding détournement as a pedagogical technique.

[23]Authorship unattributed, 'Le Détournement comme négation et prélude', *Internationale situationniste*, 3 (1959), 10-11 (p.11).
[24] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.

The Strengths and Limits of Situationist Propaganda

Understanding détournement as pedagogical technique brings us necessarily to consider the propagandist nature of the practice, and the consequent importance of the journal's rhetorical brio. A comprehension of the Situationists' employment of grandiose proclamations not only allows us to better refine our understanding of the theory of détournement by placing such grandiloquence at a critical distance, but to also consider it as constitutive of the theory itself. Détournement is incarnated in an attempt to *improve* — tactically, strategically — the original message, it never endeavours to be a definitive 'truth', as détournements are always susceptible to future détournement. In the first issue of the journal, 'Détournement' is defined as:

> [A]bréviation de la formule: détournement d'éléments esthétiques préfabriqués. Intégration de productions actuelles ou passées des arts dans une construction supérieure du milieu. Dans ce sens il ne peut y avoir de peinture ou de musique situationniste, mais un usage situationniste de ces moyens. Dans un sens plus primitif, le détournement à l'intérieur des sphères culturelles anciennes est une méthode de propagande, qui témoigne de l'usure et de la perte d'importance de ces sphères.[25]

What this admission of the propagandist element here demonstrates is the immediate purpose of such détournements. This 'primitive' or elementary function serves a rhetorical purpose in the re-application of the détourned elements to encourage the recognition of the need for construction of an alternative ('superior') political environment: 'Un revirement complet de l'esprit est devenu indispensable, par la mise en lumière de désirs oubliés et la création de désirs entièrement nouveaux. Et par une propagande intensive en faveur de ces désirs.'[26] The question of desire is therefore paramount in this regard. Critically, this desire is not a metaphysical concept for the Situationists: the distinction between 'new desires' and 'pseudo-needs' is necessarily only a political one. This requires

[25] 'Définitions', p.13.
[26] Chtcheglov, 'Formulaire pour un Urbanisme nouveau', p.18.

understanding the difference between what we might unsatisfactorily term 'legitimate' or 'genuine' desire, as opposed to those inculcated by the spectacular status quo and which perpetuate its existence. The desire for consumer goods is cultivated in order to support the commodity economy; the desire, however, to ensure a minimum living standard, to create a more equitable society (unquestionably idealized visions which our unremittingly inequitable society purports to uphold) are worthy of 'legitimate' status, though still mediated by the socio-historical context. The question of appropriation is therefore the terrain of Situationist struggle within and against culture. Any concept of political will is a selective appropriation of the cultural, social and historical context in which we find ourselves. The beginning of political action entails the détournement of existing materials of the dominant prescriptive aesthetic of the spectacle in order to change them, to use them, to transform them from their original purpose into one serving a revolutionary political agenda. In light of this later refinement by Debord, the reference to 'la création de désirs entièrement nouveaux' risks appearing naive. If desire of any sort, 'legitimate' or otherwise, can only be fashioned socially and is therefore mediated, creating entirely new desires *ex nihilo* becomes an impossibility. This need not be seen, however, as a development of Situationist theory in the eleven years between the publication of the journal article and the theoretical treatise. Rather, it is indicative of a recourse to a Romantic, passionate variety of rhetorical flourish which would come to permeate the *I.S.* journal, as it characterised the writings of Debord's Internationale Lettriste grouping. Debord would to some extent consciously relinquish this playful — if still serious — verve in favour of the icily clinical tone of *La Société du spectacle*, which he fully intended to be the culmination of Situationist theory, in contrast to the *plaire et instruire* tenor of the journal. The importance of the rhetorical flourish, the seductive poetic turn of phrase, cannot, however, be ignored as a constitutive element of the theory of détournement itself.

The seductive ('Il est vrai que la plus grande difficulté d'une telle entreprise est de faire passer dans ces propositions apparemment délirantes une quantité suffisante de séduction sérieuse.')[27]

[27] Guy Debord, 'Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine', *Les Lèvres nues*, 6 (1955).

and didactic (this is a 'propagande éducative')[28] elements of this programme, as well as the invocation of the problematic idea of propaganda, invites Jacques Rancière's criticism of Debord's theory of spectatorship in his 2008 essay *Le Spectateur émancipé*. Rancière casts Debord as part of: 'le modèle global de rationalité sur le fond duquel nous avons été habitués à juger les implications politiques du spectacle théâtral.'[29] The theory of spectacle, once considered so mordantly provocative, is, for Rancière, an orthodoxy inherently bound to the status quo. Building on his theory of intellectual equality and emancipation as delineated in his *Le Maître ignorant* (1987), Rancière seeks therefore to demonstrate that the fundamental suppositions made by Debord reproduce the hierarchical conceptions of knowledge and its transmission. Rancière deconstructs the binary oppositions Debord takes as pre-requisites in order to demonstrate how these terms function as a prescription of inequality:

> Ces oppositions — regarder/savoir, apparence/réalité, activité/passivité — sont tout autre chose que des oppositions logiques entre termes bien définis. Elles définissent proprement un partage du sensible, une distribution a priori des positions et des capacités et incapacités attachées à ces positions. Elles sont des allégories incarnées de l'inégalité.[30]

Rancière is attempting to establish that when Debord writes of the spectator that 'plus il contemple, moins il vit' (Thesis 30), he is constructing an artificial opposition between contemplation and living which serves to perpetuate the hierarchical model of the dissemination of knowledge upon which the 'spectacle' relies. Rancière states his desire to 'reconstituer le réseau des présuppositions qui placent la question du spectateur au centre de la discussion sur les rapports entre art et politique',[31] particularly the negative connotations which Debord imputes to spectatorship: those of passivity (as opposed to activity) and ignorance (as opposed to knowledge). The spectacle separates the spectator from life by consigning him to a passive role; Debord's theory seeks to overcome this separation by bridging the gap between the spectator and reality by creating an art practice that breaks the unilateral

[28] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.
[29] Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé*, p.7-8.
[30] Ibid., p.18
[31] Ibid., pp.7-8.

movement of communication, forcing the spectator into an active role. Rancière rejects this approach: 'Mais ne pourrait-on pas inverser les termes du problème en demandant si ce n'est pas justement la volonté de supprimer la distance qui crée la distance?'[32] In conceiving of the distance between activity and passivity — and in according the latter an inferior status to the former — the critique of the spectacle succeeds only in recreating the form of social relations (active/passive; enfranchised/disenfranchised) which it accuses its object of perpetrating. For Rancière, Debord's critique of the spectacle-spectator relationship, in so far as it seeks to invert it and render the spectator 'active', only reproduces the binary logic of master and ignoramus: 'Elle peut railler ses illusions, mais elle reproduit sa logique.'[33] In place of this stultifying logic, Rancière proposes a model of emancipation which,

> commence quand on remet en question l'opposition entre regarder et agir, quand on comprend que les évidences qui structurent ainsi les rapports du dire, du voir et du faire appartiennent elles-mêmes à la structure de la domination et de la sujétion.[34]

In re-evaluating these binary oppositions, Rancière encourages his reader to recognise viewing as an active engagement with a text, emancipating the spectator not by means of transmitting the knowledge denied by the separation of spectatorship but by understanding this knowledge in terms of 'narrating' and 'translating' one's own interpretations and acknowledging the validity of this activity. Rancière's emancipated spectator engages actively with all texts and images he or she encounters as a matter of course.

We are urged by Rancière to forego precisely the 'savoir de l'ignorance'[35] —which seeks to assert the distance between knowledge and ignorance — on the basis of an axiom of intellectual equality. The spectator is understood as necessarily emancipated, a fact which misadventures in critical thought such as Debord's obfuscate in their preservation of the hierarchical model according to which knowledge is communicated. Whilst Rancière characterises Debord as merely inverting the

[32] Ibid., p.18
[33] Ibid., p.52
[34] Ibid., p.19.
[35] Ibid., p.15.

hierarchical suppositions he denounces, there is evidence that Debord is aware of this essential hierarchism in his willingness to acknowledge the nature of a critique bound to its object. As early as 'Mode d'emploi', Debord and Wolman's discussion of the weaknesses of détournement by simple reversal recognises this impasse:

> Le détournement par simple retournement est toujours le plus immédiat et le moins efficace. De même la messe noire oppose à la construction d'une ambiance qui se fonde sur une métaphysique donnée, une construction d'ambiance dans le même cadre, en renversant les valeurs, conservées, de cette métaphysique.[36]

In *La Société du spectacle*, Debord reflects upon the inevitability of spectacular mediation and the necessity of confronting the spectacle in its own terms in order to understand, critique, then contest:

> En analysant le spectacle, on parle dans une certaine mesure le langage même du spectaculaire, en ceci que l'on passe sur le terrain méthodologique de cette société qui s'exprime dans le spectacle. Mais le spectacle n'est rien d'autre que le sens de la pratique totale d'une formation économique-sociale, son emploi du temps. C'est le moment historique qui nous contient. (Thesis 11)

What this short quotation can lead us to recall is the important formative influence Hegel had upon Debord:[37] in 'passing through the same methodological terrain', we understand Debord's critique first and foremost as a negation of the spectacle. A Rancièrian rejoinder might here suggest that this cannot be a genuinely dialectical movement due to this preservation of the essential logic he has been seen to denounce. For Debord, however, the inevitability of preserving the logic of the spectacle stems from its totalising occupation of the historical moment. Debord's conception of human knowledge is irrevocably bound to the historical context of an epoch: 'L'homme, "l'être négatif qui est uniquement dans la mesure où il supprime l'Être", est identique au temps' (Thesis 125), here quoting Hegel directly. It is the attempt to diagnose the hypocrisies and contradictions of the

[36] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.
[37] For the best example of an exploration of Hegel's influence on Debord, see Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord.* See also Tom Bunyard, '"History is the Spectre Haunting Modern Society"'.

spectacle by positing the theory of its negative that drives Debord's critique. The title of 'Le détournement comme négation et prélude' expresses this tactic precisely. In *La Société du spectacle*, Debord precedes his theses on détournement by delineating the workings of 'dialectical theory':

> Dans son style même, l'exposé de la théorie dialectique est un scandale et une abomination selon les règles du langage dominant, et pour le goût qu'elles ont éduqué, parce que dans l'emploi positif des concepts existants, il inclut du même coup l'intelligence de leur *fluidité* retrouvée, de leur destruction nécessaire.
>
> Ce style qui contient sa propre critique doit exprimer la domination de la critique présente *sur tout son passé*. Par lui le mode d'exposition de la théorie dialectique témoigne de l'esprit négatif qui est en elle. […] Cette conscience théorique du mouvement, dans laquelle la trace même du mouvement doit être présente, se manifeste par le *renversement* des relations établies entre les concepts et par le *détournement* de toutes les acquisitions de la critique antérieure. […] Le détournement ramène à la subversion les conclusions critiques passées qui ont été figées en vérités respectables, c'est-à-dire transformées en mensonges. […] C'est l'obligation de la *distance* envers ce qui a été falsifié en vérité officielle qui détermine cet emploi du détournement. (Theses 205-206)

The dialectical and dynamic process of détournement is fluid and constantly renewed in its endeavour to re-problematize the previously established conclusions of critical discourse, as Debord détourns Marx, and prevent them from stagnating into the authoritative 'truths' of ideology. The theory of détournement urges the recognition that all forms of cultural production are fair game. They are to be re-interpreted and re-used — this is the requisite precondition: the prelude — for emancipation, rather than its realisation. In suggesting that emancipation is a potentiality inherent within the role of spectator, Rancière seems to posit that we live in 'le meilleur des mondes possibles', emancipation is here to be seized immediately:

> Les animaux humains sont des animaux distants qui communiquent à travers la forêt des signes. La distance que l'ignorant a à franchir n'est pas le gouffre entre son ignorance et le

> savoir du maître. Elle est simplement le chemin de ce qu'il sait déjà à ce qu'il ignore encore qu'il peut apprendre non pour occuper la position du savant mais pour mieux pratiquer l'art de traduire, de mettre ses expériences en mots et ses mots à l'épreuve, de traduire ses aventures intellectuelles à l'usage des autres et de contre-traduire les traductions qu'ils lui présentent de leurs propres aventures.[38]

Debord sees the kernel of a coming emancipation in 'la *conscience possible* de notre époque';[39] Rancière seeks to uncover the emancipatory ideal in the world which we inhabit but in rejecting the theory of spectacle he fails to recognise that the form of opposition that is détournement, which is the obverse of spectacle — both at once aesthetic and political — constitutes this negation and prelude to a realisation (and not the realisation itself) which cannot take place under current conditions.

Rancière's critique of Debord understands the theory of spectacle as predicated upon a Romantic idealism in which political subjectivation occurs only when some essential human essence is realised and revealed unobstructed. Jeremy F. Lane has written on Rancière's criticism of the idealism implicitly functioning in the social sciences, showing the divergence between Pierre Bourdieu's positivist idealism — where class identity is based on the observable measurements and 'scientific' analysis of the social sciences, where this is taken to form 'an ideal core, a unity and identity of experience and feeling incorporated into a shared ethos and habitus'[40] — and Rancière's anti-Platonist and non-deterministic account of political subjectivation. Lane demonstrates this divergence with reference to a passage from Rancière's *La Mésentente* (1995), in which Rancière describes how political subjectivation is not a matter of realising any essential core of social being, but when the reaction to a wrong in the form of cries of pain and distress (*phônè*) becomes posed in the form of rational argument (*logos*):

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[38] Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé*, pp.16-17.
[39] Authorship unattributed, 'Propos d'un Imbécile', *Internationale situationniste*, 10 (1966), 75-76 (p.76).
[40] Jeremy F. Lane, 'Rancière's Anti-Platonism: Equality, the "Orphan Letter" and the Problematic of the Social Sciences', in *Rancière Now: Current Perspectives on Jacques Rancière*, ed. by Oliver Davis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp.28-46 (p.37).

> La 'prise de parole' n'est pas conscience et expression d'un soi affirmant son propre. Elle est occupation du lieu où le *logos* définit une autre nature que la *phônè*. Cette occupation suppose que des destins de 'travailleurs' soient d'une maniere ou d'une autre détournés...[41]

Lane quotes this section at much greater length but still interrupts Rancière mid-sentence at the word 'détourné'.[42] The importance Lane rightly accords this diversion or deviation from any pre-established essential notion of what constitutes political subjectivation in Rancière's analysis similarly attests to Debord's refusal to understand political activity in idealist terms, given the importance accorded to détournement in his and other Situationist writings.

The divergence between Debord and Rancière can be further elucidated by understanding the former's keen sense of the centrality of tactics and strategy to revolutionary struggle. The Situationists' privileging of détournement as the technique that combats the spectacle also constitutes an admission that there is nothing outside the spectacle: that appropriation of spectacular forms is the only means available as mediation is an inevitability. A keen reader of German military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, Debord referred to himself not as a philosopher but as a strategist.[43] Indeed, the recent BnF exhibition dedicated to his work entitled 'L'Art de la Guerre' heavily emphasised this facet of his work, particularly the board game he created with Alice Becker-Ho, *Kriegspiel*. McKenzie Wark has written about this board game and its value in understanding the role of strategy in the work of Debord,[44] as has Stevphen Shukaitis:[45] both emphasise how Situationist movement was characterised by a will to attain a theoretical coherence only as far as this would lead to real transformation of the conditions of existence. Hence their willingness to counsel this appropriation in and against the cultural sphere:

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[41] Jacques Rancière, *La Mésentente: Politique et philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), p.61.
[42] Lane, 'Rancière's Anti-Platonism', p.38.
[43] Giorgio Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's Film', trans. by Brian Holmes, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough, pp.313-19 (p.313).
[44] McKenzie Wark, 'The Game of War: Debord as Strategist', *Cabinet Magazine*, 29 (2008). Available online here: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/29/wark.php> [Accessed 11 May 2016].
[45] Stevphen Shukaitis, '"Theories are made only to die in the war of time": Guy Debord & the Situationist International as Strategic Thinkers', *Culture and Organisation*, 20.4 (2014), 251-68.

> A la question: Pourquoi avons-nous favorisé un regroupement si passionné dans cette sphère culturelle, dont pourtant nous rejetons la réalité présente? — la réponse est: Parce que la culture est le centre de signification d'une société sans signification. Cette culture vide est au cœur d'une existence vide, et la réinvention d'une entreprise de transformation générale du monde doit aussi et d'abord être posée sur ce terrain. Renoncer à revendiquer le pouvoir dans la culture serait laisser ce pouvoir à ceux qui l'ont.[46]

The Situationists make concessions to the spectacle in the interests of furthering a revolutionary cause in the here and now. There is little concern for philosophical or theoretical purity but a practical desire to overcome the condition of alienation in the present by any available means. The practice of détournement offers a path to negate the '*vérités officielles*' of the spectacle in the hope of prefiguring a possible future. The necessary question is a tactical one for the Situationists, as the revolutionary struggle is viewed as a civil war. This locates political struggle within the aesthetic realm: détournement appropriates and 're-routes' fragments of the dominant aesthetic towards oppositional ends, seeking to reveal the hypocrisies, iniquities and unfulfilled promises of the status quo and conceiving of ways to combat it. The didactic and propagandist character of Situationist writing serves the specific purpose of enunciating the need for oppositional thought and action, rather than being the sufficient criterion constitutive of oppositional thought and action itself. If détournement acts as both negation and prelude, it functions as a provocation to recognise the necessity for this action. It is Patrick Marcolini's contention that: 'Dans le "Mode d'emploi du détournement", Debord et Wolman insistent sur le fait que le détournement est à la fois le moyen et le but du combat qu'ils sont en train de mener.'[47] This performative coincidence of theory and practice endows the 'movement' with a much sought-after 'authentic' revolutionary praxis that belies much of the Situationists' own references to the 'provisional' or 'transitional' nature of their activity:

[46] Authorship unattributed, 'L'aventure', *Internationale situationniste*, 5 (1960), 3-5 (p.5).
[47] Marcolini, *Le Mouvement situationniste*, p.151.

> La théorie du détournement par elle-même ne nous intéresse guère. Mais nous la trouvons liée à presque tous les aspects constructifs de la période de transition présituationniste. Son enrichissement, par la pratique, apparaît donc comme nécessaire.[48]

Though it may not have 'interested' them particularly, the strength of Situationist propaganda lies primarily in the *theory* of détournement whilst the individual instances can appear inconsequential in the context of the political programme's grand vision. The aesthetic practice of détournement has tended not to fulfil the underlying theory of political action. It is the enrichment of the practice by means of theory that offers the possibility of more productive excavations of the Situationist movement. The identification of a 'pre-Situationist' period of transition in which propaganda and rhetorical seduction are tools, as are the explicitly stated techniques of appropriation, permits a theoretical exploration of its potential. Marcolini uncritically accepts the grandiloquent proclamations of Debord and Wolman; in a similar fashion to Greil Marcus in his essay on Debord and Jorn's *Mémoires* when he contends that for the Situationists, 'the pursuit of the utopia was the utopia.'[49] Whilst unquestionably loyal to the Situationists' insistence on the importance of everyday life and the obsolescence of academic contemplation, these earnest proclamations obscure the extent to which Situationist theory offers a pragmatic and strategic programme for oppositional action by revering the Romantic, bohemian, extra-institutional forms of their organisation. They both attempt to ascribe to the Situationists and to the practice of détournement a hallowed kind of coincidence of theory and practice which the reality does not bear out. Détournement as a concept is strong for its fluidity and multi-facetedness but this mercuriality cannot be confused with a coherence of praxis.

Patrick Greaney's article 'Détournement as Gendered Repetition' critiques the theory of détournement in a similar manner to Rancière's critique of spectacle, contending that the opposition between passive and active is a gendered one. He rightly concludes, however, that Debord's texts can 'nonetheless be reread, détourned, as texts about tensions within Situationist practices and not just

[48] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'.
[49] Greil Marcus, 'Guy Debord's Mémoires: A Situationist Primer', in *On the Passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957-1972*, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp.124-31 (p.131).

proposals to overcome spectacular passivity'.[50] Détournement is fluid and dynamic, in response to historical contexts, time and history; thought this way, 'spectacular passivity' becomes not a hypostatised concept but a term denoting the relationship between the material economic and social relations as they exist. Greaney fails to recognise the extent to which Situationist reflections on the nature of détournement (that is, the theory of détournement) perform this task of critical self-reflection as a means of resisting 'spectacular passivity' — they are not separate tasks. In his short essay on Debord's cinema, Giorgio Agamben characterises détournement thus:

> What does it mean to resist? Above all it means de-creating what exists, de-creating the real, being stronger than the fact in front of you. Every act of creation is also an act of thought, and an act of thought is a creative act, because it is defined above all by its capacity to de-create the real.[51]

Détournement is best understood as this de-creation of the real by means of critical engagement — which requires analysis and understanding — with the détourned element. It is necessary to understand détournement *against* the Situationists' claims of a unity of theory and practice, instead acknowledging the provisional, propagandist character of its political and strategic aims. By recognizing the limits of détournement in this way, a theory that calls for dynamic and constantly evolving criticism of the historical moment is brought into relief.

Avec et contre le cinéma

In the pre-Situationist 'user's guide' to détournement, Debord and Wolman declare that: 'C'est évidemment dans le cadre cinématographique que le détournement peut atteindre à sa plus grande efficacité, et sans doute, pour ceux que la chose préoccupe, à sa plus grande beauté.'[52] The cinema

[50] Patrick Greaney, 'Insinuation: Détournement as Gendered Repetition', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 110.1 (2011), 75-88 (p.84).
[51] Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's Film', *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough, p.318.
[52] Debord and Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement.'

owes this privileged position in the theorisation and practice of détournement to its status as 'l'art central de notre société' as an editorial text entitled 'Avec et contre le cinéma' sets out in the first issue of *I.S.*[53] This centrality is attributed to the fact that it is the most technologically advanced art form as well as its role offering compensatory images and narratives in the leisure time of alienated workers. This latter notion is more readily associated with popular evocations of the 'society of the spectacle' but it is the former which the *I.S.* editorial emphasises: the cinema offering 'la meilleure *représentation* d'une époque d'inventions anarchiques juxtaposées (non articulées, simplement additionnées).'[54] The article refers to potential technological advances in the cinema, giving the example of 'un cinéma odorant', seeking to render more perfect the illusion of the spectacle's incorporation of individual experience and offer a substitute for the unitary artistic activity they alleged is now possible in everyday life. The confluence of the cinema's material infrastructure and capacity for aesthetic conditioning gives it its unique importance as the defining art form of the twentieth century.

It is an escapist or compensatory cinema which presents a consumable and diversionary spectacle that the Situationists attack first and foremost. Debord would write in 1961, that 'La révolution n'est pas "montrer" la vie aux gens, mais les faire vivre',[55] and that the aim of any revolutionary organisation was not to encourage people to listen to convincing explanations from expert leaders but to provoke them into speaking themselves. The cinematic spectacle was a form of 'pseudo-communication — qui a été développée, de préférence à d'autres possibles, par la présente technologie *de classe* — où ceci est radicalement impraticable'.[56] It was this conviction which led to the initial positing of an 'anti-cinema'. The first tenet of Situationist cinema then, was to radically break with the dominant conception of what cinema could be. The notion of aesthetics is already marginalised in the 'Mode d'emploi', 'beauty' is considered an incidental aspect of the potential détournement cinema could permit. Aesthetic achievement is a potential preoccupation of others, a

[53] Authorship unattributed, 'Avec et contre le cinéma', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1958), 8-9 (p.8).
[54] Ibid.
[55] Guy Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art', *Notes critiques: bulletin de recherche et d'orientation révolutionnaires*, 3 (1962). Available online here: <https://debordiana.noblogs.org/2011/08/pour-un-jugement-revolutionnaire-de-lart-fevrier-1961/> [Accessed 12 May 2016].
[56] Ibid.

consideration uniquely motivated by the requirements of the revolutionary project to inspire action in a text's readers or a film's spectators. Debord's first film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952), made during his time among the Lettrists, took this rejection of traditional aesthetic criteria in the cinema to the extreme of completely eliminating the image. He would later describe the film as an 'entreprise de terrorisme cinématographique'.[57] The screen would alternate between black and white blocks as the voice-over played. The final twenty-minute sequence consisted only of silence and a blank screen. This anti-image, Dada-esque gesture asserted the negation of art and cinema: all forms of culture were to be considered co-opted and ideologically mortgaged to the economic and social forces which controlled them. After presenting the title and director of the film and a dedication (to Wolman), the soundtrack quotes article 115 of the French penal code, the legal definition of disappearance, an oblique warning to the audience of the absence to come. A more explicit warning followed soon after:

> Au moment où la projection allait commencer, Guy-Ernest Debord devait monter sur la scène pour prononcer quelques mots d'introduction. Il aurait dit simplement: Il n'y a pas de film. Le cinéma est mort. Il ne peut plus y avoir de film. Passons, si vous voulez, au débat.[58]

The pronouncement of the death of cinema and this radical negativity are indicative of the Lettrist leader Isodore Isou's *Esthétique du cinema* which argued that any art form would pass through two distinct stages: 'la phase amplique' and 'la phase ciselante'.[59] During this amplic phase, a mode of expression is constructed, its stylistic vocabulary and grammatical rules are brought into being and formal conventions and narrative techniques are established. The 'chiselling' phase is one of destruction, where the form turns in on itself having exhausted its capacity for communication. This phase is characterised by the self-conscious examination of the capacities and limits of the form itself. This influence endures until after the establishment of the Situationist International. 'Avec et contre'

[57] Quoted in Stephane Zagdanski, *Debord contre le cinéma* (2007). Available online here: <http://parolesdesjours.free.fr/debordcinema.pdf> [Accessed 12 May 2006] (p.6).
[58] Guy Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes: 1952-1978* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p.11.
[59] Isodore Isou, 'Esthétique du cinéma', *Ion*, 1 (1952), 147-48 (p.147).

laments the absence of such formally destructive works in the cinema, and attributes this lack precisely to the social role the cinema plays in modern society:

> Le retard de l'apparition des symptômes modernes de l'art dans le cinéma (par exemple certaines œuvres formellement destructrices, contemporaines de ce qui est accepté depuis vingt ou trente ans dans les arts plastiques ou l'écriture, sont encore rejetées même dans les ciné-clubs) découle non seulement de ses chaînes directement économiques ou fardées d'idéalismes (censure morale), mais de *l'importance positive* de l'art cinématographique dans la société moderne. Cette importance du cinéma est due aux moyens d'influence supérieurs qu'il met en œuvre; et entraîne nécessairement son contrôle accru par la classe dominante. Il faut donc lutter pour s'emparer d'un secteur réellement expérimental dans le cinéma.[60]

These superior means of influence which constitute the 'positive importance' of cinema's societal role correspond to the spectacle's seductive capacities. It is these capacities which make the cinema the battleground for revolutionary struggle and therefore the stage most requiring détournement. Despite the avowed intention to seize control of a truly experimental sector of cinema, there is at this stage, beyond the negativity of the blank screen and the stated theoretical aims of negation, no suggestion of what an experimental cinema might look like. This espousal of a radical negativity continues in the third issue of the journal, in which an article entitled 'Le cinéma après Alain Resnais' provides a (rare) approving assessment of a work of contemporary cinema, Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). The film received much critical praise at the time, and has gone down as one of the most significant landmarks in French cinema in the twentieth century. Perhaps predictably, it was the critical and popular appreciation of the film at which the Situationists took aim in their review: 'Les partisans de Resnais parlent assez libéralement de génie, à cause du prestigieux mystère du terme, qui dispense d'expliquer l'importance objective d'*Hiroshima*: l'apparition dans le cinéma "commercial" du mouvement d'auto-destruction qui domine tout l'art moderne.'[61] Rather than understanding Resnais's achievement in terms of 'genius' then, as the quasi-metaphysical product of individual

[60] 'Avec et contre le cinéma', p.9.
[61] Authorship unattributed, 'Le cinéma après Alain Resnais', *Internationale situationniste*, 3 (1959), 8-10 (p.9).

inspiration, the Situationists claimed the merit of the film lay in its recognition of the cinema's necessary passage into *la phase ciselante*. Echoing the earlier 'Avec et contre', the assessment of *Hiroshima mon amour*'s reception continues: 'En fait, chacun insiste sur le temps bouleversé du film de Resnais pour ne pas en voir les autres aspects destructifs […] Le temps d'*Hiroshima*, la confusion d'*Hiroshima*, ne sont pas une annexion du cinéma par la littérature; c'est la suite dans le cinéma du mouvement qui a porté toute l'écriture, et d'abord la poésie, vers sa dissolution.'[62] This radically negative conception of the virtue of cinematic practice must end in the destruction, dissolution and death of the cinema.

This emphasis on negativity in political and artistic practice more generally is insisted upon in the 1962 journal article, *Du rôle de l'IS*: 'Le défaut d'autres groupes, qui ont vu plus ou moins la nécessité de la mutation qui vient, c'est leur positivité. Que ces groupes essaient d'être avant-garde artistique ou bien nouvelle formation politique, ils croient tous devoir sauver quelque chose de l'ancienne praxis, et par là ils se perdent.'[63] This dependence on historical political struggle ensures the failure of these other groups aspiring to the status of the avant-garde. What the Situationists allege sets them apart then, is their resistance to such positivity, to a praxis which accepts any existing forms. They cite their recent decision at the Gothenburg conference of the same year — to expel the 'Nashist' and 'Spurist' factions, the former a predominantly Scandinavian grouping around the Danish painter (and brother of Asger Jorn) Jorgen Nash and the group SPUR (a German artistic collective), on grounds of their desire to continue to produce works for sale on the art market and subsequent declaration of all art works to be 'anti-Situationist' — as evidence for the rather grandiose claim of the S.I. holding a dominant position within modern culture. This negationist stance is reiterated at the conclusion of the article: 'Et si l'on tient vraiment à trouver quelque chose de positif dans la culture moderne, il faut dire que son seul caractère positif apparaît dans son auto-liquidation, son mouvement de disparition, son témoignage contre elle-même.'[64]

[62] Ibid.
[63] Authorship unattributed, 'Du rôle de l'IS', *Internationale situationniste*, 7 (1962), 17-20 (p.19).
[64] Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art'.

Extracts of journal articles, an essay on Debord's cinema by Asger Jorn, full scenarios as well as technical notes for Debord's first three films, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers d'une assez courte unité de temps* (1959) and *Critique de la séparation* (1961), were released in 1964 under the title *Contre le cinéma*.[65] The title is indicative of the emphasis on negativity that can be taken from Debord's early Situationist and particularly Lettrist cinema. It is nevertheless significant that this categorisation of Debord's early work forgoes the positive or affirmative aspect initially outlined in 'Avec et contre': the 'With and' has been lost. Debord's cinema in this guise (and we might add, the Situationist project more generally) does invite itself to be considered as a form of radical negativity, a wholesale rejection of existing forms which seeks to posit nothing itself. Alain Badiou has described the Situationists in terms of an 'active nihilism', a doctrine whose indifference to the labour of reconstructing the world squanders any merit of their critical intent.[66] This characterisation, however, not only ignores the means of operational organisation necessary in the formation of the S.I. as a group but also their repeated identification of the positive potential of the cinema. In 'Avec et contre', this double-edged nature of the cinema is repeatedly emphasised:

> Nous pouvons envisager deux usages distincts du cinéma: d'abord son emploi comme forme de propagande dans la période de transition pré-situationniste; ensuite son emploi direct comme élément constitutif d'une situation réalisée.
>
> Le cinéma est ainsi comparable à l'architecture par son importance actuelle dans la vie de tous, par les limitations qui lui ferment le renouvellement, par l'immense portée que ne peut manquer d'avoir sa liberté de renouvellement. Il faut tirer parti des aspects progressifs du cinéma industriel, de même qu'en trouvant une architecture organisée à partir de la fonction psychologique de l'ambiance on peut retirer la perle cachée dans le fumier du fonctionnalisme absolu.[67]

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[65] Debord, *Contre le cinéma.*
[66] Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p.329.
[67] 'Avec et contre le cinéma', p.9.

Whilst the notion of the constructed situation is one that I have marginalised in my analysis of Situationist theory in line with my argument that the rhetorical role of such effusions outweighs their substantive theoretical significance, it is important to acknowledge this affirmation of the potential revolutionary value of the cinema. Notably, it is certainly not inconsistent with the denunciation of a certain kind of spectacular cinema: the pearl can be sought amongst the manure, to quote the above (seemingly slightly confused) metaphor. Whilst the initial negativity may be most evident in *Hurlements*, as a rebellion against the image, Rancière has in fact written of Debord's cinematic work in strikingly antithetical terms, citing Debord's description of détournement as 'positif ou "lyrique"'.[68] Rancière's article, 'Quand nous étions sur le Shenandoah', appeared in an edition of *Cahiers du cinéma* on the occasion of the DVD release of Debord's films which had until then been out of circulation at their director's behest. Rancière's comments draw attention to the presence of an almost naïve identification invited by the selection of certain détourned images and filmed shots of Debord and his Situationist counterparts: 'A l'exacte opposé de toute la pédagogie brechtienne en vogue dans les années 1960, le détournement est un exercice d'identification au héros.'[69] Rancière's assessment is particularly apt for moments such as Debord's détournement of Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954), where he allows the sound track (albeit it in a poorly dubbed version) of the film to interrupt his monologue, as the hero (Sterling Hayden) talks to Joan Crawford's character about love, and significantly how he is drinking in order to 'tuer le temps'. Debord would dedicate a whole chapter of his memoir *Panégyric* to alcohol, and left instructions to translators detailing his use of alcohol to describe the passage of time. In this détournement, what we see is not the standard contempt for the image in its entirety, but an element of pathos with the diegetic characters. Here, Debord takes the spectacle at its word, and seeks to present the images themselves uncritically, whilst retaining the critical distance toward the original as a cultural object, it is removed from its original context and spared the typical caustic bite which usually accompany Debord's détournements. Sequences described below in which Debord presents photographs of himself and his Situationist

[68] Debord, *Contre le cinéma*.
[69] Jacques Rancière, 'Quand nous étions sur le shenandoah', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 605 (October 2005), 92-95 (p.93).

colleagues are invited to be considered in the same way. Once again, these are heroes of the story, and we can afford to take the spectacle at its word, by identifying with these heroes, just not certain others. Rancière's mention of Bertolt Brecht invites comparison with the work of Jean-Luc Godard — Debord and the Situationists denounced Godard repeatedly, an antipathy that will be explored below — with whom the notion of Brechtian distanciation in the cinema is widely associated.[70] This distanciation sought to animate a passive spectator by drawing attention to the necessarily constructed and artificial nature of the cinematic spectacle. Such a tactic involved introducing elements which self-consciously flouted conventions of narrative and form, such as explicit references to the film's production, characters 'breaking the fourth wall' by speaking directly to the camera or discontinuous editing. Whilst Rancière is right to signal the positivity that is not so much discernible as exaggeratedly blatant, by describing this as 'remontant le cours de l'utopie esthétique' he ignores the ways in which Debord moves between these two registers — identification and distanciation — with scant regard to a doctrinaire commitment to one or the other, in order to finally draw attention away from both aesthetics and utopia, and seeking to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

This oscillation between affirmation and negation calls to mind the dialectical functioning of détournement. Debord's repeatedly avowed Hegelianism makes recourse to referring to dialectics very tempting in examining the polarisations which feature throughout his work. Given the frequency (not least in Debord's writing itself) with which the concept of the dialectic is invoked in an imprecise and catch-all fashion, the analysis that follows seeks to show how the technique of détournement radically resists any consignment into a static doctrine. How this 'double jeu de l'art et de sa négation' plays out during the course of Debord's cinematic career will be examined over the course of the rest of this chapter. Benjamin Noys's characterisation is useful here:

> A dialectical thought must at once sharpen the contradiction between time and space, to avoid a false monism, a solution merely in thought, and sublate or supersede that contradiction so as

[70] For an account of Brechtain distanciation devices in Godard's films of the 1960s, see Jan Uhde, 'The Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory of Distanciation On The Contemporary Cinema, Particularly on Jean-Luc Godard', *Journal of the University Film Association*, 26.3 (1974), 28-30 and 44 (p.44).

