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**What is 'Anti-spectacular' Fiction?: Reconstructing Guy  
Debord's 'Spectacular' Alienation in the Contemporary Novel**

**Elizabeth Jones**

**Submitted for the award of Doctoral Thesis**

**Birkbeck, University of London**

**2021**

## **Declaration**

The work presented in this thesis is the candidates own.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 28/4/21

## Abstract

The international uprisings of 1968 popularized Debord's critique and its central principles appeared as graffiti in Paris. Yet, it subsequently fell into obscurity. As the 'image' effectively wholly dominates public space and private life perhaps Debord's key text, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) is a more convincing theory of alienation than it appeared initially. Will Self observed in 2014: 'never before has Debord's work seemed quite as relevant as it does now' (*The Guardian*, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2014). This relevance inspired my use of *The Society of the Spectacle* to identify representations of the 'image' in the novel as a vehicle of contemporary alienation and 'false consciousness'. I term this group of novels 'anti-spectacular' and argue that Debord's text, as theoretical counterpart, best accounts for their common concerns, shared approach and some themes. A small group of 'anti-spectacular' novels are discussed but further research might add to this set; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) by Milan Kundera, *Libra* (1988) by Don DeLillo, *American Psycho* (1991) by Brett Easton-Ellis, *Trainspotting* (1993) by Irvine Welsh and *Austerlitz* (2001) by W.G. Sebald.

Debord's prescience justifies asking why no real precedent exists for this original use of Debord's theory. I argue that Debord has been marginalized due to the intellectual direction taken in France, from the reception of Hegel in the 1930s onwards. In Debord's formative years, Sartre's legacy produced theories of subjectivity, alienation and aesthetics that develop in an 'anti-Hegelian' direction in subsequent Postmodern literary theory. However, Debord's use of Georg Lukács' theory of reification, set out in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), develops Hegel's legacy in an opposite, Hegelian-Marxist direction to present an 'image' as a vehicle for ideology. Debord's theoretical concepts - such as 'totality', dialectics and collective agency - are repudiated by Postmodernists. If the I.S. first develop aesthetic strategies on a basis of such principles, to transform spectacular 'false-consciousness' into oppositional consciousness, this thesis asks if novels might similarly represent alienation in an 'anti-spectacular' form.

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## Introduction

This thesis proposes that Guy Debord's Marxist critique, set out in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), can be used as a critical tool of literary analysis and applied to identify a group of novels which represent an 'image' as a 'spectacular' form of alienation. It argues that a retrospective application of Debord's theory to novels that respond to his era's new, visual alienation by 'images' (which persists to the extent that it resembles our own) is merited because it captures their political effect. While contemporary literature can be defined in several ways, here Debord's Marxist 'long view' of history is used. Tom Bunyard usefully notes that Debord, in 1982, identified his period's longevity in an anecdote recounted by Michel Prigent: 'Around 1982, [Debord] told me that his 1967 *La Société du Spectacle* would be valid for the next fifty years [...] his book would last for that period of time.'<sup>14</sup> However, Debord states the 'superficial' aspect of the visibility and ubiquity of 'images' belies their profoundly alienating social result.<sup>15</sup> To clarify, I understand the spectacle to denote a social relationship whereby class dominance and economic accumulation, enabled by technology, allows a dominant class to represent its world view in 'images', that appear to reflect the interests and identity of the social whole. However, any general recognition becomes a form of Lukácsian reification, or 'false-consciousness', and can only be partial because it does not express the interests of a working class position (this is explored in Chapter Two – see 2.3). A small group of novels are discussed here, but further research might add to this set; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) by Milan Kundera, *Libra* (1988) by Don DeLillo, *American Psycho* (1991) by Brett Easton-Ellis, *Trainspotting* (1993) by Irvine Welsh and *Austerlitz* (2001) by W.G. Sebald.

To argue that these novels epitomize the concerns of Debord's theory first requires a precise account of Debord's definition of the 'spectacle' (see below p.18-23). Second, it requires an account of what might constitute an 'anti-spectacular' cultural approach and, third, might suggest what it offers in

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Bunyard, 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Goldsmith's College, 2011), p.37. He notes the anecdote is part of a blog post by Michel Prigent in October 2009, see: <https://enemiesofutopia.wordpress.com/?s=Debord&search=Go> [accessed June, 2019]

<sup>15</sup> Debord, p.19, Thesis 24. Media is the spectacle's 'most stultifying superficial manifestation'.

comparison to the theories of literature of Debord's peers; namely Jean-Paul Sartre, Theodor Adorno and Jacques Derrida. For 'anti-spectacular' literature is argued to expose the deficiency and empty ideological promise of an 'image', in a political way, that belongs to tradition of cultural opposition that operates *immanently* within alienated social conditions. A review of important literature on Guy Debord's work now follows to illustrate that there is (a) no substantial use of his theory to read alienation in the contemporary novel (while this has been undertaken in relation to art), nor (b) a comparison of Debord's position with the Postmodern theory of Debord's peers, as it pertains to literary representations of alienation, nor (c) work that situates this comparison within a cultural history and debates between post-war critics seeking to define a political aesthetics; for example, Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes. This thesis attempts to do this. For the deeper implications of the differences between Sartre's Existential *ennui*, Postmodern 'non-identity' and Debord's Marxist 'spectacular' alienation are argued to stem from their opposite uses of post-war interpretations of Hegel.

The rationale for using *The Society of the Spectacle* as a critical tool for interpreting the 'image' and alienation in novels stems from the fact that it disappeared from critical view after 1968. When *The Society of the Spectacle* was originally published the *Times Literary Supplement* recognized it as the updating of Marx's *Capital* (1867). However, after the uprisings of 1968, Debord's theory fell into obscurity. It is absent from surveys of Western Marxism where it might be expected to feature; for example, those by Perry Anderson, Timothy Bewes and Gillian Rose. I use the term 'uprising' after Greil Marcus and Peter Wollen, who contextualize the Situationists' Sorbonne University occupation of May, 1968, within other sometimes industrial, sometimes student protests that occurred internationally in the 1960s. I now offer some possible reasons for this gradual loss of influence.

Perry Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976) contextualizes the post war Parisian 'Left' in a shift away from the P.C.F. (the French Communist Party) in a general rejection of Stalinism that caused a division to emerge between Marxist revolutionary theory and practice *that did not exist* before the Second World War: '[t]he original relationship between Marxist theory and proletarian practice was subtly and steadily substituted by a new relationship

between Marxist theory and bourgeois theory'.<sup>21</sup> Marxist theories of alienation began to develop through Existentialism - Sartre, Camus and Merleau-Ponty - offering approaches to formulating alienation in a metaphysical or psychological form, as Sartre does in *Nausea* (1938), discussed later in this thesis. In 1933, Marx's rediscovered *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* appeared in a partial translation by Lefebvre into French.<sup>22</sup> This seemed to support such unorthodox, creative interpretations of alienation, rather than the explicit class relationships of *Capital*, which prove Marx's actual concern given his later anthropological studies of labour and capital<sup>23</sup> - a framework that Debord retains. Throughout the 1950s and 60s many of these interpretive permutations of Marx appeared in French journals; *Arguments*, *Tel Quel* and Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*. *Arguments* translated influential Marxist thinkers into French for the first time and it was here that Debord was likely to have read the first translations of Lukács and Adorno in French. *Arguments* translated *The Phenomenon of Reification* from *History and Class Consciousness* by Lukács in December, 1958.<sup>24</sup> Thus, perhaps Debord's Hegelian-Marxist method of critique was conflated with an increasingly repugnant Stalinism and perceived as similarly obsolete. Additionally, Roberto Ohrt observes: 'Debord did not enjoy the same appreciation as most French theorists, who, since the mid-1970s, have held seminars in foreign universities.'<sup>25</sup> This also might have prevented his work from enjoying the same critical influence as Postmodern theory that has dominated literary criticism since the 1980s and is commonly used to interpret the novels under discussion that, apart from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are considered Postmodern.

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<sup>21</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, (London: New Left Books, 1976), p.55.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, p.50-1.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin B. Anderson, 'From the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*: Multilinear Themes', in *Marx at the Margins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp.154-195 (p.156). 'Thus, by 1857-58, Marx had developed a more complex account of historical development than the one [...] elaborated a decade earlier in *The German Ideology* (1846).'

<sup>24</sup> The French journal *Arguments*, published from 1957-63, also featured work by Lefebvre in 1959. Lefebvre might have introduced the group to the journal. Debord probably read the first piece by Adorno, *The Sociology of Knowledge and Consciousness*, published in Issue 9 (1958). In 1959, issue 14 is almost dedicated to Adorno, with an introduction by editor, Kostas Axelos, 'Discovering Adorno', followed by several pieces from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, known as *Minima Moralia*.

<sup>25</sup> Roberto Ohrt, 'The Master of the Revolutionary Subject: Some Passages from the Life of Guy Debord', in *SubStance*, 28 (1999), 13-25, (p.18).

Often, if the 'image' is interpreted by reference to Debord's 'spectacle', it is conflated with Baudrillard's 'simulacra', rather than identifying their differences. Chapter Five gives such an example: Peter Knight interprets President Kennedy's assassination in *Libra* as Baudrillard's 'imagined origin' of Debord's 'spectacle'.<sup>26</sup> Debord's absence seems acute when his formulation of the screen best accounts for representations of the political or economic alienation of these novels' fictional 'images'. Therefore, to remedy this absence, Debord's theory is used retrospectively as a materialist critique to identify an 'anti-spectacular' literary response to a dominant 'image' that might otherwise be lost. The aim is to offer an alternative, more political mode of interpreting the 'image' than Postmodern theory affords.

Following the literature review below, that indicates a lack of any use of Debord's theory to interpret representations of the 'image' in the novel, I give a brief account of Debord's 'spectacle' by relating it to historical aspects of his era, before Chapters One and Two respectively enlarge upon the philosophical roots of its key theoretical elements and its operation as a form of Lukácsian 'false consciousness', with its attendant questions of class struggle and revolution. The introduction then gives an overview of each chapter of the thesis, setting out the intellectual and cultural history relevant to Debord's formulation of the 'spectacle', but also the *Situationist Internationale's* 'anti-spectacular' aesthetic within the context of the Modernist avant-garde. This enables a comparison of Debord's position on culture with that of his contemporaries (i.e. Sartre, Adorno, Barthes, Derrida). For only by placing Debord's theory in the context of its principal theoretical influences, Hegel and Marx, do we begin to unlock its difference to Existential and Postmodern positions on alienation. The introduction closes by presenting Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) as a case study of 'anti-spectacular' fiction, to prove this application of Debord's theory is viable.

Anglophone academic responses to Debord's key text perhaps begin with Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (1989), which gives the I.S. the art historical context of Dada (as its progenitor), alongside later Punk

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Knight, 'DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity', *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 27-40, (p.34).

movements which take inspiration from it.<sup>28</sup> In 1989, Tony Wilson's Factory Records partly paid for the I.C.A. to bring a touring exhibition of I.S. work to London, uniting, as Marcus suggests, the countercultural position of artists and youth culture. Peter Wollen's contribution to a collection of essays that accompanied this exhibition examines the political intent of Debord's art (*On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957–1972*, 1989). Bunyard gives more detail on the small Left-wing groups in the U.K. whose journals embraced I.S. ideas.<sup>29</sup> However, Christopher Gray's introduction of I.S. work to the U.K. in 1973 (*Leaving The 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*) and Ken Knabb's *The Situationist International Anthology* (1981) initially made great contributions by translating a large number of articles from the *Internationale Situationniste* journal (1957-69), pamphlets and leaflets. Stewart Home's *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (1988) perhaps offers the most political critique of the S.I.'s ideas.

Anselm Jappe in *Guy Debord* (1993) rejects Marcus' treatment of Debord as a "precursor of punk"<sup>30</sup> and offers one of the first explanations of the philosophical roots of Debord's theory in Hegel and Marx, placing Debord within the Parisian 'Left' of the 1950s and 60s. Debord calls it one of the 'best informed'<sup>31</sup> accounts of his work. However, I will suggest that Jappe's misinterpretation of Lukácsian reification leaves him unable to explain Debord's theory of proletarian opposition. Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993) also takes a philosophical approach and compares Foucault to Debord through their preoccupations with power and vision; for Foucault rejects Debord's formulation of alienation. Jay finds Foucault more concerned with surveillance than Debord (although I disagree); 'seduction by the Spectacle of modern life was far more politically nefarious than Big Brother's

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<sup>28</sup> Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (London: Penguin: 1989), p.67. Punk is pitted against bourgeois values and explained as a cultural force of negation; he mentions The Adverts, The Sex Pistols, Buzzcocks and Xray Specs.

<sup>29</sup> Bunyard, *Debord Time and Spectacle*, (Chicago: Haymarket, 2018), p.21-22. He names, among others, King Mob, Solidarity and Heatwave.

<sup>30</sup> Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Bunyard, 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle', p19. Bunyard quotes from Debord, *Correspondance, Vol 7: Janvier 1988 – Novembre 1994* (Vottem: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2008), p. 453.

omnipresent watchfulness'.<sup>32</sup> Later, Bunyard presents a thorough and detailed philosophical study in *Debord, Time and Spectacle: Hegelian Marxism and Situationist Theory* (2018) to offer a more Existential reading of Debord's Hegelian Marxism through the spectacle's relationship to history, through his focus on the alienation of society's self-defined uses of 'free time'.

I agree, in part, with both Jappe's and Bunyard's accounts of the 'spectacle' but also arrive at points of difference. Jappe and Bunyard relate Debord's theory to Hegel and Marx but concur and diverge on important points. Jappe relates Debord's 'image' to the economy in terms of Marx's 'commodity-form', 'abstract labour' and value - to which I subscribe. To a degree, Bunyard rejects a reading of the 'spectacle' as an extension of Marx's 'labour theory of value', by suggesting Debord's focus is the effect of consumption, not labour relations.<sup>33</sup> While Jappe argues that Debord moves beyond Marx, giving the 'image' a similar place as the commodity (effecting 'a reduction of all human life to value' beyond production<sup>34</sup>), I find him weakest on relating an 'image', as a fetishistic 'appearance' of society, to any concrete social dimension wherein subjects might oppose the system in which images function. This is a fairly common oversight (for example, Tom McDonough does not explain this either).<sup>35</sup> Bunyard also finds that the spectacle dominates all social and private life, but suggests Debord somewhat forgoes classical Marxist class antagonisms; 'the modern revolutionary class would no longer be defined in traditional economic terms', to suggest that Debord identifies a 'more existential form of poverty' in a general lack of control over life, thus society's 'collective powers and capacities'.<sup>36</sup> Bunyard draws a close relationship between Debord's 'image' and Hegel's Absolute (re-conceived as

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.146 Foucault's critique of occularcentrism is related to Empiricism and Humanism, through Bentham's model of the Panopticon, to demonstrate presumptions of objectivity and transparency are oppressive making vision an instrument of control. Debord is said to emphasize the subject as the watcher of a seductive spectacle. However, Debord argues surveillance and advertising are aspects of the same 'spectacle', whereby technological advances allow both kinds of negative mediation of life.

<sup>33</sup> Bunyard, *Debord Time and Spectacle*, see Chapter 9, p.250-255. Despite 'classical' Marxist concerns, the I.S. are said to fail to critique labour and blur labour with its result - social alienation. However, Bunyard finds that the agitation to abolish work (in its bourgeois form) is not incompatible with goals of the workers' movement. I suggest that the economic basis of Marx's class antagonisms play out through a refusal of a spectacular economy.

<sup>34</sup> Jappe, p.19.

<sup>35</sup> McDonough, *The Situationists and the City*, pp.1-31. It is unclear how Debord's ambition for culture or revolution arises to remake cities, as he endorses.

<sup>36</sup> Bunyard, *Debord Time and Spectacle*, p. 26-27.

Marx's 'praxis') to brilliantly assert that Debord's 'image' becomes like Hegel's 'Vorstellung', a mere *representation* of action that would otherwise properly constitute history. However, my interpretation retains the class context of such abstraction, more closely adhering to Lukács' model of 'false-consciousness' and relating the 'image' to labour. I argue that its visuality fosters a failure to recognize class interest, resulting in a hypostatization of class struggle at a historical level. This visuality is captured in novels that relate characters to a world of images, as they search for identity but experience 'false-consciousness'. However, this discussion pre-empts Chapters One and Two, which relate Debord's theory to Hegel and Marx.

Overall, after the works of Gray and Knabb, scholarship mainly focuses on Debord's life as an artist and agitator, through either biographies (*The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* by Andrew Hussey, 2001), or accounts that give Debord's theory a predominately cultural or art historical context; for example, Sadie Plant's *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1998) or Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells* (2012) which relates the I.S. to a later, participatory, political art, such as Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).<sup>37</sup> Bishop's work illustrates that Debord's ideas have been applied to discuss 'happenings' and participatory art practice.

After Marcus and Jappe, another wave of academic scholarship emerged post 2000; work by Tom Mc Donough (*Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, 2002) and McKenzie Wark (*The Beach Beneath the Streets*, 2011) that sought to renew the Situationists' relevance to urban planning, architecture, activist politics and the growing preponderance of new media and technology.<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Crary's influential essay *Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory* appears in McDonough's collection of texts and essays. Like myself, he periodizes the 'spectacle', through the invention of television in the West and propaganda in the East. If Bunyard's work is atypical because, like Jappe, it grounds Debord's work

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<sup>37</sup> Biographies such as *Guy Debord* by Andy Merrifield (London: Reaktion, 2005) and *Guy Debord, Revolution in the Service of Poetry* by Vincent Kaufmann (2006) describe Debord's lived resistance to the period's alienation.

<sup>38</sup> Also see McKenzie Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation of The Situationist International* (New York: Buell Center / FORuM Project, 2008), p.9. He identifies activist groups such as Critical Art Ensemble, the Association for the Advancement of Illegal Knowledge and the Luther Blissett Project as inheritors of the I.S. 's project.

in the philosophy of Hegel and Marx, Eric-John Russell's work also relates Debord's theory to Hegel, but to *Science of Logic* (1812) rather than *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) in *Spectacular Logic in Hegel and Debord: Why Everything Is As It Seems* (2021). A third wave of academic work follows after Wark; its chief concern is digital technology and the changed relationship of class and politics to the internet, social media and digital capitalism. Douglas Kellner's work appears in *The Spectacle 2.0* (2017), a collection of essays that attempt to update Debord's 'spectacle' for our digital age. The introduction to this collection by Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano is close to my own understanding of Debord's 'spectacle'.<sup>39</sup>

Recently, two PhD theses have sought to relate Debord's theory of the 'spectacle' to literary production. Sam Cooper's thesis, *'A lot to answer for': the English legacy of the Situationist International* (University of Sussex, 2012) and subsequent book, *The Situationist International in Britain: Modernism, Surrealism, and the Avant-garde*<sup>40</sup> situates the I.S. , through its 'English Section' (the figures Alexander Trocchi and Charles Radcliffe) to English Surrealism, Sixties working class subcultures and English Romanticism. Trocchi is concerned with the politics of novelistic form and Radcliffe with youth movements that share an oppositional identity (despite abandoning traditional 'Left' politics). Cooper draws out connections between the I.S. aesthetic and English Romanticism (William Wordsworth and William Blake), by relating their 'anti-capitalist' sensibility to King Mob and later, the novels of Stewart Home. This 'anti-spectacular' approach is also shown to influence Trocchi's earlier novels *Young Adam* (1954), *Cain's Book* (1960) and his sigma project; for example, *Young Adam's* central character is proudly unemployed and preoccupied by 'play'. However, Cooper draws out influences such as Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) and the American Beat movement, alongside Postmodern strategies such as heterogeneity, that are not contrasted with the I.S. aesthetic in terms of their difference, which I undertake.

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<sup>39</sup> Briziarelli, M and Armano, E., 'Introduction: From the Notion of Spectacle to Spectacle 2.0: The Dialectic of Capitalist Mediations', in *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*, ed. by M.Briziarelli and E. Armano (London:The University of Westminster Press, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> Sam Cooper, *The Situationist International in Britain: Modernism, Surrealism, and the Avant-garde*, (London: Routledge, 2016)



More recently, Dan Barrow's thesis, *'Scars of the Visible: The Politics of the Image in Contemporary Experimental Fiction'* (2019) attends to the representation of 'images', understood in Debord's terms, specifically in relation to narrative time in experimental novels by Ben Lerner, Tom McCarthy and Don DeLillo. These novels respond to 'late capitalism' by using common strategies; 'anti-psychological flatness, distorted and slowed narrative time, dilated and visualised description, multimodal strategies'.<sup>41</sup> Barrow uses Jameson's critical terminology for Realist narrative temporality - *récit* (i.e. storytelling) and affect – relating them to the 'frozen time of the image', emptied of 'use-value' and impossible to *use* in these novels.<sup>42</sup> Time, as *récit*, breaks down ('story levels collapse'), characters are passive. Authors, confronted with 'frozen' time, are said to require strategies such as *ekphrasis* and turn to comparative ways of seeing ('visual intertexts in art and film') to intervene and move beyond novelistic reflections of spectacular time.<sup>43</sup> We both address authorial representations of 'spectacular' alienation, but I identify an anti-ideological approach by which authors adapt elements of Realist narrative form to capture traditional class antagonisms, to give the 'spectacle's repressive effect a historical past that magnifies a reader's appreciation of its ideological, oppressive, social function. For example, the Nazi 'image' in Sebald's *Austerlitz* belongs to the colonial past of Leopold II's repression of the Congo.

Therefore, this thesis uses *The Society of the Spectacle* beyond itself, as a tool, to identify a trajectory of literary *opposition* to an 'image' that closely resembles Debord's 'spectacle', in that it operates in terms of alienation. It asserts that Postmodern theory is unable to capture such political manoeuvring. This is its original contribution. Immediately, this presents a dilemma, for Debord is primarily a revolutionary Marxist. Yet, he founded the *Situationist International* (1957-72) with Asger Jorn to theorize *culture* from a Marxist perspective, albeit as a form of politics that would put an 'end to culture'.<sup>44</sup> For after the I.S.'s Gothenburg conference in 1961, what Simon Ford calls a 'schism' turned the I.S. into a political movement, as members pursuing plastic arts were purged (such as

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<sup>41</sup> Dan Barrow, *'Scars of the Visible: The Politics of the Image in Contemporary Experimental Fiction'* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2019), p.8.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.195.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 20; p.20.

<sup>44</sup> Debord, p.132, Thesis 185.

S.P.U.R.).<sup>45</sup> Culture had become the economy's 'star' commodity.<sup>46</sup> Or, in the East, an instrument of Soviet ideology; thus the 'decomposition' of its former radicalism.<sup>47</sup> However, Debord recognizes the I.S. as emerging from a political Modernist avant-garde, as part of a *broader* cultural tradition of opposition. His practice of *détournement* (discussed in Chapter Three) acknowledges the seam of radicalism from which it borrows: a 'line of contestation that runs through Sade [...] Lewis Carroll, Lautréamont'.<sup>48</sup> Debord values the radicalism of art and literature, in particular the expressive function of subjective imagination, albeit in 'freely constructing everyday life' as a revolutionary, politically nuanced 'praxis'.<sup>49</sup> In *Captive Words* (1966) Mustapha Khayati uses Lautréamont to propose that plagiarism helps to destroy past values, or implied political power that abides in dominant thought: 'to destroy the dominant sense of other terms and establish new meanings'.<sup>50</sup> Might Debord's position then apply beyond the limits of Situationist art (and depart from his later negative views on culture) to identify opposition to the 'image' in the novel, within a broader tradition of cultural opposition?

In light of Debord's indebtedness to Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* in formulating the 'spectacle' as mode of 'false consciousness', I return to Lukács' championing of critical Realism. Lukács had read Friedrich Engels who claimed that the Realist novel was able to shatter 'false-consciousness'<sup>51</sup>, or what Terry Eagleton calls bourgeois 'illusions'.<sup>52</sup> Placing the I.S. within a broader tradition of

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<sup>45</sup> Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005), p.viii.

<sup>46</sup> Debord, p.137, Thesis 193.

<sup>47</sup> Debord *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action*, (1957).  
<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html> [accessed 10.3.2022]

<sup>48</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.103.

<sup>49</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Situationist International Anthology* (2006), p.280.

<sup>50</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology* (2006), p.222. He references theory but this equally applies to *détournement*.

<sup>51</sup> *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels on Literature and Art*, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2006), p.77. Engels' letter to Franz Mehring (1893) is reproduced here: 'Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness'.

<sup>52</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976), p.46. He quotes Engels' letter to Minna Kautsky (1885), which Lukács had read by 1935, wherein he sets out Realism's oppositional power: 'by [...] describing [...] real mutual relations, breaking down conventional illusions about them [Realism] shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world [and] instils doubt as to the eternal character of the bourgeois world, although the author [...] does not even line up openly on any particular side'.

cultural opposition, I suggest that an 'anti-spectacular' aesthetic and Lukácsian Realism share some philosophical assumptions. Both Debord and Lukács use Hegel to elaborate a Hegelian Marxist basis for cultural form. Both claim that culture is uniquely able to expose dominant ideology - that operates in Debord's 'image' - by contradicting (i.e. negating) its positive claims with its negative, exploitative effect that Lukács argues a Realist novel captures in terms of class positions and inequality. European Realism is not considered a style, but a genre that emerges from Romanticism, with specific conventions and formal properties that Lukács argues undermine ideology, enlarged upon in the thesis.

Briefly, it is worth defining Debord's 'spectacle' before Chapters One and Two undertake this at depth. Debord's theory responds the social, economic and political issues faced by post-war Europe, which shape the decades leading up to May, 1968. The spectacle refers to an 'image' that arises with the advent of the automobile (1911) - the starting point of Fordist mass production<sup>53</sup> - and birth of television in the 1920s.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that a cultural Modernism, invested in redefining human identity through *expressivity* and *agency*, is associated with such modernity. Debates on the political efficacy of culture, in which Debord is involved, draw on this agency to resist alienation (for example, as subjective expression or imagination in Surrealism) until Postmodern theory rescinds such a belief. Existentialism and Postmodernism, in this thesis, are suggested to record alienation as a symptom, without identifying its cause in social processes and systems. Debord's spectacle is therefore coarticulated with the technological advances associated with modernity, but these are not considered unequivocally positive (for example, propaganda's visual reach), a position also taken in the novels under discussion. 'Images' newly populate the landscape, wholly dominating social life, with a scope that shapes the uses of free time in the ideas and activities it broadcasts, as part of Debord's: 'historical moment by which we happen to be governed'.<sup>55</sup> Such 'images', by turn commercial, political and cultural, relate to economic classes and factors that have a historical root,

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<sup>53</sup> Debord, p.123. Thesis 174. 'The pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance [...] has left its mark [...] in the dominance of freeways'.

<sup>54</sup> Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990), p.3. The spectacle is born with the mass production of television: "the society of the spectacle [...] moves quickly for in 1967 it had barely forty years behind it." Hereafter, referred to as *Comments*.

<sup>55</sup> Debord, p.15. Thesis 11.

expanded upon below. While 'images' have an objective presence, they also affect subjective (and collective) consciousness, the agency and expressivity referred to above, and thus personal and collective 'identity'. However, before discussing the 'spectacle' in terms of its effect, its economic and historical roots are established.

*The Society of the Spectacle* theorizes German fascism and Russian Stalinism as early forms of the *same* nascent, totalitarian mode of 'spectacle'. Debord argues that the Bolshevik movement in Russia (1917) and Spartacists in Weimar Germany (1919), and the later P.O.U.M. militia of the Spanish Civil War (1939) are Marxist movements ultimately defeated by bureaucratic and state forces, enabled by propaganda. For the first time, an ideological narrative, imposed through the 'cult' of a leader, appears in public space as a celluloid, visual 'image'. Debord describes the Bolsheviks as crushed by a 'dictatorial'<sup>56</sup> Stalinist bureaucracy, while the Spartacists are destroyed by socialists in a Weimar Republic that submits to Hitler. Debord writes:

the revolutionary workers movement was destroyed by the action, on the one hand, of the Stalinist bureaucracy and, on the other, of fascist totalitarianism, the latter having borrowed its organizational form from the totalitarian party as first tried out in Russia<sup>57</sup>

Note that, like Orwell's 'Big Brother', Kundera and Sebald respectively give Stalinist and Nazi propaganda a central place in their novels. However, the French elections of 1946 tell a different story; Charles de Gaulle is ousted by the French Communist Party (P.C.F.), which held a majority in the tripartite alliance of the Fourth Republic (an alliance of the P.C.F., Socialists and Christian Democrats). Thus, an earlier generation than Debord's (such as Sartre's), perceive vast differences between Hitler's fascism and Stalin's communism. France, directly after the First World War, is initially persuaded by a utopic, Stalinist 'spectacle'.

However, Debord theorizes both East and West as belonging to the same global

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<sup>56</sup> Debord, p.70, Thesis 103.

<sup>57</sup> Debord, p.77. Thesis 109

commodity production economy; Marx's 'world market' at different stages of development.<sup>58</sup> His position on Stalinism follows the critical line presented in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the late 1950s. The editor, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jappe notes: 'demonstrated as early as 1949 [...] that Soviet society was [...] a class system founded on exploitation of the most brutal sort'.<sup>59</sup> If the Western spectacle arises in 1911, with Fredrick Taylor's scientifically managed labour and Henry Ford's technological innovation of the production line, these advances are adopted in the U.S.S.R. by Alexi Gastev at the Central Labour Institute and introduced into Soviet factories in the 1920s, but as an ideologically reconceived Soviet 'technical utopia'.<sup>60</sup> Kendall E. Bailes quotes Gastev's vision, based on an American model:

the motor car and the aeroplane factories of America, and finally the arms industry of the whole world [is] where the culture of the proletariat is being manufactured [...] whether we live in the age of super-imperialism or of world socialism, the structure of the new industry will [...] be one and the same <sup>61</sup>

Debord takes Rosa Luxemburg's critical position, arguing that technological advances do not themselves alter the working class position, which can be equally exploited by a Leninist Party or Soviet bureaucracy. *The Society of The Spectacle* contextualizes Stalin's Five Year Plans (1928-38)<sup>62</sup> in Lenin's earlier New Economic Policy (1921) that respond to the Russian Civil War; they enable the Communist Party to take over agricultural and industrial production, in what Debord terms: 'history's most brutal primitive accumulation of capital ever'.<sup>63</sup> Richard Stites draws the same historical conclusion as Debord: 'Stalin's well-known juxtaposition of American efficiency and Russian revolutionary sweep was rooted in Bolshevism'.<sup>64</sup> Stalinist economic policy thereby perverts Marx's

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<sup>58</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol I*, translated by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990). p.929.

<sup>59</sup> Jappe, p. 91. Debord was briefly a member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* from 1960-61.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams; Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.151.

<sup>61</sup> *Soviet Studies*, 29, 373-94 (p. 377).

<sup>62</sup> *A History of the Soviet Union (1917-1991)* by Geoffrey Hosking, 9<sup>th</sup> edn. (London: Fontana, 1992) See Chapter 6, 'Revolution from Above', pp. 149-182. 'Stalin's first Five-year Plan (1928-32) saw a centralized, scientifically planned economy with draconian control of the workforce grow from Lenin's earlier attempt to modernize Russian industry [...] and brutally enforced collectivized farming (and deportations) to prioritize feeding the military and workforce.'

<sup>63</sup> Debord, p. 72. Thesis 104.

<sup>64</sup> Stites, p.149.

historical materialism (the assertion that socialism *must* grow from the social contradictions of capitalist production). Debord drives home that Western bourgeois ownership is replicated by Party apparatchiks, a: 'hierarchical, statist framework for this cheap remake of the capitalist ruling class'.<sup>65</sup>

In the West, France's post war recovery plan depended upon receiving 20% of the U.S.A.'s Marshall Plan aid for Europe. France could rebuild factories, rail networks and cities but on the condition, Larkin notes, that: '[i]mport restrictions on American goods [...] be lifted', thus, 'French cinemas and book-stalls were flooded with a growing stream of American films and magazines'.<sup>66</sup> Debord's critique addresses this state program of urban redevelopment, epitomized in Le Corbusier's designs and commercialization of leisure time. Kristin Ross in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1995) records that urban redevelopment blurred public and private finance, inviting corruption. Gentrification became an excuse for removing immigrant communities: 'the very presence of immigrants was [...] an indicator of the need for serious interventions'.<sup>67</sup> France's decolonization or withdrawal from Vietnam in 1954 saw the foreign policy of Truman and de Gaulle align.<sup>68</sup> In 1957, De Gaulle's role in founding the E.E.C. secured the flow of commodities and investment into France. A service industry, manned by young people, rapidly developed. Ross suggests that de Gaulle's policy of encouraging reproduction (the 'state natalist policy'<sup>69</sup> of 1945) produced a generation of consumers raised on 'images' (cinema, magazines etc.) and consumption. Thus, Jappe states that from 1954-7:

France's first television program was broadcast [...] washing machines appeared on the market [...] the first grands ensembles or high-rise 'moderate-income housing' went up [and] spending on household appliances doubled<sup>70</sup>

De Gaulle's consolidation of state power through commerce was so successful

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<sup>65</sup> Debord, p.72. Thesis 104.

<sup>66</sup> Larkin, p.123.

<sup>67</sup> Ross, p.155.

<sup>68</sup> Larkin, p. 236.

<sup>69</sup> Ross, p.126.

<sup>70</sup>Jappe, p.52.

that wages rose and when he returned as the President of the Fifth Republic in 1958, France was no longer 'Left' leaning as during the *libération* but a conservative, consumerist, 'Americanized' presidential state.<sup>71</sup>

In Debord's era, there was a generally perceived polarity between the East and West, as Ross summarizes: 'the French road to modernization - viewed by the postwar reformist avant-garde as necessary [...] had to thread its way between a vision of communist totalitarianism on the one hand and United States economic and cultural imperialism on the other.'<sup>72</sup> However, as Marx writes in *Capital*, Debord finds in both the state capitalism of the East and free market liberalism of the West, that the *state* ensures the: 'general conditions for capitalist production'.<sup>73</sup> In other words, an economically exploitative use of labour.

Debord names the East and West respectively 'concentrated' and 'diffuse' forms of the same global economic system or 'spectacle'.<sup>74</sup> Debord addresses the perceived difference between the West, its public space saturated by advertising images and entertainment, and the East, where this heightened visibility is absent; for a centralized state economy and bureaucracy ensures that propaganda occupies the same scope of influence through state broadcasting and publications. If the latter appears as false 'fact' and former a mode of communication, Debord considers both essentially ideological ('essentially *one-way*').<sup>75</sup> Therefore, in the East, 'concentrated' power relies on a centralized economy, state bureaucracy, a use of state forces (secret police) and a propaganda 'image' as a 'modern means of conditioning'<sup>76</sup>, concentrated in a leader: 'ideology condensed around a dictatorial personality'.<sup>77</sup> In the West, a 'diffuse' form of state power relies on the ideology of 'commodity abundance'<sup>78</sup>, democracy as 'freedom of choice' expressed through consumption (as much as

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<sup>71</sup> Ross, p.6. She writes: 'Economists agree that the consolidation of a Fordist regime in France in the decade or so before 1968 - a period of "growth without precedent of capitalism [...]" - was an extremely wrenching experience.'

<sup>72</sup> Ross, p.127.

<sup>73</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1., p 78.

<sup>74</sup> Debord, p. 41- 42, Theses 64 and 65.

<sup>75</sup> Debord, p.19, Thesis 24.

<sup>76</sup> Debord, p.77. Thesis 109.

<sup>77</sup> Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, p.8. (Referred to hereafter as *Comments*).

<sup>78</sup> Debord, p.86. Thesis 115.

civil liberties) and extolled by political figures, mass culture, advertising and celebrities, but, Debord writes, never appears: 'occupied by a known leader or clear ideology'. The West aims to increase mass consumption, extended to new markets, a new 'imperialism' Debord calls an 'Americanisation of the world'.<sup>79</sup> He comments that the 'fall of the Berlin Wall' is but a 'spectacular' media event after the fact of such a consolidation.<sup>80</sup> In *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle* he observes that a model of 'integrated' spectacle, 'simultaneously concentrated and diffuse'<sup>81</sup>, as in 'France and Italy'<sup>82</sup>, subsequently develops in the 1980s to combine repressive features of Eastern state control (i.e. surveillance / police force) with Western deregulation and consumption (i.e. free market economics).

Therefore, while Debord coarticulates the rise of the 'image' with modernity, it results from the exploitation of labour in both the East and West, as part of the development of a global economic system: 'the spectacle expresses [...] one particular economic and social formation'.<sup>83</sup> Here, there are two points to make, enlarged upon in Chapters One and Two. First, Bunyard suggests the Hegelian aspect of Debord's theory has been minimized due to reading: 'Debord's visual terminology [in] separation from its Hegelian roots'.<sup>84</sup> As Judith Butler observes in *Subjects of Desire*, studies of Hegel in Debord's era took: 'the theme of *desire* as its point of critical departure and reformulation'.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Debord's theory and art practice mobilizes a popular motif of Hegelian desire in a political form; he relates desire to prolific 'images', retaining Hegel's focus on self-consciousness and objectification, as they pertain to a politically nuanced formation of subjective and collective 'identity'. Lukács offers a theory of reification enables Debord to take Hegel's legacy in a Hegelian-Marxist direction and present desire as alienated by an 'image' that works on behalf of a dominant class position.

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<sup>79</sup> Debord, p.8; p.9; p.8.

<sup>80</sup> Debord, The Preface to the Third French Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*, (1992) <<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/postsi/preface.html>> [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020]. Debord puts this succinctly: 'the world could be declared officially unified [...] 1989 led the Russian bureaucracy suddenly, and as one man, to convert to the current ideology of democracy - in other words, to the dictatorial freedom of the Market [...] The phenomenon was [...] a very simple sign, "the fall of the Berlin Wall," repeated over and over again.'

<sup>81</sup> *Comments.*, p. 8; p.9.

<sup>82</sup> *Comments*, p.8.

<sup>83</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2004), Thesis 11, p15.

<sup>84</sup> Bunyard, 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle', p.14.

<sup>85</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987:1999), p.xx.



Second, the 'image' has an economic root that Debord explains in terms of Marx's 'labour theory of value', which is the discrepancy between what a wage labourer (as a commodity) is paid and the greater value their labour realizes in profit when sold in the commodity, increasing capital under the class relations of capitalism (i.e. class inequality).<sup>86</sup> Debord's 'spectacle' has a historical and economic root that enables him to extend categories of 'exchange-value' and alienation beyond Marx's industrial era to identify this new circulation of 'images' - propaganda, news, advertising or mass culture - that populate free time as a: 'new type of social existence'.<sup>87</sup> He renames Marx's bourgeois class 'the world's owners'<sup>88</sup>, and, like Party apparatchiks, they direct society's productive forces (labour) to meet social needs (desires) through commodity production, to benefit *their* class. Debord gives Marx's 'total abstract labour'<sup>89</sup> a visual form in the 'spectacle' but, as Lukács states of reification, its objective appearance is implicitly class biased, taking on the logic of ownership and the ruling class. In this sense, the 'image's' universality as a reflection of society is deemed *false*. Any recognition of desires met by propaganda, ideological conformity, commodities or leisure activities give desire a 'false' form, for 'images' are not *true* reflections of general interests, articulating the desires a social 'totality' - class inequality invalidates and contradicts such a possibility.

What then of Debord's proletariat? Returning to de Gaulle's Paris, Debord aimed to unite (a) disenchanted consumers with (b) anti-Stalinist, non-unionist workers he identified in the 'anti-union struggles of Western workers'<sup>90</sup> and (c) the young population of Paris, that Hussey writes were 'defined as outsiders by the economy [...] an economic construct'.<sup>91</sup> Greil Marcus similarly calls students: 'slaves, [...]

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<sup>86</sup> I.I. Rubin, 'Basic Characteristics of Marx's Theory of Value', in *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Quebec: Black Rose Books, 1982), pp. 63-75 (p.72). 'The reification of labour in value is the most important conclusion of the theory of fetishism, which explains the inevitability of 'reification' of production relations among people in a commodity economy.'

<sup>87</sup> Debord, p.123. Thesis 173.

<sup>88</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.6.

<sup>89</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p.150. 'The body of the commodity, which serves as the equivalent, always figures as the embodiment of abstract human labour, and is always the product of some specific useful and concrete labour. This concrete labour therefore becomes the expression of abstract human labour.' Commodities obtain exchange value, or value is realized in profit as capital, because both are expressions of abstract labour.

<sup>90</sup> Debord, p.86, Thesis 115.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Jonathan Cape: 2001), p. 52

the property of others regardless of class'.<sup>92</sup> Debord includes (d) dissidents, immigrants and the marginalized in a 'new, spontaneous struggle emerging under the sign of criminality'.<sup>93</sup> For example, the I.S. considered the Watts Riots in L.A. (1965) 'portents of a second proletariat onslaught'.<sup>94</sup> The I.S. supported French Algerian immigrants demanding an end to France's occupation of Algeria and widespread racism. Ross even suggests that France embarks on a new type of colonization by turning inwards, to its domestic population, through consumption. By the 1960s, France's surfeit of commodities, new leisure pursuits and mass culture both homogenizes and downgrades experience, despite promising the opposite. Thus, Sadie Plant writes that the I.S. perceive 'a nascent class consciousness in all rebellion against the poverty of everyday experience'.<sup>95</sup> *Le Monde* declares in March, 1968, '*Les Français s'ennuient*'<sup>96</sup> to suggest this new 'social existence' makes boredom a problem for French youth.<sup>97</sup>

When Debord first arrives in Paris in 1951, Sartre was an earlier generation's chief theorist of alienation and understood such boredom as existential *ennui*. However, Debord was consistently critical of both Sartre's anti-Hegelian, undialectical and un-economic approach to formulating alienation that ignored its economic causes - and his initial, albeit qualified, support for Soviet Stalinism.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps Debord's proletariat find their interests more aligned with general interests - the disappointed consumers that experience a new 'colonization' of social life - than Marx's proletariat. This tension with classical Marxism is not necessarily a contradiction and might in fact lend social revolution a greater chance of success. Bunyard, more than Plant, relates such general disenchantment to Marx's class struggle.<sup>99</sup> He argues that automation shifts Debord's focus from labour: consumption lessens workers' material poverty, but

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<sup>92</sup> Marcus, p. 271.

<sup>93</sup> Debord, p.86, Thesis 115.

<sup>94</sup> Debord, p.86, Thesis 115.

<sup>95</sup> Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.16.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Wolin, *The Wind From the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 2010), p.55. 'The French are bored!'

<sup>97</sup> This period falls within *Les Trente Glorieuses*, France's period of post-war prosperity from 1945-75.

<sup>98</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkely: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), p.235. In *Interview with an Imbecile* (1966) Sartre is called a 'nullity' on all fronts; 'philosophical or political or literary'.

<sup>99</sup> Bunyard, *Debord, Time and Spectacle* (Chicago; Haymarket, 2018), p.26.

makes it more evident they lack control over the conditions of their lives: 'the classical nineteenth-century proletariat's demand for control over the means of social production [...] contained [...] the modern proletariat's demand for control over the means of shaping social life.'<sup>100</sup> However, I argue that Debord recasts Sartre's 'boredom' or existential 'passivity' from a Marxist position as 'false-consciousness'. Debord formulates resistance through the S.I.'s use of theory and culture, aiming to convert this alienated state by defining and realizing the collective, authentic - not 'false' - desires of an enlarged proletariat. *The Bad Days Will End* (1962) argues such radicalized desires, once pursued, disrupt passivity and produce opposition, leading the I.S. to declare Sartre's boredom 'counter-revolutionary'.<sup>101</sup>

Debord's 'image' is therefore related to these deeper historical, social and economic factors. This background is relevant to a materialist critique of 'images' in the novel, the context in which Debord's theory is used. As stated, Debord's text enables us to read 'images' represented in terms of 'false consciousness' and alienation, in a more explicitly political way than Postmodernism allows. For Debord's text addresses issues that extend to our *current* period, as he observes: 'the general conditions of the long historical period [...] it was the first to describe accurately [are] still intact.'<sup>102</sup> Whether the novels engage with Nazism, the rise of Soviet Communism, the Cold War or the Reagan-Thatcher period of contemporary mass consumption, characters are alienated by visual 'images' as mass ideology. For example, *Austerlitz* draws on the deception of the Red Cross in 1944 by a Nazi '*Dokumentarfilm*'<sup>103</sup>, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* warns the European 'Left' of Soviet Communism through the 'image' of Big Brother and Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* records a socialist revolt overtaken by Stalinism, through propaganda that politicizes private life. Jappe observes that technology allows the power of 'images' to grow 'enormously in strength after the Second

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 262. He acknowledges that 'the workers' conditions of existence were worse than those of other members of society, and that workers may, therefore, be at the forefront of a demand for social change.'

<sup>101</sup> Guy Debord, 'The Bad Days Will End', *The Situationist International Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006 [1981], pp.107- 114, (p.112).

<sup>102</sup> Debord, The Preface to the Third French Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*, (1992).

<sup>103</sup> Karel Margry, "'Theresienstadt' (1944-1945): The Nazi Propaganda Film Depicting the Concentration Camp as Paradise", in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, ed. by David Culbert, 19, (PA: Carfax Publishing, 1999), pp. 309-337, (p.150).

World War'.<sup>104</sup> Thus, Debord argues that the superficial differences between Nazism and Communism are replaced by a later, similarly superficial Cold War opposition between Western capitalism and Eastern communism in the 1950s. DeLillo's *Libra* presents this continuousness through Lee Harvey Oswald, betrayed equally by the ideology of American mass consumption as Soviet Communism. David Black suggests that the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and intensification of mass consumption in Europe during the 1980s caused a 'retreat of the Left, in the face of the Reagan-Thatcher offensive, into postmodernism.'<sup>105</sup> However, Debord's critique of state power, mass consumption, commercially developed space and low wage jobs suggests an effacement of personal and class identity (and that of communities) to offer an alternative, political way to interpret novels that engage with the Reagan-Thatcher era. *American Psycho* (1989) sees a consumer 'image' ideologically determine Patrick Bateman's *internal* landscape. While *Trainspotting* (1993) sees the *external*, urban landscape of Edinburgh 'ghettoized', as a former shipbuilding industry is replaced by service sector jobs. However, before the body of this thesis defines a criteria for 'anti-spectacular' fiction, below is an account of its argument in individual chapters, followed by a close reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an example of this approach.

Chapter One returns to the legacy of Hegel and Marx, drawing on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), critiqued by Marx in his formulation of alienation in *Capital* (1867). Debord required both to formulate the 'spectacle'. French interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology* by Jean Wahl, Jean Hyppolite and Alexandre Kojève broadly take either a metaphysical or an anthropological direction. I locate Debord in this latter, more anthropological, Marxist tradition of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1947). This intellectual history illuminates the philosophical grounds of key aspects of Debord's 'spectacle'; his approach to 'totality' and concepts of labour and alienation, desire and identity. It supports the argument that a mediating 'spectacle' lends subjective identity Lukács' reified form of 'false consciousness'. For Debord's 'spectator' is alienated in being forced to 'appear'

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<sup>104</sup> Jappe, p.9.

<sup>105</sup> David Black, *The Philosophical Roots of Anti-Capitalism: Essays on History, Culture and Dialectical Thought* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), p. xiii.

(i.e. participate) in a field of 'images' that colonize the social basis that Hegel and Marx give the articulation of need and desires, now transposed to the ideological visual form of Debord's dominant class. As Debord writes: 'it is only inasmuch as individual reality is not that it is allowed to appear.'<sup>107</sup> Hegelian 'estrangement' is shown to be reformulated by Marx as economic alienation. Thus, Hegelian desire is extrapolated by Debord in relation to 'images', in terms of Marx's alienated labour and the implied class situation of mass production, celebrated in the 'images' that meet desire. For 'images' serve a dominant class.<sup>108</sup> I draw on Lukács' theory of reification, wherein the Hegelian 'process of *becoming conscious*'<sup>109</sup> of identity works through Marx's class contradictions. 'Images' intercede in public space and private life to convert that process of self-conception into a class based form of 'false consciousness'. To make this point, I refer to Debord's 'images' of Stalin and Kennedy (respectively the focus of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Libra*) that impose 'false-consciousness' in such terms of collective 'identity'. In Chapters Two and Three, Debord's 'spectacle' is shown to work similarly to Lukács' 'productive negation', intrinsic to capitalist social relations<sup>110</sup>, as a conceptual antithesis or cognitive dissonance Debord identifies through the metaphor of 'schizophrenia'.<sup>111</sup> However, as this contradiction between a 'false' image and the 'true' authentic desires of an individual, group or class sees the latter preferred, the 'spectacle' might thereby galvanize disenchantment as a revolutionary potential. Therefore, this chapter also addresses questions of political organization, revolution and the state, through Hegel and Marx, in advance of later relating them to Debord's 'spectacle' and revolutionary 'praxis'.<sup>112</sup>

However, the legacy of Hegel and Marx is not exclusive to Debord. It is key to

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<sup>107</sup> Debord, p.16. Thesis 17.

<sup>108</sup> Debord, p.24. Thesis 34. Debord writes: 'The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image'.

<sup>109</sup> *History and Class Consciousness*, p.178.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76. The proletariat and bourgeois economy are inherently opposed: 'the proletariat implies [...] the negation of this form of life'.

<sup>111</sup> Debord, p.152, Thesis 218. Schizophrenia and catatonia are metaphors and characterize belief in orthodox ideology in terms of mental illness. A comparison could be made with *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as it also relates desire to capitalism using the trope of schizophrenia, but this is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>112</sup> Debord, p.59, Thesis 90. Marx in *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) elaborates 'praxis' as practical activity based on revolutionary theory aimed at transforming the world.

leading post-war intellectuals such as Sartre. Therefore, the second half of this chapter turns to *The Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel's Philosophy* (1929) by Wahl, alongside Hyppolite's first translation into French of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1939-41, to demonstrate an opposite, metaphysical strand of interpretation later related, through Sartre, to Postmodernism. Sartre is a constant presence throughout this thesis because his cultural response to the alienation of post war society advocates a Modernist agency nullified in the theoretical shift to Barthes' semiology and advent of Postmodernism. This chapter establishes the foundations of Debord's Hegelian Marxist approach to theorizing the 'spectacle' as a contemporary form of alienation, but also indicates a more influential, anti-Hegelian, anti-Marxist direction taken by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and, subsequently, Barthes and Postmodern theorists. In opposition to Lukács' 'productive negation', Wahl postulates a 'negative dialectic'<sup>113</sup> and metaphysically alienated subject. These terms denote opposite theoretical bases. Thus, this intellectual history enables an analysis of Debord's 'spectacle' in Chapter Two, but also lays the foundation for a comparison in Chapter Four of Marxist and Postmodern theories of literature, underpinned by opposite philosophical assumptions; i.e. a Marxist 'totality' and Postmodern non-identity. For example, this is the philosophical territory of Lukács' argument for the critical power of the Realist novel, whose formal 'totality' captures an 'objective dialectic in the artistic reflection of reality'<sup>114</sup>; he means that Realism represents society through its aspects of class and history - a *totality* - thereby relating dominant thought to characters through a *contradiction* of their actual interests, once viewed from a working-class perspective in the text. Dominant ideology's limited claim to universality is exposed by its negative result, a *productive* negation as it 'shatters' false-consciousness.

Thus Chapter Two is equipped with the Hegelian-Marxist philosophical terminology Debord requires to define the 'spectacle' and modernize concepts of reification, the proletariat and revolution. Chapter Two takes the original step of separating the 'spectacle' into (a) its objective, concrete, visual form (i.e. as

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<sup>113</sup> *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed by Dennis King Keenan, see 'Mediation, Negativity and Separation' from *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (1929), pp. 1-26 (p.3).

<sup>114</sup> Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic and other essays*, ed. by Aurthur Kahn, see 'Art and Objective Truth', pp. 25-60 (p.41).

propaganda or advertising, akin to productive capital within Marx's circuit of production) and (b) the non-visible, conceptual form of 'false-consciousness' it engenders. Ideology as this new, visual and spatial form is immediately perceptible and physically unavoidable. This reinforces 'false consciousness' from without, resulting in subjects internalizing 'images' as concepts that are not socially or collectively, but rather ideologically, defined. It sets out Debord's paradigm of false-consciousness, isolating the *dialectical contradiction* upon which 'image' and spectator or alienated subject-object relations function: a spectator's desires, formed in relation to screens that promise fulfilment, allows 'images' to be internalized as Lukács' false-consciousness, a false form of (Hegelian) self-recognition or 'identity'. This contradicts their actual social position or class identity, implied within history (a 'totality') that is thereby occluded, but to which they belong. This kernel of *dialectical contradiction* is identified and later used to interpret 'anti-spectacular' novels that represent characters alienated by identifying with 'images'.

Debord proposes such 'images' must be rejected for the human, social, class basis of 'identity' to become possible. Chapter Two therefore examines the role of theory and culture in enabling such a refusal. Debord's rejection of 'images' is related to Marx's political negation; a dialectical contradiction of the false-consciousness promoted by screens, in terms of the class situation from which such 'images' arise, but fail to reflect. Debord gives Rosa Luxemburg's example of the German Social Democrats who used: 'the image of the working class' against the proletariat.<sup>116</sup> Through such contradiction, the 'image', like Lukács' 'productive negation', identifies a subject's contrasting authentic desires. This paradigm defines Debord's radicalized subject who necessarily becomes oppositional by rejecting the *status quo*, broadcast in 'images', and by taking action to meet new, authentic desires, defined through this rejection of consumption or propaganda. A collective refusal might constitute 'history', Marx's class struggle, as evidenced in the events of 1968. Chapter Two presents Debord's liberatory vision as an alternative to Lukács' Soviet Communist Party as the 'Subject' of History. It concludes by comparing Sartre's and Debord's

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<sup>116</sup> Debord, p.69, Thesis 101.

opposite definitions of a 'situation'; for I.S. situations are designed to provoke such refusal or 'negation' with its attendant political agitation.

Chapter Three ('Art as Revolution') thus moves from an *intellectual* to a *cultural* history of the Modernist avant-garde, to examine Debord's approach to cultural resistance. Debord's Hegelian Marxist theorization of 'identity', in terms of collective identity and the dialectical class contradiction by which it is shaped, now shifts to cultural grounds. As stated, Hegel's philosophy is the source of both Lukács' and Debord's different theories of the oppositional potential of culture. Debord mobilizes Hegel's historical chronology of cultural form to contextualize the I.S. within movements that span Romanticism and the Modernist avant-garde - focusing on Dada and Surrealism as they attempt to use culture politically.<sup>117</sup> Through this focus, a Modernist style of 'fragmentation' is argued to represent alienation through practices of disjunction and juxtaposition. However, this sacrifices Debord's aspect of *dialectical contradiction* present in class opposition and therefore subject-object relations. This might be why Debord claims Dada and Surrealism *fail* to be adequately politically effective. Chapter Three thus examines the S.I.'s claim to right such failures by re-purposing avant-garde strategies in the *dérive*, psychogeography and *détournement*, to intervene in 'everyday' life but reconceived on a dialectical basis, to 'negate' the dominant ideology broadcast in the 'spectacle' and its attendant 'false consciousness' and thereby inaugurate the transformation of life.

Chapters Three and Four therefore examine the Modernist response to alienation at the start of the twentieth century, in its various cultural forms, to interrogate its political efficacy; Hannah Hoch's Dadaist collages in Zurich, T.S. Eliot's poetry in Britain, or, in Vienna, Robert Musil's unfinished novel *The Man Without Qualities*, which he began in 1921 (1930-43). Both philosophical and cultural responses to modernity and alienation are shown to be broadly characterized by 'totality' and 'fragmentation'. If Debord finds the avant-garde aesthetic insufficiently political, I argue that the S.I.'s 'anti-spectacular' aesthetic is philosophically underpinned by

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<sup>117</sup> I take Marshall Berman's Marxist position or long view in *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London; Verso, 2010), p.32. Many global Modernisms largely fall between two camps of an apolitical formalism or a radicalism; 'the modernism of pure form and the modernism of pure revolt' - although some combine these impulses, which are individually 'too constricting to the modern spirit'.



the same Hegelian-Marxist approach that not only informs Lukács' theory of reification, but also his defence of Realist aesthetics in *Realism in the Balance* (1938). Like Engels, Lukács argues that Realism exposes 'false-consciousness', whereas literary Modernism forgoes Realism's formal 'totality' that frames dominant concepts with their socio-historical context to reveal its reified, class interested 'form' and loses this critical aspect.

Chapter Four opens with the *Das Wort* debate (1930s); a series of exchanges between Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht and Adorno that compares the political effectiveness of Realist and Modernist literary approaches that respectively favour 'totality' or 'fragmentation'. This debate brings the critical focus on culture in Chapter Three from art to literature. It refers to Lukács and Debord, but also Adorno and Frederic Jameson who, in different ways, also extend a Hegelian-Marxist or dialectical basis to society and culture, to extrapolate different arguments for a political aesthetic. It refers to recent academic re-evaluations of Lukács' work that attempt to distinguish Lukácsian Realism from Soviet Socialist Realism, exemplified by Timothy Bewes who asks: '[i]s there now an opportunity [...] to extract the kernel of a Lukácsian method from the [...] political pressures that caused it to frame itself ideologically?'<sup>118</sup> It is precisely this 'kernel' of a dialectical method that I extract and apply beyond Realism, and the I.S. aesthetic, to 'anti-spectacular' novels. For characters, brought together with an 'image' in terms of a 'totality' of social classes and perspectives, are shown to experience the 'image' in terms of a contradiction of their class interests, as a visual mode of alienation. The political nature of 'everyday' life is thus revealed through narrative contradictions established between an 'image's' promise and a character's experience, a discrepancy and a slippage which is a textual negation of ideology, an *imminent* critique of alienated conditions.

Chapter Four uses the *Das Wort* debate as a precedent to relate formal categories of 'totality' and 'fragmentation', not only to the philosophical basis of Realist and Modernist form, but also to Postmodern and 'anti-spectacular' approaches to the 'image' in the novel. It draws on Jameson's argument that

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<sup>118</sup> Georg Lukács: *The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, Edited by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, (London: Continuum, 2011), p.36.

Postmodernism is the ‘cultural dominant’<sup>119</sup> of Debord’s period. Jameson suggests the *Das Wort* debate remains relevant, writing of the ‘aesthetic conflict between “Realism” and “Modernism”, whose navigation and renegotiation is still unavoidable for us today’.<sup>120</sup> Jameson’s point is that the question of the political effectiveness of aesthetics, of positions on ‘totality’ and ‘fragmentation’, continues to resonate in the differences between Marxism and Postmodernism. I therefore address Derrida, Foucault and Baudrillard individually to compare Debord’s position to their respective work on language, history and ‘images’.

Chapter Three suggests a seam of opposition to bourgeois values is found in the subversive literary tradition of Baudelaire and the Marquis de Sade, to whom the Surrealists were indebted. Bunyard’s argument for Debord’s somewhat existential appreciation of time is supported by references to Debord’s favourite poetry; the subject matter of Li Po and Omar Khayyám is temporal finitude, mortality or the fleeting passage of time.<sup>121</sup> However, Debord was inspired by many authors, as his reading notes and letters attest; for example, he praises Realists Jonathan Swift and Gustave Flaubert.<sup>122</sup> He had a copy of *Justine* by de Sade in his library, as well as Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities* (quoted in *The Society of the Spectacle*) both discussed in this thesis. However, I want to suggest, by referring to de Sade, Musil, Orwell, Perec and others that Debord, at least in the first half of his career, was interested in political uses of culture and disliked Postmodernism. For example, he had read and loved George Orwell (particularly *Homage to Catalonia*, 1938)<sup>123</sup> and republished many of Orwell’s titles, detailed in my analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whose focus is the power of a futuristic, totalitarian ‘image’. *The Society of the Spectacle* appeared at around the same time as Georges Perec’s *Things: A Story of the Sixties* (1965) and Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles Images* (1966), both discussed in Chapter Five, as they also address alienation. The former, considered Postmodern,

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<sup>119</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, *New Left Review*, no. 146, (July, 1984), pp.53-92, (p. 55).

<sup>120</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p.217.

<sup>121</sup> Bunyard, *Debord Time and Spectacle* p. 363-366

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.notbored.org/debord-13January1989.html> [accessed 17.3.2022] In a letter to writer Morgan Sportes in 1989, Debord calls them ‘brilliant negators’.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Debord writes: ‘Orwell knew how to see and say the truth; and [...] make it believed’.

infuriated Debord because it engaged with alienation in what he considered an apolitical manner.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, Chapter Five uses *The Society of the Spectacle* as a basis for reading the 'image' in the novels named. It interprets their collective themes of desire, identity, conflict and madness. It defines their 'anti-spectacular' approach to novelistic construction; i.e. representing contemporary alienation in terms of that 'kernel' of *dialectical contradiction* identified as available or *immanent* to cultural form. If the I.S. aesthetic aims to 'negate' reified concepts, to thereby convert the passive consciousness of the 'spectator' to the S.I.'s own radicalism, instantiating an oppositional relation to spectacular 'false-consciousness', this re-instates the 'image' in a dialectical relationship to society and I.S. art becomes a radical vehicle for class struggle. Might 'anti-spectacular' novels similarly turn on a contradiction between ideology and class interest? Might they represent an 'image' - its ideological claims - in terms of a class-based history, to which it is dialectically related and demonstrate that the image works for a dominant class, affects 'false-consciousness' and a corresponding alienation, in contradiction to its claims to fulfil desires and cement identity? Jameson observes that a Postmodern approach makes Lukács' critical Realism obsolete;

Fundamental depth models [...] have generally been repudiated in contemporary theory: the dialectical one of essence and appearance (along with a whole range of concepts of ideology or false consciousness which tend to accompany it) <sup>125</sup>

Given Debord's indebtedness to Lukács, I suggest 'anti-spectacular' novels, much like Realist novels, stage such contradictions between a character and 'image', in a way Jameson claims Postmodernism nullifies. Whether Orwell's Winston, DeLillo's Lee Harvey Oswald or Sebald's Austerlitz, these novels construct a central character whose identity is effectively negated by an ideological 'image', in a dialectical reversal of their own interest - but as it belongs to a collective group or class - to intentionally dismantle what Debord terms an image's 'illusions'<sup>126</sup> in terms of a broader class history. This 'productive negation'

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<sup>124</sup> Hussey, p. 199.

<sup>125</sup> Jameson, *New Left Review*, no. 146, p.62.

<sup>126</sup> Debord, p. 32. Thesis 47.

negatively exposes the ideological 'image' through textual contradiction. By supplying a critical lens and class centred approach, Debord's text becomes an alternative to Postmodern theory (and attendant issue of apoliticism) in deciphering the politics of literary representations of the 'image'. A case study now follows to pre-emptively support this claim.

### **A Case Study of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; 'Big Brother' as Debord's 'Spectacle'**

Because history itself is the spectre haunting modern society,  
pseudo-history has to be fabricated at every level

*Guy Debord*<sup>232</sup>

Gérard Lebovici admired Debord's role in the events of 1968 and established *Les Editions Champs Libre* in 1969 to create a radical press. He became Debord's publisher in 1971 and placed Debord at the head of his publishing house in 1974.<sup>233</sup> During 1981-2 Debord re-printed a raft of anti-Stalinist titles, including all of Orwell's work that rival publishing house *Gallimard* would sell (they held on to the lucrative *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). He ordered *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) to be translated into French for the first time.<sup>234</sup> Debord perhaps did this because he shares elements of Orwell's political vision, expressed in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, as 'Big Brother' seems to fictionally reflect his 'concentrated' totalitarian spectacle.

Paul Flowers' essay (*'I Know How, But I Don't Know Why': George Orwell's Conception of Totalitarianism*) interrogates Orwell's relationship to the British Left. Orwell, fighting with P.O.U.M.<sup>235</sup> in the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) became a committed anti-Stalinist after witnessing Soviet Communists crush local revolutionaries. Flowers notes that Orwell's major complaint is against 'Left' intellectuals who remained uncritical of Stalinism during the 1930s, to which his novel speaks. This might explain why in 1949 he provided the Foreign Office with

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<sup>232</sup> Debord, p.141, Thesis 200.

<sup>233</sup> Hussey, see Chapter 27, *The Courtier*, pp.290-299 (p.295).

<sup>234</sup> Gilbert Bonifas, 'From Ingsoc to Capsoc: Perceptions of Orwell in France' in *George Orwell: Into The Twenty First Century* ed. by Thomas Cushman and John Rodden (Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), pp. 295-311 (p.295).

<sup>235</sup> Spanish Workers' Party of Marxist Unification set up during the Spanish Civil War (1937)

a list of suspected Stalinist sympathisers. Orwell locates Oceania's roots in the 1930s specifically to engage with the threat Stalinism posed to socialism, which likewise focuses Debord's theory. Orwell thereby warns the British 'Left' against the compromise intellectuals such as Sartre were prepared to make, that Debord likewise militates against.

Stephen Ingle details the complexities of the Cold War through the novel's reception. On its publication in England in 1949, Orwell's novel was grossly misappropriated as championing Tory individualism and read as an attack on 'the Left', as if Orwell's beliefs in independent thought, democracy, legality and social freedoms were the preserve of 'the Right'.<sup>236</sup> The overarching pessimism expressed in the fate of Winston Smith's revolutionary ambitions, coupled with the Cold War situation, allowed the novel to be framed as a 'proto-capitalist work'<sup>237</sup>, a warning against socialism *in toto*. Communism had spread beyond Eastern Europe to China, Vietnam, Cambodia etc. Debord captures this situation in his observation that the: 'bloody end of the workers' movements democratic illusions made a Russia of the whole world'.<sup>238</sup> Flowers correctly concludes: 'Orwell [...] attacked Stalinism so heavily *because* he was a left-winger [...] the right wing has no justification to claim his heritage'.<sup>239</sup> For, even in this climate, Orwell re-asserts he is a democratic socialist.<sup>240</sup>

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in France in 1954 and Gilbert Bonifas observes it was met by a more left-leaning response.<sup>241</sup> Bonifas traces the French reception of the novel *after* the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), writing that the 'geopolitical bipolarization'<sup>242</sup> (i.e. the post-war Stalinist threat to Western democracies) in which Orwell's work had been defined, suddenly disappeared. Bonifas refers to fellow academic, Jean-Claude Michea, a French authority on Orwell who reshaped his relevance in this new political context. Michea claims to

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<sup>236</sup> Flowers, p.15-17. *Animal Farm* was considered a proto-capitalist work because Orwell expresses a view of the 'rise of a [...] ruling élite as an ineluctable process', adding that in the U.S.A.: '*Nineteen Eighty-Four* was immediately championed by the radical right'.