> not to fall into a dualism; we could say this is precisely the dialectical function of détournement.[71]

In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate the cinematic techniques Debord uses in order to carry out this perpetually evolving task.

The interplay of an all–encompassing negativity and a seemingly naive hyper-identification with the images employed is borne out in Debord's two 'Situationist' films (by which all I mean is that they were made during the years of the Situationist International's existence — as will become clear, those that came after I am still considering as examples of 'Situationist cinema'): *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (1959) and *Critique de la séparation* (1961). Both were produced by the 'Dansk-Fransk experimentalfilms kompagni', funded by Asger Jorn via sales of his artworks. *Sur le passage* tells the story in the form of a 'documentaire détourné'[72] of the Lettrist international and Debord's comrades on the Parisian left bank during the mid-late 1950s where: 'ici était mis en actes le doute systématique à l'égard de tous les divertissements et travaux d'une société, une critique globale de son idée de bonheur.'[73] The title's identification with Debord and his Lettrist cohorts immediately signals a greater level of conciliation with conventional cinematic form than the oblique reference to Sade of his previous film (the fourth voice, 'jeune fille', on the soundtrack to *Hurlements* remarks: 'Mais on ne parle pas de Sade dans ce film'.)[74] The titles of *Sur le passage* are shown over a black screen as a recording plays from the 3rd conference of the S.I. which took place in Munich. We hear a somewhat hectic discussion of urbanism being simultaneously translated into German as the speaker holds forth, before Debord (after what one assumes is a cut) is heard discussing memory and art. This somewhat confusing and disjointed debate is contextualised by a title which notifies us of the recording's provenance. The first images show a stationary camera panning left to right over the facades of Saint-Germain-des-Prés with a subtitle situating the shot: 'Paris 1952'. Debord intones over images of crowds walking in the

[71] Benjamin Noys, 'Guy Debord's Time-Image: In girum imus nocte et consummimur igni (1978)', *Grey Room*, 52 (Summer 2013), 94-107 (p.95).
[72] 'Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude', p.11.
[73] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.21.
[74] Ibid., p.13.

streets that this neighbourhood, designed for the petit bourgeois, honourable employees and intellectual tourism is 'l'environnement étranger de notre histoire'.[75] Already the consistency of sound and image offers a coherence which constitutes a clear distinction between this and Debord's first film. A still photograph of Asger Jorn, Michèle Bernstein, Debord himself and Collette Gaillard drinking and smoking in a café is then shown. These take the form of a shot of the photograph itself, followed by panning over and zooming in on each individual, Jorn's eyes, Debord's cigarette, Bernstein's drink, as what Debord's notes describe as a 'thème cérémonieux des aventures' plays on the soundtrack.[76] It is clear at this point that we are dealing with an autobiography of sorts, and a laudatory one: 'Notre objectif a saisi pour vous quelques aspects d'une micro-société provisoire.'[77] Michel Richard Delalande's (1657-1726) 'Thème noble et tragique' lends more portentous strings to the soundtrack, with the suitably self-aggrandising title demonstrating further Debord's intention to present his and his colleagues' adventures of the 1950s in the form of this identification with the 'heroes' of the narrative.

What is equally obvious, however, is that this is not the only register on which *Sur le passage* is operating. A sequence which initially portrays shots of a sparsely populated St Germain street demonstrates the refusal of continuity editing which demonstrates Debord's enduring opposition to conventional modes of narrative construction. The cut to the same camera at a different time, after three seconds, sees the street filled with throngs of youths walking in the same direction having left their school, towards the camera. A third cut, again to the same camera, jumps forward a few seconds. Immediately after this, the next jump sees the same flow of pedestrians interrupted by a delivery vehicle that has materialised half-way down the street. The next cut, again after only a second or so, is revealed to have taken place at least a few seconds before the previous one, as the same vehicle turns the corner at the head of the street fifty meters back from where it appeared previously, moving slowly through the crowd. This shot is then again almost immediately superseded by a shot of another street, shot at a similar angle which it is easy to assume was an intentional visual

[75] Ibid., p.21.
[76] Ibid., p.21.
[77] Ibid., p.23.

quotation of the previous, in which students battle riot police. This sequence demonstrates the arbitrary manipulation of cinematic time of which a director has command, seeking to draw attention to the constructed nature of the film and the false coherence of narrative. It also serves as a depiction of the equally arbitrary currents of pedestrianisation in the modern city, in keeping with the Situationist preoccupation with urbanism and the structuring of public space with this juxtaposition of a peaceful, compliant youth, obeying the commodity time of capital as they leave school in unison and the revolting students violently confronting the state's physical manifestation and defenders of this packaged time: the police. Though Debord's cinematic oeuvre invites itself to be considered as film essay precisely because of the pre-eminence of the written script and its literary character — and the fact that for a long time, it was only his film scripts that were available for public consumption — in his complete cinematic works, this sequence is described extremely succinctly as 'Sortie d'un lycée de jeunes filles. Des policiers français dans la rue'.[78] It is also noteworthy that Debord's use of the jump cut precedes Godard's celebrated employment of the technique in *A Bout de Souffle* (1960) by a year.

As mentioned above, the *I.S.* journal describes *Sur le passage* as a détourned documentary. Debord distinguishes what he is doing from conventional documentary during the course of the film, as the voiceover states:

> Ce qui, le plus souvent, permet de comprendre les documentaires — c'est la limitation arbitraire de leur sujet. Ils décrivent l'atomisation des fonctions sociales, et l'isolement de leurs produits. On peut, au contraire, envisager toute la complexité d'un moment qui ne se résout pas dans un travail, dont le mouvement contient indissolublement des faits et des valeurs, et dont le sens n'apparaît pas encore. La matière du documentaire serait alors cette totalité confuse.[79]

This critique of specialisation contrasts the manufactured coherence of spectacular representation with the possibility of a film seeking to challenge the spectator by presenting an incoherent documentary

[78] Ibid., p.23
[79] Ibid., p.28.

which reflects the incoherence of lived reality. It is not a simple matter of everyday life being more complex than the spectacle permits, as a documentary that sought to portray an issue in all its complexity could, theoretically, do so according to the conventions of the genre. The restriction of a documentary's subject matter to neatly parcelled categories allows it to be comprehensible in the context of what has gone before. *Sur le passage* seeks to dismantle this artificial construction, not in the name of acknowledging the enhanced complexity of the world, but in terms of negation and a refusal of the construct of narrative coherence.[80] Thomas Y. Levin, in his seminal article on Debord's cinema, describes this as a 'mimesis of incoherence', which makes the relationship of détournement to the cinema analogous to the relationship between the psychogeographic *dérive* and everyday life.[81] The *dérive* involved embarking on an adventure across the city, seeing where the influences of the environment would take you. This involved disabusing onself of the instrumental logic of traditional urbanism and engaging with one's surroundings entirely as one saw fit, with no regard to convention or custom. The refusal of cinematic convention is evinced by the very fact that this programmatic statement takes place over a blank screen, quoting the negativity of *Hurlements*. This negation is itself negated, however, later in the film: 'Evidemment, on peut à l'occasion en faire un film. Cependant, même au cas où ce film réussirait à être aussi fondamentalement incohérent et insatisfaisant que la réalité dont il traite, il ne sera jamais qu'une reconstitution — pauvre et fausse comme ce travelling manqué', over a travelling shot of a group of Debord's cohorts assembled in a cafe which his notes indicate should be the 'worst' of their recorded takes, in which the watching public should encroach, the shadow of the camera be seen.[82] Even the mimesis of incoherence then, is too coherent once designated a filmmaking strategy. Détournement requires not only the negative devaluation but the re-inscription into a new affirmative context. That this reinscription, to some extent at least, can be seen as a preservation is similarly revealed in Debord's notes where he states that an earlier series of images of café-dwelling Situationists is shot 'dans la manière du reportage

[80] As Debord puts it in his *Rapport sur la construction des situations* in 1957, 'Une action révolutionnaire dans la culture ne saurait avoir pour but de traduire ou d'expliquer la vie, mais de l'élargir' (p.8).
[81] Thomas Y. Levin, 'Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord', in *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*, ed. by Sussman, pp.72-109 (p.90).
[82] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.34.

cinématographique ou télévisé' as well as by the embrace of the identification with our 'heroes', with whom, though hardly the stuff of traditional cinema, we are invited to empathise despite the Situationists' opposition to this technique on behalf of spectacular forms.[83]

Another visual quotation of *Hurlements* sees a female voice enunciate over a blank screen that: 'On ne conteste jamais réellement une organisation de l'existence sans contester toutes les formes de langage qui appartiennent à cette organisation.'[84] In the sequence of the youth in the streets, Debord is contesting the convention of continuity editing, the grammar of cinematic language, at the same time as demonstrating its practical and political corollary. This is not purely the refusal of convention in negative form but a tactical use of this negation in the formation of a critical statement. This necessarily returns to an extent to a recognisable language of cinema in order to communicate this idea, after all, *Sur le passage* cannot but remain a film and thus a means of communication, however imperfect. Whilst the blank screen denotes the pure negativity of *Hurlements*, the employment of conventional codes of identification with the heroes or shots aping the documentary form of cinema and television reveal the undesirability for Debord of foregoing this language entirely, in the manner of a non-figural form of representation, for example, or in the manner of François Dufrêne's *Tambours du jugement premier* (1952), a film without film, screen or image at all. What is meant by contesting this language is therefore beyond mere renunciation. There is rather something of a playful, tactical interplay between the two modes of identification and distanciation, of coherence and incoherence which denotes that one necessarily relies on the other: the negative only means anything in relation to the positivity of language and it is tactically desirable for a détournement to have a substantive meaning in and of itself. This substantive meaning can still be a denunciation, however, in that the necessary conclusion of the film will permit the creation of a narrative by giving it an end, just as a sentence only makes sense with a full-stop. Debord refuses this affirmation, however, constantly fighting to resist either pole of the negative/affirmative binary: the screen remains plain white, Debord's instruction indicates for twenty seconds after the pronouncement of the

[83] Ibid., p.23.
[84] Ibid., p.26.

last word: 'Pour décrire effectivement cette époque, il faudrait sans doute montrer beaucoup d'autres choses. Mais à quoi bon? Il faudrait comprendre la totalité de ce qui s'est fait; ce qui reste à faire. Et non ajouter d'autres ruines au vieux monde du spectacle et des souvenirs.'[85]

The constant flitting between affirmation and negation is repeated in 1961's *Critique de la séparation*, Debord's next film. The unsatisfying nature of everyday life is reiterated in the context of the false coherence created by spectacular convention: 'Le spectacle cinématographique a ses règles, qui permettent d'aboutir à des produits satisfaisants. Cependant, la réalité dont il faut partir, c'est l'insatisfaction.'[86] This renewal of the conceptual architecture of *Sur la passage* is extended throughout the opening of the film as Debord reemphasises the importance of a film's dissolution of its so-called subject in demystifying the cinema as well as reaffirming the essential incomprehensibility of everyday life. The predominantly autobiographical approach of *Sur le passage* has been largely replaced by an increased attention to society itself, particularly 'les pouvoirs' which are used interchangeably with 'notre époque', 'temps morts' and 'temps perdu'.[87] This equation of power and time is a manifestation of Debord's theorisation of human knowledge as irrevocably bound to time and history. It is the dominant conception of knowledge and of reason which constitutes power and at which Debord takes aim. This time is lost or dead because the individual is dispossessed of his or her own time in the service of the spectacle-commodity economy. As *Critique* has it: 'Le spectacle, dans toute son étendue, c'est l'époque.'[88] This notion of power is given a new visual referent in *Critique*: footage of and taken from aviation. Debord's notes refer to individual shots: 'Aviateur, équipement stratosphérique',[89] 'photographie aérienne',[90] whilst mention of dead and lost time is accompanied by a view of the Place de la Concorde taken from a helicopter. Footage of two separate rockets taking off are aligned with two lines of Debord's monotone describing this dispossession: 'Notre époque accumule des pouvoirs et se rêve rationelle. Mais personne ne reconnaît

[85] Ibid., p.36.
[86] Ibid., p.43.
[87] Ibid., pp.44-5.
[88] Ibid., p.55.
[89] Ibid., p.45.
[90] Ibid., p.49.

comme siens de tels pouvoirs.'[91] The God-like view from above is an effective metaphorical counterpart to Debord's description of power as it entails the employment of technical means which literally elevate the camera above and beyond the capabilities of the human. It is the super-human presentation of these images which echo power's false coherence and the spectacle's representation of life as more or greater than lived individual reality. The portrayal of power then moves into a less metaphorical stage with photographs and détourned news footage of world leaders: Krushchev, De Gaulle, the UN Security Council, Eisenhower and the Pope, Eisenhower in the arms of Franco. These images are specifically linked with the role of the cinema:

> La société se renvoie sa propre image historique, seulement comme l'histoire superficielle et statique de ses dirigeants. Ceux qui incarnent la fatalité extérieure de ce qui se fait. Le secteur des dirigeants est celui-là même du spectacle. Le cinéma leur va bien. D'ailleurs, le cinéma propose partout des conduites exemplaires, fait des héros, sur le même vieux modèle de ceux-ci, avec tout ce qu'il touche.[92]

What we see is a very coherent and intelligible relationship between the voiceover's criticisms and the images presented, yet, Debord reminds us that: 'Toute expression artistique cohérente exprime déjà la cohérence du passé, la passivité.' Again, the correlation here between the image of the prison guard (the incarnation of order and confinement) and the voiceover's denunciation of coherent artistic expression is itself relatively coherent and therefore seems to undermine Debord's critique. This is only the case, however, if we limit the theoretical and philosophical assertions of the film to the aesthetic medium of film itself. This is something Debord explicitly cautions the spectator against, in that his cinema — more so even than his written works, given the noted centrality of the cinema within the spectacle — must always be initially opposed in favour of reading his films as an intervention in the everyday life of the spectator. The means he uses to depict his arguments are therefore never coherent in themselves, even when they borrow uncomplicatedly from existing cinematic language in order to be understood. Instead, their coherence is employed as a means of

[91] Ibid., p.45.
[92] Ibid., p.49.

demonstrating the futility of creating a film in and of itself, if it cannot hope to engage the spectator as a part of the process. This is nevertheless incoherent to the extent that it refuses to tie the film together in a neat narratival bow and there is no summative conclusion from which we can take Debord's moral of the story.

This process of engaging the viewer moves once again towards the hyper-identification of Debord and the Situationists with the traditional role of the hero, so categorically denounced in the same eighteen minute film. 'La seule aventure, disions-nous, c'est contester la totalité',[93] pronounces Debord over a photograph from a film of King Arthur and his knights of the round table. The cut into a picture of an unnamed friend ('un situationniste', in the script's notes) is followed by a photograph of Asger Jorn, then a close up of one of the knights from the original photograph. We are then shown another image of Jorn, before the camera cuts back to the knights, this time panning over the photograph, before cutting to a photograph of four Situationists, including Debord and Bernstein, themselves around a table in a café on the Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, a regular Situationist haunt. The symmetry of the images of the Knights and the Situationists themselves posits once again, and not subtly, this extreme identification. This mythologisation of Debord and his band of warriors seems at once ironic and extremely unironic: whilst this manoeuvre could be interpreted as an ironic identification fulfilling the role of distanciation, it is worth noting that this sequence comes before the above discussed critique of cinema and its heroism. The heroism presented here calls into question such notions as seen in traditional narrative cinema, or in the portrayal of political leaders on television, yet it is difficult not to understand Debord's eulogy to himself and his friends as willingly preserving this tactic of exemplarity. I have noted above, in connection with the discussion of Rancière's critique of spectatorship, that Debord states it necessary to speak the language of spectacle, to pursue the spectacle's own methodology in order to analyse it. As he writes in *La Société du spectacle*, the spectacle is the 'moment historique qui nous contient' (Thesis 11). What is meant here by the verb 'contient' is perhaps vague, but indicates the spectacle's status not just as mere cultural and political power but as the constant and inevitable mediation of cultural memory in the

[93] Ibid., p.46.

construction of our identities and social relations. This being the case, the purpose of détournement is excavating the good from this cultural heritage in the service of transforming the economic and social realities of the everyday. The spectacle, then, is all there is: détournement merely seeks to repurpose what can be repurposed in the interests of a new, qualitatively superior whole. This takes place within, as *Critique* continues, '[l]e décalage entre cette image et les résultats';[94] the gap between the images the spectacle recognises itself in and the social and historical consequences of that image. The unfulfilled promises of an era can be discerned within the representation of experience and memory the spectacle offers. After mention of this 'décalage', we see swimmers filmed from under the water: like the swimmers, we flail about in time, in images and within the spectacle itself.

In the 'fiches techniques' published as part of *Contre le cinéma*, Debord describes his intentions in *Critique*: 'Le rapport entre les images, le commentaire et les sous-titres n'est ni complémentaire, ni indifférent. Il vise à être lui-même critique.'[95] The sporadic inclusion of subtitles introduces another ingredient to Debord's composition, an addition which he, in the same short piece, acknowledges is difficult to follow at the same time as the commentary. This confusion can on the one hand be considered a distanciation device, rendering the film virtually incomprehensible. Upon second viewing perhaps, or with the script to hand, we can draw out the interplay between the image, voiceover and subtitles. One scene in which this 'critical' relationship can be dissected involves an aerial view of a pinball machine from which only the playing area is visible, not the player. Debord's commentary describes how the spectacle impoverishes everyday life whilst presenting images of supposedly great richness. We are shown a game being played which the player cannot win (the end of the game always and inevitably comes when the ball falls into the hole, this is ensured from the beginning), whilst the commentary describes the spectacle in precisely these terms: though one may find some measure of solace in the spoils of the spectacle, any such consolation is necessarily partial and in need of constant renewal. It is a game fixed from the beginning. Meanwhile, the apparently incongruous subtitles read: 'Qui souhaiterait d'avoir pour ami un homme qui discourt de cette

[94] Ibid., p.55.
[95] Debord, *Contre le cinéma*.

manière? Qui le choisirait entre les autres pour lui communiquer ses affaires? Qui aurait recours à lui dans des afflictions? Et enfin à quel usage de la vie on le pourrait destiner?'[96] This apparent auto-critique immediately undermines the assertions of the voiceover and by extension any link such as the one I have made between the image of pinball and Debord's casting of the spectacle. This self-conscious critique of *Critique* asserts Debord's understanding of the contingency of cinematic communication and this self-critique continues throughout. Towards the end, a black screen, yet again recalling *Hurlements*, describes the film as 'un document sur les conditions de la non-communication',[97] a film which interrupts itself and never comes to a coherent conclusion, leaving all calculations to be remade, a 'monologue d'ivrogne'[98] with incomprehensible allusions and tired delivery (Debord's dry monologue is an ever present characteristic of all his films), a film which, as he continues, has no profound reason to have begun and no profound reason to end. These are precisely the ways Debord's film resists conventional narrative form, but in making this explicit he somewhat concedes the necessity of a narrative, albeit one that attacks itself. Following this, the final line of the film pronounces, 'Je commence à peine à vous faire comprendre que je ne veux pas jouer ce jeu-là', over a still photograph of himself. Even while declaring his unwillingness to play the game, he plays the game, illustrating his mission statement, almost as if signing his work, whilst directly addressing the spectator. These explicit assertions and disavowals, however, invite the spectator's critical engagement with the work and with Debord himself, to understand the issues he raises alongside his renunciation of the means he uses to do so. It is a constant struggle Debord participates in with and against the cinema, reflecting the unending struggle of the individual within the spectacle: 'C'est un monde où nous avons fait l'apprentissage du changement. Rien ne s'y arrête. Il apparaît sans cesse plus mobile; et ceux qui le produisent jour après jour contre eux-mêmes peuvent se l'approprier, je le sais bien.'[99] Debord's was a cinema of fluidity, then, that sought to depict

[96] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, pp.52-53.
[97] Ibid., p.54.
[98] Ibid., p.52.
[99] Ibid., pp.45-46.

(indivisibly in form and content) this struggle in terms which brought about the realisation that this re-appropriation was necessary, desirable and possible.

One man the Situationists denounced in no uncertain terms for playing this game too readily, was Jean-Luc Godard. This ire directed at Godard was due to the widespread praise accorded his work, in which the Situationists detected nothing more than the popularisation of techniques belonging to a co-opted, spectacle-friendly aesthetic: 'Dans le cinéma, Godard représente actuellement la pseudo-liberté formelle et la pseudo-critique des habitudes et des valeurs, c'est-à-dire les deux manifestations inséparables de tous les *ersatz* de l'art moderne récupéré.'[100] So began a 1966 article entitled 'Le rôle de Godard', which (without, it must be said, referring in any sustained way to any of Godard's films) described how:

> L'art 'critique' d'un Godard et ses critiques d'art admiratifs s'emploient tous à cacher les problèmes actuels d'une *critique de l'art*, l'expérience réelle, selon les termes de l'I.S., d'une 'communication contenant sa propre critique'. En dernière analyse, la fonction présente du godardisme est d'empêcher l'expression situationniste au cinéma.[101]

This criticism contrasts a cinema which constantly signals its own contingency and imperfection in the name of constant revaluation and experimentation, against Godard's perceived cooperation with the dominant conceptual architecture of the cinema. It is tempting to suspect that this antipathy is on account of the considerable commercial success and critical approval Godard received. This success seems to be a guarantee of Situationist disapproval, given their estimations of a cinema-going public and the critical capacities of virtually anyone not writing in their journal. It is perhaps on the basis of this popular acknowledgment of Godard's work that the article declares: 'Nous ne parlons pas ici de l'emploi, finalement conformiste, d'un art qui se voudrait novateur et critique. Nous signalons l'emploi immédiatement conformiste du cinéma par Godard.'[102] Godard is described as the cinematic equivalent of Henri Lefebvre's contribution to social critique: 'il *possède l'apparence* d'une certaine

[100] Authorship unattributed, 'Le rôle de Godard', *Internationale situationniste*, 10 (1966), 58-59 (p.58).
[101] Ibid. p.59.
[102] Ibid., p.58.

liberté dans son propos (ici, un minimum de désinvolture par rapport aux dogmes poussiéreux du récit cinématographique). Mais *cette liberté même, ils l'ont prise ailleurs*: dans ce qu'ils ont pu saisir des expériences avancées de l'époque. Ils sont le *Club Méditerranée* de la pensée moderne.'[103] The article then refers to another piece in the same issue entitled 'L'emballage du temps libre', referring to the packaged and neatly commodifiable units of time by which capital could be seen to be 'colonising' leisure, that is, time spent not working, in their analysis. Godard was declared then, along with Lefebvre, a product of the spectacle they both ostensibly sought to oppose. In *De la misère en milieu étudiant*, Mustapha Kayati would describe Godard in precisely these terms, this time comparing him to Coca-Cola, referencing Godard's frequent invocation of the drinks company as the representative of American consumer-capital.

The journal returns to Godard in the twelfth and final issue with an article entitled 'Le cinéma et la révolution', beginning with *Le Monde*'s approving review of Godard's *Le Gai Savoir* (1969). The article cites J.-P. Picaper's admiring account of Godard's 'auto-critique' manifesting itself as leaving the audience in the presence of a blank screen for what is described as an interminably long period of time. The fact that Picaper does not disclose what constitutes this interminablity is mocked in what cannot but be a reference to Debord's *Hurlements* and this accusation of plagiarism becomes clear throughout the rest of the article:

> L'œuvre de Godard culmine dans un style destructif, aussi tardivement plagié et inutile que tout le reste, cette négation ayant été formulée dans le cinéma avant même que Godard n'ait commencé la longue série de prétentieuses fausses nouveautés qui suscita tant d'enthousiasme chez les étudiants de la période précédente.[104]

The reiteration of Godard's lack of novelty points towards the Lettrist cinema of the early 1950s employment of the blank screen, certainly, but this passage also signals the fact that this technique remained in the register of pure negation, whilst the purpose of détournement was constituted not only

[103] Ibid., p.58.
[104] Authorship unattributed, 'Le cinéma et la révolution', *Internationale situationniste*, 12 (1969), 104-05 (p.104).

in its initial refusal, but in the reconstitution of a superior construction. Godard's cinema, then, at best remains a merely negative reaction against the status quo, in the manner of Dada or Surrealism, two currents the Situationists allege have already been co-opted by the spectacle. The article would go on to refer to René Viénet's 'Les Situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action contre la politique et l'art' from the previous issue, which made this accusation of stealing Debord's techniques explicit:

> Il ne pourra jamais faire autre chose qu'agiter des petites nouveautés prises ailleurs, des images ou des mots-vedettes de l'époque, et qui ont à coup sûr une résonance, mais qu'il ne peut saisir (Bonnot, ouvrier, Marx, *made in U.S.A.*, Pierrot le Fou, Debord, poésie, etc.). Il est effectivement un enfant de Mao et de coca-cola. [105]

This passage also demonstrates a divergence in the Situationists' and Godard's understanding of the contemporary political landscape: whilst Godard would frequently refer to 'les enfants de Mao et de Coca-Cola' as a tongue-in-cheek shorthand to refer to those of the East and West, Debord would theorise both Blocs as different incarnations of the spectacle, the West 'diffuse' and the East 'concentrée' (Thesis 64). Viénet's insult, citing Godard as both, whilst using his own terms in the form of a somewhat glib détournement, also alludes to the fact that it is his failure to effectively conceptualise the functioning of spectacle which impedes his understanding of politics and of the cinema. It is Godard's theoretical failings, it would seem, that culminate in his conformist and ultimately spectacular cinema. This is why, as 'Le Cinéma et la révolution' has it, that Godard was rendered 'démodé' by the events of May '68, and heckled by those revolutionaries who encountered him on the streets.[106] His work, so the article contends, was consigned to the 'poubelles du passé'.

It is well worth acknowledging that this considerable vitriol was meted out to Godard in part due to his work's apparent proximity to the theories the Situationists were putting forward themselves in the 1960s. Godard was, after all, marching in support of the student rioters and striking workers during May. Moreover, Godard's post-'68 career saw a movement away from what he had been

[105] Réné Viénet, 'Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action contre la politique et l'art', *Internationale situationniste*, 11 (1967), 32-36 (p.35).
[106] 'Le Cinéma et la révolution', p.104.

doing before with his establishment of the Dziga Vertov collective, named after the Soviet filmmaker and theorist. Though the group disbanded in 1972, the commitment to collective authorship and the explicitly Marxist rejection of conventional narrative modes saw the beginnings of the more 'experimental' phase of Godard's career which has signalled a less commercially recognisable aesthetic that characterises his work right up until 2014's *Adieu au Langage 3D*. Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998) is a voluminous work of over four hours featuring innumerable citations from the history of film, in which his conflation of the history of cinema and the history of the twentieth century is comparable to Debord's theoretical examination of the cinema as a symptom of spectacular society. Also recognisably Debordian is Godard's employment of détourned images alongside footage of himself, lending an autobiographical air as in Debord's *Sur le Passage* and later *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978). Indeed, there is explicit invocation of Debord and the concept of the society of the spectacle in *Histoire(s)*. Describing the televised celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation as a grand spectacle, Godard announces the essential accuracy of Debord's diagnosis whilst wryly lamenting the fact that Debord is not widely credited for this discovery. There are instances in *Histoire(s)* which bear the imprint of Debord's influence. In section 1A, Godard intertwines images of Stalin with those of Hollywood starlets, as part of a section which outlines his conflation of the history of the twentieth century and that of the cinema. In *La Société du spectacle,* Debord directly compares the role of the 'star' in the 'diffuse' spectacle — the West — and the dictator in the 'concentrated spectacle'— the East — : 'Là, c'est le pouvoir gouvernemental qui se personnalise en pseudo-vedette; ici c'est la vedette de la consommation qui se fait plébisciter en tant que pseudo-pouvoir sur le vécu' (Thesis 60). Debord contends that the role of this exemplary spectacular individual is to incarnate the possibilities of life on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In the East, this takes the form of the cult of personality, in the image of Stalin's ultimate capacity to rule as an effective leader. In the West, the star is an idealisation of the life the pleasures of the commodity can bring, the apparent embodiment of the spectacle's spoils. Debord had earlier formulated this criticism of stardom in *Sur le passage,* where, over an image of Anna Karina in a bathtub in an advert for Monsavon, a brand of bath product, Debord drones: 'Le cinéma est à détruire aussi. En dernière analyse, ce n'est ni le talent ni l'absence de talent, ni même l'industrie cinématographique ou la

publicité, c'est le besoin qu'on a d'elle qui crée la star.'[107] The impoverishment of actually lived life, so the argument runs, is what necessitates this representation of an ideal, which, by way of identification, consoles the spectator for the unsatisfied desires of their own. This image-echo of Debord's form, in addition to Godard's explicit invocation of his name, offer glimpses of the potential understanding of the proximity of the two theorists and filmmakers' bodies of work.

Furthermore, an immediate similarity between the two is their treatment of images of women. For both, female nudity is a repeated feature of their films. Laura Mulvey accuses Godard of equating femininity and sexuality in his films,[108] whilst in her article on the repeated employment of sexually charged images of women in both Situationist cinema and their journal, Kelly Baum quite rightly acknowledges that the Situationists reproduced the gender biases of their time. She does, however, impose the caveat that these images were not meant to titillate or allure, nor provide a 'decorative' aside: 'far from a frivolous addendum to or a curious departure from an otherwise progressive political and philosophical agenda, images of women were in fact one of the many platforms from which the Situationists launched their rebuke to capitalism and spectacle.'[109] There are similarly frequent depictions of scantily clad and topless women in *La Société du spectacle* (1973), the film version Debord made of his book. A sequence of ten photographs of various 'cover girls', as described in the *Oeuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*, in various states of undress, accompany a section from Debord's voiceover describing at length the spectacle's exaltation of 'la marchandise et ses passions'. We are then reminded, over the same series of pictures, that the spectacle realises 'le devenir-monde de la marchandise, qui est aussi bien le devenir-marchandise du monde'. We are invited to see this becoming-commodity of the world through the images of these women. The gendering of the French language permits all the more effectively this conflation of woman and

[107] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.35. Whilst this notion of the star and the despot being manifestations of the same social phenomena knew earlier formulations (see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligary to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), or Edgar Morin, *Les Stars* (Paris: Seuil, 1957)), given Godard's evident familiarity and recourse to quotation (of sorts) of Debord, it is not unreasonable to note this echo. Whether or not this constitutes Godard taking ideas from Debord is less important than the way in which the Situationists understood the former's film-making as a spectacular recuperation of such ideas.
[108] Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe, 'Images of Women, Images of Sexuality', in Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Sound, Image, Politics* (London: MacMillan, 1980), pp.78-103.
[109] Baum, 'The Sex of the Situationist International', p.24.

commodity, where Debord has used a pronoun in his description of the commodity, what this 'elle' perpetrates is described over the images of the topless women. Mid-thesis (the voiceover comes exclusively from the text of Debord's 1967 book), the cut is to a car show, where the newest models are displayed in front of an admiring crowd. From what we know of Debord's employment of pre-existing images and their détournement, we can acknowledge that he is critiquing the spectacle's commodification of women's bodies, yet in a manner than cannot but appear to reproduce an exclusively masculine version of what Baum describes as the 'alienation of desire.'[110] At the beginning of the film, Debord's dedication to Alice Becker-Ho, his wife and the woman with whom he would spend the rest of his life, is preceded by topless photographs of her. After the dedication, the next of the détourned images we see are one of space travel, followed by what is described as 'un long striptease', as a topless woman gyrates on a stage. Footage of the earth seen from a satellite upon which an astronaut works (images of space travel feature repeatedly throughout *La Société du spectacle*) can be immediately associated with Debord's use of the motif of aviation in *Critique* as described above, that is, in connection with the spectacle of which this film declares itself a critique. The strip tease, then, is a continuation of the portrayal of the spectacle, now targeting this spectacularisation of the female body and of sexuality (that the next shot is of the Paris Metro and the recording of its passengers on CCTV screens seems consistent with this depiction of the spectacle). There appears to be a qualitative distinction in the two different depictions of topless women, then, within the first three minutes of the film. In the first, the few grainy photographs depict Becker-Ho smiling, stretching, regarding the camera in an informal and personal manner, whilst the second depicts (in motion) performance of a choreographed dance for, one presumes, a crowd. These two differing sequences are accompanied by differing text: the first by subtitles, the second by Debord's voiceover. The final sentence accompanying Becker-Ho's photographs declare that, 'Dans l'amour, le séparé existe encore, mais non plus comme séparé: comme uni, et le vivant rencontre le vivant.'[111] This Romantic effusion seems quite out of place in one of Debord's films. On the other hand, the striptease begins when Debord is halfway through reciting the end of his book's first thesis: 'Tout ce

[110] Ibid.
[111] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes,* p.65.

qui était directement vécu [and it is at this precise point that the strip tease cuts in] s'est éloigné dans une représentation.'[112] It is tempting to equate the first topless images we see, those of Alice, with the first half of the sentence, the directly lived, and the strip tease with the half it appears in concert with. We might add that to juxtapose the image and sound in this way would have been a step too far in the direction of the 'coherence' of sound and image described above, and therefore that the subtitles signify a less sardonically critical form of address to the spectator. This apparent juxtaposition, then, seems to posit a notion of 'genuine' desire which remains masculine and beholden to the portrayal of a naked woman, as opposed to the strip tease (and the later topless images of the 'cover girls') which follows. This depiction of desire as the product of the 'male gaze', as Mulvey might have it,[113] rather undermines their critique of the spectacle's commodification of female sexuality. This equation of femininity and commodity is taken to problematic extremes in the Situationist-influenced group Tiqqun's *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille*. Though the French collective are at pains to declare that theirs is not a gendered concept ('Entendons-nous: le concept de jeune-fille n'est évidemment pas un concept sexué'[114]), their identification of the young woman specifically for identifying too much with capitalism's ideal citizen of consumption seems, at best, a tactically undesirable rhetorical device or at worst, as it has been interpreted by some commentators, the product of misogyny.[115]

It is worth recalling the critical distance Debord seeks by employing détourned images. In *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1973), Debord states: 'Voici par exemple un film où je ne dis que des vérités sur des images qui, toutes, sont insignifiantes ou fausses; un film qui méprise cette poussière d'images qui le compose.'[116] In contrast to Godard, it is worthy of mention that Debord's images of naked women were détourned or photos of Alice, his wife, where Godard would frequently

[112] Ibid., p.64.
[113] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. by Constance Penley (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp.57-68.
[114] Tiqqun, *Premiers matériaux pour une Théorie de la jeune-fille* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2001), p.9.
[115] See Nina Power, 'She's Just Not That Into You', and Moira Weigel and Mal Ahern, 'Further Materials Toward a Theory of the Man-Child', in *The New Inquiry* (9 July 2013). Available online here: <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/further-materials-toward-a-theory-of-the-man-child/> [Accessed 12 May 2016].
[116] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.212.

pay actresses in order to film them naked. Scenes such as that from Godard's *British Sounds* (1969), of the nude actress in lingering close up from navel to thigh — whilst ostensibly seeking to de-eroticise the portrayal of the female anatomy (a point which in itself is, as Mulvey states, highly questionable in its feminist credentials) — still involves a gendered form of exploitation of the actress in a way not required of, for example, the male 'right-wing newsreader' in another of the segments into which *British Sounds* is divided.

Despite this minor comparison, it should be reiterated that the Situationists unquestionably upheld patriarchal attitudes: McKenzie Wark notes that Michele Bernstein would do the typing for the journal, as this was considered 'woman's work'.[117] Bernstein also related, at an event in 2013, pleading ignorance in response to a question about the Situationists' treatment of gender issues, that she and Jacqueline De Jong would be addressed by their surnames, 'like the men', whereas other women would be addressed by their first names. This reinforces the notion of a gendering of Situationist activity, in that two of the women whose contribution to the group is best known, were addressed 'as the men were'.[118] Their silence on feminism was broken only once, in reference to May '68, where they declared: 'L'importance de la participation des femmes à toutes les formes de lutte est un signe essentiel de sa profondeur révolutionnaire.'[119] That the misogyny of the times endures in Debord's cinema, and Situationist practice more generally, is perhaps unsurprising, as they said of Marx: the faults in his revolutionary theory were the faults of the revolutionary struggle of his time (Thesis 85). In my discussion of the 'limits of détournement' above, I have spoken of the 'undétourned element', that which is not identified as pernicious and thus not dealt with critically. It is clear that this is what we are discussing when we talk of gender. As I have attempted to make clear throughout this chapter, this is precisely the intention of the concept of détournement, as Debord and the Situationists themselves defined it; they were no more supposed to be absolved from future

[117] See Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street*.
[118] 'Revenge of the Situationists', London Literary Festival, Southbank Centre, 26th May 2013, with McKenzie Wark, Michele Bernstein and Jacqueline De Jong.
[119] Guy Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', *Internationale situationniste*, 12 (1969), 3-34 (p.4).

détournement than those they themselves détourned. As an article in the final issue of the journal, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un situationniste?' puts it, of those who are not members of the group:

> Ce que peuvent faire de mieux ces révolutionnaires 'situationnistes', c'est de garder pour eux-mêmes (donc, pour le mouvement prolétarien qui monte) ce qu'ils ont pu approuver de nous, en tant que perspective et en tant que méthode; c'est de ne pas trop nous évoquer comme référence, mais, au contraire, *de nous oublier un peu*.[120]

Ultimately, Debord's fluid cinematic dialectics come to nothing, in that the sole purpose of these works is to encourage the action outside of the cinema. This is not a case of fulfilling aesthetic criteria in order to come up with an achieved style of agit-prop, but to draw attention to the inconsistencies of representational authority, of the role of spectacle in everyday life, and to call it into question. This is why the theoretical pronouncements of *La Société du spectacle* and the journal are the focus of this chapter and embody this notion better than any actual practice, Debord's films offering particular interest to the extent that they can be considered theoretical texts themselves, though not in the traditionally didactic manner of an instructive 'theory', but a set of techniques or tactics, perhaps something even as vague as an 'approach' in its resistance to positivity as well as to nihilism.

[120] Authorship unattributed, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un "situationniste"?', *Internationale situationniste,* 12 (1969), p.83.

3

Ethics

In the *Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance internationale situationniste*, to give it its full title, the foundational text of the Situationist International, penned by Debord in 1957, he writes: 'le jeu situationniste n'apparaît pas distinct d'un choix moral, qui est la prise de parti pour ce qui assure le règne futur de la liberté et du jeu.'[1] Why are a group who repeatedly derided those they termed 'les moralistes' and who professed to challenge all accepted social norms prepared to acknowledge the proximity of their project to this 'moral choice'?[2] What is meant by this notion of 'play' or 'game' which figures at the beginning and is then repeated at the end of the sentence? Why the apparent equivocation in the fact that this Situationist game 'n'apparaît pas distinct' from a moral choice? What is the significance of the *prise de parti*? How can we begin to understand what precisely is meant by the future reign of freedom and play? And how might we begin to think what it is that could assure this future reign, here only named in the indeterminate form of the pronoun 'ce qui'? Following on from the previous chapter's discussion of Debord's cinema as insistently resisting and yet self-consciously acknowledging its own incapacity to fully transgress narratival coherence, the argument will draw on the writing of Jacques

[1] Guy Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale', *Inter:art actuel*, 44 (1989), 1-11 (p.9).

[2] In the journal, the Situationists frequently use the notion of 'la morale' in order to refer to those in thrall to any particular ideology or '-ism': the first issue describes a contemporary art scene 'fardé d'idéalismes (censure morale)' (p.9) as well as De Gaulle's France as being led towards 'un ordre morale poujado-militaire' (p.32). *I.S.* no.11 bears an article entitled 'Un Moraliste' (p.57) relating to the essayist and critics Louis Janover, who had ventured a criticism of the S.I. in the anarchist journal, *Les Cahiers de front noir*. Janover's declaration in favour of monogamy is singled out by the S.I. as evidence of a reactionary, moralising brand of thought. The ethical commitment at work in the work of the S.I. distinguishes itself from this moralising in accordance with what we have seen on Debord's thinking of human knowledge being irrevocably bound to time and history, incommensurable with any kind of stable doctrine or dogma, emphasising the perpetual need for revaluation and updating.

Derrida to explore the particular kind of ethical commitment at work in Situationist theory in order to respond to these questions.

Derrida, Play and the Decision

Derrida's prolific output spanning five decades is primarily characterised by his many adherents and critics as the 'deconstruction' of the Western philosophical tradition. At the heart of this ambitious project stands the concept of logocentrism, that is, the notion that speech and writing form a binary pair in which the latter is subordinated to the former. In *De la Grammatologie* (1967), Derrida seeks to demonstrate how this opposition results in irreconcilable aporia in the work of various thinkers, notably that of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.[3] For Derrida, language is itself defined by an originary lack, for, as Saussure states, words only derive meanings from other words via a system of differences, not from any objective relation to the things they signify. Writing is therefore the sign of a sign. Derrida argues that writing is not a mere function of speaking, but a 'supplément' which seeks to rectify this originary lack but can never do so due to the absence of a direct and stable relationship of meaning between sign and referent.[4] Where the logocentric tradition depends on writing 'correcting' this originary lack, it gives rise to what Derrida calls a 'métaphysique infinitiste'.[5] This metaphysical conception of writing characterises the Western philosophical tradition. Deconstruction seeks to uncover where this metaphysical construction reveals its internal inconsistencies by examining aporetic binary oppositions within a text.[6]

In *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1993), Simon Critchley analyses Derrida's work alongside that of Emmanuel Levinas, presenting a reading of deconstruction as founded upon an ethical commitment to Otherness — 'altérité' — which simultaneously founds the political commitment of

[3] Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), p.23.
[4] Ibid. On p.17 Derrida first invokes this 'supplément', see also: 'Ce dangereux supplément…' (pp.203-34).
[5] Ibid., p.104.
[6] For a more comprehensive exposition of Derrida's overall project, see, for example, Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), Ch.1, 'Jacques Derrida', pp.7-17.

deconstruction.[7] For Critchley, it is the responsibility to this Other which motivates the necessity for deconstructive reading.[8] Critchley's book seeks to anchor the political commitments which emerge from Derridean deconstruction in this ethical responsibility, responding to the more overtly ethical, Levinassian direction of Derrida's work in the 1990s. This ethical reading is in contrast to much of the earlier — predominantly North American — responses to Derrida, which took up deconstruction in the form of self-reflexivity and debunking of conceptual oppositions. One significant exponent of this tendency was American philosopher Richard Rorty, who would emphasise the 'splendidly ironic' character of Derrida's writings, seeking to distance the latter from the academic field of philosophy in the name of 'literary studies'.[9] Derrida was concerned with demonstrating that philosophy deserves no privileged status as a form of writing, so the argument goes, and therefore is revealed to be another form of literature, subject to the same methods of inquiry. For Christopher Norris, Derrida's 1974 book *Glas* — in which two separate columns in different sized fonts, one dealing with Hegel, one with the autobiographical writings of Jean Genet, extend throughout the work, in between and around which reside various notes and marginalia — is 'the *nec plus ultra* of philosophy's undoing at the hands of rhetoric and intertextual freeplay'.[10] Rorty has argued that while Derrida's earlier works are more traditionally philosophical, or 'professorial', *Glas* signals a watershed after which his writings become more eccentric, personal and 'original'.[11] Rorty argues that Derrida's later period sees him turn his back on the political sphere (and certainly any ethical considerations) entirely in favour of indulging in sophisticated intellectual experiments and provocations for the entertainment of those who share his esoteric sense of humour. In opposition to this critical tendency would come, most notably, Rodolph Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror* (1986) and *Inventions of Difference* (1994), in which Derrida's work was repatriated into the realm of philosophy in the name of rigorous argument and philosophical engagement.[12] Gasché emphasises the letter of Derrida's writings, considering the

[7] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
[8] Ibid., p.4.
[9] Richard Rorty, 'Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?', in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Wood (London: Blackwell, 1992), pp.235-46 (p.235).
[10] Christopher Norris, 'Thinking the Unthought', *The Times Literary Supplement* (December 1987), p.1407.
[11] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.123.
[12] Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (London: Harvard University Press, 1986) and *Inventions of Difference* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994).

rhetorical and stylistic effusions Derrida employs as a function of his philosophical argumentation. Against the conception of Derrida's work fitting comfortably into the lineage of postmodern particularism or anti-philosophical aestheticism — the idea that since thought can never be verified by any authority external to thought itself, 'anything goes' and any one interpretation or position is equally as valid as any other — Gasché's Derrida remains loyal to the philosophical tradition in which he follows, that of diligent scholarship and rigorous argumentation. Critchley's ethical reading is far closer to the latter reading than to the former, which admires Derrida precisely for his supposed break from old philosophical concepts such as ethics. Critchley's Derrida intervenes in the terrain of philosophy in order to demonstrate the impossibility of fully transcending the 'métaphysique infinitise' of the logocentric tradition, yet to endeavour to act responsibly in this situation.

In his later book *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity*, Critchley discusses the Situationists in terms of this metaphysics. During the course of a discussion of Jean-Luc Nancy and Martin Heidegger, Critchley offers a brief aside quoting Nancy's dismissal of Situationist theory as 'la dernière ressource critique dans un monde sans critique'.[13] Critchley goes on to present Nancy's casting of the S.I.:

> However, the Situationist critique, although necessary, was available for complete recuperation because of its metaphysical assumptions. That is, situationism [sic] criticises the society of the spectacle, a society based on entirely imaginary constructions, but it does two things as a consequence: first, it attempts to replace this capitalist imaginary with a concept of creative imagination that remains tributary to a romantic conception of genius. Second, it understands appearance as mere appearance, namely as that which is opposed to an authentic reality or presence. Thus, the Situationist critique remains unwaveringly obedient to the Platonist tradition, opposing an order of essential truth ('desire', 'imagination') to the false order of spectacle.[14]

The previous two chapters have already sought to dispute this reading of the Situationists as maintaining a Romantic conception of genius. It should immediately be noted that Debord's use of

[13] Nancy, p.70.
[14] Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* (London: Verso, 1999), p.243.

the term 'imagination' in *La Société du spectacle* only occurs in terms of the 'maîtres propriété personelle de l'histoire', and their maintenance of that privilege 'mythiquement' or in reference to the maintenance of an impoverishment of social life (Theses 132 and 25). That is, the imaginary is exclusively the realm of the spectacle and not retained so unproblematically as a mode of opposition. The Situationists would write in 1962: 'À ceux qui croient que l'I.S. construit une forteresse spéculative, nous affirmons au contraire: nous allons nous dissoudre dans la population qui vit à tout moment notre projet, le vivant d'abord, bien sûr, sur le mode du manque et de la répression.'[15] How this commitment to the everyday lives of the population at large translates into a political and ethical mode of resistance will be explored below in an attempt to read Debord and the Situationists alongside Derrida. In distinguishing the particular nature of what Critchley and Nancy are content to describe as an 'essential truth', it is my intention to problematize this idea of an unwavering obedience to the Platonist tradition. Critchley's brusque dismissal of the Situationists echoes Rorty's praise for Derrida, in that both allegedly seek to utterly transcend the metaphysical traditions in the wake of which their work intervenes ('the spectacle' and 'philosophy' respectively).

De la Grammatologie was one of three books which Derrida published in 1967 — the same year as the publication of Debord's *Société du spectacle* and Vaneigem's *Traité* — alongside *La Voix et le Phenomène* and *L'Ecriture et la différence*. The latter featured an essay entitled 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines' which has come to be acknowledged as the essay which saw Derrida break with the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss (whom he discusses in the essay) and heralded the burgeoning of the interest in 'post-structuralism' in Anglophone academia.[16] In the essay, originally given as a paper at a colloquium in Montreal, Derrida analyses the concept of the 'centre' in structuralist analyses, the grounding of structures of discourse around which meaning is derived. Derrida argues that this centre is another form of 'presence' characteristic of the logocentric tradition: 'On pourrait montrer que tous les noms du fondement, du principe ou du centre ont toujours

[15] Authorship unattributed, 'Du rôle de l'I.S.', *Internationale situationniste*, 7 (1962), p.17.
[16] For an account of the selective appropriation and transmogrification of various continental thinkers under the name of 'Theory' in North American academia, see Francois Cusset, *French Theory, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2003).

désigné l'invariant d'une présence (*eidos, archè, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, sujet) *alethia*, transcendalité, conscience, Dieu, homme, etc.).'[17] For Derrida, this centre cannot exist: we must understand structures as being without centre and that the 'play' of meaning is thus entirely without grounding. Indeed, in translation, Derrida's 'jeu' is often translated as 'freeplay' rather than just 'play'; this is indicative of the Rortian tendency to emphasise the puckish intransigence of deconstruction which depends on infinite contextualisation and the radical refusal of all imposed meaning.[18] It is important to note, however, that Derrida does not seek to 'critique' the philosophical tradition of logocentric metaphysics, as he contends it is impossible to exceed it, to go beyond or outside it:

> Or tous ces discours destructeurs et tous leurs analogues sont pris dans une sorte de cercle. Ce cercle est unique et il décrit la forme du rapport entre l'histoire de la métaphysique et la destruction de l'histoire de la métaphysique: *il n'y a aucun sens* à se passer des concepts de la métaphysique pour ébranler la métaphysique; nous ne disposons d'aucun langage — d'aucune syntaxe et d'aucun lexique — qui soit étranger à cette histoire; nous ne pouvons énoncer aucune proposition destructrice qui n'ait déjà dû se glisser dans la forme, dans la logique et les postulations implicites de cela même qu'il voudrait contester.[19]

There is no hope of fully transgressing the confines of the metaphysical tradition. Indeed, attempting such a transgression *ex nihilo* — producing 'pure' thought, unbound to the logic, reason and language of that which precedes — would be the most consummately metaphysical of gestures: seeking to avow a complete break with this tradition binds the writer all the more thoroughly to this tradition in his or her ignorance. This irreconcilable tension between transgression and reinscription directs many of the essays in *l'Ecriture et la différence*: in his essay 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture,' Derrida describes 'la trouée' or 'la percée freudienne' which 'se laisse mal contenir dans la clôture

[17] Jacques Derrida, 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines', in *L'Ecriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp.409-28 (p.411).
[18] For a description and rebuttal of this interpretation of Derrida, see: Nicole Anderson, 'Freeplay? Fair Play! Defending Derrida', *Social Semiotics,* 16.3 (2006), pp.407-20.
[19] Derrida, 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans les discours des sciences humaines', p.412. Emphasis is Derrida's.

logocentrique'.[20] In an essay on Foucault's *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la Folie à l'âge classique* (1961), Derrida argues that to write a history of madness in the language of reason demands a writing that 'ne saurait se laisser contenir' in the metaphysical closure.[21] Derrida seeks to demonstrate that in endeavouring to write a history of madness from the point of view of the mad and the excluded necessarily renews this exclusion by virtue of its being written in the language of reason. Any 'history' necessarily implies a narrative which presents its own logic, in its necessary intelligibility. Derrida alleged that Foucault cannot but commit the same exclusion of the mad and irrational in the act of writing a history. Geoffrey Bennington refers to the 'unquestioned philosophical assumptions', or the 'transcendental contraband' which is retained in this act.[22] The difficulty of Derrida's 'deconstructive readings' emerges from the way in which the act of closure (in the case of 'Cogito et l'Histoire de la folie', the historical exclusion of the mad which Foucault describes) is transgressed then accompanied by the restoration of the closure (writing a new history), leaving each text on the limit between belonging and not belonging to the tradition. Derrida continues, in the essay on Foucault:

> *Tout* notre langage européen, le langage de tout ce qui a participé, de près ou de loin, à l'aventure de la raison occidentale, est l'immense délégation du projet que Foucault définit sous l'espèce de la capture ou de l'objectivation de la folie. *Rien* dans ce langage et *personne* parmi ceux qui parlent ne peut échapper à la culpabilité historique — s'il y en a une et si elle est historique en un sens classique — dont Foucault semble vouloir faire le procès. Mais c'est peut-être un procès impossible car l'instruction et le verdict réitèrent sans cesse le crime par le simple fait de leur élocution.[23]

In her book *Ethics and Representation* (1999), Clare Colebrook describes this sort of attempt Derrida holds Foucault is making as being 'haunted by its ontic articulation', that is, the fact of its

[20] Jacques Derrida, 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', in *L'Ecriture et la différence,* pp.293-340 (p.293).
[21] Derrida, 'Cogito et Histoire de la Folie', in *L'Ecriture et la différence,* pp. 51-98 (p.59.)
[22] Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, p.13.
[23] Derrida, 'Cogito et Histoire de la Folie', p.58.

reinscription into the very language of reason that he seeks to transgress.[24] The same is, however, equally true of Derrida's subsequent reading of Foucault and of deconstruction in general: deconstructive reading attempts to open out the possibility of alterity within a text by demonstrating the aporetic foundational assumptions upon which the text is based, but each individual act of deconstruction is then susceptible to a similar process.[25] The incessant equivocation and self-conscious reflexivity of Debord's cinema outlined in the previous chapter offers a filmic portrayal of this 'ontic haunting'. For the Situationists, no ontology as traditionally understood is possible given the inextricable connection between knowledge, power, time and history. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Debord maintains this conflict throughout his cinematic work.

In 'Cogito et histoire de la folie', Derrida suggests two ways of not effecting the betrayal of 'le fou', following either their silence or their exile.[26] This consignment to impotence, however, can offer no solace or support, political or otherwise. Derrida states that the role of madness in Foucault's text takes on that which opposes the totalising violence of reason: 'En fait, on pourrait montrer que, dans l'intention de Foucault, sinon dans la pensée historique qu'il étudie, le concept de folie recouvre tout ce qu'on peut ranger sous le titre de la *négativité*.'[27] The blank screen of *Hurlements*, which reappears periodically throughout Debord's other films, seeks to invoke this pure negativity — a refusal to acquiesce to the most fundamental of conventions, the presentation of an image in cinema — but cannot do so owing to its place within the 'work', within the language of the *logos*, the negotiated system of conventions that is the cinema, just as Foucault's history of madness takes place in the language of reason. Derrida describes this betrayal further:

> Le langage étant la rupture même avec la folie, il est encore plus conforme à son essence et à sa vocation, il rompt encore mieux avec elle s'il se mesure plus librement à elle et s'en approche davantage: jusqu'à n'en être plus séparé que par 'la feuille transparente' dont parle

[24] Clare Colebrook, *Ethics and Representation from Kant to Post-Structuralism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.112.
[25] See Geoffrey Bennington, 'A Moment of Madness: Derrida's Kierkegaard', *Oxford Literary Review*, 33.1 (2011), 103-27.
[26] Derrida, 'Cogito et Histoire de la Folie', p.58.
[27] Ibid., p.66.

> Joyce [in Derrida's epigraph to the paper], par soi-même, car cette diaphanéité n'est rien d'autre que le langage, le sens, la possibilité, et la discrétion *élémentaire* d'un rien qui neutralise tout. En ce sens, je serais tenté de considérer le livre de Foucault comme un puissant geste de protection et de renferment […] Une récupération de la négativité.[28]

The Situationists would condemn Surrealism and Dadaism for their recuperation into the art world, the eventual compatibility of their initial negative gestures of experimentation and defiance with the commodified and spectacular form. Derrida holds that the recuperation of negativity is inescapable in writing on madness: the coherent language of the 'history' operates the same enclosure or confinement of madness — that which is outside reason — as Foucault describes. For Critchley, the only means of moving beyond this impasse is via the 'clôtural reading' of deconstruction. This reading depends on what he calls 'the unconditional ethical imperative' of deconstruction.[29] Employing a Levinasian vocabulary, he asserts that the clôtural reading uncovers the alterity within a text, a rupture in the metaphysical closure where the reduction of this Otherness cannot be total, where the imperfection of logical representation is revealed. What Critchley calls this 'ethical transcendence', however, only transcends a particular metaphysical construction; there is no absolute transcendence, and thus the ethical demand is infinite.[30] As such, 'all deconstructive discourse is strategic and adventurous; which is to say it cannot be justified absolutely.'[31] Derrida states, 'on ne peut protester contre elle qu'en elle, elle ne nous laisse, sur son propre champ, que le recours au stratagème et à la stratégie.'[32] Whilst such a reading still commits the violence of subordinating this alterity to another *logos*, another version of reason and of imposed meaning, this resists the worse violence of remaining within the pre-existing structure without question. As Gasché argues: 'For difference to make a difference and hence to be one in the first place, its uniqueness must be wrenched from and negotiated within a system of conventions.'[33]

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[28] Ibid., p.85.
[29] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp.xiii and 31.
[30] For his subsequent development of this notion, see: Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007).
[31] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.35.
[32] Derrida, 'Cogito et Histoire de la folie', p.58.
[33] Gasché, *Inventions of Difference*, p.21.

Giorgio Agamben has identified Debord's spectacle with the *logos*, with 'the very linguistic and communicative nature of humans'.[34] Language is the fundamental constituent of social life, without which no communication between one another is possible. Like Derrida, Debord holds that communication is necessarily constituted within language, a mode of reason, of intelligibility and of sense-making. Moreover, politics necessitates communication, the interaction with one's fellow human beings, and thus cannot fail to be governed by the same rules and laws which govern the spectacle. When Debord contends that 'En *analysant* le spectacle, on parle dans une certaine mesure le langage même du spectaculaire, en ceci que l'on passe sur le terrain méthodologique de cette société qui s'exprime dans le spectacle' (Thesis 11), he gestures towards the untranscendability of the spectacle: that any possibility of escaping the relentless submission of human activity to the commodifying imperatives of capital necessarily proceeds through and within the spectacle as this communicative capacity. It is the 'occupation totale de la vie sociale par les résultats accumulés de l'économie' (Thesis 17) that results in a spectacle in the service of this economy. Capital's colonisation of social life, that is, of language and these communicative capacities, characterises the era of spectacle. This occupation, however, cannot be fully achieved despite its apparent totality. Resistance is always possible precisely because of the impossibility of attaining an absolute, universal command of language.

For the Situationists, the opening up of this possibility of opposition within the spectacle is theorised under the name of 'le jeu', it is play which resists the instrumentalisation of capital:

> À notre époque le fonctionnalisme, qui est une expression nécessaire de l'avance technique, cherche à éliminer entièrement le jeu, et les partisans de 'l'industrial design' se plaignent du pourrissement de leur action par la tendance de l'homme au jeu. […] Nous pensons bien qu'il ne faut pas encourager le renouvellement artistique continu de la forme des frigidaires. Mais

[34] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.79.

> le fonctionnalisme moralisateur n'y peut rien. La seule issue progressive est de libérer ailleurs, et plus largement, la tendance au jeu.[35]

As we have seen in Chapter One, technological advance is, for Debord and the S.I., indissoluble from industrialisation, yet the harnessing of technological capacities on behalf of capital cannot be total. What is at stake for the Situationists is not preserving this tendency toward play and the resistance to rationalisation in traditional forms of artistic practice but to liberate such a tendency in the realm of everyday life. The invocation of industrial design indicates firstly, in being maintained in the English language, the particularly Anglo-Saxon flavour of this technical rationality (and we may conjure the likes of Apple, in particular, as the contemporary culmination of this tendency), and secondly the comparable instrumentalisation of play into art, sport and commerce. This attempt to functionalise and compartmentalise the irrationality and experimentality of play into the commodity form can never entirely succeed; for the Situationists, play can neither be channelled towards productive, rational goals, nor offered a designated outlet in the form of a commodified and neatly packaged 'artistic creation': 'Contre toutes les formes régressives du jeu, qui sont ses retours à des stades infantiles — toujours liés aux politiques de réaction — il faut soutenir les formes expérimentales d'un jeu révolutionnaire.'[36] The declaration with which this chapter begins is preceded by an assertion as to what the 'situationist game' is not: 'Le jeu situationniste se distingue de la conception classique du jeu par la négation radicale des caractères ludiques de compétition, et de séparation de la vie courante.' This gesture seeks to divorce the Situationist conception of the 'play' from that of the sporting or recreational set piece, a game which permits play only within the enclosure of its own system of rules or laws, as in football or chess. In order for such games to function, there must be a finite amount of time dedicated to the game, or a measure of dominance and primacy attained, after which the competitors (as opposed to players, perhaps) return to the business of daily life. It is this enclosure which the Situationists eschew in favour of a notion of play not strictly delimited to establishing a victor or to the temporal finitude of the game itself. In the first issue of the journal, this competitive

[35] Authorship unattributed, 'Problèmes préliminaires à la construction des situations', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1958), 11-13 (p.12).
[36] Ibid., p.13.

aspect of play is attributed to the tension established between individuals for the appropriation of goods; it is 'le mauvais produit d'une mauvaise société'.[37] The sporting spectacle courts the identification of spectators with their heroes in the manner of the cinema, it is another 'opium of the masses', as Marx would have it, exploited by 'les forces conservatrices qui s'en servent pour masquer la monotonie et l'atrocité des conditions de vie qu'elles imposent.'[38] The Situationist conception of play, therefore, 'rompant radicalement avec un temps et un espace ludiques bornés, doit envahir la vie entière.' Historian Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938), a work which puts forward the concept of play as primary in the construction of human communities is cited approvingly. This destruction of the limits of the notion of play in establishing everyday life permits the advent 'd'une conception plus réellement collective du jeu: la création commune des ambiances ludiques choisies'. It is in this formulation that we can most evidently see the close proximity of 'play' to the notion of the 'constructed situation', defined in the same issue as: 'moment de la vie, concrètement et délibérément construit par l'organisation collective d'une ambiance unitaire et d'un jeu d'événements.'[39]

Both concepts of 'play' and the 'situation' largely disappear from Situationist writings as the sixties advance in favour of the elaboration of societal critique. The two concepts hold a quasi-utopian role in Situationist rhetoric: it is in the name of these ideas that revolutionary critique begins. It is at once the utopian horizon of Situationist activity, the 'future reign of freedom and play' that their intervention seeks to bring about and at the same time the foundational notional concept which compels this activity. Towards the end of 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu', Derrida signals a notion of play which bespeaks a similarly originary conception of play:

> Tension du jeu avec l'histoire, tension aussi du jeu avec la présence. Le jeu est la disruption de la présence. La présence d'un élément est toujours une référence signifiante et substitutive inscrite dans un système de différences et le mouvement d'une chaine. Le jeu est toujours jeu d'absences et de présences, mais si l'on veut le penser radicalement, il faut le penser avant

[37] Authorship unattributed, 'Contribution à une définition situationniste du jeu', *Internationale situationniste*, 1 (1958), 9-10 (p.9).
[38] Ibid., pp.9-10.
[39] 'Définitions', p.13.

> l'alternative de la présence et de l'absence; il faut penser l'être comme présence ou absence à partir de la possibilité du jeu et non l'inverse.[40]

Here, play is what evades the total capture of the structure or *logos*, it is the trace which cannot be thought by philosophy. Just as we call 'play' an entirely superfluous movement, a gratuitous excess, which a cog within an apparatus undergoes whilst exercising its mechanical function, so the play of language evades the distribution of definitive meaning. As Colebrook has it, play is, for Derrida, 'a movement of syntax or inscription beyond sense, world, the purposive or being'.[41] Any hope to think 'being' must understand the possibility of play, that which resists definitive expression. For Derrida then, play is both the necessary precondition for the formation of any concept of order, reason, or sense and the ultimate recognition that none of these concepts can be justified absolutely.

Derrida goes on to allege that the imposition of the centre that limits this play results in the 'neutralisation' of history: 'dans le travail de Lévi-Strauss, il faut reconnaître que le respect de la structuralité, de l'originalité interne de la structure, oblige à neutraliser le temps et l'histoire.'[42] Derrida quotes Lévi-Strauss's declaration that language, the 'structure of structures', 'n'a pu naître que tout d'un coup', not progressively or in a process of transformation. This assessment of structuralism is echoed in Debord's *La Société du spectacle*, where he describes it as an attempt at 'transhistorical thought', which finds its mirror in the form of the society of the spectacle: 'la société du spectacle s'imposant comme réalité massive qui sert à prouver le rêve froid du structuralisme' (Thesis 202). It is in the context of a dynamic process of history as neither neutralised nor frozen dream that the Situationists reiterate the interrelation of ethics and play:

> Dans cette perspective historique, le jeu — l'expérimentation permanente de nouveautés ludiques — n'apparaît aucunement en dehors de l'éthique, de la question du sens de la vie. La seule réussite que l'on puisse concevoir dans le jeu c'est la réussite immédiate de son ambiance, et l'augmentation constante de ses pouvoirs. Alors même que dans sa coexistence

[40] Derrida, 'La Structure, le signe…', p.426.
[41] Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*, p.95.
[42] Derrida, 'La Structure, le signe…', p.426.

> présente avec les résidus de la phase de déclin le jeu ne peut s'affranchir complètement d'un aspect compétitif, son but doit être au moins de provoquer des conditions favorables pour vivre directement. Dans ce sens il est encore lutte et représentation: lutte pour une vie à la mesure du désir, représentation concrète d'une telle vie.[43]

Ethics is here conceived as this question of meaning or purpose of life, how we should seek to act politically. It is worth noting that 'sens' is one of the words Derrida most frequently attaches to logocentrism, the imposition of meaning, logic or sense being that metaphysical gesture which cannot be evaded. The spectacle posits a model of rationality, the homology of capital and social relations, but the former cannot capture the latter perfectly. Where the Situationists are elsewhere routinely suspicious of the notion of representation — as upholding the separation between activity and spectacular contemplation— it is here employed to recognise the imperfection of their task, the labour and struggle of opposition. Writing and communication are necessary in the endeavour of political action, but subject to the same restrictions — language's foundational lack, the incapacity of language to perfectly capture the entirety of lived experience — as the spectacle itself.

What Critchley and Nancy, or Jonathan Kaplan's 'liberal individualist' characterisation of the Situationists, might term the idealism of the idea of 'living directly' and the seeming hypostatisation of 'desire' here serves a rhetorical function, seeking to posit the beginnings of an affirmative political program whilst simultaneously disavowing any claim to universal truth or legitimacy. No 'success' is possible, as the tendency towards play perpetually resists the instrumentalisation and rationalisation of the political program. What is instead at stake is the possibility of any alternative: 'Notre époque est caractérisée fondamentalement par le retard de l'action politique révolutionnaire sur le développement des possibilités modernes de production, qui exigent une organisation supérieure du monde.'[44] The assertion that alternative models of organisation could be found within existing forms of production is not necessarily utopian: the apparent superiority of any alternative merely implies a certain otherness, a limitless opportunity of experimentation, not a definitive model for society. Such a conception of

[43] 'Contribution à une définition situationniste du jeu', p.10.
[44] Debord, *Rapport sur la construction des situations*, p.3.

possibility refuses to understand the capitalistic spectacle as an untranscendable metaphysical construct but as an occupation of what we might call the *logos*, like any other such conception of presence or centre before it, notably that of God.