<sup>237</sup> Flowers, p.21.

<sup>238</sup> Debord, p.68, Thesis 99.

<sup>239</sup> Flowers, p.22.

<sup>240</sup> Stephen Ingle, 'Two Plus Two Equals Four' in *The Social and Political Thought of George Orwell: A reassessment* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006) pp.114-139.

<sup>241</sup> Bonifas, 'From Ingsoc to Capsoc: Perceptions of Orwell in France' in *George Orwell: Into the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 295-304.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p.298.

reveal 'the true meaning'<sup>243</sup> of Orwell's novel, in terms of that singular global economy Debord identified earlier in 1967:

Michea draws a distinction between 'socialism' – working class, egalitarian, antimechanistic, antimodern – and the 'Left' [...] [which] claimed to be able to carry out the political, technical and moral modernization of society in a less messy way than liberal capitalism, and so for quite a while the Left had the working classes on its side. But with the obvious failure of the Soviet system it became difficult to run capitalism down [...] Osmosis could thus become effective between a 'second Left' devoid of any project of its own, incapable of any radical criticism, turned libertarian and permissive in the aftermath of May 1968, and latter-day capitalism [...] It is this ideology, born of the 'merger' of capitalism and socialism, that in the past twenty years or so has atomized, decivilized, and Disneyfied society. Recently one of the most perceptive observers of contemporary intellectual life, Pascal Bruckner, has coined for it the Orwellian-sounding name of Capsoc.<sup>244</sup>

This is typical of the 'writing out' of Debord from literary studies. Bonifas claims that Michea resituates Orwell on a basis of his opposition to 'Capsoc', supplying a critical vision lacking before 1989. However, this involved preamble serves to argue that Debord sought to renew Orwell's relevance because of his opposition to 'Capsoc' - his 'spectacular' society - twenty years before Michea.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as M. Keith Booker writes, is: 'one of the central defining texts of the genre of dystopian fiction'.<sup>245</sup> However, Orwell proves to make an unorthodox use of a Realist narrative structure. Dystopian conventions typically locate a narrative's setting in the future, to de-familiarize and shock. Oppositely, Realist conventions of setting and place locate a character, events and plot in a chronological history in order to represent a recognizable, 'real' social world, in which class is fundamental to identity. In relation to the latter, Oceania's roots are related in great historical detail to familiarize us with a recent past, a post-war society whose socialist government changes into a totalitarian state. The novel's past begins just after Debord's 'spectacle' arises, in what Orwell describes as; 'a

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p.298.

<sup>244</sup> Bonifas, p.299.

<sup>245</sup> M. Keith Booker, *Dystopian Literature* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press:1994), p.208. See also p.3: 'dystopian literature generally [...] constitutes a critique of existing social conditions [...] through the imaginative extensions of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws.'

general hardening of outlook that set in round about 1930'.<sup>246</sup> Orwell adapts Realist conventions to present the narrative's past in a historical chronological form through a forbidden book, because Oceania censors history. This is Emmanuel Goldstein's *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* which relates a Marxist perspective of history. It combines theory and fact to provide a counterpoint to a state programme of historical falsification. As a theory of revolution and a historical record, the book accounts for Oceania's decline into 'oligarchical collectivism' or totalitarianism. Chapter Four discusses Realist form and conventions in detail. However, here, note that Oceania's present is constructed, as in Realist novels, through a chronological history to create a sense of historical place.

This sense of historical place is constituted through Goldstein's retrospective view of social classes. Party members and 'proles' are additionally represented through a secondary, theoretical context of Goldstein's historical-materialism or revolutionary theory.<sup>247</sup> Thus, Orwell represents social conflict - a theme of 'anti-spectacular' literature. Winston first reads that 'the essential structure of society'<sup>248</sup> is 'hierarchical'<sup>249</sup> and made up of 'High [...] Middle and [...] Low' classes, whose aims 'are entirely irreconcilable'.<sup>250</sup> Equality and socialist, revolutionary aims are extinguished with the establishment of an authoritarian socialist Party - Ingsoc. Ingsoc's totalitarianism combines features of Nazism (Oceania's persecuted Jews are 'vaporized'<sup>251</sup>[sic]) and Stalinism (purged Party members). Ingsoc's rise is represented in Marx's terms of conflict and historical movement:

Socialism [...] appeared in the early nineteenth century and was the last link in a chain of thought stretching back to the slave rebellions of antiquity [...] But in each variant of Socialism that appeared from about 1900 onwards the aim of establishing liberty and equality was more and more openly abandoned <sup>252</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000) 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p.213.

<sup>247</sup> Orwell, p.209.

<sup>248</sup> Orwell, p.192.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, p.200.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, p.192.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p.211.

Oceania's revolution sees Marx's nineteenth century bourgeoisie succeeded by Ingsoc's Inner Party, or Stephen Ingle's 'new élites seeking to replace old élites'.<sup>253</sup> Orwell's ruling minority are a former middle-class; 'bureaucrats, trade-union organisers, publicity experts, [...] teachers, journalists and professional politicians'.<sup>254</sup> At the top of a 'pyramid'<sup>255</sup> they enjoy spacious apartments, 'good food and good tobacco [and] white jacketed servants'<sup>256</sup> while actively repressing the 'proles' that account for 'eighty five percent of the population'.<sup>257</sup>

Orwell's stated aim for the novel was to oppose Stalinism. Ingle specifies that Orwell opposed the 'perversions to which a centralised economy is liable and which have already been partly realised in Communism and Fascism'<sup>258</sup> (much like Debord's opposition to Stalinism's 'brutal [...] accumulation of capital'<sup>259</sup>). Orwell believed a planned economy concentrated power centrally and undemocratically in the state through a bureaucratic class. As Bernard Crick notes, Orwell was against a; 'convergence between communism and capitalism via managerialism [...] their managers would develop a common culture'.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, Debord contends that the 'spectacle' grows out of the ashes of working class movements in Germany, Hungary and Spain, co-opted by Stalinism or Fascism in the 1930s. These states develop centralized economies, attempting to gain the full 'management' of social life through propaganda, surveillance and force. This, Debord writes: 'was the moment when an image of the working class arose in radical opposition to the working class itself'<sup>261</sup>. In Orwell's novel, this image is 'Big Brother'.

Orwell and Debord take similar positions on technology, an aspect of modernity and its implicit promise to further social equality. However, Debord warns that

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<sup>253</sup> Ingle, p. 107.

<sup>254</sup> Orwell, p.213.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p.216.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p.175.

<sup>257</sup> Orwell, p.217.

<sup>258</sup> Ingle, p.114.

<sup>259</sup> Debord, p.72, Thesis 104.

<sup>260</sup> Bernard Crick, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four: context and controversy', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. by John Rodden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.146-159. (p.148).

<sup>261</sup> Debord, p.69, Thesis 100.



technological 'apparatus has nothing neutral about it'.<sup>262</sup> Any claim to the contrary, as Luxemburg asserts, fails to consider those wider class relationships in which technological innovation develops and is used. While Orwell does represent technology in terms of repression (i.e. surveillance), unlike dystopian fiction, overall his novel retains a positive view of science. Winston refuses to abandon either natural history, physics or logic when tortured by O'Brien.<sup>263</sup> A Realist narrative chronology allows Orwell to represent technology through Goldstein's historical overview of class positions, whose contradictions play out through the mediation of an 'image':

Life, if you looked about you, bore no resemblance [...] to the lies that streamed out of the telescreens [...] the ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible and glittering - a world of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines [...] The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes <sup>264</sup>

Modernity is primarily represented through technology; first, as above, by a media 'image' that broadcasts Party propaganda, and second, by machines (i.e. machine production).

First, in regard to the 'image', a 'telescreen' or figure of Big Brother works to achieve the goals of the state, Orwell's managerial class (like Debord's 'system's managers'<sup>266</sup>). Orwell writes that social management is achieved through ideological means; 'print [...] film [...] radio [...] television'.<sup>267</sup> Orwell attacks these institutions in his non-fiction: 'the immediate enemies of truthfulness, and hence of freedom of thought, are the Press lords, the film magnates and the bureaucrats'.<sup>268</sup> Oceania uses 'rubbishy entertainment'<sup>269</sup> termed '*prolefeed*' to pacify and distract.<sup>270</sup> Crick suggests that 'mass media and proletarianisation'<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Debord, p.19, Thesis 24. He writes that the 'image'; 'answers precisely [...] the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics.'

<sup>263</sup> Orwell, p.278-9.

<sup>264</sup> Orwell, p.77.

<sup>266</sup> Debord, p.21. Thesis 26.

<sup>267</sup> Orwell, p.214.

<sup>268</sup> Orwell, 'The Prevention of Literature', in *I Belong to the Left*, 20 vols, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 17, p.369. In 1945, Orwell's non-fiction draws the same conclusion as the novel.

<sup>269</sup> Orwell, p.320.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Crick, *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. by John Rodden, p.147.

constitute one of the novel's themes. However, Debord writes that 'mass media'<sup>272</sup> is 'stultifying'<sup>273</sup>; for appearing as a mode of communication *masks* its function - to control independent thought: "instant" communication [...] is essentially *one-way*'.<sup>274</sup> Orwell fictionally reflects Debord's position through his focus on propaganda, surveillance and censorship, which prevent independent, critical thought and association. Oceania's 'telescreen' is used to: 'keep its citizens under constant surveillance [...] under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda, with all other channels of communication closed.'<sup>275</sup> Similarly, Debord's 'spectacle' uses technology to end all private life: 'governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself'.<sup>276</sup> Orwell characterizes social control in these terms, as his compulsory telescreen brings 'private life [...] to an end'.<sup>277</sup> Debord calls such technology a means of 'perpetual surveillance'<sup>278</sup> (i.e. the abhorred CCTV of modern Paris), just as Orwell writes of the 'telescreen':

Asleep or awake, working or eating,  
indoors or out of doors, in the bath  
or in bed – no escape<sup>279</sup>

Orwell's 'telescreen' also shares features of Debord's more familiar Western spectacle, in Oceania's nationalistic newsflashes ('the bulletin! Victory!'<sup>280</sup>), or fitness classes (the 'Physical Jerks'<sup>281</sup>), that recall the central place of television in the social worlds of *Libra*, *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting*.

Second, 'machine production'<sup>282</sup> is an aspect of modernity that enables power to be concentrated in the state, ultimately enabling the 'image' it broadcasts of itself. Goldstein writes that by 1940 automation had made 'human equality [...]

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<sup>272</sup> Debord, p.19, Thesis 24.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Orwell, p. 214.

<sup>276</sup> Debord, p.13, Thesis 6.

<sup>277</sup> Orwell, p.214.

<sup>278</sup> The Letterist International, 'Skyscraper by the Roots', in *Potlatch* no.5 (1954) [http: // Error! Hyperlink reference not valid./ skyscrapers.html](http://Error! Hyperlink reference not valid./skyscrapers.html) ['last accessed 20.1.2015']

<sup>279</sup> Orwell, p.29.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p.212.

technically possible'<sup>283</sup> but adds: 'earthly paradise had been discredited [...] when it became realisable.'<sup>284</sup> Debord writes that automation unleashes 'abundance' but the 'success of this production'<sup>285</sup> emerges within class divisions which make it an 'abundance of dispossession'<sup>287</sup>, an exponential increase of alienation similarly presented in Oceania's abysmal poverty.

Orwell intentionally constructs narrative contradictions which undermine the ideological Party 'image' by depicting an impoverished working class. This operates similarly to Lukácsian Realism. A historical class opposition demonstrates that visual ideology (an 'image') is formatively shaped by a dominant class perspective, but the slippage or contradiction of its 'content' and 'form' creates a textual dissonance. For subject and object, or character and world - i.e. Winston and 'Big Brother' - are related within Goldstein's class history, beyond the mediating 'image'. This demonstrates an 'image', managed by a class in power, can 'remove' such historical context from consciousness, which is necessary or formative to an oppositional identity and consequent resistance such a class identity might inspire. For example, Winston's job at the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth makes him a witness of this historical erasure by an 'image', as he ceaselessly re-writes history, disposing of truth in 'memory holes'<sup>288</sup> so it is (ironically) forgotten:

This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters [...] every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance.<sup>289</sup>

Debord makes the same point: '[s]pectacular domination's first priority was to eradicate historical knowledge'.<sup>290</sup> Winston has no idea of his age, as personal records, like history, are destroyed. A photograph of a political meeting Winston

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p.212.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p.213.

<sup>285</sup> Debord, p.23, Thesis 31. 'Workers do not produce themselves: they produce a force independent of themselves. The success of this production [...] the abundance it generates, is experienced by its producers only as an abundance of dispossession. All time, all space, becomes foreign to them [...] the very powers that have been snatched from us reveal themselves to us in their full force.'

<sup>287</sup> Debord, p.23, Thesis 31.

<sup>288</sup> Orwell, p.40.

<sup>289</sup> Orwell, p.42.

<sup>290</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.13.

once attended ('a certain photograph'), that he is instructed to destroy, acts as an example of *historical* fact ('unmistakable documentary evidence').<sup>291</sup> This event identifies 'truth' with both history and memory. Thus, Orwell constructs a contradiction between an 'image' and the objectivity it replaces (truth, history, memory). Winston's job allows a perspective external to ideology, so that he recognizes 'false-consciousness'; 'if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed [...] then the lie passed into history and became truth'.<sup>292</sup> 'False consciousness' is created in terms of the textual contradictions that Lukács' argues operate in Realism as a form of cognitive dissonance and radicalism.

The novel stages a systemic *contradiction* of objective facts by ideology 'image', in areas such as science and logic, as well as history. O'Brien denies 'the force of gravity'<sup>293</sup> and whether 'two plus two make four'.<sup>294</sup> Orwell demonstrates the 'image' undermines empiricism and an epistemological tradition, to make uncertainty a symptom of this visually imposed 'false-consciousness'. Thus, Winston complains the 'telescreen': 'penetrated inside your skull [...] persuading you, almost, to deny the evidence of your senses.'<sup>295</sup> He then wonders if truth is subjective, rather than objective: 'where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness'.<sup>296</sup> O'Brien re-enforces 'false-consciousness': 'I tell you, Winston, that reality is not external [it] exists in the human mind, and nowhere else.'<sup>297</sup> However, the narrative constructs and locates truth in history and objectivity, independent of characters' consciousness, *beyond* ideological mediation in the narrative, to undermine O'Brien's dogma by representing it through contradiction. Later, Chapter Four suggests this is not possible in literary Modernist form.

Winston, as Debord's alienated 'spectator', might be interpreted in terms of desire. Chapter One follows, to present Hegel's argument that desire, at an early stage of the Phenomenology, constitutes identity: for actions that meet desires enable self-recognition in an objective world - a process Debord demonstrates is

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<sup>291</sup> Orwell, p.259.

<sup>292</sup> Orwell, p.37.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>296</sup> Orwell, p.37.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p.261.

alienated by an 'image'. For Orwell constructs Winston on a basis of instinctual desire, ideologically mediated by a screen. First, his desire for community, that Hegel calls 'civil society' and, second, sexual desire. Chapter One demonstrates that Debord draws on Marx's critique of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). Hegelian desire takes form in labour and social action, ultimately allowing free will to be expressed in public, social structures (i.e. religion, the family) thereby creating a civil society, whereby collective will is embodied in ethics, law and the state.<sup>298</sup> Subsequently, Marx argues that Hegel's 'civil society' - based on the mutual recognition of those ethical principles - is abstract, for it requires or stems from property ownership; therefore, the state is not an embodiment of any *actual* collective will. Debord, after Marx, argues the 'spectacle', like Hegel's state, is similarly abstract in falsely representing such collective will, in the 'image' of a leader. Orwell constructs Big Brother as a similarly ideological abstraction of collective will in the: 'collective and immortal' Party.<sup>299</sup>

Debord calls the 'image' an 'illusion of community'<sup>300</sup> which replaces social life, a situation reflected in Oceania's slogan: 'Humanity is the Party'.<sup>301</sup> As Crick observes, the name Big Brother itself satirizes 'fraternity'.<sup>302</sup> Similar to Debord's colonization of 'leisure' activities, Ingsoc controls community activity through 'The Spies' and 'The Junior Anti-Sex League'. If Hegelian identity depends on 'recognition' in the 'Other', a recognition of common needs, Oceania's ideological mediation effects a dialectical reversal, converting those common needs into ideological form as desire is replaced by fear: parents fear their children and neighbours fear one another. This wholly transfers allegiance from the family or community to the state.

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<sup>298</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (New York: Oxford University Press: 1977). See, *The True Spirit - The Ethical Order*, p.287. Hegel writes: 'Human law in its universal existence is the community [...] in its real and effective activity is the government.' See also Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in *Karl Marx, Early Writings* (Penguin Classics: London, 1992), p.425. Marx argues 'legal relations' and 'political forms' both 'originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'.'

<sup>299</sup> Orwell, p.261.

<sup>300</sup> Debord, p.46.

<sup>301</sup> Orwell, p.282.

<sup>302</sup> Crick, *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, p.149.

This desire for community, given false form in Big Brother, as Debord writes of the 'spectacle', becomes a 'locus of illusion'.<sup>303</sup> However, more significantly, it erases any perception of the social, class context recorded in Goldstein's history. Winston's identity cannot be formed on a basis of a shared, common perspective of a class of 'proles'. Orwell's 'image' prevents this collective recognition to: 'prevent the true nature of present-day society from being perceived'.<sup>304</sup> In other words, possibilities of collective consciousness and class opposition. However, Orwell sets the 'image' in dialectical contradiction to the book, which, like the photograph, is a record of the wider social and historical context constructed beyond 'Big Brother', to suggest such territory of collective class opposition is possible (discussed shortly).

A second example of Winston's 'false-consciousness' of desire is sexual desire transformed into its opposite (hatred) by *The Two Minutes Hate*. Again, using an *image* of the 'Other' - a state enemy - there is a dialectical reversal that turns love into hate, cultivated for nationalistic, militaristic purposes:

how could the fear, the hatred [...] which the party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch, except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force<sup>305</sup>

Again, Orwell purposefully limits the 'image's reach, as Winston first encounters and *desires* Julia at this event. Through Julia - a real 'Other', not an 'image'- Winston rediscovers the human, social context of desire, beyond its ideological form: '[i]n the old days [...] a man looked at a girl's body and saw that it was desirable'.<sup>306</sup> Winston is able to redefine desire as; 'the love of persons [...] the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire'.<sup>307</sup> His strongest memory is his mother's love; '[h]is mother's memory tore at his heart [...] she had died loving him'.<sup>308</sup> He aspires to human emotions: '[t]he proles had stayed human [...] had held onto the primitive emotions which he himself had to learn by conscious

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<sup>303</sup> Debord, p.12.

<sup>304</sup> Orwell, p. 219.

<sup>305</sup> Orwell, p.140. The figure of an 'enemy' is a prop used to catalyse hatred and fear, often an 'image' of Goldstein, accompanied by soldiers from Oceania's enemies, Eurasia or Eastasia, see p.14-15.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>307</sup> Orwell, p.132.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p.32.

effort'.<sup>309</sup> He decides that: 'one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood'<sup>310</sup> - which requires an 'Other'. Orwell's narrative structure thereby relates Winston to both a repressive 'image' and the social, historical context it replaces, in terms of a contradiction of the latter; for Winston's desire is dialectically converted to ideological form (hate) and back again to human form (love) through the narrative's objective history ('the old days'), collective class identity ('the proles had stayed human') and factual memory (his mother): 'one had some kind of ancestral memory that things had once been different'.<sup>311</sup> This contrast emphasizes the dehumanization ideology engenders. In Chapter Three, I.S. games are argued to operate on a similarly dialectical basis and enable mutual desires to be recognized as authentic, in contrast with their commodified form ('false-consciousness') that is rejected. Debord argues that if such ideological mediation is repressive, this *politicizes* any 'consciousness of desire'<sup>312</sup>, which thereby becomes oppositional consciousness. Similarly, Winston notes: '[t]he sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion'.<sup>313</sup> *The Two Minutes Hate* sees mediated, uniform yet *collective* behaviour experienced in 'solitude'<sup>314</sup>, like Debord's description of the 'spectacle' as a 'social hallucination', a 'false consciousness of encounter'<sup>315</sup> that leaves individuals '*isolated together*'<sup>316</sup> (Debord's italics).

Orwell presents the political implications of Oceania's state control through the 'telescreen', that aims to eliminate any but ideological forms of desire. Winston seeks out Goldstein's book; for Orwell suggests that authentic identity requires the historical class context theorized therein. Winston then begins to exercise independent thought ('thoughtcrime'<sup>317</sup>), free will ('ownlife'<sup>318</sup>) and seeks to define his self-interest. Winston's Outer Party knowledge of state censorship allows him to experience Big Brother as a 'false-consciousness', a cognitive dissonance like Debord's 'schizophrenia'. This narrative epistemology turns on the contradiction

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p.172.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p.264.

<sup>311</sup> Orwell, p.63. See also p.260.

<sup>312</sup> Debord, p.34, Thesis 53.

<sup>313</sup> Orwell, p.71.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. p.30.

<sup>315</sup> Debord, p.152. Thesis 217.

<sup>316</sup> Debord, p.122. Thesis 172.

<sup>317</sup> Orwell, p.30. (Chapter 2, Part 1).

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p.85. (Chapter 8, Part 1).

of ideological concepts by their authentic form, derived from Winston's new relationship to history and class, substantiated by the book. Through such contradiction, Winston perceives the 'image' of Big Brother as a negation of his desires and identity, thus as false. However, Orwell presents the implications of such dialectical contradiction, beyond Winston, at the social level of class, allowing the potential of Winston's opposition to belong to the historical, class struggle recorded in Goldstein's book.

In Room 101, O'Brien dominates Winston, torturing him to 'capture his inner mind'<sup>319</sup> or remove the contradictions (cognitive dissonance) that allow critical thought and provide an oppositional basis for identity, thus resistance. This is termed a 'cure'<sup>320</sup> as it effects an ideological conformity that makes Winston 'sane'.<sup>321</sup> Debord uses a similar metaphor of madness to argue that the substitution of ideology for reality produces insanity: 'a lie that can no longer be challenged becomes a form of madness'.<sup>322</sup> However, Winston observes that the proletariat are without his privileged perspective: 'without the power of grasping the world could be other than it is'.<sup>323</sup> Without any access or recognition of any defining social context beyond ideology, the dialectical possibilities of class antagonisms and identity are removed. Winston comments: 'Orthodoxy was unconsciousness'.<sup>324</sup> This is similar to Debord's 'catatonia'. 'Catatonia' results once ideology so completely substitutes for reality that self-conceptions cannot be conceived apart from it, to thereby preclude conflict; orientation by class struggle at Marx's historical level is thus obstructed. Debord claims totalitarianism effects such 'catatonia' and describes the 'image' as a: 'frozen [...] immobilized spectacle of non-history'.<sup>325</sup> Similarly, Orwell writes that Ingsoc's ideology aims to: 'arrest progress and freeze history'.<sup>326</sup> O'Brien's ideological realignment produces such 'catatonia', captured in Winston's surrender: 'He loved Big Brother'.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Orwell, p.267.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p.265.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p.265.

<sup>322</sup> Debord, p.73. Thesis 105.

<sup>323</sup> Orwell, p. 219.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>325</sup> Debord, p.150. Thesis 214.

<sup>326</sup> Orwell, p. 212.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p.312.



Booker suggests Oceania's censorship is a 'dystopian control of language'.<sup>328</sup> This is too vague. If O'Brien eliminates the contradictions that allow logic to function (i.e. anithesis and negation), a logic that establishes 'truth' (from falsehood), Oceania's practice of 'Doublethink' or 'Newspeak' eliminate such contradictions, respectively present in thought and speech. 'Doublethink' is a subjective practice of internally denying the contradictions present in false ideological pronouncements. Newspeak aims to achieve the same elimination, but it requires the State to externally modify language.<sup>329</sup> Inner Party members use the tenth edition of the Newspeak dictionary. However, the narrative *class* context and history frames language (its meaning or 'content') by social, historical usage and these class relations decide or confer 'form'. For example, once Oceania's elite gain power they edit and transform Oldspeak into Newspeak.

Originally, words find identity with their objective referents, to allow subjective, 'free' thought; 'thought is dependent on words'.<sup>330</sup> Debord takes the same view: '[f]rom words to ideas it is only a step'.<sup>331</sup> Newspeak severs this formative, social relationship to language, as the state revises and reduces vocabulary, delimiting language's faculty for self-expression: 'its vocabulary grew smaller every year'.<sup>332</sup> Adjectives are purged while technical words remain; 'to diminish the range of free thought'. Grammatical changes are made: plural nouns are removed (i.e. man becomes mans), to eliminate concepts of collective identity and perspectives. Similarly, the negative of a word is removed to eliminate the concept of opposition: 'where two words formed a natural pair of opposites' only one is used (i.e. 'uncold'). Further, words are created that inscribe ideological positions within themselves: i.e. 'sexcrime'. This destroys the meaning of the word they replace (i.e. sex). Democracy is likewise replaced by 'crimethink'.<sup>333</sup> Further still, words such as Minipax (the Ministry of Peace, which is in fact the Ministry of War) appropriate a word's form, but reference its opposite meaning, making it impossible to articulate its original concept. As Newspeak removes pairs of opposites, the retained ideological word can be equivalent to any word, even its

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<sup>328</sup> Booker, p.211.

<sup>329</sup> Orwell, p.322.

<sup>330</sup> Orwell, p.312.

<sup>331</sup> Mustapha Khayati, *Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup>. edn., p.223.

<sup>332</sup> Orwell, p. 232.

<sup>333</sup> Orwell, p.313; p.315; p.319; p.318.

opposite, as its original meaning is ideologically removed: 'Freedom is Slavery'.<sup>334</sup> Newspeak makes the articulation of contradiction, therefore 'cognitive dissonance', impossible without a word for the expunged concept; 'the expression of unorthodox opinions [...] was well-nigh impossible'.<sup>335</sup> Language begins to denote ideological meanings that function: 'independent of consciousness'. This is symbolized in 'Duckspeak' - sound without meaning. Without the capacity for self-expression and negation, opposition is 'forgotten'.<sup>336</sup> The social and historical uses or 'content' that gives language meaning is entirely overtaken by its ideological 'form'. The I.S. write of 'the objective impossibility of a Newspeak'.<sup>337</sup> However, the neologisms forced upon the poet Mayakovsky by critics in the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers suggest it was attempted.<sup>338</sup>

In conclusion, Orwell was to call *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'The Last Man in Europe', a Nietzschean term that captures this period's shift toward totalitarianism and its assimilation of individual freedom and class politics, expressed in the Nietzschean figure of a 'Superman' and totalitarian 'will to power'.<sup>339</sup> Both Orwell and Debord warn this risk is inherent to modernity, as a *historical* turning point; for technology is sophisticated and accessible enough to wholly mediate social life. Goldstein warns: 'the power to keep [...] citizens under constant surveillance' and accomplish 'complete obedience to the will of the State', implies that 'uniformity of opinion on all subjects [...] existed for the first time.'<sup>340</sup>

Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940), also focused on Stalinism, is a more traditionally Realist novel than Orwell's and lacks dystopian features. He too, through history, dialectically relates the early aims of a working-class Bolshevik

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. p.323.

<sup>336</sup> Orwell, p. 321; p.312.

<sup>337</sup> *Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p.223

<sup>338</sup> *A History of the Soviet Union*, p.181. RAPP criticized his work and 'Mayakovsky tried to appease them [...] which made him so miserable that it probably contributed to his suicide in 1930.'

<sup>339</sup> Luk de Vos, 'News-peak: He hated B.B.' in *Essays from Oceania and Eurasia: George Orwell and 1984* (Antwerp: University of Antwerp, 1984), p. 93. He argues Winston's character is an act of political writing by Orwell, a particular resistance to a new era: 'The theme of the last man, and [...] conscious realisation of an author to represent such a species, points directly to fundamental social shifts, and to scientific if not ideological revolutions'.

<sup>340</sup> Orwell, p.214.

revolution to its later, contradictory form in a totalitarian Stalinist Party. Orwell's is a superficially more fantastic mode of representing this dialectical, negative transformation as the manipulation of history is negotiated within its structure. The failure and recuperation of Winston's revolutionary ambition is powerfully symbolized in his submission to O' Brien. The novel's dramatic tension builds as the plot reaches its main turning point - Winston's torture in Room 101 - to suggest that the principles of socialism itself, as an oppositional politics, are at stake when framed, through Winston (the last man) as a question of life or death.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida observes that in 1950s Paris the demise of Communism in Stalinism made questions of 'the "last man" [...] our daily bread'.<sup>341</sup> Debord engages with this question as much as Orwell. Both give the visual 'image' a central role in the defeat of socialism. O'Brien denies human action its formative relationship to class and history, telling Winston: 'you are the last man [...] you are *alone* [...] outside history'.<sup>342</sup> However, Orwell's narrative offers that very socio-historical context, which Debord likewise theorizes, that proves essential to oppositional consciousness and potential resistance. Trotsky's revolutionary theory, symbolized in Goldstein's book, that is used by O'Brien to entrap Winston, is Orwell's warning to the British 'Left' of the dangerous recuperation of socialism in Stalinism.

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<sup>341</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1994), p.16. After the fall of the Berlin wall, Derrida notes that the question of the end of Soviet Marxism was resurrected, just as it had earlier galvanized intellectual debate in the 1950s; 'the same question, already [...] of the "end of history", of "the end of Marxism" [...] of the "last man" and so forth were, in the '50s [...] our daily bread.' p.16

<sup>342</sup> Orwell, p.282.

## **Chapter 1. The Legacy of Hegel and Marx**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter builds on the introduction, but instead of identifying historical factors which led Debord to theorize 'everyday life' as alienated by the 'spectacle', such as a class dominance strengthened by renewed productivity, or movement from country to city that created urban centres populated by young people, it examines the philosophical roots of its central concepts that derive from Hegel and Marx. They are the basis of his Hegelian Marxist 'dialectical method'<sup>350</sup> of formulating alienation. Debord writes to Giorgio Agamben, at a time when he, like Sartre and others, rejected Althusser's Structuralist Hegelian-Marxism of 1965<sup>351</sup>; 'I was happy to have attempted - in 1967 and completely contrary to Althusser's sombre denial - a kind of "salvage by transfer" of the Marxist method by adding to it a large dose of Hegel, at the same time as it reprised a critique of political economy'.<sup>352</sup>

The first half of this chapter demonstrates that Hegel and Marx provide the philosophical apparatus Debord requires to formulate the 'image'. Each of these numbered theoretical terms are key: (1) a concept of 'totality', constituted through (2) desire and (3) labour, but in a state of alienation, given the social context of (4) class and history, expressed through dialectical contradiction<sup>353</sup> which give 'false consciousness' a concrete, class basis. It briefly references (5) Kojève's interpretation of Hegel as an epic, if ambiguous, class struggle, alongside Lukács, to contextualize Debord's position in a Marxist tradition that is subsequently compared to Sartre's anti-Hegelianism. Discussions of (6) the state and

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<sup>350</sup> Debord, p.50. Thesis 79.

<sup>351</sup> This approach is evident in *For Marx* (1965) and *Reading Capital* (1965).

<sup>352</sup> Letter to Giorgio Agamben (6<sup>th</sup> August 1990) <http://www.notbored.org/debord-6August1990.html>

[<sup>353</sup>last accessed 26.1.2022'] Giorgio Agamben had written to Debord thus: 'In the 1960s, however, the Marxian analysis of the fetish character of the commodity was, in the Marxist milieu, foolishly abandoned. In 1969, in the preface to a popular reprint of *Capital*, Louis Althusser could still invite readers to skip the first section, with the reason that the theory of fetishism was a 'flagrant' and 'extremely harmful' trace of Hegelian philosophy.'

<sup>353</sup> Debord, p. 18. Thesis 22. Contradiction, used throughout Debord's text, characterizes the spectacle's dialectical basis (i.e. formed around opposed economic classes); for example, see Thesis 54.

revolution, prepares the ground for Chapter Two that sets out Debord's revolutionary praxis that overcomes the 'spectacle'.

Debord uses this framework to (a) elaborate desire or need as it relates to self-consciousness and questions of identity or 'recognition' (b) extend the 'image's mediation of 'recognition', beyond the subject, in terms of class and (c) demonstrates the 'process of *becoming conscious*'<sup>354</sup> of identity, as Lukács terms it, is alienated by the 'spectacle', but might be rejected (and 'transcended') through oppositional choices that constitute political action. Conceptual antithesis and synthesis, or 'transcendence', taken from Hegel and used by Marx, are part of Debord's theoretical vocabulary and defined in the first section on 'totality'.

Debord's understanding of revolution and the state relates to Hegel and Marx and, although he rejects Lukács' Leninist model of the Communist Party, he retains his dialectical model of overcoming 'false-consciousness' through conceptual antithesis or 'negation' - a *productive* negation that converts proletariat's self-conception on an oppositional basis. This section finds Kojève's interpretation of Hegel similarly focused on class struggle. Critics consider its approach anthropological (Baugh<sup>355</sup>, Butler<sup>356</sup>, Descombes<sup>357</sup>, Heckman<sup>358</sup>). While Debord may not have read Kojève, his lectures, delivered at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études* in 1933-9 (published in 1947), were highly influential<sup>359</sup>; Heckman describes them as 'legendary'.<sup>360</sup> Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, like Debord's, focuses on class conflict and history in an anti-statist form, free of Soviet dogma. Thus, Lukács and Kojève offer a putatively Marxist tradition of interpretation closer to Debord's own.

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<sup>354</sup> History and Class Consciousness p.178.

<sup>355</sup> Baugh, p.26-27. Baugh argues that Kojève's historical anthropology makes Hegel's 'Logic' unfold, thus history end, in human potential realized through technology.

<sup>356</sup> Butler, p.64. 'Hegel's *Phenomenology* becomes for Kojève the occasion of an anthropology of historical experience in which desire's transformation into action, and action's aim of universal recognition, become the salient features of all historical agency.'

<sup>357</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p.27. 'Kojève provided an anthropological version of Hegelian philosophy.'

<sup>358</sup> *Genesis and Structure*, p. xxiv. Heckman writes in the introduction that Kojève's reading is 'an atheistic, anthropological interpretation'.

<sup>359</sup> They were attended by Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Breton, Lefebvre and, perhaps, Sartre - this is debated. Heckman and Hussey place Sartre there, Arthur does not.

<sup>360</sup> Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, p. xxiii. See John Heckman's introduction.

The second half of this chapter compares Debord's position to influential interpretations of Hegel produced by Wahl and Hyppolite. Hyppolite's *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1946), *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History* (1948) and *Studies on Marx and Hegel* (1955) were in Debord's library, along with his translation of the *Phenomenology*, the only one in French at that time. Baugh emphasizes the impact of Jean Wahl's *The Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel's Philosophy* (1929)<sup>361</sup> on Sartre, who develops Wahl's formulation of existence as a metaphysical problem. What is central to Wahl and Sartre later influences Derrida, Foucault and Baudrillard. Therefore, this chapter begins to establish the philosophical grounds of opposite formulations of alienation, that later allow a comparison of Sartre's Existential 'ennui' and Debord's spectacular, politically nuanced 'passivity'.<sup>362</sup> This enables Chapter Two to compare Sartre's and Debord's opposite definitions of a key term 'situation' and wider considerations of theories of art and literature, including the I.S. aesthetic, as responses to alienation in Chapters Three and Four that turn on 'totality' and 'fragmentation', with a particular focus on such approaches in relation to the novel in Chapter Five.

## **1.2. The Philosophical Roots of Key Features of Debord's Spectacle**

### **Totality**

Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1807) and Marx's *Capital* (1867), while divergent, are broadly comparative as both theorize subjectivity and objectivity as a 'totality' whose substance is history.<sup>363</sup> History is structured or evolves through an underlying but concealed unifying principle. For Hegel, this is *Geist* or Spirit (shaped by Christian theology) but for Marx, who elaborates a labour 'theory of value', this is concrete labour - or 'value' in economic terms. Engels introduces *The Communist Manifesto*, by writing that Marx believed history was a

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<sup>361</sup> Baugh, *French Hegel*, p.5. Baugh writes: 'the Hegelian unhappy consciousness assumes a key place in French thought'.

<sup>362</sup> Debord, p.15, Thesis13.

<sup>363</sup> See *Capital*, vol 1, Chapter 32. See p. 927-929. Marx relates the development of capitalist production and the structure of society as evolving historical epochs - a 'historical genesis'.

contestation of the control of labour: 'the whole history of mankind [...] has been a history of class struggles'.<sup>364</sup>

Importantly, Hegel enabled Debord to relate subjectively lived 'everyday' life, not just to labour but also to consciousness, theorized within this historical 'whole'.<sup>365</sup>

As Hussey writes, this appealed to Debord:

Hyppolite's magisterial study of *The Phenomenology of Mind* appeared in 1947 and appealed to Debord, insisting that Hegel was the avatar of a tradition of philosophical thought which 'answers a double demand: that for rigour in analysis, and that for direct contact with lived experience'.<sup>366</sup>

Hegel had inherited Kant's intractable problem of the 'object' as a 'thing-in-itself', a *noumenon*, ultimately unknowable by reason. This becomes problematic for a subject that is a hermetic 'form' with an unknowable 'content'.<sup>367</sup> Later Kierkegaard, in existential fashion, calls such a subject an 'incognito' which Lukács relates to the problematic construction of subjectivity in Modernist literature.<sup>368</sup> Hegel attempts to resolve this problem, as Peter Singer highlights, for it leaves an irrational subject unable to take cognizance of itself; '[t]he unknowable thing in itself and the conception of human nature divided against

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<sup>364</sup> *The Communist Manifesto*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), NEED PAGE No.

<sup>365</sup> Baugh, p.20.

<sup>366</sup> Hussey, p.115. Hussey is quoting from Hyppolite's *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1947).

<sup>367</sup> Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) sets out the problem of 'noumena' - a content or 'thing-in-itself' - which appear in thought as phenomena and cannot be comprehended independently of representation, thus are always negative or unknowable. See Hegel's *Phenomenology*, p. xiii. J.N. Findlay relates Kant's argument that: 'human knowledge only shows [...] 'the Absolute' or 'the Thing in Itself' [is] impossible, [...] there are and must be aspects of things that we can indeed conceive negatively, or perhaps have beliefs about, but of which we can never have knowledge.' Lukács writes in *History and Class Consciousness*, p.177; 'The question of totality is the constant centre of the transcendental dialectic [...] its sharp distinction between phenomena and noumena repudiates all attempts by 'our' reason to obtain knowledge of the second group of objects.' Hegel's *Phenomenology* claims to resolve this. For an account of Lukács' development of Hegel's phenomenology from Kant's transcendental philosophy in terms of this irrational relation of 'content' to 'form' see Konstantinos Kavoulakos in *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis* (Bloomsbury: London, 2020), Chapter Two, *The Problem of Content: A Neo-Kantian Theme*, pp.13-34. Before converting to Marxism and understanding this condition as alienation, Lukács argues that if 'content' is an irrational presence, this is mitigated because thought objectifies all as one 'totality'; therefore, the subject, like any object, is contingent on thought and objectively valid.

<sup>368</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn. p. 27.

itself were both, for Kant's successors, problems in need of solutions.<sup>369</sup> Hegel's phenomenology attempts to resolve this by theorizing subject-object integration, evident in his teleology (discussed further below). Later Lukács denies Hegel achieves this and identifies it as bourgeois philosophy's central problem.<sup>370</sup>

Karl Marx attended the University of Berlin in 1837 and joined the Young Hegelians, taking Bruno Bauer's Republican position. They opposed the absolutism of the Prussian monarchy and influence of the Protestant Church upon state affairs. Hegel was read against his intended meaning, as supporting the bourgeois parliamentary reforms briefly achieved after the Napoleonic victory at Jena, in what Gareth Steadman-Jones calls: 'a republican inspired revision of Hegel's political philosophy'.<sup>371</sup> Arthur also identifies in Marx a tradition that: 'refuses to take Hegel at face value'.<sup>372</sup> However, soon Marx chastises Bauer for not engaging critically enough with the Hegelian system and undertakes this in '*Critique of The Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*' (in Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*). Marx argues against German Idealism in *The German Ideology* (1846) which Debord draws upon in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

Marx contends that Hegel's error is theorizing Reason (consciousness) from a detached position (consciousness 'comprehending itself abstractly'<sup>373</sup>). Hegel divides his subject from its own reality i.e. self-consciousness, which it must regain; *this* false mutual exclusion constitutes the journey of the *Phenomenology*: '[d]espite the wealth of content in the *Phenomenology* everything is treated under the form of consciousness or self-consciousness'.<sup>374</sup> This schema of 'estrangement' reappears as a discrepancy of 'essence' (content) and its 'form':

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<sup>369</sup> Peter Singer, *Hegel: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001), p.119. Hegel is in dialogue with Kant, a German philosophical tradition of Fichte and Schiller, the inheritors of this problem.

<sup>370</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.150. Lukács calls the irrational relation of 'form' and 'content': 'the fundamental problem of bourgeois thought'.

<sup>371</sup> *The Communist Manifesto*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), p.90. The introduction by Gareth Steadman Jones details the radical Young Hegelians and roles of Bauer and Marx at length.

<sup>372</sup> *Dialectics of Labour*, Arthur. p.59.

<sup>373</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in Karl Marx, Early Writings*, p. 174.

<sup>374</sup> *Dialectics of Labour*, p.61.



estrangement, which therefore forms the real interest of this alienation [...] is the opposition of in itself and for itself, of consciousness and self-consciousness of object and subject - that is to say, it is the opposition, within thought itself, between abstract thinking and sensuous reality <sup>375</sup>

Marx therefore reinterprets Hegel's teleology on a material basis ('sensuous reality'). He understands Hegelian desire as need and the action - specifically labour - required to meet those needs. Marx suggests the first result of labour is freedom from immediate want, allowing society to subsequently develop conscious, more sophisticated desires, for example, culture.<sup>376</sup> In capitalist society, labour meets such needs through commodity production.

Totalizing structures, like Marx's economic 'world market' in *Capital*, depend on how consistently they theorize internal relations or resolve contradictions in synthesis, necessary for subject-object alignment or 'identity' and 'truth'. Marx calls *The Phenomenology* the: 'true birthplace and secret of the Hegelian philosophy'.<sup>377</sup> This secret is Hegel's dialectical method of reasoning. As Michael Inwood states, Hegel's *Begriff* is a Concept or ability to conceive.<sup>378</sup> A 'concept' meets with elements that contradict its assumptions; logic, an innate aspect of consciousness, opposes thesis to its antithesis as a contradiction. This enables concepts to expunge faulty aspects and achieve a more accurate knowledge of the external world, transcending disjunction in synthesis and achieving identity with an object: this dialectical process revises and sublates the initial concept to more accurately capture 'truth'. Later, references to 'transcendence' bear this meaning. Debord stages such antitheses between his spectator and spectacle. Hegel's phenomenology is experiential, but also epistemological; for dialectical contradictions, resolved through sublating the prior insufficient concept, is a dialectical process that uncovers the teleological 'whole', transcending the

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<sup>375</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, p.175.

<sup>376</sup> *The German Ideology*, p. 48. Marx writes: 'the satisfaction of the first need (the action of satisfying, and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired) leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act.'

<sup>377</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Karl Marx, Early Writings* (Penguin Classics: London, 1992), p.383.

<sup>378</sup> Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.58

particular, thereby relating a subject to an objective world. Baugh summarizes Hegel's method:

Hegelianism promised [...] a fluid and expanded reason that could grasp the concrete logic of becoming, and overcome the accepted distinctions between reason and sense, the contingent and the necessary, the particular and the universal. [...] Hegelian dialectics would allow one to grasp objects as totalities in *the process of becoming* [my emphasis]<sup>379</sup>

Marx claims to remove Hegel's idealist or 'mystical shell'<sup>380</sup> from dialectical processes by relating them to labour and history, giving conceptual synthesis a material expression in 'transcendence' as a proletarian revolution, expanded on shortly.

Debord's use of Hegel's 'dialectic of becoming'<sup>381</sup> operates in Marx's economically structured historical 'totality'. Hegel's desiring agent, turned Debord's 'spectator', *becomes conscious* of a 'spectacle' that articulates desires in the form labour takes in commodity consumption, or the prescriptive, activities of a totalitarian state, that aim at political or commercial ends (i.e. profit). As Raoul Vaneigem writes in *Basic Banalities*, the economy depends on class *division* and exploited labour, 'the dialectic of particular and general' is governed by the universality of commodification.<sup>382</sup> Debord writes that while 'social practice', or class struggle, 'is the real totality to which the spectacle is subordinate'<sup>383</sup>, and that its unequal economic organization could be socially rectified, the spectacle offers an alternative, 'false' vision of reuniting alienated consumers with their appropriated labour *without altering social relationships*, simply by compliance or consumption, which in fact entrenches class division.

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<sup>379</sup> Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, p.11

<sup>380</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Postface to the Second German Edition (1873), p.103.

<sup>381</sup> Debord, p.153, Thesis 218.

<sup>382</sup> Raoul Vaneigem in *Basic Banalities* (1962), in *The Situationist International Anthology*, (2006), p.122. He elaborates a 'totality' constituted by labour, in relation to slavery and the 'desires of the masters' he must identify with - a mythical reality overthrown by praxis.

<sup>383</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 7.

This is relevant to approaches to alienation in the novel. For example, Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel* (1914) and later argument for Realism depends on a formal teleology:

totality as the formative prime reality of every individual phenomena implies [...] forms are not a constraint but only the *becoming conscious* [...] of that which had to be given form.<sup>384</sup>  
[my italics]

If Modernist 'fragmentation' expresses a subjectively alienated state, Realist conventions are said to capture a socio-historical 'totality', making alienation a *social* form. Similarly, 'anti-spectacular' novels are argued to represent alienation as socially derived; a character (subject) and world (object) are related through desire, but propaganda or media 'images' are shown to frustrate desire by working against a character's class interests. Don DeLillo, for example, uses Lee Harvey Oswald to construct a working-class perspective; Oswald *desires* to escape poverty, describing himself as a 'zero in the system'.<sup>385</sup> However, C.I.A. operatives, educated at Yale, recruit him in a plan to regain their lost investments in Castro's Cuba. As Oswald is subsumed in the 'image' of the Kennedy assassination, his desire for financial security (part of the ideology of the American Dream which President Kennedy embodies<sup>387</sup>) is not fulfilled but, in a dialectical reversal, sacrificed to dominant class interests. DeLillo's fictional world presents Kennedy's 'image' in terms of a class situation that Oswald cannot escape; his desire is therefore not realized, symbolized by his death.

### **Desire and Recognition**

Butler calls the Hegelian 'subject of desire'<sup>388</sup>, a 'highly influential trope'<sup>389</sup> in post war Paris, popularized by the teaching of Hyppolite and Kojève. Debord's use of desire, in relation to consciousness and class, might be seen in this context. Robert B. Pippin explains that Hegel makes desire and self-consciousness interdependent. Hegelian desire is a spur to labour and enables a subject to

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<sup>384</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock, p.32-4.

<sup>385</sup> *Libra*, p.151.

<sup>387</sup> Debord, p.40. Thesis 61. Theodore Sorenson, Kennedy's speech writer, is said to have created his 'persona'.

<sup>388</sup> Butler, p. xx.

<sup>389</sup> Butler, p. xxi.

recognize itself in objects that result from labour.<sup>390</sup> Hegel's subject must satisfy their desires, making labour a 'content' extruded to acquire or 'utilize for its own purposes'<sup>391</sup> objects that satisfy (negate) desire, thereby making over the 'form' of the objective world to its own ends. Herein lies the dialectical operation of Hegel's phenomenology; desire is thereby 'negated' in being fulfilled, resulting in an overcoming of the original need, understood to alter the existent world along with a subject's self-conception.

Marx, in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, refers to Hegel's dialectical process as the discovery of 'man's act of creation – the story of man's origin'.<sup>392</sup> In *Capital* he suggests desire implies 'human wants of some sort'<sup>393</sup> and that commodities are produced to fulfil these needs. Action, as labour, establishes man objectively as a historical species (rather than defining man by an essential human nature). Marx commends Hegel for understanding this externalization in labour as a 'negation' from which a subject is initially estranged: 'Hegel grasps man's self-estrangement'.<sup>394</sup> However, this externalization or 'otherness' confers *self-consciousness* through the desire an object meets. Hegel argues desire and recognition thus enable 'identity': 'self-consciousness is *Desire*'.<sup>395</sup> I return to this point throughout the thesis. For 'estrangement' undergoes a further negation when *recognized* as belonging to the subject and transcending 'estrangement' in a retraction Hegel terms; 'essentially the return from otherness'.<sup>396</sup> Or, as Jean Hyppolite puts it: 'the unity of the I with itself'.<sup>397</sup> Chris Arthur summarizes Marx's praise for Hegel's dialectical method; '[a]s far as the 'producing principle' is concerned, Marx is impressed by the dialectic of spirit's

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<sup>390</sup> "On Hegel's Claim That Self-Consciousness Is 'Desire Itself' (Begierde überhaupt)." *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, by Robert B. Pippin (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 6–53 (p.15-19). 'Hegel [...] treats self-consciousness as a practical *achievement* [...] that is 'inherently social.'

<sup>391</sup> *Phenomenology*, p.112

<sup>392</sup> *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, p.173.

<sup>393</sup> *Capital*, p.125

<sup>394</sup> *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p.187.

<sup>395</sup> *Phenomenology*, p.105

<sup>396</sup> *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.13.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

actualization of itself through positing itself in the form of objectivity as the negative of itself and then negating this negation.’<sup>398</sup>

However, as stated, Marx finds Hegel’s idealism mistakenly excises self-consciousness from consciousness, an impossible disembodiment:

It is [...] the fact that he objectifies himself in distinction from and in opposition to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement and the thing to be superseded <sup>399</sup>

Marx’s critique therefore makes Hegelian *Geist* and ‘estrangement’ the territory of labour and class division and the economically alienated relationship of subjectivity and objectivity theorized in *Capital* (1867), treated polemically in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). *Capital* translates Hegelian ‘desire’ into human needs and labour is the mediation of nature that realizes human purpose, thus transforming the objective world. Andrew Chitty suggests that Marx understands ‘needs’ as ‘essential human motivations’, our primary purpose being to meet them: ‘human needs are constitutive of our essence as human beings.’<sup>400</sup> Marx’s metaphors of a spider building a web, or bees building a hive suggest labour is foremost natural and collaborative; however, it is distinguished from that of animals in being *consciously* managed by man as Marx’s ‘species’, allowing man to benefit from ‘his own sovereign power’ and lending labour a social, universal significance.<sup>401</sup> Arthur writes: ‘[t]hrough the process of production the worker realizes his potential and becomes objective to himself in his product’.<sup>402</sup> As a form of social ‘metabolism’, Marx’s biological metaphor suggests labour should serve the human species as a unitary body.<sup>403</sup> Thus, labour might be expected to objectively reflect ‘species-being’ and achieve ‘*identity*’ within such a ‘totality’. Marx elaborates this classless self-management, through a transition to

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<sup>398</sup> *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel*, by C.J. Arthur (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.61.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

<sup>400</sup> Andrew Chitty, ‘The Early Marx on Need’, *Radical Philosophy* 64, Summer (1993), 23-31, pp. 24-26. Marx identifies needs essential to survival and other social needs, such as culture, which develop once basic needs are met.

<sup>401</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1, p. 283-4.

<sup>402</sup> *Dialectics of Labour*, p.5.

<sup>403</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1, p. 283.

Communism, as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'<sup>404</sup> that Lukács uses to justify Leninism - which Debord, in turn, rejects. This point is discussed below (see 1.4 *The State and Revolution: Hegel, Marx and 'The End of History'*). Debord similarly connects desire to consciousness, but in Marx's alienated state that labour takes in an 'immense accumulation of spectacles'<sup>405</sup>; for whatever is socially produced or manufactured lies in a state of contradiction to the workers, alienated in the hands of producers, and any recognition of the spectacle's forms becomes 'false consciousness' rather than 'identity'.

### **Labour and Alienation**

To better understand Debord's position it is necessary to set out Marx's theory of alienation. Marx's *opposed* classes or the bourgeois ownership of capitalist production makes species 'identity' impossible. The relationship of labour to human need becomes, Chitty writes: 'contradictory in that its objective character as species-activity is at odds with the subjective purpose of the person doing it.'<sup>406</sup> Labour, as a social activity governed by exchange, becomes instrumental; producers are dominated by the commodity, rather than needs being collectively defined. As Chitty states: 'the object which I produce no longer has any inherent connection with my needs'.<sup>407</sup> This externality of need is consolidated by the prolific nature of production that can be seen to develop in Debord's 'pseudo-needs'<sup>408</sup>, or one's class 'position in the social division of labour'.<sup>409</sup>

Marx argues that bourgeois capitalism entirely converts the social basis of labour to an economic basis. Labour, a universal property of the species, instead operates within an economic framework to become 'labour as a commodity' and this is the root of dehumanization; in place of the community, the commodity

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<sup>404</sup> Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1948-50*, Part 3. Marx writes, after Blanqui, of: 'the class dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary intermediate point on the path towards the abolition of class differences in general' <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ch03.htm> [accessed 13/05/2020]

<sup>405</sup> Debord, p.1. Thesis 1. He intentionally recalls or *détourns* the first chapter of Marx's *Capital* (Volume I).

<sup>406</sup> Chitty, p.27.

<sup>407</sup> Chitty, p. 28.

<sup>408</sup> Debord, p.33, Thesis 51.

<sup>409</sup> Chitty, p.28.

becomes what Lukács terms society's defining 'universal category'.<sup>411</sup> This is Marx's first instance of alienation and gives Hegelian 'estrangement' a wholly economic structure. Capitalism completely overtakes society making a worker an 'object' to themselves, Arthur's 'self-estrangement'.<sup>412</sup> The reversal of a social basis of labour to an economic basis replaces a social relation with an economic one, to conversely make the economic relation of goods or commodities appear social: 'those relations appear as relations between material objects'.<sup>413</sup> Society's output or 'abstract human labour'<sup>414</sup> is therefore contained in the totality of assembled commodities, enabling them to relate to one another as equivalents, seemingly autonomously, but on a basis of labour as 'exchange value'.<sup>415</sup> All 'use value' now must express itself economically through 'exchange value' - including a worker as wage labourer. Marx calls this 'fetishized'<sup>416</sup>, for a commodity is *entirely* removed from the class divisions in which it is produced:

the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's  
own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour  
themselves [...] a social relation between objects [...] which exists apart from and outside the producers.<sup>417</sup>

Capitalism gives labour a *social* form through *equivalence*, yet in contradiction to this unified appearance society is objectively divided into a manufacturing and bourgeois class. Lukács and Marx describe factory conditions in terms of 'inhumanity'.<sup>418</sup> Labour is a 'negation' that transforms the world, but the 'recognition' granted reflects the ambitions of the owners of industrial machines. Marx thereby relocates the contradiction Hegel situates in 'estrangement' and consciousness to this concrete, economic alienation.

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<sup>411</sup> Debord, p. 24.

<sup>412</sup> *Dialectics of Labour*, Arthur, p.9.

<sup>413</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1., p. 169.

<sup>414</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1., p.128. Marx defines this abstraction as: 'human labour in the abstract'.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150. 'The body of the commodity, which serves as the equivalent, always figures as the embodiment of abstract human labour, and is always the product of some specific useful and concrete labour. This concrete labour therefore becomes the expression of abstract human labour.'

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165.

<sup>418</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 20.

Marx's second instance of alienation is the management of labour, beyond a worker's control, by a bourgeois class that makes commodities an 'estrangement of the *thing*'.<sup>419</sup> Marx applies this more widely. He argues workers' wages allow for 'subsistence'<sup>420</sup>, far less than the 'surplus value'<sup>421</sup> their labour produces, realized as capital in the commodities sold, but not paid in wages. As Arthur summarizes, for the working class; '[o]bjectification is then at the same time *alienation*'<sup>422</sup> and this proves a profound alienation from further products of labour; i.e. private property, wealth, *capital*. Thus, Lukács describes working class labour as 'the substantive core of bourgeois society'<sup>423</sup>, but this class are entirely alienated from the bourgeois world they produce. If working class labour as 'content' is divorced from its 'social' form, Debord extends this 'form' to the spectacle.

A final aspect of Marx's alienation results from working class labour paradoxically securing the growth of the economy that alienates it, to exponentially increase its own alienation:

the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that [...] exploits him: and the capitalist just as constantly produces labour-power [...] in the physical body of the worker [...] separated from it's own means of objectification and realization; in short, the capitalist produces the worker as a wage-labourer<sup>424</sup>

Chapter Two demonstrates that Debord relates desire to Marx's 'total abstract labour'<sup>425</sup> through its commodified form in the 'spectacle' – i.e. as advertised brands and goods, leisure activities etc. 'Images' *appear* as the actual equivalent of society ('the general equivalent of everything society can be or do'<sup>426</sup>) but abstract from social division and class opposition ('relationships between people

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<sup>419</sup> *Dialectics of Labour*, p.9.

<sup>420</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1., p. 717

<sup>421</sup> *Capital*, Vol.1., p.1016.

<sup>422</sup> *Dialectics of Labour*, p.19.

<sup>423</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.178.

<sup>424</sup> *Capital* Vol. 1, p.716.

<sup>425</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p.150. 'The body of the commodity, which serves as the equivalent, always figures as the embodiment of abstract human labour, and is always the product of some specific useful and concrete labour. This concrete labour therefore becomes the expression of abstract human labour.' Commodities obtain exchange value, or value is realized in profit as capital, because both are expressions of abstract labour.

<sup>426</sup> Debord, p.33. Thesis 49.



and between classes'<sup>427</sup>). Instead of Marx's survival being superseded by more sophisticated desires, realizing the potential of an evolving human species, in place of abundance this inequality only creates 'an abundance of commodity relation' (i.e. class division) and mass consumption becomes but an 'augmented survival'.<sup>428</sup> To understand Marx's thesis of the reproduction of this social condition, in terms of Debord's political stasis, requires understanding 'false consciousness' as set out in *History and Class Consciousness*.

### **Reification: Lukácsian 'False-Consciousness'**

Lukács, the founder of 'Western Marxism'<sup>429</sup>, takes Hegel's phenomenology in a Marxist direction and theorizes self-consciousness in relation to 'fetishization'<sup>430</sup> before Kojève or Debord. However, he does so in oppositional terms, through his paradigm of the 'Subject-Object of History'.<sup>431</sup> Jappe perceives this theoretical consistency in the: 'development of the critique of alienation in Marx, Lukács and Debord'.<sup>432</sup>

Lukács relates self-consciousness to Marx's economic, historical 'totality'<sup>433</sup>, Debord's framework for the 'spectacle'. Marx contends that social change depends on class conflict derived from outmoded social relations, in respect to new modes of production, which makes class relations dynamic and contested; Lukács similarly understands 'the abolition of feudal estates'<sup>434</sup> and growth of industrialization, or bourgeois capitalism as a *historical* turning point. Marx's social 'superstructures'<sup>435</sup>, set out in *The Contribution to The Critique of Political*

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<sup>427</sup> Debord, p.19, Thesis 24.

<sup>428</sup> Debord, p.28. Thesis 40. He writes: 'an abundance of commodities, which is to say an abundance of commodity relations, can be no more than augmented survival'.

<sup>429</sup> W. John Morgan, "Georg Lukács: Cultural Policy, Stalinism and the Communist International", *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 12 - Special issue: Intellectuals and Cultural Policy (Part 2), (2006), pp. 257-271. Morgan identifies the three central figures of Western Marxism as Lukács (*History and Class Consciousness*) Karl Korsch (*Marxism and Philosophy*) and Antonio Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks*).

<sup>430</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.86.

<sup>431</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.197.

<sup>432</sup> Jappe, p.5.

<sup>433</sup> Arthur, p.17. Lukács develops Marx's historical materialist approach; 'Marx's object of study is a totality, characterised by a set of internal relations.'

<sup>434</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.59.

<sup>435</sup> Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, in *Karl Marx, Early Writings* Marx, p.425-6. 'men inevitably enter into definite relations [...] The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a

*Economy* (1859) become Lukács' social institutions; 'the objective laws of the process of production [...] that [...] become the forms in which human relations are directly manifested'.<sup>436</sup> Lukács writes:

relations are not those between one individual and another,  
but between worker and capitalist, tenant and landlord, etc.

Eliminate these relations and you abolish the whole of society <sup>437</sup>

Lukács defines 'reification' thus: once capitalism converts the social relation of labour to an economic basis, as Marx observes, *no other social category* - i.e. religious, ethical or social - defines a subject beyond the economy i.e. the commodity - the 'wage labour' that a bourgeois economy requires. The 'species' is literally *dehumanized* in becoming a commodity and *all bourgeois social structures* (i.e. law, trade, marriage etc.) arise to support and justify the bourgeois economy, influencing society as dominant thought at the level of consciousness: 'it stamps its imprint on the whole consciousness of man'.<sup>438</sup> Reification operates on consciousness from this concrete basis.

The historical objectivity of the development of the bourgeois economy lends the self-interest of the 'ruling class'<sup>439</sup> a falsely natural character. Reification gives a 'ghostly objectivity'<sup>440</sup> to social life as 'an illusion'<sup>441</sup>, a 'second nature'<sup>442</sup>, 'veiling'<sup>443</sup> the class division it *abstracts* from:

the situation in which the bourgeoisie finds itself determines the function of its class consciousness in its struggle to achieve control of society [...] it really does attempt to organise the whole of society in its own interests [...] it was forced [...] to develop a

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legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.'

<sup>436</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 177.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p.100.

<sup>439</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.64. Arthur writes: 'the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time the ruling *intellectual* force'; the working class are 'subject' to those dominant ideas.

<sup>440</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.100.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., p.59.

coherent theory of economics, politics and society(which in itself presupposes and amounts to a 'Weltanschauung')<sup>444</sup>

Lukács interprets reification as the 'free market' or 'classical economics'<sup>445</sup> of Smith and Ricardo (that appear, Engels writes, as "natural laws" of economics'<sup>446</sup>); laws that protect private property while claiming to be 'an "impartial" system of justice'<sup>447</sup>; or bourgeois philosophy, like Hegel's, that claims 'formal rationalism'<sup>448</sup> in its power to unify 'content' and 'form', but does so only by speculation or 'abstract rationalism'.<sup>449</sup> For if Hegel aims to overcome the Kantian *noumenon*, Lukács finds Hegel's resolution of Kant's problem a mistake of bourgeois philosophy more generally (i.e. Sartre), discussed in Chapter Four.

Thus, Lukács extends Marx's *dialectical contradiction* to the Hegelian territory of self-consciousness, similarly at the heart of Debord's paradigm of 'spectator' and 'spectacle'; for a worker is a 'dehumanised[sic]'<sup>450</sup> *object* in the production line and thus *self-consciously* 'a mechanical part in a mechanical system'.<sup>451</sup> For Hegel originally argues that self-consciousness is forced to arise 'behind the back of consciousness'<sup>452</sup> and deny its imputed otherness in another subject, in a dialectical twist (negation), to affirm it knows it is uniquely itself. Houlgate describes this as: 'insisting that its own identity resides wholly within itself'.<sup>453</sup> Marx, however, argues that alienated *labour* works objectively through society to arise 'behind the backs of the producers'<sup>454</sup>, through 'exchange value', in an act of *negation* turned on a worker, to impose the commodity form instead of directly shaping an objective world. As Chitty observes, Marx's 'exchange value': 'makes

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p.138.

<sup>449</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* p.137.

<sup>450</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.92. He writes: 'the worker [...] must present himself as the 'owner' of his labour-power, as if it were a commodity [...] this transformation of a human function into a commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanised and dehumanising function of the commodity relation.'

<sup>451</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.89.

<sup>452</sup> *Phenomenology*, p. 56.

<sup>453</sup> Houlgate, p.18.

<sup>454</sup> *Capital*, vol. 1, p.167. In *History and Class Consciousness*, p.87. Lukács paraphrases Marx: "What is characteristic of the capitalist age,' says Marx, 'is that in the eyes of the labourer himself, labour-power assumes the form of a commodity belonging to him [...] at this moment [...] the commodity form of the products of labour becomes general'.

instruments of the exchangers as well as of their products'.<sup>455</sup> However, Lukács advances Marx's 'negation' as a *productive* negation. For a worker experiences themselves in a 'dehumanized' form of 'use-value', yet recognizes their inner humanity 'behind the back of consciousness', in a negation of their 'false', economic, bourgeois form. The bourgeois 'form' becomes an antithesis, or biting point of conflict, that instead enables self-consciousness to be defined in oppositional terms. This *immanent contradiction* emerges in a subject, but as an expression of greater, historical class contradictions. Again, in terms of literary representations of alienation, Lukács borrows Marx's Aristotelian term '*zoon politikon*'<sup>456</sup> to argue that Realist characters are socially formed and embody greater conflicts, in terms of class relations and history. I argue that 'anti-spectacular' novels take a similar approach. For Debord similarly locates immanent, conceptual antitheses between 'true' and 'false' concepts of desire in his radicalized 'spectator'; spectacular concepts of self-identity are negated once desires are defined in contradistinction to them, as authentic

Lukács argues such antithesis or *dissonance* reflects material contradictions, forcing a worker's *recognition* that such mediation is a general condition, i.e. that labour is 'the living core'<sup>457</sup> of an external world fashioned through bourgeois dominance. Reification is overcome through such negation and new self-conceptualization of the working-class position, wherein workers are the originators of the ostensible world in a: '*real connection with the totality*'<sup>458</sup> (my italics). Such self-knowledge, extended to similar workers, is a 'self-consciousness' that collectively constitutes Lukács' '*Subject of History*', capable of self-interested, therefore *conscious* political action, discussed later in relation to Leninism and the Soviet Communist Party.

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<sup>455</sup> Chitty, p.28.

<sup>456</sup> *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* trans. by S.W. Ryazanskaya, ed. by Maurice Dobbs (London: Lawrence & Wishart, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981) Marx's 'political citizens', a term borrowed from Aristotle, is used by Lukács to discuss characterization in the Realist novel.