Rather than positing a particular conception of post-revolutionary organisation, then, the Situationists seek to 'répandre une autre idée du bonheur. La gauche et la droite étaient d'accord sur une image de la misère, qui est la privation alimentaire. La gauche et la droite étaient aussi d'accord sur l'image d'une bonne vie. C'est la racine de la mystification qui a défait le mouvement ouvrier dans les pays industrialisés.'[45] The Situationists target the apparent concordance of what constitutes a desirable life according to the political establishment. Rather than offer a comparable image of what Debord calls the 'ce qui est bon' (Thesis 12), the Situationists offer a residual definition: another idea, one that is 'other' to that presented by the spectacle. This 'other', whatever it could entail, is presented as being better than the 'boredom' of everyday life offered by the spectacle: 'Nous ruinerons ces conditions en faisant apparaître en quelques points le signal incendiaire d'un *jeu supérieur*.'[46] What is important here is that what the Situationists proffer is not a utopian civilisation of liberated desire, but the concept of any alternative, of unrealised possibilities, in which utopian concepts such as the constructed situation and 'living directly' present the fundaments of an idealised vision:

> Il n'y a plus d''utopie' possible, parce que toutes les conditions de sa réalisation existent déjà. On les détourne pour servir au maintien de l'ordre actuel, dont l'absurdité est si terrible *qu'on la réalise d'abord*, quel que soit son prix, sans que *personne n'ose en formuler la théorie, même après*. C'est *l'utopie inverse* de la répression: elle dispose de tous les pouvoirs, et personne ne la veut.[47]

[45] Authorship unattributed, 'L'effondrement des intellectuels révolutionnaires', *Internationale situationniste*, 2 (1958), 8-10 (p.10).
[46] Ibid. Emphasis is theirs.
[47] 'Du rôle de l'I.S.', p.18.

Positing this 'other' idea is the only way of seeing beyond the untranscendability of the spectacle. In the journal article entitled 'Du rôle de l'I.S.', they refer to this aborted utopianism directly in the context of the spectacle's political incarnations:

> Il nous est facile de choisir chaque fois le terrain du conflit. S'il faut faire face, avec des 'modèles', aux 'modèles' qui sont aujourd'hui les points de convergence de la pensée technocratique (que ce soit la concurrence totale ou la planification totale) notre 'modèle' est *la communication totale*. Que l'on ne nous parle plus d'utopie. Il faut reconnaître là une hypothèse qui, évidemment, n'est jamais réalisée exactement dans le réel, pas plus que les autres.[48]

Against the free-market capitalism of the West and the state-planned capitalism of the East the Situationists posit a notion of 'total communication' — a perfectly egalitarian and liberatory mode of social relations — of which they tacitly acknowledge the utopian nature. That this utopianism needs to be surmounted is implied by the explicitly totalitarian nature of these three ideas. That such 'models' — confined to inverted commas — require a rival model to be presented in their stead, in conflict with the actually existing ideologies bespeaks a conviction that politics is a game in which these self-justifying dogmas fight for predominance. This is clearly a problematic theorisation in that one form of totalitarianism can only displace another. To argue, however, that the difference between such abstractions negates the need to oppose and displace those which currently predominate forgoes the possibility of material change being effected in the realisation of any 'superior' construction. As Gasché states compellingly in relation to Derrida:

> To relinquish all attempts at comprehensive, synthetic, even systematic presentation because they are totalitarian is not only to bind oneself to perhaps unheard-of possibilities of gathering, but also to miss the singular shape that synthetic and unifying thought has taken in

[48] Ibid.

> a very determined historical conjunction, and what such singular recasting of gathering holds for the future.[49]

Describing such constructs merely as a 'hypothesis' reveals a perhaps surprising measure of pragmatism[50] which defies the idealist or Neo-Platonist casting of Situationist theory. No more does the notion of total communication have the ambition to be fully realised than free market or bureaucratic capitalism can hope to definitively preclude the possibility of opposition. This (relative) pragmatism, contrary to a naïve utopianism of liberated desire and infinite play, holds political activism as a constant struggle within and against existing forms of communication with the aim of bringing about achievable material change:

> Cependant dans l'action immédiate, qui doit être entreprise dans le cadre que nous voulons détruire, un art critique peut être fait dès maintenant avec les moyens de l'expression culturelle existante, du cinéma aux tableaux. C'est ce que les situationnistes ont résumé par la théorie du détournement. Critique dans son contenu, cet art doit être aussi critique de lui-même dans sa forme. C'est une communication qui, connaissant les limitations de la sphère spécialisée de la communication établie, 'va maintenant contenir *sa propre critique*'.[51]

The 1967 article 'Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action contre le politique ou l'art' in the journal's eleventh issue counsels occupation of mass media in evoking such change, interrupting transmissions or replacing them entirely.[52] The 'liberal individualist' criticism of the Situationists ducks the paradox of advocating the use of the media they wish to 'destroy', ignoring this critical

[49] Gasché, *Inventions of Difference*, p.20.
[50] Richard Rorty has sought to associate Derrida's work with the notion of pragmatism, in that his perceived turning away from the political realm in favour of the 'freeplay' of literary-experimental tricks and gimmicks demonstrates a recognition of the realities of what can be achieved. This conservative notion of pragmatism is a far cry from the Situationists' recognition that the forms within which they intervened necessitated some rhetorical and stylistic effusiveness for the purpose of encouraging political engagement on behalf of their readers. It is a similar self-consciousness of writing in its textuality and the incorporation of this understanding within his work that Rorty misses in his casting of Derrida's withdrawal from matters political.
[51] Guy Debord, *Les Situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action dans la politique ou l'art* (1963). Available online here: <http://debordiana.chez.com/francais/action.htm> [Accessed 12 May 2016].
[52] This was precisely the action taken by the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionniare in 1971, interrupting a radio broadcast entitled 'L'Homosexualité, ce douloureux problème'. See Scott Gunther, *The Elastic Closet* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.47-53.

interrelation between form and content and subsequently takes pronouncements made within the realm of publishing and the cinema too readily at face value.

This understanding of Situationist writings as self-consciously defying the conditions of their status as writings invites consideration of the seemingly utopian question of the 'règne futur' invoked in the quotation from Debord's *Rapport*. The apparent temporal ineluctability of this reign of freedom and play indicates a belief in the eventual realisation of such a utopian civilisation. Indeed, many of the Situationists' pronouncments could be read in this way, valorising a break with the past in the name of such an arrival: 'Le jeu révolutionnaire, la création de la vie, s'oppose à tous les souvenirs de jeux passés.'[53] In the 1961 journal article, 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes', the Situationists assert the impossibility of reanimating any anterior form of revolutionary organisation as a useful mode of opposition to the spectacle, likening the French Revolution's mimicking of Republican Rome to the ridiculous attempt by their much hated Club Méditerranée holiday packages to mimic some kind of Polynesian island atmosphere (the Club Méditerranée was a frequently invoked source of ire, emblematic of the homogenising tendencies of capital, reducing another country's way of life into neatly consumable parcels, eventually rendering them indistinguishable from one another). They then round on their contemporaries on the revolutionary left who 'se voient d'abord eux-mêmes, se définissent, en ce qu'ils tiennent *le rôle du militant*, de style bolchevik ou autre. Et la révolution de la vie quotidienne ne saurait tirer sa poésie du passé, mais seulement du futur.' Firstly, we should note that this is not necessarily a temporal distinction, though it is made as such here: the past refers to self-consciously rehearsing former modes of behaviour and action, associated with the *logos* (we recognise what has come before, in the articulation of what 'makes sense'); 'the future' means nothing in and of itself, not acting and behaving in an entirely novel way but rather refusing to repeat what has gone before in a deliberate, mimetic, fashion. Secondly, the argument put forth so dogmatically is rather undercut by the fact that the title of the short article is taken (unmodified) from a tract of the same name by nineteenth century revolutionary Auguste

[53] Authorship unattributed, 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes', *Internationale situationniste*, 6 (1961), 3-5 (p.4).

Blanqui, a détournement which goes unacknowledged in the article itself. This unacknowledged reference to a past authority in a text denouncing such appeals to past authority reveals a certain potential for duplicity in the written word. Those familiar with Blanqui may 'get it', but to understand the text itself it is not necessary to fully appreciate the 'joke'. Just as the *Mode d'emploi* describes the 'parodique sérieux' as a form of playfulness which nevertheless entails a profound seriousness, the self-negating relation of title to article — 'communication contenant sa propre critique'— takes the form of an 'in-joke'.

What emerges then, from the Situationists' 'communication contenant sa propre critique' is the provisional nature of even their most utopian assertions, and their admission that their tracts, journals, books and films constitute an imperfect theory of capitalist society motivated only by the aim of exceeding it:

> L'interprétation que nous défendons dans la culture peut être regardée comme une simple hypothèse**,** et nous attendons qu'elle soit effectivement vérifiée et dépassée très vite; mais de toute manière elle possède les caractères essentiels de la vérification scientifique rigoureuse en ce sens qu'elle explique et ordonne un certain nombre de phénomènes qui sont, pour d'autres, incohérents et inexplicables — qui sont donc même parfois *cachés* par d'autres forces —; et en ce qu'elle permet de *prévoir* certains faits ultérieurement contrôlables. Nous ne nous abusons pas un instant sur la soi-disant objectivité de quelque chercheur que ce soit, dans la culture ou ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler sciences humaines. La règle y est au contraire d'y cacher tant les problèmes que les réponses. L'I.S. devra divulguer le caché, et elle-même comme possibilité 'cachée' par ses ennemis. Nous le réussirons — relevant les contradictions que les autres ont choisi d'oublier — en nous transformant en force pratique.[54]

Imperfect though any purely theoretical construction can possibly be, it can still reveal important characteristics of the mechanisms by which society functions, ones which the forces of law and order seek to control, as well as modes of opposition which could in fact be recuperated by these forces. In

[54] 'Du rôle de l'I.S.', pp.19-20.

contrasting rigorous scientific verification to the presumed objectivity of the human sciences, it is clear that what is at stake is a perpetual labour of analysis and evaluation, not the pursuit of some revelatory truth. Whilst this in no way remains a comprehensive claim on behalf of their own theoretical labours, the admission that the positions they advocate within their work are merely hypothetical and strategic, to be surpassed, places Situationist thought on a far less naively and dogmatically idealist standing than a reading of their work as a Romantic paen to an unalienated, sovereign subjectivity would have it: in more Derridean terms, the Situationists acknowledge the impossibility of fully transcending the *logos*, the metaphysical tradition and language in which their interventions necessarily take place, whilst nevertheless seeking to reveal moments of other possibilities.

What follows substantively from this hypothetical position is a commitment to agitate for 'une autre idee de bonheur', in the form of an ethical duty to the non-spectacle, the 'that which does not appear' (after Debord's characterisation of the spectacle as 'ce qui apparaît est bon, ce qui est bon apparaît' (Thesis 12)), the Other-than-spectacle which functions as a permanently postponed commitment to a notional utopian horizon of possibility. The title of the 1970 manifesto 'Contribution à une prise de conscience d'une classe qui sera la dernière' displays the link between rhetorical value of utopianism — this ultimate class — in the formation of a 'prise de conscience'. This notion makes clear the Situationists' belief in the seductive — or 'incendiary' — capabilities of revolutionary theory but also, the idea of 'taking' leads us to consider the 'prise de parti', the taking of a position, of a stand, of partisanship which is mentioned in the opening quotation of this Chapter. It is the idea of a utopian commitment which demands the 'prise de parti', in the name of another possibility of politics which resists the metaphysical enclosure of capital's occupation of social life. The means of enacting this 'prise de parti', acting upon an ethical decision to 'take sides', in turn requires such closure in opposition, the necessary precondition of political action.

In the 1957 text, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes', Debord states that the only difference between an exhibition showing paintings done by monkeys and his film *Hurlements*, both on show simultaneously at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, is that the latter is a

'pari sur certaines formations à venir'.[55] These 'formations to come' occupy the same idea as the 'règne futur', a conceptualisation of possibility outside of the spectacle. This bet, the wager that Debord's film makes is then the hypothesis of another possibility, and a decision made to enter into the enterprise of writing or filmmaking. 'Mais notre pari est toujours à refaire', continues Debord, so what we have described as the utopian commitment in the name of which the bet is made is permanently deferred. The ethical duty that the Situationists describe as being indistinct from their 'game' refers to the necessity of making this decision, to engage in the 'cadre que nous voulons détruire'; to intervene in the realm of language and communication. This 'game' is not the same as the utopian evocation of 'play', but where the consequences of this wager play out. The fact that the tactical and strategic battles that this political engagement entails cannot be entirely divorced from the notion of 'play' in the more Derridian sense — the undecidabilty and perpetual deferment of meaning — demonstrates that what is at stake in this Situationist wager: what constitutes an ethical duty appeals not to some kind of universal morality but a perpetually revaluated analysis and understanding of events and circumstance.

Despite this perpetual revaluation of what constitutes an ethical act, the 'prise de parti' is nevertheless, for the Situationists, a decision that must be taken. This is the decision to oppose and contest the status quo:

> Aujourd'hui alors que, malgré certaines apparences, *plus que jamais* (après un siècle de luttes et la liquidation entre les deux guerres par les secteurs dirigeants, traditionnels ou d'un type nouveau, de tout le mouvement ouvrier classique qui représentait la force de contestation générale) le monde dominant *se donne pour définitif*, sur la base d'un enrichissement et de l'extension infinie d'un modèle irremplaçable, la compréhension de ce monde ne peut se

[55] Guy Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes', *Potlatch*, 29 (1957). The title is an allusion to Sade's 'Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être Républicains' from *La Philosophie dans le boudoir ou Les instituteurs immoraux* (1795).

> fonder que sur la contestation. Et cette contestation n'a de vérité, et de réalisme, qu'en tant que contestation de la totalité.[56]

This decision to oppose the 'dominant world' provides the only possible way of understanding it. It is an axiomatic principle with which Situationist thought begins. This decision must take place at the level of the totality owing to the totalising nature of the spectacle itself. In presenting itself as an unassailable totality, the only possible resistance comes in the name of that which is 'other than spectacle'. The decision comprises a necessary ethical component, rather than the inevitable outcome of intellectual analysis, because there is enjoyment to be had in the faithful enacting of the spectacle's allotted roles:

> Qui réduit la vie d'un homme à cette pitoyable série de clichés? Un journaliste, un policier, un enquêteur, un romancier populiste? Pas le moins du monde. C'est lui-même, c'est l'homme dont je parle qui s'efforce de décomposer sa journée en une suite de poses choisies plus ou moins inconsciemment parmi la gamme de stéréotypes dominants. […] Les rôles assumés l'un après l'autre lui procurent un chatouillement de satisfaction quand il réussit à les modeler fidèlement sur les stéréotypes. La satisfaction du rôle bien rempli, il la tire de sa véhémence à s'éloigner de soi, à se nier, à se sacrificier.[57]

The acting out of a role is its own form of play, as in the playing of roles in the theatre. In this sense, the 'jeu situationniste' refers to the tactical game of contesting the totality within and against that totality. This can only be achieved having made the decision to undertake a particular kind of oppositional role within and against the spectacle, one which militates in favour of 'play' in the sense of liberatory and spontaneous experimentation ('le règne futur du liberté et du jeu') as opposed to the mimetic performance of a 'pitoyable' cliché. As we will see below, this decisionism necessarily, and problematically, implies exclusion and excision which runs counter to any kind of ethical commitment to 'otherness'.

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[56] Authorship unattributed, 'Géopolitique de l'hibernation', *Internationale situationniste*, 7 (1962), 3-10 (pp.9-10).
[57] Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, pp.172-73.

For the Situationists, the decision to oppose is the first necessary step in forming a means of effecting this opposition. The categorical nature of this decision is, in the same issue of the journal, applied to potential political allies in an article entitled 'Du rôle de l'I.S.':

> Quant à ceux qui peuvent être des interlocuteurs valables, qu'ils sachent bien qu'ils ne pourront avoir avec nous des rapports inoffensifs. Nous trouvant à un tournant décisif, et bien que nous connaissions la proportion de nos erreurs, nous pouvons quand même obliger ces alliés possibles à un choix global. Il faudra nous accepter ou nous rejeter en bloc. Nous ne détaillerons pas.[58]

Once again, a total choice is offered, a yes or no: the Situationists must be accepted or rejected in their entirety. This, despite the imposed caveat of professing to know the proportion of their own errors. The same article has already offered an indication of what these errors may be:

> Nous sommes capables d'apporter la contestation dans chaque discipline. Nous ne laisserons aucun spécialiste rester maître d'une seule spécialité. Nous sommes prêts à manier transitoirement des formes à l'intérieur desquelles on peut chiffrer et calculer: ce qui nous le permet, c'est que nous connaissons la marge d'erreur, elle-même calculable, qui fait forcément partie de tels calculs. Nous diminuerons alors nous-mêmes nos résultats du facteur d'erreur introduit par l'usage de catégories que nous savons fausses.[59]

This margin of error is itself a calculation made by the Situationists owing to the inevitable necessity of enacting a programme of opposition within and against 'the disciplines'. The article offers only a vague conception of these disciplines: that is, the reader is invited to understand any form of hierarchized organisation with its own particular conventions and orthodoxies (not least the university). The same process stands for writing itself, however, for the inscription of a political program into communicable form. As such, the article itself constitutes an intervention within and against a domain with its own conventions. It is in these circumstances that the ethical decision to

[58] Du rôle de l'I.S.', p.19.
[59] Ibid., p.18.

oppose must be taken, in something approaching an act of faith: it is a universal choice between accepting existing conditions or agitating in favour of that which is 'other', the possibility of another world which cannot be given the expression of a sovereign programme, but requires the détournement of existing forms in the service of the utopian vision, or the commitment to oppose the world as is.

It is such a decision, however, that Derrida refuses to make, though Derrida's invocation of Lévi-Strauss's description of the 'bricoleur' in 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu' does demonstrate a notable proximity to Situationist détournement. Derrida quotes Lévi-Strauss in his *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962) describing the 'bricoleur' as one who constructs his designs with the materials he has to hand, which are neither consciously selected for his purposes nor themselves made with his ends in mind: 'Si l'on appelle bricolage la nécessité d'emprunter ses concepts au texte d'un héritage plus ou moins cohérent ou ruiné, on doit dire que tout discours est bricoleur.'[60] Moreover, in a formulation distinctly reminscent of Debord on détournement, as we have seen above: 'Il y a donc une critique du langage dans la forme du bricolage et on a même pu dire que le bricolage était le langage critique lui-même.'[61] Where Derrida writes further on in the same essay, written in October of 1966, that this 'langage porte en soi la nécessité de sa propre critique',[62] the Situationists, four months earlier, quote themselves for the second time in articulation of their proposed practice of a 'communication contenant sa propre critique', originally set forth in the journal in 1962.[63] In the 1971 essay 'Signature Evènement Contexte', in which Derrida reiterates the process of deconstruction, he claims that any word can be placed between quotation marks and cited, and that this citationality is necessarily true of any word that can be recognised and understood.[64] The question of context then, becomes a matter of centreless play, similar to the theorisation in the 1967 essay. Whilst the Situationists make explicit the political programme that attends the critique of spectacle and détournement, conceiving the latter not only as a literary device but as a programme for social and

[60] Derrida, 'La Structure, le signe...', p.412.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., p.416.
[63] 'Communication Prioritaire', p.24. They quote themselves on more than one occasion: 'Réponse à une enquête du *Centre d'art socio-expérimental*', *Internationale situationniste*, 9 (1964), 41-44 (p.44) and 'Le rôle de Godard'.
[64] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Evènement Contexte' in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), pp.365-93.

political transformation, Critchley argues that the political stakes of deconstruction remain largely implicit in Derrida's writings. Indeed, Derrida was long criticised for political impotence at best, wilful obfuscation at worst.[65] In 'Cogito et Histoire de la folie', Derrida writes:

> La Décision lie et sépare du même coup raison et folie; elle doit s'entendre ici à la fois comme l'acte originaire d'un ordre, un *fiat*, d'un décret, et comme une déchirure, une césure, une séparation, une dicession.[66]

It is precisely this kind of fiat, however, that Derrida cannot justify making. He takes a quotation from Søren Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* as an epigraph to his paper, declaring that 'l'Instant de la Décision est la Folie'. Derrida argues that that a decision worthy of the name is a matter for ethics, as reason cannot dictate the taking of a decision, which would amount to the carrying out of a pre-conceived programme as a matter of administration. The necessity for a decision arises where reason cannot distinguish between two alternatives.[67] It is precisely this decision, however, this moment of madness, to which Derrida refuses to commit. In the closing paragraphs of 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans les discours des sciences humaines', Derrida concludes that there are two possible paths along which structure, sign and play can be interpreted, one which dreams of deciphering the origin, or centre, which continues in the quest of discovery for meaning and truth, and another which turns away from this origin and embraces the play of signs in an endeavour to go beyond the metaphysical notion of pure presence, 'l'origine et la fin du jeu'.[68] He concludes on the question of choosing between two such interpretations:

> Je ne crois pas pour ma part, bien que ces deux interprétations doivent accuser leur différence et aiguiser leur irréductibilité, qu'il y ait aujourd'hui à *choisir*. D'abord parce que nous sommes là dans une région — disons encore, provisoirement, de l'historicité — où la

[65] In 1992, The University of Cambridge's proposal to give Derrida an honorary doctorate caused significant brouhaha when a group of protestors sent a letter to *The Times* opposing the award, accusing Derrida of perpetrating 'tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists' as well contending that his work 'does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigor'. The letter can be read online at: <https://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/againstdsdegree.htm> [Accessed 10.06.2015].
[66] Derrida, 'Cogito et Histoire de la folie', p.62.
[67] Bennington, 'A Moment of Madness', p.106.
[68] Derrida, 'La Structure, Le signe et le jeu…', p.427.

> catégorie de choix paraît bien légère. Ensuite parce qu'il faut essayer d'abord de penser le sol commun, et la *différance* de cette différence irréductible. Et qu'il y a là un type de question, disons encore historique, dont nous ne faisons aujourd'hui qu'entrevoir *la conception, la formation, la gestion, le travail*. Et je dis ces mots les yeux tournés, certes, vers les opérations de l'enfantement; mais aussi vers ceux qui, dans une société dont je ne m'exclus pas, les détournent devant l'encore innommable qui s'annonce et qui ne peut le faire, comme c'est nécessaire chaque fois qu'une naissance est à l'œuvre, que sous l'espèce de la non-espèce, sous la forme informe, muette, infante et terrifiante de la monstruosité.[69]

Derrida, unlike the Situationists, does not hold much store by the question of the choice, or of choosing. A choice implies a decision, a conclusion to reading and thinking, whereas deconstruction provokes 'an infinite and infinitely surprising reading' that shows the shortcomings of any unitary, finite notion of totality. The famous neologism Derrida coined, 'la différance' — referring to both the difference between words and the perpetual deferral of meaning that can constantly be revised and refined — here offers the way out of making such a decision, the recourse to an infinitely unnameable 'non-concept' which opens up the possibility of alterity without ever requiring a 'prise de parti'. Derrida, though he took up political questions in his later writings, insisted upon the impossibility of properly taking a political position owing to the need for perpetual interrogation and analysis. Where Derrida's decision is permanently deferred, the Situationists' decision is an axiom of their thought and work. The utopian commitment to a reign of freedom and play is what demands permanent postponement, but Derrida's 'forme informe' is reminiscent of the 'négativité' of 'Cogito et Histoire de la folie' in its muteness (Derrida describes the mad as 'mute', deprived of a voice or of expression). The Situationists reject the 'double bind' of deconstruction in embracing the fallibility of their written, artistic and filmic interventions.

The quarrel amongst the readers of Derrida of which I briefly related the terms at the beginning of this section would doubtless have been of singular unimportance for the Situationists:

[69] Ibid., p.427-38.

‘Laissons aux fossoyeurs officiels la triste besogne d’enterrer les cadavres des expressions picturales et littéraires. La dévalorisation de ce qui ne nous sert plus n'est pas notre affaire; d’autres s’en occupent’, Constant Nieuwenhuys would write in a journal article entitled ‘Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives.’[70] Against the hesitation or political paralysis of deconstruction, the inflammatory propaganda of Situationist theory results from making the *decision*:

> La propagande révolutionnaire doit présenter à chacun la possibilité d’un changement personnel profond, immédiat. En Europe cette tâche suppose des revendications d’une certaine richesse, pour rendre insupportable aux exploités la misère des scooters et des télévisions. Les intellectuels révolutionnaires devront abandonner les débris de leur culture décomposée, chercher à vivre eux-mêmes d’une façon révolutionnaire. Ce faisant, ils pourront enfin rencontrer les problèmes d’une avant-garde populaire. Le bifteck sera remplacé, comme signe du droit de vivre des masses. Les intellectuels révolutionnaires auront appris la politique. Mais le délai, qui s’annonce fort déplaisant, risque d’être long.[71]

The domain of revolutionary politics does not permit the equivocation and rhetorical somersaults that saw Derrida frequently criticised for obfuscation. The Situationists saw the imperatives of a quasi-bohemian revolutionary intellectual collective and those of the professor of philosophy as irreconcilably different. Their style of agit-prop demanded greater (if not, we might acknowledge, necessarily consummate) clarity as well as, more pressingly, the capacity for seduction. As far as they were concerned, provisos, caveats, parentheses and double binds were not the stuff of political propaganda. Thought, writing and filmmaking may well be essentiality ‘contaminated’, but to admit as much would be to stifle the message which motivates the ‘prise de parti’ that thought, to constitute a political intervention, requires. An axiomatic principle of the Situationist movement was that neither philosophy nor the academy offered any route to political emancipation on their own. The aim of Situationist activity was not the construction of a ‘theory’ but to encourage political engagement:

[70] Constant Nieuwenhuys, ‘Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives’, *Internationale situationniste*, 2 (1958), 23-26 (p.26).
[71] ‘L’effondrement des intellectuels révolutionnaires’, p.10.

> La participation et la créativité des gens dépendent d'un projet collectif qui concerne explicitement tous les aspects du vécu. C'est aussi le seul chemin pour 'colérer le peuple' en faisant apparaître le terrible contraste entre des constructions possibles de la vie et sa misère présente.[72]

Deconstruction can explicitly avow an ethical commitment ('la résponsibilité') but political commitments remain implied, whereas the Situationists' political commitments were proclaimed loudly and their ethical exigency only rarely alluded to. Where deconstruction is discursive and inquiring, Situationism is declamatory propaganda. It is the violence of the Situationists' rhetoric which testifies to their political ambition: 'Depuis le début de notre action commune, nous avons été clairs. Mais maintenant, notre jeu est devenu si important que nous n'avons plus à discuter avec des interlocuteurs sans titres. Nos partisans sont partout. Et nous n'avons aucune intention de les décevoir. Ce que nous apportons, c'est l'épée.'[73] The bid to bring about the *prise de parti* on behalf of their readers finds its basis in the quasi-utopian imperative to oppose existing conditions in the name of unnameable and indefinable possibility. Whilst it is this utopian commitment which is permanently postponed, the political commitment to engage is the labour of bringing such a 'prise de parti' about is an ethical pre-requisite.

In his later *Politiques de l'amitié* (1994) Derrida speculates as to how a theory would fare which forewent the indissoluble aporia and paradoxical possibilities with which he was so concerned:

> Or que feraient une 'histoire', une science ou une action historique qui se voudraient résolument et ingénument extradiscursives et extratextuelles? Que feraient en vérité une histoire ou une philosophie politiques enfin réalistes si elles ne prenaient en charge, pour s'y mesurer, pour en rendre compte, l'extrême formalisation, les nouvelles apories, l'instabilité sémantique, toutes les conversions inquiétantes que nous venons de voir à l'œuvre dans ces signaux? Si elle ne tentait de lire tous les possibles d'apparence contradictoire ('rapport sans rapport', 'communauté sans communauté', etc.) auxquels nous rappellent ces 'discours

[72] 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes', pp.3-4.
[73] 'Du rôle de l'I.S.', p.19.

> sophistiqués'? Disons-le: très peu de choses, presque rien. Elles manqueraient le plus dur, le plus résistant, le plus irréductible, le plus autre de la 'chose même'. Elles s'affubleraient de 'réalisme' au moment de tourner court devant la chose — et de répéter, répéter, répéter sans même la conscience ou la mémoire du ressassement.[74]

It is this notion of an 'extra-discursive' or 'extra-textual' political philosophy that Critchley (via Nancy) ascribes to the Situationists, bound in their ignorance to repeat the mistakes of those they purport to oppose or succeed. This is precisely the opposite of what I have been attempting to demonstrate during this chapter, that Situationist theory is characterised by a profound awareness of the limitations of their interventions and the attempt to nevertheless engage the means at their disposal in the service of an ethical commitment with which their intellectual and political endeavours begin. The entirety of their written, artistic and filmic output can be read as a meditation on the possibilities of action within and against the forms they seek to oppose; with the difficulty of using language to talk about language, film to talk about film. Situationist theory, considered in its deeply self-referential textuality, most notably Debord's cinema, testifies to the impossibility of 'burying the old forms' completely. Constant, towards the end of his contribution to the above cited article, makes a distinction between the 'vrai' and the 'faux', then immediately qualifies it as a distinction between 'ce qui est utilisable et ce qui est compromettant'.

This ethical commitment I have attempted to illustrate at play within Situationist theory 'n'apparaît pas distinct' from a moral choice because the Situationists seek to distance themselves from a universal morality, an absolute conception of 'right' or 'Truth', and original or 'pure' desire — the unfettered realisation of an innate, subjective truth. The ambiguity of the pronominal 'ce qui assure' can only be expressed in this indeterminate form. That which must be undertaken in the name of the 'règne futur' is as undecidable as the infinitely ludic and liberated utopian horizon itself. However, the fact that something must be done — 'ce que les intellectuels doivent faire' (from the end of the *Rapport sur la construction des situations*) — is unequivocal. The only way to understand

[74] Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p.99.

the world of the spectacle is to oppose it. This is thus both an ethical and intellectual imperative. When communicated, inscribed and transmitted in language, both the 'ce qui' and the 'règne futur' become a presence. Politics, then, is itself is logocentric because it requires communication in and through language, it cannot but relate to postulated ends, to be teleological. Politics requires an intelligible interaction with an 'other'. This is why, for Debord and the Situationists, it is necessary to speak the language of the spectacle both in analysing it and in the creation of revolutionary propaganda, via the media of writing books or making films.

There is a notion of ethics operating in the Situationists' critique, in line with the one Critchley identifies in Levinas and Derrida, distinct from that historically considered as a branch of philosophical inquiry. Nevertheless, what results from the Situationists' ludic notion of ethics errs towards a Manichean distinction between acts 'with' or 'against' the spectacle, the status quo. Not only this, but what constitutes the conformism or rebelliousness of one's actions remains a political question. This question is to be constantly referred and updated, according to Debord's conception of human knowledge as being bound to time and history. This is why it is difficult to speak of 'a Situationist ethics', whilst there is nevertheless an ethical commitment, it is one which is indivisible from the political and intellectual tasks of analysis, criticism, and creation. Moreover, these tasks are inevitably undertaken in perpetual struggle. In practice, the nature of this decisiveness would prove perhaps predictably problematic. The conception of discipline that grew from this ethical commitment manifested itself in frequent denunciations, splits and bitter sectarianism and rivalry between the Situationists and those they perceived to be betraying their revolutionary cause. As often as not, these people were held to be within their ranks.

Friendship and Exclusion

Given the centrality of everyday experience to the Situationist movement, friendship inevitably played a role in the workings of their organisation and the writings which emerged from it. As Michèle Bernstein writes in an article tellingly entitled 'Pas d'indulgences inutiles', in the first issue of the

Situationists' journal: 'Une collaboration d'allure, si l'on veut, intellectuelle ou artistique, dans un groupe se livrant à des recherches du genre des nôtres, engage plus ou moins notre usage de la vie quotidienne. Elle est toujours mêlée d'une certaine amitié.'[75] Bernstein's article features alongside details of the exclusion of three members of the Italian section of the S.I. — the proceedings of the S.I.'s second conference, in Paris, having revealed that 'une fraction avait soutenu des thèses idéalistes et réactionnaires, puis s'était abstenue de toute autocritique après qu'elles eussent été réfutées et condamnées par la majorité'[76] — and the section's consequent 'épuration', as well as the break with the only British founding member of the S.I., Ralph Rumney. The circumstances of Rumney's exclusion are given in an article entitled 'Venise a vaincu Ralph Rumney': his inability to deliver his psychogeographical report on Venice before the publication of the first journal. Rumney was in Venice with Pegeen Guggenheim, the daughter of Peggy, a wealthy American art collector and socialite whom he married in 1958. Pegeen suffered from depression throughout her life, eventually commiting suicide in Paris in 1967; the article announcing Rumney's exclusion describes Rumney 'aux prises de difficultés sans nombre', which Debord, in a letter to Pinot-Gallizio, a surviving collaborator of the S.I. in Italy, would acknowledge referred to Pegeen's travails.[77] Rumney related the tale of his exclusion with good humour in a series of interviews collected in *The Consul*, conducted shortly before his death in 2002. He tells of his own insistence, six months prior to the printing of the first journal, that those guilty of not displaying the necessary fanaticism should be punished by expulsion as well as his suggestion that the members of the S.I. be introduced along with mug-shot style photographs: 'Venise a vaincu Ralph Rumney' appears next to two such photos of Rumney. His son Sandro was also born in the same year, prior to his deadline for inclusion in the journal; he suggests that Debord and Bernstein both considered the birth of a child to be a 'bit of foolishness that should not distract a true revolutionary from his path.'[78] Rumney also asserts that

[75] Michèle Bernstein**,** 'Pas d'indulgences inutiles', *Internationale situationniste,* 1 (1958), 25-26 (p.25).
[76] Authorship unattributed, 'Deuxième conférence de l'I.S.', *Internationale situationniste,* 1 (1958), 27.
[77] Guy Debord, *Correspondances* (Paris: Editions Fayard, 1997): 'Ralph Rumney a répondu gentiment que ses travaux ménagers, et ses ennuis avec Pegeen [Guggenheim], l'empêchaient de collaborer effectivement avec nous mais qu'il espérait que, peut-être, plus tard, cela irait mieux. Par conséquent Rumney n'a plus rien de commun avec les situationnistes, et nous le notifierons officiellement dans notre revue.' — Debord, letter to Pinot-Gallizio, 4 April 1958.
[78] Ralph Rumney, *The Consul,* trans. by Malcom Imrie (London: Verso, 2002), pp.53-55.

Debord was prone to excluding those whom he considered of comparable intellectual capabilities as himself, in order to ensure his control over the groups he commanded, citing his breaks with Lettrist companions Gil Wolman and François Dufrêne, the latter of which Debord responded to seeing in the streets of Paris by saying, in Rumney's account: 'From today on, I will never speak to you again.'[79] Debord was unquestionably not reticent to denounce those around him or those on the left with whom he had varying degrees of involvement, as we have seen from the insults hurled in the direction of Lefebvre, Althusser and Godard, as Bernstein writes in 'Pas indulgences inutile': 'Nous ne voulons toujours pas de relations inoffensives, et nous ne voulons pas de relations qui puissent servir nos adversaires.'[80] Debord's concept of friendship was subordinate to his understanding of the political exigencies of the S.I.: those whom he considered to be complicit in the workings of the spectacle, such as those actively participating in the art market (as at the third conference of the S.I. in 1962), would be excluded without compunction, as would those whom Debord decided threatened his leadership or those he merely deemed incapable.

This capricious and despotic method of organisation somewhat jars with Debord's stated desire, in the 'Rapport sur la construction des situations', to do without such exclusionary and denunciatory machinations: 'Enfin, il faut liquider parmi nous le sectarisme, qui s'oppose à l'unité d'action avec des alliés possibles, pour des buts définis; qui empêche le noyautage d'organisations parallèles.'[81] Though Rumney relates that the decision to take the form of a disciplined organisation was taken at Cosio di Arroscia in 1957, Debord's pronouncement is inconsistent with the frequent splits and excommunications he would later enact: Debord's conception of friendship, his assessment of those with whom he wished to associate himself, was subordinated to his calculations of the political goals of the S.I. That is, he would operate his personal, quotidian relationships with people on the basis of what he considered properly political grounds. This rigorously disciplined — bordering on instrumental — conception of friendship also manifested itself in his relative leniency towards certain others: Asger Jorn remained Debord's friend until the former's death in 1973. Jorn

[79] Ibid., p.56.
[80] Bernstein, 'Pas d'indulgences inutile', p.26.
[81] Debord, *Rapport sur la construction des situations*, p.8.

quit the Situationists in 1961, as it became clear that his relative prominence and success in the art world was inimical to the increasingly anti-art direction the S.I. would soon take; nevertheless, he would continue to fund the S.I. through sales of his work. Bernstein appears to qualify the Situationists' policy of categorical exclusion:

> Mais nous n'avons pas de la rupture une conception idéaliste, abstraite, absolue. Il faut voir quand une rencontre dans une tâche collective concrète devient impossible, mais aussi chercher si cette rencontre, dans des circonstances changées, ne redevient pas possible et souhaitable, entre des personnes qui ont pu se garder une certaine estime.[82]

Jorn, for example, was able to remain on good terms owing to the practical use his financing offered the S.I., whose refusal to work was unsurprisingly reflected in the often parlous and always precarious state of their finances.[83] Personal friendship was considered secondary to, and a derivative of, the perceived political value of an individual's contribution to the S.I. Despite the above caveat, the idealist, abstract and absolute nature of such exclusion remains discernible: 'friendship' and 'politics' were seemingly accorded to distinct and unique domains, the former depended on how 'useful' — to echo the title of Bernstein's article — you were with regards to the latter.

It is precisely this demarcation between what is considered 'friendship' and the realm of the political with which Derrida is concerned in his 1994 book, *Politiques de l'amitié*. Derrida seeks to show that despite its apparent marginality in political philosophy, the concept of friendship is and has always been integral to the notions of community, nation, state and politics. Derrida's meditation on friendship deals with precisely the question of how the concepts of 'the political' and 'friendship' cannot be conceptually divorced. Over the course of the fifth and sixth chapters of the book in particular, entitled respectively, 'De l'hostilité absolue: la cause de la philosophie et le spectre du politique' and 'Serment, conjuration, fraternisation, ou la question "armée"', Derrida's examination of German philosopher Carl Schmitt's writings on the fundamental importance of the 'enemy' to 'the

[82] Bernstein, 'Pas d'indulgences inutile', p.26.
[83] Brigitte Cornand, with whom Debord would collaborate in his final work, the 'anti-television' show, *Guy Debord, son art et son temps*, is quoted to this effect in McKenzie Wark's *The Spectacle of Disintegration*. Bernstein was the only member of the S.I. who held a job with any regularity.

political' provides a lens through which to analyse the Situationists' ethical decision of opposition to the spectacle and the exclusionary model of Situationist organisation as a reflection of their politics of the decision.

Derrida recapitulates Schmitt's understanding of antagonism as inherent to the notion of 'the political': 'Seul un ennemi concret, concrètement déterminé, peut réveiller le politique, nous est-il répété sans relâche; seul un ennemi réel peut arracher le politique à son sommeil et, on s'en souvient, à la "spectralité" abstraite de son concept; seul il peut l'éveiller à sa vie effective.'[84] As I have attempted to show above, Situationist theory conceives of the capitalist spectacle as this 'enemy' against whose commoditising imperatives political opposition takes shape. Debord's chef d'oeuvre takes the name of this enemy as its title, *La Société du spectacle*; the formation of a political program in response to this enemy begins with the theoretical explanation of how this enemy came to be and how it functions. For Schmitt, it is with the identification of this figure of the enemy that politics begins. Quoting Schmitt's *Le Concept du politique* (*Der Begriff des Politischen*, 1927), Derrida goes on to outline how this concept of the enemy finds its antithesis in the notion of the friend: 'La discrimination entre l'ami et l'ennemi serait aussi, au sens hégélien du terme, une "différence éthique" (sittliche Differenz), la première condition de la détermination éthique, ce qui ne veut pas dire morale.'[85] Firstly, we may note the reference to Hegel, who Derrida cites as Schmitt's key reference point in the construction of his theory of the political, and who, alongside Marx, informs most fundamentally Debord's own theory. Secondly, that this difference is categorised as an ethical one goes some way to further revealing the fundamentally ethical operation at work in Situationist theory and practice: if there is an ethical demand to agitate in favour of the 'other-than-spectacle', there is also an ethical dimension to the form and organisation of how this endeavour is undertaken. That is, exclusion and excommunication await those who are deemed unworthy or agents of the spectacle. Such is the logic of this absolute hostility. Moreover, the distinction between the enemy and the friend, in the realm of what Schmitt (and the Situationists, both following Hegel) repeatedly insist on

[84] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, pp.159-60.
[85] Ibid., p.160.

calling the ‘concrete’ — the application of the theoretical categories friend and enemy, the transition from the conceptual level of ‘the political’ to the everyday one of ‘politics’ — necessarily implies a measure of exclusion from the beginning. Derrida’s central critique of Schmitt’s theorisation of ‘the political’ (and indeed, of the concept of what the canonised philosophical tradition names ‘the political’, since Plato and Aristotle) is that this is an exclusionary operation.

Throughout *Politiques de l’amitié*, Derrida aims to show the androcentric character of the traditionally conceived idea of friendship. That the notion of *fraternité* has such a privileged role in French public discourse, most notably in terms of the Republican motto, ‘Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité’, but also in a more general term for solidarity and cooperation, illustrates this predisposition towards an understanding of friendship as masculine. The classical concept of friendship is, as Derrida shows, that of two mortal men, brothers, effectively excluding the notion of friendship between women or between a woman and a man. Derrida traces this back notably to Aristotle’s *Physics* and a passage concerning the familiar, or ‘oikeiôtês’, one of the words Derrida cites as an incarnation of presence in Western metaphysics.[86] The concept of friendship is then, for Derrida, revealed to be not just logocentric, but *phallogocentrique*: fundamentally inflected by gender.[87] Derrida states that this exclusion or omission categorically manifests itself in Schmitt’s analysis:

> Pas femme qui vive. Un désert peuplé, certes, un plein désert en plein désert, et même, diront certains, un désert noir de monde: oui, mais des hommes, des hommes, des hommes, depuis des siècles de guerre, et des costumes, des chapeaux, des uniformes, des soutanes, et des guerriers, des colonels, des généraux, des partisans, des stratèges, et des politiques, des professeurs, des théoriciens du politique, des théologiens. Vous chercheriez en vain une figure de femme, une silhouette féminine, et la moindre allusion à la différence sexuelle.[88]

[86] Ibid., p.177. Derrida elaborates on the same page: ‘mais elle forme un indissociable réseau de significations qui nous importent ici, un foyer sémantique tout entier rassemblé, justement, autour du foyer (oikos), de la maison, de l'habitation, du domicile — et du tombeau: parenté — littérale ou figurée —, domesticité, familiarité, propriété, donc appropriabilité, proximité, tout ce qu'une économie peut rendre conciliable, ajustable ou harmonisable, j'irai jusqu'à dire présent dans la familiarité du proche ou du prochain.’
[87] Ibid., p.182.
[88] Ibid., p.179.

We are confronted with this same desert in Debord's *La Société du spectacle*, where we find no mention of women or as Derrida says of Schmitt, even the slightest allusion to sexual difference. This absence does not take the same form in the Situationists' journal (or Debord's cinema, as we have seen in the previous chapter) where numerous sexualised images of women in various stages of undress feature regularly. In the ninth issue of the journal, such an image adorns many pages, including one reproduction of a Spanish 'tract clandestin' of a nude woman flirtatiously smiling at the camera, which has been détourned with the incorporation of a speech bubble declaring (in Spanish, as the I.S. caption tells it) 'Je ne connais rien de mieux que coucher avec un mineur asturien. Voila des hommes!', a reference to the Asturian miners' strike of 1934 which was crushed by General Franco. The fact that Michèle Bernstein has an article in the issue, and was unquestionably a valued member of the group, fails to mitigate this, given (as mentioned in Chapter Two) her own account of how she and Jacqueline de Jong were referred to by their surnames, 'like the men', therefore disqualifying herself from responding to a question asking as to the Situationists' treatment of women.[89] That Bernstein also was charged with much of the typing of hand written articles for each issue with which she was involved also betrays a clear hierarchy as far as what constitutes 'women's work' was concerned. Despite some meagre evidence that this blindness to female equality was lifting by the end of the 1960s — the sole journal published after *les événements* of 1968 included an article entitled 'Le commencement d'une époque', which declared, more or less in passing, that 'L'importance de la participation des femmes à toutes les formes de lutte est un signe essentiel de sa [May's] profondeur révolutionnaire'[90] — such a delayed and very brief reference to the role of women serves to highlight the failure to confront the issue previously, falling far short of rectifying this occlusion. The Situationists were guilty of unproblematically inheriting an androcentric conception of political action. As Derrida describes: 'la vertu politique […] a toujours été vertu virile en sa manifestation androcentrée.'[91]

[89] See note 118 of preceding Chapter.
[90] Debord, 'Le commencement d'une époque', p.4.
[91] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, p.183.

For the group to be party to such egregious automatism rather belies some of the Situationists' more declarative propositions, where they often announce their resistance to any and all conditioning or convention: Bernstein in 'Pas d'indulgences inutiles' declares: 'Le rôle révolutionnaire de l'art moderne, qui a culminé avec le dadaïsme, a été la destruction de toutes les conventions dans l'art, le langage ou les conduites.'[92] Similarly, the limits to their often professed desire for 'la désorientation des réflexes habituels',[93] are rather keenly brought to light when the contemporary reader is confronted with such highly sexualised images. The gender and sexual politics of the S.I. demonstrate their inability to stand equal to their own 'Définition minimum d'une organisation révolutionnaire', which asserted that: 'Une telle organisation refuse toute reproduction en elle-même des conditions hiérarchiques du monde dominant.'[94] That it was precisely such automatism, such reproduction of existing hierarchies, that the Situationist project sought to defy, along with the obstacles and difficulties in doing so, is elaborated in Raoul Vaneigem's 'Banalités de base', a series of thirty long theses that spanned the seventh and eighth issues of the journal. For the Situationists, as Vaneigem expounds, the spectacle is the self-justificatory narrative of 'le pouvoir hierarchisé' seeking to perpetuate the conditions for its own preservation. Vaneigem emphasises the continuity between the harnessing of developed technological forces that characterises the spectacle and the forms of myth and theology which served the same process over the centuries: 'Le spectacle n'est que le mythe désacralisé et parcellarisé', extricated from the notion of divine entities and fragmented into a series of perceived necessities, prescriptions, commodities or idols which the spectacle distributes. Vaneigem describes a notion of myth which adapts according to the technological and social structures within a given culture, whilst always ensuring the necessity of hierarchical power. This role of the mythic endures, for Vaneigem, 'de la République platonicienne à l'État cybernéticien'.[95] Vaneigem gives another name to this confluence of myth, spectacle and hierarchical power, *logos*: 'Chaque fois que le Logos ou "organisation de l'apparence intelligible" gagne en autonomie, il tend à

[92] Debord, 'Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action dans la politique ou l'art'.
[93] Debord, 'Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine'.
[94] 'Définition minimum des organisations révolutionnaires', p.54.
[95] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (ii)', *Internationale situationniste*, 8 (1963), 34-47 (p.35).

se couper du sacré et à se parcellariser.'[96] This organisation of intelligible appearance represents what Agamben describes as the 'linguistive and communicative being' or 'nature' of humans[97] at a particular juncture in time and history. This *logos*, myth (or spectacle, at a particular historical moment) binds all individuals, oppressed and oppressor alike, to a particular conception of life, of the idea of happiness and the idea of necessity, it imposes an order as if it were natural (as Debord describes a second or pseudo nature in *La Société du spectacle* (Theses 24 and 39)), an inescapable law:

> Le mythe unit donc possédant et non-possédant, il les enrobe dans une forme où la nécessité de survivre, comme être physique ou comme être privilégié, contraint de vivre sur le mode de l'apparence et sous le signe inversé de la vie réelle, qui est celle de la praxis quotidienne. Nous en sommes toujours là, attendant de vivre au-delà ou en deçà d'une mystique contre laquelle chacun de nos gestes proteste en y obéissant.[98]

As above with Vaneigem's discussion of roles, and the 'chatouillement de satisfaction' attainable in the faithful reproduction of the gamut of available models of behaviour at any given point (a point he reiterates during the course of *Banalités de base*), there is the assertion that we are obliged to act in regard to these stereotypes but are always capable of defiance: the occupation of daily life and capture of human activity can never be complete. Even in the most obedient enacting of such paradigms, Vaneigem contends that there is protest in the materiality of the act, as opposed to its abstracted prototype, the model against which our actions are measured. The labour of both the creation and mimesis of these roles unties those Vaneigem calls the possessor and non-possessor, as both are subordinate to the machinations of power, fulfilling their duties according to the mythic order of spectacle. It is this reproduction — this automatism — that the S.I. hope to fight. As such, the political question of allocation of material resources, the battleground of the traditional understanding of Marxist struggle, comes after this ethical distinction between reflecting and breaking the

[96] Ibid.
[97] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p.79.
[98] Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (i)', p.37.

automatism of one's allocated social role and the tastes, attitudes, actions and positions derived therefrom.

Vaneigem seeks to give examples of those who attempt such defiance: 'Déjà, les signes d'une révolte se manifestent chez les acteurs, vedettes qui essaient d'échapper à la publicité ou dirigeants qui critiquent leur propre pouvoir, B.B. [Brigitte Bardot] ou Fidel Castro. Les instruments du pouvoir s'usent, il faut compter avec eux, dans la mesure où, d'instruments, ils revendiquent leur statut d'être libre.'[99] This problematic identification of who is considered a 'friend' and who the 'enemy' (whilst those with whom they lived and collaborated are routinely denounced and excommunicated, dubious public figures can be heralded for the revolutionary implications of certain actions) reveals much of the destructive, discriminatory understanding of organisation the S.I. practised.

It is in the same meditation on Schmitt's brother/enemy distinction that Derrida's perspective offers a prism through which to view this organisational practice. In redressing the exclusive, privileged notion of fraternity in the discourse of friendship, Derrida places ultimate significance on the fundamental unnaturalness — that is, always constructed — of notions of brotherhood and enmity:

> Pour être conséquent avec cette dénaturalisation de l'autorité fraternelle (ou si l'on veut, avec sa 'déconstruction'), il faut prendre en compte une première nécessité, une première loi: il n'y a jamais rien eu de naturel dans la figure du frère sur les traits de laquelle on a si souvent calqué le visage de l'ami — ou de l'ennemi, du frère ennemi. La dénaturalisation était à l'œuvre dans la formation même de la fraternité. C'est pourquoi, entre autres prémisses, il faut rappeler que l'exigence d'une démocratie à venir est déjà ce qui rend possible une telle déconstruction. Elle est la déconstruction à l'œuvre. Le rapport au frère engage d'entrée de jeu dans l'ordre du serment, du crédit, de la croyance et de la foi. Le frère n'est jamais un fait.[100]

[99] Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (ii)', p.39.
[100] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, p.150.

Derrida's' 'démocratie à venir' is a recurring idea throughout *Politiques de l'amitié*, an attempt to give a name to that at which his work is directed. It is an indefinable concept, one which both offers an idea of what a certain form of political organisation could look like and at the same time founds the political and ethical commitment of his interventions. It is this mechanism of a foundational axiom which is at once the ultimate horizon of his writings. In Derrida's estimation, there is nothing inherent or natural in the concept of recognising who is one's friend and who is one's enemy. This antagonistic conceptualisation ultimately leads to the identification of the other in oneself, and oneself in the other: the traditional understanding of friendship, between two mortal men, recognises only what is familiar in the other. This insistence on locating the other, the one to fight and to eliminate, rests on the recognition of this other. The traditional understanding of friendship excludes the figure of the woman from its schema, neither brother nor enemy. The Situationists were guilty of inheriting unquestioningly such an exclusive model of friendship, a model which was inherently exclusive, if not of women themselves in practice (though they were largely confined to semi-subordinate roles), then of 'otherness' more broadly conceived, as that which constitutes the 'other-than-spectacle' but which they could not recognise themselves. Derrida poses himself the question of how, in the context of this model of exclusionary friendship upon which our inherited notions of the political operate, can one respond and hope to act politically:

> 1. *Ou bien* admettre que le politique, c'est en effet ce phallogocentrisme en acte. Schmitt ne ferait qu'en prendre acte; et nous ne pourrions pas ne pas reconnaître qu'en effet, tant de faits l'attestent dans toutes les cultures européennes, dans la Bible et le Coran, dans le monde grec et dans la modernité occidentale, la vertu politique (le courage guerrier, la mise de mort et la mise à mort, etc.) a toujours été vertu virile en sa manifestation androcentrée. La vertu est virile. […] On ne peut combattre cette structure qu'en se portant au-delà du politique, du nom 'politique', et en forgeant d'autres concepts, des concepts autrement mobilisateurs. Qui jurerait que cela n'est pas en cours?
>
> 2. *Ou bien* garder le 'vieux nom', analyser autrement la logique et la topique du concept, et engager d'autres formes de lutte, d'autres opérations de 'partisan', etc. S'il y avait une thèse

> au présent essai, elle poserait peut-être que choix il ne saurait y avoir: la décision consisterait une fois encore à trancher sans exclure, à inventer d'autres noms et d'autres concepts, à se porter au-delà de ce politique-ci sans cesser d'y intervenir pour le transformer.[101]

Despite a too willing and unquestioning internalisation of the androcentric concept of politics, the Situationists, like Derrida, sought to go between these two possible responses. On the one hand, they agitated for another idea of politics, one beyond the 'idée de bonheur' they alleged both the traditional left and right agreed upon, one of freedom and play against the commoditising imperatives of the market and the continuation of hierarchical power.[102] In seeking to effect 'concrete' change, however, and in continuing to intervene politically, the inherited exclusivity and discrimination of 'the political' — notably in the case of their gender and sexual politics but also more generally in their constant will to purify and excise those deemed useless — the destructive brand of political action Derrida identifies is distinctly evident in Situationist practice. Once again, however, there is no little evidence that they were at least partially aware of their failings on this front:

> Tout ce qui est praxis entre dans notre projet, il y entre avec sa part d'aliénation, avec les impuretés du pouvoir: mais nous sommes à même de filtrer. Nous mettrons en lumière la force et la pureté des gestes de refus aussi bien que des manœuvres d'assujettissement, non dans une vision manichéenne, mais en faisant évoluer, par notre propre stratégie, ce combat où, partout, à chaque instant, les adversaires cherchent le contact et se heurtent sans méthode, dans une nuit et une incertitude sans remède.[103]

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[101] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, p.183.

[102] 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes', p.3: 'Les groupes qui cherchent à créer une organisation révolutionnaire d'un type nouveau rencontrent leur plus grande difficulté dans la tâche d'établir de nouveaux rapports humains à l'intérieur d'une telle organisation. Il est sûr que la pression omniprésente de la société s'exerce contre cet essai. Mais, faute d'y parvenir par des méthodes qui sont à expérimenter, on ne peut sortir de la politique spécialisée. La revendication d'une participation de tous retombe d'une nécessité sine qua non pour la gestion d'une organisation, et ultérieurement d'une société, réellement nouvelles, au rang d'un souhait abstrait et moralisateur. Les militants, s'ils ne sont plus les simples exécutants des décisions des maîtres de l'appareil, risquent d'être encore réduits au rôle de spectateurs de ceux d'entre eux qui sont les plus qualifiés dans la politique conçue comme une spécialisation; et par là, reconstituent le rapport de passivité du vieux monde.'

[103] Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (ii)', p.45.

The acknowledgement of their own potential shortcomings comes accompanied with an insistence that they were able nevertheless to factor this into their theory, such calculated intransigence as to the righteousness of their cause serves as a rhetorical disclaimer of sorts. The self-critical aspect of such acknowledgments is defied and yet endorsed by this rhetorical brio: the latter is a by-product of their attempts as a political organisation to seduce and galvanise their readers. Just as Vaneigem acknowledges that the Situationists could only make use of the means at their disposal in order to reach a readership — 'nous ne pouvons éviter de nous faire connaître, jusqu'à un certain point, sur le mode spectaculaire'[104] — their theory can only be read with the particular ends of a group at a particular time in mind. Vaneigem reiterates the point throughout 'Banalités de base':

> Mais il faut se rendre à l'évidence, nous sommes aussi empêchés de suivre librement le cours de tels moments (excepté le moment de la révolution même), aussi bien que par la répression générale du pouvoir, par les nécessités de notre lutte, de notre tactique, etc. Il importe également de trouver le moyen de compenser ce 'pourcentage d'erreur' supplémentaire, dans l'élargissement de ces moments et dans la mise en évidence de leur portée qualitative.[105]

The purpose of their theoretical works and incendiary tracts always comes back to the everyday struggle, the contamination of the media employed in the service of this struggle is the source of a constant anxiety that is nevertheless suppressed in the rhetorical effusions of their writing. Vaneigem subsequently describes the need for absolute coherence within any revolutionary organisation: 'La seule limite de la participation à sa démocratie totale, c'est la reconnaissance et l'auto-appropriation par tous ses membres de la cohérence de sa critique: cette cohérence doit être dans la théorie critique proprement dite, et dans le rapport entre cette théorie et l'activité pratique.'[106] This relationship between theory and practice is the central conundrum in all Situationist works: how to establish a relationship between words and actions.[107] The journal's preoccupation with organisation and

[104] Ibid., p.47.
[105] Ibid., p.38.
[106] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Avoir pour but la vérité pratique', *Internationale Situationniste*, 11 (1967), 37-39 (p.37).
[107] 'Nous ne prétendons pas avoir le monopole de l'intelligence mais bien celui de son emploi. Notre position est stratégique, nous sommes au centre de tout conflit quel qu'il soit. […] Mais ce point ne saurait être fixe. Il représente […] le jeu de tous les hommes, l'ordre mouvant de l'avenir.' Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (ii)', p.47.

exclusion, with other groupings on the left and the frequent explicit declarations that their work sought to constitute a praxis all testify to this grand ambition. Derrida is particularly critical of this notion: *'On ne peut pas faire ce qu'on dit. Ni ce qu'on dit faire ni ce qu'on dit qu'il faudrait faire.* Aucune praxis ne peut correspondre à ce qu'en dit une léxis.'[108] He continues:

> Le concept du politique correspond sans doute, comme concept, à ce que le discours idéal peut vouloir énoncer de plus rigoureux sur l'idéalité du politique. Mais aucune politique n'a jamais été adéquate à son concept. Aucun événement politique ne peut être correctement décrit ou défini à l'aide de ces concepts. Et cette inadéquation n'est pas accidentelle, dès lors que la politique est essentiellement une praxis, comme l'implique toujours Schmitt lui-même en recourant de façon si insistante au concept de possibilité ou d'éventualité réelles et présentes dans ses analyses des structures formelles du politique.[109]

Derrida contrasts this presumption of politics as praxis to Schmitt's defence when on trial for his complicity with the Nazis, where he described himself purely as a diagnostician, writing with the pretence to pure objectivity in assessing his object of study.[110] Derrida is particularly suspicious of this idea of the diagnostician: he cites this as Schmitt's possible retort to his own charges of androcentrism. That is, the exclusion of sexual difference merely reflects the nature of politics in history, where the figure of woman has been excluded. Derrida responds to the response he himself has placed in Schmitt's name: 'Il ne s'agirait pas de faire la guerre à cet être qu'on appelle la femme — ou la sœur, mais de répéter et de consolider, dans le diagnostic, une structure générale qui tienne sous contrôle et sous interdiction cela même qui la constitue — et qu'on appelle depuis si longtemps le politique.'[111] Whilst the charge of ever pretending to be 'pure diagnosticians' is far from the case as regards the Situationists, their belief that their own theoretical coherence would provide the path to political revolution relies on the initial accuracy of their concept of 'the political'.[112] If the initial

[108] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*. p.133.
[109] Ibid., p.134.
[110] Ibid., p.137.
[111] Ibid., p.182.
[112] The process of exclusions and denunciations were a performance of the Situationist conception of politics, which sought to demonstrate the dynamism and evolution of their ideas to those they hoped to seduce. Ivan Cthecheglov, writing to Debord in correspondences printed in the journal entitled 'Lettres de loin', remarked

ethical decision that Situationist theory demands is to oppose, to break the automatism and conditioning of the spectacle, then the practical consequences of this decision rely on the analytical assessment of what 'concrete' actions are to be taken. Otherwise, their films, books and journals remain mere spectacle themselves, in their own account. Their conception of theory and practice remains derived from the same heritage as that which Derrida traces in Schmitt, that is, one of exclusion, of identifying the concrete enemy, those who must be opposed. The peculiarly ethical practice of excommunication and denunciation which emerged from this mode of organisation was an expression of this exclusionary understanding of politics.

'La catégorie de la totalité étant le jugement dernier de l'organisation révolutionnaire moderne, celle-ci est finalement une critique de la politique. Elle doit viser explicitement, dans sa victoire, sa propre fin en tant qu'organisation séparée',[113] states Vaneigem in 'Banalités de base'. The Situationists' own end as an organisation came in 1972, when Debord declared the dissolution of the S.I., Vaneigem having resigned two years earlier.[114] Whilst this disbanding was heralded by Debord as a final gesture in defiance of their own recuperation, there was not much victorious in it. Four years after May '68, only one journal issue would follow, in 1969, dedicated predominantly to revisiting those events, and the resignation or expulsion of many key members; there was not much of a Situationist International left for Debord to command. By their own criteria of success, the Situationists unquestionably failed, such bitter exclusionism doubtless contributing to this failure. Bernstein (who by 1972 had divorced Debord, though she had drifted from the S.I. years before)[115] wrote in the first issue of the journal:

upon the apparent undesirability of sectarianism at the same time as the valuable role such excisions carried in demonstrating the Situationists' distinctive character as a revolutionary group: 'Sur l'exclusion d'A[ttila] K[otányi], que dire d'autre? Ces exclusions *devraient* cesser. Je sais que ce n'est pas facile: il faudrait prévoir les évolutions, ne pas accepter d'avance les suspects, enfin l'idéal, quoi. Ces exclusions font partie de la mythologie situationniste.' The Situationists cultivated a mythology of their own, if Vaneigem describes myth as the mechanism of power, it is inevitable that in seeking to achieve 'political' goals, such power was necessarily a vehicle to such ends. 'Nous sommes devenus plus forts, plus séduisants donc', says Bernstein of the exclusions of three of the nascent Italian section of the S.I. in 'Pas d'indulgences inutile'.

[113] 'Définition minimum des organisations révolutionnaires', p.54.

[114] Guy Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *La Véritable scission dans l'internationale* (Paris: Fayard, 1998). First Published 1972.

[115] As Bernstein relates in an interview with Gavin Everall, 'The Game', *Frieze*, 157 (September 2013). Available online here: <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the-game/> [Accessed 22 June 2015].

> Il est vrai qu'un travail commun tel que celui que nous avions entrepris, et que nous poursuivons, ne peut aller sans être mêlé d'amitié. Je l'ai dit pour commencer. Mais il est vrai aussi qu'il ne peut être assimilé à l'amitié, et qu'il ne devrait pas être sujet aux mêmes faiblesses. Ni aux mêmes modes de continuité ou de relâchement.[116]

This demarcation of the realms of politics and friendship served to undermine the Situationists' capacity to realise their stated aims of politicising the everyday, and constitutes a particular automatism of their own. Debord was certainly the architect of this practice, he played the demagogue despot of the S.I., a role he would appear to have thought was politically desirable. When he writes, in 1955, that 'la première déficience morale reste l'indulgence, sous toutes ses formes',[117] such a spikily confrontational understanding of how revolutionary organisations should seek to behave derives in no small manner from the 'virile virtue' that Derrida teases out from the concept of friendship.

[116] Bernstein, 'Pas d'indulgences inutile', p.26.
[117] Debord, 'Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine'.

4

‘The Beginning of an Era’

The upheaval of May 1968 was a watershed moment in the history of the Situationist International. *Les événements*, as they have come to be known, saw what for many contemporary observers constituted the apotheosis of the Situationists’ influence on political and intellectual life in France.[1] Whilst, like the majority of those who had taken part, they were insistent that the desire to name leaders ran contrary to the anti-hierarchical ethos of the events themselves, Debord and the Situationists were nevertheless keen to outline what role they had played in the movement and to detail their interpretation of what had gone on: the successes and failures of what they saw as a potentially revolutionary moment. The final *Internationale situationniste* journal appeared in September of 1969 — two years after the eleventh and penultimate issue in October of 1967 and three years before the eventual dissolution of the group — and dealt predominantly with fallout from May. A text by Guy Debord opened the issue, following on from the collaboratively written *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* — produced by Debord, Vaneigem, René Viénet, Mustapha Khayati, and René Riesel, and published under Viénet’s name from self-imposed exile in Brussels in the immediate aftermath of the events — which had detailed the activities of the Situationists themselves during the month of occupations and strikes.[2] Entitled ‘Le commencement

[1] The twelfth issue of the I.S. journal collates some of the judgments pronounced upon the Situationists in the European press, in leftist journals and published accounts of the events before, during and after May under seven subheadings: ‘La bêtise’; ‘Le soulagement prématuré’; ‘La panique’; ‘Le confusionnisme spontané’; ‘Le confusionnisme intéressé’; ‘La calomnie démesurée’; and ‘La démence’. See ‘Jugements choisis concernant l’I.S. et classés selon leur motivation dominante’, *Internationale situationniste*, 12 (1969), 55-63. The rather bureaucratic presentation of these excerpts is doubtless a deliberately tongue-in-cheek technique further mocking the perceived poverty of the various assessments, in addition to the explicit mockery of the categories themselves. Nevertheless, this final issue of the journal’s relentless efforts to distinguish themselves from other strands of thought and action amongst such a disparate movement as that of May speaks of a tension between the professed anti-hierarchism and an exercise in self-advancement.

[2] René Viénet, *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

d'une époque', Debord's article sought to assess the historical significance of May, arguing that such an outpouring of revolutionary fervour, though it had been stifled by the machinations of bureaucratic trade unions and state power, as well as the inability of the vast majority of students to free themselves from the yoke of their bourgeois aspirations, would usher in a new period of revolutionary struggle. One of the most written about and contested events of the history of the twentieth century, May has been subject to a great deal of theoretical and historical discussion, both in France and abroad. It is not the primary intention of this chapter to intervene in such debates but to examine how the Situationists' activities and reaction to what happened can inform our assessment of Situationist theory's relevance to the present day. With this aim in mind, the chapter will begin by outlining the Situationists' May in the context of some of the salient critical perspectives which have emerged in the forty-eight years since. In light of some of these more recent debates, particularly surrounding the development of capitalism since May '68, this chapter will proceed by examining the Situationists on labour and communication and how their theoretical arguments can be read in the wake of nearly half a century's worth of technological and social transformation. An assessment of this development will lead on to a critique of the neo-liberal university, and a subsequent evaluation of the Situationists' usefulness to the today's struggle against commodification, inequality and subjugation.