<sup>457</sup> ., p.169.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

### **1.3. Kojève: Mastery and Slavery**

Although Kojève was never an orthodox Marxist, Heckman suggests Kojève 'points in the direction of Marx'<sup>459</sup>, as does Pippin.<sup>460</sup> Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's 'totality' relies on class conflict, labour and consciousness. Chris Arthur notes that Kojève first connects Marx's early critique of Hegelian alienation with his later development of labour as the medium of alienation in *Capital*.<sup>461</sup> Kojève's theme of conflict, like Lukács' classes 'locked in a life-and-death struggle'<sup>462</sup>, draws out material contradiction through Hegel's Lord and Bondsman confrontation - a fight to the death.<sup>463</sup> In this confrontation, a subject is a being *for itself* (has an authentic desire to survive) and *in itself* (conscious it possesses the life it is prepared to stake). Therefore, a subject is proved uniquely *only* itself (Being-for-self) and must extend what Houlgate calls this 'own proper otherness'<sup>464</sup> to its opponent and thus the entire 'species' as an objective, universal category. Subjectivism is transcended by *recognition* through Hegel's universal category of *Self-consciousness*;

A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it.<sup>465</sup>

The desiring subject, or desire, takes on universal significance. For, as Inwood writes, the 'I' must be 'at once both universal and particular'<sup>466</sup> to substantiate

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<sup>459</sup> Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, p. xxiv.

<sup>460</sup> Pippin, p.11. 'Our species status as [...] equal free subjects must be collectively achieved, and until the final bloody revolution ushers in a classless society, there are only Masters and Slaves.'

<sup>461</sup> Chris Arthur, 'Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic and a Myth of Marxology', *New Left Review*, no. 142, (November-December, 1983), pp. 67–75 (p.68). Arthur observes: 'In the 14 January 1939 issue of *Mesures* Kojève published a free translation, with interpolated glosses, of the section of the *Phenomenology* entitled 'Autonomy and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Mastery and Servitude' [...] Kojève includes as an epigraph the following words of Marx: [...] "Hegel [...] grasps labour as the essence, as the self-confirming essence of man". No reference is given, but in fact this is quoted from Marx's *1844 Paris Manuscripts*, which remained unpublished until the nineteen-thirties. Kojève is the first person, therefore, to make a direct connection between this famous judgement of Marx's on Hegel and the Master–Servant dialectic in the *Phenomenology*.'

<sup>462</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.53.

<sup>463</sup> See *Phenomenology*, Part B. Self-consciousness, IV, The Truth of Self-Certainty, section A; Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage, pp.104-119.

<sup>464</sup> Houlgate, p.19.

<sup>465</sup> Hegel, p.110.

<sup>466</sup> Michael Inwood, A Hegel Dictionary, *The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 62-3.

Hegel's 'totalizing' structure. The epistemological implication of this struggle, important for the success of Hegel's phenomenological method, is that subjective consciousness becomes certain of its own being as a referent (i.e. *self-consciousness*). The 'concept' thus captures identity or 'truth' but requires desire or self-interest, initially expressed through the Lord and Bondsman confrontation, but ultimately in Hegel's ethical community.<sup>467</sup>

Kojève's Master willingly forfeits life, his object-like status ('Being-in-itself'), to achieve dominance ('Being-for-itself') that carries the risk of death (an 'absolute [...] negativity'<sup>468</sup>). This implies possibilities of self-consciousness: 'only by the risk of life does it come to light that Self-Consciousness is nothing but pure Being-for-itself'.<sup>469</sup> A Slave fails to make this sacrifice and 'binds'<sup>470</sup> himself to his given object like state of 'Being-in-itself'. (Shortly, Sartre is shown to associate this denial of volition with 'bad faith', a lack of authentic self-instantiation). A Slave's labour is usurped to meet a Master's desires, who enjoys a delusory independence regarding his needs, met by a Slave's labour (wrongly believed to be met by nature or society).<sup>471</sup> Kojève's Master fails to 'recognize' the *dialectical relationship of classes* by which he is related to the 'Other', i.e. the Slave. This recalls Lukács' bourgeois class: 'the capitalist [...] is nothing but a puppet'.<sup>472</sup> For Lukács writes that 'false consciousness': '*objectively* [...] by-passes the essence of the evolution of society and fails to pinpoint it and express it'.<sup>473</sup> He means that 'false-consciousness' denies labour its working class source, equally expressed through Kojève's Master-Slave paradigm or Debord's 'spectacle'.

In anticipation of Chapter Two, Debord has Hegel's Lord, or Kojève's Master, in mind when the 'image' of Stalin as 'lord and master' effects the same negating subject-object reversals of *Capital*. Lukács' 'weltanschauung'<sup>474</sup>, now Debord's

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<sup>467</sup> Inwood, p.62-63 These stages of self-consciousness 'advance to universal self-consciousness, the mutual recognition of self-conscious individuals coexisting in an ethical community.'

<sup>468</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p.13.

<sup>469</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p.12.

<sup>470</sup> Kojève, *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>471</sup> Kojève, *Ibid* p.46-47. 'the Master no longer needs to make any effort to satisfy his (natural) desires. The *enslaving* side of this satisfaction has passed to the Slave: the Master, by dominating the working Slave, dominates Nature and lives in it as *Master*.'

<sup>472</sup> *History and Class Consciousness*, p.133.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

<sup>474</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 5.

concrete 'spectacle', more effectively persuades society to conceive of itself through its 'fetishistic appearance'.<sup>475</sup> In the East, this 'image' of society *in toto* takes Hegel's form of collective will in the state, rather than Marx's commodities, but in the totalitarian 'image' of a leader:

the person of Stalin - that lord and master of the world who takes himself in this way to be the absolute person [...] becomes really conscious of what he is viz., the universal might of actuality by that power of destruction which he exercises against the contrasted selfhood of his subjects <sup>476</sup>

If Hegel's 'Lord' threatens his servant with a power that stems from the servant's labour, so too Stalin, as an abstraction, is not only *not* a legitimate representation of collective will, but the latter's social power is measured by a destructive use against the population. Shortly, Marx is shown to critique such abstraction in the state, opposed to the interests it claims to represent. Orwell, but also Kundera, Sebald, De Lillo and Easton Ellis construct a similar 'image' that mediates class relationships through, respectively, the figures of Stalin, Hitler, Kennedy and Reagan.

Kojève's Slave experiences sharper contradictions of true and false concepts of 'selfhood' than his Master. Through labour ('mastery') the Slave rises above a Master; '[t]hrough his work [...] the Slave [...] no longer depends on the [...] natural conditions of existence; he *modifies* them starting from the concept he has of himself'.<sup>477</sup> His *concept* of self-consciousness, derived from labour, now formed in terms of self-reliance, lies in direct *contradiction* to his enslavement. The Slave experiences 'Being-for-self' as a call to revolutionary action that is 'social, human, historical'.<sup>478</sup> He subsequently seeks 'the active abolition of Slavery'.<sup>479</sup> Kojève acknowledges that Hegel relates this stage of consciousness to the French Revolution of 1789 and foregrounds its dialectical aspect to intentionally make the Slave the driver of history, much like Lukács, or Debord.

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<sup>475</sup> Debord, p.19. Thesis 24.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., p.75. Thesis 107.

<sup>477</sup> Kojève, p. 49.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

#### **1.4. The State and Revolution: Hegel, Marx and 'The End of History'**

The 'End of History' is an overused term, but never actually appears in Hegel's *The Phenomenology*. It references a point in that text whereby, through Hegel's philosophy, Reason 'recognizes' that history itself is a manifestation of *Geist*.<sup>480</sup> *Geist* takes form through subjective Reason, which manifests in actions to advance society. Hegel extends 'negation', 'recognition' and 'transcendence' to historical action, indicating that Reason advances with social periods. Primitive communities built on myth and superstition (i.e. Ancient Greece) become religious (Christian) and later rational societies (the Enlightenment) to culminate in Hegel's post French Revolution, Prussian state that promises to '*recognize*' the subject objectively, through democratic freedom (free will); i.e. enfranchisement and a reformed, constitutional monarchy that Napoleon's victory at Jena seemed to promise (1806). Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820)<sup>481</sup> bases such 'recognition' exclusively on private property. Arthur writes that 'personal and economic relations' become politically enshrined in the 'laws and institutions' of civil society, whose cornerstones are the family and ownership of property.<sup>482</sup> This 'recognition' of interests is assumed as universal and becomes the foundation of Hegelian ethics.:

if men comprehend that true freedom is that based on rational principles common to them all, their wills find satisfaction precisely in the universal order realized by the State<sup>483</sup>

Hegel claims this is a positive '*recognition*' (realization) of human freedom. However, Marx critiques Hegel's formulation.

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<sup>480</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1969), p.32. He writes: '*absolute* Knowledge, which reveals the *totality* of Being, can be realized only at the *end* of History'. Hegel alludes to this end point in the *Phenomenology* but uses the term in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1822-3), devoting a segment on to the 'end of world history'. See Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Vol 1, edited and translated by Robert F. Brown and Peter C Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), p.168.

<sup>481</sup> Only the introduction was published in Marx's lifetime in 1844.

<sup>482</sup> *The German Ideology*, edited and introduced by C.J. Arthur, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p.5. Chris Arthur writes in the introduction: "civil society" therefore only emerged when the time was ripe to insist on setting free private property and the process of accumulation from these multifarious political restrictions [...] transforming arbitrary personal rule into the *general* function of protecting the right of property.'

<sup>483</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.6



*Geist*, at almost the same historical point, arrives at Hegel's dialectical method itself - the apex of Reason - by which 'Absolute Knowing' is actualized. The Concept, adequate to capturing truth, has developed through historical time into 'Absolute Knowing', enabling Absolute Spirit or *Geist* to recognize itself. *Geist* knows itself as its object, as the substantive 'essence' of Being; i.e. through action, society, religion, culture, the state, history, philosophy. There is an 'end of history' when 'Absolute Knowing', as Hegel's method, recognizes 'Absolute Spirit'; any misperceptions (irrationality) are resolved and no further objective externalizations in history are necessary for *Geist* to achieve conscious apprehension of itself. As Descombes observes: 'Absolute knowledge is the science of the identity of subject and object (thought and being)'.<sup>484</sup> As 'recognition' must occur in consciousness, subjective 'estrangement' is transcended once a subject, through history, understands itself as part of Absolute Spirit and is reconciled with an objective world, that, as evidenced by the state, is a positive fulfilment of freedom. Here is Hegel's phenomenological solution to Kant's metaphysical problem. J.N. Findlay writes that, unlike Kant, Hegel claims: 'knowledge can really reach some standpoint where 'the Absolute' or 'the Thing in Itself' will be accessible to it'.<sup>485</sup> Findlay adds that *Geist* 'must be conceived as realizing itself in what is individual and empirical, and as responsible both for the being and intelligibility of the latter'.<sup>486</sup> Hegel thus asserts that the 'Concept' is the 'content'; for this achieves subject-object identity (i.e. of content and form) and the phenomenology that produces epistemological knowledge of it.<sup>487</sup>

Marx's early writings (*The German Ideology*, *The Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*) respond to Hegel at these four levels of subject, society, history and philosophy. Marx argues that if labour is a *concrete* mediation, history need no longer refer to *Geist* (a power beyond it) as its structuring principle, for labour *itself* constitutes the teleology of history. Historical change depends on productive forces (technology, tools and labour) and relations of production i.e. class

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<sup>484</sup> Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.27.

<sup>485</sup> *Phenomenology*, p. xiii.

<sup>486</sup> *Phenomenology*, p.viii.

<sup>487</sup> *Phenomenology*, p. 488. Hegel writes: 'the transforming of that *in-itself* into that which is *for itself*, of Substance into Subject [...] the circle that returns into itself.'

opposition; he writes that 'common conditions developed into class conditions'.<sup>488</sup> Marx's class struggle for the control of labour drives history. He argues that 'civil society' (i.e. laws) only reflect bourgeois interests: 'Civil society [...] develops with the bourgeoisie [...] evolving directly out of production and commerce'.<sup>489</sup> This class revolutionizes the state through a constitution:

the State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests, and in which the whole civil society of an epoch is epitomised [...] [its] institutions receive a political form<sup>490</sup>

Marx contradicts Hegel's<sup>493</sup> claim that the State overcomes particular interests to represent a 'genuine community'.<sup>494</sup> Marx critiques Hegel's positive abstraction practically, for Hegel annuls competition between workers, or conflict between classes, in abstraction alone, which Marx argues justifies dismantling the state. Marx gives examples of similar abstractions. *On the Jewish Question* (1844) demonstrates that although the German state might take a non-religious political position, Jews continued to remain marginalized. Similarly, the American constitution of 1787 abolished the property qualification in universal suffrage, but many remained property-less without that parity which enfranchisement suggests. Likewise, Marx's proletariat, due to property relations, are not politically represented by the state nor 'free'.

Marx critiques Hegel's resolution of Kant's problem, as his dialectical method, which cumulates in the state, only offers a 'speculative expression for the movement of history'<sup>495</sup> and resolves Hegel's error of making self-consciousness an external reality:

Mind, this thinking returning home to its own point of origin [...] as the anthropological, phenomenological, psychological, ethical, artistic and religious mind is not valid for itself, until

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<sup>488</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.82.

<sup>489</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.57.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.* p.80.

<sup>493</sup> *Phenomenology*, p. 486. Hegel asserts: 'the universal power of government is the will, the self of the nation'.

<sup>494</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.8.

<sup>495</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, p.173. Marx writes: 'he has found only the abstract, logical, speculative expression for the movement of history; which is not yet the real history of man'.

ultimately it [...] receives its conscious embodiment in the mode of being corresponding to it. For its real mode of being is abstraction.<sup>496</sup>

Debord's position echoes Marx; 'Hegel was merely the *philosophical* culmination of philosophy [...] [and] [...] transcended separation [...] in thought only.'<sup>497</sup> For Debord envisions his theoretical and cultural work as inspiring Marx's 'transcendence' in class struggle.

Marx's concrete 'transcendence' of capitalist 'negation' (i.e. 'labour-as-commodity', lack of ownership of the means of production, expropriated 'surplus-labour' etc.) is revolution. Revolution involves the concrete recovery of the means of production, Marx's 'negation of the negation'.<sup>498</sup> It involves a temporary transition to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to meet the lack of political representation of proletariat interests in the state. Jon Elster characterizes its political form by; 'majority rule, extra-legality, dismantling of the state apparatus and revocability of the representatives'.<sup>499</sup> If Marx does not theorize how a Communist society might operate, he offers basic premises.<sup>500</sup> Inherited economic conditions and various sectors of production *fractured* by their relation through bourgeois competition, are treated as *whole* and the means of production appropriated by the proletariat and consciously managed.<sup>501</sup> Marx writes that Communism: 'turns existing conditions into conditions of unity'.<sup>502</sup> Marx arrives at this 'end of history' by turning Hegel 'right side up', whereby society, free from class division, can materially re-produce itself in un-alienated form as its own 'object', a classless body:

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<sup>496</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, p.384.

<sup>497</sup> Debord, p. 49. Thesis 76.

<sup>498</sup> *Capital*, Vol 1., p. 929.

<sup>499</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx: Studies in Marxism and Social Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.448.

<sup>500</sup> J.J. Clarke, "'The End of History' A Reappraisal of Marx's Views on Alienation and Human Emancipation", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol 4, (September 1971), p.375. Marx, a materialist, would not prescribe future economic structures but only set out premises that might right inequalities: " 'Communism' as Marx says [...] is not [...] an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself".

<sup>501</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.86. Marx writes: 'Communism [...] for the first time consciously treats all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men [...] and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals.'

<sup>502</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.86.

[i]ts organisation is, therefore, essentially economic, the material production of the conditions of this unity<sup>503</sup>

Labour can meet universal needs and desires, which makes a *recognition* of 'species-being' finally possible. Such economic and social freedom allows conscious self-creation, Marx's development<sup>504</sup> of what Clarke calls 'talents and potentialities'.<sup>505</sup> Elster describes such objectification as the: 'unity of self-realization and community'.<sup>506</sup>

Marx inspires Debord's emphasis on working class revolution as the gateway to a re-creation of society on a collective, non-hierarchical basis. He interprets Marx's transcendence of German Idealism as a historically progressive step, a supersession of philosophy by revolutionary theory. Hegel gives Absolute Spirit aspects of self-consciousness, as a supra-personal *Subject*.<sup>507</sup> However, Marx dismisses the idea of 'society as the subject'<sup>508</sup> as idealist, thus 'fantastic'.<sup>509</sup> However, Lukács, after Lenin, makes Hegel's claim the basis for arguing that the will of the proletariat is embodied in the Soviet Communist Party as 'Subject'. Baugh warns of Hegelian Reason or its authority being posited in the state: 'reason that seeks to be all-inclusive falsifies reality [...] repressing its "other," much as the police state achieves a certain homogeneity by repressing dissidence'.<sup>510</sup> Engels attributes the loss of the radical aspect of Hegel's dialectical method to his bourgeois position: 'by conceiving of the end of history as [...] the absolute idea [...] the revolutionary side is smothered beneath [...] the conservative side.'<sup>511</sup> This conservatism is epitomized in Francis Fukuyama's

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<sup>503</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.86.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54. Marx famously writes: 'in communist society [...] society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.'

<sup>505</sup> J.J. Clarke, p.375.

<sup>506</sup> John Elster, p.446.

<sup>507</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p.490. Thesis 804.

<sup>508</sup> *The German Ideology*, p.55.

<sup>509</sup> *The German Ideology*, p. 55. Marx dismisses this position; 'this view can be expressed again in speculative-idealistic, i.e. fantastic, terms as "self-generation of the species" ("society as the subject") and thereby the consecutive series of interrelated individuals connected with each other can be conceived as a single individual [...].' It is not a sufficiently socially articulated and mediated step as presented by Hegel.

<sup>510</sup> Baugh, p.12.

<sup>511</sup> Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (London: Union Books, 2009), p.12.

famous essay, *The End of History?* (1989), which celebrates an enfranchisement Marx finds a disenfranchisement:

‘The End of History’ (a term quite familiar to Marxists) actualized the principles of the French Revolution. While there was considerable work to be done after 1806 [...] the basic principles of the liberal democratic state could not be improved upon.<sup>512</sup>

Moishe Postone argues, against Lukács, that within capitalism’s reversal of subject-object relations; ‘the subjective agency of the Proletariat can only ever be subsumed by the meta-subject of capital’.<sup>513</sup> This might seem to reflect the oppressive nature of Debord’s spectacle. For Jappe claims that Debord believes ‘the fetishistic system is the agent’.<sup>514</sup> However, Marx offers Debord a marriage of revolutionary theory and political action in ‘praxis’: ‘the realization of philosophy in [...] praxis’.<sup>515</sup> Debord opposes a ‘meta-subject of capital’, refuses Althusser’s structuralism and denies Lukács’ Subject as Party, contingent on the state; he instead approves of personal autonomy and a direct democracy similar to Marx’s in ‘workers councils’.<sup>516</sup>

Chapter One has thus far examined desire, self-consciousness, ‘totality’ and alienation through the legacy of Hegel and Marx, that prove key to Debord’s theory of the ‘spectacle’, analysed in the next chapter. ‘Spectator’ and ‘spectacle’ emerge within class contradictions, expressed as a contradiction of ‘content’ and ‘form’, or, specifically, any self-conception given a form promoted by ‘images’, making Debord’s alienation politically nuanced, unlike Sartre. For the ‘spectacle’ makes impossible any identity of ‘concept’ and ‘content’, or subject and object, upon which ‘recognition’ depends. Instead of Hegel’s perceived estrangement, a temporary disjunction of ‘concept’ and ‘object’, in a dialectical, fluid *process of becoming* conscious of belonging to a ‘totality’, Debord’s ‘spectator’ experiences an entrenched alienation: ‘[i]f something grows along with [...] the economy, it

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<sup>512</sup> Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History and the Last Man’, in *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick O’Meara, Howard & Carolee Mehlinger, Matthew Krain (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.163. He outlines the liberal changes to be implemented - ‘extending the franchise to workers, women, blacks’ - omitting how these inclusions are achieved.

<sup>513</sup> Black, p. xvi.

<sup>514</sup> Jappe, p.38.

<sup>515</sup> Debord, p.151. Thesis 216.

<sup>516</sup> Debord, p.87. Thesis 117.

can only be the alienation that has inhabited the core of the economic sphere from its inception'.<sup>517</sup> A 'spectator' endures a form of 'false consciousness', ultimately structured by the material contradictions of class division that are obscured by it, not Sartre's metaphysical alienation.

### **1.5. The Existential 'Unhappy Consciousness'; Wahl, Hyppolite and Sartre**

Finally, we can compare Debord's 'spectacle' with Sartre's different, existential theorization of the 'boredom' of French youth in de Gaulle's Americanized society. In 1940s Paris, Sartre's influence was so profound that Amelie Cohen writes his lecture, which became *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946), was 'the cultural event of 1945'.<sup>647</sup> Sartre extrapolated a concept of 'ennui' from interpretations of Hegel by Wahl and Hyppolite which take Hegel's legacy in a metaphysical direction that influences later Postmodernists. As Greil Marcus writes:

Everyone was bored [...] Thanks to Camus we had learnt that man is a stranger on earth [...] If he tries to participate, he gets lost, 'objectivizes' himself and disintegrates. And if he does not try [...] he is neglecting the responsibilities he has towards everything that exists.<sup>648</sup>

Wahl lectured at the Sorbonne from 1936. By removing Hegel's Christian teleology (Heckman's 'religious context'<sup>649</sup>) and replacing it with a metaphysical framework, Wahl makes Hegel's temporary estrangement of a subject from *Geist* analogous to a permanent state of separation. Eschewing 'totality', he theorizes a disunity of 'Being' or permanent separation, exercised through nature, language and time.

Hyppolite develops Wahl's metaphysical approach to time and language in his influential commentary, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of*

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<sup>517</sup> Debord, p.23. Thesis 32.

<sup>647</sup> Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life* (Heinemann: London, 1985), p. 252.

<sup>648</sup> Marcus, p.305.

<sup>649</sup> Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, p. xxx.

*Spirit*. From 1949-54, Hyppolite's position at the Sorbonne and course on Hegel and Marx, led to the publication of *Studies on Hegel and Marx* (1955).<sup>650</sup> From 1963, his lectures at the *College de France* were attended by Sartre, de Beauvoir, Derrida<sup>651</sup> (whose research was supervised by Wahl) and Debord (in February, 1967).<sup>652</sup> For Hyppolite's work profoundly influences Sartre (and his existential theory of the novel, as well as later Postmodern theories of language, time and history).

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), an early Sartre theorizes 'recognition' in an ontology that borrows from Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). Sartre's subject exists in a state of 'thrownness-into-the-world' that he calls *facticity*. Subject-object relations are constituted by 'being-in-the-world'<sup>654</sup> that Nik Farrell Fox describes as: 'situations that are not all our choosing'.<sup>655</sup> The *Phenomenology's* stage of the 'Unhappy Consciousness' hugely influences Sartre. In Hegel's socio-historical trajectory this period of scepticism, prior to Enlightenment rationalism, sees Reason enter a phase of solipsism within the relationship of subject and world. This has negative implications, as it negates the existence of the 'Other', undermining ethical appeals to consensus, community or law in Hegel's 'nullity of ethical principles'.<sup>656</sup> Here is the source of Sartre's focus on 'the Other' in terms of ethics or 'commitment' (discussed shortly in this chapter). Once Hegel's subject turns such 'negation' upon itself however, in Baugh's moment of 'radical doubt'<sup>657</sup>, it finds it remains in the face of such negation. Thus, Hegel's speculative thought proves ineffectual as a determining function of consciousness. For, if all objects are *similarly* negated by each other or different - but only in *thought* - speculative thought (as opposed to experience and phenomenological thought) is a useless determination that fails to define and identify, resulting in Hegel's endless or multiplying 'bad infinite'.<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure* p. xxvii.

<sup>651</sup> Butler, p.62; Baugh, p.21; Ibid.

<sup>652</sup> The *Bibliothèque Nationale* of France holds the Debord archive. His notebooks are dated and contain these lecture notes as well as those on Hyppolite's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History of Hegel* (1944) and *Studies on Marx and Hegel* (1955).

<sup>654</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.3.

<sup>655</sup> Farrell Fox, p.12.

<sup>656</sup> *The Phenomenology*, p.125.

<sup>657</sup> Baugh, p.3.

<sup>658</sup> See Hegel's *Phenomenology*, ed. by Terry Pinkard, (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 2018), p.141. Thesis 238.

Ironically, however, turning negation upon itself *does* indirectly prove to be a *determinate* negation, as Hegel's subject redefines itself as the 'Unhappy Consciousness'. Self-consciousness is split between its inherent self-identity, i.e. of 'content' and 'form' (a subject identified with God) *and* a 'self-consciousness' that arises, as above, in relation to multiple objects a subject is *not* (Hegel's 'otherness within itself'<sup>659</sup>) that, in a negative way, proves the self *is* the true object of consciousness. Hegel calls this contradiction 'dialectical unrest'<sup>660</sup> and it inspires Sartre's dual modes of self-consciousness as 'Being-in-itself' and 'Being-for-itself'.

*The Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel's Philosophy* (1929) by Wahl argues for these differences as metaphysical contradictions. God is expressed through the 'Other' - Man and Nature - while God is also that 'Concept' by which Man and Nature are part of the divine, a 'synthesis' that precludes their separation. Wahl is inspired by Victor Delbos' explanation of Hegel's synthesis *preceding* the thesis. A subject seems to replicate its identity by arriving at an understanding of itself as (all along) belonging to Absolute Spirit. Sartre develops this cycle of repetition, focusing on its aspect of temporality, or futurity that conditions the past. This also inspires Derrida's theory of the 'non-originary' in language (examined later in Chapter Four). Therefore, Sartre's circulatory movement, born of such temporal antitheses, proves opposite to Debord's Marxist, dialectical, historical-materialist contradictions that involve social change. Wahl's metaphysical situation is reflected in what Baugh terms a subject's 'structures of consciousness' that reflect a 'tragic self-division'.<sup>661</sup> Hegel refers to Christ's resurrection to suggest a 'transcendence' of human limitation, but Wahl insists this is speculative; 'an individual does not have a conceptual existence'.<sup>662</sup> Wahl concludes that Being simply *is* and cannot be reduced to thought. He denies Hegel's 'Concept' any concrete synthesis of subjective consciousness and its object - even in relation to action. Wahl coins the term 'negative dialectic'<sup>663</sup> -

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<sup>659</sup> *Phenomenology*, p.121.

<sup>660</sup> *Phenomenology*, p.124.

<sup>661</sup> Baugh, p.19.

<sup>662</sup> Baugh, p. 39. Baugh quotes from Wahl's *Études Kierkegaardianes* (1938).

<sup>663</sup> *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed by Dennis King Keenan, see 'Mediation, Negativity and Separation' from *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (1929), pp. 1-26 (p.3).



crucial to Sartre and later Postmodernists - to effectively isolate the first two stages of the Hegelian dialectic, making alienation a permanent 'fragmentation'.

Like Wahl, Sartre dispatches with *Geist* and this 'abandonment'<sup>664</sup> by God makes the Existential subject chief agent.<sup>665</sup> Sartre rejects Kant's *noumena*<sup>666</sup> and Descartes 'cogito'<sup>667</sup>, for, as Joseph Catalano observes, Sartre believes; 'consciousness is *directly* an awareness of something other than itself'<sup>668</sup>, i.e. the multiple objects of the world that it is *not*. Therefore, critics such as Farrell Fox, David E. Cooper or Mary Warnock argue that Sartre's philosophy 'constituted a radical break from traditional French Idealism and [...] the individual as [...] immaterial essence divorced from concrete determinations'.<sup>669</sup> For consciousness perceives what exists and *this* constitutes its content, leading Sartre to famously claim; 'existence precedes essence'.<sup>670</sup>

Sartre formulates Hegelian 'negation' through desire, to offer a forceful example of Wahl's 'negative dialectic'. However, closer interrogation suggests this is due to Sartre's misunderstanding of Hegel's philosophy. Sartre states that Hegel makes 'Being' a category applicable to everything existent, as an undetermined state; 'the very condition of all structures'.<sup>671</sup> Within Hegel's dialectical process of *becoming*, only a mediation of Being (as essence or 'content') determines its 'form'. A lack of determination in 'Being' is claimed by Hegel to be the negation or 'Nothingness' of form, yet to be expressed, or what Sartre calls an: 'absence

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<sup>664</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Methuen; London, 1985), p.32. Sartre writes: 'And when we speak of "abandonment" - a favourite word of Heidegger - we only mean to say that God does not exist.'

<sup>665</sup> John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (Pelican; Baltimore, 1973), p. 2. He writes of Existential phenomenology: 'philosophizing begins from man rather than from nature. It is a philosophy of the subject [...] one must further qualify [...] that for the existentialist the subject is the existent in the whole range of his existing.'

<sup>666</sup> Joseph Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness'* (University of Chicago Press: 1980), p. 24. Catalano draws this out through Sartre's discussion of objects: 'the phenomenon does not hide an unknowable thing-in-itself, the noumenon.'

<sup>667</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.44. Sartre's starting point for subjectivity is Descartes: 'outside of the Cartesian *cogito* all objects are no more than probable'. Elsewhere he claims; 'the Cartesian "I think" is the moment in which solitary man attains to himself'.

<sup>668</sup> Catalano, p.33

<sup>669</sup> Farrell Fox, p.15. Also, Macquarrie, p.10. He agrees that Existentialists; 'reject the Kantian dualism that supposed some hidden 'noumenon' of which the phenomenon is merely the appearance'

<sup>670</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.4.

<sup>671</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.15.

of determinations and of content'.<sup>672</sup> However, Sartre argues that this makes 'Being' and 'Nothingness' the same, not opposites.<sup>673</sup> If Hegel's 'Nothingness' is abstract, Sartre claims to remedy this by making it a concrete negation of Being and giving 'Nothingness' materiality, at the level of existence: 'non-being is empty of *being* [...] we must recall here against Hegel that being *is* and that nothingness *is not*'.<sup>674</sup> Or, as Catalano writes: 'the true relation between being and nothingness is not on the level of meaning but on the level of existence'.<sup>675</sup>

Sartre postulates Existential alienation in terms of this negation as 'Not-Being'. Primarily, consciousness takes form from a world of objects; as Sebastian Gardener argues it must 'accordingly register its taking itself to *not be* its object'.<sup>676</sup> Sartre's subject is 'nothing' in relation to itself: 'Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world.'<sup>677</sup> This recalls the 'Unhappy Consciousness', particularly as theorized in Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence* (1953). Hyppolite argues that Absolute Spirit must constitute itself through 'Being', but in a metaphysically divided form similar to Wahl's, i.e. through Nature and the 'Logos' (i.e. logic, reason). Hyppolite writes: 'Nature is one part of 'Being' or 'the Other of the Logos'.<sup>678</sup> He means that Nature is a material counterpart of the 'Concept' (Logic) which operates through Man (consciousness). For example, death is inherent to Nature and Man and makes the concept of 'negation' possible (i.e. 'not being'). Negation thereby delimits or makes a 'limit' the determining function of a 'Concept'. Wahl's 'pan-tragicism' *experienced* by Man, becomes Hyppolite's *conceptual* 'nothingness', a negation within the 'pan-logicism' of Reason which mirrors experience (as the titular *logic* and *existence* attests). For

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<sup>672</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid, p.13. Sartre does not interpret Hegel correctly. He quotes Hegel: "This pure Being" writes Hegel in *Logic* [...] is "pure abstraction and consequently absolute negation, which taken in its immediate moment is also non-being." Is Nothingness not in fact simple identity with itself, complete emptiness, absence of determinations and of content? Pure being and pure nothingness are then the same thing.' Hegel never intends to suggest a state of Non-Being exists as such, to match Sartre's Nothingness as a 'yet-to-be-fashioned' Hegelian form. Undifferentiated, universal Being is simply an early stage of Hegel's process of 'becoming conscious', part of a series of determinations that reaches a final 'Being' or form.

<sup>674</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 15. Also see Catalano, p.60. He writes: 'According to Sartre, Hegel's notion of nonbeing is simply the abstract negation of being [...] concrete nothing is always the emptiness of *something*.'

<sup>675</sup> Catalano, p.60.

<sup>676</sup> Sebastian Gardener, *Sartre's Being and Nothingness: A Reader's Guide*, (London: Continuum, 2009), p.70.

<sup>677</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.24.

<sup>678</sup> Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.181.

Baugh this involves: 'transposing the structures of the unhappy consciousness from man to being'.<sup>679</sup> Negation is no longer limited to Hegel's conceptual, abstract contradictions resolved in identity, rather negation inheres to Being; for example, Nature in relation to Man through death, or language's mutual exclusions of signifier and signified – i.e. language identifies an external world. This enables Sartre to subsequently suggest that whatever is absent - food (hunger), sleep (tiredness) - is recognized as such because consciousness entails 'Not-Being' in its own structure and can apply the term (i.e. I have *not* slept). Sartre's subject, in '*not being* the thing'<sup>680</sup>, identifies a 'lack'<sup>681</sup> which motivates desire. For desire instantiates alienation through the contradiction of 'Being-in-itself' (an object-like state) and 'Being-for-itself' (the action taken to negate a 'lack' and meet desire).

Butler writes that Sartre's subject takes self-interested actions to transcend any 'lack' in a process of '*becoming*' that fashions identity:

[t]he desire to be is, for Sartre, an effort to [...] overcome externality and difference, in order that the self might finally coincide with itself [...] to overcome ontological disjunction.<sup>682</sup>

However, actions and choices prove negations that separate, 'fragment' or alienate a subject. Wahl's inner division becomes Sartre's existential alienation. Thus, Catalano suggests action causes 'the collapse of the identity of being.'<sup>683</sup> In relation to the future, consciousness is aware of difference: 'I am not the self I will be'.<sup>684</sup> Catalano explains that such futurity is concrete: 'a real nothingness between myself and the future that I would be'.<sup>685</sup> Similarly, in relation to the past, a subject's actions negate a previous existence or identity. Gardener suggests existential consciousness is: 'reflexive and negative - consciousness "says" [...]

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<sup>679</sup> Baugh, p.29.

<sup>680</sup> Gardener, p. 71.

<sup>681</sup> Butler, p.124. Butler puts this well: 'desire reveals the lack in being that consciousness is, a lack that cannot be relinquished save through the death of consciousness.'

<sup>682</sup> Butler, p.124.

<sup>683</sup> Catalano, p.68.

<sup>684</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.39. Sartre writes: 'I am not the self I will be. First, I am not that self because time separates me from it. [...] I am the self I will be in the mode of not being it.'

<sup>685</sup> Catalano, p.70.

that it *is not* this thing.<sup>686</sup> Here, Wahl's doubling reappears in Sartre's futurity that negatively conditions a subject in 'Not-Being' yet, while the past is 'nothing' - an identity that has vanished. Sartre therefore writes; '[w]hat separates prior from subsequent is exactly *nothing*'.<sup>687</sup> 'Not-Being' is no longer conceptual but rather a temporal, metaphysical negation. Sartre's existential alienation operates as a 'negative dialectics', through contradiction, as the past and future place a subject in relation to a concrete 'Nothingness'. Desire, as a 'lack', always reappears, never to be satisfied. Hegel's integrated 'teleology' is replaced by Sartre's alienation, an *internal* state of perpetual contradiction between 'Being-for-itself' and 'Being-in-itself' which arises from 'Being-in-the-world' and temporality.

Chapter Four relates Sartre's existential vision to an aesthetics of the novel, but it is worth observing here that aspects of his philosophy are thematised, through their psychological effect, in existential fiction. A subject, radically free to ascribe value independently of God, no longer sees Reason as necessary to underpinning choices with meaning, resulting in states of terror, paralysis, guilt and 'anguish'.<sup>688</sup> An 'absurd'<sup>689</sup> world, with limitless freedom and choice, becomes a burdensome responsibility (as articulated by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942). The most problematic aspect of Sartre's philosophy is that identity is removed from Hegel's 'Other' as a self-same, universal category, with its ethical implications.<sup>691</sup> Sartre's defence is that 'desire', and projects which fulfil it, are a *universal* condition, not isolated decisions of *particular* subjects. Sartre's theory of 'commitment' addresses this, by arguing that choice and values have an imputed, universal status; 'I bear the responsibility of the choice which, in committing myself, also commits the whole of humanity'.<sup>692</sup> In chapter Four this is related to Existential *literature engagée*. However, clearly there is a tension between freedom and the impossibility of objective, universal meaning, if only subjective choices have meaning.

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<sup>686</sup> Gardener, p.71.

<sup>687</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.28.

<sup>688</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.29.

<sup>689</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin,1975)

<sup>691</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 45. Sartre claims to retain 'inter-subjectivity' and the process of Hegelian recognition through 'the Other' by the shared 'human universality of condition' i.e. 'facticity' of existence.

<sup>692</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 48.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

To conclude, Sartre's alienation is *inherent* to time, divorcing alienation from social institutions or social relations and historical causes and internalizing it in contradictory states of being. Sartre's subject might comply with socially imposed expectations, resulting in 'bad faith' or *ennui*, but the next chapter reconsiders this as an apolitical expression of alienation, once compared to Debord's denial of agency or 'boredom' that results from the influence of ideological 'images'. Marcus too suggests this is a political articulation of Sartre's pointlessness or passivity.<sup>693</sup> Debord situates ideological 'images' in historical time: thus 'images', once internalized as self-conceptions, contradict a subject's authentic identity, which plays out as class identity within Marx's broader historical contradictions to make *ennui* Debord's more political repression. Having set out these differing philosophical bases, Chapter Four relates Sartre's construction of subjectivity in the novel to Lukács' opposition to Modernism, precisely for his ahistorical treatment of time that makes alienation a '*condition humaine*'.<sup>694</sup> Baugh acknowledges that Sartre's existential alienation is never resolved: 'Sartre wanted [...] in Being and Nothingness [...] the dialectic without the totality [...] an endless series of negations without any final resolution'.<sup>695</sup> Sartre's anti-Hegelianism, Butler suggests, defined Debord's period: 'teleology seems significantly contentious in [...] the twentieth-century French appropriation of Hegel'.<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> Marcus, p.50.

<sup>694</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn. p. 27. Hegel's or Marx's social subject is reduced in Modernist form to 'solipsistic', existential characters.

<sup>695</sup> Baugh, p. 94.

<sup>696</sup> Butler, p. xii.

## **Chapter 2. What is the ‘Spectacle’?**

To salvage Marx’s thought it is necessary to continually make it more precise, to correct it and reformulate it in the light of a hundred years of reinforcement of alienation and of the possibilities of negating alienation <sup>697</sup>

*Captive Words*, Mustapha Kayati

### **2.1. Introduction**

Thus, *The Society of the Spectacle* claims Marx’s legacy but deepens the alienation set out in *Capital*. Hegel’s dialectical approach to constituting a subject through desire and Marx’s theory of alienation are crucial to Debord’s formulation of the ‘spectacle’, now analysed here. Debord’s historical materialist approach draws out the correspondence between the alienation inherent to the structural processes of nineteenth century capitalism, its unequal class relationships, and a post-war era that sees public and private space (previously only superficially affected) flooded by ‘images’ in the 1950s and 60s, which only continues with technological advances (i.e. mobile phones, computer games, social media etc.). Kellner writes that the internet is now central to social life as; ‘a means of promotion, reproduction and the circulation and selling of commodities’<sup>698</sup> referring, of course, to websites like LinkedIn, Tinder and Amazon. Debord’s ‘spectacle’ arises within circulation, accumulation and new technology, driving mass consumption: ‘the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image’.<sup>699</sup> In the East, where a centralized economy consolidates control in the state, it wields an ideologically coercive power as a: ‘materialization of ideology’.<sup>700</sup> Debord gives the ‘spectacle’ its ‘historical moment’<sup>701</sup>; for if Marx considered Charles Fourier’s ‘play’<sup>702</sup> the opposite pole of the alienation of the factory, this free time or ‘everyday’ life is now alienated.

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<sup>697</sup> Khayati, *Situationist International Anthology*, p.171.

<sup>698</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.1.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., p. 24. Thesis 34.

<sup>700</sup> Debord, p.150, Thesis 212.

<sup>701</sup> Debord, p.29. Thesis 42.

<sup>702</sup> Charles Fourier (1772-1837) a French utopian socialist, lauded by the I.S. as his ‘passions’ and ‘realm of play’ (I.S. no.11, ‘Aiming For Practical Truth’, Raoul Vaneigem, 1967) offer a counter-point or freedom from capitalist exploitation.

However, Debord insists the 'spectacle' is *not* simply; 'news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment'.<sup>704</sup> While Debord's 'spectacle' implies spectators enthralled to screens, the commercialization and ideological influence that extends to spheres of private life effects a deeper benefit to 'society's bosses'<sup>705</sup> who consolidate their influence over 'the modern state'.<sup>706</sup> The 'spectacle' is more than a 'mass dissemination of images'<sup>707</sup> and has 'depth [...] unity, and [...] real workings'.<sup>708</sup> A general fault perhaps is that critics, for example Jay and Jappe, do not grasp that 'spectacular' alienation operates in terms of this 'unity' as a class situation, or its 'workings' i.e. consequences such as alienation, and therefore do not understand how Debord's proletariat might be oppositional, given the ubiquitous or monolithic presence of screens. For example, Jay writes: 'play and the festival was incoherently related to its celebration of workers' councils'.<sup>710</sup> Jappe similarly misunderstands that Debord aims to use culture and theory to provoke or produce a conceptual discrepancy within a subject, whereby a personally elected alternative to spectacular ideology is a contradiction, negation or rejection of commercial, ideological forms. Authentic desires emerge *immanently* in contradistinction or opposition to the economy and state and might constitute a collective opposition, as part of Marx's dialectical class movement of history.<sup>711</sup> Jappe misunderstands this dialectical contradiction implies a subject need not be external to the 'value-form' of the image to oppose it, for he doubts it is: 'possible to position oneself *outside* the spectacle'.<sup>712</sup>

As stated in the introduction, the 'spectacle' is shown to alienate desire through (a) the *external* redevelopment of the urban landscape, through state and city planning, uses of technology for surveillance (C.C.T.V.), mass culture (i.e. cinema) and commercialized activities (i.e. music festivals) Fictional examples of

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<sup>704</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 6.

<sup>705</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.7.

<sup>706</sup> Debord, p.20, Thesis 24. 'The social cleavage that the spectacle expresses is inseparable from the modern State, which, as the product of the social division of labor [sic] and the organ of class rule, is the general form of all social division.'

<sup>707</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 5.

<sup>708</sup> Debord, *Comments* p.3.

<sup>710</sup> Jay, p.431.

<sup>711</sup> Jappe, See 'Part Three: Theory Past and Present', pp.125-159. For example: '[t]he precise attitude to the negative adopted by Debord [...] is not easy to pin down'.

<sup>712</sup> Jappe p.145.

Debord's 'spectacle', as it intervenes to prescribe 'leisure activities'<sup>713</sup> would be Orwell's 'Physical Jerks', or, in terms of the Western 'spectacle', Patrick Bateman's frenzied shopping trips to Bloomingdale's in *American Psycho*. Second, this allows visual images to give desire an ideological form that is (b) *internalized* as a mode of 'false consciousness'. These external and internal aspects of spectacular alienation are analysed separately below. Finally, Debord's process of 'becoming conscious' of identity, ideologically effaced by the 'spectacle', is claimed to work more widely, beyond the individual, at the level of class and history. Chapter Three follows, to consider the role played by theory and culture, particularly Situationist art practices, within such alienated circumstances. Finally, Debord's proletarian subject is compared to Sartre's Existential subject, alongside their different definitions of the term 'situation' and closes with an analysis of Debord's vision of the 'end of history'.

## **2.2. The 'Spectacle' of Urban Space: Disempowerment, Atomization and Isolation**

Debord quotes Hegel (below) to emphasize that an 'image' intercedes in a '*process of becoming*' conscious. As an *external* vehicle of alienation, the spectacle is an investment by the state or global business in material space, developed for profit and mediated by technology and screens; for example, advertising billboards or automated systems. If Hegel's subject externalizes or negates ('abolishes') Being through *action*, to reflect identity in a use of *time* (which ultimately constitutes history), self-objectification unfolds to instantiate freedom:

Man – that 'negative being who is solely to the extent that he abolishes being' – is one with time. Man's appropriation of his own nature is at the same time the apprehension of the unfolding universe<sup>728</sup>

Here, 'images' are not mentioned directly, but the spectacle operates within the context of time as history, in which Marx argues the human 'species' might direct its social self-production. Hegel assumes a free use of space, thus time, that

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<sup>713</sup> Debord, p. 111. Thesis 152

<sup>728</sup> Debord, p.92. Thesis 125.



Debord argues interrupts social life, now channelled by 'images' into pre-arranged uses by the economy or state. Thus action is isolated from any consciousness of being shaped within social relations - Marx's implied class conflict. In ways comparable to Taylorism at the factory, action and time become wholly determined by the economy, through reconfigured social space. Thus, Sadie Plant writes:

situationists pointed to the forms of conditioning imposed by shopping malls, night clubs, adverts [...] as evidence of the existence of a plethora of techniques by which experiences, desires, attitudes, and behaviour are presently manipulated [...] urban lives are shaped in the most subtle and neglected ways by these arrangements of space. The situations in which we live are created for us.<sup>729</sup>

Debord argues that time once had a practical immediacy, a 'natural basis'<sup>730</sup> defined by 'the sensory data of its passage'.<sup>731</sup> In other words, experiences were once 'directly lived'.<sup>732</sup> Not utopic, as Jappe claims, but space (thus time), beyond the workplace allowed for autonomous desires and direct forms of communication or social experience that disappear altogether.<sup>733</sup> For example, Marx founded the International Workingman's Association (1864) upon a basis of free association and time available to identify class interests. However, Debord writes:

[t]here is no place left where people can discuss the realities which concern them, because they can never lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse.<sup>734</sup>

Debord's images hijack a 'former unity of life'<sup>735</sup>, as personal activities become divided between the economy's sectors in a corresponding visual realm of projected appearance: '[a]ll that was once directly lived has become mere representation'.<sup>736</sup> All self-conceptualized, self-determined and self-directed uses

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<sup>729</sup> Plant, p.57.

<sup>730</sup> Debord, p.116, Thesis 163.

<sup>731</sup> Debord, p.116. Thesis 163.

<sup>732</sup> Debord, p.12 Thesis 1.

<sup>733</sup> Jappe p. 136. He writes of 'a ready-made subjectivity', that we have 'no good reason to believe [...] ever existed in the past'.

<sup>734</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.19.

<sup>735</sup> Debord, p.1, Thesis 2.

<sup>736</sup> Debord, p.12, Thesis 1.

of time, thus action, become difficult to envision or execute in social terms outside of it. Chapter One established that Hegelian time allowed self-consciousness to develop through mutual recognition and community, giving time a historical aspect and establishing space as historical place. The 'spectacle' destroys this temporal association of identity and space to society and history.

As Fordism is Debord's starting point for the 'spectacle', the car is a symbol of this destruction of communities and alienation of public space: 'the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance [...] has left its mark on the landscape in the dominance of freeways'.<sup>737</sup> The I.S. criticize De Gaulle's town planning policies, particularly Le Corbusier's urbanism, as an economic project that destroyed Paris's historic working class districts to make them serviceable to cars and redevelopment, for example, Les Halles and Gare d'Austerlitz<sup>738</sup>: 'the spectacular logic of the automobile argues for a perfect traffic flow entailing the destruction of the city centres'.<sup>739</sup> Post-war regeneration normalizes what Simon Sadler notes was the steady removal of working class communities to housing estates outside the city, replaced by expensive developments: '[b]etween 1954 and 1974 the number of workers living within the Ville de Paris declined by 44 percent, displaced by rebuilding and rent-hiked gentrification to the suburbs'.<sup>740</sup> Debord attacks urbanism on such grounds; '[u]rbansim is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism'.<sup>741</sup> Le Corbusier's 'brutalist' *Unité d'Habitation* (1947-52), built in Marseilles, was an approach to redevelopment adopted in many government housing projects that Debord considered a physical form of class repression, spreading through the suburbs to encroach upon the countryside: 'a reciprocal erosion of town and country'.<sup>742</sup> This is discussed in the next chapter in relation to the S.I.'s Unitary Urbanism. Housing policy and concrete bring people together in ideologically conceived projects that entail class repression and profit, in an alienated condition that lacks community or history. Debord suggests this allows alienating 'images'

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<sup>737</sup> Debord, p.123, Thesis 174.

<sup>738</sup> These are named locations in two accounts of the I.S.'s *dérives*. See, *On the Passage of A Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957-72*, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman (Boston: ICA Boston, 1989), p.135.

<sup>739</sup> Debord, p. 42. Thesis 65

<sup>740</sup> Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 2000), p.55.

<sup>741</sup> Debord, p.121. Thesis 169.

<sup>742</sup> Debord, p.124. Thesis 175.

to 'attain their full force [...] by virtue of this isolation.'<sup>743</sup> Community is thereby precluded as the 'spectacle' inextricably substitutes *itself* in its place.

Debord writes that 'holiday camps and housing developments'<sup>744</sup> are examples of 'pseudo-community'.<sup>745</sup> Subjects are involved with images instead of one another: 'the average American spends three to six hours daily watching television'.<sup>746</sup> Isolation is self-perpetuating because it is the opportunity for an image to appear as a mode of 'recognition', as if a Hegelian 'Other', while no actual connection is made. Technology offers "'instant" communication'<sup>747</sup> and 'long-distance mass communications'<sup>748</sup>, but these lack mutual responsiveness, identification, contradiction, the negotiation of difference implicit in dialogue and the discovery of shared values integral to collective identity and political sensibilities.

This destruction of space entails a destruction of its connection to history and correlative historical consciousness; for example, the disappearance of working-class neighbourhoods, that over time became centres of radical dissent and organization, that, in Engels' words: 'gives to the proletarians a consciousness of their own strength'.<sup>750</sup> Debord writes that policing leads to 'the suppression of the street itself'.<sup>751</sup> The sterile character of 'pseudo-communities'<sup>752</sup> derives from this absence of continuity with past conflict, leaving contemporary space without the context of identity: "'new towns" [are] the clearest of indications [...] of the break with historical time.'<sup>753</sup> Contemporary space is wholly, ideologically made over; motorways deliver consumers to 'giant shopping centres created ex nihilo and

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<sup>743</sup> Debord, p.122. Thesis 172.

<sup>744</sup> Debord, p.122. Thesis 172.

<sup>745</sup> Debord, p.122. Thesis 172.

<sup>746</sup> Debord, p.112. Thesis 153.

<sup>747</sup> Debord, p.19. Thesis 24.

<sup>748</sup> Debord, p.122. Thesis 172.

<sup>750</sup> In early texts, Engels and Marx write that the working class, concentrated in cities, in conditions of misery, act as centres of uprisings; Marx often cites Paris - the French Revolution (1789) and Paris Commune (1792) - to support this. Engels' *Principles of Communism* (1847) that becomes *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) states; 'cities where industry can be carried on most profitably [...] throwing great masses in one spot [...] gives to the proletarians a consciousness of their own strength'. See also *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) where Marx refers to political organization in Bolton and Manchester.

<sup>751</sup> Debord, p.122. Thesis 172.

<sup>752</sup> Debord, p.122.

<sup>753</sup> Debord., p.126.

surrounded by acres of parking space'<sup>754</sup> that are 'temples of frenetic consumption'.<sup>755</sup> Space, structured by the economy, is an investment, a commodity consistent with 'exchange-value'. This has a homogenizing effect, altering local identities and creating an 'interchangeability'<sup>756</sup> of place. Tourism, for example, becomes 'the chance to go and see what has been made trite'<sup>757</sup> as any sense of exploring an unknown culture is lost in a global economy that commercializes such differences, while investing in developing countries.

From the standpoint of the economy, any difference between work and leisure, or apparent choices between forms of leisure, is removed. Production and consumption are parts of the same circuit of *capital*. Debord writes that this development of the landscape mediates all aspects of life - community, association, adventure, culture - making it difficult to access space, and therefore time, beyond its pre-designed uses:

capitalism has begun selling 'fully equipped' blocks of time [...] an expanding economy of 'services' and leisure activities, of the 'all-inclusive' purchase of spectacular forms of housing, of collective pseudo-travel, of participation in cultural consumption and even of sociability itself, in the form of 'exciting conversations', 'meetings with celebrities' and suchlike <sup>758</sup>

The spectacle substitutes its own alienating forms in place of everyday, social activities through 'technology'<sup>759</sup> (everything 'from cars to television'<sup>760</sup>) which enables the economy's monopoly of *time*.

The deeper, significant implication of this is alienation. A central function of the 'image' is to model, justify, reinforce and normalize these newly alienating activities and behaviours. 'Spectators' become oriented by Debord's 'images' as a 'map of this new world.'<sup>761</sup> Debord's enlarged proletariat, disaffected by the emptiness of consumption or ideological falsehoods, are dominated by 'images'

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<sup>754</sup> Ibid., p.123.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid., p.123.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>758</sup> Debord, p.111.

<sup>759</sup> Debord, p. 22. Thesis 28.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid. p. 22. Thesis 28.

<sup>761</sup> Debord. p.23.

in ways shown to have *political* results; 'images' destroy a shared identity upon which Marx's working class or human 'species' is built. This intercession replaces a subject's primary relationship to a social community (that Hegelian 'Other' through whom identity is defined), that for Marx and Debord is a class situation. If Marx's industrial capitalism makes possible the *recognition* of a common working class identity, the 'spectacle' intervenes and prevents subjective consciousness from relating to others in terms of their class perspective, supplanting community for 'images', to: 'reinforce the isolation of the "lonely crowd"'.<sup>762</sup> Debord's 'spectacle' broadcasts dominant ideology to thereby 'fragment' society, replacing a collective, social identification of interests as Marx demonstrates through class antagonisms, with a universally 'atomized and manipulated'<sup>763</sup> mass. Individuals thus become a divided 'sum of solitudes'<sup>764</sup>, unable to unite on a basis of recognizing a shared, disenfranchised status.

### **2.3. The 'Spectacle' of Illusion: Desire and 'false-consciousness'**

A landscape shaped by investment or government control gives to a second, *internal* form of spectacular alienation, which Debord explains through Lukács' theory of reification. Once an 'image' intercedes to mediate the relationship of a subject and society, it effects 'false-consciousness' which Debord calls: 'a separation *within* human beings'.<sup>765</sup> Hegel's dialectical constitution of identity as recognition through an 'Other', gives the 'Concept' of identity real substance. However, Debord argues that subjects mistake 'selfhood' in 'images' of social life and self-interest imposed by media or propaganda. Debord understands this as a political repression. Bunyard identifies this 'spectacular' representation of identity, a false self-reflection, by explaining it as Hegel's *Vorstellung* - or 'picture thinking' - that requires further mediation to attain conceptual truth in the *Begriff*:

The *Vorstellung* is a mere 'image' - in the sense of a conceptual representation that remains separate from its object - of the 'life pulse' of the *Begriff* ('Concept'), and [...] thus [...] estranged from its own true nature. Debord's claim is that the unity of subject and object afforded by self-determined action has been denied by the spectacle, and that, in separating the subject from his or her own

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<sup>762</sup> Debord, p.22.

<sup>763</sup> Debord, p. 154.

<sup>764</sup> Debord, p.46.

<sup>765</sup> Debord, p.18.

activity, spectacular society becomes a representation of that unity.<sup>766</sup>

Perhaps, this is a question of content' and 'form', a contradiction at the heart of Lukácsian reification; for the social context of labour, given fetishized form in commodities, develops a further fetishized self-representation or 'image' of that social 'abstract labour', lacking any aspect of the class situation from which it results, as it expresses desires defined by a single, dominant class. Debord's subject mistakes the 'image' as a self-representation that ordinarily (through the 'Other') would make it a legitimately universal *Concept* to articulate shared, authentic needs. However, the 'image' does not reflect human self-objectification. Like the dehumanizing 'exchange-value' of Marx's worker, or a commodity, an 'image' gives subjectivity as *content* an abstract, economic or ideological *form*. The 'image' derives from concerns that are exclusively economic or political, thus 'inhuman', extending the dehumanization of the system of production into free-time and private life. As stated, the 'spectacle' thus represents desires that are *false* insofar as they are not human or representative, but produced and fulfilled on a basis of profit or political imperatives. This threatens to reverse Marx's dictum that ideas have a material basis, a 'material world [...] translated into forms of thought'.<sup>767</sup> For *images*, imported as if subjective *Concepts*, transform social activity into forms defined by their 'representation'.<sup>768</sup> Herein, free will is eroded as the spectacle is a mirror in reverse; a subject identifies with or enacts behaviour that is not conceived through human necessity, desire or need: '[t]he spectacle [...] is held up as a self-representation to the world'.<sup>769</sup> Screens convert self-conceptualization by replicating the gamut of human experiences and emotions for profit or political purposes: 'images [...] merge into a common stream'.<sup>770</sup> Jappe and others do not explore the implication of this, in terms of class and its exponential effect of depoliticization.

In terms of a possible tension between desire and rational self-determination, if Debord's subject is encouraged to comply with the 'image', then authentic desire,

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<sup>766</sup> Bunyard, p.15.

<sup>767</sup> *Capital Vol I*. See the Postface to the Second Edition, p. 102.

<sup>768</sup> Debord, p.12, Thesis 1.

<sup>769</sup> Debord, p.22, Thesis 29.

<sup>770</sup> Debord, p.12, Thesis 2.

as 'content', becomes the antithesis of its 'spectacular' form - an opposition to the economy or government - and might negate it to allow 'true', thus rational concepts of identity to emerge. In collective terms, this might inaugurate a collective, oppositional position. For, if identity is reflexive, oppositional action converts an alienated concept into a radical one. Debord envisions this as a means of a possible 'transcendence' of the spectacle, in a new form of classless society. Later, we see Debord turn to Surrealism, in his efforts to engage imagination and provoke desires in distinction to what the spectacle permits, to make a new type of social life (and therefore basis of production) a real *possibility*: '[t]he modern spectacle [...] depicts what [...] is permitted [...] rigidly distinguished from what is *possible*.'<sup>771</sup> Debord means that need, desires, uses of time, forms of association (i.e. oppositional, collective action) - *what* and *how* goods are produced, how the economy is structured or how technology is used, might all be redefined through subjectively shared interests, a type of society that is not 'permitted' to appear (i.e. represented).

Jappe neglects that an 'image' effectively substitutes for society but confers a context that lacks contradictory class perspectives. The class relationships that might define oppositional consciousness or action are obscured as consciousness is awash with speculative false *self-conceptions*, alienated from actual social conflict; 'the spectacle [...] turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation'.<sup>772</sup> Jappe neglects that the result of substituting the speculative for the material is political, as class interest cannot be located.<sup>773</sup> For the significant point here is that once the working class are *exponentially* reproduced in false forms, it stands at an ever greater distance from its actual interests and thereby possibilities of contestation and thus becomes disempowered. This vast separation between classes accounts for novelistic representations of an 'image' within an enormous social divide, as illustrated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but also *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting*.

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<sup>771</sup> Debord, p.20. Thesis 25.

<sup>772</sup> Debord, p.17. Thesis 19.

<sup>773</sup> Jappe, pp. 144-5. He is overwhelmingly negative about Debord's theorized possibilities of revolution, predicated on theory and collective organization - despite '68 - chiefly because the integration of the workforce from the 1950s meant that Western capitalism had: 'resolved its traditional contradictions' i.e. class opposition.

Debord's Lukácsian model of false consciousness uses terminology related to mental illness to identify its effect: 'schizophrenia' and 'catatonia'.<sup>774</sup> False concepts of identity, promoted through brands or ideology are abstract, not yet concrete, and have to be purchased or enacted. Once a subject takes any 'spectacularly' mediated action only multiple, speculative, 'fragmented' conceptualizations of selfhood are objectivized. Unlike Sartre's free, multiple options for action, Debord's 'schizophrenia' is constituted by 'spectacular' concepts that never reflect identity, and are opposite to actual class conditions (misery, competition, antagonism etc.):

the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but [...] those of someone else who represents them<sup>775</sup>

Just as the 'spectacle' *inverts* Marx's dictum of the material world preceding the *concept*, Debord argues it inverts Hegel's dialectical process of '*becoming*' or achieving identity: 'the closer his life comes to being his own creation, the more drastically he is cut off from his own life.'<sup>776</sup> The 'image' nullifies agency in 'everyday' life; the more action, the less realization of a class perspective or self-interest, that comes with taking self-interested action.

'Images' impose so aggressively that 'spectacular' alienation induces a subject's 'modern passivity'<sup>777</sup> at a wider, social level. 'Images' destroy possibilities of a collective identity and Debord's dialectical possibilities of political opposition. Debord postulates desire in this alienated state, severed from being orientated by, or in service to authentic interests, subsisting below a level of consciousness without any authentic referent or possibility of externalization, in a liminal position termed 'catatonia' - a state of unconsciousness. As images repress conscious action or agency, self-directed action cannot discover its collective aspect and this potential class consciousness sits in opposition to a politically nuanced

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<sup>774</sup> Debord, p.152. Thesis 218.

<sup>775</sup> Debord, p.23. Thesis 30.

<sup>776</sup> Debord, p.24. Thesis 33.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid., p.15. Thesis 13.



unconsciousness; the 'spectacle preserves unconsciousness', is a 'submission', an 'enslavement', 'a wish for sleep'.<sup>778</sup> Under conditions in which a subject is a 'spectator', such conscious, political self-interest is obstructed, as the 'image' is 'the guardian of [...] sleep'.<sup>779</sup> 'Catatonia' implies Debord's '*dialectic of becoming*' ceases at Marx's dynamic, historical level; for the 'spectacle' transposes the process of subject-object unity away from social struggle, with its historical past, deciding all possibilities of identity and action: 'the spectacle [...] is [...] an ideology that manages to remold the whole of the real [*sic*]'.<sup>780</sup>

Chapter Three follows and demonstrates that I.S. strategies follow this logic and take a dialectical approach: for if Debord's 'spectator' complies with an 'image', then authentic, 'true' desires are the antithesis of its 'spectacular' form and might negate it, allowing correlatively 'true' concepts of identity to be produced – and in collective terms. Chapters Four and Five consider culture in terms of this power to dialectically transform socially dominant ideological terms, but in relation to the novel. For, like I.S. art, 'anti-spectacular' novels represent characters in relationship to an 'image', as a visual mode of repression on a similarly dialectical basis, whereby class and history are a context of opposition, making the changed status of dominant thought politically nuanced.<sup>780</sup> Just as Winston rejects ideological conformity and Big Brother within the context of class struggle set out in Goldstein's book, Mark Renton refuses to 'choose life'<sup>781</sup> in its advertised form in *Trainspotting* within a gentrified Edinburgh's whose annual Festival is at odds with its heroin epidemic. In 'anti-spectacular' novels, rejections of a 'screen' are given a historical, class dimension.

#### **2.4. Debord's 'Spectator'**

Debord's argument that spectacular 'false-consciousness' disarms opposition, originates in *History and Class Consciousness*, as stated. Lukács claims the objective structure of the bourgeois capitalist economy galvanizes an explicit contradiction by its creation of a proletariat class; its 'insoluble contradiction'.<sup>784</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Debord, See p.20, p.44, p.151, p.18.

<sup>779</sup> Debord, p.18. Thesis 21

<sup>780</sup> Debord, p.150. Thesis 212

<sup>781</sup> Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Minerva, 1996), p.188.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid., p.61.

Lukács identifies this as the material root of Hegel's faulty epistemology, for this contradiction cannot be solved abstractly. However, Lukács suggests this contradiction enables opposition, articulated in terms of conscious self-interest: 'with the creation of a society with a purely economic articulation, class consciousness arrived at a point where *it could become conscious*' (Lukács' italics).<sup>785</sup> He means that the possibility of true identity is inherent within class division; for the bourgeois revolution's logic of class interested action might be extended to the proletariat, who might take over the means of production and reproduce material life. Debord's 'spectator', set in contradiction to an 'image', on Lukács' dialectical basis, bears this inherent possibility of defining collective interest.

However, Lukács continues; 'as [...] the proletariat made society conscious of this unconscious, revolutionary principle inherent in capitalism, the bourgeoisie was thrown back increasingly on to a conscious defensive'. If bourgeois success is built upon 'class struggle as a basic fact of history'<sup>786</sup> they are motivated to repress these social co-ordinates, as maximizing 'false-consciousness' might prevent a working class revolution:

the barrier which converts the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie into 'false' consciousness is objective; it is the class situation [...] the objective result of the economic set-up, and is neither arbitrary, subjective nor psychological<sup>787</sup>

The journey from unconsciousness to class consciousness is conducted through its dialectical and oppositional formation, which is social and historical. However, the perpetuation of reification remains: 'the bourgeoisie [...] eradicate the fact of class conflict from the consciousness of society'<sup>788</sup>, even shifting toward deception, present to Debord's 'image', as the bourgeois claim of impartiality becomes a 'mendacious [...] moral posture'.<sup>789</sup> This is relevant to Lukács'

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<sup>785</sup> Ibid. p.59.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid., p. 65; p.65.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>788</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 61. 'Politically, [...] 'freedom' in whose name the bourgeoisie had joined battle with feudalism, was transformed into a new repressiveness. Sociologically, the bourgeoisie did everything in its power to eradicate the fact of class conflict from the consciousness of society.'

<sup>789</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* p. 65.

rejection of Modernist characterization, as 'psychological' motivation alone neglects this historical relationship, unlike Realism.

This can be related to Debord's 'spectator' and 'spectacle'. The 'spectacle' is rooted in commodity production, but ultimately labour, and defines the social output: '[t]he *entirety of labour sold* is transformed overall into the *total commodity*.'<sup>828</sup> However, this is not an objective reflection of society's productive power, in which an individual, as 'spectator' might recognize itself in Marx's 'species being'. It is a 'fetishized' visual equivalent. Just like Lukács' *weltanschauung* and its class bias, the 'spectacle' abstracts from class division and fails to represent universal interests. This is because of Chitty's 'contradictory' character of the objectification of labour that stems from Marx's class division. In this sense, the spectacle's 'false' equivalence to abstract social labour is first compared to religion ('a technological version of the exiling of human powers in a "world beyond"'<sup>829</sup>). Here, Debord was greatly influenced by Feuerbach.<sup>830</sup> Second, after Marx, it is compared to money ('the spectacle is another facet of money'<sup>831</sup>). Its obvious bias is exemplified by Arthur's point that capitalism conceives in such terms i.e. 'abstract labour', because its goal is abstract wealth; he writes that value 'exists latently, so to speak, prior to its realisation in exchange'.<sup>832</sup> For a producer accumulates profit through advertising 'images' once a commodity is purchased, while the outcome of the circuit of capital for the proletariat or majority is different.<sup>833</sup>

Beyond commodities, Debord's spectacles of 'power and leisure'<sup>834</sup> reference realms like culture, the more sophisticated 'by-products' of 'social labor [*sic*]' that, again, exclude real human self-identity or self-interest, offering instead an economically defined *representation* of it. Mass culture and leisure activities are

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<sup>828</sup> Debord, p.29. Thesis 42.

<sup>829</sup> Debord, p. 18. Thesis 20.

<sup>830</sup> Bunyard, p.18. He writes: 'this idea can be found in Feuerbach's critique of religion [...] according to Feuerbach, a community of believers worship their own collective desires, powers, capacities'.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid., p. 32. Thesis 49.

<sup>832</sup> Arthur, *The Practical Truth of Abstract Labour*, pp. 4-7. Capitalist production aims to create: 'wealth in its abstract form'.

<sup>833</sup> The economy seems to operate autonomously, but this, Marx's apparent 'self-valorisation', in fact depends on labour and circulation for the increase of capital.

<sup>834</sup> Debord, p.38-9. Theses 60 and 61.

promoted by 'spectacular representations of living human beings'<sup>835</sup> - 'media stars' and '[c]elebrities' - that share the same economic basis as commodities and, as equivalents, lack qualitative difference. Celebrities invite 'identification with mere appearance'.<sup>836</sup> Similarly, 'spectacles'<sup>837</sup> of political figures in the sphere of 'government power'<sup>838</sup> invite identification. As demonstrated, Debord refers to Stalin, but also to Krushchev, Mao and Kennedy. While the 'image' of Mao - 'a personification of totalitarian power'<sup>839</sup> - fraudulently claims to represent (Hegelian) universal will, no actual inclusion in political decisions is permitted in systems and structures. This allows the 'universality'<sup>840</sup> of collective will to become a power concentrated in an elite, that broadcasts an 'image' of a leader as 'absolute celebrity'.<sup>841</sup> A seeming collective *Subject*, with whom all must identify, leaders 'personify the system'<sup>842</sup> - the interests of an economic market, class position or elite - to make Stalin and Kennedy equivalents with only superficially different ideological narratives - like celebrities.

Alienation and social division remain, despite an 'image' whose visual narrative promises that by purchasing commodities such dispossession might be rectified in a 'transcendence', and unite the subject with what has been appropriated (labour); Debord's 'image of the blissful unification of society through consumption'.<sup>843</sup> Debord emphasizes this return of goods, in 'fragments'<sup>844</sup>, never unifies: only the proletariat's self-management of labour materially reproduces a classless society in an unalienated unity with its products. So, too, political figures are 'images' of 'transcendence' of alienation through ideological compliance, an 'illusion of community' that on a leader's death actually reveals the social body is fragmented; 'exposed as a mere sum of solitudes without illusions'.<sup>845</sup> Again, fictional examples of this spectacular 'false-consciousness' include Sick Boy in *Trainspotting* who takes on the screen

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<sup>835</sup> Debord, p.38-9. Theses 60 and 61.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid.

<sup>837</sup> Debord, p.12. Thesis 1.

<sup>838</sup> Debord, p.38, Thesis 60.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid., p.45. Thesis 70.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid., p.150 Thesis 213.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid., p.42. Thesis 64.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid., p.40. Thesis 61.

<sup>843</sup> Debord, p. 45. Thesis 69.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid., p.43. Thesis 65.

<sup>845</sup> Debord, p. 45. Thesis 70.

persona of James Bond, as Debord's celebrity that models different 'styles of life', 'personality types' or 'views of society'.<sup>846</sup> Or Mirek In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, that experiences the Communist Party as a 'spectacle' of political participation, that Debord claims is 'inaccessible'<sup>847</sup>, as he is expelled for criticizing the Party. Sartre argues that choice denotes possible self-determination, but Debord's choices are a passive identification with an economic or political ideology, not an indication of agency, merely a 'pseudo-power over life lived'.<sup>860</sup>

### **The Revolutionary Role of Theory and Culture**

If Debord makes Lukács' reification visual, more immediate and compelling or, in the East, practically coercive, what are its political results? Does the 'image' make any '*recognition*' of shared conditions or class consciousness impossible? Debord quotes Luxemburg as a witness of this sudden loss of directly perceptible class opposition; 'face to face: [...] class against class'.<sup>870</sup> He refers to the Spartacists (1919) faced with a reactionary U.S.D.P. that used an: 'image of the working class' against 'the working class itself'.<sup>871</sup> Might novels represent the 'image' as such a destruction of a character's personal, but also social (class) identity, in contradiction to its possibilities?

Debord elaborates the 'image' as risking the loss of that dialectical aspect of consciousness, or conceptual antithesis, that inspires opposition and connects a subject to history. Hegelian *time* is immediate, but negation or 'estrangement' is resolved dialectically through *history*. Lukács resituates Hegel's dialectical self-consciousness within material class contradictions, to theorize working-class opposition as the 'negation' of the bourgeois economy, collectively represented by the Communist Party as a Subject of History. If Debord's 'spectacle' occupies a position of futurity and predetermines all choice ('a choice already made in the sphere of production'<sup>878</sup>), time fails as a medium for opposition. Compliance with the prescribed behaviours of the 'spectacle' gives action an 'undialectical

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<sup>846</sup> Debord, p.45. Thesis 70.

<sup>847</sup> Debord, p.39. Thesis 30.

<sup>860</sup> Ibid.

<sup>870</sup> Debord, p.69. Thesis 101.

<sup>871</sup> Debord, p.69. Thesis 100.

<sup>878</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 6.

aspect'<sup>879</sup>, thereby making it difficult to *recognize* alienation through that dissonance as Lukács' biting point of conflict, necessary for identity and 'transcendence' in revolution. Thus, Debord writes:

The spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world [...] repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances<sup>880</sup>

Ideology broadcasts a 'false' narrative, obscuring the causes of injustice, disempowerment and poverty in an external world, that might otherwise shape class identity. Yet, the opposition of *true* and *false* experience is retained, albeit suppressed, as an opportunity for self-determination, thus resistance. Desire subsists in this repressed, latent state and requires a 'true' correlation with working class aims within this '*reality*' (below):

[i]n a society where no one is any longer recognizable by anyone else, each individual is necessarily unable to *recognize* his own reality. Here ideology is at home; here separation has built its world <sup>881</sup> [my emphasis]

A recognition of working class interest and identity is a *reality* (as class division exists) but the mediating 'image' is a contradiction of such a position. Thus repressed, the working class, in thrall to 'images', take prescribed therefore 'undialectical' action with a subsequent reduction of conflict or gains that might orient working class, oppositional consciousness. This repeats to exponentially reduce class consciousness or oppositional action, lending time a conceptually ahistorical basis, no longer defined by conflict. Free time spent in commercial spaces, sites of leisure, absorbed in screens is ultimately politically repressive, but paradoxically labour reproduces these conditions which preclude time being used in liberating action:

the alienation that now holds sway [is] suffered by the producers of an estranged present. This is a spatial alienation [...] that [...] separates him in the first place from his own time. Social alienation, though in principal surmountable, is nevertheless the

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<sup>879</sup> Debord, p. 51. Thesis 80.

<sup>880</sup> Debord, p.153. Thesis 219.

<sup>881</sup> Debord, p.152. Thesis 217.

alienation that has forbidden and petrified the possibilities and risks of a living alienation within time.<sup>882</sup>

Here, 'social alienation' is the class division that works for the bourgeois economy, reproducing conditions that obstruct 'living alienation' i.e. resistance, a resistance which politicizes a process of '*becoming*' for Lukács and Debord. Contestation involves 'possibilities and risks' that Marcus identifies as 'the drift of secret history'<sup>883</sup>; a thread of social revolt, rebellion and working-class revolution. Without the gains achieved by proletarian struggle and their defence, the accumulation of capital concentrates power in elites, corporations and the state with a correlative rise of 'dispossession'<sup>884</sup>, Debord's 'proletarianization of the world'.<sup>885</sup>

This lack of opposition enables a 'rift' (below) between classes to open up, an extenuation of class division that seems to separate or fragment a 'totality' of classes engaged in conflict:

Social practise, which the spectacle's autonomy challenges, is also the real totality to which the spectacle is subordinate. So deep is the rift in this totality however, that the spectacle is able to emerge as its apparent goal <sup>886</sup>

Debord means this 'rift' cuts the proletariat off from the divided society its labour reproduces, as vast disparity makes it impossible to perceive any 'totality', antagonism or oppositional perspective implicit in its social relationship and historical position. This absence allows an 'image' to convince as an illusion of the 'transcendence' of alienation, rather than social conflict and struggle being the route to closing this 'rift'.

As stated, the effect of 'spectacular' false consciousness is a figurative 'schizophrenia' and 'catatonia'.<sup>887</sup> Debord claims 'false consciousness' is like 'catatonia' because it effectively severs a conscious relation to the dialectical

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<sup>882</sup> Debord, p.116. Thesis 161.

<sup>883</sup> Marcus, p. 184.

<sup>884</sup> Debord, p.58. Thesis 88. He connects the growth of the economy with this 'dispossession'.

<sup>885</sup> Debord, p. 21. Thesis 26.

<sup>886</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 7

<sup>887</sup> Debord, p.152. Thesis 218.

struggle that drives history, causing a political paralysis at Marx's historical level. Debord comments such stasis is recognized as a bourgeois 'triumph'<sup>888</sup>, received in terms of 'positivity'<sup>889</sup>, as in Fukuyama's approval of this 'end of history'. The spectacle is therefore not arbitrary, 'not a collection of images', but furthers alienation to benefit an invested, politically repressive class: 'a social relationship between people [...] mediated by images'.<sup>890</sup>

Is revolution then possible? Debord intended *The Society of the Spectacle* to be a theory that would enable the working class to 'recognize' its interests and galvanize revolution (on the barricades in 1968): '[i]n 1967 I wanted the Situationist International to have a book of theory'.<sup>891</sup> Jappe observes that Debord follows Lukács by making theory essential to revolution; 'placing consciousness and the historical struggle at its centre'.<sup>892</sup> For Lukács made theory the first step to resistance: 'social conflict [is] reflected in an ideological struggle for consciousness and for the veiling or the exposure of the class character of society'.<sup>893</sup>

However, in 1924, General Secretary Zinoviev, at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), rejected Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* for 'revisionism' and 'Hegelian influences'.<sup>894</sup> Lukács was publicly upbraided for stating possibilities of revolution in terms of imputed oppositional consciousness, rather than following what W. John Morgan refers to as 'the Comintern line'<sup>895</sup>; the international economism of Marx's 'laws', which develops

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<sup>888</sup> Debord, p.150. Thesis 213.

<sup>889</sup> Debord, p15. Thesis 12.

<sup>890</sup> Debord, p. 12-13. Theses 4-7.

<sup>891</sup> Debord, *Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of The Society of the Spectacle* (London, Chronos, 1979), p. 8-9. 'In 1967 [...] [t]he SI was at this time the extremist group which had done the most to bring back revolutionary contestation to modern society; [...] having imposed its victory on the terrain of critical theory [...] it [...] was then drawing near the culminating point of its historical action.'

<sup>892</sup> Jappe, p. 93.

<sup>893</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.59.

<sup>894</sup> Morgan, p. 260.

<sup>895</sup> Morgan, p. 258.



in Debord's period (1950s) in mechanical (Structuralist) Althusserian Marxism.<sup>896</sup> Lukács' retraction was probably a condition of remaining in the Communist Party:

Can a genuinely identical subject-object be created by self-knowledge [...] however perfect [...] We need only formulate the question precisely to see that it must be answered in the negative. For even when the content of knowledge is referred back to the knowing subject, this does not mean that the act of cognition is thereby freed of its alienated nature<sup>897</sup>

For, if revolution relies upon consciousness rather than objective conditions, it was questionable if a Western working class would awaken to revolutionary consciousness rather than enjoy cheap goods, visual entertainment etc. However, theoretically, Lukács' epistemology serves as a robust critique of Hegel's idealism, the logic of a bourgeois revolution, based on the 'one-sidedness of history'<sup>898</sup> and class division that precludes universality by allowing antinomies to persist. Lukács argues that any bourgeois recognition of freedom in Marx's Communism, a true subject-object identity, wherein concepts might be consistent: 'would be tantamount to suicide'.<sup>899</sup> To correct Hegel and abolish 'false consciousness' - which Lukács calls 'the problem of irrationality (i.e. the relation of form to content)'<sup>900</sup> - he takes a working-class point of view and tips the historical horizon beyond Hegel's 'end' in the state.

The I.S. similarly retain an important role for theory on the anti-Stalinist 'Left' in the 1960s. Debord, after Lukács, marries theory and action in 'praxis'. Baugh observes: 'Marx and Engels thus put practice in place of the Notion as the unity of the real and the ideal, of subject and object'.<sup>901</sup> Debord uses theory and culture to close that class 'rift' and end historical paralysis by inspiring revolution. He maintains, as Raya Dunayevskaya writes, that; 'man was not merely object but subject, not only determined by history, but its creator'.<sup>902</sup> Debord gives Hegel's

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<sup>896</sup> Morgan, p. 260. He writes: 'The Communist International could not tolerate the implication that there was a cultural difference between the prospects for communism in Europe and that of Russian bolshevism'.

<sup>897</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.xxiii.

<sup>898</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.177.

<sup>899</sup> Ibid., p.181.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid., p.138.

<sup>901</sup> Baugh, p.64.

<sup>902</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution, From Hegel to Sartre, and from Marx to Mao*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (1982), p. 49. < <https://thecharnelhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Raya->

conceptual antithesis Lukács' political form; theory and culture become what Hussey calls Debord's 'weapon' through which the dominant concepts of the spectacle are set in *contradiction* to their immediate meaning:

Kojève isolated negation as the central lesson of Hegel's philosophy [...] As Debord was formulating the concept of 'spectacle' [...] it was of central importance that [...] the formulation of a concept in entirely negative terms was also a dialectical weapon.<sup>903</sup>

Culture and theory become a platform for 'praxis' to intervene against Lukács' 'contemplative'<sup>904</sup> aspect of reification and produce a subject's *negative* perception of the spectacle's 'positivity'<sup>905</sup> to thereby expose spectacular 'false consciousness' as politically repressive. Debord's radical point is that, like Lukács' *productive* negation, this forces a subject to define and fulfil desires *outside* of the spectacle's ideological forms, depriving the economy, or opposing the state, by necessarily standing outside, thus against them.

Jappe does not understand that Debord's conceptual antithesis of true and false desires is immanent and at the root of this radicalized subject. Jappe defines '[s]ituationist subjectivity'<sup>906</sup> as decisions based on authenticity, but he is unsure if this is separate from a 'falsified' world: 'by reference to what "authentic" other reality [...] could it be falsified?'<sup>907</sup> Plant better understands that a rejection of the 'spectacle' implies politically nuanced, self-authored action: 'the radical subject demands the right to construct the situations in which it lives'.<sup>908</sup> Bunyard is best at locating conflict between an economy based on 'exchange value' that manufactures 'pseudo-needs' and commodifies all aspects of social life, and a general demand for a more personally rewarding use of such time in a direct appeal to time's 'use' values.<sup>909</sup>

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[Dunayevskaya-Philosophy-and-Revolution-From-Hegel-to-Sartre-and-from-Marx-to-Mao.pdf](#)  
[10.9.20.]

<sup>903</sup> Hussey, p. 115-6.

<sup>904</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.3.

<sup>905</sup> Debord, p.15. Thesis 12.

<sup>906</sup> Jappe, p.100.

<sup>907</sup> Jappe, p.100.

<sup>908</sup> Plant, p. 39.

<sup>909</sup> Bunyard, p.302-303 See particularly the Watts riots.

Therefore Debord's 'anti-spectacular' choice is oppositional; this reinstates a 'dialectic of becoming'<sup>910</sup>, as consciousness and, therefore, identity grow in exponentially more oppositional forms, from the basis of a rejection of ideology and corresponding un-alienated autonomy. This self-determination is formulated by Debord at a historical level, re-engaging Marx's class conflict. Ultimately, individuals '*becoming conscious*' of needs and desires correlates them with broader economic contradictions and implies an overthrow of state-capitalism in the East and American styled consumption in the West. Debord gives political substance to Sartre's metaphysical 'negativity at the heart of [the] world'.<sup>911</sup> On this basis, Debord relates personal desire and the political realm.

## **2.5. An Existential and Marxist 'Subject' and 'Situation'**

How then is Sartre's Existential subject different to Debord's Marxist subject? How does their use of Hegel produce different theories of the 'situation'? Wollen attributes Debord's 'concept of situation'<sup>934</sup> to Sartre and Frances Stracey similarly finds Debord's model for the 'situation' in *Being and Nothingness* (specifically 'Freedom and Facticity: The Situation'<sup>935</sup>). Vincent Kaufmann traces Debord's first use of the term to the second issue of *International Letteriste* (1952).<sup>936</sup> What does the S.I. claim for 'situations', as cultural interventions in the contemporary alienation of social life and new scope of ideology?

The chief difference between Sartre's and Debord's subject stems from time and its relationship to identity. The location of Sartre's 'internal' and Debord's 'external' negation determines whether time produces a subject that exists in separation or integration with itself. For both, negation occurs in 'everyday' circumstances - Sartre's 'human reality in situations'.<sup>937</sup> Sartre's 'situation' necessitates a negation of 'Being-in-itself' to fulfil desires, leaving a subject

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<sup>910</sup> Debord, p.153.

<sup>911</sup> Debord, p. 197.

<sup>934</sup> *On the Passage of A Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman, p.30.

<sup>935</sup> Frances Stracey, *Constructed Situations A New History of the Situationist International*, (London: Pluto Press, 2014), p.12.

<sup>936</sup> Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord; Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.93.

<sup>937</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. xiii.

permanently alienated by 'Being-for-itself' and the multiple projects that temporally 'fragment' identity.

Debord might be said to *détourn* Sartre's 'situation' by rejecting his politically neutral temporal alienation, his universal 'facticity' that is metaphysical and transhistorical.<sup>938</sup> Alternatively, Debord's alienation is social, suggesting it might be remedied. Existentialism internalizes values, identity is not formed in relation to its objective truth (or falsehood) as there is no dialectical relationship to objective truth. As Sartre writes: 'man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity'.<sup>939</sup> However, if agency or '*becoming*' involve choice, how can the alienation inherent to capitalism, rather than time, be avoided? Thus, Debord claims to: 'replace Existential passivity with the construction of moments of life, and doubt with playful affirmation.'<sup>940</sup> Sartre's 'bad faith' as inauthentic choice becomes Debord's 'spectacular' alienation. Sartre's fragmented multiplicity is Debord's 'false-consciousness' or 'schizophrenia'. Sartre's paralysis is Debord's more political 'catatonia'. For Debord, authenticity is only arrived at once 'false consciousness' is overcome; both theory and culture (i.e. a 'situation') intervene to liberate 'everyday life' by negating false, 'spectacular' forms of identity.

Desire is not *itself* a source of alienation for Debord as for Sartre, but an opportunity for opposition. Neither is time inherently negative or simply metaphysical. Debord critiques Sartre's 'bourgeois' philosophy, to echo Marx's critique of Feuerbach; 'philosophers have only *interpreted* the world'.<sup>941</sup> As Sartre's existential descriptors of alienation - terror, angst, *ennui* - fail to capture a subject's inner contradictions being actively consistent with those of an objective, socio-economic world (or to 'change' it);

[t]he passions have been sufficiently interpreted;  
the point now is to discover new ones<sup>942</sup>

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<sup>938</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 46-47 Sartre's 'facticity' is 'a human universality of condition'. Regardless of epoch, negation is present to experience, therefore transhistorical; choice and commitment bear value 'no matter what epoch'.

<sup>939</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>940</sup> *Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.138

<sup>941</sup> Marx, *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, p. 423.

<sup>942</sup> Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', *The Situationist International Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p.43.

Here, Debord's 'new' emotional states come from resistance and recovering an authenticity gained exponentially, by rejecting the spectacle and re-envisioning life. The next chapter examines I.S. 'situations' in relation to Surrealism's concern with imagination; Debord hopes to make a participant *conscious* of desire, within the historical contradictions in which they are implied. Debord's artistic practice aims to be political and Sartre's 'authenticity' becomes Debord's 'class-consciousness' on this basis. Sartre claims to retain ethical 'recognition' in relation to the 'Other' by a universal 'facticity' that is 'man's fundamental situation'.<sup>943</sup> However, would a member of the ruling class extend any recognition of universal equality to a disenfranchised worker? Without Sartre's subject achieving a fixed rather than dispersed identity, it is difficult to credit 'recognition' with any humanistic, ethical rationalism.

### **Conclusion: Debord's 'End of History'**

To conclude, Debord's 'anti-spectacular' action as a demand for self-determination constitutes an autonomy similar to Marx's principle of conscious self-creation through the organization of labour - but begins with social life. For Debord suggests that a subject's shift from 'false consciousness' to autonomous action becomes *class consciousness* and a desire to reconstruct society from this oppositional perspective. Consciousness is related to class struggle through intentional action in this: '[c]onsciousness of desire and the desire for consciousness'.<sup>944</sup> Marx relates pre-history to history on this basis of the *intentional* management of production to meet universal needs.<sup>945</sup>

Chapter Four of *The Society of the Spectacle*, entitled *The Proletariat as Subject and Representation*, retells working class history as Marcus's thread of revolt. It illustrates the proletariat's path to self-determination has historically been subsumed by political structures - whether Leninist vanguardism, Stalinist totalitarianism, Maoism or Western economies wherein 'Capital' is 'Subject'.

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<sup>943</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.46.

<sup>944</sup> Debord, p.34. Thesis 53.

<sup>945</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. by Maurice Dobb (Lawrence and Wishart; London, 1981), p. 21. Marx writes: 'the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.' Marx suggests that pre-history ends with Communism's rational management of labour for a unified society.

Debord's retelling is that theoretical context which supplies a working class perspective on history, otherwise obscured by the 'spectacle', as a platform for praxis and an approach to resistance that might close the class 'rift' or gulf to re-engage class struggle and instantiate 'history'. As Raoul Vaneigem summarizes; '[e]ach time the proletariat takes the risk of changing the world, it rediscovers its historical memory'.<sup>946</sup> Debord elaborates history as 'memory' to supply the grounds for 'praxis'. In distinction to Stalinism or Leninism <sup>947</sup>, Debord's critique appeals to that urban, 'bored' Parisian youth, and non-Party audience, by its focus on desire, free-time, autonomy and freedom.

For Debord, Hegel's journey, which results in freedom, is reformulated in Marx's materialist terms of workers' councils, which take the place of Hegel's state. Antonie Pannekoek's model of federated council communism influenced Debord in its refusal of Party leaders and revocable delegates, to give the principle of conscious self-determination a corresponding political form.<sup>949</sup> During the May 1968 Sorbonne occupation, the I.S. attempted to establish a federation of workers' councils throughout occupied factories (i.e. the Renault plant at Cléon) and universities (i.e. Nantes University). Direct political participation properly articulates Hegelian 'universal will'. Once Debord aligns consciousness and history, on a basis of autonomy and the management of production, desire is expressed in social terms through both the limitlessness of Marx's human need and its powers of self-creation to meet those needs, or, as Debord writes; 'history, once it becomes real, no longer has an end'.<sup>951</sup>

Debord, like Lukács, finds culture implied in this social process of a political 'recognition' of interests. Next, Chapter Three examines the avant-garde - Dada Surrealism and the I.S. through a focus on desire. If Hegelian dialectics sees concepts produced by negation, similarly the I.S. devise strategies that engage 'spectacular' concepts and contradict or 'negate' their positive appearance, to revise ideological concepts from a self-interested position. I.S. strategies provoke a recognition of self-interest, articulated in terms of class interest. Chapters Four

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<sup>946</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, 'Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management', *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 363, Thesis 3.

<sup>947</sup> Debord, p. 98. Thesis 98.

<sup>949</sup> Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 439.

<sup>951</sup> Debord, p.51, Thesis 80.

and Five examine literary treatments of desire, alienation and social life; for 'memory' (above) a theme of anti-spectacular' literature, in this permutation as history - as with Orwell's Winston - lends characters a social, class context to set up similar discrepancies with the ideological promise of 'images', to political affect.

## **Chapter 3. Art as Revolution: The I.S. and the 'End of Culture'**

### **3.1. Introduction: Debord's Theory of Culture**

'Culture is the locus of the search for lost unity'<sup>952</sup>

Guy Debord

This thesis has analysed the theories of Hegel, Marx, Lukács, Sartre and Debord, regarding alienation and its resolution. The concepts of 'totality' and 'fragmentation' inform their theoretical approaches, in which 'negation' plays a central role in social, political transformation. This chapter explores Debord's use of culture as a means of social revolution. Debord's Hegelian-Marxist, dialectical approach to theorizing self-consciousness or 'recognition' has been shown to rely on the relationship between consciousness and historical class struggle. 'Spectacular' alienation has been demonstrated to affect a 'false-consciousness' that obscures such identity - its class aspect. This chapter now turns to the avant-garde, analysing I.S. practice as it adapts techniques pioneered by Dada and Surrealism to oppose spectacular 'false-consciousness'.

Many theorists - Engels, Lukács, Lefebvre and Adorno - like Debord, argue for a dialectical relationship between culture and late capitalist society.<sup>953</sup> However, Jappe misses that Debord finds this dialectical contradiction is internal to cultural form *itself*. Lukács makes this same point in relation to the Realist novel, as does Bakhtin in relation to novelistic language. While Bunyard finds Hegel's work on Tragedy influences Debord's position on culture, I remain with the *Phenomenology*.<sup>954</sup> For Hegel is a chief source of Debord's position and accounts

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<sup>952</sup> Debord, p.132.

<sup>953</sup> Jappe, p.63-72. The I.S. are said to repossess culture (as superstructure) so that technology and experiment might introduce artistic values directly into life, to fulfil the Surrealists' project of unifying art and life; 'contrary to the view of so-called orthodox Marxism, such delay in the development of the superstructure (i.e. culture) was quite capable of holding up change at the base of society.'

<sup>954</sup> Bunyard, p.9. Bunyard uses Hegel's position on Tragedy to argue that Debord views negation as undermining 'totality', indicating a more existential approach to time: 'tragic art [...] insofar as it presents negative disruption within a [...] coherent whole, provides a useful motif for [...] the spectacle's historical arrest.'



for the historical framework in which he places the avant-garde, including the I.S. Debord adapts Hegel's argument for the social purpose of *philosophy* thus:

Culture detached itself from the unity of myth-based society, according to Hegel, 'when the power to unify disappeared from the life of man, and opposites lost their connection and living interaction, and became autonomous' ("The Difference between the Philosophical Systems of Fichte and Schelling")<sup>955</sup>

For Hegel in fact refers to philosophy as necessary to formulating the relation between seemingly unrelated social forms, that it must prove are connected. For Debord, like Marx, this unification takes on a material meaning, in his alienated society, and becomes *culture's* social function.

Debord mobilizes Hegel's proposition that myth, an original cultural form, embodies the universal shared values of Ancient Greece, J.N. Findlay's 'universalism of ethical [...] laws and customs'.<sup>956</sup> Before Debord, Lukács also makes this his starting point for theorizing the novel (*The Theory of the Novel*, 1920).<sup>957</sup> Critics miss that Lukács and Debord share the same theoretical basis for explaining culture's revolutionary potential. Debord paraphrases Hegel, writing that Ancient Greece was a 'community that myth was formerly able to ensure'.<sup>958</sup> Hegel sees myth abandoned, as this unitary society separates into a more democratic but polarized Athenian society and, later, that of Imperial Rome whose laws exclusively recognized property owners, making it impossible for myth to be universal and fulfil its function of capturing a 'totality'. In Hegel's stages - Ethical and Enlightenment societies, the French Revolution of 1789 etc. - *Geist* progresses as a mode of rationalism, to achieve an identity of *content* and *form* that 'truth' requires to be objective. At one stage, *Geist* is self-alienated because society's religious and cultural forms seem opposed.<sup>959</sup> However, culture is found

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<sup>955</sup> Debord 1994, p132. Hegel's original appears in in, 'The Difference Between Fichte's and Shelling's System of Philosophy' Trans. by H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977). Hegel argues 'the Absolute' (*Geist*) is found in division; in nature, religion and self-consciousness (Reason) and, while culture first represents their identity, philosophy does this better: i.e. Romanticism sets up an antithesis of 'intelligence and nature', but, Hegel argues, philosophy recognizes their unity as 'absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity' p. 90.

<sup>956</sup> *Phenomenology*, p. xx. J.N. Finlay's Foreward.

<sup>957</sup> This thesis, p. 177, footnote 913.

<sup>958</sup> Debord, p.132. Thesis 186.

<sup>959</sup> Culture, as social custom or intellectual life develops to make Hegel's philosophical system possible - while, oppositely, religion gives form to an inward expression of faith. Different in

to be part of religion - a sublation that overcomes their opposition - because 'Reason' works through culture (i.e. the education system of the Enlightenment) to enable Hegel's dialectical method which identifies Absolute Spirit. Therefore, there is an 'end to culture' in this overcoming of the division of difference in social forms (religion, culture) in *Geist*.<sup>960</sup>

Debord argues culture is premised on 'surplus-value', accrued throughout similarly historical stages (patronage of the aristocracy, the Church, the industrial bourgeoisie) termed: 'culture as defined by the ruling class'.<sup>962</sup> Consequently, culture cannot fulfil its unifying purpose and adopts a 'false-consciousness' of its *independence* (from labour) – typical, as we have seen, of the bourgeois position:

gaining its independence, culture was embarked on an imperialist career of self-enrichment that was at the same time the beginning of the decline of its independence [ ...] the whole triumphant history of culture can be understood as the history of the revelation of culture's insufficiency, as a march toward culture's self-abolition. Culture is the locus of the search for lost unity. In the course of this search, culture as a separate sphere is obliged to negate itself.<sup>963</sup>

Contradiction is inherent to cultural form itself; *ipso facto* culture demands that the values of an *entire* society ('whole') are represented, but paradoxically a unitary perspective is impossible while class division maintains. This is the theoretical root of both Lukács' and Debord's argument for the radicalism of cultural form, which relies on 'totality' and thus must represent its own violation (being class based) to correctly fulfil its purpose.

If art is 'sensory communication', Debord argues the avant-garde exploit culture's internal contradiction, by engaging with class struggle, despite its bourgeois form; i.e. studied in art history ('spheres of knowledge') or traded by collectors ('management as a dead thing to be contemplated in the spectacle'). Debord

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form, both are needed for Absolute Spirit to be perceived and their synthesis or supersession takes form in Christianity.

<sup>960</sup> *Phenomenology*, p, xxviii. Finlay writes that through social forms 'the self, alienated from self, has been steadily enriched in its determinations', thus the reader of the *Phenomenology* (or Reason itself) recognizes the antithesis of Culture and Religion transcended in Absolute Spirit and infers this implies reconciled aspects of their own human nature, i.e. intellect and faith.

<sup>962</sup> Debord and Gil Wolman, *A User's Guide to Détournement*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.14.

<sup>963</sup> Debord, p. 132.

suggests that culture can only gesture to a 'lost' social unity ('totality') it is tasked to represent by abolishing itself as a privileged, economic category, as this return gestures to a restoration of the whole. However, culture thereby implies a potential negation of bourgeois forms more generally and their similar dialectical basis or potential transcendence. Thus, despite the S.I.'s more polemical insistence on the destruction of art (post 19??) - culture *does* instantiate a contradiction of bourgeois forms, *located both within and beyond culture*, which proves the main point of difference between Debord's and Adorno's theories of culture and the 'transcendence' of capitalism, discussed in relation to Realist and Modernist literature in the next chapter.

Culture's antithetical status - to represent a 'totality' undermined by its own bourgeois form - gives Debord a Hegelian-Marxist dialectical structure that becomes a paradigm for all I.S. artworks. To substantiate this, I examine Berlin Dada's use of space in performance, which Marcus considers their most significant achievement. Dada demonstrates that space provides an opportunity for the political transformation of dominant forms and is critical to the I.S. 'situation', *dérive* and psychogeography which aim to politically transform 'everyday' life. Second, while Jappe, McDonough and Strachey acknowledge Surrealism's influence on the S.I., only Wollen notes that Breton originally suggests a cultural practice based on Hegelian-Marxist theory.<sup>964</sup> Breton first attempts to mobilize Surrealism and transform 'everyday life' on this basis, to support class struggle, although Debord argues it fails to be effective. Yet, Breton's attempt at social revolution serves as a precedent.

*The Society of the Spectacle* frames this cultural power of negation, or S.I.'s use of culture as a weapon, within a shift away from Realism. European Romanticism (1700s -1800s) rejected neo-classical Realism as a resuscitated form, modelled on that of Ancient Greece. Romanticism, through its heightened subjectivity, gives way to Modernism, whose technique of 'fragmentation' forfeits a Realist

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<sup>964</sup> They all account for the debt the I.S. owe Surrealism, but not in this respect. See Wollen in *On the Passage of A Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*, p.34. He remarks: 'Breton never swerved from his own attachment to Hegel' but Wollen never explicitly explains how dialectics operates in Surrealism or applies this to I.S. works, that he finds Romantic, subjective and neglectful of Marx's later economic theories.

'totality', through the avant-gardes of 'cubism'<sup>965</sup>, Dada and Surrealism - a legacy the I.S. inherit. Modernist 'fragmentation' is a style used, perhaps, to represent the alienation inherent to modernity.<sup>966</sup> Debord is positive, in qualified terms, about the avant-garde, unlike Lukács who denies that Modernist 'fragmentation' is radical; however, both question its relation to larger, liberating social forces. Asger Jorn, for example, associates Modernism with sensationalism to ask, in 1955; 'Does [...] modernism have any real artistic value?'<sup>967</sup> While Berlin Dada use 'fragmentation' as Lukács' productive negation, adapted by the I.S. in their 'style of negation'<sup>968</sup>, Paris Dada denies any dialectical relationship between culture and society. In Paris, Marcel Duchamp approaches alienation as a metaphysical phenomenon; his style of 'fragmentation', similar to Hyppolite's 'negative dialectic' or Sartre's Existentialism, implies permanently separated spheres - whether cultural, physical or temporal - and thus perhaps treats alienation apolitically.

Therefore, 'fragmentation' is analysed in relation to Debord's interrogation of the Modernist avant-garde's political efficacy, but anticipates chapters Four and Five, which consider Lukács' similar question of literature in the *Das Wort* debate (1930), to better establish an 'anti-spectacular' criteria of the novel. For Lukács questions if 'fragmentation' in novels by Franz Kafka, Robert Musil and Virginia Woolf offers a less politically radical representation of alienation than Realist novels. While Debord was negative about traditional culture, as a bourgeois form or commodity, he was very widely read. *Panegyric I* (1989), Debord's tribute to his revolutionary early years, is filled with references to various authors; from Aristophanes to Shakespeare, Cervantes to Swift and Sterne.<sup>969</sup> Again, a fuller definition is given in Chapter Four, but Realism reconstructs a social and historical narrative 'totality', which allows ideology to be represented in terms of a working-class perspective, through a discrepancy of its claims, enabling ideology to be radically undermined. I.S. art similarly engages a participant and

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<sup>965</sup> Debord, p. 133. Thesis 189. 'What eventually followed the baroque [...] was an ever more individualistic art of negation which, from romanticism to cubism, renewed its assault [...] until the fragmentation and destruction of the artistic sphere was complete.'

<sup>966</sup> Linda Nolin, *Realism*, contrasts Romanticism with Realism by the former's forward looking, contemporary point of view, contact with nature, individuality and imagination or aspiration. Chapter 3 'Il faut etre de son temps': Realism and the Demand for Contemporaneity' p.104-5

<sup>967</sup> Asger Jorn, 'Wonder, Admiration, Enthusiasm', *October*, 141, 59-69, p.59.

<sup>968</sup> Debord, p. 143. Thesis 204.

<sup>969</sup>

'image', not in immediacy, but relates a participant 's refusal to Marx's historical class conflict or 'totality'. This reliance on 'totality' and common principle of using a contradiction internal to cultural form, in a dialectical reversal of class perspectives, to expose ideology in the negative, suggests a basis upon which Debord and Lukács define culture as radical. Duchamp's opposite position, like later Postmodernists, believes 'fragmentation' is metaphysical and emphasizes un-relatedness or seriality; 'totality' becomes an obsolete construct, as forms have no common, social relationship. Therefore, this chapter anticipates a comparison of Marxist and Postmodern approaches to interpreting fiction in chapters four and five.

Debord understands that culture's formal purpose is to represent a 'coherent account of the social totality'<sup>970</sup> which is unavailable under capitalism, which therefore becomes the antithesis of culture's purpose. Debord situates a Hegelian styled Reason in culture (not philosophy) which comes to operate as Lukács' self-reflexive *class* consciousness; culture's internal contradictions come to demonstrate a 'lack of rationality' in its partial, class biased reflection.<sup>971</sup> The I.S. argue that the self-reflexive nature of objective form allows culture to become a: 'means through which a society thinks of itself and shows itself to itself'.<sup>972</sup> Therefore, Debord's theory opposes culture (tasked with representing the 'whole') to the 'spectacle', as respectively false and true *loci* of society's 'lost unity'. If Hegel interprets culture as a social category, which participates in a socio-historical process of the negation of divisions, Debord *radicalizes* this principle, arguing that the avant-garde is a focal point for '*becoming conscious*' of society's possibility of recognizing its unity, with all its political implications. Culture must actively draw Hegel's 'opposites' - Marx's classes - together, through its aim of conscious 'unity' (equality) and thus discovers its ambition as a mode of class critique.

Dada and Surrealism, as successive movements, build a cumulative awareness of culture as an alienated social category, only redeemed by divesting itself of value through self-abolition. To achieve this, culture perceives a lack of efficacy

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<sup>970</sup> Debord, p.131, Thesis 183; p.132, Thesis 185; p.131, Thesis 184.; Ibid.

<sup>971</sup> Debord, p.181, Thesis 182.

<sup>972</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, 'Basic Banalities' in *Situationist International Anthology*, p.305.

in representing social 'unity' through traditional cultural forms. Thus, Dada and Surrealism innovate to respectively develop the aesthetics of 'negation' and 'creation':

[t]he two currents that marked the end of modern art were dadaism and surrealism [...] dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it, and surrealism sought to realize art without abolishing it.<sup>973</sup>

Culture becomes an instance of Lukács' *productive* negation, as 'shattering' its bourgeois or reified aspect gives culture a correct *form* in its rehearsal of a social unity it seeks to represent by its self 'transcendence'<sup>974</sup> (as a bourgeois form). This is identical with the goals of more direct, political action in the return of *content* ('surplus value') realigned with working class aims.<sup>975</sup> This attempt to embody 'lost unity' as Marx's classless society fulfils culture's proper function, or effects Debord's 'end of culture'<sup>976</sup> in its transition to politics. As in Hegel's system, where culture works beyond itself to reveal *Geist*, this effort beyond its own production demonstrates that culture participates in historical class struggle, aligning culture with Marx's goal of Communism: 'the project of culture's self-transcendence as part of total history'.<sup>977</sup> Debord thus *détourns* Hegel's reformism calling his own radicalism: 'the victory of the rational'.<sup>978</sup> The I.S. adapt a range of experimental techniques honed by Dada and Surrealism as attacks on a dominant class; 'extremist innovation is historically justified'.<sup>979</sup> Debord positions the I.S. as the 'synthesis' of prior movements in this 'conscious' use of the inherent radicalism of culture; 'implicitly present albeit not fully realized in the

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<sup>973</sup> Debord, p. 136, Thesis 191.

<sup>974</sup> Debord, p.136, Thesis 191. Debord writes: 'dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it, and surrealism sought to realize art without abolishing it. The critical position since worked out by the situationists demonstrates that the abolition and the realization of art are inseparable aspects of a single transcendence of art.'

<sup>975</sup> Lukács likewise defines working class consciousness as an alienated 'content' that is dialectically changed to a radical 'form'.

<sup>976</sup> Debord, p.132, Thesis 185

<sup>977</sup> Debord, p.131, Thesis 184.

<sup>978</sup> Debord, p.131. Thesis 182.

<sup>979</sup> Debord, 'Methods of *Détournement*', in *Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.8.

1910-1925 period'.<sup>980</sup> Thus, the sublation of art in revolution leads Gérard Berreby to call the group, 'the last avant-garde'.<sup>981</sup>

### **3.2. Dada**

There was the father we hated, which was surrealism.  
And there was the father we loved, which was dada.  
We were the children of both.<sup>982</sup>

Michelle Bernstein

The I.S. assess Dada by focusing on its political achievements and failures. Despite Dada's diverse membership, several geographical locations (Zurich, Berlin, Paris and New York) and innovative use of new media (manifesto, performance, photo-montage), its characteristic style of 'fragmentation' operates in both visual and linguistic mediums (i.e. cut-ups and manifestos). The movement is divided between members for whom this destructive style works politically, to confront and mirror capitalist alienation (the 'fragmentation' of society) and those who are sceptical of culture's agency.

Helena Lewis in *Dada Turns Red* considers Dada primarily an anti-establishment movement because, at least in Zurich and Berlin, members oppose the hypocrisy of bourgeois values that were seen to cause the First World War. In Zurich, 1916, Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball and 'draft dodger'<sup>983</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck met regularly at Ball's café, the Cabaret Voltaire, avoiding the war in neutral Switzerland. Gordon Mantel describes this pre-war period (1910-14):

It is difficult to imagine now the kind of thinking that led people to rejoice at the prospect of war [...] there was dancing in the streets [...] men flocked to recruiting offices [...] there was a spirit of festival and a sense of community in all European cities as old

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<sup>980</sup> Debord, 'Questionnaire', *Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.139. Debord writes similarly: '[...] there is a notable progression from futurism through dadaism and surrealism to the movements formed after 1945.' (p.18).

Debord, p.136. Thesis 191.

<sup>981</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Self Portraits and the Caricatures of the Situationist International* (Brooklyn: Colossal Books, 2015), p.113.

<sup>982</sup> Marcus, p.181.

<sup>983</sup> Marcus, p. 27.

class divisions and political rivalries were replaced by patriotic fervour<sup>984</sup>

Ball and Huelsenbeck suggest that such enthusiasm proved the pernicious nature of Germany's bourgeois institutions; industriousness turned to greed, profit encouraged imperialism, while nationalism fuelled militarism. These values found support in the church, education system, family and state. William Rubin quotes Tzara's reflection upon the emptiness of such values:

Honor, Country, Morality, Family, Art, Religion, Liberty, Fraternity etc. [sic] [...] had once answered to human needs, now nothing remained of them but a skeleton of conventions.<sup>985</sup>

The hypocrisy of bourgeois values was revealed by their dire result; Germany's loss of the war, an enormous loss of life and national bankruptcy which contributed to the later appeal of Fascism. Lewis suggests Romanticism stoked war fever by portraying nationalism positively (German soldiers 'marched off with a volume of Goethe in their knapsacks to skewer Frenchmen and Russians'<sup>986</sup>). Tzara thus proposed representing a destruction of such values, to indicate their emptiness. First, cultural conventions must be addressed: 'there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished.'<sup>987</sup> 'Fragmentation' becomes a Dadaist technique that enables the destruction of values celebrated by bourgeois culture (i.e. Goethe). Thus, Dada becomes the 'negative' of bourgeois society.

Dadaist 'fragmentation' represents social values in a bankrupt state through many mediums. Just as Debord demonstrates the ideological 'fragment' alienates society, Dadaist 'fragmentation' derives critical power from reflecting the partiality of a bourgeois viewpoint in the negative.<sup>988</sup> For example, *Mechanical Head* by Raoul Hausmann (1919) [Figure 1] - the inventor of photomontage<sup>989</sup>, or works

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<sup>984</sup> Gordon Mantel, *The Origins of the First World War*, Seminar Studies in History (New York: Longman, 1987), p.3.

<sup>985</sup> William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1968), p.10.

<sup>986</sup> Helena Lewis, *Dada turns Red*, p. 2.

<sup>987</sup> Rubin, p.10.

<sup>988</sup> Debord, p.151, Thesis 214.

<sup>989</sup> Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2016), p.117. Two parties within Berlin Dada claim to have invented photomontage; Hausmann and the creative partnership of Grosz and Heartfield. Richter does not favour either claim.



by John Heartfield who produces covers for Hausman's journal *Der Dada*<sup>990</sup> (Issue 3, 1920) [Figure 2] or Hannah Hoch's collages such as *The Beautiful Girl* (1919) [Figure 3]. They employ 'fragmentation' to juxtapose key elements or symbols of bourgeois life in a context of opposite imagery to suggest its negative result.

**Figure 1. *Mechanical Head*, Raoul Hausmann (1919)**



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<sup>990</sup> <https://www.johnheartfield.com/John-Heartfield-Exhibition/about-john-heartfield-photomontages/dada-political-art-history/heartfield-grosz-der-dada-3> '[accessed 11 June, 2020]'

Figure 2. Cover of *Der Dada* Issue 3 (1920) by John Heartfield



Figure 3. *The Beautiful Girl*, Hannah Hoch (1919)



Stylistically, their juxtaposition of objects, words and brands introduces the 'negative' meaning of the bourgeois value by proximity, an association that enacts its obliteration. Dada often uses machines to thematize the rationalism and alienation of modern life as in *Mechanical Head* (1919). Housmann's *objets trouvés* - the wooden head of a tailor's dummy and ruler - evoke the automation of production and evacuation of human identity by the robotic, identifying 'mechanical' behaviour in a way that continues in Debord's prescriptive 'spectacle'. Hoch's *The Beautiful Girl* (1919) uses BMW emblems pictorially, as ironic modern talismans of status and beauty, to suggest a commodification of beauty by this equivalence to an eye-catching brand, using a 'cut and paste' approach she terms 'aggressive'.<sup>991</sup> Hoch writes on photomontage ('A Few Words on Photomontage', 1934) that advertising used this technique before Dada; however, she turns its often falsifying use against its purposes of promotion to parody the advert's claim - a subversion.<sup>992</sup> Marcus suggests that Dadaist 'fragmentation' might respond to the hypocrisy of militarism and symbolize the dismemberment, or reconstructive surgery, of returning soldiers.<sup>993</sup> Dadaist works reconfigure magazine advertisements, newspaper copy, numbers, photographs and often pieces of found material (Kurt Schwitters used rubbish) to re-contextualize their *intended* meaning and express instead the ideological degradation of human values by bourgeois society.

'Fragmentation' as assemblage affects 'anti-ideological' juxtapositions. Hans Richter quotes George Grosz's description of this method:

On a piece of cardboard we pasted a *mischmasch* of advertisements for hernia belts [...] labels from [...] wine-bottles, and photographs from picture papers, cut up at will in such a way as to say, in pictures, what would have been banned by the censors if we had said it in words. In this way we made postcards supposed to have been sent home from the Front [...] Heartfield was moved to develop what started as an inflammatory political joke into a conscious artistic technique <sup>994</sup> [sic]

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<sup>991</sup> Maud Lavin, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 219.

<sup>992</sup> Lavin, p. 17. She writes 'photomontage had been common in advertising since the nineteenth century'.

<sup>993</sup> Marcus, p. 222.

<sup>994</sup> Richter, p. 117.

However, although bold juxtapositions refuse a single, ideological perspective, 'fragmentation' might prove politically ineffectual. Juxtaposed capitalist symbols or 'signs' are chaotic, disjointed and fail to explicitly articulate Debord's class relationships. Richter makes the distinction that Dada was not primarily an attack on art but a wider critique of bourgeois values: 'art should be [...] turned into a battle, not against art as such, but against social conditions in Germany.'<sup>995</sup> Often Dadaist 'fragmentation' fails to go beyond a destruction of visual or linguistic form. Its influence is certainly felt in early I.S. works; for example, Debord's destruction of film (referred to shortly) or works by the *Letterists* (1952) that aim to destroy language as a tool of conventional poetry and political rhetoric.<sup>996</sup> If Heartfield's collage is a humorous, political joke, Dada more widely uses what Marcus calls 'satire, bluff, irony and finally violence'.<sup>997</sup> A new, attitudinal form of negation emerges in Dada's use of insults, a practice borrowed by the Surrealists and S.I., that elevates humour to the level of culture but subverts culture by this introduction to *negate* traditional cultural values and conventions. Here, perhaps, negation finds its target; those wider, bourgeois expectations. As Grosz recounts:

we held 'meetings', at which, for an entrance fee of a few marks, we did nothing but tell people the truth - that is to say we insulted them [...] nothing was sacred, we spat on everything, and that was Dada.<sup>998</sup>

Dada's provocative performances prove a use space that is a subversive reconsideration of cultural form and has a lasting effect on the Surrealists and I.S. However, does Dada's use of space *transform* the social conditions of Germany?

The first German cabaret, the Bunttes Theater (1901), opened as an experiment, seeking to marry high culture and popular entertainment. Alan Lareau notes that cabaret's method of critical juxtaposition 'critiques reality by contrasting it with a norm or ideal to usually humorous effect'[sic].<sup>999</sup> By 1910, cabaret experienced

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<sup>995</sup> Richter, p. 113.

<sup>996</sup> Debord and Wolman with the *Letterist* group attempted to pare back letters to sound, in response to the meaninglessness of rhetoric and poetry.

<sup>997</sup> Marcus, p. 115.

<sup>998</sup> Richter, p. 49.

<sup>999</sup> Alan Lareau, 'The German Cabaret Movement during the Weimar Republic' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 43 (1991), 471-490 (p. 471).

commercial pressures that made political satire rare, thus, Lareau adds; '[t]he audience [...] was not interested in hearing about current events and problems'<sup>1000</sup> and cabaret degenerated into 'obscenity and nudity'.<sup>1001</sup> Dada, perhaps in opposition to its populist form, builds on the satirical aspect of cabaret. Marcus relates one such Dada event:

[t]he peak of the movement came in 1920 in Cologne with an exhibition which one had to enter through a public urinal. Its main attraction was a young girl, dressed in white as though for her first communion, reading pornographic poems<sup>1002</sup>

Here, religion (a bourgeois value) is juxtaposed to the sexual desire it attempts to control. The girl becomes dually symbolic of bourgeois convention (communion, purity), but also a contradictory, provocative, sexual 'corruption' (pornography) that overturns a purported female innocence with an apparent female licentiousness, used by the church to justify its control.

From its earliest days, Dada used juxtaposition to negate the values of bourgeois, capitalist society. Emmy Hemmings would sing anti-war poems for Ball, to the tune of *So Leben Wir* (That's How We Live) a popular military drinking song.<sup>1003</sup> Irrational '[c]ubist dances'<sup>1004</sup> aimed to subvert ballet (bourgeois culture) and oppose, in principle, the rationalization and extreme control of space in production by such parody. Dances were often accompanied by Tzara's absurdist poetry, composed from randomly chosen words cut out of newspapers, using the 'irrational' principle of chance to subvert poetic form, again, as a political gesture. Richter describes Tzara's bare, phonetic *poèmes simultaines* performed 'by twenty people who did not always keep in time with each other'.<sup>1005</sup> The irrational, illogical and absurd was juxtaposed with bourgeois values as a mode of critique. Similarly, Richter suggests that this theme of the 'uncivilized' was inspired by primitive art (which inspired Picasso) in opposition to bourgeois sophistication; 'Janco's savage Negro masks [...] [were] something quite new, unexpected and

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<sup>1000</sup> Lareau, p. 475.

<sup>1001</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>1002</sup> Lewis, p.10.

<sup>1003</sup> Michael Howard and Debbie Lewer, *A New Order: An Evening at the Cabaret Voltaire* (Manchester: The Manchester Metropolitan University, 1996), p.93.

<sup>1004</sup> Lewis, p.3.

<sup>1005</sup> Richter, p.78.

anti-conventional'.<sup>1006</sup> Lewis identifies the 'purely destructive shock value'<sup>1007</sup> entailed in this cultural negation of conventional values. The next chapter considers Adorno's claim that 'shock' is a key strategy of Modernist literature.<sup>1008</sup> Here, however, British Surrealist David Gascoyne recalls the Cologne exhibition 'created such a scandal that it had to be closed down by the police'.<sup>1009</sup> Dada's anti-ideological use of space, that Marcus finds its greatest achievement, pre-figures the I.S. 'situation' when it galvanizes such concrete oppositions (i.e. culture and the state) rather than effecting simple juxtapositions.

If Dadaist destruction uses shock to 'transform' an audience through self-reflection, in a re-assessment of values which are ordinarily affirmed by bourgeois culture, nowhere is clearer than in examining an audience's reaction to a Dada performance, comparable to the reception of a later I.S. film. Gascoyne recounts:

the rage of those provoked [was] inhuman [...] and [...] this had been the reason for Serner's performance in the first place [...] Through Serner's contribution the public had gained in self-awareness.<sup>1010</sup>

As with the elevation of humour to the cultural medium, here, an audience's violent reaction to their disappointed cultural expectations becomes part of the performance, so to speak. Civility and the positive status given to bourgeois culture that underpins capitalist values, such as nationalism, is replaced by their negative value - barbarism. The crowd's anger is revealed to be the actual reality, and therefore the negation of, 'civilized' values, to reflect their negative outcome, i.e. war. This begins to suggest a Hegelian antithesis and synthesis operating in Dada's lesson of the transformative possibilities of space. Compare Serner's performance to Roberto Ohrt's account of a Paris screening of Debord's intentionally unwatchable *Howling in Favour of Sade* (1952) <sup>1011</sup>

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<sup>1006</sup> Richter, p.80.

<sup>1007</sup> Lewis, p.4.

<sup>1008</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, 'Adorno on Brecht' p.180. Adorno praises the effect of 'the shock of the unintelligible'.

<sup>1009</sup> David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, (London: Enitharmon Press, 1935:2000), p. 41.

<sup>1010</sup> Richter, p.79.

<sup>1011</sup> Hussey, p. 60-61. The screening took place at the Avant Garde Film Club, Saint-Germain-des-Près; 'In the distinguished tradition of avant-garde art riots especially beloved of the

[t][he audience at the Cine-Club d' Avant-Garde would not tolerate a dark screen [...] The film finally came on, accompanied by [...] whistling and booing, but this was really nothing more than its title and a proclamation of itself: Howlings in Favour of Sade. And, of course, a young woman's voice [...] mentioned casually, "In this film nothing is said about Sade." Why should anything need to be said? He had entered the theatre in a different way.<sup>1012</sup>

Like Dada, Debord destroys cinematic form to disappoint cultural expectations and provoke a reaction, a self-reflection of the audience as passive spectators, dependent on being entertained by a positive reflection of itself. To do this, Debord understood cultural negation must create an *opposite* reality, thus instantiating contradiction within the 'performance'. The audience's veneer of civility, reinforced by the values of a 'culture industry' critiqued by Adorno, descends into the crowd's brutish response, to demonstrate the Marquis de Sade's scepticism toward bourgeois morality and its opposite actuality.<sup>1013</sup> (De Sade's wider influence is discussed shortly.)

First, Dada taught the I.S. that juxtapositions enable a destruction of bourgeois values by representing them through their opposite reality. Second, while performance allows contradictions to remain symbolic, it can catalyse *actual* antagonism in the audience, if presented at an extreme and in Dada's case engage an anti-establishment position with state authority (the police). Dada performance demonstrates that discrepancy (empty conventions) can be *instantiated* as a 'living' antithesis, a form of 'living' contradiction using space as a medium or intermediary of wider class struggle.

However, in Paris, Duchamp demonstrates an opposite understanding of negation, treating space and time as metaphysical, not social phenomena. Negation operates in apolitical terms, much like Hyppolite's 'negative dialectic'. This apoliticism is exemplified in the sculpture *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913). Duchamp's focus is engineering and mechanics. He relates to space and time as

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Dadaists and Surrealists, there was a considerable degree of [...] prankish anarchy about the screening.'

<sup>1012</sup> Roberto Ohrt, 'The Master of the Revolutionary Subject: Some Passages from the Life of Guy Debord', *SubStance*, 28 (1999), pp.13-25, p.14.

<sup>1013</sup> *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (London: Verso, 1997), p. 126. Adorno writes: 'Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies.'

intellectual concepts, a focus which makes him a pioneer of a later conceptual art. Identical lengths of string are dropped from the same height, pasted down and presented alongside rulers which measure them, to become part of the sculpture and record the effects of gravity or chance. As each piece of string falls in a different shape they *appear* to be different lengths, although this is an illusion. The strings' lack of uniformity emphasize chance, which appears to corrupt the objective physical laws of gravity (i.e. space and time) in such variation. Science and rationalism, as intellectual structures, might be internally consistent but are suggested to be self-referential constructs themselves (to perhaps reflect an economy that reduces art to a commercial object) and throws into doubt the consistent 'totality' they claim to interpret. Duchamp's sculpture represents space and time as nihilistic forces that deny objectification any lasting 'transcendent' meaning. The theoretical frameworks of Hegel and Marx become humanist creations, or illusions. (Chapter Four revisits this point through Postmodern theory). Duchamp's negation operates as Hyppolite's 'negative dialectics', taking an opposite position to Berlin Dada. Rubin terms his apolitical mode of negation an 'ahistoricism'<sup>1015</sup>, for agency is defeated by chance or natural laws, rescinded in time, to undermine the act of being posited and there is no meaningful integration with objective, social processes and *history*. Initially, this aspect of negation influences Breton, as Rubin observes:

these creations neither updated values of the past nor provided models for the future [...] Since a work of art becomes history the moment it is completed, there was logic as well as wit in the Dada 'manifestation' in which Picabia made drawings that Breton erased as he went along <sup>1016</sup>

This begins to suggest that Debord's combative use of culture is the opposite of an anti-Hegelian, apolitical form of negation, theorized by Wahl and Hyppolite, that might be read into Duchamp's work.

What precisely distinguishes Berlin from Paris Dada making it useful to the S.I.? This question relates back to the rejection of a Realist 'totality' for Modernist 'fragmentation'. Maurice Nadeau (an early historian of Surrealism) suggests that scientific discoveries herald modernity and a transition to the twentieth century

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<sup>1015</sup> Rubin, p.16.

<sup>1016</sup> Rubin, p.16.



which inspires a changed perspective on cultural representations of space and time:

Einstein, Heisenberg, Broglie and Freud [...] were inaugurating a new conception of the world, of matter, and of man. The notions of universal relativism, of the collapse of causality, of the omnipotence of the unconscious breaking with the traditional notions based on logic and determinism, imposed a new point of view <sup>1017</sup>

Here, Modernist style is framed politically to ask if 'fragmentation' is radical or if formal novelty is mistaken for critique simply because it departs from bourgeois forms, namely Realism. Filippo Marinetti's Futurist manifesto (1909) employs 'fragmented' script and might be assumed to foreshadow Dada, however, their ambitions differ. Debord argues Futurism is the cultural counterpart of a 'period of bourgeois euphoria'<sup>1018</sup> toward modernity, a shift from industrialism toward late capitalist mass consumption, during a period Debord considers the birthplace of the spectacle (1911-20). Marinetti writes: '[t]ime and [s]pace died yesterday [...] we have [...] created eternal, omnipresent speed.'<sup>1019</sup> Space and time, represented in Futurist themes of speed and strength, celebrate bourgeois ideology; speed is exemplified by the efficiency of the production line, while space is mastered through motorized transport (for example, the use of trains by the military to control colonies, cement trade and serve nationalistic interests that culminate in the First World War). Dadaist Huelsenbeck suggests the Futurists' destruction of nineteenth century cultural form is prompted by impatience during the *fin de siècle*, the conflict between lingering, old customs and new social attitudes that motivate the Futurists to embrace war: 'Marinetti and his group love war as the highest expression of the conflict of things.'<sup>1020</sup> Debord writes such 'fragmentation' might be reactionary, observing that Futurism 'introduced a great

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<sup>1017</sup> Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, Trans. by Richard Howard and Introduction by Roger Shattuck, (London: Johnathan Cape, 1968), p.85.

<sup>1018</sup> Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.18.

<sup>1019</sup> The Futurist Manifesto found at:

[https://www.societyforasianart.org/sites/default/files/manifesto\\_futurista.pdf](https://www.societyforasianart.org/sites/default/files/manifesto_futurista.pdf) [accessed 12.06.20]

<sup>1020</sup> Lewis, p.4.

number of formal innovations' but was sympathetic 'to fascism'.<sup>1021</sup> Debord did not consider Modernism radical in itself.

Richter describes Berlin Dada's transformative vision of space as: 'the fragmentation or [...] anarchistic negation of all values [...] a raging *anti, anti, anti*, linked with an equally passionate *pro, pro, pro!*'<sup>1023</sup> Its intentional use of space aims to politically *transform* the 'totality', a productive use of cultural negation that goes beyond stylistic 'fragmentation' and this defines Berlin Dada's common position with the S.I., in what Stewart Home observes is a thread of radicalism within Modernism:

From these pre-war movements the essential features of twentieth-century Utopianism become apparent. The partisans of this tradition aim not just at the integration of art and life, but of all human activities. They have a critique of social separation and a concept of totality<sup>1024</sup>

Dada's manifesto demands a 'radical Communism'<sup>1025</sup> and could be said to work alongside the Spartacist uprising of 1919. Only in this highly political context did the I.S. accept culture had value. Thus, Marcus suggests Dada performance, rather than Sartre's philosophy, is the precursor of the I.S. 'situation': '[a]ny spot could be a stage, and any stage could be a real terrain: anyone could make history.'<sup>1026</sup> To 'make history' through revolutionary struggle however, the I.S. also required the lessons and failures of Surrealism.

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<sup>1021</sup> Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.18.

<sup>1023</sup> Richter, p. 35.

<sup>1024</sup> Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (London: Aporia Press, 1988), p.5.

<sup>1025</sup> See Richard Huelsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann's 'What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?' (1919) published in *Der Dada*, 1. 'The international revolutionary union of all creative and intellectual men and women on the basis of radical Communism'.  
<http://mariabuszek.com/mariabuszek/kcai/DadaSurrealism/DadaSurrReadings/DadaGrmny.pdf> [12.6.20]

<sup>1026</sup> Marcus, p. 240.

### **3.3. Surrealism**

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality if one may so speak.

*The Surrealist Manifesto*, André Breton (1924)

Breton's erasure of Picabia's drawing is symbolic of his re-evaluation of Dadaist nihilism that, Gascoyne observes, he came to find 'unsatisfying'.<sup>1027</sup> Critics generally miss that Breton, before Debord, develops a cultural practice informed by Hegelian-Marxist theory. In an unknowing correspondence with Lukács, Breton's *First Surrealist Manifesto* is published in 1924, the same year as *History and Class Consciousness*. The significant difference is that Breton elaborates the unconscious as a Freudian 'Id', able to transcend separation in a reformulation of the Hegelian Absolute as 'absolute reality'<sup>1028</sup> or 'surreality', not Lukács' proletariat with its latent but 'unconscious' revolutionary power. Yet, Breton aims at social revolution, giving aspects of Dada - its experimental media, its technique of 'fragmentation' - new life in Surrealism. This section examines Surrealism's claim that Freud's 'Id' is the source of culture's revolutionary possibilities, and, second, accounts for the political context in which Breton rethinks this position to alter Surrealism and give it a Marxist paradigm.

Like Dada, Surrealism opposes a subject to repressive elements of bourgeois society - 'family, nation, religion'<sup>1029</sup> - that Löwy identifies as a Romantic, anti-capitalist mode of cultural resistance, present to the Modernist avant-garde. Nadeau describes this resistance:

certain values [...] they brandished like flags: omnipotence of the unconscious [...] dreams and automatic writing: and consequently the destruction of logic [...] of religion, of morality, of the family, those straightjackets that kept man from living according to his desires<sup>1030</sup>

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<sup>1027</sup> Gascoyne, p.42.

<sup>1028</sup> *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924).

<<https://www.tcf.ua.edu/Classes/Jbutler/T340/SurManifesto/ManifestoOfSurrealism.htm>>  
[12.6.20]

<sup>1029</sup> Michael Löwy, *Morning Star* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p.34.

<sup>1030</sup> Nadeau, p.105.

Initially, Freud's psychoanalytic theory lends Surrealism a subject-object paradigm that allows desire as 'Id' to be oppositional; the erotic, the irrational and heightened emotion are powerful disruptors that challenge bourgeois life. Surrealism, Mary Caws writes: 'wishes to confer, by its magical and yet controlled discourse, a constant expansion upon the world as we know it'.<sup>1031</sup> Desire might at first appear a potential source of revolutionary 'synthesis'.

Poetry is central to a 'Surrealist' revolution as it gives primacy to subjective emotion, interiority and desire. This is relevant because this thesis ultimately concerns 'anti-spectacular' *literary* representations of alienation. Nadeau writes; '[t]hese rebels wanted to change [...] the traditional conditions of poetry [...] and especially of life.'<sup>1032</sup> Henri Lefebvre, in *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), suggests a literary history and subversive poetics, such as Baudelaire's, that anticipates the Surrealist aesthetic.<sup>1033</sup> The movement was rooted in literature, but in Nadeau's unorthodox form.

*Littérature* (1919-24), a Dadaist styled journal, was produced by Breton in Paris after he left Dada and before he founded Surrealism, along with Surrealism's other founding members Louis Aragon and Phillipe Soupault. Rubin observes, as the title suggests, that they turned to literature and not plastic arts for inspiration: 'Rimbaud was their model [...] and Isidore Ducasse'.<sup>1034</sup> Gascoyne also identifies their place in a tradition which subverts conventional subject matter, vocabulary and iconography; 'Sade, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautreamont'.<sup>1035</sup> Lefebvre and Löwy suggest Surrealism emerges with Modernism to respond to those scientific discoveries of Einstein and Freud that redefine space, time and the psyche, to inspire new formulations of human identity, reflected in new cultural styles pioneered by Modernist artists and authors. Guillaume Apollinaire, an older poet central to the avant-garde, invents the portmanteau, describing 'a "*sur-réalism*"' that, Rubin states, might 'illuminate an artistic truth more 'real' than that conveyed

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<sup>1031</sup> André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, trans. and introduction by Mary Ann Caws, (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London, 1990), p. ix.

<sup>1032</sup> Nadeau, p. 105.

<sup>1033</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2008) See Chapter 1, pp.103-129.

<sup>1034</sup> Rubin, p.113.