Les événements

The Situationists' involvement in what they called the 'Strasbourg scandal' — the publication of Mustapha Khayati's *De la misère en milieu étudiant* and subsequent trial of the students who printed it for the misappropriation of U.N.E.F. funds — in 1966 was part of a significant period of protest in French universities leading up to May '68. After months of protests throughout 1967 at the hierarchical organisation, poor facilities and the institutional enforcement of repressive sexual mores at the Nanterre campus on the outskirts of Paris, the university was closed by the authorities on May 2nd. The next day, hundreds of students gathered in the courtyard of the Sorbonne in response to the closure where they were met by members of the fascist student group Occident, who were seeking to

eradicate 'Bolshevism' from the universities. The police were called by the rector of the university, whereupon violent clashes with students resulted in 574 arrests. On the sixth, a group of protesters calling themselves *le mouvement du 22 mars* (named for their occupation of the Salle du conseil at the top of the administrative tower at Nanterre on that date in '68)[3] were to attend a disciplinary hearing as a result of their actions. Among the students attending the hearing were Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who would come to be held as the de facto leader of the student protesters owing to journalistic coverage of the early skirmishes, and René Riesel, who, as one of the leading *Enragés* became close to the Situationists during the course of the month. A considerable number once again demonstrated outside the Sorbonne against the treatment of their fellow students; whilst inside, Riesel treated the meeting with disdain, reportedly rolling up his leather jacket and using it as a pillow on the wooden floor. It was such intransigence which endeared Riesel to the Situationists, whom he would join throughout the occupations of May and afterwards in exile in Belgium. Fighting broke out when the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS, French riot police), notorious for their involvement in the massacre of Algerian demonstrators on the 17th of October 1961, and their violent response to miners' strikes in the North of France earlier in 1968, confronted the students once again. Reacting to the fighting in the streets, the authorities closed the Sorbonne for what was only the second time in the University's seven-hundred-year history, lending further meaning to the students' chants of 'CRS: SS'. Posters representing this equation would become one of the most well-known images of May. Prior to the hearing on the sixth, Debord and the Situationists handed out a pamphlet entitled 'La rage au ventre' outside in the public courtyard of the Sorbonne, intended as a provocation to further action against the university administration and the police.[4] The street fighting continued, culminating on the night of the tenth in the *nuit des barricades*. Images of the barricades, burned cars and torn up paving stones are now a familiar part of the May heritage.

The CGT and other unions were initially scornful of the student protests, declaring Cohn-Bendit and *le mouvement du 22 mars* puerile and petit-bourgeois but could eventually not afford to

[3] See Robert Merle, *Derrière la vitre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). Though a novelistic account, rather than an academic study in the traditional sense, Merle's book is based closely on the events of the 22nd of March.
[4] 'La rage au ventre', in Viénet, *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations*, pp.260-61.

ignore the solidarity felt among workers, particularly the young, with the rioting students. An official strike was called by the CGT only after workers had taken to the streets and, in some cases, occupied factories. Graffiti denouncing the unions could be seen on the streets: 'les syndicats sont des bordels' and 'camarades, lynchons Séguy', referring to Georges Séguy, the secretary general of the C.G.T, are two indicative examples. At the height of what began as wildcat strikes and culminated in a general strike, a third of the French workforce refused business as usual. Debord and the Situationists would take part in the occupation of the Sorbonne that began on the 13th of May. Initially establishing the 'Comité enragés-situationnistes', one of many such committees set up by various factions in the occupied Sorbonne, the Situationists produced tracts, détourned comic strips and adorned walls with their slogans. Photographs of the occupation along with many of the tracts and posters produced from within the occupied Sorbonne are collected in Viénet's book. The Situationists would leave by the 17th of May, fatigued by the perceived fecklessness of the students and their internecine quarrels.[5] They subsequently set up the Conseil pour le mantien des occupations with the intention of producing more tracts in support of the worker-occupied factories and encouraging 'councilist tendencies'. The eventual negotiations between union bosses and the government at the end of May resulted in the 'accords de Grenelle', comprising a 7% increase in wages and a 35% rise in the minimum wage. Though they were initially rejected by many striking workers, harsh police repression during June saw the occupations end and normal work resume. Eventually, over the course of the next month, the dissipation of revolutionary enthusiasm would see de Gaulle's newly formed Union pour la Défense de la République party emerge with an absolute majority in hastily called parliamentary elections after the P.C.F and the socialists had attempted unsuccessfully to translate the street protests into electoral success. The organs of state power were able to re-establish themselves and the revolutionary possibilities ebbed away.

Despite the dissolution of the movement as June wore on, the Situationists remained convinced of the revolutionary potentialities the events revealed, describing May as 'Le plus grand

[5] This is made clear throughout both Viénet, *Enragés et Situationnistes* and Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque'.

moment révolutionnaire qu'ait connu la France depuis la Commune de Paris',[6] the last time such an erosion of state power had been effected by people taking to the streets, and pouring scorn on the nomenclature that had, by 1969, already become commonplace:

> Depuis la défaite du mouvement des occupations, ceux qui y ont participé aussi bien que ceux qui ont dû le subir, ont souvent posé la question: 'Était-ce une révolution?'. L'emploi répandu, dans la presse et la vie quotidienne, d'un terme lâchement neutre — 'les événements' —, signale précisément le recul devant une réponse; devant même la formulation de la question. Il faut placer une telle question dans sa vraie lumière historique. La 'réussite' ou 'l'échec' d'une révolution, référence triviale des journalistes et des gouvernements, ne signifient rien dans l'affaire, pour la simple raison que, depuis les révolutions bourgeoises, *aucune révolution n'a encore réussi*: aucune n'a aboli les classes.[7]

Since no revolutionary movement had succeeded in overthrowing hierarchical power, moments of interruption of the dominant socio-economic order, Debord would continue, were worthy of the name revolution. In their capacity to reveal the future potential of alternative conceptions of society, such moments were therefore of the utmost historical significance. The euphemistic coinage of the term 'events' to describe what had happened in May was therefore a risible attempt to diminish their true weight. The criterion of whether or not a revolutionary movement had managed to seize control of state power was no longer enough to constitute historical import. Debord described reducing May to such a banal category as a manoeuvre of Gaullist thought, seeking to reassure that nothing had really happened.[8] This is precisely what Kristin Ross identifies as the 'police conception of history' in her book on May and the enormous output of critical literature it has generated. Ross argues that much of the work dedicated to explaining, commemorating and analysing May, particularly the work of sociologists, consists of asserting that nothing happened. Drawing from Jacques Rancière, Ross describes the role of the sociologist to the past as analogous to that of the police in the present: in what she describes as a 'teleology of the present', the ultimate message of such works is 'move on,

[6] Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', p.3.
[7] Ibid., p.13.
[8] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, pp.19-27.

nothing to see here'.[9] Ross, again like Debord, also argues that to judge the revolutionary importance of May according to the number of deaths incurred would be to miss the point.[10] Debord describes this as a Romantic conception of history, one which 'ne mérite pas d'être discutée'.[11] This was another measurement in which the forces of order would seek refuge to deny the import of May: instead, such events should be judged by the potentialities they, however briefly, seemed to realise.

Debord begins his article by asserting the prescience of the S.I., citing Arnold Ruge's words to Marx in 1843 on the unlikelihood of any revolutionary uprising five years before the revolutions which swept across Europe in 1848. Debord had taken Ruge's words as an epigraph in *La Société du spectacle*, a book first published, Debord reminds the reader, six months before the May uprising, in December 1967. His characterisation of May accorded primacy to the workers' strikes, as opposed to the student riots, in addition to affirming the revolutionary nature of the events:

> La plus grande grève générale qui ait jamais arrêté l'économie d'un pays industriel avancé, et la première *grève générale sauvage* de l'histoire; les occupations révolutionnaires et les ébauches de démocratie directe; l'effacement de plus en plus complet du pouvoir étatique pendant près de deux semaines; la vérification de toute la théorie révolutionnaire de notre temps, et même çà et là le début de sa réalisation partielle; la plus importante expérience du mouvement prolétarien moderne qui est en voie de se constituer dans tous les pays sous sa forme *achevée*, et le modèle qu'il a désormais à dépasser — voilà ce que fut essentiellement le mouvement français de mai 1968, voilà *déjà* sa victoire.[12]

For two weeks, somewhere in the region of ten million factory workers were on strike, many of whom took part in factory occupations in Paris, Nantes and Rouen. The fact that these were wildcat strikes, undertaken in resistance to union organisation — the C.G.T, C.F.D.T and P.C.F. all initially opposed strike action and denounced the rioting students — was of particular significance to the Situationists. The spontaneous and defiant nature of the workers' action, particularly amongst younger workers, in

[9] Ibid., pp.23-24.
[10] Ibid., p.186.
[11] Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', pp.13-14.
[12] Ibid., p.3.

solidarity with the student protesters signalled, along with the subsequent factory occupations throughout the country, the possibility of creating autonomous workers' councils. Debord blamed the forces of organised labour for the eventual petering out of workers' revolutionary fervour. By comparison with the potentially revolutionary actions of the striking workers, the Situationists saw the student revolt as of secondary importance to the factory occupations coming back under the sway of the trade unions:

> La déficience presque générale de la fraction des étudiants qui affirmait des intentions révolutionnaires a été certainement, par rapport au temps libre que ceux-ci *auraient pu* consacrer à l'élucidation des problèmes de la révolution, lamentable, mais très secondaire. La déficience de la grande masse des travailleurs, tenue en laisse et bâillonnée a été, au contraire, bien excusable, mais décisive. […] Ils n'avaient pas, en majorité, reconnu le sens total de leur propre mouvement; et personne ne pouvait le faire à leur place.[13]

Workers were unable to truly grasp the potentially momentous consequences of their actions, whilst the majority of student demonstrators were in thrall to the various ideologies of the 'groupuscules', small factions of predominantly leftist students, denounced by the Situationists variously as Maoist, Stalinist, Trotskyist or anarchist. The issue Debord took with regard to such groups was the submission of events to pre-conceived categories: the insurrectionary nature of the uprising defied the deterministic impulse to ascribe what was happening in terms of pre-conceived methods of interpretation. This theoreticism, according to Debord's analysis, prevented the student movement from recognising the potential revolutionary implications of their actions. For the Situationists, there is an analogous relationship between the competing ideological currents in the student movement and the role of the unions and political parties in suffocating the workers' movement.

There is, however, a certain tension between the conception of May as this limitless refusal of constraints, an irreducible and incomparable revolt against power and ideology, whilst simultaneously pronouncing the pre-eminent importance of their own analyses, theories and actions. Though both

[13] Ibid., pp.11-12.

Viénet and Debord emphasise that what was so remarkable about May was the refusal of constraints and the impossibility of reducing all the activities of the revolt to any set formula, their casting of the events nevertheless centres on Paris, and on themselves.[14] Debord argues that the Situationists, unlike the various groupuscules, never sought power in their own name:

> Au contraire, les situationnistes peuvent résumer leur action dans la Sorbonne par cette seule formule: 'tout le pouvoir à l'assemblée générale'. Aussi est-il plaisant d'entendre maintenant parler du *pouvoir situationniste* dans la Sorbonne, alors que la réalité de ce 'pouvoir' fut de rappeler constamment le principe de la démocratie directe ici même et partout, de dénoncer d'une façon ininterrompue récupérateurs et bureaucrates, d'exiger de l'assemblée générale qu'elle prenne ses responsabilités *en décidant*, et en rendant toutes ses décisions exécutoires.[15]

This declaration only comes however, after Debord has sought to redress what he sees as three trends of miscasting the role of the Situationists during May in the 'three hundred or so' books which had been published in the intervening year and a half. The first of which, and here he names the book Daniel Cohn-Bendit wrote, consists of reducing the Situationists' involvement to the Strasbourg scandal eighteen months earlier.[16] Secondly, the outright lie that the Situationists were in any way associated with the *mouvement du 22 mars*, and thirdly, that the Situationists were a group of crazed vandals, intent on wanton destruction, responsible for the worst excesses of the Sorbonne occupation, possibly armed and seeking monstrous disorder.[17] Those who doubt the contribution of the S.I. are instructed to 'lire les murs'.[18] Though Viénet and Debord both seek to emphasise the provincial and global scenes of revolt during the course of the year and their account lauds the spontaneous nature of the explosion of unrest, they still ascribe a central role to their actions in the capital. Debord and the Situationists were as guilty as the groupuscules they criticised of manipulating accounts of the events

[14] Edgar Morin proffered a similar argument at the time. See Edgar Morin, 'May '68: complexité et ambiguïté', in Morin, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, *Mai 1968: la brèche, premières réflexions sur les événements, suivie de Vingt ans après* (Paris: Complexe, 1988), pp.171-82.
[15] Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', pp.23-24.
[16] See Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Le Gauchisme, remède à la maladie sénile du communisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).
[17] Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', pp.17-18.
[18] Ibid., p.18.

to emphasise their own theoretical contributions; there is an inherent contradiction in making declarations about the fact that they had sought not to publicise themselves:

> Personne ne peut nier que l'I.S., opposée également en ceci à tous les groupuscules, s'est refusée à toute propagande en sa faveur. Ni le C.M.D.O. n'a arboré le 'drapeau situationniste' ni aucun de nos textes de cette époque n'a parlé de l'I.S. […] Et parmi les multiples sigles publicitaires des groupes à vocation dirigeante, on n'a pas pu voir une seule inscription évoquant l'I.S. tracée sur les murs de Paris; dont cependant nos partisans étaient sans doute les principaux maîtres.[19]

Debord insists that he is not interested in framing triumphant denunciations of his 'intellectual adversaries', despite doing so at some length throughout 'Le commencement d'une époque'. The categorical assertion that supporters of the S.I. were 'principal masters' of May's graffiti and poster art appears highly dubious, both in its veracity and in the authoritarian nature of such a pronouncement.

Whilst on the one hand, the Situationists rejected any attempt to place the revolutionary movement under any kind of pre-conceived political banner, in writing their own accounts of the events, they could only be seen to offer their own brand of interpretive authority. Hence the pretention to declare 'ce que fut essentiellement le mouvement de mai'. Though they lamented the use of the term 'Situationism' and the notion that their work could be reduced to a static body of thought, they were precisely concerned with convincing their readership of the need for revolutionary change and therefore sought an authority rhetorically in the name of Situationist theory. As we have seen in the previous chapter, their understanding of politics and 'the political' requires this rhetorical authority in the seduction of their audience. Theoretical coherence was prized by the Situationists as a means to the end of mobilising those who came into contact with their work, rather than for the sake of 'scientific' correctness in and of itself. This is why Debord's text refers to the beginning of a new era of contestation, rather than being only a case of settling accounts of what happened.

[19] Ibid., p.26.

The emphasis in Debord's text and throughout the final issue of the journal is placed upon that which remains to be pursued of the opportunities that May seemed to make possible: 'Au lieu de souligner ce qui est déjà vérifié, il est plus important désormais de poser les nouveaux problèmes; de *critiquer le mouvement de mai* et d'inaugurer la pratique de la nouvelle époque.'[20] This is a critical enterprise which has been undertaken in innumerable guises in the immediate aftermath and on the occasion of anniversaries, though certainly not in the manner in which Debord envisaged. The 'new era' which May has been seen to have ushered in is frequently held to be one of capitalism's adaptation and reinforcement, rather than one of exciting new proletarian revolutionary experiments. The occasion of anniversaries of the May events have frequently seen the publication of works seeking to historicise the revolt, to place it into the context of what has happened since. There has been a proliferation of studies and theories seeking to reconcile the May events with subsequent historical developments.

While Ross's excellent book on the 'afterlives' of May seeks to criticise the 'official histories' which have come to characterise May in retrospect, one particular strand of this critical consensus is particularly relevant in relation to Situationist theory: the attempt to explain away the revolutionary prospects of May and why the critique of capitalism was, supposedly, amenable to capitalistic recuperation. Régis Debray's 'modest contribution' to the tenth anniversary commemorations argued that, 'Mai 68 est le berceau de la nouvelle société bourgeoise.'[21] It was the 'socio-cultural' side of May which — with the equal rights movements, sexual liberation and youth revolt — updated the top-down, old-fashioned and out of touch Gaullism. The malfunctioning capitalist machine could thus be corrected in bringing social values into accordance with those of a modern, industrial economy. Similarly, in the early 1980s, Gilles Lipovetsky would argue that May heralded a new era of individualism, again, thoroughly in accordance with the growth of the consumer economy.[22] Jean-Pierre Le Goff's *Mai '68: L'Héritage impossible*, in its assertion of the paradox

[20] Ibid., p.17.
[21] Régis Debray, *Modeste contribution aux discours et cérémonies officielles du dixième anniversaire* (Paris: Maspero, 1978). It is worth recalling that the Situationists used the term 'Masperisation', referring to the publisher François Maspero, to mean falsification or misrepresentation.
[22] Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'Ere du vide: essai sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

between the 'socio-cultural' side and the 'workerist, Leninist/Neo-Marxist' side, claimed that it was the leftist groupuscules that sought to effect a synthesis of *ouvriérisme* and libertarianism.[23] Le Goff insists upon an impossible heritage of a polyvalent May whilst simultaneously arguing that May can be reduced to these two contradictory currents. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *Le Nouveau esprit du capitalisme* is probably the best known of these post-May analyses. Written in 1999, the two authors, Boltanski, a sociologist who had worked closely with Pierre Bourdieu, and Chiapello, a scholar in the field of management studies, argued that that the unique impact of the May events was brought about by the combination of two separate types of thought.[24] They called these 'la critique sociale', the call for solidarity and equality, typically associated with workers' movements, and 'la critique artiste', which decries the inauthenticity, alienation of the subject and repression of individual freedom and creativity perpetrated by capitalism. It is this latter critique which the 'new spirit' has found it eminently useful to recuperate in its compatibility with what they call a 'connexioniste' capital's valorisation of freedom and creation.

It is precisely such a dichotomy, between an 'artistic' and 'social' critique which the Situationists opposed, particularly with regard to May, and Debord spends much of 'Le commencement d'une époque' analysing the incompatibility of the student and worker movement, not on the basis of competing or antagonistic thought, but in terms of their susceptibility to fall back into forms of spectacular control, be that the bourgeois aspirations of certain sections of the students, the related surrender to the ideological formations of the groupuscules, or the workers' eventual return to the factories under the authority of the management. For Debord, it was the 'sabotage' of the university enacted by groups of 'anti-students' — by which he specifically indicates he does not mean groupuscules such as the *mouvement 22 mars* — which created the opportunity for direct action on behalf of young workers in particular. He also draws attention to the strikes which had taken place in the early months of 1968 in Cannes and Redon, as evidence of a burgeoning revolutionary movement within the factories.[25] Debord refutes the popular understanding of May as a student movement:

[23] Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Mai '68: L'Héritage impossible* (Paris: La Découverte & Syros, 1998).
[24] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *Le Nouveau esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).
[25] Debord, 'Le commencement d'une époque', p.8.

> Tout au contraire, et quoi qu'affectent d'en croire le gouvernement et les journaux aussi bien que les idéologues de la sociologie moderniste, *le mouvement de mai ne fut pas un mouvement d'étudiants*. Ce fut un mouvement révolutionnaire prolétarien, resurgissant d'un demi-siècle d'écrasement et, normalement, *dépossédé* de tout: son paradoxe malheureux fut de ne pouvoir prendre la parole et prendre figure concrètement que sur le *terrain* éminemment défavorable d'une révolte d'étudiants: les rues tenues par les émeutiers autour du Quartier Latin et les bâtiments occupés dans cette zone, qui avaient généralement dépendu de l'Éducation Nationale.[26]

Debord's description of the sociological response to May is once again reminiscent of Kristin Ross's later assessment, in the assertion that to describe May as a student movement facilitates the forgetting of the general strike and the reduction of what happened to a 'generational' or 'socio-cultural' conflict. It was the university environment which remained intact despite the occupations and street fighting (here again, Debord's animosity towards the vast majority of students and their ideological affiliations is evident). The 'sabotage' of this environment remains a crucial aspect of the revolutionary moment, but could not be considered the motivation for much of the student movement's activity. He argues that though thousands of students during May were transformed by their experiences and sought to reject 'la place qui leur est assignée dans la société', the overwhelming majority of the students were not transformed in this way. Debord then qualifies why this is: not, he says, because of the 'pseudo-marxist platitude' that considers their social origins as determinant, but because of the 'social destiny' of the student: 'le *devenir* de l'étudiant est la vérité de son être.'[27] Debord describes how the student is 'fabriqué et conditionné pour le haut, le moyen ou le petit encadrement de la production industrielle moderne': this is a productive process of the students' upbringing and provisional social role, rather than an innate function of their bourgeois identity. Debord goes on to state that students who sought their deliverance from the undesirable future role as a functionary of industry in the ideologies of the groupuscules saw their studies as having furnished

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

them with the tools to defy this conditioning, whereas in fact the university was indeed part of this process: 'Pour cet ensemble de raisons, les étudiants, comme couche sociale elle aussi en crise, n'ont rien été d'autre, en mai 1968, que *l'arrière-garde* de tout le mouvement.'[28] The refusal of assigned social roles is the predominant characteristic of May, one which comes easily to the factory workers, in the Situationist analysis, as theirs is a role in which they are subjugated and exploited. The student, on the other hand, occupies a provisional role destined for the *patronat*, and Debord argues that the rejection of both the role of the student — in its subordination of the hierarchical strictures of the university — and, crucially, the future position of manager or boss is necessary.[29] It would appear on the evidence of this reading of Debord that the Situationists prized what Boltanski and Chiapello call 'la critique sociale' above the 'critique artiste', in their exaltation of the proletariat and dismissal of the vast majority of the student activists. However, what emerges from the Situationists' emphasis on rejecting the allocation of social roles is the proletarianisation of the salariat, that is, the submission of all social classes: 'Le mouvement des occupations, c'était le retour soudain du prolétariat comme classe historique, *élargi* à une majorité des salariés de la société moderne, et tendant toujours à l'abolition effective des classes et du salariat.'[30] It is the spectacle's domination of social life and regulation of hierarchical roles which the proletarian revolution rebels against. This is as true of the students as of the workers, though the distribution of power in the allocation of these roles in unquestionably unequal:

> C'est une consommation hiérarchique, et qui croît pour tous, mais en se hiérarchisant davantage. La baisse et la falsification de la valeur d'usage sont présentes pour tous, quoique inégalement, dans la marchandise moderne. Tout le monde vit cette consommation des marchandises spectaculaires *et* réelles dans une pauvreté fondamentale, 'parce qu'elle n'est pas elle-même au-delà de la privation, mais qu'elle est la privation devenue plus riche' (*La Société du Spectacle*). Les ouvriers aussi passent leur vie à consommer le spectacle, la

[28] Ibid., pp.8-9.
[29] Again, there is a parallel with this reading and Kristin Ross's description of May as a 'crisis in functionalism'. Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, pp.25 and 65-80.
[30] Debord, 'Le commencement d'une époque', p.3.

> passivité, le mensonge idéologique et marchand. Mais en outre ils ont moins d'illusions que personne sur les conditions concrètes que leur impose, sur ce que leur coûte, dans tous les moments de leur vie, la *production* de tout ceci.[31]

Where the Situationists viewed the separation of student and worker as a concoction of the spectacle, they rejected categorisations of separate critiques such as those which would later be formulated by Boltanski and Chiapello. It is this demarcation which permits the students' identification with the revolutionary ideologies of the groupuscules or their allocated role in spectacular society which amount to the same abnegation of revolutionary responsibility, in the Situationist analysis.

Maurizio Lazzarato, who has written on and been active within Italian and French labour movements over the last three decades, in his essay on Boltanksi and Chiapello's work, also argues that the demarcation of the two critiques is a political and methodological error. Lazzarato sees this operation as a 'liquidation' of what the May events united in theory and in practice.[32] In manufacturing this divorce, Lazzarato understands the traditional Marxist concept of ideology as being culpable. Where Boltanski and Chiapello suggest that capitalism's 'new spirit' seeks to justify hierarchical social organisation 'moralement', by means of discourse and language, Lazzarato argues that this argument artificially separates politics and the economy, 'la macropolitique et la microphysique du pouvoir'.[33] In upholding the category of ideology, Debord, it could be argued, performs this same operation: what for Lazzarato constitutes capitalism's production of subjectivities is misunderstood as an appropriation of the metaphysical notion of human nature, a self-legislating individual subject. This is also why the Situationists might be identified with Boltanski and Chiapello's 'critique artiste', in their use of concepts such as alienation and 'l'homme totale'. What we see at the end of the above quotation from Debord, however, is a reference to the production of these conditions; the Foucauldian critique of ideology resists the reference to any preconceived notion of a subject, whilst the theory of spectacle holds that the political subject is forged in response to the contradictions and hypocrisies of the dominant social order, in the form of an 'idéologie matérialisée',

[31] Ibid., p.10.
[32] Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp et le refus du travail* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2014), pp.71-72.
[33] Ibid., p.73.

the title of the final chapter of Debord's *La Société du spectacle*. This materialised ideology is a parallel configuration to Lazzarato's Foucauldian 'dispositifs qui impliquent l'individu';[34] not merely the mystification of images usurping the natural activity of the spectator but the hierarchical social relationships produced and maintained by its own making: 'On ne peut opposer abstraitement le spectacle et l'activité sociale effective; ce dédoublement est lui-même dédoublé. Le spectacle qui inverse le réel est effectivement produit' (Thesis 8).

If the Situationist concept of alienation can be understood not as some perversion of innate subjectivity, but as the subjective response to exploitation under hierarchical social conditions, then the concept of this 'materialised ideology' can be similarly understood. Debord gives two clear indications of this in 'Le commencement d'une époque', firstly in response to this accusation from the journalist Fréderic Gaussen that the Situationists possess 'une confiance messianique dans la capacité révolutionnaire des masses et dans leur aptitude à la liberté'.[35] The same journalist would later refer with almost identical wording to the revolutionary movements of 1968 across Europe. Debord is contemptuous of such an assertion, given his conviction that his work seeks not to predict the future or carry any notion of 'belief' but to describe the workings of the spectacle given the evidence at hand. Secondly, and despite the fact that it is frequently cited as an example of the Situationist slogans which adorned the walls of Paris during May, Debord is disdainful of one of May's most famous epithets: 'en écrivant sur des murs en béton "prenez vos désirs pour la réalité", ils [*les enragés*] détruisaient déjà l'idéologie récupératrice de "l'imagination au pouvoir", prétentieusement lancée par le "22 mars". C'est qu'ils avaient des désirs, et les autres pas d'imagination.'[36] The concept of imagination, that is, one derivative of a Romantic conception of individual genius and creation is eschewed by the S.I., in accordance with the theory of détournement we have seen.

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[34] Ibid., p.75.
[35] Quoted in Debord, 'Le commencement d'une epoque' from an article in *Le Monde*, 9th December 1966. Henri Lefebvre is quoted similarly, much to the Debord's disdain given the May revolt would shortly follow: 'Les situationnistes […] ne proposent pas une utopie concrète, mais une utopie abstraite. Se figurent-ils vraiment qu'un beau matin ou un soir décisif, les gens vont se regarder en se disant: "Assez! Assez de labeur et d'ennui! Finissons-en!" et qu'ils entreront dans la Fête immortelle, dans la création des situations? Si c'est arrivé une fois, le 18 mars 1871 à l'aube, cette conjoncture ne se reproduira plus.' Henri Lefebvre, *Positions contre les technocrates* (Paris: Gonthier, 1967).
[36] Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', p.21.

On the other hand, the Situationists' valorisation of the proletariat could be seen to approach a teleological conception of history as the march towards egalitarian harmony. Debord is equally scornful, however, of such pretension to 'scientific' status, reminiscent of Althusserianism, an influence on many of the groupuscules:

> Mais c'est justement en ceci que l'étudiant fournit le bétail avide de trouver sa marque de qualité dans l'idéologie de l'un ou l'autre des groupuscules bureaucratiques. L'étudiant qui se rêve bolchevik ou stalinien-conquérant (c'est-à-dire: le maoïste) joue sur les deux tableaux: il escompte bien gérer quelque fragment de la société en tant que cadre du capitalisme, par le simple résultat de ses études, si le changement du pouvoir ne vient pas répondre à ses vœux. Et dans le cas où son rêve se réaliserait, il se voit la gérant plus glorieusement, avec un plus beau grade, en tant que cadre politique 'scientifiquement' garanti.[37]

Where Debord does refer to the 'return of history', it is once again tempting to see this not as a question of an ontology of the proletariat as universal class but, firstly, as a response to the enforcement of hierarchical power and secondly as a tactic of political subjectivation, forging the identification with an oppressed group in order to work towards material change. Once again, the rhetorical impact of such pronouncements seeks to serve both of these aims.

The fact remains that despite the apparent optimism of Debord's article's title, May '68 did not herald the beginning of a new contestatory era but a period of development and adaptation of capital which has only enhanced its control over life in Western societies, and indeed throughout the globe. The question of how capitalism has changed over the course of the last half-century or so is obviously a contested one, given the countless published and doubtless forthcoming accounts of 'neo-liberalism', 'post-industrial society' or comparable competing conceptualisations of the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of this one. In light of Debord's analysis of the worker and student movements, subsequent developments in the analysis of labour and the role of the university will here be considered. Lazzarato's work provides a theoretical counterpoint for what follows: his

[37] Ibid., p.10. Lefebvre is accused of possessing a similar 'prétention scientifique'.

work on 'immaterial labour' and the production of subjectivity will first be outlined in order to present certain affinities with Debord's theory of spectacle, whilst acknowledging their clear disparities. Secondly, Lazzarato's more recent work on debt, taking the creditor-debtor relationship as the 'archétype de l'organisation sociale' will be analysed alongside Debord's conceptualisation of spectacular power relations, with particular attention to how both treat the concept of time.[38] The question of debt leads on to the final section of this chapter on the university, and how Situationist theory's treatment of notions of power, control, politics and opposition can inform and nourish our understanding of the current predicament facing higher education in Britain and the 'neo-liberal' West. Lazzarato's work on capitalism and the production of subjectivity presents a prism through which can emerge a revaluation of the Situationists' relevance to contemporary discussions of work, resistance and politics.

Labour, Subjectivity, Communication

The concept of 'Immaterial Labour' offers an important interpretation of how forms of work in developed Western economies have changed since May 1968. Lazzarato defines immaterial labour as 'the labour which produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity'.[39] It is this concept which increasingly describes the activity of the working class in technologically developed Western societies, in which the tertiary (service, logistics, commercial) and quaternary ('knowledge': finance, information etc.) sectors have come to predominate, where work is increasingly characterised by the operation of computers and supported by digital networks, as well as the activity involved in the establishment of cultural and artistic tastes and standards, as in marketing and advertising but far from confined to these activities. Related notions of 'cognitive capitalism',[40] the 'knowledge' or

[38] Maurizio Lazzarato, *La Fabrique de l'homme endetté* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2011), p.30.
[39] Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour', in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, trans. by Paul Colilli and Ed Emory (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.132-46.
[40] See Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Le Capitalisme cognitif: la nouvelle grande transformation* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2007).

'information economy' and the transition from the industrial capitalism of the post-war era and its technologies of production specific to the factory indicated by terms such as 'post-Fordism', or 'post-Taylorism' also seek to lend further descriptive depth to his change. For Lazzarato, this changes how we understand work and by extension the concept of the proletariat, requiring the abandonment of what he calls 'our factoryist prejudices', the division between intellectual and manual labour and the privileging of the latter.[41]

This transformation of what constitutes labour in post-industrial capitalism takes cultural work as the model of 'human capital', the individual as creative entrepreneur who combines imagination, technical and manual labour as well as the management of social relations in structuring cooperative activity with others in the undertaking of various projects and tasks. This paradigm of the creative entrepreneur demands the internalisation of the labour market's norms and values, combining activity ostensibly constitutive of the 'self' into modes of economic valorisation. For Lazzarato, this kind of working existence erodes the boundaries between work and life, 'leisure' and 'productive' time: 'Now, the post-Taylorist mode of production is defined precisely by putting subjectivity to work both in the activation of productive cooperation and in the production of the "cultural" contents of commodities. […] In a sense, life becomes inseparable from work.'[42] Lazzarato states that immaterial labour produces subjectivity and economic value simultaneously, touching every moment of our lives, demolishing the boundaries between economy, power and knowledge.

Lazzarato argues that this threatens to become a more 'totalitarian' power relation than the clearly defined hierarchy between 'boss' and 'worker' because of this integration of subjectivity and productivity, as the very process of social communication is incorporated into the sphere of economic value: 'If Fordism integrated consumption into the cycle of the reproduction of capital, post-Fordism integrates communication into it.'[43] Where the figure of the consumer emerged particularly after the

[41] Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour', p.136.
[42] Ibid., p.137. Confusing this apparent erosion of the boundaries between 'work' and 'life' under the banner of 'free creative activity' and the collapse of what the Situationists called 'separation' between alienated labour (in the form of both production and consumption) and 'free activity' is indicative of Nancy's description of their role as 'capital's avant-garde' as mentioned in the previous chapter.
[43] Ibid., p.142.

Second World War as the motor of economic growth, what defines immaterial labour is this disintegration between 'leisure' and 'work' and the assimilation of communication, subjectivity, and personality into the production process. Lazzarato describes this as a redefinition of the production-consumption relationship, as the cultural and informational products of immaterial labour are no longer 'consumed', that is, 'used', but consumption is inscribed from the beginning in the processes by which consumer tastes, fashions, and standards are produced: 'Consumption is no longer only the "realization" of a product, but a real and proper social process that for the moment is defined with the term *communication.*'[44] Immaterial labour promotes continual innovation in the forms and conditions of communication and in its consequent production of subjectivity, since this is precisely what communication deals in, as a social relationship. This leads Lazzarato to argue that immaterial labour 'makes immediately apparent something that material production had "hidden", namely, that labor produces not only commodities, but first and foremost it produces the capital relation.'[45]

It would be misleading to map Lazzarato too neatly onto Debord's theory of spectacle, but it is in this relation between immaterial labour, communication and social relations that Lazzarato's conceptualisation of this new form of work comes close to how Debord characterises the spectacle. As we have seen in Chapter One of this thesis, Debord describes the spectacle as a 'rapport social entre les personnes' (Thesis 4), which is mediated by the images to which the theory of spectacle is so often reduced, considered narrowly in terms of 'the media', where the capture of the spectator's activity is neither confined to 'work' or 'leisure'. Rather, Debord echoes Lazzarato on the process of commodity production and consumption as extensive and perpetually unfolding, encompassing the entirety of the individual's activity: 'Le temps qui a sa base dans la production des marchandises est lui-même une marchandise consommable, qui rassemble tout ce qui s'était auparavant distingué, lors de la phase de dissolution de la vieille société unitaire, en vie privée, vie économique, vie politique' (Thesis 151). Debord quotes Marx's *Capital* at the conclusion of the same thesis, stating that one commodity's consumption can form the basis of another, rather than necessarily being exhausted in

[44] Ibid., p.139. Emphasis is Lazzarato's.
[45] Ibid., p.142.

the extraction of its use-value. It is this understanding of consumption as a continual process in the production of value which Debord and Lazzarato share, one which motivates Debord's dissatisfaction with the concept of the 'société de consommation', expressed in 'Le Commencement d'une époque'. Debord laments what he calls an 'inepte travestissement sociologique' for its limited characterisation of a society which certainly proffers the commodities and their consumption, but does so only as part of a process which subjects everyone to hierarchical power.[46] The power relations inscribed in the consumption of commodities are the target of Debord's analysis, rather than the vacuity or futility of consumption alone.