<sup>1035</sup> Gascoyne, p.28.

by conventional realism'.<sup>1036</sup> In his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre similarly defines Modernism by its attempt to overcome Realism's fixed dualities, such as causality, the real and ideal or 'action and dream [...] flesh and soul'.<sup>1037</sup> Surrealism emerges with Modernism's refusal of Realist binaries ripe for collapse, which Löwy calls: 'dualisms of matter and spirit, exteriority and interiority, rationality and irrationality'.<sup>1038</sup> Lefebvre takes the Surrealist theme of 'the marvellous' to argue it is misrepresented by nineteenth century Realism - and this applies to Romantic literature too - which restricts it to an opposition with the mundane or 'everyday', within Realism's wider conception of human nature's dualities that refuse integration and are mutually exclusive:

[u]nder the banner of the marvellous, nineteenth-century literature mounted a sustained attack on everyday life which has continued unabated up to the present day. The aim is to demote it, to discredit it [...] nineteenth century man [...] continued obstinately to belittle real life, the world 'as it is'.<sup>1039</sup>

Even if Lefebvre's bourgeois institutions enforce such separations, they are not considered in Marx's or Lukács' terms of alienation but instead excise what Breton identifies as Freudian aspects of human nature, such as erotic desire.

Surrealists therefore celebrate Baudelaire as a modern poet because he embraces 'the marvellous' within 'everyday' life, a theme expressed in his 'life universal'.<sup>1040</sup> Baudelaire as *flâneur* elevates mundane daily experience, characterized by temporal impermanence, through a poetic register of heightened emotion or eroticism. Characteristically, Modernist novels construct a similarly subjective perspective, through a first-person narrator, to relate *experiences* of space and time through personal moods, sensation, memories and revelations in a form that collapses 'the everyday' and 'marvellous' in an interconnectedness. For example, Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) uses the interior monologue to achieve a form of self-reflection that represents

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<sup>1036</sup> Rubin, p.115.

<sup>1037</sup> Lefebvre, p. 105.

<sup>1038</sup> Löwy, p.5.

<sup>1039</sup> Lefebvre, p.105

<sup>1040</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p.15.

mundane yet intense personal instances of joy *and* sorrow.<sup>1041</sup> Breton likewise hopes automatic writing, séances or the 'stroll' offer a method of overcoming bourgeois prohibitions and 'surmount the depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream'.<sup>1042</sup> The question is whether Surrealism, like Modernism, 'fragments' Realist binaries so completely that their disconnected, collapsed or merged emotional state forfeits any possibility of representing alienation in terms of opposition to a bourgeois order. Does it successfully mobilize desire as opposition, establishing Surrealism as a 'father' of the I.S. through Löwy's 'Freudo-Hegelianism'?<sup>1043</sup>

This tradition of Baudelaire, de Sade and Lautreamont breaks with Realism's separations to represent the human condition as non-binary; opposite terms combine in the experience of good and evil, heaven and hell, poverty and wealth, life and death. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) exemplifies this, in his conflicted style; 'all I loathe [...] is one with all I love'.<sup>1044</sup> Opposite states are collapsed: 'spume of pleasure [and] tears of torture'.<sup>1045</sup> The Surrealists claim Baudelaire's tradition of 'modern' poetry (Paul Éluard is 'a direct descendent of Baudelaire'<sup>1046</sup>) because 'everyday' subjects - dreams, the city, society, sexuality - thereby gain *full* expression. Baudelaire's moral ambivalence presents a threat to bourgeois appearances; for conventional culture celebrates morality, censoring those aspects of experience that the bourgeoisie nevertheless indulge in (i.e. prostitution). Surrealism expands on Baudelaire's conflation, in a project of an inverted order (i.e. morality represented as immorality) aimed at the destruction of the bourgeois establishment through its own hypocrisy. Thus, the *First Surrealist Manifesto* announces: 'Baudelaire is Surrealist in morality'.<sup>1047</sup>

Breton edits *La Revolution Surrealiste* (1924) and in issue 2 (1925) a mock survey pretends to question famous literary figures' attitudes to suicide, in order to

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<sup>1041</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Grafton, 1976), p.197. Clarissa Dalloway reflects in the same passage: 'it was her disaster - her disgrace [...] Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy.'

<sup>1042</sup> Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, p.146.

<sup>1043</sup> Löwy, p. xiii.

<sup>1044</sup> Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, trans. by Keith Waldrop (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), *Against Her Levity*, p. 48.

<sup>1045</sup> Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs Du Mal, Damned Women*, p.152.

<sup>1046</sup> Gascoyne, p.63.

<sup>1047</sup> The First Surrealist Manifesto

ridicule Catholicism, which deems suicide a moral question, punishable by damnation, rather than an irrational, desperate impulse: 'condemnation [...] is maintained concerning the relative who committed suicide that is more opaque, more massive, more crushing than a tombstone.' Similarly, Raymond Queneau's poem, *The Ivory Tower* (Issue 10, 1927) imagines graffiti that inverts elements of bourgeois life with Surrealist ones: 'having written on the walls IT IS FORBIDDEN NOT TO DREAM'.<sup>1048</sup> Surrealism goes further than Dada's juxtapositions because its form and imagery inverts dominant, bourgeois values to *enact a reversal* of the value associated with the depicted object or convention. As part of this tradition, Surrealism draws on De Sade whose novel *Justine* (1791) demonstrates that depravity and cruelty prove the reality of false, bourgeois morality or virtue.<sup>1049</sup> Like Debord's *Howling in Favour of Sade*, Surrealist poetry relies on a Sadean reversal. Hussey comments that a voice in Debord's film refers to 'human relations [...] based on passion [...] not terror' to strike an 'authentic Sadean note'.<sup>1050</sup> Debord's theory implies a similar reversal in that totalitarian 'terror' is the contradictory reality of the revolutionary 'passion' of Russian and German working-class revolutions, despite the ideologically positive 'image' of Stalin's dictatorship, for example. Surrealist reversals take on a political depth in the S.I.'s contradiction of working class aims and spectacular 'image', and Chapter Five argues 'anti-spectacular' novels by Kundera and Sebald similarly give the 'image' this dimension.

The more Freudian nature of Surrealist literary reversals is exemplified by the automatic text *The Magnetic Fields* (1919) by Breton and Soupault. Textual meaning resists the semantic field of bourgeois discourse; instead, subjectivity is claimed to erupt in un-alienated form through the stronger repulsions and attractions or *field* of the 'Id'. Dawn Ades perceptively suggests that automatic writing is an: 'equivalent of the free associative monologue of psychoanalysis'.<sup>1051</sup> Breton's method uniquely records a sovereign subjectivity, free of logic, taste and

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<sup>1048</sup> <<https://www.marxists.org/history/france/surrealists/>> [accessed 15.6.20]

<sup>1049</sup> De Sade's heroine Justine, a model of virtue, suffers multiple sexual attacks by a cast of aristocrats and clergy who engage in extremes of vice; this provides a basis of his polemic against the hypocrisy of bourgeois morality and its professed 'natural' status. Justine suffers a final injustice in being struck by a lightning bolt, in a presumed act of God.

<sup>1050</sup> Hussey, Chapter 5. p. 57-69. He quotes from *Howling in Favour of Sade*: 'human relations should be based on passion, if not, the terror.'

<sup>1051</sup> Ades, p.31.

convention, that uncovers a new lexicon of imagery. Gascoyne call this an 'assortment of images [...] we should never have been able to obtain in the normal way of writing.'<sup>1052</sup> Tzara's nonsensical Dadaist poetry and its collapsed states (i.e. the rational and irrational) reappears in Breton's use of the 'irrational' as a new mode of literary opposition to bourgeois society. Ella Mudie suggests this is the original source of *détournement*, as developed by the S.I.<sup>1053</sup> However, Surrealism's destruction of cultural form performs a negation by its reversal of meaning in nonsense, but fails to offer 'synthesis', whereas *détournement*, in the following section, is shown to politically transform *meaning* to achieve 'synthesis'. Shortly, a further study of Baudelaire's imagery reveals that its oppositions better capture this political aspect of 'synthesis', missing in Surrealism, but present in *détournement*.

If Surrealist negation is a revolutionary inversion of orders - an attack on bourgeois values - this is more obvious in plastic arts; for example, Rene Magritte's *Golconda* (1953) or Dali's disconcerting sculpture *Lobster Telephone* (1936). Magritte's displaced businessmen retain their 'everyday' uniform of suit and bowler hat, but are suspended in a dreamscape, the opposite context of capitalism. However, capitalist rationalism and alienation is suggested by the isolation and identical forms of the figures, set out in a striking, repetitious pattern. Like Haussman's dummy, that reflects Lukács' worker made alienated 'object', Magritte's use of a dream is symbolic of a unique individualism that is ironically repressed or absent, represented by this patterning. Here, 'the marvellous' as a 'dream' is used in a cynical fashion. David Sylvester write that Magritte's paintings often give a physical relation to a subconscious or sensory experience, which Sylvester calls the 'pure embodiment of an idea'.<sup>1054</sup> Magritte's patterning suggests this idea is alienation, as capitalism requires conformity and rationalism. Sylvester adds that Magritte's 'iconography of traditional popular images' are turned 'upside down'.<sup>1055</sup> In other words, a figure symbolic of capitalism, labour and conformity is re-contextualized to invert its meaning and negate its value in a dream, in Surrealism's humorous manner that Löwy calls its 'ironic spirit of

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<sup>1052</sup> Gascoyne, p.49.

<sup>1053</sup> Ella Mudie, 'An Atlas of Allusions: The Perverse methods of Debord's *Mémoires*'. *Criticism*, 58, (2016) 535-563, p.539.

<sup>1054</sup> David Sylvester, *Magritte* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p. 296.

<sup>1055</sup> Sylvester, p.281.



negation'.<sup>1056</sup> Dali affects a similar dreamlike psychosis through the unsettling disjunction of a telephone and a lobster. Disjunction brings two different objects together, as practised by the poet Comte de Lautréamont (Isadore Ducasse) in *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869). Breton popularizes his phrase: '[a]s beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table.'<sup>1057</sup> Rather than Duchamp's objects (which mobilize an indifference to objective laws) Dali invests the telephone with strangeness, humour, mystery and eroticism to suggest the depths of personal communication (subject) but also the impossibility of conversation, given the lack of a functional telephone (object) to capture this subject-object relation in a state of alienation, through negation as disjunction, rather than Magritte's reversal.

Surrealism is almost defined by its prolific innovation of media. This is the positive aspect of culture Debord identifies. Breton believed new forms might reveal desire in an autonomy that would demand a transformation of bourgeois institutions. He wanted to establish a 'Bureau of Surrealist Research': '[w]e must regard this conception of poetry as one of the main reasons for a creation of a Bureau of Surrealist Research'.<sup>1058</sup> He invites 'inventors, madmen, revolutionaries, misfits, dreamers'<sup>1059</sup> to contribute collectively, share discoveries and shape a revolutionary vision of a society fit for a redefined, modern humanity. Surrealists seek to involve the public; 'Everyone is a poet'.<sup>1060</sup> The I.S. adopt this approach of democratic inclusiveness and engagement aimed at a collective, transformative creativity: 'You want to join the SI!'<sup>1061</sup> (IS#8, 1963) exclaims an ironically *détourned* P.R. leaflet, encouraging everyone to become Situationists. Surrealist literary experiment, games and practices such as the 'stroll' (below) are adapted by the I.S. in, respectively, *détournement*, the 'situation' and *dérive* – discussed shortly.

The Surrealist use of space transfigures Dada performance by embarking on 'strolls' through Paris that Löwy observes are directed by Freud's 'pleasure

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<sup>1056</sup> Löwy, p.19.

<sup>1057</sup> Andy Merrifield, *Guy Debord*, p.17.

<sup>1058</sup> Nadeau, p.99.

<sup>1059</sup> Nadeau, p.100.

<sup>1060</sup> Nadeau, (1978), p.97.

<sup>1061</sup> 'Situationist International Anti-Public Relations Service', *I.S. no. 8*, in *The Situationist International*, p. 134.

principle', often ending up in districts of prostitution.<sup>1062</sup> 'Strolling', originally a form of recreation for the upper-middle class of late nineteenth century Paris, involved parading through parks and shopping arcades, allowing fashionable, wealthy citizens to observe one another and window-shop. However, Baudelaire's *flâneur* stands at a reflective distance, resisting shopfronts, to intentionally lose touch with bourgeois uses of the city. Surrealist wandering with an openness to 'life universal' results in a flow of living images, useful to poetry, just as automatic writing produces a sedentary but psychic flow of unusual images. Nadeau uses the *flâneur* to explain the Surrealists' fresh responses to space: 'living meant looking [...] savouring the atmosphere of those inspired places in postwar Paris: the Passage de l'Opera [...] the Porte Saint-Denis'. Nadeau reports that Surrealists would: 'buy a Sunday ticket at a suburban railway station and shunt for hours and hours on all the tracks of a landscape of desolation, on a journey whose end is never fixed in advance.' Surrealism re-invests a city with spontaneity, imagination and desire, in terms Nadeau likens to the 'marvellous': 'surrealists [...] escaped as far as the [...] Saint-Ouen flea markets where wonders leaped out of [...] each stray object, each pavingstone'.<sup>1063</sup> Walter Benjamin first suggests a *flâneur* idles as 'an unconscious protest against the tempo of the production process'.<sup>1064</sup> As Benjamin identifies Baudelaire's arcades with the birth of the advertising 'image', which develops over the century into Debord's spectacle, one might imagine the *dérive* develops from the 'stroll' as this protest against consumption.

However, Breton's 'stroll' does not give time an explicitly political form, beyond Benjamin's gesture. McDonough and Wollen neglect that the I.S. consider space in terms of 'lived time', as part of a *historical*, political process, a point Marcus emphasizes.<sup>1065</sup> Benjamin and Lefebvre, as critics, first suggest that Baudelaire's

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<sup>1062</sup> Löwy, p. 2.

<sup>1063</sup> Nadeau, p.106-7.

<sup>1064</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 338.

<sup>1065</sup> Tom McDonough, *The Situationists and the City* (London: Verso, 2009) p.10-30. He understands the I.S.'s Hegelian-Marxist approach, but not how it operates *through* the *dérive*: he calls cities 'historical landscapes', but nowhere is the *dérive* dynamic and oppositional, thereby relating the present to Marx's historical, dialectical struggle. 'Psychogeographic' maps such as *Axis of Exploration and Failures in the Search for a Situationist 'Great Passage'* might record 'ambiance' but are not politicized. Thus, a redesigned city 'privileges psychology' instead of being a material opposition to dominance. By failing to understand the dialectics at play, Unitary Urbanism, the I.S.'s method of this conversion, is termed 'imprecise'. Similarly, Peter Wollen in 'Situationists and Architecture', *New Left Review* (2001), p.125-6 incorrectly makes

images represent action and space through the historical dimension of time. *Morning Twilight* (1857), for example, in part attacks Georges-Eugène Haussmann's gentrification of Paris. Aurora, Greek Goddess of dawn, rises over the city, likened to an 'old workingman'<sup>1066</sup>, a simile for poverty that articulates a decay of values through a temporal distance from an ideal Greek *polis*.<sup>1067</sup> Baudelaire demands that poets anchor the 'everyday' in a temporality that transforms the immediate in terms of such 'universality' - i.e. past, historical, infinite mutations:

[t]he aim for him is to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory<sup>1068</sup>

Baudelaire suggests new forms are defined by their relationship to a historical past ('historical envelope'), a historical dimension similarly present to Debord's Hegelian-Marxist framework that undermines permanence and authority, as with Haussmann's project - and suggests 'synthesis'. Baudelaire's image of dawn couples together opposed temporal *and* moral states; he requires history, the relation of modernity and eternity, the contradiction of present and past, to compare *polis* and poverty.

Benjamin suggests Baudelaire allows opposed states - moral and immoral - to appear as *contradiction* through this historical aspect: '[f]or Baudelaire [...] "the new" [...] must be wrested heroically from what is always again the same'<sup>1069</sup> - i.e. continuous with a historical past. Lefebvre's use of Hegelian terminology identifies this same historical aspect of Baudelaire's images, that straddle a temporal frame, harnessing together opposite dimensions of an object to refract history as a 'dialectic of opposites'.<sup>1070</sup> Lefebvre argues this opposition and

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the *dérive* a continuation of the Surrealist 'stroll': 'dependent on chance and [...] spontaneous subjective impulses' but nowhere are impulsive reactions politicized and related to dominant ideology and repression.

<sup>1066</sup> Baudelaire, p. 135. 'Aurora, in a gown of pink and green, rose slowly over the deserted Seine as gloomy Paris, rubbing eyes, took up its tools, old workingman'.

<sup>1067</sup> See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989). See her discussion of this strategy in relation to *The Swan*; an image's temporal duality is crafted by using Andromache to describe Paris, like Hector, with memories and a longing for the past. p.178-9.

<sup>1068</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p.16

<sup>1069</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.337.

<sup>1070</sup> Lefebvre, p.108.

transformation of a symbolic object allows time to be represented as a dialectical 'totality'; Baudelaire is 'concerned with intensifying it [opposition] until it reveals a sort of unity within its extremely painful tensions.'<sup>1071</sup> Baudelaire's images capture an object in concrete space making historical time a gateway to a 'totality' wherein transformation occurs; the present becomes the past, the rational and familiar the irrational and ambiguous. This is no longer Ducasse's oddly conjoined objects, or Surrealism's inversions and reversals. Lefebvre suggests Baudelaire's historical time reveals the *ideological* mediation of immediate reality: 'the symbol hidden behind the thing'.<sup>1072</sup> For an object (i.e. a city like Paris) is presented as ideologically reconstructed through historical time and becomes a symbol of moral corruption. Debord develops this aspect of Baudelaire's poetry in *détournement*, which he calls; 'the insubordination of words [...] manifested in all modern writing (from Baudelaire to the dadaists to Joyce)'.<sup>1073</sup>

Until Breton's shift to Communism in 1927, Surrealism relies on what Löwy calls 'Freudo-Hegelianism'<sup>1074</sup> but its chief target is bourgeois morality. Freud, not Marx, structures Surrealist works. Breton's 'Id' is almost the opposite of a repressed, proletariat class, driven by collective *conscious* rather than unconscious action. Ades and Baugh arrive at this conclusion. Ades suggests 'transcendence' is limited to individual consciousness: 'the barrier between the conscious and the unconscious [...] could [...] be broken down.'<sup>1075</sup> While Baugh concludes: '[t]he ultimate target of surrealist negation [...] is [...] the destruction of the ego'.<sup>1076</sup> Debord identifies *this* as Surrealism's inherent weakness (discussed at the end of this section).

However, during the early 1920s, Breton's use of the motif of Max Weber's 'iron

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<sup>1071</sup> Lefebvre, p.107.

<sup>1072</sup> Lefebvre, p.106

<sup>1073</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, 'All The King's Men', p. 114.

<sup>1074</sup> Löwy, p. xiii.

<sup>1075</sup> Ades, p.31.

<sup>1076</sup> Baugh, p. 57.

cage'<sup>1077</sup> decries restrictive bourgeois conventions, a connection Löwy observes<sup>1078</sup>:

The absolute rationalism still fashionable permits consideration only of facts closely related to our experience [...] experience itself has been assigned limits. It inhabits a cage increasingly difficult to coax it out of. Experience too relies on immediate utility and it is guarded by common sense [...] By virtue of those [Freud's] discoveries, a current of opinion is finally appearing by means of which the human explorer can extend his investigations [...] to take into account more than superficial realities.<sup>1079</sup>

Surrealism turns to subjective desire as a source of resistance, fearing that modernity produced Weber's ever more impelling social conformity, or what Eugene Lunn calls a 'liquidation of the autonomous psychological self'.<sup>1080</sup> Breton's attack on rationalism - 'immediate utility', 'common sense' - clearly but unknowingly resembles Lukács' analysis of reification, set out in *History and Class Consciousness*, just as the *First Surrealist Manifesto* was published.

To conclude, by 1926 Surrealism is openly discussed as ineffectual in *Clarté*, a journal that supported the Communist Party under editors, and fellow Surrealists, Pierre Naville and Jean Bernier: 'moral scandals provoked by surrealism [...] do nothing to depose the ruler of the intellectual hierarchy in a bourgeois republic.'<sup>1081</sup> Breton realizes Surrealism only represents an 'idea' of transcendence, insufficient to changing society. As Nadeau writes; 'the Revolution is in *ideas* [...] it permits them to scorn [...] all concrete material activity'.<sup>1082</sup> He adds: 'Breton perceived the weakness of such a position.'<sup>1083</sup> In relation to the 'negative dialectics' of Duchamp, Löwy comments that Naville

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<sup>1077</sup> Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism; an historical study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 58-59. Marshall Berman cites Weber's term in *All that is Solid Melts into Air*. Subsequently Marxist critics of Modernism then reference it; for example, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p.15 or Perry Anderson (NLR, 1984 No. 143-148 p.99).

<sup>1078</sup> Löwy, p.1. 'Max Weber has written [...] we are now living in a world that has become for us a veritable steel cage [...] a reified and alienated structure that imprisons us as individuals within the laws of the system'.

<sup>1079</sup> Nadeau, p.86.

<sup>1080</sup> Lunn, p.61.

<sup>1081</sup> Nadeau, p.140.

<sup>1082</sup> Nadeau, p.110.

<sup>1083</sup> Nadeau, p.110.

‘urged his Surrealist friends to go beyond a purely negative, “metaphysical” and anarchist standpoint toward the dialectical one of Communism by accepting party “discipline”’.<sup>1084</sup> In 1927, again in similarity to Lukács, Breton compromises, against a backdrop of a growing European socialist movement. He moves the Surrealists *en bloc* to an attachment to the French Communist party that he might otherwise have rejected as authoritarian. Breton’s *Second Surrealist Manifesto* (1929) duly revises the ‘Freudo-Hegelian’ paradigm and replaces the Hegelian ‘Absolute’ with Communism, to declare that Surrealism: ‘takes as its point of departure the “colossal abortion” of the Hegelian system’.<sup>1085</sup> Once Breton accepts the necessity of a Communist revolution, he reconfigures Surrealism on the basis of Hegelian-Marxist dialectics, giving Surrealist practice a *political* paradigm for the first time. Debord terms this Surrealism’s: ‘liquidation of idealism and rallying to dialectical materialism’.<sup>1086</sup>

Breton reframes ‘ideas’ as a cultural product, alienated like any other in a capitalist society. Surrealism becomes a mediation that reverses ‘ideas’, allowing them to be directly *subjective* and un-alienated, resistant to being subsumed by capitalism. A Surrealist inspired idea, in a subject faced with an alienated world, is claimed to be Marx’s ‘negation of the negation’.<sup>1087</sup> Yet, as Lewis explains, Breton denies this is a change in direction, claiming there is ‘no inherent conflict between Surrealism and Marxist theory, since Surrealism was also materialist, with its belief in *one* reality’.<sup>1088</sup> Breton implies that ideas have a material reality and change society in revolutionary ways. Although this is the grounds upon which the Communist Party criticise Lukács’ ‘idealism’.

Breton however clearly collapses the conceptual realm (‘ideas’) and materiality - which is *not* ‘transcendence’. During Surrealism’s most productive years (1924-33), Breton lacks an adequate theoretical hypothesis for ‘transcendence’ as revolution. For example, *The Communicating Vessels* (1932) is extremely vague:

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<sup>1084</sup> Löwy, p.46.

<sup>1085</sup> *Manifestoes of Surrealism* by André Breton, trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p.140. Breton argues that Surrealism first applied the ‘dialectical method’ as an artistic strategy - which aligns it with historical materialism - but that Hegelian idealism not practicable enough to be revolutionary.

<sup>1086</sup> Debord, ‘Report on the Construction of Situations’, *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.19.

<sup>1087</sup> *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p.140.

<sup>1088</sup> Lewis, p.20.

'the conversion [...] of the imagined to the lived or, more exactly, to the ought-to-be-lived.'<sup>1089</sup> Gascoyne relates Breton's similarly woolly observation that: 'the things which are and the things which might so well be should be fused, or thoroughly intercept each other'.<sup>1090</sup> In 1933 Breton was expelled from the P.C.F. for unorthodoxy as he refused to curb aesthetic experiment. Yet, Lewis states, Breton continued to insist: 'the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic is at the heart of the philosophy of Surrealism'.<sup>1091</sup> Breton hoped culture might bridge political and social realms to create revolution, but Zhdanov's cultural orthodoxy and the Moscow show trials of 1936 bore no resemblance to what Löwy calls Breton's 'desire for human emancipation in its totality'.<sup>1092</sup>

Debord acknowledges that Surrealism contributes to a poetic tradition that is critical to the S.I., for 'situations' stage similar reversals of ideas. However, the I.S. establish discrepancy between the 'spectacular' appearance and authentic form of desires, to allow for a concrete, political mode of contradiction and 'negation':

everyone realizes himself in an inverted perspective. In this context the I.S. is in the line of contestation that runs through Sade, Fourier, Lewis Carroll, Lautreamont, surrealism <sup>1093</sup>

Debord argues that capitalism is impervious to Surrealism's irrational 'ideas' and activity he terms 'weirdness'.<sup>1094</sup> Breton's defensive stance tacitly recognizes Surrealism's problematic lack of a theoretically rigorous basis for 'transcendence':

[t]he Surrealist cause is the revolutionary cause, in spite of the Surrealists' bourgeois origin, in spite of the attitude of certain dogmatic Marxists towards such phenomena as Freudian psychoanalysis. <sup>1095</sup>

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<sup>1089</sup> *The Communicating Vessels*, p.4.

<sup>1090</sup> Gascoyne, p.71.

<sup>1091</sup> Lewis, p.5.

<sup>1092</sup> Löwy, p.33.

<sup>1093</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.103. Sylvester similarly uses Carroll to identify a poetics in Magritte's inverted iconography that acts as a reversal of values, p. 280.

<sup>1094</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.19.

<sup>1095</sup> Gascoyne, p.24

Debord writes that Surrealism's decline 'soon after 1930'<sup>1096</sup> stems from this inability to provide culture with a workable dialectical means of actualizing revolt or 'catalysing [...] the desires of an era'<sup>1097</sup> and treats this as a problem for the I.S. to solve.

### **3.4. The *Internationale Situationniste***

We are artists only insofar as we are no longer artists: we come to realize art.

*Questionnaire*, Debord (1964)

This final section examines the S.I.'s use of the avant-garde legacy to create 'situations' capable of negating ideological, 'spectacular' choices. For Debord writes: '[t]he construction of situations begins on the ruins of the modern spectacle.'<sup>1098</sup> This would allow a participant an alternative, un-alienated, autonomous experience of space. As argued, Debord's Hegelian concept of culture placed a kernel of dialectical contradiction within cultural form itself. Surrealism had deployed it in an insufficiently political way. All I.S. work relies on this 'kernel', a Hegelian Marxist paradigm, particularly its aspect of productive negation, to nullify and convert 'false-consciousness' into class consciousness; whether a 'situation', game, *dérive* or *détournement*. Culture might thereby build alignment with the aims of a redefined proletariat (i.e. African-Americans fighting racism in Watts; for, as Stracey notes: 'the I.S. [...] attempt to make the Watts revolt their own').<sup>1099</sup>

Prior to establishing the *Internationale Situationniste* with Danish artist Ager Jorn at Cosio d'Arroscia, Italy in July, 1957, Debord followed Isidore Isou's *Lettrists* from Cannes to Paris in 1951, to subsequently split from the group and form the *Lettrists International* with Gil Wolman in 1952 and produce the journal *Potlatch* (1954). Hussey suggests this split was caused by Debord's disruption (without Isou's permission) of a press conference held by Charlie Chaplin. McCarthyism

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<sup>1096</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.18.

<sup>1097</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>1098</sup> Debord, 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation', *The Situationist International Anthology*, Kabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, p.43.

<sup>1099</sup> Stracey, p.57.



had made Chaplin a 'cultural hero of the Anti-American French Left'.<sup>1100</sup> This is typical of Debord's political independence; he protested at the 'anti-revolutionary' sentimentality of Chaplin's films. Jorn and former members of the IMIB (International Movement for an Imaginationist Bahauss) - the Italian artist Pierre Simondo, his wife Elena Verrone, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio and musician Walter Olmo - had met with a former member of CoBra, Constant Nieuwenhuys and other artists, curators and philosophers at Alba, Italy, throughout 1955-6. Jorn had enjoyed *Potlatch* and made contact with Debord in 1954.<sup>1101</sup> While Jorn had gathered factions of these obscure European avant-garde movements together at Alba, Debord finally united them as the Internationale Situationniste movement, with the addition of Michelle Bernstein (whom Debord married in 1954) and artist Ralph Rumney, the single member of his own London Psychogeography Committee.<sup>1102</sup>

The I.S. was founded on the principle that culture should only be put to political ends, as set out in its foundational text, composed at Cosio: *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action* (1957) - a nominal early manifesto (the I.S. manifesto was not written until 1960, IS #4). Here, Debord shares his vision of the I.S. as 'a revolutionary front in culture'<sup>1103</sup>, with aesthetic strategies fit to renew the avant-garde's assault on a worldwide 'spectacle'. The global commodity production economy, operated by Western elites or Eastern apparatchiks, whereby automation and service sector industries or bureaucracies reduce work to boredom and 'misery'<sup>1104</sup>, convert leisure time to commercial or state approved activity to leave citizens 'spectacularly' alienated by excessive advertising or propaganda in public and private space, whether in gentrified cities or state built housing projects. Chapter Five argues that 'anti-spectacular' novels depict this contemporary, social landscape; for example, *Trainspotting* uses Spud's interview for the 'leisure' industry ('what specifically attracts you to the leisure industry?')<sup>1105</sup> to indicate how far Tory policies replace skilled working-class jobs

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<sup>1100</sup> Hussey, p.66.

<sup>1101</sup> Hussey, p. 109-110

<sup>1102</sup> These nine are the founding members of I.S. , but Gil Wolman was not.

<sup>1103</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, Kabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p.37.

<sup>1104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1105</sup> Welsh, p.67.

with unskilled work. Or Welsh, like Kundera and Sebald, uses the theme of 'forgetting' to depict state programmes of gentrification, spatial dislocation and surveillance to demonstrate it causes a political erasure ('forgetting') of identity, community and, ultimately, history.

When Debord arrives in Paris in 1951, the cultural establishment is dominated by Existential, Surrealist and Modernist figures such as Sartre, Dali and Beckett and Le Corbusier (feted by Left-wing critics, such as Lucien Goldmann, whom Debord derides).<sup>1106</sup> In contrast, Debord playfully describes the I.S. as a political vanguard, an 'organization of professional revolutionaries in culture'.<sup>1107</sup> Central to the S.I.'s programme of instantiating art as revolution is the 'situation' that Sadler calls a 'revolutionary alternative to the creation of traditional art works'.<sup>1108</sup> The I.S. write that creating 'situations' is 'inconceivable without some connection with a political critique'.<sup>1109</sup> The I.S. use culture as a catalyst to put desire to political ends, as Wollen writes:

its project was that of relaunching surrealism on a new foundation, stripped of some of its elements (emphasis on the unconscious, quasi-mystical and occultist thinking [...] irrationalism) [...] within the framework of cultural revolution<sup>1112</sup>

*Artificial Hells* (2012) by Claire Bishop gives the I.S. a context of cultural production after the Russian Revolution (1917), particularly Dada. She suggests the revolution shifted focus to culture's *political* purpose, to question whether art should: 'reflect social reality, or [...] change it'. She argues that Dada and the I.S. influence a later participatory art, such as Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave*

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<sup>1106</sup> 'The Avant-garde of Presence', I.S. no. 8 (1963): 'Lucien Goldmann, recently turned critic [...] recognizes the negative role of avant-garde culture in our century about forty-five years after the event [...] we find, disguised as resuscitated Dadaists, none other than Ionesco, Beckett, [etc.]. Goldmann, an attentive audience, comments solemnly [...] "the great avant-garde writers express above all, not actual or possible values, but their absence, the impossibility of formulating or perceiving acceptable values in whose name they might criticize society." Here is precisely what is false, as is immediately apparent when one abandons the actors of Goldmann's comic novel to examine the historical reality of German Dadaism, or of Surrealism between the two wars. Goldmann seems literally unaware of them.'  
<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/avantgarde.html> [accessed 16.6.2020]

<sup>1107</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, Kabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 'Theses on Cultural Revolution' (IS #1, 1958), p.54.

<sup>1108</sup> Sadler, p.105.

<sup>1109</sup> Debord, *The Situationist International Anthology*, Kabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, p.18.

<sup>1112</sup> *On the Passage of A Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*, p.22.

(2001).<sup>1113</sup> However, this section forgoes art historical context to instead establish the Hegelian-Marxist dialectical *form* I.S. works take to oppose contemporary alienation.

From 1962, if the I.S. produce a less conventionally artistic output (i.e. tract, cartoon, theory, graffiti), Simon Ford insists 'the SI never gave up the self-description of itself as an avant-garde'.<sup>1114</sup> For Debord persists with cultural practice as a valid means of actualizing revolution.<sup>1115</sup> Even after the Gothenburg conference (1961) the 'schism'<sup>1116</sup> that Ford states is used by academics to identify the I.S. becoming a political movement (members pursuing plastic arts, such as S.P.U.R. were expelled), sees Debord and Vanegiem undertake a three day *dérive* through Hamburg - one of their longest - and in 1963 the group exhibit at Odense.<sup>1117</sup> Perhaps the I.S. find culture more easily able to intervene in 'everyday' aspects of alienated life than direct political action. I.S. cultural practices are intended to be personal, local, radical interventions but aim to work at the broader level of Marx's international, working-class revolution.

### **The I.S. Game**

*Psychogeographical Game of the Week* appears in the *Letterist International's* first pamphlet, *Potlatch* (1954). It exhibits wholly Surrealist themes; desire, imagination and chance. If Cubism alters the conventions by which space is represented on the canvas and Dada subsequently liberates space from a canvas entirely, while Surrealism explores space as 'lived' time in the 'stroll', the I.S. go further and engage the lived time of 'everyday life', to which the game refers. This analysis demonstrates how its Hegelian-Marxist paradigm works towards political transformation. The game is retained and reprinted in *Les Levres Nues* (1955)

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<sup>1113</sup> *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop (London; New York: Verso Books, 2012), p.30-33.

<sup>1114</sup> Simon Ford, *The Situationist International A User's Guide*, (London; Black Dog Publishing, 2005), p.95.

<sup>1115</sup> McDonough suggests that even the 'conference' might be reconsidered a form of art. Bunyard reminds us that Debord's last offering was a game, focused on military strategy - the *Game of War* (1987).

<sup>1116</sup> Ford, p.viii.

<sup>1117</sup> Ford, p.viii. 'The 1962 split occurred because Debord [...] had a more ambitious role for the group than that envisaged by Heimrad Prem [...] This being said, it is often overlooked that the only exhibition where the SI exhibited as a group took place after the split, in June of 1963, at Odense.'

then elaborated in *Theory of the Dérive* (I.S. journal #2, 1958) with 'walking' added as a further means of transformation:

In accordance with what you are seeking, choose a country, a more or less populated city, a more or less busy street. Build a house. Furnish it. Use decorations and surroundings to the best advantage. Choose the season and the time of day. Bring together the most suitable people, with appropriate records and drinks. The lighting and the conversation should obviously be suited to the occasion, as should be the weather or your memories.<sup>1118</sup>

The game mimetically imitates a *magazine* game - part of the 'spectacle' - to demand we *desire* or imagine certain experiences but, in doing so, we inevitably recall their 'spectacular' commodified form, ordinarily endorsed in a magazine. The instructions act as a Dadaist *negation* because they implicitly recall such magazine forms of self-objectification - home decoration ('decorations'), fashion ('appropriate records') or package tourism ('choose a country') - but reframe these 'spectacular' forms in *contradiction* to a participant's authentic desires, engaged by Surrealist styled questions that appeal to the imagination and emotions – thus choices establish a *self-referential* Hegelian mode of identity (see Chapter One). Debord intends this to perform a conceptual negation of commercial, ideological concepts, a 'false-consciousness' or dominant 'superstructure', allowing authentic concepts to replace 'spectacular' ones:

a dadaist-type negation must be present in any later constructive position as long as the social conditions [...] of rotten superstructures [...] have not been wiped out <sup>1119</sup>

If a magazine is read during a commute or break from work - 'free time' already circumscribed by production - magazines additionally recuperate time as 'leisure', exerting ideological influence over the 'everyday life' to which they refer and that Debord's game opposes (i.e. package holidays). *Questionnaire*, printed in IS journal #9 (1964) uses the same paradigm. The practice of consumer feedback

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<sup>1118</sup> Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.6.

<sup>1119</sup> Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 18.

Debord calls 'pseudodialogue'<sup>1120</sup> is negated and transcended, as the I.S. instead make it a vehicle for their *political* critique (real 'feedback') of the spectacular economy, against its recuperated form, which is never truly critical.

Debord's games give conceptual contradictions a dialectical basis, drawing a subject's authentic, self-reflecting desires to mind (personal taste, poignant memories, emotional preferences) to interpose them in competition or *contradiction* with the spectacle's 'false' forms, re-coded as their antithesis. The game uses advertising in that 'Left', avant-garde tradition of Dada, as Lukács' *productive* negation, as we assume a subject's wished for alternatives are preferred to spectacular forms that become implausible, rejected or negated forms of subjective realization. Advertising images, Debord writes, are 'an idea of happiness whose crisis must be provoked'.<sup>1121</sup> This conceptual antithesis, whereby concepts vie for objectification in action, implies a further stage of 'transcendence' in enactment. Desire, both poetically and politically, is lived out in 'anti-spectacular' opposition to its 'spectacular', economic form (a 'choice *already made* in the sphere of production'.<sup>1122</sup>) For, no matter how arbitrary, *self-directed* action always lies outside, thus beyond, the spectacular project and, no longer directed to its ends, negates it. Here, Surrealism's reversals develop as form of political opposition.

While Surrealism engages desire and chance in immediacy, the S.I recognize, as Kelly Baum writes, that 'human pleasure, happiness and sexuality'<sup>1123</sup> are *already* ideologically mediated. Prior to the game's publication, Marilyn Monroe appeared in *Playboy* (1953) as its first nude centrefold, a spectacular commodification of desire as pornography whose mass consumed image had a new visual reach. Monroe became a favourite I.S. symbol for 'spectacular' desire. Like Hoch, Debord uses the magazine against its intended purpose, to *undo* ideological mediation: 'the [...] mystification of advertising is to associate ideas of fulfilment with objects (television, or garden furniture, or cars, etc.) [in an] imposed image

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<sup>1120</sup> Debord, 'Questionnaire', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.142: 'The questionnaire [...] is becoming obsessively used in all the psychotechniques of integration into the spectacle so as to elicit people's happy acceptance of passivity under the crude guise of "participation"'.  
<sup>1121</sup> Ibid., p.6.  
<sup>1122</sup> Debord, p.13. Thesis 6.  
<sup>1123</sup> Kelly Baum, 'The Sex of the Situationist International' *October*, 126, (2008), 23-43, p.37.

of fulfilment'.<sup>1124</sup> The game negates this 'false-consciousness' of desire and uses what Debord calls a 'surrealist [...] sovereignty of desire'<sup>1125</sup> to *create* re-imagined alternatives that replace them. Here, Surrealist 'poetry', as an essential subjectivity, re-emerges through self-discovery to shape wished for alternative forms of housing, leisure, social life etc. Debord describes his game as 'an adroit use of currently popular means of communication'<sup>1126</sup>, as it works to reverse alienation through autonomous agency.

Debord and Jorn contrast the Existential and I.S. 'situation', suggesting that 'false consciousness' is present in Sartre's immediate, phenomenological 'situation' (below), whereas an I.S. 'situation' intervenes and transforms alienation to make authenticity and freedom concretely available:

[o]ur time is going to replace the fixed frontier of the borderline situations that phenomenology has limited itself to describing with the practical creation of situations; it is going to continually shift this frontier with the development of our realization. We want a phenomeno-praxis.<sup>1127</sup>

Sartre's phenomenology, obliquely referred to, severs the dialectical relationship ('borderline') of subject and object, Hegel's 'concept' and 'action', by making alienation a metaphysical or final condition to be observed ('described') rather than contested. In line with Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, Debord criticizes Sartre, accusing him of 'interpreting the world's transformation'.<sup>1128</sup> Debord's game, as 'situation', aims to be a *concrete* mediation: 'man is the product of the situations he goes through'.<sup>1129</sup> He reminds us of materialism, intentionally correcting Breton's abstract notion of a concept: '[t]he imaginary is what tends to become real'.<sup>1130</sup>

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<sup>1124</sup> 'The Situationist Frontier', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.106. Debord insists that changing false for authentic desires implies the dismantling of a 'global reality' and 'condition of the whole' (i.e. commodity production economy).

<sup>1125</sup> Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.19.

<sup>1126</sup> Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.6.

<sup>1127</sup> Debord, 'Questionnaire', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.138.

<sup>1128</sup> Debord, p.49. Thesis 76.

<sup>1129</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.138.

<sup>1130</sup> Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.8.

Baum construes Debord's 'spectator' thus; 'a subject who lacks power over the object of his desire [...] has also lost ownership of his desire and, by extension, of himself'.<sup>1131</sup> However, I disagree, for the I.S. reconfigure the Surrealist '*Id*' through Fourier's play, as a political resistance 'played' out in a rejection of 'everyday' commodification or repression. As Debord writes: '[t]he situation is [...] made to be lived by the constructor'.<sup>1132</sup> This use of culture toward his 'free construction of daily life'<sup>1133</sup>, by a subject attempting to fulfil desires by rejecting the 'spectacle', action becomes Marx's 'negation of the negation'. An instance of dialectical contradiction consistent with Marx's class conflict, suggested by the I.S. graffiti which appears during the Paris uprisings of 1968: 'Take your desires for reality!'<sup>1134</sup> Debord describes the 'situation' as; '*the pleasure of living*; the consciously experienced entry into the totality'.<sup>1135</sup> Notice that 'consciousness' is co-articulated with 'action' and a 'totality'. If Marx's 'prehistory' (feudalism) develops into capitalism, this final 'antagonistic' form makes possible the *conscious* management of production and a resolution of social problems in a Communist society ('[t]he prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation' <sup>1136</sup>). The I.S. 'situation' is intended only as an initial intervention in the reproduction of society; '[t]he transformation of the environment calls forth new emotional states that are first experienced passively and then, with heightened consciousness, lead to constructive reactions.'<sup>1137</sup> Debord means that once an I.S. intervention establishes an '*anti-spectacular*' basis for desire, subsequent self-objectification and the consciousness which issues from action, become a self-perpetuating process: further 'anti-spectacular' concepts exponentially increase self-determination or 'emancipation'.<sup>1138</sup> Opposition grows independent of the original 'situation', hence the S.I.'s declaration; '*[w]e will only organize the detonation*: the free explosion must escape us and any other control

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<sup>1131</sup> Baum, p.41.

<sup>1132</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.25.

<sup>1133</sup> Tom McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Mass: MIT Press, 2002), p.159.

<sup>1134</sup> Merrifield, p.70.

<sup>1135</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 285.

<sup>1136</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 21. 'The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production' as it creates 'the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism.'

<sup>1137</sup> Debord, 'Unitary Urbansim at the end of the 1950s', *I.S. journal* 3. <<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/is3.html>> [accessed 18.6.20]

<sup>1138</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 285.

forever.’<sup>1139</sup> The I.S. believe culture might emancipate a subject, but freedom takes a more political form than for Sartre.

### **The Dérive, Psychogeography and Unitary Urbanism**

#### **The Dérive**

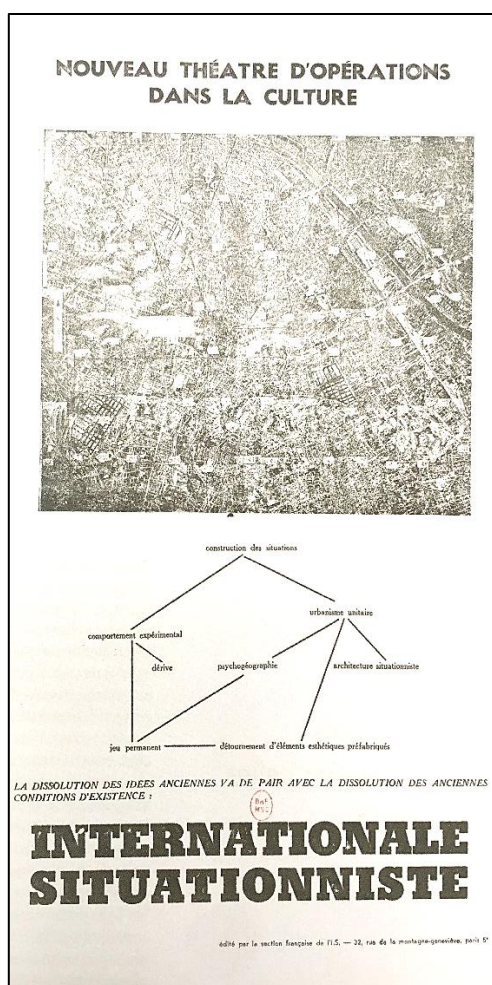
If McDonough, Sadler and Wollen miss how far a Hegelian-Marxist paradigm works through ‘negation’ and ‘transcendence’ across all I.S. works, this paradigm is best illustrated by the *dérive* and psychogeography. A pair of practices, they capture the political mediation of subjective experience, but also the objective world - specifically the architecture and design of homes and cities. Early issues of *Internationale Situationiste* focus on the *dérive*, psychogeography (IS #2, 1958) and unitary urbanism (see *Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s*, I.S. # 3, 1959). In 1958, the first issue of the I.S. journal reprints a topographical photograph of Paris entitled *A New Theatre of Operations in Culture* [Figure 4].

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<sup>1139</sup> Debord, ‘The Counter-Situationist Campaign in Various Countries’, *I.S. Journal* 8, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.148.



Figure 4. *A New Theatre of Operations in Culture*, Internationale Situationniste Journal, Issue 1 (1958)



Libero Andreotti comments that it replicates the ‘new methods of military aerial survey’ used to photograph the 13<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> arrondissements, through which the I.S. would *dérive* (along with the 11<sup>th</sup> arrondissement).<sup>1140</sup> Post-war city planners, whom the I.S. sarcastically call ‘detectives’<sup>1141</sup> of the state, used this aerial perspective to redevelop old neighbourhoods and relocate working-class citizens *en mass* to Modernist housing blocks. A diagram sits below the photograph to present I.S. practices as a method of revolution; power is located broadly in participants engaged in the ‘construction of situations’, an anti-hierarchical, upside down foundation for the *dérive*, psychogeography and all other practices. It indicates all I.S. practice aims at a post-revolutionary society, whose

<sup>1140</sup> McDonough, p. 51 and p. 224. ‘The collective task we have set ourselves is the creation of a new cultural *theatre of operations* [...] at the level of an eventual general construction of [...] surroundings [...] depending on [...] the terms of the environment/behaviour dialectic.’

<sup>1141</sup> See *Potlatch*, no. 5 (1954) <https://www.cddc.vt.edu> [last accessed 18.6.20]

component parts (labour, leisure, city planning, government) are to be reorganized in un-alienated form, just as the I.S. want to reorganize 'everyday life' through culture (*détournement d'éléments esthétiques préfabriqués*); this would allow life to be lived as authentic, free expression, as if a permanent 'game' (*jeu permanent*).

The *dérive* first develops in the summer of 1953, when Debord and Bernstein (as part of the *Letterist International*) explore Parisian neighbourhoods.<sup>1142</sup> Dadaist negation and Surrealist creativity work here through the relationship between 'spectator' and 'spectacle', giving real life to the 'painful tensions' of the temporality of Baudelaire's 'images'; '[t]he point is to take effective possession of the [...] playful relationship to time, which the works of the poets [...] have [...] merely represented.'<sup>1143</sup> Hussey writes that, stoned on hash, Debord and Bernstein trespassed in an illegal 'night-time stroll through the *Jardin de Plantes* comparing each plant [...] with the elegance of the cannabis plant.'<sup>1144</sup> This nascent *dérive* emphasises the botanical garden as a state owned use of public space, which Sadler describes as one of Paris's 'spectres of past spectacular leisure'.<sup>1145</sup> The 'dead labour'<sup>1146</sup> of Marx's superstructure takes architectural form, physical evidence of a leisured class (like magazine advertising) that remains to prolong past uses of public space, thus time, by the state. The *dérive* connects its present-day use as a leisure spot or tourist sight to past history, but in a mode of *contradiction*, as Debord's current, *desired* use of this space is to grow cannabis, in the 'counter cultural' spirit of the 1960s. *Potlatch* 23 (1955), *Project for Rational Improvements to the City of Paris*, demonstrates this logic in a similarly dialectical construction; the churches of Parisian neighbourhoods - the dominant ideology of a past era - are identified to ask if the influence of religion should be re-evaluated and if the destruction of churches ('superstructure') and associated religious values (morality) is preferable. Thus, Debord calls for 'the complete demolition of religious buildings', while Wolman alternatively proposes

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<sup>1142</sup> Wollen, *On the Passage of A Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*, p.143 'the origins of unitary urbanism (UU), discovered as of 1953 [...] appears as a program of research and development.'

<sup>1143</sup> Debord, p.133. Thesis 187.

<sup>1144</sup> Hussey, p.91.

<sup>1145</sup> Sadler, p.100.

<sup>1146</sup> *Capital*, vol 1, Chapter 10 The Working Day, 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour', p.342.

that 'churches should be [...] stripped of all religious content', so that children might 'play in them'.<sup>1147</sup> Hussey adds that Debord and Bernstein refused to acknowledge religion whilst walking, to enact this negation in a spirit of resistance; 'at one point the L.I. had a rule never to use the word *saint* when referring to street names'.<sup>1148</sup>

Like the magazine game, the *dérive* isolates ideology - here, through a city's history, its 'superstructure' as architecture; its monuments, gardens, town planning, signs etc. Ideology, as Lukács' negative repression, is shown to determine a city's space throughout successive epochs and, therefore, how time is spent. A *dérive*'s instructions are a Dadaist 'negation' of a bourgeois use of space and time, as participants must: 'drop their usual motives for movement and action [...] relations [...] work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain'.<sup>1149</sup> Once this is done, a Surrealist inspired, psychic openness to impulse engages the *desires* of participants, asked to 'drift' collectively through Parisian *quartiers* and record their spontaneous responses to the city; the churches, prisons, palaces, nunneries, cinemas, football stadiums, shopping centres, car-parks, ring roads, universities, housing blocks etc. Drifting, Debord writes, is a 'transient passage through varied ambiances'.<sup>1150</sup> A *dérive* thereby uncovers a subject's preferences, using the moods evoked by a city's spaces, or its 'specific effects [...] on the emotions and behaviour'.<sup>1151</sup> Debord records the 'atmospheric effects'<sup>1152</sup> of squares and plazas, quays and neighbourhoods, 'hallways [and] streets'.<sup>1153</sup> He notes his reactions to 'a dismaying monotony of facades', an area's 'charm [...] enhanced by the curve of the elevated subway line', or mood created by a 'beautiful and tragic' street.<sup>1154</sup>

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<sup>1147</sup> See 'Project for Rational Improvements to the City of Paris', in *Potlatch*, no. 23 (1955).  
<<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/potlatch23.html>> [last accessed 18.6.20]

<sup>1148</sup> Hussey, p.91

<sup>1149</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 50.

<sup>1150</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 45.

<sup>1151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>1152</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>1153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>1154</sup> Debord, 'Two Accounts of the *Dérive*', *Potlatch* (1956)

<<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/twoaccounts.html>> [last accessed 19.6.20]

Debord and Jorn use the *dérive* to address space and time, not as metaphysical conditions like Duchamp or Sartre, but as Marx's material, historical relationships, the 'progressive movement' (below) of a dialectical 'totality':

[f]or humanity, time is nothing but a succession of phenomena from a point of observation in space, while space is the order of the co-existence of phenomena in time or process. Time is the change that is only conceivable in the form of a progressive movement in space, while space is the solid that is only conceivable in its participation in movement. Neither space nor time possesses a reality or value outside of change or process<sup>1155</sup>

From a subject's emotional perspective, however disparate a city's historical periods might be, 'drifting' is a record of simultaneous ideologies that are similarly objectively dominant; whether modern, neon lit shop fronts (a capitalist sales technique) or an earlier era's 'subterranean catacombs'<sup>1156</sup> that evidence the church's power - they are continuous in a landscape understood as a corollary of Marx's class conflict, much like the polarity captured in the temporality of Baudelaire's metaphors. It is not simply history that renders this radical perspective. The *dérive* uses space to reframe and isolate ideology in the landscape, ordinarily invisible in a city, in terms of repression and contradictions. This establishes a consciousness of Lukácsian repression as a productive negation, the basis of what Debord calls an 'awakening of consciousness'<sup>1157</sup> or radical consciousness. As in the magazine game, a participant's emotional response to ideology renders a discrepancy between a subject's negative experience of ideological forms (no-entry signs, shopping malls, ring-roads etc.) and that which is desired (i.e. cannabis), to thereby politicize desire as illustrated in Debord's original 'drift'.

Groups of participants are thereby transformed into a collective, conscious 'Subject'. The I.S. do not wish to be a hierarchical vanguard in Lenin's sense of professional Party members<sup>1158</sup> but rather facilitate an 'anti-spectacular' basis for

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<sup>1155</sup> Jorn, 'The end of the Economy and Realization of Art', I.S. No.4. (1960)  
<<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/economy.html>>[last accessed 19.6.20]

<sup>1156</sup> Debord, 'Theory of the *Dérive*', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.53.

<sup>1157</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>1158</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.106. The I.S. despised hierarchical power: 'Unlike the hierarchic bodies of specialists who increasingly make up the armies and even the political

consciousness that might enable independent, radical, social action, as in Paris, 1968. *The Durutti Column* [Figure 5], an I.S. inspired cartoon published by Strasbourg students in 1966, makes this point. Lukács' concept of reification can be equally perceived by 'drifting' through 'everyday' life as by reading Marxist theory. The 'spectacle', in the form of a comic strip, is subverted using an 'image' of an American cowboy, an icon of Western mass culture in Debord's day. Debord writes; 'revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity by provoking their capacities to revolutionize their own lives'.<sup>1159</sup> The cartoon evacuates the ideological symbolism of a 'hero', as the cowboy becomes a 'drifting' participant, confronting the frontier of space as a frontier of (historical) time; a 'hero' of their own political struggle for control over identity. Baudelaire's flâneur becomes Debord's radical 'drifter' within Marx's historical class conflict.

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parties of the modern world, the SI [...] evinces itself as the purest form of an anti-hierarchical body of anti-specialists.'

<sup>1159</sup> Debord, Report on the Construction of Situations, *The Situationist International Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.41.

Figure 5. *The Return of the Durutti Column* (1966)



"What's your scene, man?"  
 "Reification."  
 "Yeah? I guess that means pretty hard work with big books and piles of paper on a big table."  
 "Nope. I drift. Mostly I just drift." (*The Return of the Durutti Column*)

### Psychogeography

Popularisers of the term *psychogeography*, such as Will Self and Merlin Coverley, as well as academics (i.e. McDonough), do not recognize the extent to which the city is conceived by Debord in these Marxist terms, nor its difference from, but relationship to, the *dérive*.<sup>1160</sup> If the *dérive* isolates 'ideology' in an architectural, historical form, it is too subjective a practice to be revolutionary itself. Therefore, Debord intends 'the findings arrived at by this type of investigation [...] their influence on human feelings'<sup>1161</sup> to be put to greater use in psychogeography. Psychogeography refers to the S.I.'s architectural projects; designs for homes and cities reconsidered from the oppositional, subjective perspective of the

<sup>1160</sup> Coverley, p. 85-90. He fails to see that the *derivé* is a method of a socialist revisioning of a city.

<sup>1161</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.5.

*dérive*. Intended as an intervention in the 'spectacular' reproduction of space, psychogeography reverses class and state dominance and uses the *dérive*'s scale of human sensibility to plan cities specifically for this collective 'Subject', rather than investors or state purposes. This material dialectical at work in the landscape is better understood by Wollen <sup>1162</sup> and Plant. <sup>1163</sup>

From the late 1950s, key I.S. polemics argue against the Modernist aesthetics of C.I.A.M. (International Congress of Modern Architecture) that Le Corbusier helped found; i.e. *Situationist Thesis on Traffic* (1959) or *Critique of Urbanism* (1961). Debord describes Le Corbusier's designs as 'pure spectacular ideology'<sup>1164</sup> (discussed in the following section on Unitary Urbanism). In opposition to Le Corbusier's brutalist designs, psychogeography re-imagines space from that reversed perspective of Surrealist poetics, now the 'anti-spectacular' position of the *dérive*, operating at a concrete and objective (rather than subjective) level of 'superstructure' or architecture. The *dérive*'s perspective is thus given that material temporality of Jorn's *historical* change (Marx's 'negation'). I.S. journal #7 (1962) displays a photograph of the Vendôme column (1871) and praises Courbet for his involvement in the Paris Commune's felling of the memorial to Napoleon - a material change. Sadler writes that the I.S. 'applauded this brilliantly radical artistic gesture.'<sup>1165</sup>

*New Babylon* (1956), designed by I.S. architect Constant, reconfigures urban space by separating pavements and traffic, allowing individuals to wander freely in a self-directed way. His houses are transparent shells, not Le Corbusier's concrete and let in daylight. Internal walls can be reconfigured at will by inhabitants to suit their changing moods. The I.S. redesign cities to give primacy to human sensibility, using 'a theory of states-of-mind quarters [...] each quarter of a city would be designed to provoke a specific basic sentiment'.<sup>1166</sup> For

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<sup>1162</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Situationists and Architecture', *New Left Review*, 8, (2001), 123-139, (p.129). He writes that a: "framework for living" could not be imposed from outside [...] by city planners and architects. It had to be built in co-operation with the inhabitants of the city [...] a critique of Corbusier developed into a theory of 'unitary urbanism', which developed into a critique of the totality of capitalist society, which in turn led to [...] the uprisings of May 1968.'

<sup>1163</sup> Plant, p.59. She describes the dialectics of psychogeography: 'using an environment for one's own ends, seeking not only the marvellous beloved by surrealism but bringing an inverted perspective to bear on the entirety of the spectacular world.'

<sup>1164</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.65.

<sup>1165</sup> Sadler, p.100

<sup>1166</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, p. 23.

example, a 'Happy Quarter' and 'Useful Quarter'<sup>1167</sup> where respectively a hospital and tool shop would be located. *A New Theatre of Operations in Culture* emphasizes that the city is a battlefield on which to launch this project. McDonough however reads class opposition in this photograph of Paris in terms of a static segregation: 'a proletarian east confronting a bourgeois west [...] marked the Situationists' own maps'.<sup>1168</sup> He misunderstands that the I.S. believe cultural interventions activate class tensions in a dialectical mode of guerrilla warfare; graffiti, a 'situation' or *dérive* could take place in any part of the city, represented by the map, to give subjective consciousness an oppositional form and consequently re-orient a subject to a past history of conflict and, from this position of resistance, demand a different, radical form of social organization for the future.

### **Unitary Urbanism**

During the 1950s, the influence of Bauhaus on Le Corbusier, its principle of innovation put in service to social utility (see the Bauhaus manifesto of 1919),<sup>1169</sup> seemed betrayed in the renewal of De Gaulle's Fifth republic. Urban projects saw state and corporate partnerships mushroom, often dogged by corruption<sup>1170</sup> and the working-class removed from the heart of Paris. Ford states this served to 'relocate the indigenous population to the outskirts of the city' in a way that 'Algerian immigrants would find themselves ghettoized on the fringes of Paris in the early 1960s'.<sup>1171</sup> Paris was continuously redeveloped for investors and the middle class in 'spectacular' form; for 'the smooth circulation of motor vehicles'<sup>1172</sup> destined for new shopping malls, monitored by the 'perpetual surveillance'<sup>1173</sup> of CCTV cameras. Jorn observes that Paris itself becomes a tourist destination, a place of leisure, a commodity; 'cities themselves are presented as lamentable

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<sup>1167</sup> Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.4.

<sup>1168</sup> McDonough, p.14.

<sup>1169</sup> Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *The History of Modern Art*, 2 vols (N.J.: London: Pearson Education, 2010). For the manifesto see, Chapter 14, Bauhaus and the Teaching of Modernism, pp. 297-317, (p. 299).

<sup>1170</sup> Ross, p. 154-155. Ross calls it a: 'massively corrupt era'. Debord refers to such corruption in his film, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* (1978).

<sup>1171</sup> Ford, p.52.

<sup>1172</sup> Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.5.

<sup>1173</sup> *Potlatch* no. 5, 1954.



spectacles [...] for tourists driven around in glassed-in buses'.<sup>1174</sup> Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* (1922) and *Plan Voisin* (1925) never materialize, but their designs characterize this state building programme; space saving, high density blocks built to house citizens *en mass*, using concrete, a relatively cheap material. *Another City for Another Life* records Constant's *dérive* inspired response to such urbanist architecture as 'dismal and sterile':<sup>1175</sup>

streets have degenerated into freeways and leisure activities are being commercialized [...] by tourism [...] Social relations become impossible. The newly built neighbourhoods have only two all-pervasive themes: automobile traffic and household comfort - an impoverished expression of bourgeois contentment [...] cemeteries of reinforced concrete are being built in which masses of the population are condemned to die of boredom <sup>1176</sup>

Ford thus writes that the S.I.'s 'main figure of hate was Le Corbusier' and his 'vertical ghettos'.<sup>1177</sup> Sadler gives a sense of the scope of this Post-war transformation: '[t]he Parisian built environment had not encountered a stylistic revolution as authoritative as modernism since the Renaissance'<sup>1178</sup>

By the 1950s, *Unité d'Habitation* (1947-52) had been erected in Marseilles and reproduced in Nantes (1953). The former, Sadler writes, was: 'the touchstone of modern architecture in the decade after the Second World War'<sup>1179</sup>. It provides a clear example of Le Corbusier's designs as 'spectacular' architecture. *Unité d'Habitation* situates shops below atomized apartments, with a swimming pool on the roof terrace. This now common integration of commerce, living space and leisure is said by Debord to falsely imitate the 'unity' of an organic community, but is built solely on economic principles. Sadler writes that Le Corbusier's designs attempt to 'transfer the rationality of the workplace to home life'.<sup>1180</sup> New towns Sarcelles and Mureaux, discussed in I.S. journals #6 (1961) and #9 (1964) allocate space in Le Corbusier 'barrack' styled housing blocks according to

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<sup>1174</sup> Debord, 'Unitary Urbanism At The End of the 1950s', *International Situationist no.3*, (December, 1959). <<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/unitary.html> December I.S> [8/9/2020]

<sup>1175</sup> Constant Nieuwenhuis, *Another City for Another Life*, I.S. no. 3, (1959) Bureau of Public Secrets, <<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/3.constant.htm>> [11.09.2020].

<sup>1176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1177</sup> Ford, p.75.

<sup>1178</sup> Sadler, p11.

<sup>1179</sup> Sadler, p.22

<sup>1180</sup> Sadler, p.50.

income and role, a direct continuation of relations of production outside of work that Ford describes as: 'housing to literally stratify workers according to their social and economic status'.<sup>1181</sup> Le Corbusier's designs make town planning, home design and technology a question of segmentation, class, function and control, divorced from a connection with locality or community, leading Debord to compare urbanism to imprisonment<sup>1182</sup> and the communities thus marshalled by the state to totalitarian regimes, as people are 'transplanted far away from their own [...] neighbourhoods to a new and hostile environment, according to the concentration-camp like convenience of present-day industry'.<sup>1183</sup> Again, the novels of Kundera, Sebald and Welsh represent space through such strategic relocation and state rebuilding programs.

If a 'situation' is a microcosm of an un-alienated experience of space and time, 'unitary urbanism' moves beyond individual experience and combines the *dérive* with psychogeography to deliver such un-alienated experience at the social level or macrocosm of a city, i.e. public space, housing, transport, recreation. If Modernism, as Le Corbusier's urbanism, obeys economic and ideological imperatives to concretely 'fragment' everyday life (i.e. ghettoization, zoning of separate areas for work and leisure, privileging of traffic), unitary urbanism offers a contradictory position from which a city is redesigned as a 'totality' to give *all* its elements un-alienated form; from décor to transport, sleeping spaces to work places. Debord's vision is of 'an integrated human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved'.<sup>1184</sup> If Debord's 'image' obscures proletarian identity and thus political organization, urbanism likewise obstructs identity through Ford's 'functional segregation'<sup>1185</sup> and isolates, relocates and ghettoizes the working class. However, the state presents urbanism in positive terms of modernity and progress, promoting a *harmonious*

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<sup>1181</sup> Ford, p.52.

<sup>1182</sup> Sadler, *The Situationist City*, p.50-51, Fig 1.21: 'less sophisticated than the Benthamite panopticon prison later chosen by Foucault, [Debord] made the point well enough, the plans of a nineteenth century prison workhouse floating through the tortured space of their *Memoires* was a damning metaphor for their experience of modernity.'

<sup>1183</sup> Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni*, (London: Pelagain Press, 1991), p.6.

<sup>1184</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.57.

<sup>1185</sup> Sadler, p.75.

stratification – albeit marshalled by surveillance! Urbanism functions as a spatial correlate of the image's 'false harmony'.<sup>1186</sup>

The I.S. understand, like Marx, that automation and technology enables abundance, leisure and culture but that Western capitalism, or equally what Sadler sarcastically calls the 'sacrifice of Stalinism'<sup>1187</sup>, prevents the fruits of progress from being enjoyed equally, in progressive terms. The I.S. use a motif of 'journeying' to express progress as the direction of Marx's revolutionary struggle toward a classless society, which Debord describes as: 'a human journey through authentic life'.<sup>1188</sup> In unitary urbanism, Debord calls for 'a more modern, more progressive'<sup>1189</sup> use of materials and technology to fulfil this journey as a proletarian movement or a collective, self-realizing 'Subject', in cities that allow for a 'unitary', un-alienated relation to society (i.e. space and time) as 'Object'. As Wollen summarizes, '[f]rom situation Debord enlarged his scope to city, and from city to society'.<sup>1190</sup> A city designed to give subjects control over their surroundings and meet their desires, preferences and requirements, enabling autonomy, authenticity and sociability. Debord argues this is obstructed by the spectacle's repressive stultification of such a collective identity, thus: 'the lagging of revolutionary political action behind the development of modern possibilities of production which call for a superior organization of the world'.<sup>1191</sup>

### **Détournement**

*Détournement* is primarily a literary practice (although images are used) - the literary equivalent of psychogeography. Like architecture, language is considered a material, ideological construct. Bernstein writes; '[w]ords *work* - on behalf of the dominant organization of life'.<sup>1192</sup> The S.I.'s *Détournement as Negation and*

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<sup>1186</sup> Adorno, 'Commitment' in *Marxist Literary Theory*, ed. by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 201. Adorno also gives the example of works of 'mass' culture, see *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.7.

<sup>1187</sup> Sadler, p.33.

<sup>1188</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.57.

<sup>1189</sup> Debord, *Critique of Urbanism*, I.S. no. 6 (1961)

<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/critique.html>

<sup>1190</sup> Wollen, *On the Passage Of A Few People Through A Rather Brief Moment In Time*, p.31. Sadler too describes unitary urbanism by referring to Debord's: 'decision to reconstruct the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the power of the Workers' Councils' p. 46.

<sup>1191</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.17.

<sup>1192</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.149.

*Prelude* (1959) defines *détournement* as a reuse or reordering of phrases, passages or words to expose their ideological form - and its limits. Here, Dada's re-use of materials and juxtapositions re-appear as semantic contradictions; political rhetoric, literary styles or slogans are given a new context to create a *contradiction* between their intended meaning and the S.I.'s anti-ideological, reversed (*détourned*) meaning, which re-contextualization produces; 'the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect'.<sup>1193</sup> I return to Debord's definition of 'scope' and 'effect' shortly.

Breton's first Surrealist manifesto earlier proposes a similar method, which modifies dominant meanings, making them appear contingent through a contradiction of semantic registers: 'pieces of paper that Picasso and Braque insert into their work have the same value as the introduction of a platitude into a literary analysis of the most rigorous sort'.<sup>1194</sup> Breton means that Picasso's insertions ask us to reconsider space in continuity with its lived reality, not circumscribed to the pictorial plane, just as various registers of language ask us to consider *its* representational purpose. However, if Surrealist irrationality is no longer radical and language is alienated in Bernstein's 'production process'<sup>1195</sup> then *détournement* works politically to introduce a context that converts meaning into its opposite by this introduction of a working-class perspective.

Debord accepts poetry is a dead convention ('[r]estricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention'<sup>1196</sup>) but instead of heeding Adorno's warning that '[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'<sup>1197</sup>, *détournement* belongs to that avant-garde, poetic tradition of 'insubordination' of de Sade, Lautréamont and Baudelaire. *Détournement* isolates the ideological function of language by using opposite, antithetical semantic registers, drawing out Baudelaire's 'painful tensions' through the historical dimension of language to fix

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<sup>1193</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>1194</sup> *First Surrealist Manifesto*

<sup>1195</sup> *The Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.149.

<sup>1196</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>1197</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Prisms* trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981), p. 34.

meaning in Marx's context of class struggle. Hussey uses the example of an I.S. cover of *Les Levres Nues* (issue 8, 1956) [Figure 6]:

a map of France [...] had been 'detourned' so that Algerian cities had replaced the French ones. This image was a perfect visual *détournement*: the slogan 'Algerie Francaise' (Algeria is French), the rallying cry of all good Gaullist French patriots in the 1950s, had been neatly reversed into its opposite, 'France Algerienne' ('France is Algerian')

**Figure 6. Cover of *Les Lèvres Nues*, Issue. 8 (1956)**



The nationalistic appeal of De Gaulle's slogan is recalled but reversed to contradict and undermine French Imperialism, in terms of the decolonization of Debord's era and the Algerian immigrants that were part of his redefined proletariat. Marches for Algerian self-determination in Paris were often brutally put down by police, but finally led to Algerian independence (1962). Another example is Debord's use of Marx's *détournement* of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's position (*The Philosophy of Poverty*, 1847):

the young Marx achieved the most cogent use of this insurrectional style: thus the philosophy of poverty became the poverty of philosophy <sup>1198</sup>

Proudhon's philosophy, that treats poverty as an eternal condition, is deemed reified like Hegelian philosophy, once compared with Marx's critique of Proudhon and theory of poverty as the product of social relationships, solved by revolution. Wollen calls *détournement* a 'semantic shift'. <sup>1199</sup> Hussey gives another example; the S.I.'s approval of Lautréamont's *Poesies* that enacts a *détournement* of Blaise Pascal's moral achievements and thereby 'revealed the limits of the whole French tradition of rational thought'. <sup>1200</sup> A further example of *détournement* is Debord's re-use of Marx's explanation of his dialectical method as 'an abomination to the bourgeoisie [...] because it regards every historically developed social form as being in a fluid state' being thus 'in its very essence critical and revolutionary'. <sup>1201</sup> Debord re-states this, to make Marx's method relevant for his generation:

the style of [...] dialectical theory is a scandal and an abomination to the canons of the prevailing language [...] because it includes in its positive use of existing concepts a simultaneous recognition of their rediscovered fluidity, of their inevitable destruction <sup>1202</sup>

*Détournement* treats language as a cultural product whose *content* (meaning) takes a dominant, ideological *form*. Any changed definition implies a temporality that associates contradiction with a class conflict, or change wrought by the distance between social periods or social positions - whether progress or defeat; i.e. Marx's revision undergirds the meaning of 'poverty' with a proletarian position obscured by Proudhon's definition. Reversals around the genitive pronoun ('poverty of philosophy') symbolize possession - that greater, formative social context in which language is shaped and transformed by shifts in class power. Lukács' theory of Realism is similar to *détournement* on this basis of its conversion of dominant (reified) 'form'. Lukács writes that, like 'praxis', Realism: 'consists in annulling *that indifference of form towards content*' (his italics). <sup>1203</sup>

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<sup>1198</sup> Debord, p.144. Thesis 206.

<sup>1199</sup> *On the Passage Of A Few People Through A Rather Brief Moment In Time*, p.22.

<sup>1200</sup> Hussey, p.104.

<sup>1201</sup> *Capital*, Volume 1, Postface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Edition (1873), p.103.

<sup>1202</sup> Debord, Thesis 205, p.144.

<sup>1203</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.126.

Chapter Four relates Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' or parody of ideological language to *détournement* on this same basis.

Debord treats history as a 'totality', the territory of a class struggle that politicizes a poetic avant-garde legacy:

the analogical structure of images demonstrate that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed <sup>1204</sup>

The I.S. makes Surrealist juxtapositions more politicized contradictions in *détournement*, invoking class relationships. *Détournement* mediates the alienation of 'content' and 'form' beyond language; the audience and social territory of class relationships is the 'scope' of *détournement*, while its 'effect' is subversion. For *détournement* is a 'language of anti-ideology'<sup>1205</sup> and re-situates meaning in class struggle beyond language, as new meanings appeal to a logic beyond the prevailing dominant ideology. The Hegelian-Marxist paradigm of 'transcendence' allows *détournement* to negate language's ideological form, leaving it to subsist in an undermined state and thereby destroy its authority; thus, the 'production' of meaning is returned to a working-class perspective. Hegel's successive higher stages of social organization are articulated in terms of Marx's transition to a revolutionary society, driven by a radical politics and use of culture. Debord therefore calls *détournement* 'a powerful cultural weapon in the service of a real class struggle'.<sup>1206</sup> Debord seems to have this in mind when he writes: 'the principal domain we are going to replace and *fulfil* is poetry'.<sup>1207</sup> He intends the internal contradictions of culture to serve radical ends once ideology is used against its intended purpose, as meaning takes 'form' from a previously repressed class perspective. Culture's purpose in expressing 'unity' is fulfilled by this abolition and return.

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<sup>1204</sup> Debord, 'Methods of *Détournement*', Knabb, p.9.

<sup>1205</sup> Debord, p.146. Thesis 208.

<sup>1206</sup> Debord, 'Methods of *Détournement*', Knabb, p.11.

<sup>1207</sup> Ibid., p.44. Debord adds; 'poetry [...] burned itself out by taking its position at the vanguard of our time.'

### **3.5. Conclusion: The Northwest Passage**

Thomas de Quincey's real life from 1804-1812 makes him a precursor of the *dérive*: 'Seeking ambitiously for a northwest passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys [...] I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these terrae incognitae, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London.'

I.S. #3 (1959)

'Journeying' recurs as a motif which the I.S. use to suggest that culture participates in class struggle, with revolution as the goal. Maps symbolize revolution as a *journey*, emphasizing a navigation of space that implies an associated time, understood in the historical terms of Marx's revolutionary movement.

**Figure 7. *Carte de Tendre*, from Madame Scudéry, *Clélie* (1654-60) re-printed in International Situationist Journal, Issue 3 (1959)**



Constant's critique of urbanism in I.S. journal #3 (1959) appears alongside a map, *Carte du Tendre* [Figure 7] for which McDonough provides a gloss:



the Carte du Tendre had been created three hundred years earlier in 1653 by Scudery and the members of her salon and used the metaphor of the spatial journey to trace possible histories of a love affair <sup>1208</sup>

He misses a significant point. This *détourned* imaginary map reflects space, and therefore time, in terms of emotion; negative emotion, like Constant's *dérive*-inspired response to urbanism, implies an associated opposition and Marx's historical dimension through such resistance.

The S.I.'s *Mémoires* and *Fin de Copenhague* are early demonstrations of a similar symbolism. Advertising images, brands and slogans symbolize a 'spectacular' landscape that aggressively 'fragments' (alienates) subjective autonomy, represented by the fluidity of *dérive* inspired ink trails, intimate photographs of the S.I.'s friends, quotes from favourite authors etc. Stracey reads *Mémoires* as a 'thought-landscape'<sup>1209</sup>, examining it in relation to an orthodox archive of art historical memory. However, this omits the Hegelian-Marxist paradigm that underpins it; the S.I., as a nascent revolutionary force, lend a class position or perspective that, as a group, 'map' or orient the onward 'journey' of a social, revolutionary 'Subject' through history itself.

*The Naked City* (1957) [Figure 8] illustrates this point. The screen-print is described by McDonough as 'composed of nineteen fragments of a map of Paris'.<sup>1210</sup> No ordinary map, he neglects that its arrows symbolize the 'painful tensions' of dialectical class struggle, shifting power in opposite directions. For the arrows are *dually nuanced*. They represent a discovery of urban planning ('fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones'<sup>1211</sup>) but by a *dérive* that is 'complete insubordination'<sup>1212</sup>, symbolized by arrows that 'map' an opposite subversive route.

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<sup>1208</sup> McDonough, p. 243.

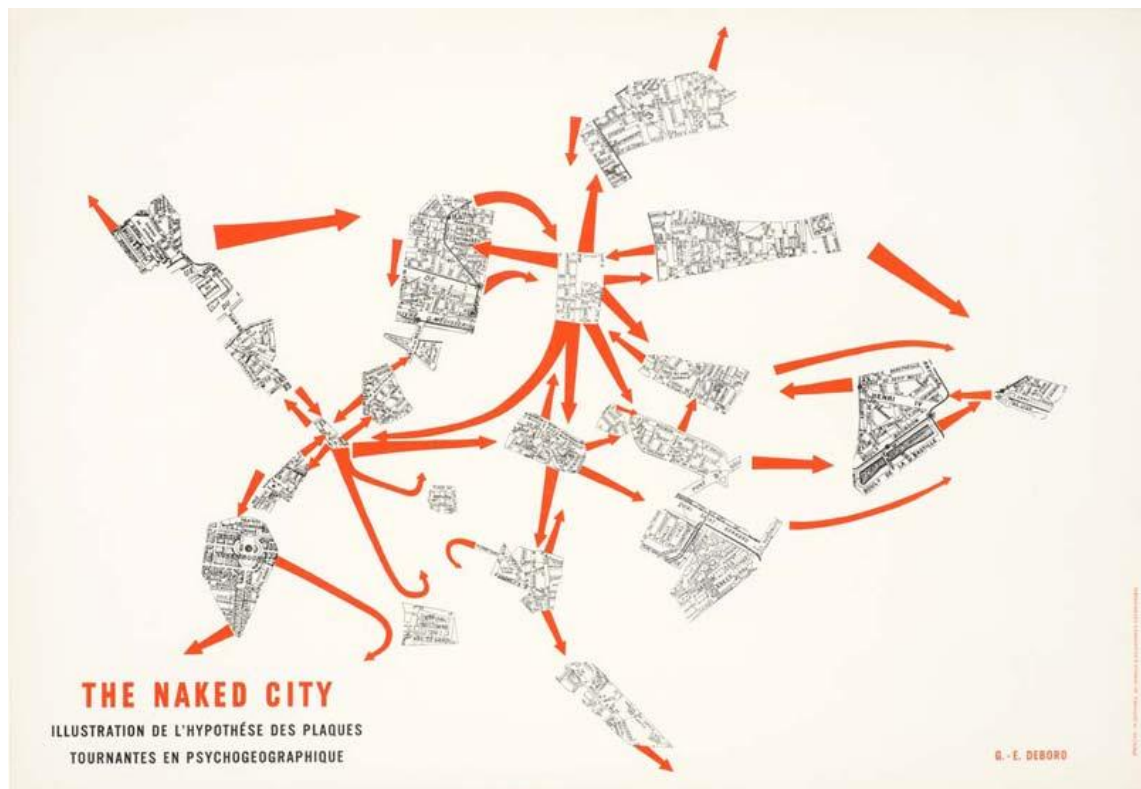
<sup>1209</sup> Stracey, p.25

<sup>1210</sup> McDonough, p.246.

<sup>1211</sup> Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.50.

<sup>1212</sup> Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.7.

Figure 8. *The Naked City*, Guy Debord (1957)



Wollen mistakes the *dérive* for a continuation of the Surrealist 'stroll': 'dependent on chance and [...] spontaneous subjective impulses and reactions'.<sup>1213</sup> He neglects that these impulses are politicized by their relationship to ideology. Debord's economically, ideologically determined landscape precludes chance, thus he writes: 'André Breton is naïvely psycho-geographical in encounters.'<sup>1214</sup> Surrealism naïvely fails to appreciate the 'limitations of chance and of its inevitably reactionary use'.<sup>1215</sup> Debord means that apparently incidental encounters are permitted by city planners. Jorn's approach of re-ordering the map's cut up *quartiers*, like Tzara's scattering of words in absurdist poetry, is in the political register of psychogeography; the arrows indicate a reversal of dominant and proletariat positions, but at the topographical level of a city, to suggest, like the map, that a city can be 'remade' on this oppositional basis. As

<sup>1213</sup> Wollen, 'Situationists and Architecture', *New Left Review* (2001), p.125-6.

<sup>1214</sup> 'Exercise in Psychogeography', *Potlatch* No.2,  
<<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/potlatch2.html#exercise>> [last accessed 23.06.20]

<sup>1215</sup> Debord, 'Theory of the *Dérive*', *The Situationist International*, p. 51.

Stewart Home writes, the I.S. 'saw cities as the site of "new visions of time and space"' <sup>1216</sup>.

De Quincey's metaphor of the Northwest Passage describes leaving a known for an unknown route through London, with its attendant discoveries. *The Naked City* not only plots a spatial journey but an anti-ideological *direction* that finds expression in all Debord's work. The 'image' emerges with a shift to modernity but technology, entertainment and urbanism increase the alienation of public space, meaningful work, communities, private time and identity. Novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reflect modernity in such negative terms, through a repressive image or reification contradicted by real social division:

[t]he world of today is a bare, hungry, dilapidated place [...] In the early twentieth century, the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly - a glittering antiseptic world of glass and [...] concrete - was part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person. <sup>1217</sup>

Debord, likewise, requires a concept of a historical 'totality' to relate the 'image' to its social result across time, to demonstrate its active alienation of 'spectator' and world, *subject* and *object*, *concept* and *action* or *content* and *form*. This alienated relationship becomes explicit only because the I.S. introduce resistance to a polarized class rift, refusing to allow a superficial, ideological 'fragmentation' to revoke such a relationship.

In conclusion, Debord's use of culture aims to 'transcend' a spectacular economy in an experimental 'phenomeno-praxis', theoretically consistent with his political 'praxis'. I.S. artworks seek to galvanize Hegel's 'living interaction' of Debord's opposed classes by bringing local resistance to a bourgeois order, to close separation by re-engaging class conflict as history. If the magazine game, a 'pseudo-game of passivity' <sup>1218</sup>, stultifies the struggle of 'everyday' life, the I.S. game transcends 'false-consciousness' through an 'anti-spectacular' perspective (i.e. transforms dominant concepts). As a local instance of resistance it

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<sup>1216</sup> Home, p.18.

<sup>1217</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.196

<sup>1218</sup> Debord, 'Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s', I.S. Journal No.3  
<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/unitary.html>, [last accessed 23.10. 2020]

*reconnects* the present with history through struggle, to challenge Fukuyama's stasis and 'discover *lost history*'.<sup>1219</sup> At a wider level, culture makes struggle a conscious matter, heralding Debord's 'inauguration of a real historical community'.<sup>1220</sup> Stracey writes that *The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy* gives 'a present-day event a new memory and language [...] of past revolutionary experiences'.<sup>1221</sup> In this context, the *dérive* redefines spontaneity and chance: 'the subject's use of time will take an unexpected turn'.<sup>1222</sup> Debord means that 'chance' is entailed in the *futurity* of action, placed beyond the spectacle's project in unprescribed actions or 'behavioural disorientation'<sup>1223</sup>, that thereby constitute a resistant, revolutionary '*sum of possibilities*'.<sup>1224</sup> Chance therefore 'plays an important role in *dérives*'<sup>1225</sup> and this political aspect 'completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the [...] stroll'.<sup>1226</sup> I.S. works provide a route like De Quincey's, through exponentially, ever more liberated action, 'opening up [...] the "Northwest Passage" towards a new revolution [...] the conquest of everyday life'.<sup>1227</sup> By instantiating material contradictions through the transformative power of 'poetry', culture re-orientates a stymied working class, offering a route - not just through immediate space and time, or a city - but from one social organisation to another. Debord's 'spectacular' era, like Marx's industrial past, are 'continents' that, through his radicalized subject, are connected to '*terrae incognitae*' - an unknown, revolutionary future.

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<sup>1219</sup> Debord, 'The Bad Days Will End', *The Situationist International Anthology*, p.85.

<sup>1220</sup> Debord, p.132. Thesis 186

<sup>1221</sup> Stracey, p.57.

<sup>1222</sup> Debord, 'Theory of the *Dérive*', Knabb, p. 51.

<sup>1223</sup> Debord, 'Theory of the *Dérive*', Knabb, p. 53

<sup>1224</sup> Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', Knabb, p.7.

<sup>1225</sup> Debord, 'Theory of the *Dérive*', Knabb, p. 51.

<sup>1226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50. This contradicts Peter Wollen's critical view.

<sup>1227</sup> 'The Counter-Situationist Campaign in Various Countries', Knabb, p.113.

## **Chapter 4. Representations of Contemporary Alienation**

### **in The Novel**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

Debord's theory formulates the alienation of a period that extends from the Fordist years, through the post-war years to the late capitalist present and might be applied to representations of alienation and the 'image' in novels. For example, *The Society of the Spectacle* appears at around the same time as George Perec's *Choses* (1965). Considered a Postmodern text, Hussey relates that it upset Debord: 'Debord's anger [...] had been provoked by the feeling that Perec had plagiarised key Situationist ideas and stripped them of their political meaning'.<sup>1228</sup> Perec's characters Jérôme and Sylvie, are trapped; they enjoy freedom but seek status, wholly defined by material objects (the titular 'things') which requires sacrificing freedom for a corporate job. As Ross writes, they are: 'reduced to [the] function of embodying the *desires* of a new, streamlined, middle-class couple' (my emphasis).<sup>1230</sup> Later, *Atomized* (1988) by Michel Houellebecq, who might be considered Perec's progeny, only superficially engages with France's transition to a post-war 'spectacle' (akin to Adorno's 'culture industry'<sup>1231</sup>):

Europe was flooded with prurient mass-market entertainment from America (the songs of Elvis Presley, the films of Marilyn Monroe). With the refrigerators and washing machines designed to make for a happy couple came the transistor radio and the record player [and] magazines [that] embraced the ideals of the entertainment industry.<sup>1232</sup>

Houellebecq's characters prove 'alienated' by a Darwinian sense of inadequacy when faced with desire articulated in the sexual revolution of the Sixties, not by socio-economic inequalities. The question here, suggested in the introduction, is whether a Modernist agency is nullified or 'decentred' as Existentialism and

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<sup>1228</sup> Hussey, p. 199. '*Things* tells the story of [...] two young market researchers [...] characters who have no political ideas [and] 'drift' through Paris, in imitation of the Situationist *dérive*, in a way which parodies [...] the Situationists' own subversive techniques.'

<sup>1230</sup> Ross, p. 126.

<sup>1231</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp.120-167.

<sup>1232</sup> Michel Houellebecq, *Atomized* (London: Vintage, 2001), p.63.

Postmodernism theorize, in Butler's 'death [...] of the Hegelian subject'<sup>1233</sup>, and if so, do novels that make such assumptions apolitically reflect, rather than oppose, alienation - as Ross observes of Pécrot's characters? What form might a more political literary resistance to alienation and the 'image' take?

This thesis has considered culture in terms of formal 'fragmentation' and 'totality'; Modernist juxtapositions, disjunctions and reversals 'fragment' composition and disorder any formal harmony that might positively reflect a capitalist order. Adorno writes of the failure of both critique and culture should antagonisms or crises be resolved in the false harmony of ideological form, like Zhadonv's Socialist Realism.<sup>1234</sup> This chapter now turns to *literary* Modernism and its particular temporal 'fragmentation' to compares it with Lukács' 'critical' Realism, in terms of that kernel of dialectical contradiction which allows ideology to be undermined. The *Das Wort* debate (1930) evaluates Realism and Modernism as political aesthetics and compares their representation of alienation. Lukács champions Realism within the tight parameters of Soviet Party doctrine, attempting to open up debate on the European intellectual 'Left' to prevent a radical aesthetics being reduced to a widely accepted "'modernist" anti-realism'.<sup>1235</sup>

The theories of Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes are also examined, because they instantiate a transition from Modernism to Postmodernism. A general intellectual, post-war rejection of Stalinism, conflated with Hegelian-Marxism, has been argued to contribute to Debord's marginalization. Both Sartre and Barthes explicitly contest Zhadanov's edict of Socialist Realism as a 'committed' literature.<sup>1236</sup> Although part of an earlier generation, Sartre shares with Barthes a common theoretical principle: both abandon theoretical 'totalities'. Barthes, and later key Postmodernists, are shown to theorize alienation as a metaphysical, '*negative dialectic*' (after Wahl) that leaves a subject permanently alienated in the late capitalist landscape. This is the opposite of the dialectical contradictions of a Realist 'totality', its possibilities of a 'productive' negation that

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<sup>1233</sup> Butler, p.175.

<sup>1234</sup> Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms*, p.28-29. He sarcastically calls reified form 'harmonious'.

<sup>1235</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn, p.17.

<sup>1236</sup> This thesis, p. 11.

Lukács argues radically undermines 'false consciousness', that similarly underpins the I.S. aesthetic; for example, in *détournement*.

Sartre formulates an Existential literature of 'commitment', subsequently critiqued by Barthes, to herald an intellectual shift to a Postmodern aesthetic. This latter position is theorized by Baudrillard through the 'image' in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), by Foucault through history in *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and by Derrida through language in *Of Grammatology* (1967) - amongst other figures and texts. I refer to Debord's rejection of Barthes' Structuralist account of a 'committed' literature, which he considers politically ineffectual.

Chapter Five, the following, final chapter, uses Debord's theory to identify an oppositional, 'anti-spectacular' response in a set of novels that approach the 'image' as his economic and political 'spectacle', a visual form of 'intensified alienation'<sup>1237</sup> that emerges in the twentieth century. Debord's theory, as a tool of literary analysis, is used to explore their construction of an 'image' - and opposition to it - as they represent it operating within a historical 'totality' of class perspectives, most often associated with Realism. This offers an alternative interpretation of novels that are routinely categorized as Postmodern, as secondary criticism will show. For Modernist radicalism is seen to end in the Postmodern, anti-humanist, post-structuralist theories of Derrida, Foucault and Baudrillard that deny the ontologies of both Realist and Modernist novelistic form and thus their critical power.

Therefore, this chapter sets out Lukács' argument for Realism that, like Debord's theory of the 'image', requires a concept of 'totality'. For the novels under discussion present an 'image' in terms comparable to Lukács' argument for Realism; 'anti-spectacular' novels stage textual, dialectical contradictions between an 'image' and a character's class interests. The 'image', constructed in terms of class, is perceived by a reader as a vehicle of social repression and 'false-consciousness', as these narratives present a historical long-view of class dominance and disempowerment, in which the 'image' likewise functions. Such

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<sup>1237</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p.84, Thesis 114.

a narrative 'totality' is unavailable in Postmodern novels based upon opposite, anti-Hegelian, anti-Marxist assumptions.

#### **4.2. Rehabilitating Lukácsian Realism: Realist 'dissonance' or Modernist 'shock'?**

At the Soviet Writers Congress of 1934, Karl Radek condemned Modernism to proclaim Socialist Realism as the 'officially' revolutionary literary method; 'to present a picture of revolution by the Joyce method would be like trying to catch a dreadnought with a shrimping net'.<sup>1238</sup> Critical positions on the political ambitions of Lukács' argument in *Das Wort* vary. Bloch suggests that Lukács resurrects Expressionism as a 'straw man' (the movement ended in 1914) to secure his position at the Comintern. Eagleton agrees, suggesting that Lukács is not genuinely concerned with Realism's 'claim to "progressive" status'.<sup>1239</sup> However, Rodney Livingstone expresses the view, taken here, that Lukács genuinely believes Modernism is not 'artistically progressive'<sup>1240</sup> and his argument with Bloch is 'essentially a contest over the historical meaning of modernism'.<sup>1241</sup> Regardless, it is important to acknowledge that Lukács' early argument for the radical potential of Realism is corrupted by his subservience to Zhdanov's edict of Socialist Realism.

Like Debord, Lukács' argument for the radicalism of culture is found in Hegel. *The Theory of the Novel* (1920) re-articulates a 'Hegelian'<sup>1242</sup> chronology of cultural forms, beginning with the Greek Epic. A hero (subject) finds 'positive meaning'<sup>1243</sup> in the universal religious and civic values<sup>1244</sup> of Ancient Greece (objectivity) to make the narrative construction of social forms 'transcendental loci': 'totality [...] implies [...] forms are not a constraint but only the *becoming conscious* [...] of that which had to be given form'<sup>1245</sup> [my italics]. As stated, he means culture *from*

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<sup>1238</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1934/sovietwritercongress.htm> [last accessed 12/4/21] Essentially, Radek means the social factors which cause revolution cannot be captured by Modernist literary form.

<sup>1239</sup> Eagleton, 'German Aesthetic Duels', in *New Left Review*, 107, (1978) p.21-34 (p.27).

<sup>1240</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.32

<sup>1241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>1242</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.15. The early Lukács is a self-confessed Hegelian.

<sup>1243</sup> *Ibid.*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Manchester: The Merlin Press, 1978), p.34.

<sup>1244</sup> See this thesis, p.3. Debord subscribes to a Hegelian cultural chronology that originates in Ancient Greece.

<sup>1245</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock, p.32-4.



*its inception* constructs a subject-object unity, a metaphysical paradigm or 'totality' reflected in cultural form. However, social progress causes universal values to disappear, thus successive cultural forms (his example is Tragedy) must work to return objective meaning to interior agency, in order to represent such lost 'unity'. In Greek Tragedy this is the device of 'fate'.<sup>1246</sup> This paradigmatic consistency of culture's formal structure, throughout generic transformations, and requirement of unity, leads Bernstein to observe that the: 'epic [...] is the ancestor of the novel'.<sup>1247</sup>

At this stage, Lukács belongs to the Heidelberg circle (1906-16) and reflects its 'romantic anti-capitalist' position that Löwy describes as an intelligentsia's lament at capitalism's destruction of old aristocratic social bonds.<sup>1248</sup> However, critics generally miss that without *any* radical affiliation, Lukács argues that capitalist class divisions are so extreme that the novel must treat alienation as a problem and 'still thinks in terms of totality'<sup>1249</sup> but exists in a state of structural 'paradox'.<sup>1250</sup> Early on, Lukács already considers alienation as it relates to novelistic form; 'the problems of the novel [...] are [...] the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint'.<sup>1251</sup> He suggests that Enlightenment authors use *irony* to negotiate the vast class divisions present to society, that make universal values impossible to represent. *Justine* is an example of the universal value of virtue. An author's ethical position is said to inform a dual-aspected representation of an epoch's social reality, as discrepancies must be knowingly manipulated to make a singular or universal social reality. Lukács describes this as an 'interaction of [...] ethical [...] duality as to form'<sup>1252</sup>, adding: 'their unity in being given form is the content of irony, which is the normative mentality of the novel'.<sup>1253</sup> Eric

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<sup>1246</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock, p.35. Lukács writes; 'life as it was [...] had lost the immanence of the essence'. Greek Tragedy uses the device of destiny to restore objective significance to subjective acts.

<sup>1247</sup> Jay M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* (Brighton: Harvester), p.47.

<sup>1248</sup> Lukács coined this term to describe Dostoevsky's authorial perspective, which Löwy uses in turn (Georg Lukács - *From Romanticism to Bolshevism*) to describe Lukács' position at this time. See also Katerina Clark Petersburg, *Crucible of Revolution* (Cambridge M.A., Harvard University Press, 1995), p.16.

<sup>1249</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.56.

<sup>1250</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.31. Lukács writes that the Greeks 'drew the creative circle of forms this side of paradox' and that the capitalist period of the novel is 'our time of paradox'.

<sup>1251</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>1252</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>1253</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

Auerbach makes this point in *Mimesis* (1946), writing that Realism is pre-empted by 'satirical' Enlightenment works.<sup>1254</sup> If the Epic's paradigm is socially derived, and changes to genre are located in Bernstein's 'primarily social'<sup>1255</sup> realm, then Lukács' early position surely anticipates his later Marxist argument for Realism's ontological continuity with social forces *and* its epistemological work. For, in place of irony, he argues concepts of knowledge are presented through Realism's textual *contradictions*, a discrepancy in the relationship of 'content' to 'form', that, as a productive negations, challenges ('shatters') dominant values Lukács considers ideologically *reified*. In other words, his later argument for Realism mobilizes the concept of reification in the novel.

Chapter Three referred to scientific and social changes such as De Broglie's Wave Theory (1924), Freud's work on sexuality and the foundation of the British Labour Party (1900) that mark the beginning of the twentieth century and announce a more politically complex and socially divided reality after the Russian Revolution. Modernist 'fragmentation' might capture this changed reality, that poet Stephen Spender describes as progress: 'machines, revolutions [and] scientific thinking'.<sup>1256</sup> David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) explains that Imperialism and technical innovation work together, altering Europe's concept of time and space. Harvey writes of continents: 'reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial [...] administration'; of global imports that 'bury locality (its parochial politics and culture)'; of the telephone, automobile and radio that replace a former perception of temporal and spatial unity with simultaneity and 'fragmentation'. He concludes that Realist narratives, structured by a linear, historical narrative time could no longer 'emulate' such a reality.<sup>1257</sup> Modernist authors Kafka, Musil, Woolf and Joyce, much like the avant-garde (Lukács refers to 'the Surrealism of Joyce'<sup>1258</sup>), respond by abandoning a Realist 'totality', seeking an idiom fit to express a redefined human identity (subjectivity) and reconceptualized time and space (objectivity).

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<sup>1254</sup> Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis* (New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 457. Realism is pre-empted by 'politico-satirical tracts' and the 'satirical attitudes of the Enlightenment'.

<sup>1255</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.18.

<sup>1256</sup> Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London; Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p.83.

<sup>1257</sup> Harvey, p.264-5.

<sup>1258</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, p.30.

Lukács argues that Modernist novels construct subjectivity by making consciousness sovereign, a final authority that defines meaning, much like Surrealism. This is achieved by experimenting with conventions, creating the interior monologue, a 'stream of consciousness' that relies on imagery. Montage particularly suggests a process by which the world appears through a characters' thoughts and ideas. Lukács places montage at 'the centre of modernist literature'.<sup>1259</sup> In *Das Wort* he argues that Realism's historical time and space lends truth an objective appearance and a character's thoughts and ideas are more obviously products of, and can be compared with, an external narrative world. Modernism largely replaces this world with the parameters of consciousness, 'objectivity' as it appears through characters' perceptions, reactions and impulses. Anthony Giddens calls this: 'the "emptying" of time-space', the aesthetic abortion of a material, independent narrative objectivity.<sup>1260</sup>

Modernism's reconsideration of time and space is academically well accounted for. In *The Widening Gyre* (1963) Joseph Frank early on suggests time and space are elements of structure that constitute the novel's defining limits.<sup>1261</sup> Lukács uses Woolf's work to argue Modernism produces an ahistorical representation of time, as characters' significant moments are 'static and sensational'<sup>1262</sup>, i.e. objectively unrelated: which he calls 'modernist schizophrenia'.<sup>1263</sup> In *Mrs Dalloway*, as Clarissa walks home to prepare for a dinner party, the narrative time switches from the present to the past and future according to her memories and emotions;

pausing for a moment at the window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves [...] Gloves and shoes [...] her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them [...] Not a straw, she thought, going on up Bond Street.<sup>1264</sup>

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<sup>1259</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.40.

<sup>1260</sup> Anthony Giddens, 'Modernism and Postmodernism', Special Issue on Modernism, *New German Critique*, 22, (1981), pp. 15-18 (p.16).

<sup>1261</sup> Joseph Frank, *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p.14-25.

<sup>1262</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.19.

<sup>1263</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.46.

<sup>1264</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Grafton Books, 1976), p.15.

Temporal order is produced by the mind, achieved through first person narration. Harvey uses T.S. Eliot's poetry to similarly suggest that Modernism represents 'time through a fragmentation of space'.<sup>1265</sup> He argues that Eliot's 'spatialization of time'<sup>1266</sup> reduces time to space through a use of memory. Images of places are used to recall and connect the past, present and future through a *subjective* logic. As Gordon Graham writes: 'the sole aesthetic consideration is with the form of consciousness, never its content'.<sup>1267</sup> On this basis, Gordon observes:

the mind has direct and not mediated contact with the world [...]  
the mind is not filled with ideas which reflect (or fail to reflect)  
reality, but with the things of reality itself [...] Joyce's stream of  
consciousness, unlike Mann's, is all that there is.<sup>1268</sup>

T.S. Eliot self-reflexively acknowledges that Modernism is problematized by this lack of means for capturing objective knowledge and refers to this means (imagery) in *The Waste Land* (1922) as: 'a heap of broken images'.<sup>1269</sup>

Despite Lukács becoming enmeshed in Stalinist cultural orthodoxy, he asks a pertinent question: is literary Modernism radical in itself? Does it record the alienation inherent to Imperialism, progress, mass production and class exploitation in terms of antagonism (i.e. in oppositional form)? Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* represents alienation through Modernist 'fragmentation'. For example, the novel is divided into over one hundred and fifty extremely short chapters, ('fragments' of action) that relate a character's ideas or point of view. Musil, as author, directly derides both Romanticism and Realism, a refusal of sorts: 'the [...] anaemic romanticism and yearning for God that [...] the machine age squirted out as an expression of its [...] misgivings about itself.'<sup>1270</sup> More obliquely, he rejects Realist conventions of setting and place, or narrative historical time, through a self-referential, authorial voice; 'it is a bit old-fashioned: It was a fine day in August 1913'.<sup>1271</sup> Musil's representation of time and space

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<sup>1265</sup> Harvey, p.267.

<sup>1266</sup> Harvey, p. 21.

<sup>1267</sup> Gordon, Graham, 'Lukács and Realism after Marx', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 38 (1998), p.198-207, (p.205).

<sup>1268</sup> Graham. 'Lukács and Realism after Marx', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 38 (1998), p.198-207, (p.205).

<sup>1269</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p.7.

<sup>1270</sup> Musil, p.106.

<sup>1271</sup> Ibid., p.3.

are largely limited to Diotima's salon, taking form in the 'fragmented' conversations and influential ideas (dominant concepts) of this transitional period between centuries in Austria-Hungary, its shift in political systems (i.e. from monarchy to parliamentary democracy) within which Modernism emerges. Diotima's salon typifies the environment of the novel's social world, wherein: 'a [...] circle of admirers gathers around one prophet or another'.<sup>1272</sup> Ulrich, the central character, characterizes the alienation of this era, described as 'uncertainty'.<sup>1273</sup>

In *Against Postmodernism* (1989) Alex Callinicos devotes a section of his seminal work to Austria before World War I, the territory of Musil's action.<sup>1274</sup> The novel's action stems from 'The Parallel Campaign'. As a feudal aristocracy crumbles, it reasserts its power by manufacturing Austrian unity through a nationalist campaign, a 'Year of Austria'<sup>1275</sup>, using patriotism and an idea of 'our fatherland'<sup>1276</sup>, placing the Emperor at the helm, named the 'Emperor of Peace'<sup>1277</sup> (despite the plan being a *parallel* response to the growth of Prussian strength). Musil's facetious authorial tone is perhaps the novel's strongest element. Employing the motif of Hegelian *Geist*, Musil presents the organization of the campaign in terms of Hegel's rationalism and governing ideas. Thus, Ulrich considers; 'the degree to which one saw one's life as a general manifestation or an individual one'.<sup>1278</sup> However, 'The Parallel Campaign' emerges with little, if any, social and historical narrative context.

Callinicos' text supplies the social, class context that Musil reduces to a conflict between old and newly dominant ideas (much like Huelsenbeck's criticism of Futurism); particularly Nietzsche's idea of a 'will to power' popular with younger characters, like Clarisse or Gerda Fischel: '[t]here were those who loved the overman and those who loved the underman'.<sup>1279</sup> Callinicos identifies threats to an Austrian aristocratic class faced with a democratic levelling by an ascendant

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<sup>1272</sup> Ibid., p.148.

<sup>1273</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>1274</sup> Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989)

<sup>1275</sup> Musil, p.148.

<sup>1276</sup> Musil, p.148.

<sup>1277</sup> Musil, p.189.

<sup>1278</sup> Musil, p.157.

<sup>1279</sup> Musil, p.53.

bourgeois class (significantly Jewish), its associated trans-national liberalism, a new labour movement and Slavic nationalism. He identifies a reactionary strand of Austrian Modernism which he correlates with the rise of Nazism. Musil represents this nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-bourgeois position partially through Nietzsche's influence. If a Viennese aristocratic class hold Lukács' initial Romantic 'anti-capitalist' perspective, they take an opposite, conservative political path to Lukács. Faced with social 'uncertainty' (demands for self-determination, class antagonism etc.) the aristocracy retreat into culture, to produce an aestheticized vision of a social order in a self-preserving mode of nationalism. Musil satirizes this requisitioning of culture through 'The Parallel Campaign', which offers up such visions ('Diotima's striving [...] was a noble idealism [...] quite typical of this idealism was the term "culture"; it regarded itself as the vessel of culture'<sup>1280</sup>). Callinicos' conclusion is that such visions, imposed from above, enlist the support of new technologies:

class antagonisms [...] overcome [...] in a community committed to realizing through military expansion the will to power given visible form by the machinery of mass production and destruction.<sup>1281</sup>

This is the basis of Benjamin's similar assertion that Fascism sees an 'aestheticization of politics'.<sup>1282</sup> It recalls the grounds of Debord's rejection of Futurism and Orwell's ambivalence toward Modernist assertions that technology is a progressive force, expressed in Goldstein's reflection on its negative employment in a totalitarian state. Musil makes Walter, Ulrich's childhood friend and Viennese aristocrat, subscribe to a Romantic anti-capitalism, represented by his love of Goethe and lost ideals of an era when; 'instead of death and logical mechanization, blood and wisdom reigned'.<sup>1283</sup> His love of Richard Wagner signals Nazism's later appeal to this ruling class through nationalism ('blood') and, although Musil stops short of characterizing Walter this way, Musil does satirize a Nietzschean position that makes politics and history, or self-creation ('life-as-art'), a matter of forceful ideas, synthetic and unifying, but idealist rather

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<sup>1280</sup> Musil, p.358.

<sup>1281</sup> Callinicos, p.51.

<sup>1282</sup> Callinicos, p.51.

<sup>1283</sup> Musil, p.62.

than material through Clarisse, his wife ('Clarisse [...] stood on her bed, declaiming Nietzschean sentiments'<sup>1284</sup>).

While Musil's novel is not necessarily reactionary, it is not emancipatory. Musil's Modernist form represents social 'fragmentation' - class division, alienation, anti-Semitism – only through characters' differing *ideas*, expressed as 'widely varying battle cries', foreshadowing later Fascist and Communist ideologies that dominate Europe.<sup>1285</sup> Musil presents prolific, multiple, divergent ideas, theories or ideologies, which promise progress, to improve society and its institutions, but distance any directly personal meaning in what is termed 'pseudoreality';

Oehl's system of shorthand, so effective a time-saver it can solve the problems of society once and for all [...] a metaphysical theory of the motions of celestial bodies, simplification of the administrative apparatus [...] a reform of sex life' <sup>1286</sup>

He thereby explores abstraction, partially ridiculing the assumptions of Hegelian rationalism, a necessary relation of 'content' and the social 'form' it takes in conceptual theories or 'truth'; 'form into which inner meaning streams like helium into a balloon.'<sup>1287</sup> Through multiplicity, he satirizes the hope of social unification, of Hegelian 'transcendence', as attempted by 'The Parallel Campaign':

His Grace had not reckoned with [...] the widespread need to improve the world [...] he had expected a great amount of patriotism but was not prepared for inventions, theories, schemes for world unity, and people demanding that he release them from intellectual prisons. They besieged his palace, hailed the parallel campaign as a chance to [...] make the truth prevail at last <sup>1288</sup>

Aristocrats are alarmed by Jewish industrialists such as Paul Arnheim ('the symbolic figure of democracy-in-the-making'<sup>1289</sup>) and this vying to define the 'form' of social unification through the lens of any (class) position other than their own. Rationalism and modernity prove, from Ulrich's position, a product of

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<sup>1284</sup> Musil, p.44.

<sup>1285</sup> Musil, p.53.

<sup>1286</sup> Musil, p.147.

<sup>1287</sup> Musil, p.137.

<sup>1288</sup> Musil, p.148.

<sup>1289</sup> Musil, p.422.

capitalism rather than Hegelian *Geist*: 'that eventually gave rise to poison gas and warplanes.'<sup>1290</sup>

However, Musil's Modernist form strips ideas of social context, those very class differences which lead Ulrich to echo W. B. Yeats and report: 'today everything is falling apart'.<sup>1291</sup> Unlike Walter, Ulrich is a mathematician and intellectual, part of an *haute* bourgeois class. As the aristocratic social order he serves dies, Ulrich's alienation stems from the loss of a formerly fixed, class identity; he experiences a new, instrumental use of his 'reason' in an advancing capitalist order he must work within. Ulrich calls it a 'world [...] continually losing and changing shape'.<sup>1292</sup> He practises restraint, an 'active passivism', by subscribing neither to Neitschean amorality or liberalism,.<sup>1293</sup> Responding to social change or capitalist dominance with 'uncertainty' (his lack of idealism), makes him: 'a man without qualities'.<sup>1294</sup>

If Musil attempts to make Ulrich's alienation symbolic of the lost identity of an entire *haute* bourgeois class, he fails because the narrative constitutes characters' social positions only by ideas. It lacks Callinicos's context that attributes alienation to class causes, i.e. the growth of bourgeois liberalism that creates conflict with an aristocratic class. Thus, the period's alienation is represented in Ulrich's obscure subjective feeling of aversion, similar in form to Sartre's 'nausea' (discussed shortly):

a hint of aversion had lain on everything he did and experienced,  
a shadow of impotence and loneliness [...] for which he could not  
find the complimentary inclination <sup>1295</sup>

Here, 'complimentary inclination' implies that he cannot account for his alienation, he lacks the explanatory social causes for his alienated state. Ideas, without a class context, lack a class perspective, which Lukácsian dialectics turns upon, and *forms* of thought are presented instead as ideas *relative to each other*,

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<sup>1290</sup> Musil, p.37.

<sup>1291</sup> Musil, p.64. A reference to W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming* (1919) 'things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.'

<sup>1292</sup> Musil, p.166.

<sup>1293</sup> Musil, p.386.

<sup>1294</sup> Musil, p. 62.

<sup>1295</sup> Musil, p.58.



appearing kaleidoscopic and abstract rather derived from class positions. Without narrative social scope, characters such as Ulrich cannot recognize whether ideas (i.e. Nationalism, Communism, Liberalism) are serviceable. Musil's novel lacks the social scope necessary to represent such 'pseudoreality' or 'The Parallel Campaign', as reification, through its negative effect on society (and as a potentially fascist vision).

Musil's 'fragmented' form presents competing ideas as equivalents, through characters' differing unifying visions that might overcome social 'fragmentation'; whether Diotima's culture, Arnheim's commercial practicality or General Stuum's military order. Musil's Modernist approach foreshadows a later Postmodern position that rescinds the relation of binaries for relativism. Musil's parody relies on a strategy of mirroring the Emperor's plan (The Parallel Campaign) in the figure of Moosbrugger, a pathological murderer, whose trial focuses social interest and plays out in the background of the novel's action. Moosbrugger's theoretical justifications for murdering women suggests that theory might legitimate insanity or elevate criminal impulses. Musil uses this amorality, also present in Nietzschean philosophy, to suggest that nationalism similarly legitimates 'insanity' as transpires in the genocide of the 1930s to which the Austrian Nazi Party subscribes. However, a reader, finds it difficult to comprehend how an empowered bourgeois class pursue an imperialism that precipitates the First World War, how its associated liberalism threatens the domestic status quo, or how these events combine to lend Fascist ideology its later appeal (i.e. its promise to restore a ruling class through nationalism, technology and militarism) because of the lack of social depth. Orwell, through Winston as the figure of 'the last man', identifies the same social issues in 1930s Europe as Musil, but through Goldstein's historical account. Orwell's novel is a more political representation of alienation because he constructs objective, social class perspectives that allow modernity or progress to be perceived as repressing nascent working-class movements *alienated* by a Nietzschean 'will to power', exercised by a class above, albeit in his Communist, not Fascist, form.

A Modernist aesthetic is more pronounced in Kafka's stories, for the logic of the excision of Giddens' narrative 'time-space', replaced by images, is symbolism or allegory. *The Hunger Artist* (1922) similarly symbolizes modernity's degradation

of social life through the character of a starving man who no longer wishes to *consume* anything - analogous to a rejection of consumption. Although onlookers marvel at his will power, his starvation is in fact motivated by no longer finding anything appealing - a rejection of consumption expressed as a lack of desire.

In *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1945) Adorno, like Lukács, argues for cultural radicalism but through a different model of 'immanence'. Culture and ideology emerge in a dialectical relationship from the *same* social conditions; culture is thereby forced to become autonomous in its effort to evade absorption into ideology. Culture becomes radical by differentiating itself through its *critical* evaluation of ideological claims, a process of: 'culture's becoming self-consciously cultural, which in turn places culture in vigorous and consistent opposition to the growing barbarism of economic hegemony'.<sup>1296</sup> Adorno develops Ernst Bloch's initial position in *Das Wort*. A heightened subjectivity achieves 'the most authentic expression possible'<sup>1297</sup> as it allows 'suffering'<sup>1298</sup> to represent a negative experience of alienation through distortion, exaggeration and shock (similar to Brecht's distancing techniques in drama). In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) Adorno elaborates on the historical mediation of form which makes this possible; new social realities inherit old forms, consequently formal innovation reflects social contradiction, embodied within changes to cultural form itself. Thus, cultural form is given a dialectical relationship to the social content it articulates. Culture, Sven-Olov Wallenstein writes: 'embodies social contradictions as inner contradictions in its own form [...] form is always a content that is historically mediated'.<sup>1299</sup> Adorno claims Modernism thereby allows content - the experience of alienation - to be newly represented through distortion, to affect a: 'dialectical tension between reality and the realm of art.'<sup>1300</sup> Exaggeration contrasts the promise of capitalism with its lived experience. Culture thus reveals alienation through Adorno's 'dissonance'<sup>1302</sup> but remains the autonomous sphere of Wahl or Hyppolite, with its own laws of construction. Adorno suggests this effects Marx's double negative - 'the "distortion of the

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<sup>1296</sup> *Prisms*, p.14.

<sup>1297</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.23.

<sup>1298</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.168.

<sup>1299</sup> Sven Olov-Wallenstein, 'Adorno's Realism', *Baltic Worlds*, 4 (2016), 28-34 (p.30)

<sup>1300</sup> *Prisms*, p.185.

<sup>1302</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.168.

distortion" is the positive'<sup>1303</sup> - just as Bloch states 'two minuses produce a plus'.<sup>1304</sup> For culture forces consciousness 'to go beyond the total immanence'<sup>1305</sup> of reified *form*, which is thereby undone to political effect.

Realism, it has been suggested, is more than a style and a genre with specific conventions, which I will fully define. After the Russian Revolution (1917), Lukács converts to Communism. Although *History and Class Consciousness* is rejected by the Fifth Congress of the Communist International (1924) Lukács is determined to bring its *method* to cultural analysis, writing that; 'dialectical materialism is the road to truth' and that its 'orthodoxy refers exclusively to method'.<sup>1306</sup> Lukács' response to Bloch in *Realism in the Balance* (1938), *Art and Objective Truth* (1954) and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1955) all serve to mobilize his concept of reification *in the novel*. Lukács, like Engels<sup>1307</sup> (and Adorno, Sartre and Barthes) identify the Realist novel with the emergence of bourgeois capitalism; after Cervantes in the 1600s it fulfils its potential in Balzac, Goethe, Mann and Tolstoy, ceasing to be radical once the European revolutions of 1848 take a conservative turn.<sup>1308</sup> The novel's structure, its subject-object paradigm, which informs a representation of character and world, is constructed as a historical 'totality' from an ascendant bourgeoisie 'perspective'<sup>1309</sup> that Eagleton calls 'history in the making'<sup>1310</sup> and similarly Jay calls a 'progressive longitudinal totality'.<sup>1311</sup> Realist conventions, such as an omniscient third person narrator, construct space and time through society and history, which gives them an appearance of objectivity. Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, a critical authority on Realism, analyses this construction of historical chronology and spatial continuum through a temporally linear narrative<sup>1312</sup> and serial

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<sup>1303</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.184.

<sup>1304</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>1305</sup> *Prisms*, p.26.

<sup>1306</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.1.

<sup>1307</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Literature and Art*, 2nd edn., (Bombay: Current Book House, 1956), Balzac, p.37, Cervantes, p.39.

<sup>1308</sup> Lukács argues that the 1848 European revolutions consolidate the bourgeois position as the dominant class. Sartre puts this decline earlier, after the French revolution (1789). Also see Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, p.28.

<sup>1309</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.33.

<sup>1310</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, p.29.

<sup>1311</sup> Jay, p.105.

<sup>1312</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p.41. She writes: 'The conception of time as a common medium in which distinctions between past, present and future are

descriptions of objects, differentiated only by verisimilitude, which creates a neutral, objective perspective of space.<sup>1313</sup> (Verisimilitude is later critiqued by Barthes). Thereby, the present appears to belong to the past, as part of a social, historical continuity or objectivity. As stated, characters are established as Aristotle's '*zoon politicon*'<sup>1314</sup>, or Lukács' 'typical universal characters'<sup>1315</sup> and generalize a historical experience, through a social class or community, making their particular condition universal - i.e. alienation - which Lukács claims Modernist form makes impossible.

Realism's critical power, however, also turns on 'immanence'. If, like the fetishized commodity, reification is a contradiction of 'content' and 'form', Lukács argues that the Realist novel uniquely captures society at a historical depth in terms of the mobility of Marx's class relationships; as a historical, dialectical 'totality'. Therefore, the *appearance* of dominant ideas and governing institutions - Lukács' 'bourgeois society'<sup>1316</sup> - which shape the 'form' of characters' self-conceptions and behaviour, are related to a bourgeois class - its 'view of the world [...] or *weltanschauung*'<sup>1317</sup> - despite other viewpoints. Social forms can be understood as 'reified' in being shaped by this one-sided, class position<sup>1318</sup> which falsifies or excludes other positions present in that historical class situation or real 'unity'. Characters thus embody the: 'contradictions within society and [...] the individual in the context of a dialectical unity'.<sup>1319</sup> *Realism in the Balance* uses Marx's capitalist crises to illustrate how ideology is represented as reification through this antithesis of 'content' and 'form':

the basic economic categories of capitalism are always reflected in the minds of men, directly, but always back to front [...] in periods when capitalism functions in a so-called normal manner,

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meaningful (i.e. mutually informative) is a conception predicated by realistic narrative as well as confirmed by it.'

<sup>1313</sup> Deeds Ermath, pp.16-24. She argues that an object drawn from repeated points of view creates a perception of a spectator's neutral point of view and stable, universal laws. Similarly, Lukács in *Aesthetics and Politics* (p.33) calls this 'seriality', after Lenin, a Realist technique that attempts to construct 'all-round knowledge of an object'.

<sup>1314</sup> This thesis, p.16. Lukács follows Marx who cites Aristotle.

<sup>1315</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.56.

<sup>1316</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.178.

<sup>1317</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.19.

<sup>1318</sup> This thesis, p. 44. The 'one-sidedness of history' is Lukács' expression for the logic of the bourgeois revolution that ignores class divisions which preclude universality, allowing antinomies to continue; the 'irrationality' of the discrepancy between form and content.

<sup>1319</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.31.

and its various processes appear autonomous, people living within capitalist society think and experience it as unitary, whereas in periods of crisis, when the autonomous elements are drawn together into unity, they experience it as disintegration.<sup>1320</sup>

'Autonomy' becomes a reified perception of 'unity', *contradicted* by a real underlying 'unity' of classes engaged in struggle; for example, Trade Union strikes aim at equality, but appear as social 'disintegration'. Realist form constructs 'false-consciousness' through this antithesis or dissonance that, like Lukács' productive negation, allows characters' ideas to be recognized in terms of their class bias by such socio-historical context. Whereas Modernism records 'fragmentation', responding to the century's changed relationships between genders or classes, it cannot represent social change (apparent 'disintegration') as righting social wrongs and 'shattering' reification, which suggests its limitations.

If culture inherently treats obstacles to 'totality' as a problem, Lukács' argues Realism's historical form resolves duality by allowing the *antithesis* of 'content' and 'form' or *reification* to be perceived through opposite class perspectives, to contradict the positivity of dominant ideology. Lukács follows Lenin who first reads Tolstoy as an imperfect 'mirror' of a peasant class. Changes to land ownership that cause the peasants' impoverishment are the 'contradictory conditions'<sup>1322</sup> (class conflict) which impels the Russian revolution but seen from Tolstoy's aristocratic perspective. Therefore, Lenin calls his religious solution 'patriarchal Tolstoyan ideology'.<sup>1323</sup> Similarly, Lukács argues that Balzac frames poet Lucien de Rubempré's aspirations by disillusionment, after he discovers poetry is produced, not by inspiration, but contradictorily for bourgeois commerce (i.e. the printing press). Balzac's depiction transforms 'literature into a commodity' to represent a 'destruction of culture by capitalism', a contradiction whereby history provides an 'angle of social criticism'.<sup>1324</sup> If Modernism presents alienation as immediate suffering or aversion, Realism uniquely undermines 'positive' universal values as 'false' (reified), through its historical *class* situation that makes the slippage between a terms and its experience a clear instance of injustice.

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<sup>1320</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.28.

<sup>1322</sup> Lenin, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), p.28.

<sup>1323</sup> Lenin, p.28.

<sup>1324</sup> Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (London: The Merlin Press, 1972), p.51.

Lukács writes that Realism is analogous to science, in this ability to reveal ‘truth’ in an otherwise reified world: ‘[s]cience would be superfluous if there were an immediate coincidence of the appearance and reality of things’.<sup>1325</sup>

However, the rehabilitation of Lukácsian Realism has largely failed. In part because ‘reification’ remains misunderstood. Bewes, for example, believes reification a secondary effect of commodification called ‘thing-hood’<sup>1326</sup>, a transhistorical phenomenon that becomes a standard of perceptions of objective reality: ‘an institution [...] takes on the character of a “force that controls human beings”’.<sup>1327</sup> Honneth also believes that reification is an effect whereby an instrumental perception of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is encouraged (as demonstrated in Ulrich). Honneth struggles to understand how instances of ‘reification’ become a uniform practice: ‘[i]t isn’t clear from the text how this social generalization theoretically occurs’.<sup>1328</sup> However, *History and Class Consciousness* is clear: the point at which society is built upon a wage-labour economy, institutions arise to protect biased bourgeois interests, generating reification through such social structures. Honneth mistakenly suggests reification is a matter of volition: ‘we only reify other persons if we lose sight of our antecedent recognition of their existence’.<sup>1330</sup> Neil Larson and Andrew Feenberg challenge this, with Larson facetiously asking if ‘a passionate act of commodity exchange would escape reification’.<sup>1331</sup> Like Postone, who makes capital the ‘Subject’ of history by its generation of value, Larson asks if ‘crisis’<sup>1332</sup> might be considered the theoretical category that bears out both Lukács’ dialectical, historical contradictions and disrupts reification, instead of a debunked ‘subject-object’ of history: ‘the crisis of capital as itself an immanent standpoint of critique’.<sup>1333</sup> Feenberg rearticulates Larson’s crises, but in terms of *praxis* that makes the mediation of ‘structure’ by ‘agency’ possible: ‘form and content are not identical [...] content overflows the

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<sup>1325</sup> Lukács, *Writer and Critic and other essays*, ed. by Aurthur Kahn, p.26.

<sup>1326</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, p.106.

<sup>1327</sup> *The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, p.4.

<sup>1328</sup> Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 23. He also writes of: ‘the perceived contradiction between total reification and original empathetic engagement, which is the exact point of recognition of mistaken content of form’ p.55.

<sup>1330</sup> Honneth, p.75.

<sup>1331</sup> *The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, p. 82.

<sup>1332</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>1333</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

form of objectivity and has the power to modify it'.<sup>1334</sup> Feenberg is closest to Lukács' understanding of reification as non-identity and its dialectical, social transformation.

Realism is also difficult to rehabilitate because mistakes made by Bloch and Adorno are repeated by later critics. Lukács and Adorno accuse each other of championing an aesthetic that replicates ideology, thereby failing to be oppositional. Adorno understands Realist reflection as Eagleton's 'mirror'<sup>1335</sup> that instead of producing 'dissonance' replicates the 'internal logic'<sup>1336</sup> of capitalism. Joseph Stern (*On Realism*, 1973) claims Realism's mimetic conventions are 'epistemologically naïve'.<sup>1337</sup> Later still, following the same logic, Richard Rorty rejects Realist ontologies premised on a 'correspondence theory of truth'.<sup>1338</sup>

Galin Tihanov offers a different interpretation of Lukács' understanding of the Realist novel as a metaphor for the working class, historically located but at a 'preliminary stage to be followed by a permanent condition of perfection'.<sup>1339</sup> In other words, the Realist novel turned Social Realist neo-Epic resolves the class contradictions it captures, in step with Stalin's purportedly perfect 'classless' society, free of contradictions.<sup>1340</sup> For the greatest obstacle to rehabilitating an early Lukács, who identified the radicalism of Realism, was his later accommodation of Socialist Realism after denouncing *History and Class Consciousness* in 1934. Tihanov criticizes Lukács' approval of Socialist Realism and rendering a historical 'totality' from a false proletarian 'perspective': 'Realist literature [that] produces the right picture of reality in struggle with [...] class bound ideas'.<sup>1341</sup> However, in *Das Wort* Lukács defends his early position precisely against such an accusation: 'Bloch directs his attack at my view of

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<sup>1334</sup> Ibid., p.110 -111.

<sup>1335</sup> *Marxist Literary Theory*, ed. by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, p.52. Eagleton writes that Realism is: 'art that reproduces reality as a mirror reflects the world'.

<sup>1336</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.180.

<sup>1337</sup> Joseph P. Stern, *On Realism*, (London: Routledge, 1973), p.54.

<sup>1338</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1979), see Chapter 6, Epistemology and Philosophy of Language pp. 257-311. Rorty, a Postmodern philosopher, considers objectivity not 'mind-independent' but a construct contingent on linguistic and philosophical structures - there is no truth to be referenced by words.

<sup>1339</sup> Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p.65.

<sup>1340</sup> Tihanov, p.127.

<sup>1341</sup> Tihanov, p.109.

totality'<sup>1342</sup>, denying that he wants a neo-Epic or: 'unified reality as a mere hangover from the systems of classical idealism'.<sup>1343</sup>

Lukács is not opposed to representing alienation as 'fragmentation', discussed in *Das Wort* as variously; 'fissures in the surface inter-relations'<sup>1344</sup>, 'disruption'<sup>1345</sup> 'discontinuity'<sup>1346</sup> or 'ruptures'.<sup>1347</sup> He objects to alienation being represented in a form that removes the social territory which constitutes Hegel's 'unity of thought and action'<sup>1348</sup>, Giddens's 'time-space' of the novel. For social causes establish alienation in terms of: 'real factors that relate [...] experiences to the hidden social forces that produce them'.<sup>1349</sup> He finds Modernism prone to ideological perversion, as it makes the epistemological mistake of conflating 'content' and 'form', representing ideology as textual 'truth' to thereby make alienation a '*condition humaine*'.<sup>1350</sup> In *Das Wort*, Expressionist Emil Nolde is claimed to represent the crises of Weimar Germany through 'pathos'<sup>1351</sup>, which Debord terms 'panic'<sup>1352</sup>, to share 'abstract'<sup>1353</sup> premises (emotions, 'immediacy'<sup>1354</sup>) with Nazi ideology that similarly used 'panic' to make Germans vulnerable to antisemitic propaganda and obscure actual, capitalist causes of crisis; i.e. national war debt, mass unemployment, trade union action. Adorno's 'shock' is considered a contradiction of ideological 'form' that works *outside* a text, by a reader, to generate its critical power; 'loneliness [...] transcends itself as soon as it reflects on itself as such'.<sup>1355</sup> Evidently, this is not Marx's 'negation', for nothing

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<sup>1342</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.26.

<sup>1343</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.30.

<sup>1344</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.16.

<sup>1345</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>1346</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>1347</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>1348</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p27. Eugene Lunn similarly refers to the 'causality of events lost' in *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (University of California Press: London, 1982), p.81.

<sup>1349</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.33.

<sup>1350</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn. p. 27. Hegel's desirous subject is said to be reduced to Kant's 'incognito' in Modernism's 'solipsistic' characters.

<sup>1351</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Expressionism: its Significance and Decline' in *Essays on Realism* trans. by David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p.96.

<sup>1352</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p.77, Thesis 109.

<sup>1353</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 93.

<sup>1354</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1355</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.181.



*within the text* has transformed the alienated state, represented in heightened form (loneliness).

Oppositely, Peter Uwe Hohendahl suggests that Realism is drawn onto epistemological grounds through language: 'an epistemology that presupposes the principle recognisability of reality as independent of subjective experiences'.<sup>1356</sup> Lukács argues this enables 'false-consciousness' to be represented through slippage, dissonance, a contradiction of 'content' and 'form', wrought through opposite class perspectives that reframe ideological terms. Lukács claims such textual 'dissonance'<sup>1357</sup> truly *reflects* the 'metaphysical dissonance'<sup>1358</sup> of capitalism:

literature is a particular form by [...] which objective reality is reflected [...] it becomes of crucial importance for it to grasp that reality [...] and not merely to confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface.<sup>1359</sup>

Therefore, Realism performs as a 'Left' epistemology, identifying 'false-consciousness' through contradictions *within* a text, mapped through language to the ideological terms of the world beyond it. It critically intervenes as Eugene Lunn's 'productive mediation of the objective world'.<sup>1360</sup> Lukács claims its textual contradictions are reversals of dominant ideology consistent with actual contestation:

modernism portrays distortion without critical detachment [...] attributing distortion to reality itself, it dismisses [...] as ontologically irrelevant, all counter-forces [...] actually at work in reality.<sup>1361</sup>

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<sup>1356</sup> Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'The Theory of the Novel and the Concept of Realism in Lukács and Adorno', in *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, ed. by Michael J. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2011), p.89.

<sup>1357</sup> Lukács, *Writer and Critic and other essays*, ed. by Aurthur Kahn, p.72.

<sup>1358</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.72.

<sup>1359</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.33.

<sup>1360</sup> Lunn, p.65. He summarizes this Marxist argument best: 'Marx viewed art [...] as part of the human productive mediation of the objective world, not its mere reflection or mimetic representation.'

<sup>1361</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.184.

Lukács finds his early Heidelberg position; ‘a conception of the world which aimed at a fusion of “left” ethics and “right” epistemology (ontology etc.)’<sup>1362</sup> In other words, while a ‘Left’ ethics drives at anti-capitalism, a ‘Right’ philosophical framework denies Marx’s socio-economic relations and inherent working-class perspective. Lukács levels this error at Modernism: ‘Ernst Bloch continued undeterred to cling to his synthesis of “left” ethics and “right” epistemology’<sup>1363</sup> and pre-empts Debord’s dismissal of Sartre on the same grounds, whom Lukács calls ‘an extremely influential representative of it’.<sup>1364</sup>

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<sup>1362</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.21.

<sup>1363</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.22.

<sup>1364</sup> Ibid.

### **4.3. From Existential ‘Commitment’ to Postmodern Deconstruction**

After the First World War, the alienation and inequality addressed by Communist politics is a social ‘fragmentation’ that is similarly resisted by an adversarial avant-garde. Andreas Huyssen argues this point in *After the Great Divide* (1986)<sup>1365</sup>, proposing a division arises between literary Modernism, capable of cultural autonomy (i.e. Adorno’s independence), and mass culture – Adorno’s ‘entertainment industry’<sup>1366</sup> or Debord’s ‘spectacle’. However, after the Second World War and Europe’s shift to Daniel Bell’s ‘post-industrial society’<sup>1367</sup>, Debord’s ‘everyday life’ is even more profoundly ‘fragmented’. Television, cars, shopping centres, commercialized leisure activities, mass tourism and mass culture in the West, propaganda, state surveillance and state sanctioned culture in the East, generally makes ‘culture’ yet another example of a pervasive and extensive alienation of public space, association and leisure time. From the 1960s to the 1980s, critics such as Ihab Hassan or David Harvey are lead to ask if Modernism can remain autonomous and oppositional in a late capitalist landscape. Is Modernist *agency*, already inflected by ‘suffering’, stymied by existential *ennui*, possible if further alienated or ‘deconstructed’ as Postmodernism suggests.

*The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) was published in the same period as Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1967), Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), while *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988) appears shortly after Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). Yet, Debord’s theory is never used to decode representations of alienation in the novel, as they are. The question of whether Modernist radicalism expires in Postmodernism is therefore reframed here to ask a slightly different question: does Debord’s theory offer a more radical interpretation of the ‘image’ than Postmodern theory affords? For contemporary fiction often makes key

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<sup>1365</sup> Andreas Huyssen, ‘Mapping The Postmodern’, in *New German Critique*, 33, (1984), 5-52 (p.11). Huyssen writes that (communist) Russian Formalism and high modernism are ‘conceptually and practically bound up with capitalist modernization’ but that the historical avant-garde is differently and actively adversarial.