Again, as for Lazzarato, communication is implicated in this power relation: 'toute communication personnelle directe entre les producteurs' is lost under the regime of the spectacle, where communication becomes 'l'attribut exclusif de la direction du système' (Thesis 26). As we noted in Chapter Three, the Situationist model of post-revolutionary organisation is described as 'communication totale', signifying a social relation unmediated by hierarchical power.[47] By contrast, Debord holds that spectacular communication is:

> essentiellement *unilatérale*; de sorte que sa concentration revient à accumuler dans les mains de l'administration du système existant les moyens qui lui permettent de poursuivre cette administration déterminée. La scission généralisée du spectacle est inséparable de l'*État* moderne, c'est-à-dire de la forme générale de la scission dans la société, produit de la division du travail social et organe de la domination de classe. (Thesis 24)

Despite the changes in the workplace and forms of communication between l967 and 1996 — the expansion of information technology and digital networks even up to the mid-nineties bearing little comparison to Debord's denunciation of, essentially, the factory and the television — Lazzarato's prognosis of the predicament of the individual subject permits no greater capacity for action:

[46] Debord, 'Le commencement d'une époque', p.11.
[47] 'Du rôle de l'I.S.', p. 18.

> The subject becomes a simple relayer of codification and decodification, whose transmitted messages must be 'clear and free of ambiguity', within a communications context that has been completely normalized by management. The necessity of imposing command and the violence that goes along with it here take on a normative communicative form.[48]

Under the regime of immaterial labour, the worker's personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command as it is incumbent upon the individual to mould themselves to the requirements of the market. Nor is this simply a matter of professionalism or workplace conduct, as communication, and therefore language, taste, behaviour are constitutive of this marketised subjectivity. Though internalised and taken on by the individual, this is a unilateral power relation of command and control.

In his more recent work, Lazzarato has referred to Deleuze and Guattari's reading of the Marxian base/superstructure paradigm in terms of the univocity of the concept of production to describe the workings of this relationship: the production of subjectivity, no less than forms of life and of existence, does not constitute an ideological or discursive superstructure but part of an economic infrastructure. In this way, subjectivity becomes the commodity par excellence, the commodity which goes into the production of all other commodities.[49] Debord and Situationist theory are here closer to Lazzarato than both the 'vulgar Marxist' model of economic base and representational superstructure or its simple inversion, asserting the independence of the latter from the former. As Debord remarks, 'Là où était le *ça* économique doit venir le *je*. Le sujet ne peut émerger que de la société, c'est-à-dire de la lutte qui est en elle-même. Son existence possible est suspendue aux résultats de la lutte des classes qui se révèle comme le produit et le producteur de la fondation économique de l'histoire' (Thesis 56). The role of a 'leisure' industry, what Debord refers to as commodified blocks of time — reducing time itself to a commodity —, in addition to what we immediately recognise as 'consumption', prefigures Lazzarato's theorisation of capital's production of subjectivity. Debord prophesises that 'culture' will become the 'marchandise vedette' of spectacular society, outlining 'le

[48] Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour', p.134.
[49] Lazzarato, *La Fabrique de l'homme endetté*, p.31.

complexe processus de production, distribution et consommation *des connaissances*' (Thesis 193. Emphasis Debord's) becoming to the second half of the twentieth century what the car had been to the first half, and the train had been to the second half of the nineteenth, the perceived principal motor of economic growth. Similarly, he argues that it is 'les conduites qu'il [the spectacle] règle', the gestures of everyday life, affective behaviour and conduct, cultural tastes and preferences which become commodified under the spectacle. It is worth considering the theatrical connotations of the French '*spectacle*' as opposed to the English 'spectacle', where the former pertains more immediately to the theatre and therefore to the undertaking of gestures, actions and performance. Rather than being restricted to the external and passive observation, we might read the theory of spectacle as encompassing both performance and audience, constitutive of both what we think of as 'work' and 'leisure'.

It must simultaneously be acknowledged, however, that Debord did not prophesise capital's capture of taste and preferences as evinced by the digital era in the twenty-first century. The media today, most obviously in the guise of social media, demand the opposite of passivity. Where the Situationists write in the context of the overtly top down, hierarchical power relations of Gaullist France in the 1960s, notably state control over television and radio via the ORTF, which crystallised around May, today's media require the individual to narrate their own life via writing and image. Nevertheless, where Debord describes power, the pertinence of his conclusions maintains a recognisable relevance: what the likes of Facebook, Twitter or YouTube offer is a formal and technical template into which one can pour one's subjective impressions. The equivalence of profiles, posts and videos, and their comments or messages, present a technical-bureaucratic model in which we enter our 'personal' contributions *pro forma*. The commodity form of such profiles is redoubled not only by the mimetic nature of so many such 'subjective contributions' (opinions imported from other media, photographs in which appearance, pose or style are reproduced from magazines, film or television) but also the way in which such contributions are subsequently captured and sold in the form of data, for marketing and advertising purposes most obviously.

Whilst this may not be 'passive' in the sense Debord describes the spectator of television or film, the conception of activity to which Debord opposes such passivity is far removed from the formal, bureaucratic and mimetic operations that overwhelmingly characterise social media. As Mustapha Khayati wrote in *De la misère en milieu étudiant*: 'L'autogestion de l'aliénation marchande ne ferait de tous les hommes que les programmateurs de leur propre survie: c'est la quadrature du cercle.'[50] Survival used in this manner is a frequently employed term in Situationist theory, referring to the maintenance of the spectacular status quo. Where Lazzarato describes a communication where the terms are 'normalised by management', we might discern a comparable understanding of contemporary media forms, owned by corporations who produce no content themselves but own the means of production and invite us to produce the substance ourselves. What emerges from this reading of the commodity form, communication and what we might call, following Lazzarato, the production of subjectivity, is that 'work', for the Situationists, is any activity that is valorised by capitalism.[51] Labour, in the Situationist analysis, is not the 'essence' of human activity. Rather, it is the critique of value itself which Debord and the Situationists develop from Marx's work.[52]

Focusing on the concept of time as understood by Debord and the Situationists allows a reading of their theory which eschews a metaphysical conception of the 'value' of human labour, and more generally what might be understood as vitalism or the recourse to humanistic notions of the proletariat as universal class, a misunderstanding which so much of their rhetoric would seem to perpetuate. Understanding Situationist theory as taking the expropriation of time as that which is perpetrated by the spectacle permits an analysis of their work which demonstrates its relevance to the present day. It is here once again that we can see certain convergences between Situationist theory and Lazzarato's. The latter's more recent work has concentrated on the question of debt, in *La Fabrique de l'homme endetté* (2011) and *Gouverner par la dette* (2014) and, as a part of this, on the

[50] Mustapha Khayati, *De la misère en milieu étudiant*.
[51] See Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp et le refus du travail.* The Situationist dictum 'Ne travaillez jamais' is best understood as a refusal of this mode of valorisation.
[52] Anselm Jappe, *Crédit à mort: la décomposition du capitalisme et ses critiques* (Paris: Lignes, 2011); Krisis Gruppe, *Manifeste contre le Travail* (Paris: Editions Lignes, 2002. First published 1999); and Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) are all influential examples of the 'Wertkritik' school, taking up the critique of the value form and commodity fetishism from Marx's work.

expropriation of time, in the formation of which he draws on Marx, Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari. Where his essay on immaterial labour offers some optimism as regards what he calls the 'autonomous organisational capabilities' of new forms of labour, this has been replaced by an emphasis upon the importance of 'subtracting' oneself from the logics of capitalist valorisation, experimenting with new forms of subjectivity and of organisation. The notion of opposition, refusal and experimentation is crucial to the Situationists and Lazzarato, and it is to how the expropriation of time functions in the latter's theorisation of debt and the former's of spectacle that the following section turns.

Debt, Exchange and Time

Writing in the context of the global financial crisis of 2008, Lazzarato's more recent work has sought to confront the power relations defining contemporary society (*La Fabrique de l'homme endetté* is subtitled 'essai sur la condition néo-libérale'), understanding debt as the 'fondement du social'.[53] He argues that the debtor-creditor relationship intensifies mechanisms of exploitation and domination as it applies across society without distinguishing between workers and the unemployed, consumers and producers, working and non-working populations, retirees and welfare recipients. The creditor-debtor relationship is therefore one of the most effective instruments of exploitation man has managed to create, since the expropriation of labour, wealth and time of others is blind to such distinctions. Lazzarato criticises Boltanski and Chiapello for ignoring the financialisation of capital in their attempts to conceptualise contemporary forms of capitalism, where he holds that what is commonly referred to as 'speculation' constitutes a machine for capturing and preying on surplus value in conditions created by modern-day capitalist accumulation, conditions in which it is impossible to distinguish rent from profit. Subsequently, all of modern-day capitalist accumulation is comparable to rent, as a class owning the means of production (most notably, the means of producing money, as

[53] Lazzarato, *La Fabrique de l'homme endetté*, p.15.

debt) is able to perpetually extract the wealth of a class of non-owners by virtue of this relationship.[54] Under neo-liberalism, Lazzarato states, what we reductively call 'finance' is indicative of the increasing force of the creditor-debtor relationship.[55]

Understanding debt as the archetype of social relations has two consequences for Lazzarato. Firstly, that the basis of what we call economy and society presupposes an asymmetrical relation of power, rather than the presumed equality of market exchange. Secondly, debt affords the power to reconfigure the economy and society by controlling the subjectivity of the indebted. What we call work becomes indissociable from what he calls 'travail sur soi', as the indebted individual must be capable of promising a future commitment to 'pay back' the debt, and therefore undertake the means of doing so, not only by obtaining a job but also by conforming to the expected standards of the responsible subject. He describes this relationship as revealing 'une vérité qui concerne toute l'histoire du capitalisme: ce qu'on définit comme "économie" serait tout simplement impossible sans la production et le contrôle de la subjectivité et de ses formes de vie.'[56]

In a section headed 'Le temps de la dette comme possible, choix, décision', Lazzarato argues that capital expropriates the time of the indebted subject, in that the provision of credit requires a future commitment — a disciplined regular labour required to repay the debt, normalising and stabilising the debtor's future. The importance of the debt economy lies in the fact that it appropriates and exploits both chronological labour time and *action*, non-chronological time, time as choice, decision, a wager on what will happen and on the forces (trust, desire, courage etc.) that make choice, decision and action possible.

In this way, social relations become a matter of contractual obligation between individuals; as a debt is undertaken on the level of the individual, the subject is individually responsible for its

[54] McKenzie Wark's theorisation of a new 'vectoral class', according to which the proprietors of the means of communication (the 'information vector') extract value from those who use them similarly understands contemporary capital's accumulation as rent. See McKenzie Wark, *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p.208.
[55] David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), p.53. Lazzarato discusses Graeber's reading of Nietzsche on the question of value and values in uncomplimentary terms, see *Gouverner par la dette* (Paris: Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2014), pp.68-69.
[56] Lazzarato, *La Fabrique de l'homme endetté*, p.30.

repayment, neutralising the possibilities for collective action. A subjective feeling of guilt and isolation is the consequence of this 'contractualisation', Lazzarato offers a reading of Nietzsche on the moral foundation of the concept of debt (in German, debt and guilt are the same word, 'schuld') alongside recent press campaigns against the Greek 'loafers and parasites' surrounding the ongoing Euro crisis. This rhetoric finds its analogue in contemporary British politics: the demonization of 'benefit scroungers' as opposed to the 'hardworking people', striving to forge a 'strong economy' which has become a constant refrain of the current Conservative government. The emphasis once placed on the 'work ethic' now functions not only in the construction of social prestige which surrounds work and consumption, along the lines of which subjective valorisation is measured, but as a means of sowing division and suspicion between the indebted, foreclosing the possibility of forming alliances and modes of being together.

The appropriation of time as a mode of economic valorisation and impediment to collective political action are therefore inextricably linked in Lazzarato's analysis and he quotes Marx to establish how this operation functions:

> Pour agir, c'est-à-dire pour commencer quelque chose dont la réalisation est soumise aux aléas du temps, pour se risquer dans l'inconnu, l'imprévisible et l'incertain, il faut d'autres forces que celles engagées dans le travail: la confiance dans les autres, dans soi-même et dans le monde. La relation créancier-débiteur ne représente que 'l'illusion' de la fin de la subordination de l'homme à la production 'de la valeur' économique et son élévation à la 'production des valeurs' fondée non plus sur le travail salarié, le marché et la marchandise, mais sur la communauté et sur les sentiments les plus nobles du cœur humain (la confiance, le désir, la reconnaissance de l'autre homme, etc.). Avec le crédit, nous dit Marx, l'aliénation est complète, puisque ce qui est exploité, c'est le travail éthique de constitution de soi et de la communauté.[57]

[57] Ibid., p.46.

The power of the debt relation extends beyond the realm of 'work' and into the realm of inter-subjective relations. The model of the neo-liberal free creative entrepreneur sees his or her peers as competitors rather than potential allies. Where Lazzarato employs Marx's understanding of alienation, it describes the expropriation of time as life itself.

The concept of time in Debord's theory of spectacle functions in a remarkably similar fashion to Lazzarato's theorisations of debt. Though Lazzarato is keen to establish the pre-eminence of the creditor-debtor relation over the notional equality of exchange in the market place — exchange and commodity being two of *La Société du spectacle*'s central theoretical categories taken from Marx — Debord in fact argues that the expropriation of time precedes the workers' entry into the commodity economy:

> Pour amener les travailleurs au statut de producteurs et consommateurs 'libres' du temps-marchandise, la condition préalable a été *l'expropriation violente de leur temps*. Le retour spectaculaire du temps n'est devenu possible qu'à partir de cette première dépossession du producteur. (Thesis 159. Emphasis is Debord's.)

Time, rather than labour, still less any metaphysical notion of 'human nature', is what the spectacle usurps in order to appropriate the activity of the proletarian. What Debord calls commodity or spectacular time, 'returns' as it is constituted by 'une accumulation infinie d'intervalles équivalents', marked by what Debord calls its 'exchangeable character' (Thesis 147). If the purpose of the commodity is to render all things equal before the law of the market, spectacular time levels all forms of activity to this measure. For Debord, quoting Marx's *Misère de la philosophie* (1847), time is everything, where 'l'homme' is nothing but the carcass of time, spectacular commodity time is, 'le temps dévalorisé, l'inversion complète du temps comme 'champ de développement humain' (Thesis 147). Again, where Debord quotes Marx's reference to human development, this notion cannot be understood without reference to capitalist expropriation, as opposed to an ontological conception of 'the human'. This conceptualisation of time as 'returning' and equivalent derives from the power and control the spectacle exerts on all forms of life. What Debord describes as 'le caractère fondamentalement tautologique du spectacle' (Thesis 13), where 'le but n'est rien, le développement

est tout. Le spectacle ne veut en venir à rien d'autre qu'à lui-même' (Thesis 14), the image of a society which actively inhibits the prospect of political action as the capacity to forge new modes of social organisation, presages Lazzarato's ruminations on debt, the future and the way in which power relations ensure conformity:

> Dans chacune de ces sociétés, une structuration définitive a exclu le changement. Le conformisme absolu des pratiques sociales existantes, auxquelles se trouvent à jamais identifiées toutes les possibilités humaines, n'a plus d'autre limite extérieure que la crainte de retomber dans l'animalité sans forme. Ici, pour rester dans l'humain, les hommes doivent rester les mêmes. (Thesis 130)

The societies to which Debord is referring here are what he calls 'froides', frozen in their refusal to countenance alternative possibilities. Theoretical notions of structure or system are anathema to Lazzarato, who insists that capitalism cannot be described in these terms, since it is constantly developing, adapting and establishing new forms of exploitation and domination, forging new power blocs in order to ensure control over time and forms of life: 'Le pouvoir du capitalisme, comme le monde qu'il veut maîtriser et s'approprier, est toujours *en train de se faire*.'[58] Where Lazzarato attempts to think what he refers to as the processes and flows of economic valorisation, how subjectivity is produced and reconfigured, in order to formulate the logics from which workers' movements might seek to 'subract' themselves, Debord refuses to understand these processes as anything other than the usurpation of time in the service of class interest. This may appear, on the one hand, indicative of what Lazzarato describes as a politics coming from nothing: in this case, an innate subjectivity, a vital sovereignty of the individual, a humanistic, metaphysical belief. On the other hand, however, this could be read as a tactic of political subjectivation in and of itself: that is, a rhetorical move with the intention of scandalising the reader, establishing the terms of a class antagonism that requires resistance and action, and thus a means of 'soustraction' within and against spectacular forms themselves. Indeed, in its totalising aspect, there is an injunction to accept or reject

[58] Ibid., p.83.

this state of affairs, this is the ethical moment discussed in the previous chapter, and it is inseparable from capital's production of subjectivity: in demanding the opposition to acquiescence in this regard, there is a refusal to accept the commodity time of both labour and leisure and a dismissal of both the prestige of capitalist valorisation as well as the moralising stigma of the work ethic.

The University and Protest

> We apologise to readers for our obsessions. But the outcome of our conflict concerns them also. It will decide not only whether this University can become a good, technologically well-equipped and intellectually alert, self-governing community — as it still, despite all its history, could be — or whether it will become simply 'the Business University' from which all other aspirations fall rapidly away. The outcome of this episode will also be some kind of an index of the vitality of democratic process — and of the shape of the next British future.
>
> (E.P Thompson, *Warwick University Ltd. Industry, Management and the Universities*, p.164.)

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to higher education in England for a localised examination of the consequences of neo-liberal managerialism and then to how possible modes of opposition to capitalist valorisation endure. In *Gouverner par la dette*, Lazzarato outlines how the American university serves as a model for the debt economy, with high levels of student indebtedness incurred as a matter of course, obligating the indebted student to manage themselves over the course of their life in order to pay.[59] In England, higher education has been restructured over the last few years in accordance with international and governmental requirements pressing the need for reform and for renewed sources of funding. Raising tuition fees and the inducement of private investment into the higher education sector have seen a new climate in English higher education emerge, emphasising 'competitiveness' domestically and internationally, in which universities battle each other in a game

[59] 'L'Université américaine, modèle de la société de la dette', in Lazzarato, *Gouverner par la dette*, pp.51-73. Wendy Brown has also written on neo-liberalisation in the context of the American university, see Chapter six, 'Educating Human Capital' in Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neo-liberalism's stealth revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), pp.175-201.

of seduction for fee-paying students, who inevitably act as consumers purchasing a commodity on which they expect to see a financial return. Some of the potential consequences of this marketised environment in higher education will be outlined here, in accordance with the analysis of debt, power and control above, with consideration of how this current climate impacts upon a reading of Situationist theory.

Andrew McGettigan's *The Great University Gamble* (2013) charts recent policy changes in the wake of the Browne Review on higher education funding, commissioned by the last Labour government in 2009 and released in 2010, after the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government was formed in the wake of that year's General Election.[60] The purpose of the Browne review — named for the man who led report, John Browne, a former executive of British Petroleum — was always to reduce the sector's reliance on central funding and to foster greater entrepreneurialism, according to the 2009 program set out by the Labour government's then Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Peter Mandelson. McGettigan's analysis shows the underpinning logic of the reforms undertaken since 2010, the government having given themselves the task of cutting back public finance according to the narrative of 'austerity': marketisation, privatisation and financialisation. In order for our universities to 'compete' with international institutions, they require greater funding than the public purse can provide. Therefore, the establishment of a market in higher education, where 'better' universities are able to charge higher tuition fees than others and private investors can seek profit, was facilitated by cutting the block grant distributed for undergraduate provision from £5 billion to £2 billion, including removing central funding for some subjects entirely. McGettigan quotes David Willets, Minister for Universities and Science between 2010 and 2014, as seeking a 'level playing field' for any private provider to enter the market by removing 'anti-competitive' barriers to market entry of central funding.[61]

As we have seen above in connection with Lazzarato and debt, the extent to which the 'free' market constitutes a level playing field is vastly overstated. The complex financial mechanisms upon

[60] Andrew McGettigan, *The Great University Gamble* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).
[61] Ibid., p.3.

which the government's plans for the long-term provision of student loan financing rely — plans which, McGettigan suggests, are almost certain to be subsequently revised — are little-understood by those whom they will most affect and the process as a whole has been subject to conspicuously little oversight or public debate (indeed, the legality of George Osborne's plans to modify the rate of loan repayments has since been called into question).[62] The most well-known, widely reported and immediately felt consequence of the government's recent reforms is the increase in maximum tuition fee cap that universities can charge as of 2012, up from £3,375 to £9,000. The intention behind this move was not just to increase the financial burden upon individual students and off the government but to allow a differentiation between institutions, so those with 'high quality providers', those with greater prestige, could charge more than those perceived as less worthy of higher prices. Though McGettigan describes a 'gamble' regarding the stated aims of the reforms, their long-term fiscal viability and the stability and health of what was a relatively stable system, he alleges in the introduction to his book that, 'the clear intent of the government is to make universities more customer-, business-, and industry-focused' in the course of what he goes on to term 'a single ideological aim': reducing the role of the state in order to broker deals between finance and private sector provision.[63] As with Lazzarato's evaluation of financial speculation, whilst this restructuring might initially be seen as a gamble or 'speculation', it in fact represents strategic manoeuvre in itself: students are forced to behave as consumers seeking returns on their investment and education becomes a commodity. David Graeber, in remarks addressed to an occupation at the New University Amsterdam in 2015, described this as a 'pre-emptive strike', in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, where any perceived source of potential alternative ideas is clamped down upon and what he describes as 'neo-liberal logic' is inculcated in the student.[64] Just as in the EU's negotiation with the Greek government, which sought austerity policies rather than any feasible plan of debt repayment,

[62] Ibid., p.49. Indeed, this aspect of the government's student loan reform has been the subject of more recent scrutiny: Helen Lock, 'Lawyers lines up to challenge sneaked-in student loans charges', *The Guardian*, 15 December 2015, available online here: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/15/lawyers-lined-up-to-challenge-sneaked-in-student-loan-changes> [Accessed 15.12.2015].
[63] McGettigan, pp.7-8. He also lists the twelve occasions Willets held meetings with private equity firms prior to the publication of the Government's 'Higher Education White Paper' in 2011.
[64] A video of Graeber's address is available online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ruS17ivinU> [Accessed 15.12.2015].

the ideological aims are achieved in the enactment of the policy, the control of behaviour in the present, rather than whether such policies result in their stated criteria being fulfilled. In the case of tuition fees, advertised as necessary belt-tightening on behalf of the government, the increase in student loan provision necessitates an increase in upfront government borrowing. The narrative of austerity is employed to make such 'reform' or 'modernisation' appear rational and inevitable.

The application of corporate managerialism in the university has been the subject of two particular articles I wish to review here in light of their resonance with Situationist theory, both of which pre-date the reforms McGettigan describes. Both seek to describe the subjective consequences of the changing landscape of higher education for those working in universities. Both identify this application with the reform under way at present with the 'there is no alternative' program of neo-liberalisation beginning with Thatcher and Regan in the late 1970s. In the first of these two articles, Joyce E. Canaan outlines what she describes as this 'dramatic reconfiguration' of higher education, citing a World Bank report from the late 1990s stipulating what is required of such a transformation, which:

> means either fewer and/or different faculty, professional staff and support workers. This means lay-offs, forced early retirements, or major retraining and reassignment […] which means radically altering who the faculty are, how they behave, the way they work and are organised and the way they work and are compensated.[65]

Canaan theorises the implementation of this reform as the extension of the corporate sector's 'audit culture'.[66] She describes how the constant bureaucratic oversight enacted by an increasing number of administrative staff and corresponding duties required of academics leads to 'new forms of conduct and professional behaviour […] and the creation of new kinds of subjectivity: self-managing

[65] Joyce E. Canaan, 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the (European Social) Forum, Or How New Forms of Accountability are Transforming Academics' Identities and Possible Responses', in *Structure and Agency in the Neoliberal University*, ed. by Joyce E. Canaan and Wesley Schumar, (New York: Routledge Research in Education, 2008), pp. 256-377 (p.257).
[66] Ibid. p.259.

individuals who render themselves auditable.'[67] Metrics introduced to calculate the 'quality' of academic performance in teaching and research — seeking to impose a quantitative measurability upon their work, so that such outputs can be published as various forms of rankings tables which permit differentiation between individuals and institutions for the purposes of the market (who is hired and fired; which ones can charge higher fees for their product) — necessitate the fulfilment of certain criteria in order to present the characteristics deigned desirable by the 'audit' process. Canaan identifies the alleged neutrality of this phenomenon as a misnomer: where the etymology of the word suggests its impartiality, the Latin *audere*, hearing, listening, then measuring according to apparently objective standards, audit also, in Canaan's terms, 'takes a view':

> [Audit] does not just examine an institution and the departments and individuals within it as they are; it makes a judgement about how the institutions, departments and individuals *ought to be* — which transforms these entities.[68]

Under the guise of supposed neutrality, the objective necessity dictated by the laws of the market economy, the audit process reshapes what it is that constitutes valuable activity. In accordance with Lazzarato's meditations on capitalist valorisation and subjectivity outlined above, the internalisation of this logic that its apparent ineluctability demands applies equally to the professional and to the 'personal' life of the individual. Once again, we can go further back in identifying the emergence of this phenomenon. In the 1970s, the historian E.P. Thompson wrote that the integration of business, managerialism and the university brought about politically prescriptive consequences:

> The demands of the institution become larger — moving outwards from the working life to the private and social life of its employees — and its attempts to enforce loyalties by moral or disciplinary means, by streaming its procedures or by managing promotions and career prospects, become greater. The managers, at the top, need not even see themselves as police-

[67] Ibid. Graeber frames his discussion of academic bureaucracy in similar terms in David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: on technology, stupidity and the secret joys of bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015).
[68] Canaan, 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the (European Social) Forum, Or How New Forms of Accountability are Transforming Academics' Identities and Possible Responses', p.262.

> minded men; they think they are acting in the interests of greater 'efficiency'; any other course would damage the institution's 'public image' or would encourage subversion.[69]

The language of political intrigue reflects the concerns of the book, published in reaction to a scandal as Warwick's university administration stood accused of routine surveillance of staff and students and colluding with local businesses and politicians in seeking to influence admissions and hiring in light of the local activism of certain students and staff members. Whilst talk of subversion and loyalties might not necessarily echo the terms in which most people couch academia today, the introduction of new practices under the rubric of greater 'efficiency' is directly related to McGettigan's analysis of funding and Canaan's conception of audit. The concept of 'police-mindedness' equally reflects the political nature of this technocratic modernisation, here calling to mind Rancière's understanding of the police order as the defence and reinforcement of the status quo. Canaan argues that the paradox of 'audit' is that, whilst it constantly demands accountability from those it surveys, its professed objectivity grants it freedom from similar accountability: 'audit is not accountable to anyone or anything and is therefore hardly democratic.'[70] Equally, the subjects of audit 'internalise the logic of this policing',[71] enacting the new market norms as a technique of survival, reproducing the behaviour required of the World Bank's new academic.

If the concept of audit, imported from corporate managerialism, reflects the clandestine workings of a political agenda, then the second article in this field which I wish to discuss, brings a recognisably Debordian lexicon to the analysis of education reform. Stephen J. Ball's 2003 article 'The Teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' also understands education reform in terms of the 'policy technologies' of marketization and managerialism, aligning public sector organisations with the 'methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector'.[72] Ball anticipates David Graeber's 'iron law of liberalism', that where neo-liberalism professes to abhor bureaucracy and state

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[69] E.P. Thompson and others, *Warwick University Ltd: Industry, Management and the Universities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.163.
[70] Ibid., p.263.
[71] Ibid., p.268.
[72] Stephen J. Ball, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity', *Journal of Education Policy*, 18. 2 (2003), 215-28 (pp.215-16).

control in the name of flexibility and freedom, the construction of markets requires not less but more form-filling and red tape: '[C]rucially it is a mis-recognition to see these reform processes as simply a strategy of de-regulation, they are processes of re-regulation. Not the abandonment by the State of its controls but the establishment of a new form of control.'[73] This new form of control takes the form of a 'management panopticism', whereby the imperatives of quality and excellence in teaching and research are driven by the market and competition.[74] For Ball, the internalisation of these norms engenders the individualisation of responsibility in conforming to such imperatives, replacing solidarities based on collective identity and common cause with the construction of an institutional identity based around the corporate culture of the university as a market competitor. What constitutes 'quality' and 'excellence' is at stake, and control of this field of judgement in the hands of managers and the market results in the experience of what Ball calls 'a kind of *values schizophrenia*'.[75] Whatever subjective values are not in line with market reason are necessarily subordinated in the course of professional survival:

> This structural and individual schizophrenia of values and purposes, and the potential for inauthenticity and meaninglessness is increasingly an everyday experience for all. The activities of the new technical intelligentsia, of management, drive performativity into the day-to-day practices of teachers and into the social relations between teachers. They make management, ubiquitous, invisible, inescapable — part of and embedded in everything we do. Increasingly, we choose and judge our actions and they are judged by others on the basis of their contribution to organizational performance, rendered in terms of measurable outputs. Beliefs are no longer important — it is output that counts. Beliefs are part of an older, increasingly displaced discourse.[76]

This leads Ball to speak of the 'spectacle' of these performances: he speaks of 'game playing' and 'cynical compliance' where the professional necessity of conforming to the bureaucratic requirements

[73] Ibid., p.217. Graeber describes this as an 'iron law of liberalism' in *The Utopia of Rules*.
[74] Ibid., p.219.
[75] Ibid., p.221.
[76] Ibid., p.223.

of management and the market demands activities we might consider pointless or contrary to intellectual or ethical values. This 'spectacle' of a solicited performance calls us back to Debord, and can allow us to understand the relevance of his theory in more everyday contexts. Restricted to the realm of representation, the spectacle of television and media, it is passivity that is demanded of the spectator; more broadly understood as spectacular social relations, we see that the performance of activity valorised by capital is precisely what Debord's 'économie spectaculaire-marchande' compels.

In the field of higher education, we can observe how Debord's theory can be read as the market's colonisation of new realms of social activity. The clandestine workings of an ideological agenda behind Canaan's 'audit' and Ball's conception of 'values' find their analogue in Debord's theory precisely when he argues that the spectacle is more than mediatic representation alone: 'Le spectacle ne peut être compris comme l'abus d'un monde de la vision, le produit des techniques de diffusion massive des images. Il est bien plutôt une *Weltanschauung* devenue effective, matériellement traduite. C'est une vision du monde qui s'est objectivée' (Thesis 6). Ball describes an 'alienation of self', the product of this 'values schizophrenia'; Debord's invocation of the concept of alienation can be read as the appropriation of the spectator's activity — as time, once again opposed to the repression of an innate species being — which seeks to diagnose why the refusal of this universal model of valorisation is necessary.

For Debord, this impulse to universality is characteristic of the commodity form in its endless levelling of qualitative distinctions, whilst at the same time, the 'économie spectaculaire-marchande' is based in the maintenance of power relations and is therefore inherently hierarchical, fostering distinction at every level:

> Le spectacle est universel comme la marchandise**.** Mais le monde de la marchandise étant fondé sur une opposition de classes, la marchandise est elle-même hiérarchique. L'obligation pour la marchandise, et donc le spectacle qui informe le monde de la marchandise, d'être à la fois universelle et hiérarchique aboutit à une hiérarchisation universelle. Mais du fait que cette hiérarchisation doit rester inavouée, elle se traduit en valorisations hiérarchiques inavouables, parce que irrationnelles, dans un monde de la rationalisation sans raison. […]

> Avec la marchandise, la hiérarchie se recompose toujours sous des formes nouvelles et s'étend; que ce soit entre le dirigeant du mouvement ouvrier et les travailleurs, ou bien entre possesseurs de deux modèles de voitures artificiellement distingués. C'est la tare originelle de la rationalité marchande, la maladie de la raison bourgeoise, maladie héréditaire dans la bureaucratie. Mais l'absurdité révoltante de certaines hiérarchies, et le fait que toute la force du monde de la marchandise se porte aveuglément et automatiquement à leur défense, conduit à voir, dès que commence la pratique négative, l'absurdité de toute hiérarchie.[77]

Debord detects the same process of hierarchisation at work in bureaucratic and bourgeois reason, once again testifying to the essential compatibility of the 'diffuse' and 'concentrated' spectacle, in a formulation which pre-empts the profusion of bureaucracy under neo-liberal managerialism. Asserting the reinforcement of hierarchical structures in higher education is a common thread of the articles discussed above: that those not in 'elite' institutions face the choice of conforming to the new managerialism or losing out, as McGettigan states, 'elite' institutions will benefit from recent reforms.[78] Ball argues that these are the places least likely to become afflicted by alienation and the 'terrors of performativity' owing to their hierarchical prestige and consequent strong market position.[79] Wendy Brown says much the same of 'elite' private institutions in the American setting.[80]

The notion of this 'pratique négative' is a nebulous one, one designed to encompass all forms of protest and resistance to the hierarchical status quo, including both the work of the S.I. and the revolt of the Watts rioters in Los Angeles, of whom the text is a staunch defence. The particular, 'unavowable' hierarchies invoked above refer to the racism and ghettoization suffered by the population of the district who took to violent resistance in response. Recognisable contemporary incarnations of the resistance to police racism — the Watts insurrection began after a black motorist was pulled over by police and a fight ensued — such as the Black Lives Matter movement, which has seen hundreds of thousands march the streets to protest against the fact that young black men are so

[77] Guy Debord, 'Le Declin et la chute de l'économie spectaculaire-marchande', *Internationale situationniste*, 10 (1966), 3-11 (p.9).
[78] See McGettigan, *The Great University Gamble*.
[79] See Ball, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity'.
[80] See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

often the victims of police violence, could be considered to constitute incidences of this broad concept of 'pratique négative'. Riots in response to police violence are not a thing of the past, as those in the Paris suburbs in 2005 and in London in 2011 attest. Indeed, it is the police reaction to various forms of protest which testifies to the insecurity of contemporary capital's universal mode of valorisation: in 2010, over 50,000 marched in protests organised by various student groups (some of which have since coalesced into the Free Education movement) against the UK government's trebling of tuition fees were met with the 'technique' of kettling and even a cavalry charge, which was captured live on BBC news. Numerous incidents of campus occupations have, over the last three or four years been met with varying degrees of repression: in 2013, five students from the University of Sussex were banned from campus by the university administration after a floor of a building was occupied, whilst at the University of Warwick the following year, a small sit-in of free education activists was greeted by taser- and pepper spray-wielding police. Under the previous Labour government, 'joint enterprise' legislation was introduced tantamount to criminalising peaceful protest, legislation which was recently employed in order to bring LSE academic Lisa McKenzie to court after someone else had placed a sticker on a door during a protest against 'poor-doors' in London housing blocks.[81] Whilst there is often suspicion expressed at such campus contestation as the bleating of the privileged few, the mere performance of rebelliousness and spectacle of refusal, such disproportionate responses from police, university administration and government displays something of a panicked fear towards any signs of diversion from the dominant model of neo-liberal rationality.[82]

As we have seen above, both Canaan and Ball incorporate the notion of performativity into their analyses of higher education reform. Where Ball understands the 'spectacle' required by bureaucratic managerialism along the lines of Judith Butler's description of such performance as 'enacted fantasy', his use of 'performativity' is restricted to this reproduction of established norms and as the title of his article suggests, his usage of the term owes more to Jean-Francois Lyotard's

[81] Owen Jones, 'Our right to protest should be sacrosanct. Unforgivably, it's being betrayed', *The Guardian*, 23 October 2015, available online here: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/23/protest-betrayed-prosecution-lisa-mckenzie-police> [Accessed 18 January 2016].
[82] See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, 'The Revolt of the Salaried Bourgeoisie', *London Review of Books*, 34.2 (2012), 9-10.

discussion of the 'terrors of performativity' in relation to the commodification of knowledge.[83] Canaan, however, employs Butler's notion more fully than Ball, arguing (as Butler does) that though norms may well be increasingly prescribed, they are far more insecure than their apparent universality allows.[84] Such norms require constant reiteration, but alternative performances are therefore possible, ones which resist the dominant narratives.[85] In this sense, Debord's 'pratique négative' includes all forms of riot, strike and occupation which disturb and interrupt the 'business as usual' of the status quo, the faithful reproduction of the norms and enaction of prescriptive social roles and capitalist valorisation.

The Situationists' preferred designation for May, 'le mouvement des occupations', links what McKenzie Wark, in some reflections on 2010's Occupy Wall Street movement, notes are two conceptual opposites: a movement seeks some measure of coherence in meaning and purpose to animate those who belong or might soon belong to it, whilst an occupation selects a space and resides in it. Often, this entails the interruption of the usual activities undertaken in that space, as with campus occupations of university buildings or the factory occupations of May, but, as in the case of Occupy Wall Street, this can just as easily be the occupation of a public space. Wark notes that Occupy Wall Street didn't take place on Wall Street itself, but in Zucotti Park, a few blocks over. The police would doubtless not have permitted such disruptive action on Wall Street, not that they were particularly enamoured of protesters gathering in a public park, in any case. In a brief book chapter entitled 'How to Occupy an Abstraction', Wark puts forward his interpretation of Occupy as both the occupation of a public space as well as of an abstract terrain: the idea of 'Wall Street', as the encapsulation of the power of finance capital, a synecdoche for power in general. This second, 'abstract occupation', however, lends itself more to the category of movement: a question is addressed to those not in the space occupied, in this case, a question of how the world is run and how it could be run. The question was, of course, essentially the same one during May, and when the Situationists refer to the 'mouvement des occupations', what is clear is that they are describing the contagion, the

[83] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: essai sur le savoir* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979).
[84] Canaan, 'A Funny Thing Happened…', p.271.
[85] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).

feverish excitement which spread first throughout Paris then throughout other parts of France, in factories, public offices, universities. The Occupy movement famously presented no demands, there was a declaration, but no stated requirements to bring an end to their civil disobedience; by contrast, the Situationists sought, after May particularly, to present their theorisation of what would come after the initial strikes and occupations, the moments of negativity which cause rupture in the status quo.

Vaneigem's article in the final journal issue, 'Avis aux civilisés relativement à l'autogestion généralisée' takes its title from a text by Charles Fourier entitled 'Avis aux civilisés relativement à la prochaine métamorphose sociale', the détournement clearly signifying the attempt to formulate a program for what comes after revolutionary upheaval. The article begins by invoking David Lloyd-George's demand of political dissidents, to those who would abolish social structures, he asks, with what would they replace them? This question of 'what next' (Vaneigem's article deals with the workers' councils and the notion of generalised self-management) is not just one the more utopian, idealistic Vaneigem sought to answer, but so too Debord, who writes of a 'third stage' in the history of the S.I. — after the 'supersession of art' (1957-62), and the subsequent period of underground agitation and fomentation of revolt — in 'La question de l'organisation pour l'I.S.', a text also published in the final issue of the journal but written in April of '68, before the 'events': 'L'I.S. doit maintenant prouver son efficacité dans un stade ultérieur de l'activité révolutionnaire — ou bien disparaître.'[86] Debord's text predictably deals more with the methodology involved in some recent exclusions than attempting to provide a politically coherent vision to affirm and around which to rally, as does Vaneigem's, though attaining a new coherence of the movement is given as one of the concerns of this 'third stage'.

What is significant about Debord's periodisation and desire to usher in a new phase of activity is the assertion that this question of 'what next' is one to which a response must be given. In the final issue of the journal, and in this third phase, the Situationists convinced themselves that it was now necessary to posit an affirmative vision of the future of a post-revolutionary society, whereas the

[86] Debord, 'La question de l'organisation pour l'I.S.', p.12.

earlier calls to the workers' council served a rhetorical aim of furnishing their theory of negativity and revolt with a seductive endgame. The substantive shift, as opposed to yet another rhetorical one, lies in the fact that Debord now repeatedly threatens the group's extinction. As above, where Debord declares the S.I. must adapt to this 'third stage' or disappear, 'Le Commencement…' ends with a brief acknowledgment of the tension between a theory which prizes spontaneous organisation whilst constantly narrating the necessity of this spontaneity:

> Le 'lever du soleil qui, dans un éclair, dessine en une fois la forme du nouveau monde', on l'a vu dans ce mois de mai de France, avec les drapeaux rouges et les drapeaux noirs mêlés de la démocratie ouvrière. La suite viendra partout. Et si nous, dans une certaine mesure, sur le retour de ce mouvement, nous avons écrit notre nom, ce n'est pas pour en conserver quelque moment ou en tirer quelque autorité. Nous sommes désormais sûrs d'un aboutissement satisfaisant de nos activités: l'I.S. sera dépassée.[87]

Debord is quoting Hegel whilst asserting the dialectical relationship between what he calls 'le mouvement réel et "sa propre théorie inconnue"'. May is this sunrise, according to Debord, signalling their certainty of a revolutionary future. Yet the eventual dissolution of the S.I., a process which took place over the next three years, can hardly be said to have derived from the satisfactory culmination of their activity, as Debord puts it here. Indeed, that May signalled the beginning of a quite different era to the one Debord appears so sure is coming limits the impact of this final rhetorical flourish, particularly when the gesture of announcing the group's eventual supersession in the certainty of what is to come constitutes a gesture of authority renounced in the preceding sentence.

The paradox of renouncing this authority so authoritatively recalls Henri Lefebvre's charge that the Situationists were absolutely dogmatic but without any stable dogma. What Lefebvre does not acknowledge, in the 1983 interview with Kristin Ross, is that this precisely echoes Debord's description of the spectacle: 'Le spectacle est absolument dogmatique et en même temps ne peut aboutir réellement à aucun dogme solide' (Thesis 71).[88] Situationist theory presents a negative

[87] Debord, 'Le Commencement d'une époque', p.34.
[88] Kristin Ross, 'Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International', p.76.

response to the forms of capital's subjectivation, in the hope of encouraging 'la pratique negative' which refuses and resists such forms, in the quest to forge new modes of subjectivation. The frequent paradoxical self-contradiction of their writing reflects this negative project, which consistently emphasises the limits of theory and of writing alone. As Debord states in *La Société du spectacle*:

> Le temps irréversible est le temps de celui qui règne; et les dynasties sont sa première mesure. L'écriture est son arme. Dans l'écriture, le langage atteint sa pleine réalité indépendante de médiation entre les consciences. Mais cette indépendance est identique à l'indépendance générale du pouvoir séparé, comme médiation qui constitue la société. Avec l'écriture apparaît une conscience qui n'est plus portée et transmise dans la relation immédiate des vivants: une *mémoire impersonnelle*, qui est celle de l'administration de la société. 'Les écrits sont les pensées de l'État; les archives sa mémoire' (Novalis). (Thesis 131)

Irreversible time is the opposite of what Debord calls historical time, in which man (as we have seen in the previous chapter, such gendering is common in the Situationists' work) autonomously forges his own history. As I have argued previously, Situationist theory, read in a manner which emphasises their relevance to the twenty-first century, does not comprise a teleological conception of history that hypostatises Hegel's dialectic. Rather, this conception of history is a rhetorical imposture, emphasising the capture of the individual's time as both work and leisure under the spectacle and encouraging its rejection. Writing cannot but function in the same way as spectacular power, what Situationist theory attempts is a writing which cultivates an oppositional tendency. Writing is understood as the means of resistance to capital's subjectivation. Though this takes place in the name of a multiplicity of other forms of subjectivation (the sunrise which reveals the form of a new world), it is the same delimiting notion of the political that I discussed in Chapter Three which holds that an authoritative relation of the text to the reader is necessary for this negativity to be effected. This in turn confines their writing to a prescriptive and restricting account of subjectivation, limiting the theories of spectacle and of praxis to the thought of negativity and revolt, against their apparent pretentions to outlining post-revolutionary forms of social organisation.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that interpretations of Situationist theory which insist upon its basis in ontological or metaphysical conceptions of 'the human' refuse to acknowledge the extent to which the work of the S.I. resists such epistemological foundationalism. The repudiation of the term 'Situationnisme' outlined in the first issue of *Internationale situationniste*, anticipated such an understanding of their writings which presumed theoretical foundations that required mere translation into the realm of practice. This popular reading sees Guy Debord and the S.I. primarily as theorists of the mass media, who oppose the saturation of human life by images and the passivity this condition of spectatorship engenders. Whilst it may be tempting to identify Debord's theory of spectacle, and by extension the work of the S.I. as a whole, with the critique of what he calls the spectacle's 'manifestation superficielle la plus écrasante' (Thesis 24), I have attempted to show that considered as a body of work not limited to *La Société du spectacle* or to the concept of a 'constructed situation' that unifies art and everyday life, Situationist theory offers a more complex perspective on the workings of what they called the 'économie spectaculaire-marchande' and the possibilities of resistance to it than one premised on the usurpation of the human subject's sovereign activity.

In the first issue of the journal, the following quotation from Asger Jorn, writing in an article entitled 'La lutte pour le contrôle des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement', demonstrates from the inception of the group both the Situationists' refusal of traditional concepts of 'the human' and the distinctive understanding of political activity which follows on from this refusal:

> C'est toute la conception humaniste, artistique, juridique, de la personnalité inviolable, inaltérable qui est condamnée. Nous le voyons s'en aller sans déplaisir. Mais il faut comprendre que nous allons assister à *une course de vitesse entre les artistes libres et la police pour expérimenter et développer l'emploi des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement.* Dans cette course, la police a déjà un avantage considérable. De son issue dépend pourtant l'apparition d'environnements passionnants et libérateurs, ou le renforcement

> — scientifiquement contrôlable, sans brèche — de l'environnement du vieux monde d'oppression et d'horreur.[1]

In Chapter One, I endeavoured to show, with reference to Debord's deployment of Marx and Hegel, how the theory of spectacle incorporates the rejection of this 'personnalité inviolable, inalterable', in binding the human subject to time and history. Subsequently, in Chapter Two, what Jorn describes as the 'artistique' and 'juridique' aspects of this rejection were explored as they pertain to the theory of détournement: they refuse the idea of the artist as creator, the moral injunction not to plagiarise and the legal injunction to respect intellectual property, in the name of a form of a political and aesthetic practice predicated on appropriation. Jorn's invocation of 'artistes libres' is indicative of the early Situationist project to realise art in the realm of the everyday, one which they abandoned after 1962 in the name of what Debord called the 'second phase' of the S.I. Nevertheless, the conflict in the form of a 'race' which Jorn identifies between these free artists and the police (this latter understood as the representation of the status quo) bespeaks what I have identified in Chapter Three as an antagonistic ontology of the political which runs through Situationist theory. Equally, this battle between the repressive and the revolutionary 'usages' of these 'techniques de conditionnement' implies a mastery of technology which I have argued is complicated elsewhere in the journal and in Debord's *La Société du spectacle*, but maintained in the guise of a propagandistic rhetoric of progress and the inevitability of their assertions' 'truth'. Whilst there are mentions made of 'cinéma odorant' and forms of 'lavage de cerveau' involving forced submission to images, there is no programmatic explanation of what use these free artists might make of the new techniques of conditioning.

It is my contention that the rhetorical incorporation of a Hegelian dialectic of history-as-progress and terms such as 'l'homme totale' or 'la perte d'unité du monde', which invite interpretations referring to a teleological understanding of human activity and an unalienated human consciousness, is excessive to the purely theoretical manner in which many seek to read their work and therefore what leads to the casting of Situationist theory's foundational metaphysical

[1] Asger Jorn, 'La lutte pour le contrôle des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement', *Internationale Situationniste*, 1 (1958), 6-8 (p.8). Emphasis is Jorn's.

commitments. I have attempted to analyse this rhetoric, alongside the quasi-utopian sketches of workers' councils and a 'future reign of freedom and play', as a tactic inviting their reader to a different kind of political subjectivation. That is, an attempt to encourage the reader to forge a rupture, Jorn's 'brèche', in the pre-established processes of subjectivation that the spectacle permits — the prescriptive social roles, the forms of work, leisure, communication and the social relations with which they are entwined — which constitute Debord's spectacle.

The book which announced the dissolution of the S.I., *La Véritable Scission dans l'internationale* (1972), includes a series of sixty-one theses, entitled 'Thèses sur l'I.S. et son temps', during the course of which Debord makes rare mention of the rhetorical techniques he and the Situationists sought to employ:

> Une inévitable part du succès historique de l'I.S. l'entraînait à être à son tour *contemplée,* et dans une telle contemplation la critique sans concessions de tout ce qui existe en était venue à être *appréciée positivement* par un secteur toujours plus étendu de l'impuissance elle-même devenue pro-révolutionnaire. La force du négatif mise en jeu contre le spectacle se trouvait *aussi* admirée servilement par des spectateurs. La conduite passée de l'I.S. avait été entièrement dominée par la nécessité d'agir dans une époque qui, d'abord, *ne voudrait pas en entendre parler*. Environnée de silence, l'I.S. n'avait aucun appui, et nombre d'éléments de son travail étaient, à mesure, constamment *récupérés* contre elle. Il lui fallait atteindre le moment où elle pourrait être jugée, non 'sur les aspects superficiellement scandaleux de certaines manifestations par lesquelles elle apparaît, mais sur sa vérité centrale *essentiellement scandaleuse*' (*I.S.* no 11, octobre 1967). L'affirmation tranquille de l'extrémisme *le plus général,* comme les nombreuses exclusions des situationnistes inefficaces ou indulgents furent les armes de l'I.S. pour *ce* combat; et non pour devenir une autorité ou un pouvoir. Ainsi, le ton de fierté tranchante, assez employé dans quelques formes de l'expression situationniste, était légitime; et du fait de l'immensité de la tâche, et surtout parce qu'il a rempli sa fonction en permettant la poursuite et la réussite. Mais il a cessé de convenir dès que l'I.S. a pu se faire reconnaître par une époque qui ne considère plus

> du tout son projet comme une invraisemblance [‘Quand on lit ou relit les numéros de l’*I.S.*, il est frappant, en effet, de constater à quel point et combien souvent ces *énergumènes* ont porté des jugements ou exposé des points de vue qui furent, ensuite, concrètement vérifiés.’ — Claude Roy, ‘Les desesperados de l’espoir’ (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 février 1971).]; et c’est justement parce que l’I.S. avait réussi cela que ce ton était devenu, pour nous sinon pour les spectateurs, *démodé*.[2]

In the wake of May and the burgeoning autonomist workers’ movements in Italy and throughout Europe, which he alludes to approvingly, Debord claims that this ‘ton de fierté tranchante’ is no longer necessary and that the S.I.’s revolutionary agenda is no longer as improbable as it was once considered. This assertion comes during the course of a text replete with the same tone, notably in its excoriation of the ‘pro-situs’ who gathered around the Situationists after what he calls the ‘historical success’ of the S.I. and in the familiar self-validating course of his argument (the final thesis reads: ‘Qui considère la vie de l’I.S. y trouve l’histoire de la révolution. Rien n’a pu la rendre mauvaise’).[3] The description of this style as ‘démodé’ indicates once again the seductive and propagandist intentions of their writings, in that they clearly sought not objective theoretical exposition but a more affective, immediate reaction from their readers. Similarly, the vocabulary of war and violence employed to justify his exclusionary practice, alongside ‘tranchante’, with its connotations of incision or cutting, illustrates what I described in Chapter Three as their ‘politics of the decision’: the necessity, first and foremost, of militating against the status quo. This rhetorical violence forms part of the ‘force négative’ of Situationist writings.

After May, Debord laments the servile admiration of the S.I.’s own ‘spectators’, who were attracted by the singular style of the S.I. and the notoriety they had attained, without sharing their revolutionary commitments. Referring back to their own assertion of their ‘*essentially scandalous* truth’ we may observe the rhetorical role of violence as per Chapter One’s discussion of the *skandalon*: the ‘stumbling block’, an inducement to ‘sin’ — here, to transgress the prescriptive

[2] Guy Debord, ‘Thèses sur l’I.S. et son temps’, in Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *La Véritable scission dans l’internationale* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1972), p.54.
[3] Ibid., p.60.

norms of the spectacle-commodity economy — just as the 'sabotage' of the university which Debord alleges constituted the best of May's student movement in 'Le Commencement d'une époque'. The imported quotation from *Le Nouvel Observateur,* which evokes both the accuracy of the S.I.'s pronouncements as well as their bombastic rhetoric, may have met with Debord's approval on account of the particular figuration conjured: '*énergumènes*' deriving from the Latin, referring to persons appearing as if possessed by a demon. As we will see below in connection with his *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, Debord was fond of cultivating a heretical mystique around the S.I., whilst Raoul Vaneigem would later go on to write a history of heretical movements.[4] This prizing of this negativity, as well as the above deprecation of the 'positive appreciation', seems consistent with a thought of revolt and refusal, rather than the affirmative project of the construction of a humanistic political or theoretical programme.

This prizing of negativity manifests itself in the Situationists' rhetoric as what we might call, after Gilles Deleuze, a 'return to the subject'.[5] Deleuze explicitly cautions against any such a return in a 1990 interview with Antonio Negri, during a discussion of processes of subjectivation in what he names control or communication societies: 'de tels processus ne valent que dans la mesure où, quand ils se font, ils échappent à la fois aux savoirs constitués et aux pouvoirs dominants.'[6] Throughout the interview, Deleuze refers to 'sabotage' as a form of delinquency or resistance which resists the business as usual of the status quo, and, in response to Negri's rather optimistic enquiry as to the technological possibilities afforded by new forms of communication in the construction of a communism based on the 'transversal organisation of free individuals', Deleuze further elaborates on how this escape from established forms of power and knowledge could take place:

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[4] Raoul Vaneigem, *La Résistance au christianisme: Les Hérésies aux origines au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1993). Jacques Rancière writes at length on heretical movments in the same year, in his *Les Noms de l'histoire: essai poétique sur le savoir* (Paris: Seuil, 1993). Medieval heretical groups are a frequent touchstone in Griel Marcus's *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), which seeks to emphasise the influence of the Situationists on the punk. Heresy more generally attained some considerable popular attention after the publication of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's influential *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

[5] Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Toni Negri, 'Le devenir révolutionnaire et les créations politiques', *Futur Antérieur*, 1 (1990). Available online here: <http://www.multitudes.net/Le-devenir-revolutionnaire-et-les/> [Accessed 13 May 2016].

[6] Ibid.

> Peut-être la parole, la communication est-elle pourrie. Elles sont entièrement pénétrées par l'argent: non par accident, mais par nature. Il faut un détournement de la parole. Créer a toujours été autre chose que communiquer. L'important, ce sera peut-être de créer des vacuoles de non-communication, des interrupteurs, pour échapper au contrôle.[7]

Deleuze states that even if these processes of subjectivation which forge this 'vacuoles de non-communication' eventually institute new forms of power and knowledge, they nevertheless comprise a 'spontanéité rebelle' in the moment of their creation. It is at this point that Deleuze rejects any such 'return' to a notion of the individual as sovereign actor: 'Il n'y a là nul retour au "sujet", c'est-à-dire à une instance douée de devoirs, de pouvoir et de savoir.'[8] I have attempted to show how the Situationists anticipate Deleuze's concerns in resisting the dominant structures of power by sabotage and in their reiterated suspicion of writing, film-making and communication in the form of a 'communication contenant sa propre critique', just as Deleuze echoes the Situationists in evoking the notion of a 'détournement de la parole'. However, the Situationists enact this 'return' in conceiving of writing and film-making as a stimulus to the negative formation of alternative subjectivities. Debord does not go down the Deleuzian path of refusing the egoic, or the heroic, as I have attempted to show in Chapter Two's discussion of the simultaneous process of identification and distanciation at work in Debord's films. On the contrary: for Debord, this is the model of political subjectivation by means of ideological contestation, presenting the critique of the spectacle's production of subjectivity by seeking a subjectivation of their own, a contestatory, negative one. The utopian figurations of post-revolutionary organisation offer a rhetorical justification for this tactic of political subjectivation, agitating for the creation of a 'brèche' (or 'vacuoles' in Deleuze's terms) from which opposition can begin. Such varied notions of what another world could look like stand in for the refusal to accept the business as usual of the status quo.

In Debord's 1978 film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, he offers a precis of such a project: 'notre intention n'avait été rien d'autre que de faire apparaître dans la pratique une ligne de

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

partage entre ceux qui veulent encore de ce qui existe, et ceux qui n'en voudront plus.'[9] As I have shown in Chapter Three, an 'ethical commitment' to oppose the machinations of spectacle, though not depending on any metaphysical conception of the human, but on resistance and refusal of hierarchical power, requires this 'politics of the decision': a Manichean choice between acquiescence and opposition. Where Henri Lefebvre accuses Debord of imitating André Breton[10] in his proclivity for denunciation and excommunication, I would see this destructive practice (this 'arme', as we have seen Debord put it above) as derived from this delimiting conception of 'the political'. Whilst resolutely refusing to see 'the political' as an autonomous realm that can be divorced from writing, filmmaking and everyday life, and despite their professed resistance to all hierarchical power, the Situationists' misogyny, as I have shown in Chapters Two and Three, reflects the automatism, or 'undétourned element' of this notion of politics conceived as a constantly antagonistic activity, as opposed to seeking convergence between different forms of thought and action. In practice, these assumptions about the adversarial nature of political activity led to the reproduction of hierarchy within the group, as well as the declamatory position towards others on the left and those deemed unworthy of their membership of the S.I.

A consequence of these assumptions is the role of a certain method of myth-making which became integral to this project of negativity, a project described as a 'quest' in *In girum*, and which is cast in theological language and imagery throughout the film: Debord describes the 'Graal néfaste' the Situationists pursued, in addition to the incorporation of Jules Berry's devil, from Marcel Carné's *Les Visiteurs du soir* (1942). Berry cavorts with fire in one détourned scene, narrating his character's affinity with it; Debord's notes for the film identify fire as one of the two primary themes, representing 'momentary brilliance' and revolution, as opposed to water's signification of the passage of time.[11] Echoing the plot of Carné's film, Debord describes how he and his cohort became emissaries of the 'Prince de la division, de "celui à qui on a fait du tort", et nous avons entrepris de

[9] Guy Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.260.
[10] Kristen Ross, 'Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International', pp.69-83.
[11] Guy Debord, 'Notes sur *In girum*' in 'Fiches techniques' accompanying the DVD box set of Debord's films: Guy Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes* (Paris: Gaumont, 2005).

désespérer ceux qui se considéraient comme les humains'.[12] This retrospective view of the work of the S.I. as a provocation, a nefarious *samizdat* designed to bring about a negative reaction against the status quo, reigns throughout the film: 'C'est ainsi que nous nous sommes engagés définitivement dans le parti du Diable, c'est-à-dire de ce mal historique qui mène à leur destruction les conditions existantes; dans le "mauvais côté" qui fait l'histoire en ruinant toute satisfaction établie.'[13] Referring to Hegel's 'bad side' of history on which history progresses, it is alongside Debord's assertions as to the dialectical nature of détournement, a dialectic of 'dévalorisation/révalorisation' as we have seen in Chapter Two, that we can understand the simultaneous rejection of the human subject, and its subsequent 'return' in the form of this propagandistic rhetoric.

Kristin Ross, in her book on the Paris Commune and its intellectual legacy, describes how Marx, 'after 1871 distances himself from a revolutionary perspective that depends on capitalist "progress", whether technical or socio-structural.'[14] Ross quotes a letter Marx sent to the Russian writer and revolutionary Vera Zasulich:

> But, he [Marx] adds, 'Everything depends on the historical context in which it is located.' At this level, he concludes, 'it is a question no longer of a problem to be solved, but simply of an enemy to be beaten. Thus it is no longer a theoretical problem … it is quite simply an enemy to be beaten.'[15]

Ross argues that this distinguishes between two forms of dialectic: an 'either-or' dialectic, and a Hegelian transcendental one. Marx breaks with the latter, a teleology of historical progress, in favour of the former, conceiving struggle of the proletariat as this conflict with the bourgeois 'enemy'. In the work of the Situationists, both of these forms could be said to be at play, whilst I argue that despite pronouncements indicating otherwise, their theory performs a similar break to the one Ross alleges Marx makes. However, this transcendental dialectic is maintained in the course of the 'either-or' one: the rhetorical evocation of historical progress is a tactic in the service of defeating this 'enemy', in the

[12] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.255.
[13] Ibid., p.253.
[14] Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury* (London: Verso, 2015), pp.88-89.
[15] Ibid., pp.83-84

form of a self-mythologising project dedicated to the destruction of 'toute satisfaction établie'. The notion, taken from Hegel, of 'man being one with time' is inflected in their writings by the propagandistic mode inciting this conflict with the established order.

The role of the concept of dialectics in the work of the Situationists is one worthy of further consideration, and has not been the central focus of this thesis, but I would argue that hypostasising any kind of concept of the dialectic would be misleading in this case.[16] As Theodor Adorno argues in his creation of 'negative dialectics':

> The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. Contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism was bound to transfigure it into: it is not of the essence in a Heraclitean sense. It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.[17]

The same could perhaps be said of the notion of the dialectic itself, the apparently uncritical incorporation of the concept in so much of the S.I.'s work indicates an area in which the tension between theory and rhetoric is at play. The Situationist predilection for definition and redefinition — manifest in the first journal issue's list of 'definitions', the stated (but never completed) project of a 'Situationist dictionary' announced in the subtitle of Mustapha Kayati's article 'Les mots captifs', as well as their repeated contrasting of what 'art' or 'the cinema' currently were and what they could be — suggests a resistance to any kind of steadfast conceptualisation of any such theoretical notion. As Khayati's article states, 'Or rien n'est manifestement plus soumis à la dialectique que le langage,' where language itself is 'la demeure du pouvoir, le refuge de sa violence policière.' Once again, this invocation of the policing function of language indicates an understanding of the police which seems close to Rancière's understanding of the police order, as well as Deleuze's notion of communication

[16] See Bunyard, 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle'.
[17] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973), p.5.

as a function of control societies, and for the Situationists signifies the conformism of everyday life unless spectacular forms of language and activity are self-consciously resisted.

By contrast with this policing violence, the Situationists' negative project takes the form of 'un langage autre',[18] which functions as both theoretical and rhetorical justification of their oppositional posturing. Clearly, for Debord and the Situationists, the realm of writing is still a political form, and despite their awareness of the limitations of particular written or filmic interventions, they wrote and made films in any case. I have endeavoured to show that the Situationists understand all forms of power, knowledge, and language as deeply interwoven and constitutive of one another; that this is simplified into an antagonistic political relation in their rhetoric is indicative of the contestatory, oppositional, negative 'force' they saw their work as effecting, which takes place in and against this language, by means of what they called an 'insoumission des mots'.[19]

The inextricability of the theoretical and rhetorical is in evidence in an apparently open-ended notion of the dialectic. Khayati's article states that: 'Toutefois nous savons d'avance que ces mêmes raisons ne nous permettent en rien de prétendre à une certitude légiférée définitivement; une définition est toujours ouverte, jamais définitive; les nôtres valent historiquement, pour une période donnée, liée à une praxis historique précise.' This conviction stands for their organisational activity as a group just as much as their attempts to define and elaborate certain concepts. In the twelfth and final issue of *International situationniste*, a short article, 'Qu'est ce qu'un situationniste' states that what was most necessary to be considered 'a Situationist' was to 'nous oublier un peu'; to forget the Situationists themselves.[20] Debord repeats this same sentiment throughout *In girum*, stating that 'les avant-gardes n'ont qu'un temps',[21] just as 'les théories sont faites pour mourir dans la guerre du temps'.[22] A similar notion of forgetting, pointing to the historical finitude of the S.I., ends Debord's theses on the

[18] All quotations from Mustapha Khayati, 'Les Mots captifs: préface à un dictionnaire situationniste', *Internationale situationniste*, 10 (1966), 50-55 (p. 50). The exposition of language as this policing violence continues: 'Tout dialogue avec le pouvoir est violence, subie ou provoquée. Quand le pouvoir économise l'usage de ses armes, c'est au langage qu'il confie le soin de garder l'ordre opprimant.'
[19] Ibid., p.51.
[20] 'Qu'est-ce qu'un situationniste', p.85.
[21] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.266.
[22] Ibid., p.219.

S.I. and its time: 'Que l'on cesse de nous admirer comme si nous pouvions être supérieurs à notre temps; et que l'époque se terrifie elle-même en s'admirant *pour ce qu'elle est*.'[23] In all of these invitations to forget, apparent acknowledgements of the limitations of a particular historical project bound to its time, there is a simultaneous gesture of theoretical authority being taken up: Khayati's 'nous savons...' indicates how this apparent self-deprecation involves the assumption of an all-knowing position outside of the processes of history. As we are entreated to forget, we are nevertheless reminded of the fact that it is they themselves who demand this forgetting. Nietzsche is the figure best known for this kind of active forgetting, and in his memoir *Ecce Homo*, he quotes his own *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in a formulation which neatly encapsulates my reading of the Situationists' attempts at disavowing their own authority:

> So is Zarathustra not a seducer?
>
> But what does he himself say when for the first time he again returns to his solitude? Exactly the opposite of what any 'sage', 'saint', 'world savior' and other décadent would say in such a case... He not only speaks differently, he is different too...
>
> > Now I go alone, my disciples! You too go away now and alone! So I will it! Go away from me and protect yourselves against Zarathustra! And better yet: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you. The man of knowledge must not only love his enemies, he must also be able to hate his friends. One repays a tender teacher badly if one always remains a pupil. And why do you refuse to pluck at my wreath? You revere me: but what if one day your reverence comes tumbling down? Beware lest a statue slay you! You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what does Zarathustra matter? You are my believers: but what do all believers matter? You had not yet sought yourselves: then you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all

[23] Debord and Sanguinetti, *La Véritable scission*, p.22.

> belief means so little. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you...[24]

That this passage immediately precedes a section entitled 'Why I am so Wise' is no accident, the entreaty to forget is at once the gesture of theoretical authority par excellence. Considered in a theoretical manner, we understand this forgetting as a testimony to the dialectical inescapability of negation and supersession of concepts, theories and political movements. Considered as a rhetorical ploy, this same approach testifies to the inescapable logic of the theory itself. As such, it is as much difficult as purposeless to attempt to discern where the theory ends and the rhetoric begins and vice versa: in the work of the Situationists, the rhetorical bombast was performative of the theoretical conviction that their work should seek to encourage a revolutionary *prise de conscience*.

In *In girum*, Debord suggests the partial success of their search for their 'Graal néfaste' owed to their status as, 'possesseurs d'un bien étrange pouvoir de séduction'[25] which led those with whom they came into contact to want to follow them. I have attempted to show that the fact that this seduction was understood as a necessary step in what we might call, after Deleuze, 'le devenir révolutionnaire' reveals, on the one hand, a rejection of humanistic notions in its implication of the processes by which the spectacle-commodity economy engenders its own forms of subjectivation.

On the other hand, this notion equally implies a form of revolutionary ethics which is at least as delimiting and prescriptive as it is liberatory, based on the uncritical inheritance of an understanding of political action located in a particular time, and resulted in a destructive practice of excommunication, denunciation and the group's eventual dissolution. As a result, the dissolution should not be understood as the revolutionary gesture which Debord thought it was. That the Situationists signposted their own limitations in relation to their times and demanded that they were forgotten is no reason to endorse their work uncritically, but invites their work to be subjected to future détournement.

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[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. by Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), p.10.
[25] Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, p.252.

The decades following May'68 failed to provide Debord's predicted new contestatory era but the Situationists' analysis of the workers' and students' movements present some convergences with Lazzarato's attempts to theorise the present moment. What the Situationists' particular brand of revolutionary theory emphasised was the immediacy of revolt and the importance of protest in positing the possibility of 'another world'. Their 'future reign of freedom and play' was not, however, a Romantic vision of universal harmony and reconciled lost unity; though they employed considerable rhetorical recourse to comparable notions, their theorisations of the spectacle, of détournement and of communication demonstrate how they rejected all such foundationalism in favour of an analytical, strategic engagement with politics and everyday life.

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