<sup>1366</sup> *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.5.

<sup>1367</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (London; Heinemann, 1976). Bell, a centre-Right critic concerned with the effect of capitalism on morality, coined the term ‘post-industrial’ for the period of late capitalist mass consumption.

Postmodern assumptions its own. Jameson suggests Postmodern literary conventions emerge to affect a crisis of representation in the transition from:

an essentially realistic epistemology [or] mirror theory of knowledge and art [and] novelistic “realism” of the Lukácsian variety [to a] ‘postreferential “epistemology” in terms of linguistics, and in particular theories of the performative.<sup>1369</sup>

This has repercussions for representations of alienation, particularly Giddens ‘time-space’<sup>1370</sup> as the social territory where Lukács’ contradictions of ideology are staged. For Jameson, Callinicos and Harvey all suggest that Postmodernism might involve a de-politicization of aesthetics, which is considered its main flaw.<sup>1371</sup>

Sartre and Barthes are fundamental to this later, Postmodern reconsideration of time, space and language. For they redefine the novel’s oppositional possibilities for an earlier generation. In *What is Literature?* (1948), as Rick Rylance observes: ‘Sartre [...] posed the central question for the postwar generation who had come through the Nazi Occupation: how is literature situated in relation to the dominant culture?’<sup>1372</sup> For Sartre’s great emphasis on freedom perhaps primarily responds to the censorship and oppression of Nazism.

Sartre’s *Nausea* (1938) presents Antoine Roquentin as metaphysically alienated by time and space. Yet, in existential fashion, he possesses an absolute freedom, demonstrating aspects of Modernist agency, such as choice. Later, Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles Images* takes the same approach, creating a subject faced with an advanced ‘technical’ world of screens and ‘leisure’<sup>1373</sup>, progress, automation and Modernist culture (i.e. the architecture of Brazilia<sup>1374</sup>). Her central

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<sup>1369</sup> *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean-Francois Lyotard, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Forward by Frederic Jameson, ‘Theory and History of Literature’, Volume 10, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. ix.

<sup>1370</sup> Giddens, *New German Critique*, p.16.

<sup>1371</sup> Generally, the Humanities syllabi of Anglo-American and European universities throughout the 1980s and 1990s were dominated by Postmodern theorists, neglecting the minority view of Marxist critics, such as these, that Postmodernism exhibits a moral relativism and ambiguity that makes it apolitical.

<sup>1372</sup> Rick Rylance, *Roland Barthes*, ‘Modern Cultural Theories’ Series (Harvester: London, 1994), p.9.

<sup>1373</sup> Simone De Beauvoir, *Les Belles Images*, trans. by Patrick O’ Brian (London : Fontana, 1975), p.35.

<sup>1374</sup> De Beauvoir, p.10.

character, Gisèle Dufrène, is built on an existential model of autonomy and choice; time takes form as a sequence of choices, that never obtain lasting meaning. Of her husband, Gisèle muses; 'Why Jean-Charles rather than anyone else?'<sup>1375</sup> However, Gisèle's loss of identity and mental breakdown is not attributed to alienation, but patriarchal and psychiatric causes.

Sartre considers language a referent that directly reflects 'objective reality'<sup>1376</sup> like a pane of glass. Language is not 'postreferential'; instead, cultural autonomy allows language to be used instrumentally in the novel. Sartre's 'abandonment by God' is an anti-Hegelian denial of necessity, of intrinsic value, enabling a writer to ascribe or 'commit' meaning through characters that elect values through choice and act accordingly in specific situations. Thus, Sartre militates against Zhdanov's edict of Socialist Realism as a 'committed' literature<sup>1377</sup> and intends his *literature engagée* to retain the freedom necessary for writing and reading meaning. The novel is enabled to construct an 'anti-ideological' position through its election of values, a 'disclosure':<sup>1378</sup>

What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure? The 'committed' writer knows that words are action.<sup>1379</sup>

If the literary object (novel) has no substance other than a reader, writing constructs meaning to make the novel an 'empire of signs'.<sup>1380</sup> Thus, Sartre claims the novel is a means of 'transcendence' of the dominant ideology of a class, Party or State: '[t]o write is to [...] appeal to the reader that he lead into objective existence the revelation [...] undertaken by means of language.'<sup>1381</sup>

Although Roquentin's freedom demands he impose sense on the world through choice, space remains inherently alienating, dividing him from those choices through external, indifferent objects, in which he is implicated. He is both an

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<sup>1375</sup> De Beauvoir, p.115.

<sup>1376</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature?* (London: Methuen, 1978), p.41.

<sup>1377</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 26-30.

<sup>1378</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p.13.

<sup>1379</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p.13.

<sup>1380</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p.4.

<sup>1381</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.32. Sartre argues for the mediation of a reader by the text; if a novel's objective meaning is created beyond words, words are claimed to be a means of transcendence of what is real.

object to himself ('I can understand nothing of this face'<sup>1382</sup>) *and* the 'Other'. Sartre's alienation is a metaphoric 'nausea':

[t]he Nausea is not inside me: I feel it out there [...] everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the café, I am the one who is within it<sup>1383</sup>

Time is similarly alienating, as the past and future ceaselessly nullify his choices or values, thus any stable 'identity' or meaning. Roquentin's temporal alienation proves inescapable: 'I am cast out, forsaken in the present'.<sup>1384</sup> He hopes to affirm his identity in terms of Woolf's significant moments - his 'great moments'<sup>1385</sup> - but the Modernist model of subjectivity fails, as the present offers no privileged perspective or synthesis of the past. This would require memory, but Roquentin finds recalling and ordering memories a false reconstruction of selfhood: 'I am not sure what they represent, whether they are memories or just fiction'.<sup>1386</sup> Here, in nascent form, is Foucault's later concept of subjectivity as a reflexive construct.<sup>1387</sup> Viktor E. Frankl's *Man's Search For Meaning* (1946) similarly suggests that even within the circumstances of a Nazi concentration camp, a subject retains an inviolable freedom and, therefore, a meaning-making function or ability to ascribe meaning through choice:

there were always choices to make [...] a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom'.<sup>1388</sup>

This commitment to self-defined meaning is the message of Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Frankel's choices, like those of Roquentin, aim to 'transcend' alienation. However, clearly this freedom is not concrete.

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<sup>1382</sup> Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. by Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, [n.d.]), p.27.

<sup>1383</sup> *Nausea*, p.27.

<sup>1384</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>1385</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>1386</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>1387</sup> Farrell Fox, p. 48. Sartre's aestheticized subject is discussed in relation to Foucault; 'Sartre and postmodernists both envisage the subject as something which must be *created*, they tend [...] to *aestheticize* the subject and the project of authentic self-determination.'

<sup>1388</sup> Victor E. Frankel, *Man's Search For Meaning*, (London: Rider, 2004) p.74-75.

Despite Roquentin's essential freedom, any *identity* or externalization in objectivity - in time and space - renders choice meaningless and identity contingent. If alienation is this removal of agency, it becomes a 'human condition' (as per Lukács' objection) and freedom an abstract, subjective aspect of consciousness. Sartre addresses this by claiming that a text's ascription of values, extended to readers as 'Others', establishes the particular in terms of the universal. His ethical humanism is said to operate in literature as an 'objective mind'<sup>1389</sup>, suggesting that choice is guided by ethics: 'the moment [...] my freedom is indissolubly linked with that of all other men it cannot be demanded [...] that I use it to approve the enslavement of a part of these men.'<sup>1390</sup> However, as a character is always alienated or 'fragmented' in individual experiences, 'transcendence' becomes impossibly located in values endorsed by a text, rather than social structures - 'each book proposes a concrete liberation'.<sup>1391</sup> For example, Albert Camus' *L'Etranger* (1942) sees Meursault express freedom by causally shooting a stranger. If the final logic of the alienation of Lukács' 'dehumanized' (objectified) subject is Nazism's genocide, such abstract representations seem apolitical or at least easily distorted. Frankel, for example, gives sickness value as it avoids labour in the camp - 'how glad [...] to be sick and able to doze'<sup>1392</sup> - when ordinarily this is not universally true, as Sartre claims.

Marianne De Koven in *Utopia Limited* locates the cultural 'paradigm shift' from modernity to postmodernity in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957).<sup>1393</sup> In the early 1950s, Barthes crucially introduces a semiotic framework for reading the 'image'. Earlier than Debord, Barthes finds 'Nature' (space) and 'History' (time) wholly ideologically made over by advertising, fashion, T.V. and film<sup>1394</sup>:

I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn [...] and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display [...]

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<sup>1389</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p.13.

<sup>1390</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p.46. Like Hippolyte, Sartre is inspired by Hegel's position on language as a unifying structure that constitutes a community of speakers.

<sup>1391</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>1392</sup> Frankel, p.59.

<sup>1393</sup> Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 19 - 22.

<sup>1394</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, See his articles; 'Soap-powders and Detergents', p.36, 'Operation Margarine', p.41, 'The Poor and the Proletariat', p. 39 and 'The Face of Garbo', p.56 for the best accounts of how visual ideological imagery mediates the world.

the ideological abuse which [...] is hidden there.<sup>1395</sup>

Inspired by Claude Levi-Strauss' use of myth, as a trans-historical model, Barthes adapts Ferdinand de Saussure's work on language to produce a theory of culture that Graham Allen describes as based on 'structuralism and semiology'.<sup>1396</sup>

Modernist *agency* - a subjective meaning-making function - is transferred from Sartre's Modernist subject to Barthes' 'image'. The 'image', analogous to myth's symbolic form, is a 'sign' that, beyond indicating a referent, denotes a secondary ideological meaning. This more influential meaning effaces the signifier's concrete referent, its *content*.<sup>1397</sup> 'Nature', for example, is replaced by *fashion* and ubiquitous fads obtain a false 'naturalness'.<sup>1398</sup> This order of 'signs' demonstrates, as Allen writes: 'all human practices in society are mediated, they are always already contained within systems of signification.'<sup>1399</sup> Derrida takes up this concept, applying it to language (discussed next). Barthes' images evidence an ideological order that structures meaning at the level of form, in what he calls: 'an abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier'.<sup>1400</sup> *Image-Music-Text* (1977) suggests signs obtain a formal ability to *mythologize*, in other words they generalize and thereby naturalize ideology by referencing other signs in 'rhetorical'<sup>1401</sup> chains of signification, independent of actual referents and constructed instead from 'material that has already been worked on'.<sup>1402</sup>

Sartre's anti-Hegelian temporality and Barthes' semiotic framework together provide a basis for Derrida's 'deconstruction'. They enable Derrida, Foucault and

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<sup>1395</sup> *Mythologies*, p.11.

<sup>1396</sup> Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), p.39. In 1957 Barthes read Ferdinand de Saussure and borrowed his linguistic framework to critique bourgeois culture in what Allen calls: 'a new phase [...] focused on the idea of a science of criticism'.

<sup>1397</sup> Rick Rylance, *Roland Barthes* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 49. He writes: 'Myths capitalise the conventional 'arbitrariness' of the sign's relationships, and cash in its multiple networks of association. In this process the original meaning (let alone the referent) is sometimes left behind [sic].'

<sup>1398</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, (London: Fontana, 1990), p.44.

<sup>1399</sup> Allen, p.60.

<sup>1400</sup> Roland Barthes, *Barthes Selected Writings* ed. by Susan Sontag, (Oxford, Fontana, 1983), p.103.

<sup>1401</sup> *Image Music Text*, p.49. Wrestling, for example, is said to reference Roman antiquity, or suffering 'the cross and the pillory'. He argues both reflect and shape consumers' experience of capitalism. (p.21).

<sup>1402</sup> *Mythologies*, p.110.



Baudrillard to reject what Downing calls a: 'unified meaning making subject (the Cartesian cogito).'<sup>1403</sup> In 1967, this prompts American academic John Barths to first suggest the Modernist novel's most radical convention - a reliable, independent, first person narrator or agent - is 'exhausted'<sup>1404</sup>, as a subject is impossibly 'decentred' by an objectivity theorized in Postmodern terms that Jameson calls a: 'decentring of that formerly centred subject'.<sup>1405</sup>

In *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (1962), Derrida, after Sartre, makes space rather than time 'non-originary', to produce a 'non-identity' that allows for absolute difference, elaborated as *différance*. Farrell Fox suggests this makes Sartre a 'hidden origin' of Derrida's Postmodern approach.<sup>1406</sup> Derrida rejects Hegel's 'non-originary'<sup>1407</sup> world, that *a priori* allows contradiction to be nullified by identity in *Absolute Spirit*. For *différance* militates against 'logocentrism' - the correspondence of a word and its object or historical event. Derrida argues that language, unlike written numbers, is not a simple relation to empirical appearance and does not obtain a stable 'truth'. Descombes expresses this well: '[i]f the *true* is identical with the *true for myself* [...] I must then be the Cartesian God [...] otherwise, truth is no more than [...] a "point of view"'.<sup>1408</sup> After Wahl and Hyppolite, Derrida argues that there is no 'origin' in the sense that 'Being' and language achieve identity in an eternal, trans-historical meaning.

However, *différance* is not centred in Sartre's temporality. Rather, Derrida argues that the naming of any experience anticipates it being 'always already'<sup>1409</sup> mediated by *language*, after Barthes. This nullifies an origin to make Derrida's language 'non-originary'. Hyppolite's *Logos* is a metaphysical separation, but Derrida argues this is itself a logocentric *construction*: for language might attempt identity by drawing on 'presence' (Being) as Descombes' stable 'truth', however, a word never obtains this intrinsic value. Linguistic meaning is contingent upon

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<sup>1403</sup> Lisa Downing, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.16.

<sup>1404</sup> John Barth, *The Friday Book* (New York: Putnam's, 1984), p.64. By 'exhaustion' he means; 'the used-upness of certain forms [...], of certain possibilities'.

<sup>1405</sup> *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.63.

<sup>1406</sup> Farrell Fox, p.150. He endorses Jameson's view that Sartre is a 'hidden origin' of postmodern theory.

<sup>1407</sup> Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, p.179.

<sup>1408</sup> Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.144.

<sup>1409</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 2016), p.10. He uses this term throughout this text.

prior usage, allows for comparative meanings and thus semantics generates meaning rather than any referent.

Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) and *The Death of the Author* (1967) preempt how far Postmodernism proceeds to undermine Modernist conventions. Rylance observes that Barthes' 'analytic method' undermines the claims of Adorno (or indeed Huyssen) of a radical, Modernist literature distinct from mass culture, as it treats both in terms of signification, as written forms are governed by the same rules.<sup>1410</sup> This leads to what Baudrillard terms 'nostalgia'<sup>1411</sup> for culture's former independence.<sup>1412</sup>

Barthes' language becomes an imitative 'metalanguage', for meaning is 'non-originary' ('calls any origin into question') as it relies on chains of signs not referents ('words can be explained through other words').<sup>1413</sup> A Modernist first-person narrator - autonomous, expressive, capable of 'truth' - is reduced to Barthes' 'speech act' (below), and pre-empts Derrida's position on the speaking subject as a narrative construct:

the author is nothing but the one who says I: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject [is] empty outside of the very speech-act which defines it.<sup>1414</sup>

Barthes turns Sartre's authorial 'commitment' into a choice executed within the limits of genre; a choice of *form*. A 'dual' aspected choice between canonical 'Tradition' (i.e. Realism) and new *forms* demanded by social change, which 'proposes - or imposes - new problematics of literary language'.<sup>1415</sup> Saussure's arbitrary relation of language to reality is the basis of Barthes' neat rejection of Realism for a verisimilitude unnecessary to narrative sense; 'a resistance to meaning'.<sup>1416</sup> He reduces the complexities of Realist structure, its dialectical

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<sup>1410</sup> Rylance, p.37. He aptly terms it an 'analytic method for the era of mass communications.'

<sup>1411</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), p.6. He writes: 'When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.'

<sup>1412</sup> Jameson, p.66. He elaborates upon nostalgia.

<sup>1413</sup> Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, Trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.52-3. Barthes claims 'the writer can only imitate' objects and events.

<sup>1414</sup> Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, p.51.

<sup>1415</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1967), p. 22.

<sup>1416</sup> Barthes, 'The Reality Effect' in *The Rustle of Language* (pp. 141-148).

conversions of ideological forms, to a style - a 'referential illusion'<sup>1417</sup> or 'reality effect'.<sup>1418</sup> Modernists such as Kafka, Musil and Camus are said to deny to 'the zero degree of writing' participation in inherited forms (i.e. Realism). Through this 'absence of signs', Barthes argues, their novels perform as a 'negative dialectic' of sorts, 'a total sign'<sup>1419</sup> which he redefines as political 'commitment'.<sup>1420</sup>

Derrida's critical vocabulary is adopted by Foucault and Baudrillard as, like Barthes, they respectively offer theories of 'History' (Time) and 'Nature' (Space). In *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) Foucault interprets history through the function of Derrida's 'episteme'.<sup>1421</sup> Like Derrida's precondition of language, Foucault's 'archaeology'<sup>1422</sup> aims to reveal the precondition for events or concepts employed in a historical period's 'discourse'<sup>1423</sup>, even as an 'unconscious functioning'.<sup>1424</sup> Foucault calls such conditions the 'tacit rules governing the organisation of knowledge at a given historical moment'.<sup>1425</sup> If the Hegelian trope of the desiring agent, as exemplified in Modernist subjectivity, reappears it is within Foucault's anti-Hegelian framework. For, while power ultimately resides in the state or economy, it operates through multiple, varied institutions and their forms of 'discourse'<sup>1426</sup> to effect different exclusions in fields of; "psychiatry", sexuality, 'political economy'<sup>1427</sup> and law. Lukácsian reification, its historical development through a dominant class, is dispersed in 'exclusions' that operate, like Derrida's writing, to affect 'non-identity':

discourse [...] is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not said' [...] undermines from within all that is said <sup>1428</sup>

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<sup>1417</sup> Ibid., p.148.

<sup>1418</sup> Ibid. He believes the identity between a referent and world is illusory.

<sup>1419</sup> Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p.20.

<sup>1420</sup> Ibid., p.20- 21.

<sup>1421</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.10.

<sup>1422</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002; 1989), p.151.

<sup>1423</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>1424</sup> Downing, p.10.

<sup>1425</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p.9.

<sup>1426</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.28.

<sup>1427</sup> Ibid., p.152. These are fields he re-examines using his own historicizing approach.

<sup>1428</sup> Ibid., p.28.

On this basis of repression as '*différance*', Butler compares Foucault's 'history' to Derrida's 'writing': 'the identity of the linguistic signified or the identity of some historical epoch, is necessarily undermined by the difference that conditions any such positing.'<sup>1429</sup> However, if any dominant idea is undermined by the implicated differences such exclusion entails, this mediation makes a direct class politics indirect.

Foucault's repressions operate on a subject (primarily through the physical body) but *posit* desire: i.e. identify desire as socially possible, even if prohibited and historically specific. Harvey calls this 'a periodization of experience'.<sup>1430</sup> Foucault's model of desire operates as a 'negative dialectic', for the binary model is exceeded (punishment / desire), as new desires are social forms that do not share ontological grounds with the old forms they depart from.<sup>1431</sup> Like Sartre's temporal non-identity, or Derrida's semantic heterogeneity, Foucault's social forms are *non sequiturs*, relative but indirectly related by the 'episteme' (what was previously permitted). Foucault invokes Derrida's 'non-originary' to argue that, if a point of non-existence cannot be identified, any origin of a linear, chronological history is itself a 'logocentric' construct of the nineteenth century. Thus, Butler concludes Foucault's paradigm is anti-Marxist:

an implicit critique of Hegel's postulation of reason in history [...] Foucault is reformulating the master-slave relationship [...] but displaces this relationship from its dialectical framework.<sup>1432</sup>

Foucault's Postmodern 'fragmentation' constitutes history through the 'discontinuity' and 'rupture'<sup>1433</sup> of multiple conditions 'lost'<sup>1434</sup> in the 'false universals'<sup>1435</sup> of the theories of transcendence of Hegel and Marx. For Foucault, history offers no oversight of a subject within Marx's developing class conflict.

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<sup>1429</sup> Butler, p.183.

<sup>1430</sup> Harvey, p. 213.

<sup>1431</sup> Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique; Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013) p.25.

<sup>1432</sup> Butler, p.180.

<sup>1433</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.23.

<sup>1434</sup> Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), p.155.

<sup>1435</sup> Downing, p.13.

Finally, Baudrillard might seem the Postmodernist closest to Debord through their shared focus on an 'image'. However, Baudrillard proves indebted to Barthes, Lacan and Derrida, not Marx. *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) uses Lacan's framework of a pre-linguistic 'Real', to argue this is repressed by an order of symbolic images. Space becomes colonized by visual media images that simulate reality: 'substituting the signs of the real for the real'.<sup>1436</sup> A subject is alienated in being wholly identified with this 'hypperreality'<sup>1437</sup>:

a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, [...] the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials<sup>1438</sup>

Power and identity, just as they are reformulated by Foucault through multiple contexts, obtain meaning here through a context of images. Images reference each other to simulate meaning. For an 'image' operates in Barthes' semiotic terms, but as Baudrillard's: 'second-order simulacra'.<sup>1439</sup> Images are 'simulacra' that postulate meaning by refraction, by their relationship to one another, like Derrida's signifiers. For example, Disneyland is a model whose images (the 'comic strip'<sup>1440</sup>) generate ('feed'<sup>1441</sup>) an illusion of an opposite, adult, 'real' America, but no such reality exists: 'Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real'.<sup>1442</sup> A subject identifies with various 'images', but inevitably in terms of 'non-identity' as they are imposed not self-conceived. A further example is President John F. Kennedy, the last genuine threat to established interests; thus, his death affirms political 'substance'.<sup>1443</sup> Kennedy becomes a model for subsequent simulations or 'images' of political gravitas that use impeachment or assassination threats to create leaders who become 'caricatures'<sup>1444</sup> of such substance. Nixon's impeachment is argued to intentionally draw on threats to Kennedy in order to suggest Nixon's legitimacy.

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<sup>1436</sup> Baudrillard, p.2.

<sup>1437</sup> Baudrillard, p.29.

<sup>1438</sup> Baudrillard, p.2.

<sup>1439</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>1440</sup> Ibid. p.12.

<sup>1441</sup> Ibid., p.13

<sup>1442</sup> Baudrillard, p.12.

<sup>1443</sup> Baudrillard, p. 24.

<sup>1444</sup> Ibid., p.24.

Baudrillard's 'image', like Derrida's 'sign' or Foucault's 'episteme', is non-referential and affects a 'doubling'<sup>1445</sup>; 'things are doubled by their own scenario'.<sup>1446</sup> However, 'images' do not duplicate an external referent, they *suggest* such a referent. Thus, Baudrillard famously terms the 'image' a copy without 'an original model'.<sup>1447</sup> Baudrillard implies Debord and Foucault respectively when he announces that the 'image' heralds: 'the end of perspectival and panoptic space'.<sup>1448</sup> Baudrillard claims the 'image' invalidates space as Hegel's territory of agency that Debord recasts as an alienation of identity (from a working class perspective). For there is no legitimate reality to which the 'image' relates or falsifies, or class positions mediated by 'images' for political advantage, open to contestation, as Debord argues.

A Postmodern approach to the novel builds on such premises. Regarding characterization, Farrell Fox writes of Baudrillard's 'image', but it applies equally to Derrida's 'language' or Foucault's 'history':

the postmodern subject [is] [...] fragmented and decentred [...] dispersed totally in the linguistic, semiotic and cultural codes that constitute and determine it.<sup>1449</sup>

Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* is often cited as an example of such characterization (analysed in the next chapter). If Modernists like Sartre assume language reliably records identity and truth, Derrida postulates a *loss* of Modernist agency and rejects Sartre's authorial agency: 'language is not the governable instrument of a speaking being (or subject)'.<sup>1450</sup> Further, Derrida rejects any Structuralist inside / outside binary that would see an author as agent and infamously writes: 'there is nothing outside the text'.<sup>1451</sup>

Derrida's *différence* significantly reframes Barthes' semiotic equivalence as a *semantic* indeterminacy. Derrida theorizes writing as a 'trace'<sup>1452</sup>, a trail of words

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<sup>1445</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>1446</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>1447</sup> Baudrillard, p.5.

<sup>1448</sup> Baudrillard, p.30.

<sup>1449</sup> Farrell Fox, p.33.

<sup>1450</sup> Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.36.

<sup>1451</sup> *Of Grammatology*, p.172.

<sup>1452</sup> *Of Grammatology*, p.51

that is chiefly meaningful in terms of a sign's connection to other signs. As Gayatri Spivak reminds us; "writing" or "difference" is the structure that would deconstruct structuralism'.<sup>1453</sup> Derrida, unlike Barthes, envisages a 'negation' that operates through a distinction to meanings not chosen, or through simultaneous meanings that make meaning open and uncertain in:

the radical [...] heterogeneity of an inheritance, the difference without opposition [...] and a quasi-juxtaposition without dialectic [...] that is never one with itself <sup>1454</sup>

Nicholas Royle considers this instability, in relation to stable meaning: 'a kind of "negativity" or "nothingness"'.<sup>1455</sup> For Derrida this is a positive, if limited, form of literary opposition. For, in relation to Socialist Realism which prescribes a single orthodox meaning, multiple meanings are an anarchic, semantic 'play'.<sup>1456</sup>

Thus, a Postmodern character or narrator is often a self-consciously textual construct, acknowledging scepticism toward the authorial voice turned Barthes' or Derrida's literary convention, emphasizing the limitations of fiction as a construct. This strategy emphasizes Foucault's performative aspect of identity through multiple social forms, such as media, as Peter Knight suggests in regard to *Libra*: 'Oswald's sense of self came to be constructed through the media'.<sup>1457</sup> Stylistically, this non-essential, self-constructive mode of being leads Hassan to describe Postmodernism's defining style as 'rhetoric'.<sup>1458</sup> If 'identity' and 'truth' are no longer fixed but relative, impossible to finally locate or define, they become a question of individual perception. *Trainspotting* is often cited as an example of what Jennifer Jeffers calls: 'a non-linear, non-stable narrative' as 'multiple strands of narrative emerge to amplify [...] repeat and reconnect.' <sup>1459</sup> This uncertainty is

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<sup>1453</sup> Ibid., See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Introduction, p. lxxxi.

<sup>1454</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.18.

<sup>1455</sup> Royle, p.5.

<sup>1456</sup> Royle, p.32-34. He offers an exposition of Derrida's 'play'.

<sup>1457</sup> Peter Knight, 'DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John Duval, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 27-40, (p.32).

<sup>1458</sup> Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays In Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), p.91.

<sup>1459</sup> Jennifer M. Jeffers, 'Rhizome National Identity: "Scatlin's Psychic Defense" in *Trainspotting*, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Winter 2005), p. 88-111 (p. 89-92)

emphasized by a use of unreliable or multiple narrators that produce competing narrative perspectives.

Postmodern narrative time and space (narrative objectivity) is never a Realist chronological history that constructs 'truth' as objective and external. Foucault's non-essential subject, 'dispersed' in decentralized power relations, might suffer repressions which lead him to characterise social life in terms of 'opposition' (as Butler notes, 'civil society is structured as an occupied zone'<sup>1460</sup>); however, 'non-identity' and conflict is never represented directly as class struggle. For, as Callinicos observes: 'no causal priority can be assigned [...] to the economic base'.<sup>1461</sup> Objectivity is rather 'de-totalized' by the 'non-originary' status of space and time; thus, Postmodern narratives are often non-linear. *Austerlitz* is often cited as an example of this approach to representing history. Postmodernism mobilizes aspects of construction and reflexivity, but through objectivity, to emphasize that history is shaped by perspectives, demonstrating the contingency of any foundational beliefs regarding identity. Harvey suggests one radical aspect of Foucault's approach is that it enables Western 'logocentric' accounts of history to be rejected for that of a Post-Colonial 'Other'. Similarly, Postmodern narrative space is characterized by relativity, as landscapes become de-familiarized in being endlessly commercially and ideologically re-made. Jameson, like Debord, gives the 'image' a key role in this ideological overdetermination of space: 'a society of the image' that leaves 'our [...] postmodern bodies [...] bereft of spatial coordinates'.<sup>1462</sup> Such landscapes are often critically termed 'homogeneous' for this disassociation from any local, cultural or historical identity.

Linda Hutcheon argues in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) that Postmodern, historically relative perspectives are: 'entirely conditioned by textuality [...] its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*'.<sup>1463</sup> Therefore historiographic meta-fiction becomes a defining, often ironic, Postmodern

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<sup>1460</sup> Butler, p. 226. For example, successful campaigns or 'battles' for equal rights concerning gay marriage.

<sup>1461</sup> Callinicos, p.82.

<sup>1462</sup> Jameson, p.87. He suggests we are 'practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiating', that resistance to reification is co-opted, since we can 'achieve no distance from it'.

<sup>1463</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History Theory Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.16.



narrative mode. Postmodern style more generally turns to intertextuality, embracing the artifice of literary conventions, to make fluid the 'borders between literary genres' as Hutcheon notes.<sup>1464</sup> Barthes' choice of generic styles becomes a Postmodern, self-referential faculty of irony that Hutcheon argues makes Postmodern texts critical, distinct from the mass culture in which they are implied by such a repetition or re-use. Critics often interpret the construction of the '*Dokumentarfilm*'<sup>1465</sup> in *Austerlitz* as Postmodern on this basis. For example, Anita Mc Chesney claims that Sebald represents the 'image' by limiting its significance, as Baudrillard argues, to an articulation of the premises of its own construction, to reflect upon its *form* through its relationship to other media *forms* such as eye-witness accounts.<sup>1466</sup> Like Derrida's 'play', Postmodern style celebrates the artifice of conventions through intertextuality, heterogeneity, fabulation and genres such as Magic Realism. Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* is often cited as an example of the latter.<sup>1467</sup>

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Baudrillard explicitly rejects Debord's Marxist formulation of alienation: 'we are no longer in the society of the spectacle [...] nor in the specific kinds of alienation and repression it implied.'<sup>1468</sup> However, the next, final chapter argues that a set of novels capture the contemporary 'image' in terms much closer to Debord's theory than Baudrillard's. As Callinicos observes, Baudrillard declares: 'the collapse of any distinction between true and false, real and imaginary'.<sup>1469</sup> Referring to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Baudrillard interprets the

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<sup>1464</sup> Hutcheon, p.9. 'Intertextuality' is originally coined by theorist Julia Kristeva in the essay, 'Word Dialogue and Novel' (1966).

<sup>1465</sup> Karel Margry, "'Theresienstadt' (1944-1945): The Nazi Propaganda Film Depicting the Concentration Camp as Paradise", in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, ed. by David Culbert, 19, (PA: Carfax Publishing, 1999), pp. 309-337, (p.150).

<sup>1466</sup> Anita, McChesney, 'On the Repeating History of Destruction: Media and the Index in Sebald and Ransmayr', in *Modern Language Notes*, 121 (2006), pp. 699-719.

<sup>1467</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p. 68. In a Magic Realist style, Kundera satirizes Surrealist poet Eluard's blindness to Stalinism's repressions through a conceit of socialists dancing in a ring which ascends 'over Wenceslaus Square [...] the very image of a giant wreath taking flight [...] and in the crematorium they were just finishing off one Socialist [...] and one Surrealist, and the smoke climbed to the heavens'.

<sup>1468</sup> Baudrillard, p.30.

<sup>1469</sup> Callinicos, p.86.

'image' in terms of semiotics and equivalence, a simulation that reflects Jameson's lost status of 'truth':

war and peace are equivalent. "War is peace," said Orwell [...] one can completely miss the truth of a war [...] namely, that it [...] never existed <sup>1470</sup>

He misses the point of Orwell's novel; the 'image' is constructed to oppose extreme oppression to Oceania's ideological images which reference it, specifically in terms of economic alienation, as an epistemological discrepancy of 'content' and 'form'. This critiques 'false' meanings defined by a totalitarian power. Orwell's contradictions *reaffirm* that 'truth' is constituted independently of ideology, located through 'cognitive dissonance', not within the limitations of Oceania's propaganda (falsehood) as Baudrillard implies. Similarly, Debord differentiates 'truth' from propaganda: '[i]n a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood'.<sup>1471</sup> Baudrillard neglects the social context of an image's 'authors'<sup>1472</sup>; for, like Derrida's 'non-originary' which emphasizes a relationship of forms, there is no 'outside' relevant to its meaning.<sup>1473</sup> Debord likewise argues that Kennedy's 'image' is an exploitative mode of spectacular 'false-consciousness'.<sup>1474</sup> In *Libra*, Kennedy's 'image' proves significant, not because of its relationship to other images, but because it confers a 'false-consciousness' at odds with Lee Harvey Oswald's class interests. As with Orwell's novel, *Libra*'s 'image' is manufactured in the wider class contradictions it falsifies (missing in Baudrillard's theory) through a contradiction of 'content' and 'form'.

Jameson argues in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1986) that Postmodernism is the 'cultural dominant'<sup>1475</sup> of Debord's period. From the Sixties to the deregulation of the Reagan-Thatcher years, Postmodern theory reached the peak of its influence in universities and art markets. Derrida claims a Modernist subject, 'deconstructed' by language, no longer has recourse to

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<sup>1470</sup> Baudrillard, p.38. He writes: 'a simultaneity of contradictions [...] the parody and the end of every dialectic.'

<sup>1471</sup> Debord, p.14. Thesis 9.

<sup>1472</sup> Jameson, p.58.

<sup>1473</sup> Baudrillard, p.2.

<sup>1474</sup> Debord, p.40, Thesis 61.

<sup>1475</sup> Jameson, p.56.

'truth'.<sup>1476</sup> Postmodernism responds to accelerated consumption, visual mediation and alienation by reflecting the dismantled status of 'truth' or 'identity' in codes, 'images' and language, to thereby remove 'the inside and the outside'<sup>1477</sup> and annul Modernism's expressive agent in Jameson's 'waning of affect'.<sup>1478</sup> This loss of a politically subversive Modernism leaves a void, to which Jameson critically responds.<sup>1479</sup> This returns us to Lukács' earlier problem with 'solipsistic' Modernism, its purported failure to capture alienation in oppositional terms.<sup>1480</sup> For Jameson suggests that Postmodernism implicates language, time *and* the 'image' in the objective systems and processes that 'deconstruct' a subject, but in terms that fail to establish 'critical distance' from them and thereby identify alienation.<sup>1481</sup> This has implications for Postmodern novels that represent alienation through 'images', but strip them of Giddens's 'time-space' and the social and historical relationships that cause alienation, thereby eliding ideology and objectivity. It removes Lukács' narrative distance, so that Debord's form of alienation becomes impossible to record.

Sartre, perhaps, first theorizes alienation from flawed premises. He abstracts – and Marx accuses Hegel of this same error – as no *actual* division exists within a subject, or 'Being-in-itself' and 'Being-for-itself', which is a perceived, not concrete, alienation. Sartre postulates a similarly abstract freedom. Herbert Marcuse first argues that Sartre's unconditioned freedom displays aspects of a reified concept of bourgeois autonomy: 'the egoic individual of classic liberalism [...] [t]hat gives rise ultimately to a form of political quietism'. Sartre must defend himself from Lukács' similar accusation that his existential characters, with their freedom assured, invite such 'quietism'.<sup>1483</sup> Barthes' semiotics is similarly

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<sup>1476</sup> *Of Grammatology* p.11. See 'The Signifier and Truth'. Derrida writes: '“rationality” [...] no longer issues from a logos' and claims his theory 'inaugurates the destruction [...] the deconstruction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of *truth*.'

<sup>1477</sup> Jameson, p.61.

<sup>1478</sup> Jameson, p.64.

<sup>1479</sup> Jameson, p.55 He argues that: 'every position on Postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatization – is also at once and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today'.

<sup>1480</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.27.

<sup>1481</sup> Jameson, p.85-7. Regarding reification he writes that we are 'practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distanciation.' Instances of resistance are also coopted 'since they can achieve no distance from it.'

<sup>1483</sup> Farrell Fox p.13. He states: 'in 1948, Herbert Marcuse criticizes Sartre's conception of the *pour-soi* as [...] sharing a deep affinity with the egoic individual of classic liberalism'. Lukács

abstract. His analytic approach of formal comparison, taken up in Postmodernism - i.e. 'form' to 'form' - replaces Lukács' alienated relationship of 'content' and 'form'. Barthes fails to frame 'form' as itself socially conditioned by concrete class relationships and reflect on this relationship to 'content'. Debord rejects Barthes' critique as apolitical on this basis, alluding that Barthes' *theory* is itself reified, by asserting an objectivity, in formal comparisons, that is impossible:

theory has to be communicated in its own language – [...] dialectical in form as well as in content [...] Not some "writing degree zero" – [...] not a negation of style, but the style of negation <sup>1484</sup>

As Patrizia Lombardo observes, Barthes' radicalism, as a relation of forms, thereby: 'displaces the problem of history inside the discipline of literature'.<sup>1485</sup>

Postmodernism perhaps depoliticizes a Hegelian legacy that becomes radical in Debord's theory of the 'image'. For example, Derrida's 'non-identity' is semantic, a 'juxtaposition without dialectic'.<sup>1486</sup> Derrida's linguistic 'play', structured by semantic functions (i.e. connotation), neglects the social context of Bakhtin's 'linguistic struggle'<sup>1487</sup> captured in heteroglossia (discussed in the next chapter) or Debord's 'play', which both invoke history, with recourse to its class perspectives and logic of class conflict.

Regarding history, if Postmodern form relies on irony and parody in its re-use of generic forms, Jameson, in critical terms, calls this pastiche. For 'form' is similarly removed, like language, from the social conditions that birth and transform it. Non-linear narratives reflect a synchronic view of history, collapsing history in a temporal present, emphasized in the textual comparisons that historiography entails, making perspectives relative, much like Musil's kaleidoscopic representation of history through ideas. As Hal Foster writes; '[h]istory appears [...] fragmented, fabricated [...] and schizoid'.<sup>1488</sup> Jameson argues this

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likewise accuses Sartre's 'solipsistic' characters of inviting political 'quietism' which he defends in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.23.

<sup>1484</sup> Debord, p.144. Thesis 204.

<sup>1485</sup> Patrizia Lombardo, 'History and Form' in *Roland Barthes*, ed. by Neil Badmington, *Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, 4 vols, (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), p.61.

<sup>1486</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.18.

<sup>1487</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>1488</sup> Hal Foster, '(Post)Modern Polemics', in *New German Critique*, No.33, 67-78, (p. 62).

representation of time gives history a: 'new depthlessness'.<sup>1489</sup> Lukács somewhat pre-empted Jameson by arguing that Modernist narratives, such as Woolf's, demonstrate a 'negation of history'<sup>1490</sup>, replaced by a character's interiority or 'man's inwardness'.<sup>1491</sup> Debord is similarly negative about Musil's conceit of alienation as an 'erasure of the personality'<sup>1492</sup>, through bourgeois characters or '*men without qualities*'. For Debord makes the case for the causes of alienation to be set out and contested or resisted by the working class.<sup>1493</sup>

Debord's paradigm of 'spectacular' alienation thus differs entirely from Postmodern 'non-identity'. The Postmodern position perhaps *itself* severs the dialectical relation of cultural 'content' and 'form', excising class forces from their formative relationship to genres and dominant ideas to instead make *form* a 'content' shaped only by its relation to other *forms*. Difference is thereby depoliticized in being recorded solely at a formal level, that reduces it to equivalence. Baudrillard's 'image', for example, is without external referents.

However, 'anti-spectacular' novels, like Debord's theory, stage a discrepancy between an ideological 'image' and its *external referents* to indicate reification within a history of class domination, similarly captured in Realism's 'depth' model of alienation. Postmodern 'non-identity' can never perform this contradiction of ideological 'form' by content to express resistance. Postmodern novels circumscribe visual alienation by its form (i.e. aesthetics). Jameson observes that Lukács' 'depth' model of alienation is replaced by a Postmodern 'fragmentation' of media images located at the 'surface [...] often called intertextuality' and that *this* substitutes for historical factors that are 'no longer a matter of depth'.<sup>1494</sup> The next chapter refers to the Postmodern novel *Generation X* by Douglas Coupland (1991) to illustrate his characters are related to history in this way. For example, a central character's style of dressing is referred to as 'decade blending'.<sup>1495</sup> Thus, Jameson writes of Postmodernism: 'the alienation of the subject is

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<sup>1489</sup> Jameson, p.18.

<sup>1490</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.21.

<sup>1491</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.2.

<sup>1492</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.32.

<sup>1493</sup> Debord, p. 89, Thesis 123.

<sup>1494</sup> Jameson, p.62-3.

<sup>1495</sup> Douglas Coupland, *Generation X* (London: Abacus, 1996). p.17. A glossary informs us this is 'the indiscriminate combination of two or more items from various decades to create a personal mood'.

displaced by the fragmentation of the subject'.<sup>1496</sup> Marx's historical class perspectives, which Debord retains in service to political resistance, are removed. If avant-garde 'fragmentation' takes political form through reversals and inversions, it is replaced by a less political Postmodern model of formal repetition, comparison and equivalence.

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<sup>1496</sup> Jameson, p.62-3.

## **Chapter 5. The ‘Anti-Spectacular’ Novel; Criteria for Opposition to an Eastern and Western ‘spectacle’**

### **5.1. Introduction: ‘Anti-Spectacular’ Structure and Themes**

This thesis has enumerated the reasons why a concept of ‘totality’ has fallen into critical oblivion through a prescriptive Socialist Realism, Modernist ‘fragmentation’ and Postmodernism. McKenzie Wark writes; ‘the concept of totality [has] become the great boo-word of late twentieth century thought.’<sup>1497</sup> For example, Lyotard’s ‘sublime’ uses Kant’s term to define media, technology and information networks too vast to be subject to comprehensive knowledge and instead denotes the inadequacy of representation or, as Callinicos writes, an ‘inability to experience this totality’.<sup>1498</sup> Yet ‘anti-spectacular’ novels do make use of a representational ‘totality’, a historical context in which everything is produced, interconnected, and reworked through a class based social lens, including the ‘image’, to represent its alienating effect politically, as Debord theorizes.

As Debord reformulates Lukács’ theory of reification for Daniel Bell’s ‘post-industrial’ society, this proves a good starting point for an ‘anti-spectacular’ criteria of the novel. Debord writes that ideology ‘transposed to a visual image’<sup>1500</sup> is ‘a weltanschauung’ operating as a global ‘objective force.’<sup>1501</sup> Although the novels under discussion are considered Postmodern, once read through the lens of Debord’s theory, they might appear ordered on different premises and thus understood in more politically critical terms.

Chapter Two reminds us that Debord finds private realms and public space subject to an intensified alienation through an ever present ‘image’. This is the subject of ‘anti-spectacular’ novels; their focus is ideology, whether commercial or political, broadcast as a visual mediation of desire, agency and ultimately, identity. Whether these novels are set in the East or West, they present a ruling

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<sup>1497</sup> McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath The Street: The Everyday Life And Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (London: Verso, 2011: 2015), p. 101.

<sup>1498</sup> Callinicos, p.16.

<sup>1500</sup> Debord, p. 24, Thesis 34.

<sup>1501</sup> Debord, p.12, Thesis 5.

class and state as dependant on media to align a domestic majority with interests not their own. In the East, as established in the introduction, Debord's 'spectacle', as a vehicle of 'false-consciousness', depends on; 'a dictatorial personality'.<sup>1502</sup> This Eastern form of social organization is captured in Orwell's Oceania but also Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* set in Communist Post-war Prague and the Nazi Germany of *Austerlitz*.

Shifting the focus from East to West - the U.K. and America - Debord's 'spectacle' is more instantly recognizable in the fictional worlds of *Libra*, *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting*. Here, state and business interests combine in a capitalist exploitation of the working class. However, the 'image' is no less ideological than its Eastern counterpart, despite Western civil liberties. Like Orwell's compulsory telescreen, as Frank Lentricchia observes: 'the environment of the image [...] is what (for us) 'landscape' has become, and it can't be turned off with the flick of a wrist'.<sup>1503</sup> If, in the East, the 'image' is a vehicle of political rhetoric and nationalism (justifying militarism and geo-political expansion), it is equally so in the West, where a new 'imperialism' secures new markets through advertising, movies, music videos and computer screens, that normalize increased domestic consumption. Debord calls this 'the autocratic reign of the market economy', which necessitates influence or 'new techniques of government' i.e. marketing.<sup>1504</sup> Thus, visual alienation is consistent across this ideological divide between East and West. For example, like Winston's indoctrination, Oswald is: 'raised [...] to be happy and patriotic'<sup>1505</sup> under Kennedy's 'glow in the lens barrel of a camera'.<sup>1506</sup> Or Kundera captures the arrival of mass consumption in Prague in 1968: 'women you see on posters [...] the ones all women try to imitate nowadays [...] have no reality of their own'.<sup>1507</sup> Similarly, posters of models dominate the sidewalks of New York in *American Psycho*. This is more than descriptive detail. These narratives thereby construct worlds wherein 'images' are broadcast to ideologically convert the desires and agency of a population for the

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<sup>1502</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.8.

<sup>1503</sup> Frank Lentricchia, 'Libra as Postmodern Critique', *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 195.

<sup>1504</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.2.

<sup>1505</sup> Don DeLillo, *Libra*, (London: Penguin, 1988), p.49.

<sup>1506</sup> DeLillo, p.62.

<sup>1507</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.139.



benefit of a ruling class, commerce or the state to make alienation 'spectacular' rather than a condition of *ennui* or 'suffering'.

Debord argues that reification is systemic, operating beyond the 'image' through institutions and culture. Adorno makes a similar point, writing that Stalinism ideologically remakes all social structures, including cultural production: 'countries of the East [...] abolished culture and turned it into a means of control [...] [i]n the West, at least, one is allowed to say so.'<sup>1508</sup> Therefore, Debord claims the disciplines of 'sociology, applied psychology, cybernetics, *semiology*'<sup>1509</sup> (i.e. Barthes semiotics) propagate ideology, if only because their theoretical assumptions misconstrue, thus obscure, the causes of alienation. So, too, 'spectacular' reification operates through architecture in *Austerlitz*, to somewhat reflect Debord's position on urbanism. Or a dominant language in Easton-Ellis's conversational clichés of Upper West Side New York, that like Oceania's 'Duckspeak', might be considered Debord's 'language of the spectacle'.<sup>1510</sup>

Perhaps Mikhail Bakhtin's work on novelistic language appeals to a concept of historical 'totality' that, alongside Lukács' work on the novel and Jameson's critique of Postmodernism, supports reading an 'anti-ideological' position in the novel. Tihanov's *The Master and the Slave* (2000) sets out the shared influences of Bakhtin and Lukács.<sup>1511</sup> Bakhtin had read *The Theory of the Novel* and followed Lukács' later arguments for Realism.<sup>1512</sup> Even Bakhtin's early work, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1921) generally approves of Lukács' historical-materialist methodology of culture.<sup>1513</sup> Like Lukács, Bakhtin relates literature to society on an ontological and historical basis. Tihanov suggests that *this* 'social aspect of literature' makes their theories 'emancipatory discourses'.<sup>1514</sup> For

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<sup>1508</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.367

<sup>1509</sup> Debord, p.29, Thesis 42.

<sup>1510</sup> Debord, p.13, Thesis 7.

<sup>1511</sup> These influences are Hegel, Marx and Simmel (specifically his *Lebensphilosophie*).

<sup>1512</sup> Tihanov., p.11. Bakhtin had read 'at least fourteen articles published by him [Lukács] in *Literaturnyi kritik* between 1935 and 1938'.

<sup>1513</sup> Ibid., p.35. Tihanov writes; 'as early as in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin speaks of historical materialism as a method which, albeit with a number of incongruities, succeeds in entering into "the living world of the actually performed responsible deed".' Bakhtin endorses Lukács' more orthodox Marxist ontological continuity of art and life, but, Tihanov notes, 'never fully embraces Marxism'.

<sup>1514</sup> Tihanov, p.20; p.65.

Bakhtin argues the novel's language is: 'period-bound [and] associated with a particular world view'.<sup>1515</sup> Tihanov correlates this with Lukácsian reification: 'the place of reification is taken by monologism'.<sup>1516</sup> Bakhtin defines a novel's language and style as a textual 'object of representation', which, like a symbol or image, encodes an ideologically dominant meaning that becomes a target for parody (depending on an author's relationship to it), similar to Lukács' '*weltanschauung*' undermined in Realist works.<sup>1517</sup> Bakhtin argues that novels record a 'dialogical' relationship to this dominant, centralizing 'impermeable monologosia'<sup>1518</sup>, as an author mediates a character's use of language to ridicule it. In 'anti-spectacular' novels a dominant ideological language is often similarly subverted; i.e. Orwell's *Newspeak*.

Beyond this, novelistic language is internally polemicized: it cannot simply record a dominant language, as history refracts how far it is undermined by 'heteroglossia'<sup>1519</sup> – the new, informal or foreign languages subordinate to it that are: 'located at different distances from the unifying artistic and ideological centre of the novel'.<sup>1520</sup> Through language, Bakhtin argues that the novel is radically situated:

between the completed, dominant, literary language and the extraliterary languages that know heteroglossia [...] senses itself on the border of time [...] senses time's shifts, the aging and renewing of language, the past and the future

Lukács' original argument for the novel's strategy of irony, that develops into one for Realism, is Bakhtin's similar argument for ideological contradiction inscribed within novelistic language, that plays out as 'linguistic struggle', often through irony.<sup>1521</sup> Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' acknowledges the class struggle implied in Debord's strategic use of language: 'every critique of the old world has been

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<sup>1515</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 46.

<sup>1516</sup> Tihanov, p. 69.

<sup>1517</sup> Bakhtin, p.44-6. An author is argued to make style an object of representation - a 'novelistic image of another's style' - therefore, the use of language as an object by an author or character is 'parodic and ironic': an 'author represents this language, carries on a conversation with it [...] dialogizes it from within'

<sup>1518</sup> Bakhtin, p.61.

<sup>1519</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>1520</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>1521</sup> Bakhtin, p.67;

made in the language of that world, yet is directed against it and therefore automatically in a *different* language'.<sup>1522</sup> This is not like Postmodern parody or 'pastiche', concerned with a relativity of form, rather, it implies social problems and class perspectives and positions that are more directly political.

Harvey observes that Debord's theoretical 'totality', its Marxist assumptions, are nullified in Postmodernism:

postmodernists insist [...] we cannot aspire to any unified representation of the world, or picture it as a totality full of connections and differentiations rather than as perpetually shifting fragments<sup>1523</sup>

Certainly, the 'objective dialectic' of Realist form is historically specific. However, just as Realism relates subject-object relations through class contradiction and, similarly, I.S. strategies require Marx's concept of 'totality' and its class struggle to convert the ideological meaning of an 'image' into its opposite, perhaps Lukács' interpretative framework is key to understanding a novel's 'anti-spectacular' approach. For 'anti-spectacular' novels mobilize a socio-economic structure most often associated with Realist form. They rely on conventions of setting and place to construct time and space through a convincing social, historical world. For example, Sebald constructs Jacques Austerlitz within an elaborately retold history of Napoleonic capitalism and nineteenth century Imperialism: 'international traffic and trade'.<sup>1524</sup> Characterization in these novels is not a Modernist psychological construct, nor a Postmodern self-reflexive construct but a form closest to Lukács' *zoon politikon*.

'Anti-spectacular' novels intentionally engage what Lukács calls a character's 'personal history'<sup>1525</sup> with an 'image' as the period's chief vehicle of ideology. Characters encounter an 'image', imposed on 'everyday' life through technology, culture or propaganda, as a general, contemporary condition which actively subordinates private life to ideology, to deny authentic, self-interested identity. Just as Debord's 'image' appears 'as if society itself'<sup>1526</sup>, these novels contrast

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<sup>1522</sup> Mustapha Khayati, 'Captive Words', in *Situationist International Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p.222.

<sup>1523</sup> Harvey, p.52.

<sup>1524</sup> Winfried Georg Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002), p.12.

<sup>1525</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.21.

<sup>1526</sup> Debord, p.12, Thesis 3.

an 'image' to an actual, social situation it is constructed within - and falsely represents - to thereby give primacy to Marx's class relationships or the 'real "totality" to which the spectacle is subordinate'.<sup>1527</sup> Novels demonstrate, through such contradiction, that an 'image' replaces and obscures the objective class situation, history or 'truth' with which it is contrasted. An 'image' is shown to obstruct a character's *recognition* of this historical situation, that otherwise might orient their identity or class interest. Character and 'image' are related in a socio-economic history that reflects Debord's polarized class 'rift'<sup>1528</sup> between the rich and poor, powerful and oppressed, to implicate the 'image' in such a 'rift', using history as Eagleton's territory of distantiation. For these narratives stage a contradiction of ideology and actuality to undermine an 'image's false claim of universal positivity, exposing it as an instance of repression responsible for that inequality, social 'fragmentation' or 'rift' these novels capture.

Therefore, these novels situate an 'image' within the repressive circumstances of the period to which Debord's theory applies. For example, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* moves from Cold War Stalinism (1948) to the Prague Spring (1968), using an official 'image' (photograph) from which Vladimir Clementis is airbrushed to symbolize Mirek's revolutionary desires for Czechoslovakia that are similarly 'removed' (repressed) once Soviet Communism defeats the Czech uprising, thus generalizing Mirek's alienation to make it generational and political. Or Sebald relates Jacques Austerlitz to a Nazi '*Dokumentarfilm*'<sup>1529</sup> but to demonstrate a wider, general 'amnesia' caused by later reified accounts of the Holocaust propagated by German academia and European states. Or DeLillo's *Libra*, set in 1950s America, that engages Oswald (a working-class 'everyman') with the rhetoric of Cold War ideology promoted by American television, that exploits his desire for freedom from poverty. While *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting*, read as a pair, engage characters with the mass media and consumption of the Reagan-Thatcher era (1980s-1990s), to explore its politics from opposite sides of a class divide. *American Psycho*, set in 1980s New York, at an investment bank on Wall Street engages Patrick Bateman with a 'spectacle'

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<sup>1527</sup> Debord, p.13, Thesis 7.

<sup>1528</sup> Debord, p.13, Thesis 7.

<sup>1529</sup> Karel Margry, "Theresienstadt" (1944-1945): The Nazi Propaganda Film Depicting the Concentration Camp as Paradise", in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, ed. by David Culbert, 19, (PA: Carfax Publishing, 1999), pp. 309-337, (p.150).

of advertising, brands, music and 'images' which promise to define him but alienate him, expressed by his mental breakdown. While *Trainspotting*, set in the housing estates of Leith in Scotland, moves beyond 'mind-numbing'<sup>1530</sup> T.V. and consumerism to explore the effect of globalization and Thatcherite policies on the working class.

Debord's 'spectator', like Lukács' radicalized worker, is engaged in a process of '*becoming conscious*' of identity. Characters in these novels similarly find this process alienated by an 'image' that confers Debord's 'false-consciousness' (Lukács' 'second nature') upon them:

[t]he fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relationships conceals their true character as relationships [...] between classes<sup>1531</sup>

As these novels stage an 'image's dialectical conversion of 'identity' on a basis of class, they demonstrate that identity is correctly *recognized* in relation to that narrative class 'rift' established, which an 'image' obscures, to divert agency to the ends of a ruling class. For example, Oswald's poverty thus *desire* for revolution leads him to reject mass consumption and seek a working-class *identity*. Thus, he travels to the Soviet Union, but this desire is equally hijacked (alienated) by Soviet ideology. DeLillo reveals, primarily through plotting, that the Cold War ideological narrative is an empty binary, as Oswald's political self-interest is equally alienated by an 'image' in the East as in the West. Oswald's identity is 'negated' (he is murdered) in the 'image' of the Kennedy assassination, set within a context of class opposition - the plan is hatched to enrich C.I.A. operatives: 'gentlemen spies' from 'Yale'.<sup>1532</sup>

In place of Postmodern historiography or 'depthlessness', 'anti-spectacular' novels construct characters and the 'image' as socio-historical constructs. This re-instates an objective history of Harvey's social 'connections' (classes) that entail 'differentiations' (opposite class perspectives), to provide what Jameson

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<sup>1530</sup> Welsh, p.188.

<sup>1531</sup> Debord, p. 19, Thesis 32.

<sup>1532</sup> DeLillo, p.30.

calls a 'vital' perspective, overlooked in Postmodernism.<sup>1533</sup> For example, *Libra*'s C.I.A. operatives, recruited from 'old money' describe Oswald as 'piss-poor'.<sup>1534</sup> Similarly, Sebald frames Austerlitz's search for his Jewish identity, beyond a Nazi 'image' of the Holocaust, in a history of capitalism. Sebald absents Austerlitz's history (through amnesia) to *re-present* and contrast the false Nazi 'image' of history with its socio-economic reality - a 'dehumanization', exploitation and reification he relates to capitalism. Sebald thereby relates Jews to an exploited working class and colonial peoples. Thus, Austerlitz is presented with contradictory identities; an identity ('false-consciousness') conferred by the Nazi *dokumentarfilm* and, oppositely, that conferred by his Jewish parentage and diaspora aligned with working-class and colonial peoples by a narrative history, that gives his authentic identity a collective class basis and 'anti-ideological' perspective beyond the 'image'. Similarly, Orwell constructs Winston through such contradiction; a 'false-consciousness' conferred by 'Big Brother' and an opposite class-consciousness, supplied by the narrative's underlying history, giving Winston the opportunity of genuine self-recognition through the 'Proles'. 'False' versus 'true' forms of identity generates a 'cognitive dissonance' which proceeds from the 'image' being constructed within narrative, socio-economic contradictions, to illustrate that the dialectical conversion of identity serves a ruling class.

This historical distantiation means that 'anti-spectacular' novels do not simply present the alienating 'image' in terms of personal cost, a negation of particular interests. Like Lukácsian 'typifications', whether Winston, Mirek, Austerlitz or Bateman, a characters' 'false-consciousness' becomes *general*, as it results from a socio-economic situation. Orwell captures the *objective* effect of Big Brother beyond Winston as, like Debord's 'schizophrenia', or Winston's dually true and 'false-consciousness', it takes on Eagleton's historical sweep or distance in Ingsoc's wider betrayal of revolution that terminates proletariat agency. Similarly, Sebald's '*Dokumentarfilm*'<sup>1535</sup>, as part of Nazism's *total* negation of Austerlitz's

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<sup>1533</sup> Jameson, p.66 For Jameson, historical depth provides an essential basis for an oppositional perspective.

<sup>1534</sup> Don DeLillo, *Libra* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.30; p.56.

<sup>1535</sup> Karel Margry, "'Theresienstadt' (1944-1945): The Nazi Propaganda Film Depicting the Concentration Camp as Paradise", in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, ed. by David Culbert, 19, (PA: Carfax Publishing, 1999), pp. 309-337, (p.150).

Jewish 'identity' (i.e. native language, death of his family) which causes Austerlitz's 'amnesia' (akin to Debord's 'catatonia'), is aligned with the reification of European capitalism, that operates more generally to 'negate' the identity of colonial peoples and an industrial working class.

Jameson argues that Postmodernism's apoliticism results from representations of society that elide its relationships with factors that cause alienation:

the historical novel as Lukács defines it [...] the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future [...] has [...] become a vast collection of images<sup>1536</sup>

However, rather than representing alienation as an apolitical 'fragmentation' in media, 'anti-spectacular' novels operate at a narrative scale that is supra-personal, beyond character and 'image', to make the 'image' a part of class conflict represented on a historical scale, to powerfully contradict an 'image' 's ideological claim of social 'unity'.

Debord's analysis of 'spectacular' alienation proves so apt it offers a way to interpret some interlocking themes of 'anti-spectacular' fiction. Desire proves alienated in Debord's political sense. Whether through 'Big Brother', or a character like Kundera's Zdena, who perceives her erotic relationships in terms of Communist Party ideology, or, again, Patrick Bateman, whose desires are defined by luxury consumer brands. Therefore, the first theme of 'anti-spectacular' fiction is desire and identity. Memories that affirm identity are subsequently politicized in relation to an 'image' that erodes it. Beyond individual characters, at a supra-personal level, the cultural identity of communities and cities is equally erased by 'spectacular' power, as Debord observes of De Gaulle's gentrification of Paris. Therefore, these novels thematize 'false-consciousness' through memory and forgetting. The next theme is conflict, as authentic choices in these novels politicize desire, bringing characters into conflict with the police, the state or creating conflict between classes. Finally, these novels use the trope of mental breakdown to capture a *spectacular* 'false-consciousness', displayed by Winston, Oswald, Bateman, Austerlitz etc. At an

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<sup>1536</sup> Jameson, p.62.

individual level, Debord's metaphor of 'schizophrenia' captures this splitting of identity by an 'image', within a narrative's wider class oppositions. Debord's 'catatonia' identifies a complete erasure of 'identity' (like Austerlitz's), to indicate a total repression of the collective identity of a group or class (i.e. Jews) that severs a collective struggle from its dialectical relationship to society, by repressing resistance and social change (as practiced by totalitarianism).

In conclusion, an early Lukács pre-empted the problems of 'anti-spectacular' novels, in arguing that all aspects of a novel are problematized by representing alienation; *character*, *plot*, *themes* and *language* are: 'a problem of form whose formal nature [...] looks like a problem of content'.<sup>1537</sup> He means that alienation is not primarily a theme, but a structural problem. The novel struggles to represent classes in any kind of social 'unity', despite using a 'totality', given the attenuated distance or 'rift' that contemporary alienation creates between classes. Novels struggle to capture the shared terms of a social world, or relate subjective concepts to their material referents given the vast divide and reification (the 'image') which obscures the actual, underlying unity of which all characters are a part. Therefore, 'anti-spectacular' novels choose to represent disempowerment through an 'anti-ideological' class perspective, beyond the superficial surface of any 'image'. For example, in Lukács' terms of *character*, Patrick Bateman's murderous psychopathy is nonsensical if considered exclusively through his relationship to screens. However, Bateman, a Reagan devotee and upper class banker is placed at a great distance from the working class, whose humanity he denies. This class context, beyond the 'image', gives his open hostility the explanatory logic of a literal class war. Again, in terms of *plot*, Oswald's revolutionary ambitions fail once he takes part in the Kennedy assassination, but, a working-class anti-hero, his attempt and failure to actively close a class 'rift' DeLillo draws beyond Cold War propaganda, is contextualized in that very class history Oswald finds it impossible to influence, allowing DeLillo to suggest such ideological 'images' are politically repressive.

The radical aspect of 'anti-spectacular' novels is not their historical span, but their narrative construction of time and space in terms of historical, class

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<sup>1537</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.71.



contradictions, which determine characters and events. This historical dimension enables alienation to be represented as a social 'rift' or 'fragmentation', in which the 'image' is implicated and lends events a conflict of perspectives. History provides a crucial 'long-view' and oversight of the 'image' from an oppositional, often collective perspective, such as Sebald's Jewish diaspora or Welsh's dispossessed working class. 'Anti-spectacular' novels thereby re-engage the ideological 'image' as a representation of the society Debord claims it falsely represents, using the discrepancy of an 'image's' 'form' and 'content' to return dominant forms, like the 'image', to possibilities of dialectical reversal which undermine its claims. Whereas 'fragmentation' is isolated and elided with media forms by a Postmodern approach that removes such possibilities. The I.S. argue time and space only take form in Marx's terms of 'change and process'.<sup>1538</sup> In place of Jameson's 'depthlessness' and a 'waning of affect', or Postmodern criticism that ignores class to consider the 'image' as 'banal'<sup>1539</sup> and largely affectless, an 'anti-spectacular' novel achieves a narrative scope and perspectival class dimension to dramatically *amplify* the negative effect of the 'image's' alienation, through historically located conflict, lending its work gravity and profundity through such historical scale and its political implications.

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<sup>1538</sup> Asger Jorn, 'The End of the Economy and Realization of Art', *International Situationist*, 4 (1960).

<sup>1539</sup> Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p.6-10. Dinnen writes: 'The banality of Facebook in the context of its users' lives - its everydayness - is both the means by which, and the block to recognizing how, Facebook becomes a modulation of "life itself"'. Her paradigm of banality versus novelty presents the latter as an affect that blocks a recognition of the alarming way social life is mediated by algorithms, codes etc.

## **5.2. The Eastern Spectacle**

### **5.2.1. The Book of Laughter and Forgetting**

the society we call democratic is also familiar with the process  
that bureaucratizes and depersonalizes [...] a totalitarian state is  
a prosaic material hyperbole of it

Milan Kundera<sup>1540</sup>

As Orwell finished *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, his seemingly futuristic projection of a foolhardy empowerment by the 'Left' of a totalitarian Communist Party occurred in Czechoslovakia's Stalinist coup of 1948. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) consciously takes up Orwell's theme to present alienation as the erasure of individual identity by the state, in a program of ideological repression aimed at ending political opposition. Kundera refers to this in *The Art of the Novel*<sup>1541</sup>:

the first thing a reader recognizes in a novel is the 'already known.' The 'already known' in that novel is Orwell's famous theme: the forgetting that a totalitarian regime imposes<sup>1542</sup>

In 1950, Stalin banned *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the U.S.S.R. but it remained hugely influential in the Eastern Bloc. Stephen Ingle relates that readers marvelled at how *real* it was, that Orwell demonstrated an 'empathetic understanding of how things were'.<sup>1543</sup> Kundera fled Czechoslovakia in 1975 and on the French publication of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* his citizenship was revoked. Kundera engages with Orwell's theme of ideological repression but takes a self-consciously different approach, as his self-confessed aim was to capture the *unknown* effects of Stalinism and avoid Orwell's 'already known' or novel's Realist emphasis on social, historical conditions:

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<sup>1540</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. by Linda Asher, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.107.

<sup>1541</sup> Ingle, p. 121. Ingle notes a continuity, referring to Newspeak to imply that Kundera records the same destruction: 'Language was not the only significant conduit of these traditional values. "The first step in liquidating a people," said Milan Kundera's Hubl, "is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have someone write new books [...] Before long the nation will begin to forget [...] what it was."'

<sup>1542</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p.130.

<sup>1543</sup> Ingle, pp.114-139. Ingle writes that Orwell astounded 'readers who had lived in Stalin's Russia with the depth of his empathetic understanding of how things were.'

there is on the one hand the novel that examines the historical dimension of human existence, and on the other the novel that is the illustration of a historical situation, the description of a society at a given moment [...] You're familiar with all those novels about the French Revolution, [...] about collectivization in the USSR (for or against it), or about the year 1984 <sup>1544</sup>

To speculate, Kundera's oblique reference here to Orwell's novel unfairly associates its 'realist' style with an official Socialist Realism ('historical situation'). Perhaps, in part, Kundera's ambitions for his novel reflect a wish to emerge from Orwell's rather long shadow.

Kundera's approach to creating his narrative world is existential; '[t]o apprehend the self in my novels means to grasp the essence of its existential problem'. <sup>1545</sup> His authorial voice is biographical in places - 'in the spring of 1948 [...] I took other Communist students by the hand' <sup>1546</sup> - but more consistently characters are created with a Modernist sensibility that prioritizes personal experience - mood, impulse, erotic desire - to record the existential 'problem' of existence. Additionally, in Postmodern fashion, Kundera seems to reference his own experiences to explicitly suggest 'character' is an artificial construct i.e. Mirek's life directly resembles Kundera's and, in places, his fantastic Magic Realist style underpins this fictional status.

In an interview in 1986, Kundera approves an existential, phenomenological model of characterization <sup>1547</sup> that places an emphasis on choices and relative perceptions that sees identity 'fragmented' in temporal terms. This makes memory and forgetting the novel's chief themes, but apparently conceived in terms that differ to Orwell. Kundera's multiple characters offer narrative perspectives to both generate Postmodern irony and existentially isolate characters from one another and their past. Therefore, Eagleton uses Barthes to

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<sup>1544</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.36.

<sup>1545</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p.29.

<sup>1546</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.65.

<sup>1547</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p.32. In 1986, Kundera responds to an interviewer's suggestion that his approach to characterization is phenomenological: 'The adjective isn't bad, but I make it a rule not to use it. I'm too fearful of the professors for whom art is only a derivative of philosophical and theoretical trends. The novel dealt with the unconscious before Freud, the class struggle before Marx, it practiced phenomenology (the investigation of the essence of human situations) before the phenomenologists.' Here, my point is that his characters are determined by external ideology more than an existential condition, as he claims.

describe Kundera's manifestation of choice as a 'persistent "modernist" impulse to decipher and decode'.<sup>1548</sup> For characters must attribute their own meaning to their choices, actions and 'identity'. Kundera thereby aims to capture the *personal* or 'unknown' results of Stalinism, which Orwell's 'realism' ('already known') does not.

However, characters prove ultimately not alienated by an existential condition but by propaganda in a political mode of repression. Despite using Modernist, Existential and Postmodern conventions, in consideration of Realist form, and like Koestler and Orwell, Kundera requires a historical 'totality' to demonstrate that a propaganda 'image' dialectically converts the revolutionary ambition of the Czech uprising of February 1948 by absorbing it into the U.S.S.R.'s later totalitarianism, which leads to the rebellion of the Prague Spring in 1968. History is a context that demonstrates a character's ideologically induced 'forgetting' is a negation of an oppositional 'identity', which plays out in these wider events as historical contradictions between a population and a Party elite.

In Realist fashion, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* has a specific social setting or place; Eastern Bloc, post-war Prague between 1948 and 1968. 'Everyday' life is alienated by Debord's type of simultaneously political and consumerist 'image'. Czech foreign minister Clementis is photographed with Stalinist Gottwald greeting crowds of optimistic Czech Communists: '[e]very child knew the photograph from posters, schoolbooks and museums'.<sup>1549</sup> Gottwald, a Stalinist puppet, stages a putsch to become leader of the Communist party and president of Czechoslovakia. Citizens fail to anticipate the Stalinist invasion and totalitarian government that follows. Clementis is ousted, executed and airbrushed from the original photograph (a censorship similar to Oceania's). Like Debord's 'pseudo-history', the hat he lent Gottwald remains on Gottwald's head to ironically suggest such a falsification is never quite complete. Additionally, the Czech state engages in coercive, illegal activity and places 'microphones [...] in private dwellings'.<sup>1550</sup> Debord identifies such state repression, hidden beneath an 'image' of social unity: "'official secrets" [...] allow the state a vast field of operation

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<sup>1548</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Estrangement and Irony' in *Milan Kundera*, ed. by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Modern Critical Views, (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), pp.47-60 (p.48).

<sup>1549</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.3.

<sup>1550</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.14.

free from any legal constraint'<sup>1551</sup> (an aspect also explored in *Libra*). A later social landscape of 1968 is only superficially transformed by modernization, fashion and pop music: a 'surface of [...] the noise of cars [...] of music, the noise of signs [...] we live in constantly'.<sup>1552</sup> Prague remains occupied, its people repressed, despite their original, revolutionary action:

The sadder people are, the louder speakers blare [...] trying to make an occupied country forget the bitterness of history and devote all its energy to the joys of everyday life.<sup>1553</sup>

The political result of this colonization of 'everyday life' by propaganda and pop-music is a political repression not adequately explained by Barthes' theory of 'signs' and illustrates why Debord's theory is useful.

Kundera's stated existential approach to characterization should be opposite in form to Lukács' 'typifications' whose: 'ontological being [...] cannot be distinguished from [the] social and historical environment'.<sup>1554</sup> However, Clementis, Mirek and Kundera's authorial persona are all defined by a historical 'situation' and drawn in a continuousness by their similar alienation. Mirek, a university professor, is removed from his position and, like Clementis 'erased from history, literary reference books, even the telephone book'.<sup>1555</sup> Kundera's citizenship is revoked thus 'erased'. They are *historically* located, Kundera writes, at a 'crucial moment in Czech history'<sup>1556</sup>, a historical point whereby technological advances enable a centralized, bureaucratic state to repress its population in a manner similar to Debord's 'spectacle'. Thus, characters *typify* an experience of a visual mode of alienation, providing Kundera with his subject - a 'forgetting' of identity first introduced by Orwell.

The themes of 'anti-spectacular' fiction, already explored in relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, include desire in its dual forms of social agency and erotic love, which are formative to identity. First, as agency, the Stalinist 'image' alienates

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<sup>1551</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.52.

<sup>1552</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.104.

<sup>1553</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>1554</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p.19.

<sup>1555</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.60.

<sup>1556</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

revolutionary ambition. Kundera, as author, writes of 1948 in veiled terms of Marxist theory and practice: 'intelligent radicals [...] sent something into the world [...] which had [...] lost all resemblance to the original idea'<sup>1557</sup> (i.e. in Soviet Communism). He comments that, were he to write a novel about it, he would name it 'Stalking a Lost Deed'.<sup>1558</sup> If Kundera labours to distinguish a historical 'dimension' from a 'situation', ironically his novels largely 'stalk' this period, or their overriding subject is this 'historical situation'. Mirek participates in the uprisings of '48 that put the Czech Communist Party in power, but after the Soviet invasion of 1968 the Party turns against him. His revolutionary agency suffers a reversal, illustrated through a media 'image', like Debord's 'image', to erase the meaning of his political intentions ('original idea') like Clementis in the photograph: '[t]hey'd force him to go on TV and give the nation a contrite account of how wrong he'd been when they'd said those nasty things about Russia.'<sup>1559</sup> Similarly, Kundera, as author/narrator is 'accused'<sup>1560</sup> and disappears into exile, while many others are 'silenced and removed from their jobs'.<sup>1561</sup>

In *The Joke*, the central character Ludovik similarly actively supports the putsch and through Kundera's self-conscious use of Marxist rhetoric - 'essence' - emphasizes the irony of the subsequent contradiction by its 'form' in Communist Party dogma: 'we felt participation in the proletarian revolutionary movement to be a matter of, how shall I put it, essence'.<sup>1562</sup> When Ludovik attempts to impress his girlfriend Marketa by sending her a postcard ridiculing rhetorical Stalinist clichés (like Debord's 'language of the spectacle'), the Party redefines his 'joke' a crime and, like Mirek, the revolutionary intent of his participation in '48 is reversed as he is sentenced to hard labour 'in the mines'.<sup>1563</sup> Kundera requires a socio- historical 'totality' to contrast the *collective* agency or 'identity' of the Czech revolution as it is dialectically converted into Soviet Communism and plays out in *history* through a discrepancy with its initial aim. The novel achieves this by

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<sup>1557</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.9.

<sup>1558</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.9.

<sup>1559</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>1560</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>1561</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>1562</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, trans. by Michael Henry Heim, p.37.

<sup>1563</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, p.41.

contrasting the Soviet 'image' of unity broadcast in media and culture, with its underlying actual reality - 'thousands of people were sent to jail'.<sup>1564</sup>

As characters are situated in a dialectical relationship to both the socialist revolution they author and the Soviet state which subsequently crushes it, self-expression becomes politically inflected. Ludovik's sentence or 'black insignia' classes him an 'enemy' of the state, converting his identity into an 'image' of a traitor that he comments; 'bore no resemblance to me'.<sup>1565</sup> This discrepancy of 'content' and 'form' suggests Lukács' depth model of historical contradiction. Characters risk death ('negation') in their struggle against the state to retain their identity, both political and personal. The latter is symbolized by writing, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Mirek's wife Tamina seeks to *remember* by retrieving her dead husband's love letters, despite the secret police following her: 'what gave her written memories value, meaning, was that they were meant for *her alone*'.<sup>1566</sup> She wishes to retain her unique identity, to avoid ideological conformity. Like Mirek (and Winston) she keeps 'a careful diary'<sup>1567</sup>, a record of self-expression which preserves her identity, that is recast as a gesture of political opposition.

Kundera's suggestion that his novel demonstrates an existential alienation ('fragmentation') seems more accurately Debord's spectacular 'false-consciousness', a state of 'schizophrenia' and 'catatonia'. Tamina seeks to retrieve her love letters and notebooks, left behind as she escapes from Prague, because they act as objective coordinates which cement her identity through a record of memories and facts:

[s]he longs to see the notebooks so she can fill in the fragile framework of events [...] [b]ecause if the shaky structure of her memories collapses [...] all Tamina will have left is the present

Ultimately, she does not ask for her things to be sent to her in exile because: '[c]orrespondence [...] goes through the hands of the secret police' and her name is on 'police files'. Tamina's identity is split, converted into an opposite form, as

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<sup>1564</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.65.

<sup>1565</sup> Ibid., p.41; p.38; p.42; p.42.

<sup>1566</sup> Ibid., p.100. Kundera's use of italics.

<sup>1567</sup> Ibid., p.3.

she becomes one of the state's 'adversaries'.<sup>1568</sup> Her possessions prove irretrievable and she therefore begins to lose her identity: 'shrinking and blurring'.<sup>1569</sup> She becomes mute in this alienated state, similar to Debord's 'catatonia'. This total removal of agency is symbolized by her subsequent suicide. Her death becomes a symbolic loss, in the wider context of Kundera's generation of Czechoslovakian political émigrés, grieving their 'lost freedom'.<sup>1570</sup> Similarly, once Mirek is 'erased'<sup>1571</sup> from history by the state, he returns to his girlfriend Zdena; 'a fragment of barely delineated void'.<sup>1572</sup> Both experience alienation as 'non-existence', negation, a lack of identity shaped in relation to the state's repression of citizens not simply the passage of time.

Mirek's former girlfriend Zdena makes an opposite decision to Tamina and conforms to Stalinist ideology. Kundera explores erotic desire in an alienated state, like Orwell's 'The Two Minutes Hate'. Mirek's affair with Zdena sees her passion converted to an ideological, abstract form as she coldly reproaches him for; 'acting too much like an intellectual that first time they made love'.<sup>1573</sup> Yet, Zdena is deeply moved at the death of a Russian official, Masturbov, whom she has never met:

just as she was capable of imbuing an abstract relationship (her relationship to a stranger like Masturbov) with the most concrete of feelings (in the form of tears), she could give the most concrete of acts an abstract meaning and her dissatisfaction a political name<sup>1574</sup>

Desire and action, in an authentic state, have a dialectical relationship which allows ideas to become concrete, i.e. Czech radicals organize a revolt. However, once the Soviet state exerts ideological influence through an 'image', Kundera's ironic reversal of Zdena's 'false-consciousness' of desire (above) demonstrates that ideology precedes action. Ludovik is similarly accused of 'intellectual tendencies'.<sup>1575</sup> His passion and humour is set in opposition to a regressive

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<sup>1568</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.86; p.86; p.87; p.87.

<sup>1569</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>1570</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>1571</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>1572</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>1573</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>1574</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>1575</sup> Ibid. p.38.



Soviet ideal of personality to prevent intelligence being used against the Party: the term 'intellectual' is an 'expletive'.<sup>1576</sup> This ideological management of language is similar to Orwell's 'Newspeak', which also aims to control thought.

Mirek accuses Zdena of ignoring contradictions between ideology and reality; 'playing their game, a game calling everyone to pretend the secret police didn't exist and no one was ever persecuted'.<sup>1577</sup> *The Joke* also depicts this denial of contradiction as a 'game': 'the game Marketa took for reality (and that she was living for all she was worth)'.<sup>1578</sup> This duality and contradiction is reflected in Debord's 'schizophrenia', whereby ideology represses 'directly lived truth beneath [...] appearances'.<sup>1579</sup> If Tamina suffers the ideological contradictions that finally negate her identity, Zdena denies such contradictions exist, much like Orwell's 'doublethink'. Ludovik, more directly than Tamina, experiences a negation of his identity, a 'depersonalization'<sup>1580</sup> through the labour camp. In a moment of self-reflection, Ludovik contrasts the 'true' and 'false' forms of his identity, which proves instructive:

I grew used to the idea that my life had lost its continuity, that it had been taken out of my hands, and that I had no choice but to live the internal reality of the external reality I had actually, inescapably been living all along<sup>1581</sup>

Ludovik, as a Party member, is naively unaware that his identity is fashioned by orthodox dogma. However, subsequently, as an 'enemy' of the state, he compares both forms of identity - Party member and 'enemy' - recognizing Stalinist ideology as the cause of both forms of this double identity. He finally understands that ideology causes an internally contradictory state, recognizing his 'false-consciousness' in terms of Lukács' 'cognitive dissonance'. This lack of authentic identity - as either Party member or 'enemy' - wholly reverses subject-object relations. Stalinist ideology severs (alienates) the relation of Ludovik's

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<sup>1576</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.5.

<sup>1577</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>1578</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, trans. by Michael Henry Heim, p. 36.

<sup>1579</sup> Debord, p.153, Thesis 219.

<sup>1580</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, p.45.

<sup>1581</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, p.45.

revolutionary acts, it hijacks the process of externalization or meaning, as 'images' take the place of a socialist, progressive agenda, as Debord theorizes.

Kundera also depicts ideology in its form as Soviet cultural policy, described as 'a massacre of culture and thought'.<sup>1582</sup> *The Joke* (1967) demonstrates that an authentic Czech (Moravian) folk tradition is deployed in Zhadanov's dogmatic program of Socialist Realism. Chairman Zamanek enjoys 'playing the village swain', even though he is 'born and bred in Prague'.<sup>1583</sup> Other Party members similarly conceive of themselves in ideological form: 'like figures out of a heroic canvas'.<sup>1584</sup> If characters suffer a loss of identity through an eradication of their personal history, Soviet cultural policy similarly aims to remove a *national* memory in a regressive move to impede self-determination and infantilize society, which, Ellen Pifer observes, is expressed through Kundera's trope of childhood.<sup>1585</sup> Kundera uses childhood to symbolize totalitarian repression as a return to 'infancy'<sup>1586</sup> - for childhood is a time without memory. For example, Kundera as author/character overhears 'the 'Internationale' being 'sung by children's voices'.<sup>1587</sup> While *The Joke* makes the Soviet revival of Moravian folk music, a *young* cultural form, a resuscitation of what Kundera negatively terms 'atavistic custom'<sup>1588</sup>, that is 'reconstructed more from textbooks of ethnography than from living memory'.<sup>1589</sup> This Soviet manipulation of culture, akin to Debord's 'pseudo-culture', is a forced revival of cultural identity used to deflect from the U.S.S.R.'s occupation.

Kundera explores alienation beyond individual identity, at this wider, social level through cities, recording the destruction of historical buildings and the ideological redevelopment of space which effects a national 'forgetting'. In a *dérive* styled narrative journey through Prague, Kundera sets up architectural comparisons that suggest associated historical conflict, a contradiction of interests. Statues of

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<sup>1582</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, p.159.

<sup>1583</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>1584</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.17.

<sup>1585</sup> Pifer, 'The Book of Laughter and Forgetting: Kundera's Narration against Narration', in *Milan Kundera*, ed. by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Modern Critical Views (Pennsylvania, Chelsea House; Northam; Roundhouse, 2003), p.72.

<sup>1586</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.186.

<sup>1587</sup> *Ibid.*, p.173.

<sup>1588</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>1589</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

Stalin suddenly replace those of Lenin, communities suffer changed street names. Kundera writes of Tamina's street: 'they just kept changing its name, trying to lobotomize it'.<sup>1590</sup> Under Husak, 'the president of forgetting'<sup>1591</sup>, Prague becomes 'a city without memory'.<sup>1592</sup> The physical landscape, with its historical past thus removed, reflects its alienated citizens. Tamina's catatonic state is reflected in 'lobotomized' Prague. Exiled Czechs can never return to places they knew and become displaced, disempowered 'ghosts prowling [...] confused streets'.<sup>1593</sup> Kundera's narrative sets ideology against memory as a political act: 'the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'.<sup>1594</sup> Pifer further connects this trope of 'forgetting' with genocide; 'the attempt to erase a people and their history from the face of the earth'.<sup>1595</sup> Sebald's *Austerlitz* takes this further step and extends the theme of 'forgetting', the erasure of personal identity, to genocide and collective identity.

While Kundera's approach is undeniably Existential and characterization displays Modernist properties of autonomy, impulse and choice, this is presented in a defunct state. Elsewhere, Kundera compares Realism to Modernism by using Proust and Kafka, to suggest that Kafka's stymied characters anticipate a modernization that relies on excessive state control and bureaucratization:

For Proust, a man's interior universe comprises a miracle, an infinity [...] that is not what amazes Kafka [...] He asks what possibilities remain for man [...] where the external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry weight?<sup>1596</sup>

If Kundera uses Kafka to argue for a contemporary situation that makes Modernist autonomy impossible, then Debord's theory proves fitting for interpreting Kundera's novel. For, equally, Kundera's narrative is constructed as a socio-historical 'totality' that demonstrates an 'image' enables a dialectical reversal and ideological defeat of collective political will. Kundera, like Orwell and

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<sup>1590</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.158.

<sup>1591</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>1592</sup> Ibid., p.175.

<sup>1593</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>1594</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>1595</sup> Pifer, p.72.

<sup>1596</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p.26.

Debord, seems ambivalent about modernity and considers technology in terms of its negative commercial and coercive uses:

those who extol the mass media din, advertising's imbecilic smile, the neglect of the natural world [...] they deserve to be called collaborators with modernity <sup>1597</sup>

In other writing Kundera observes: 'we are more and more determined by external conditions, by situations that no one can escape [...] that make us resemble one another.'<sup>1598</sup> Kundera's observations ultimately resemble the closed possibilities of Debord's alienated 'spectator'.

When the Communist Party changes the humorous meaning of Ludovik's words in line with Soviet ideology, he recognizes this register has final power over his subjective intent: 'my words had an *objective* significance'.<sup>1599</sup> Similarly, Mirek's peers vote to expel him from his university position, leading Kundera to reflect in an essay on this novel: 'they would, if necessary, have voted with the same ease to hang him'.<sup>1600</sup> Unlike Modernist form, the meaning attributed to personal experience does not reside in a subject and subjective perception is not privileged above the objective conditions shown to alienate experience, therefore the existential model of freedom is untenable. Kundera represents all experience - love, culture, memory, history - as inescapably politically mediated. Eagleton, praising Kundera, writes such *total* dominance requires; 'violent demystification in fictions which ironise'.<sup>1601</sup> However, this is not Sartre's simple existential irony that depends on time, for identity is not 'fragmented' simply in temporal terms. Rather it is alienated by the 'spectacular' contradictions of self-interest or class interest, as theorized by Debord.

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<sup>1597</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p.126.

<sup>1598</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p.27.

<sup>1599</sup> Kundera, *The Joke*, p. 29.

<sup>1600</sup> Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 37.

<sup>1601</sup> Eagleton, 'Estrangement and Irony' in *Milan Kundera*, ed. by Harold Bloom, p.49.

### 5.2.2. Austerlitz

I had neither memory or the power of thought, nor even any existence [...] my life had been a constant process of obliteration

Austerlitz<sup>1602</sup>

In Sebald's *Austerlitz* we return to Czechoslovakia in 1939, annexed and occupied by Nazi Germany. Kundera's Stalinism and Sebald's Nazism can be read as Debord's continuous form of Eastern totalitarian spectacle ('fascist totalitarianism [...] borrowed its organisational form from [...] Russia'<sup>1603</sup>). Kundera observes their similar political organisation, writing that his characters 'are not united by a *march*, like [...] fascist commandos; they are united by a *dance*'<sup>1604</sup> (his italics), to imply that veneer of false 'unity' promoted by Soviet culture which hides an authoritarianism identical to Fascism.

Criticism illustrates that *Austerlitz* is rightly categorized as a key text of both contemporary trauma fiction and Holocaust literature. Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun* (1989) popularizes what Cathy Caruth describes as trauma fiction's key psychoanalytic terms of analysis<sup>1605</sup>: melancholia, repetition and mourning, that demonstrate Sebald's German 'history [is] the history of trauma'.<sup>1606</sup> The novel is also considered Postmodern. Its non-linear temporality repeats or 'revisits' place, but narrative space remains unfamiliar or unrecognized and is critically interpreted as uncanny ('unheimlich'). This disorientation is perhaps reinforced by Sebald's use of two central narrative perspectives, that of the unnamed Narrator and protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz. Thus, Sebald is said to deliberately reject Realism's generic conventions of chronological time and an omniscient narrator. Amir Eshel writes that Sebald; 'set his prose in opposition to [...] "belles-lettres" in the nineteenth century tradition, prose in which the anonymous narrator

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<sup>1602</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.173-4.

<sup>1603</sup> Debord, (Thesis 109), p.77.

<sup>1604</sup> Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p.63.

<sup>1605</sup> Frances L. Restuccia, 'Sebald's Punctum: Awakening to Holocaust Trauma in *Austerlitz*', *European Journal of English Studies*, ed. by Maria Maragoni and Effie Yiannopoulou, 9 (2005), pp.301-322, (p.304). Restuccia draws on Cathy Caruth's work to draw out Kristeva's influence on Trauma fiction.

<sup>1606</sup> Anne Witehead, 'The Butterfly Man', *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp.117-139, (p.117). 'Sebald [...] established a reputation as one of the key writers of trauma fiction.'

knows and controls everything'.<sup>1607</sup> Similarly, Julia Hell's observations on the novel's structure and style is typical: 'What is Sebald's oeuvre all about if not the refusal of realism?'<sup>1608</sup>

However, although Sebald, like Kundera, uses a non-linear temporality, seemingly shaped by Austerlitz's lapsed memory, he equally makes use of a chronological, concrete history, pieced together through Austerlitz's studies as an architectural historian. This enables Sebald to present the Holocaust both through Austerlitz's partial memories *and* the objective evidence of capitalism's social and economic structure. Elsewhere, Sebald writes of a 'chronological continuity'<sup>1609</sup> in which Nazism develops. Reading *Austerlitz* through Debord's theory refocuses its *history* of trauma as a psychological pathology (i.e. mourning), upon socio-economic, *historical* causes of the Holocaust present in the objective landscape. Sebald represents these material factors as concealed by the distortions of a Nazi 'image', which contributes to Austerlitz's uncertain identity and mental breakdown, read here as 'false-consciousness' or Debord's 'catatonia'. Sebald's chief narrative strategy centres on comparing Austerlitz's subjective 'forgetting' and its actual, historical reality. The latter is constructed as a chronology, but Sebald's focus on Austerlitz's memory loss enables him to omit a period of German Nazism (1933-45) to later reintroduce that lost history and contrast it with 'reified' accounts, i.e. the Nazi *Dokumentarfilm*. This strategy not only applies to the *dokumentarfilm* but to post-war German academia whose accounts of the Holocaust are also described as a 'spectacle of history [...] images [...] imprinted on our brains'.<sup>1610</sup> These 'spectacles of history' are contradicted or perceived as 'false' because Sebald's narrative establishes a history of capitalist exploitation with which 'spectacles' are contrasted.

In his early years at Freiburg University (1963-4) Sebald wrote on the

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<sup>1607</sup> Amir Eshel, 'Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W.G. Sebald's "Austerlitz"', *New German Critique*, ed. by Andreas Huyssen and others, 88 (New York: Telos Press, 2003), pp.71-96, (p.75).

<sup>1608</sup> Julia Hell, 'Eyes Wide Shut: German Post Holocaust authorship', *New German Critique*, ed. by Andreas Huyssen and others, 88 (New York: Telos Press, 2003), pp.9-36.

<sup>1609</sup> Whitehead p.117.

<sup>1610</sup> Austerlitz, p.101.

Expressionist playwright Carl Sternheim from a 'Left', critical perspective.<sup>1611</sup> He had read Lukács' early works, alongside Adorno and Benjamin, and would have been familiar with the unresolved issues of the *Das Wort* debate, regarding the political effectiveness of aesthetics. Richard Sheppard, Sebald's colleague at the University of East Anglia, comments that Sebald criticized Sternheim's language for lacking an ambiguity that would allow it to effectively satirize the morality of his bourgeois characters; 'Max already understood the importance of literary irony as a means of distantiation'.<sup>1612</sup> Sebald would have known of Lukács' argument for the critical potential of Realist distantiation. A small number of critics, such as Mark M. Anderson note a Realist influence in Sebald's; 'old-fashioned, nineteenth century tone'.<sup>1613</sup> Therefore, while Realism is rejected perhaps elements of its structure are deployed and perhaps his novels takes an uncertain form or, as Jo Caitlin writes, is 'deliberately hybrid'.<sup>1614</sup>

Sebald's emphasis on Austerlitz's melancholic recollections, a poetic stream of consciousness, is not necessarily a Modernist construction of subjectivity. Nor does Sebald's non-linear narrative, in which memories are realized through a history conditioned by multiple forms of media (radio, film) make Austerlitz a Postmodern character. Austerlitz's alienation proves not to be the result of an existential temporality, nor a Postmodern decentring of identity in media; his 'forgetting' (alienation) is caused by ideology which obscures the history that might otherwise affirm his Jewish identity. Sebald foregrounds Austerlitz's shattered psyche explicitly to *re-present* such history in terms of concrete, chronological, capitalist relationships, enabling Sebald to compare this objective 'truth' to its ideological distortion at various points in time, using history to create distantiation. For example, the Nazi propaganda film *Theresienstadt* hides the German genocide of European Jews, as do the inaccurate German academic accounts of the Holocaust from the 1950s which the Narrator recalls. In his non-

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<sup>1611</sup> *Saturn's Moons: W.G. Sebald - a Handbook*, ed. by Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (Leeds: Legenda, 2011), p.62. He found Sternheim's language was not ambiguous enough to permit irony, leaving bourgeois characters uncensored.

<sup>1612</sup> *Saturn's Moons*, p.99.

<sup>1613</sup> Mark Anderson, 'A Childhood in the Allgau: Wertach, 1944-52', *Saturn's Moons*, p.33. He suggests; 'conservative or sentimental [...] Biedermeier realists [...] provided Sebald with a model for his own literary voice, which, as critics have noted, has an old-fashioned, nineteenth century tone.'

<sup>1614</sup> *Saturn's Moons*, p.2.

fiction, Sebald remarks on 'the extraordinary indifference'<sup>1615</sup> of post-war accounts of Auschwitz that prevailed. Austerlitz's 'forgetting' proves more like Debord's spectacular 'false-consciousness', as multiple instances of reification, located within Sebald's narrative history, are related by a continuous socio-economic structure, *despite* their separation by time. This enables Sebald to engage with alienation in Marxist terms of the concrete (history) and its 'fetishized' aspect ('image'), discussed at the end of this analysis. Anita Mc Chesney's use of Marshall McLuhan<sup>1616</sup>, or Amir Eshel's use of Walter Benjamin<sup>1617</sup> provide a precedent for using Debord's theory to interpret Sebald's 'image'.

Austerlitz's search for his parents constitutes *Austerlitz's* plot (not a 'plot' in any conventional sense) and turns on two major events. First, his journey to Terezin, which drives the narrative, that he calls 'my journey's end'.<sup>1618</sup> For it accomplishes the task of the novel and locates his mother and therefore his Jewish identity (although this proves a case of mistaken identity, discussed later). The second event is the opening of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris in 1996, part of the redevelopment of the *Gare d'Austerlitz*, the site from which Austerlitz's father is deported during the German occupation. These two, key events concern Austerlitz's parentage - a primary source of identity - and both are represented as obscured by reification. Before analysing these key events, I establish that Sebald does indeed construct a chronological, socio-economic narrative history which connects them both.

Sebald makes Jacques Austerlitz an art historian, with a special interest in 'architectural history'.<sup>1619</sup> Like Kundera's approach, Austerlitz's fictional 'excursions'<sup>1620</sup> are similar in form to Debord's *dérive*. Unlike the irrationalism of the Surrealist 'stroll', Austerlitz walks to study a city's landscape, making the past visible through a human perspective on material space, its architectural styles

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<sup>1615</sup> W. G. Sebald, 'Against the Irreversible: On Jean Amery', in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 149-171, (p.149).

<sup>1616</sup> Anita, McChesney, 'On the Repeating History of Destruction: Media and the Index in Sebald and Ransmayr', pp. 699-719. Using McLuhan, different mediums and the generic conventions that govern them, are argued to alter any reported event.

<sup>1617</sup> Amir Eshel, 'Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W.G. Sebald's "Austerlitz"', pp.71-96.

<sup>1618</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.265.

<sup>1619</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.8

<sup>1620</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.1



reveal dynamic class relationships he has studied as a 'topography'.<sup>1621</sup> His studies encompass a historical trajectory that begins with post-Napoleonic capitalism (1789) and progresses to the opening of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (1996) with which the novel closes. Austerlitz is constructed as a character whose 'personal history' (Lukács' term) is integrated with a history established through built space, a concrete objectivity privileged over time. Time, as represented by Austerlitz's memories, becomes only a personal aspect of such space. For example, Austerlitz recounts that Antwerp's central station is 'constructed under the patronage of King Leopold II', to suggest Belgium's colonialism is enabled by advances in engineering associated with modernity (a 'railway system'). However, the colonial labour that enriches Belgium, making such architectural grandeur possible, is reduced to a symbolic decoration: 'native people of the African continent', symbolized by a 'negro boy' on a turret.<sup>1622</sup>

The station is an example of the 'architectural style of the capitalist era' which relies on both enslaved labour and rationalism. Rational planning takes on a 'compulsive sense of order'. Planning allows production, expansion and accumulation to increase through; 'mining, industry, transport, trade and capital', which develops in the twentieth century through 'capitalist accumulation'. Austerlitz quotes Wittgenstein to describe the 'family likeness' that identifies the common social features of this historical trajectory; brutally exploited labour, imposed, purposive rationalism and increased capital. However, Sebald's reconstructed history gives an invisible workforce a central place (like Debord) to suggest that labour underpins Austerlitz's observations on European culture (i.e. architecture).<sup>1623</sup> For Sebald describes culture or this 'style of the capitalist era' within a social 'network' (i.e. 'totality') and *includes* the exploited workforce which makes culture possible; 'the [...] order and [...] monumentalism evident in lawcourts [...] penal institutions, railway stations and stock exchanges' require 'dwellings built to rectangular grid patterns for the labour force.'<sup>1624</sup> Austerlitz studies a history that evidences a growth of capitalism which depends on advances associated with modernity, such as technology, but also suggests that

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<sup>1621</sup> Austerlitz, p.278

<sup>1622</sup> Austerlitz, p.4; 45; 4; 44

<sup>1623</sup> Austerlitz, p 44; 13; 13; 44; 44; 44.

<sup>1624</sup> Austerlitz, p.44.

the Holocaust (which defines his identity) arises within and is consistent with the structures of capitalism, as Debord theorizes of the 'spectacle'.

Sebald constructs a continuous, economic history in an objectivity that allows a connection to be drawn between colonial peoples ('negro'), the working class and fatally exploited Jewish 'work-slaves'.<sup>1625</sup> For example, he relates how factory workers are gassed by mercury and cyanide whilst making mirrors: "*l'inhalation de vapeurs de mercure et de cyanide*".<sup>1626</sup> The mirrors, intended for bourgeois drawing rooms, become a metaphor for the reversal of interest of working class labour in reified forms that only *reflect* (serve) the bourgeoisie. The illusory quality of fetishization is captured in the abstractness of reflection, while exploitation is concrete and fatal, although invisible. This intentionally recalls the Holocaust. Again, Sebald draws parallels between the production line and Nazi prison camp *Theresienstadt* by noting the latter's 'meticulously worked out [...] production plans'.<sup>1627</sup> Conditions at *Theresienstadt* are described in terms that might apply to a working class community: a 'high population density and poor diet'.<sup>1628</sup> Again, Austerlitz looks out over Paris and pairs together the Jewish quarter with the site of the French Revolution; 'the Marais quarter and the Bastille'.<sup>1629</sup> The Narrator makes the same connection, on the same basis: 'beyond the penal colony, the fence and the watch towers, I saw the high-rise blocks'.<sup>1630</sup>

Sebald thereby presents dominant ideology (i.e. culture, architecture, city planning) as a form of reification, similar to that theorized by Debord. The narrative's socio-economic structure connects architecture, the *dokumentarfilm* and academia (i.e. *Bibliothèque Nationale*) as examples of reification, to a class whose labour is required to construct a society that actively 'negates' it. Sebald is shown to often present reification through metaphors whose success depends on a paradigm of reversal (i.e. the mirror), the reversal of concrete and abstract typical of reification, similarly demonstrated by Kundera when he illustrates Zdena's feelings for Masturbov are a reversal of the concrete and abstract. The

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<sup>1625</sup> Austerlitz, p.279.

<sup>1626</sup> Ibid., p. 15. The inhalation of mercury and cyanide.

<sup>1627</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>1628</sup> Ibid., p.334.

<sup>1629</sup> Ibid., p.400.

<sup>1630</sup> Ibid., p.412.

fatal dominance of a class in power, possible within his narrative trajectory of class oppositions, is a context that extends from King Leopold's reign to, first, the later *Thereisenstadt* 'documentary' produced for the Red Cross in 1944 and, second, prize-winning, Modernist, *Bibliothèque Nationale*, built in honour of President Mitterrand. As stated, these events are instances of reification that conceal Austerlitz's parentage, 'negating' his *identity* through their *ideological* form. Having demonstrated that Sebald relates reified form to the concrete labour which produces them, these two central events are analysed as examples of reification.

In Czechoslovakia, January, 1942, the Jewish ghetto *Terezin* was turned into a German prison known as *Theresienstadt*. The Red Cross and Danish government, suspicious that mass exterminations were occurring in Poland and Germany (the 'final solution' had begun in 1941) feared that prisoners were being deported from *Theresienstadt* to Auschwitz and demanded to inspect it. In an attempt at denial and delay that allowed the genocide to progress, the Gestapo Central Jewish Office of Prague planned to deceive the Red Cross inspection by making a false 'documentary' that presented the prison as Sebald's 'pleasant resort'.<sup>1631</sup> Karel Margry relates that the film of 'the "model ghetto" of Theresienstadt'<sup>1632</sup> aimed to disguise the fact it was 'just a stop on the way to Auschwitz'.<sup>1633</sup> Margry elaborates on this deception:

the SS embarked on a major 'Town Beautification' programme. They ordered the Jewish prisoners to paint the house fronts, clean the streets, dig flower beds, erect a playground for children in the park and a music pavilion on the square, fill the store windows, refurbish the ghetto café and the ghetto bank, and transform the Sokolovna gymnasium into a community centre with a stage, prayer hall, library and verandas<sup>1634</sup>

To make the ghetto look less crowded 7,500 people were sent to Auschwitz.

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<sup>1631</sup> Austerlitz, p.335.

<sup>1632</sup> Karel Margry, "'Theresienstadt' (1944-1945): The Nazi Propaganda Film Depicting the Concentration Camp as Paradise", in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, ed. by David Culbert, 19, (1999), p.146.

<sup>1633</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1634</sup> Ibid.

The narrative relates colonized peoples and factory workers to these entirely dispossessed Jews. Their exploited labour and valuables (money, gold and savings), stolen to 'pay' for their places at *Theresienstadt* is used to strategically construct buildings, prayer halls and parks. While inmates that were actors, artists or musicians, deported from Vienna, were forced to crew and score the film. Such visual reification is, in its fictional form, similar to Debord's 'spectacle'. It is a conversion of 'total labour' into an abstract, fetishized 'image' of 'society itself', but in a reversal of the self-interest of labour and identity.<sup>1635</sup> Just as Debord's 'image' conceals *actual* social relations at play, Sebald, like the reversal and metaphor of the mirror, represents Jewish identity reversed in an *appearance* of positivity that conceals actual 'negation' in Margry's 'film to conceal their own holocaust'.<sup>1636</sup> Margry relates that the film was labelled a 'documentary' to support its appearance as truth; 'a Dokumentarfilm was meant to indicate that this was [...] no staged propaganda, but a reliable authentic account, showing Theresienstadt "as it really is"'.<sup>1637</sup> Just as Kundera's Moravian folk tradition is manipulated in Soviet ideology, Austerlitz recounts that to create an impression of Jewish autonomy, the film was later given 'a soundtrack of Jewish folk music in March 1945'.<sup>1638</sup> The *dokumentarfilm* is a falsification of an identity which contradicts its actual reality. As Sebald's 'sham Elderado'<sup>1639</sup> the rumour of *Theresienstadt* spread in positive terms in a form of 'false consciousness' amongst European Jews, whom, Sebald writes, were 'completely misled by the *illusions implanted* in their minds'<sup>1640</sup> (my italics).

More explicitly, Sebald makes the 'image' a symbol of the erasure of identity, for it enables a case of *literal* mistaken identity when Austerlitz wrongly identifies his mother, Agata, in this film (I return to this later). Similarly, Austerlitz's father observes that German national identity becomes appropriated by 'false' images:

Maximilian later repeatedly described the spectacular film of the Party rally [...] which confirmed his suspicions that, out of the

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<sup>1635</sup> Debord, p.12, Thesis 3.

<sup>1636</sup> Margry, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, ed. by David Culbert

<sup>1637</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>1638</sup> Austerlitz, p. 342.

<sup>1639</sup> Austerlitz, p. 341.

<sup>1640</sup> Austerlitz, p.335.

humiliation from which the Germans had never recovered, they were now developing an image of themselves<sup>1641</sup>

If Debord argues the 'image' halts class struggle, the deception of Jews, the Red Cross and Allies who, Austerlitz recounts, found the film 'a most reassuring spectacle'<sup>1642</sup>, similarly halts resistance to Fascism, illustrating that, whether German citizen or Jew, a correct perception of identity is impossible if an ideological 'image' contrives to remove all opposition to a totalitarian 'will to power'.

Sebald's second major instance of reification relates to Germany's education system; for reification is systemic, present in academia and social institutions, symbolized by the opening of a national library - the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, in Paris. The Narrator complains of German teachers during the post-war years: 'academics who had built their careers in the 1930s and 1940s and still nurtured delusions of power'.<sup>1643</sup> This detail might be drawn from Sebald's experience, as in his non-fiction he writes: 'my teachers had gotten their jobs during the Brownshirt years'.<sup>1644</sup> If Sebald *re-presents* history to contradict 'reified' scholarly accounts with historical fact, such textual contradictions ironically undermine a pedagogy which sees Austerlitz praised as a schoolboy for essays on 'concepts of empire and nation'.<sup>1645</sup> For his displacement, trauma and family's death in the Holocaust ultimately results from such nationalist ideology.

Sebald's *re-presentation* of history through the textual contradiction of ideology and concrete objectivity centres on two symbolically important dates. Austerlitz's initial meeting with the Narrator in 1967 and their subsequent meeting in 1996 when the *Bibliothèque Nationale* opens. Christina Szentivanyi quotes Sebald's criticism of unreflective, post-war German accounts of the Holocaust, reflective of the wider 'false-consciousness' of German society in the 1950s: 'most German

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<sup>1641</sup> Austerlitz, p.239.

<sup>1642</sup> Austerlitz, p.341.

<sup>1643</sup> Austerlitz, p.43.

<sup>1644</sup> Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years: W. G. Sebald's Lehrjahre and Theatralische Sendung 1963–75', in *Saturn's Moons*, ed. by Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (Oxford: Legenda, 2011), p.54. Sebald writes of Germany in the mid-sixties: 'I understood I had to find my own way through that maze of the German past and not be guided by those [...] teaching [...] at that time'.

<sup>1645</sup> Austerlitz, p.103.

writers during that period - like their socio-cultural surroundings [were] “constitutionally unable to tell or even look for a truth”.<sup>1646</sup> However, the novel records truthful accounts of the Holocaust that emerge from survivors to challenge this, particularly that of Jean Amery: ‘accounts of the Final Solution written in the sixties’.<sup>1647</sup> By 1967, Sebald had read reports of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials of 1965.<sup>1648</sup> Sebald integrates Austerlitz’s ‘personal history’ with an objective history that *re-introduces* the ‘truth’ about Nazism - like Amery’s account. Although this is achieved through Austerlitz’s recollections, in a moving fashion that expresses the subjective cost of the alienating effect of ideological concealment; i.e. the *Theresienstadt* ‘documentary’, the education system, which cause his ‘forgetting’ to leave him without an identity, or ‘self-awareness’.<sup>1649</sup>

If Debord argues self-recognition (self-consciousness) is impossible if authentic social relationships are reified, Austerlitz seems to suffer from Debord’s ‘catatonia’ as reification leaves him unable to recognize his identity in others: ‘I came to realize how isolated I was [...] nor did I ever feel I belonged to a certain social class, professional group, or religious confession’.<sup>1650</sup> Without agency, he cannot consummate desire (i.e. for Marie).<sup>1651</sup> Sebald depicts the effect of reification on identity through Austerlitz’s terrible ‘disintegration of the personality’.<sup>1652</sup> In terms of ‘anti-spectacular’ themes, Sebald thematises memory in a radical form, as Austerlitz’s Jewish identity is recovered (i.e. the *Kindertransport*) in contradiction to his ideologically induced ‘forgetting’, in a style that recreates Austerlitz’s trauma and amnesia (‘false-consciousness’) for the reader. Sebald’s rambling sentences recreate both the searching for, and avoidance of, painful memories related to genocide, concealed by the greater ideology at play:

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<sup>1646</sup> Christina M.E. Szentivanyi, ‘W.G. Sebald and Structures of Testimony and Trauma: There are spots of Mist That no Eye can Dispel’, *History-Memory-Trauma* ed. by Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), pp.351-p.363 (p.352).

<sup>1647</sup> Sebald, ‘Against the Irreversible: On Jean Amery’, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. by Anthea Bell, p.150.

<sup>1648</sup> Sheppard, *Saturn’s Moons: W.G. Sebald - a Handbook*, p.54. Sheppard recounts that Sebald read reports on Auschwitz that radically changed his perception of the atrocities.

<sup>1649</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.61.

<sup>1650</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.177.

<sup>1651</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304. ‘I had always believed I must be alone [...] in spite of my longing for her’.

<sup>1652</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.174.

I realized that it must have been to this same waiting room I had come on my arrival in England over half a century ago. As so often, said Austerlitz [...] I felt something rending within me, and a sense of shame and sorrow, or perhaps something quite different, something inexpressible because we have no words for it, just as I had no words all those years ago when the two strangers came over to me speaking a language I did not understand<sup>1653</sup>

Alienation is a 'forgetting' that, like a Lukácsian typification, generalizes Austerlitz's Jewish experience *and* wider German denial Sebald calls a 'collective amnesia'.<sup>1654</sup> Therefore, structurally, stylistically and thematically, Sebald's novel absents a period of German Nazism (1933-45) through Austerlitz's ellipses first to symbolize the actual, physical erasure of Jewish people through genocide in his forgotten identity but a *second* 'erasure' identifies reification in the concealment performed by pedagogy and academia to ask, in principle, how it differs to the Nazi 'documentary'. Sebald thereby questions a pedagogy that removes the relationship between capitalism, Imperialism and Nazism (a context Debord's theory supplies) but rectifies this by re-instating it.

For, apart from the *Theresienstadt* film, Sebald's second major instance of reification is the opening of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris in 1996, symbolic of the 'reified' academic accounts of the Holocaust sanctioned by the state. Austerlitz first visits the library to discover facts about his father and recover from his catatonic 'forgetting' or remember. As Sebald represents class dominance through built space, the novel stages a contradiction between the library, a dominant cultural form, with its four ascending twenty-two storey towers, a 'ziggurat'<sup>1655</sup> or symbol of state and leader and its concealment of genocide. For, just as Sebald underpins the *dokumentarfilm* with a paradigm that relates reification to enslaved labour, so too this paradigm operates through the library, situated at the *Gare d'Austerlitz*, that in 1942 was; 'an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris'.<sup>1656</sup> This Left Bank site - location of the S.I.'s original *dérives*

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<sup>1653</sup> Austerlitz, p.193.

<sup>1654</sup> Sebald, 'Against the Irreversible: On Jean Amery', in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. by Anthea Bell, p.150.

<sup>1655</sup> Austerlitz, p.387.

<sup>1656</sup> Austerlitz, p.401.

- is redeveloped by the government in terms of the urbanism Debord opposed; a 'dilapidated area'<sup>1657</sup>, redeveloped in prize-winning Modernist form<sup>1658</sup>, which makes it an alienating 'no-man's land'. The redevelopment replaces the old library, described in terms that intentionally recall the displacement of Jews like Austerlitz through a displaced community of readers: 'in close contact with their neighbours and in silent harmony with those that had gone before them.' For the building's scale is: 'inimical to human beings, and runs counter in principle one might say to the requirements of any *true reader*'<sup>1659</sup> (Sebald's italicized term is discussed shortly). It is not built in consideration of readers but to honour President Mitterrand.<sup>1660</sup> Austerlitz says that its 'monumental dimensions [are] evidently inspired by the late President's wish to perpetuate his memory'.<sup>1661</sup> This nationalism and 'cult of leader' recalls both the station built as a monument to King Leopold and German Nazism.

Austerlitz discovers that Maximilian was deported from the *Gare d'Austerlitz*, the site overlooked by the library. This spatial proximity is ironically contrasted with the library's failure to house any historical records necessary for Austerlitz to identify or 'remember' his father and thereby recover his own identity as, instead, Mitterrand's memory is celebrated. In much the same way, 'images' of *Theresienstadt* prevent Agata, his mother, from being identified:

this gigantic new library, which according to one of the loathsome phrases now current is supposed to serve as the treasure-house of our entire literary heritage, proved useless in my search for any traces of my father<sup>1662</sup>

Sebald's narrative history structurally relates instances of 'expropriation'<sup>1663</sup> (wealth, labour) and reified forms (media, culture, architecture) in a continuousness *and* records a response to such dominant forms. For example, the library seems designed 'on purpose to instil a sense of insecurity and

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<sup>1657</sup> Austerlitz, p.385.

<sup>1658</sup> James Stirling designed the entrance and it won the Mies van der Rohe Award in 1996.

<sup>1659</sup> Austerlitz, p.386-7

<sup>1660</sup> Debord, p.95, Thesis 131. Debord's Marxist approach to culture identifies the function of language, education and archives with the state: "Writings are the thoughts of the State," said Novalis, "and archives are its memory."

<sup>1661</sup> Austerlitz, p.386.

<sup>1662</sup> Austerlitz, p.393.

<sup>1663</sup> Austerlitz, p.401.



humiliation in the poor readers'.<sup>1664</sup> Whether dwarfed readers, colonized peoples, exploited workers or fatally enslaved Jews, the text negatively relates them to ideological forms that, instead of offering identity, negate them (the *dokumentarfilm*, academia, state building projects).

The library becomes a metaphor to more widely demonstrate the negative relationship between reification and objective truth. Sebald moves beyond the abstraction of figurative language - 'the treasure-house of our [...] heritage' - to make this relationship *literal*; for buried 'treasure', as Nazi theft, lies at the foundation of James Sterling's 'towers': 'the fact is that the whole affair is buried in the most literal sense beneath the foundations of our pharaonic President's Grande Bibliotheque'.<sup>1665</sup> The narrative is a literary opposition to reification, that aims to defeat *abstraction* at work in figurative language which metaphor requires, as he collapses the figurative and literal meanings of 'treasure'. This is a Debordian *détournement* so to speak, as 'treasure' is given the context of a *literal* and negative referent. Sebald thereby conflates the Nazi 'burying' of looted Jewish possessions with the reification the library symbolizes, whose academic accounts 'bury' true accounts of the Holocaust. Sebald thereby extends this paradigm of reification from the birth of European capitalism up to the 1990s. He indicates, through the figure of Mitterand, that state institutions are complicit in the Holocaust, a complicity extended to citizens at a social, national level:

the Paris Union of Furniture Removers [...] fifteen hundred removal men [...] the residents' and properties registries, the banks and insurance agencies, the police, the transport firms, the landlords and caretakers of the apartment buildings, must have undoubtedly known [...] the valuables, bank deposits, the shares and the houses and business premises ruthlessly seized at the time remain in the hands of the city and the state to this day<sup>1666</sup>

Sebald uses a further metaphor to encourage us, as '*true readers*', to distinguish between reification or abstraction and its opposite, material actuality. He suggests the ability to take ideological illusions at face value is enabled by a flawed Cartesian mind-body dualism, implied through his reference to: 'the

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<sup>1664</sup> Austerlitz, p.389.

<sup>1665</sup> Ibid., p.403.

<sup>1666</sup> Austerlitz, p.401-2.

Cartesian overall plan of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*'.<sup>1667</sup> To support this point, compare Sebald's metaphor of a bird's failed flight at the library to Kant's similar use of a metaphor of a 'dove'<sup>1668</sup> to refer to abstraction, unembodied thought or 'pure intellect'.<sup>1669</sup> Like Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, Sebald suggests abstraction is *itself* deceptive, as it mistakes ideas (that become ideology) for pure, unembodied thought, which is an illusory, impossible disembodiment:

several times, said Austerlitz, birds which had lost their way in the library forest flew into the mirror images of the trees in the reading-room windows, struck the glass with a dull thud, and fell lifeless to the ground.<sup>1670</sup>

The 'mirror' metaphor recurs, for, as in the *dokumentarfilm*, abstraction is not a reflection identical with the material world it purports to be. The trees reflected by the windows symbolize the library's reified accounts said to 'reflect' the Jewish experience. Reification, whether a Nazi 'documentary' or academia, King Leopold's self-aggrandisement in Antwerp station or Mitterand's glorification by French culture, is premised on taking its own position as the starting point of an abstract yet generalized vision based on race or nationality that, like Marx's bourgeois class, dangerously objectifies 'the Other'. Austerlitz, symbolic of Jewish identity, is likened to this bird, lost in ideological forms that conceal truth whilst appearing real. As Austerlitz is unable to identify Agata in stills from the *dokumentarfilm*, this uncertainty more generally refers to a Jewish diaspora searching for relatives, that are not re-united with murdered family members, to present Jewish identity - passed on through the mother - as lastingly alienated by genocide.

Returning to Debord's *dérive*, Richard Sheppard writes that Sebald undertook; 'Baudelairean / Benjaminian flaneuries through scenes of slum clearance and

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<sup>1667</sup> Austerlitz, p.392.

<sup>1668</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans by Norman Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.10. Kant writes: '[t]he light dove cleaving in free flight the thin air whose resistance it feels, might imagine that her movements would be far more free and rapid in airless space. Just in the same way did Plato, abandoning the world of sense because of the narrow limits it set to the understanding, venture upon the wings of ideas beyond it, into the void space of pure intellect.'

<sup>1669</sup> Kant, p.10

<sup>1670</sup> Austerlitz, p.392.

urban decay'.<sup>1671</sup> These perhaps were the inspiration for his Narrator's excursions that, like the *dérive*, are never 'planned in advance'.<sup>1672</sup> Or indeed Austerlitz's 'meandering through the city'.<sup>1673</sup> Like Debord, Sebald understands the landscape as ideologically made over, cultivated, 'colonized'. Sebald *re-presents* or corrects false historical accounts by relating a wandering subject - Austerlitz - to the negative domination recorded in the architectural landscape, but, like the *dérive*, in terms which privilege a heightened subjective response. For example, Austerlitz visits Breendonk where Jews, including Amery, were tortured and he experiences a 'nauseating smell of soft soap'<sup>1674</sup> which implies concealment in the washing away of spilt blood. This releases personal memories and psychic 'doors [are] flung open'.<sup>1675</sup> At the start of the novel, Austerlitz studies socio-economic domination topographically (i.e. architecture). By the end of the novel, Austerlitz's wandering performs as a subversive, fictional reflection of Debord's 'street level' rebellion that sets up subjective response, emotions and memory against dominance and repression as a form of opposition.

Sebald *re-presents* history on this basis of an 'anti-ideological' perspective, a contradiction or reversal. The arc of Austerlitz's self-recognition, a process of 'becoming conscious' of identity, is a retrieval achieved by productive negation, a dialectical relationship set up through textual contradictions. For Sebald reinstates history on a basis of Austerlitz's subjective response to the ideology imposed in a landscape where power functions negatively through 'images', or architecture - libraries, stations, prisons etc. This affects a textual, dialectical conversion of the material class relations glorified by culture in this landscape. For Sebald reintroduces history on a basis of Austerlitz's emotional experience, an approach that never divorces the subject from space and time as socio-economic realities. This, rather than false accounts or 'images' offers Austerlitz referents of identity. Sebald calls this a 'historical metaphysic'<sup>1676</sup> as it returns reified accounts or images of history to their 'proper order'<sup>1677</sup>, to produce

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<sup>1671</sup> Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years', *Saturn's Moons*, p.66.

<sup>1672</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.36.

<sup>1673</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.16.

<sup>1674</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>1675</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>1676</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.14.

<sup>1677</sup> *Austerlitz*, p.61.

'knowledge'<sup>1678</sup> or re-write history on this basis of repressed experience; 'Adler describes it [*Theresienstadt*] down to the last detail in its *objective actuality*'<sup>1679</sup> (my emphasis). Sebald's novel produces that form of Lukácsian 'cognitive dissonance', that, like Debord's theory of the 'image', corrects reified representation through demonstrating a subjective and collective contradictory experience.

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<sup>1678</sup> Austerlitz, p.14.

<sup>1679</sup> Austerlitz, p.331.

### **5.3. The Western Spectacle**

#### **5.3.1. *Libra***

Moving from an Eastern to a Western 'spectacle', *Libra* by Don DeLillo seems to capture the duplicity Debord sets out in *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1988 - the same year as *Libra*. His novel seems to fictionalize Debord's comment that a 'rising number of assassinations over the last two decades (Kennedy, Aldo Moro)' are a 'pseudo history' that serves hidden stakeholders: 'the state's security services intend to use all the advantages they find in the realm of the spectacle, which has indeed been organized with that in mind.'<sup>1680</sup> Debord's text offers a more political interpretation of De Lillo's 'image' of Kennedy than the Postmodern ones it ordinarily receives, such as those by Stacey Olster, Jeremy Green or John Johnston (discussed in the following paragraphs). Overall, DeLillo's oeuvre is undeniably Postmodern. Therefore *Libra*'s 'image' is frequently interpreted as Baudrillard's 'simulacrum', that is sometimes confused with Debord's 'spectacle'. For example, Peter Knight writes: 'in DeLillo's work the Kennedy assassination functions as the primal scene of postmodernism, a symbolically necessary but imagined origin of the "society of the spectacle" that America has come to inhabit.'<sup>1681</sup> Knight locates the 'spectacle' in Baudrillard's Lacanian paradigm of the 'image' as an imaginary Real, but this wrongly revokes Debord's explicitly economic, social and political territory, which DeLillo represents.

Ostler and Green argue that De Lillo's work demonstrates that Modernist techniques are defeated by a new Postmodern sensibility. Returning to the theme of desire, Ostler asks in relation to *White Noise* (1985): 'whether there remain grounds for recovering an "I" of individual subjectivity.'<sup>1682</sup> She suggests any resistant Modernist 'individual subjectivity' is sacrificed to commodification and homogeneity in a 'postmodern world'.<sup>1683</sup> Green makes the same point, but in

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<sup>1680</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.62; 25.

<sup>1681</sup> Peter Knight, 'DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity', *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* ed. by John N. Duvall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 27-40, (p.34).

<sup>1682</sup> Stacey Olster, 'White Noise', *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall pp. 79-93 (p.79).

<sup>1683</sup> Olster, p.83.

relation to narrative objectivity. De Lillo is said to recreate 1960s America with a Modernist 'imagistic precision'<sup>1684</sup>, chiefly through the work of senior C.I.A. analyst Nicholas Branch, whom, DeLillo writes, is tasked 'to write the secret history of the assassination of President Kennedy'.<sup>1685</sup> Green argues that Branch's work allows history to be represented through temporal 'fragmentation' through the multiple perspectives and memories of different witnesses, making De Lillo's narrative history a 'work of modernist complexity'. However, this history is chaotic and equally exhibits the repetition and equivalence of a Postmodern approach. Green thus asserts narrative instability denies history the status of definitive fact, associated with the authorial perspective of Realism and that DeLillo 'steers clear of grand narratives'.<sup>1686</sup>

Johnston differently argues that DeLillo represents history through a comparative narratology. The critical possibilities available in Postmodern 'play,' or use of comparative genres and conventions, allows historiography - represented by Branch's work – to be contrasted with DeLillo's 'storytelling' as fiction, which Green defines as an: 'outline of a plausible conspiracy'.<sup>1687</sup> These dual forms of narratology - historiography and fiction - are said to delimit one another by their different conventions: '[g]enre delimits and governs the boundary between fiction and history'.<sup>1688</sup> All three agree that *Libra* announces an uncertainty of historical fact that derives from Postmodernism, which Green calls 'the origins of our own historical and cultural moment'.<sup>1689</sup>

DeLillo writes of *Libra*: 'a novel about a major unresolved event will aspire to fill some of the blank spaces in the known record'.<sup>1690</sup> DeLillo *does* 'fill' in and contrast his fictional 'story' of conspiracy with a 'known record' or history. However, as in *Austerlitz*, the 'known history' of the Kennedy assassination, unpicked by Branch, is constructed much like Debord's reified 'pseudo-history'.

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<sup>1684</sup> Jeremy Green, 'Libra', *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, pp. 94-107, (p.100).

<sup>1685</sup> DeLillo, *Libra*, p.15.

<sup>1686</sup> Green, *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* p.100; p.96.

<sup>1687</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>1688</sup> John Johnston, 'Superlinear Fiction or Historical Diagram: Don DeLillo's "Libra"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, ed. by Patrick O' Donnell, 40 (1994), pp.319-342 (p.320). Johnston suggests comparative narratological approaches in relation to fiction and history.

<sup>1689</sup> Green, *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, p.94.

<sup>1690</sup> *Libra*, (London: Viking, 1988). See his Author's Note.

As former C.I.A. agent Parmenter admits; 'we fake our own files'.<sup>1691</sup> DeLillo's 'story' reconstructs the assassination as a conspiracy by rogue C.I.A. operatives, staged to conceal their economic and political gains and *this* frustrates arriving at a full, factual account of the event. History - and the class struggle implied therein - is falsified because the assassination is an 'image' produced by conspirators, for their benefit - but within DeLillo's class context. For DeLillo's conspiracy, that fills in 'blank spaces', constructs history not simply through the discrepancies caused by the textual limits of genres, or historiography as relative perspectives but through falsification. As stated, Debord's alienating 'image' has a dialectical aspect that expresses wider historical contradictions between state or global businesses interests and the working class. Oswald is used in the management of 'appearances' to financially benefit C.I.A. agents, representative of an upper class. Therefore, Kennedy's 'false' image and its true meaning is a discrepancy staged within class oppositions and its instrumental use is shown to have a repressive result. For Green to state that DeLillo does not subscribe to 'grand narratives', implying Realism, avoids the novel's 'depth model' of alienation and concern with the class relationships mediated by an 'image' which gives Oswald a 'spectacular' false-consciousness.

DeLillo constructs Oswald's character as a product of the narrative's socio-economic structure. Oswald 'typifies' a working-class position, describing himself as a 'zero in the system'. Rogue C.I.A. agents exploit this, calling him 'dreadfully, grindingly poor'. All three of Mrs. Oswald's sons are in the military and defend a system they cannot afford to participate in; her sons 'can't buy what they are selling'. The 'image' of Kennedy is consumed and produced in this socio-economic framework, to give Oswald a class position that identifies him with Bobby Dupard. Dupard, recruited from a black ghetto, is similarly poor, targeted by the navy despite America's institutional racism. Mrs Dupard is told: 'Your boy is safe with us'.<sup>1692</sup> Ironically, this implies the wider dangers of racism, mob beatings and lynchings prevalent in 1950s America. Dupard also supports a system that oppresses him, as DeLillo ironically compares the dangers of racism to war. C.I.A. plotter, Guy Banister, embodies the resentment of the dominant

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<sup>1691</sup> *Libra*, p.74.

<sup>1692</sup> *Libra*, p.106; p.56; p.40; p.106.

white perspective as he laments; '[w]e'll give away white America next'.<sup>1693</sup> Oswald is motivated by a desire to escape his stigmatizing poverty. DeLillo creates a nominal working class through Oswald, Dupard and Wayne Elko, a homeless veteran and fixer for the C.I.A. conspirators.

DeLillo constructs a dominant class by eliding disparate state (C.I.A.) and multinational business interests in Cuba, where personal and geo-political gains are made by exploiting oil and property concerns, through characters such as ex-C.I.A. agent Larry Parmenter, who has: 'hidden financial involvement in a leasing company [...] to facilitate oil drilling'.<sup>1694</sup> Parmenter arranges 'transactions between the Batista government and interests in the U.S.', which involve 'mineral surveys, land-development deals, drilling contracts, casino franchises'.<sup>1695</sup> Frank Lentricchia observes that fellow conspirator T.J. Mackey uses: 'the agency's intelligence-gathering power to bring down hostile Central American regimes in return for substantial kickbacks from the multinationals'.<sup>1696</sup> C.I.A. operatives ascend into the establishment in a 'pure line'<sup>1697</sup>, to suggest heredity, privilege and a ruling class's historical power.

Just as Debord treats Cold War politics as a continuous, ideological 'spectacle', to emphasize the global structure of a single commodity production economy, so too De Lillo's 'image' of the Kennedy assassination is set in a Cold War narrative that has a global, geo-political frame of reference and involves neo-imperialism, state militarism and a class invested in global business. For the U.S. military vie with similarly positioned Communist forces in Guatemala, Cuba and Vietnam, in incursions which prove lucrative for; '[m]erchant banks, sugar companies [and] arms dealers'. American business, state and military interests are so aligned that Parmenter says of United Fruit: 'there would have been no need for an operation if the Guatemalans hadn't taken back all that land belonging to United Fruit'. United Fruit becomes one of many 'legally incorporated businesses actually

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<sup>1693</sup> *Libra*, p.141.

<sup>1694</sup> *Libra*, p.30.

<sup>1695</sup> *Libra*, p.126.

<sup>1696</sup> Lentricchia, *Introducing Don DeLillo*, p.200.

<sup>1697</sup> *Libra*, p.30.



financed by the C.I.A.' Parmenter personally knows C.I.A. agents with 'important holdings in sensitive parts of the hemisphere', in 'Kurdistan or Yemen'.<sup>1698</sup>

De Lillo suggests that television gives their ideological deception a new reach, matched by the scale of profits available by this merging of business and military operations. DeLillo's 'story', or strand of conspiracy, requires 'Televisionland'<sup>1699</sup> to dissemble. In terms of narratology, DeLillo's 'story' (conspiracy) is related as if a 'true' history. He constructs Oswald's identity in socio-economic terms to contrast it with Oswald's later televised 'image', subsumed in the 'pseudo-history' of the Kennedy assassination. DeLillo thereby somewhat personifies the processes of capitalist reification. For the chief players in the assassination plot assimilate Oswald's working-class identity in an 'image' whose narrative they control for profit. Conspirator Win Everett suggests they 'build an identity' for Oswald: 'a name, a face, a bodily frame they might use to extend their fiction into the world'. Debord's separation of agency in a 'spectacular' identity is reflected in C.I.A. agents who 'plot' a 'spectacular miss', an 'electrifying event'.<sup>1700</sup> Their cynical use of Cold War ideology aims to cast suspicion on Castro and trigger a second invasion of Cuba, allowing them to recoup their investments there. Oswald's agency and identity are used in the 'image' of the Kennedy assassination to ultimately benefit an upper class.

Parmenter boasts that the C.I.A. author objective events, as 'men who believed history was in their care'.<sup>1701</sup> Their concealed exercise of power explains the novel's refrain of 'a world inside the world'.<sup>1702</sup> DeLillo's conspiracy, as 'true' history, demonstrates that a class, state and institutional interests manufacture a Cold War 'image' to inscribe ideological justifications into public consciousness. DeLillo's use of Banister's cynical reference to *Nineteen Eighty Four* - 'we invent a society where it's always wartime'<sup>1703</sup> - implies that public perception can be managed through 'images' to manufacture patriotism, allowing secret C.I.A. incursions. Like *Austerlitz's* Nazi 'dokumentarfilm', the negation of Oswald's

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<sup>1698</sup> *Libra*, p.125 ; p.125 ; p.125 ; p.125.

<sup>1699</sup> *Libra*, p.51.

<sup>1700</sup> *Libra*, p.50; p.221; p.51; p.27; p.78.

<sup>1701</sup> *Libra*, p.127.

<sup>1702</sup> *Libra*, p.13.

<sup>1703</sup> *Libra*, p.64.

identity in 'images' is ironically emphasized, as reality is reduced to an aesthetic; C.I.A. plotters 'want a realistic-looking thing' that is 'perfectly plausible'.<sup>1704</sup> Oswald's identity is thereby 'fragmented', but not temporally in a Modernist style, nor in terms of Baudrillard's Postmodern refraction, but rather by the relationship of classes to an 'image'.

Just as Debord emphasizes the continuity of a Communist East and capitalist West, similarly DeLillo collapses superficial Cold War ideological differences and treats the ideological 'image' as an exploitation continuous in both America and the U.S.S.R. The novel gains much of its critical power from plotting and, like Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Oswald's search for self-realization (identity) drives the 'story'. However, DeLillo collapses difference, not at the visual level of Baudrillard's abstract refraction, but at a *material* level of Oswald's experience and *physical* journey from the U.S.A. to the U.S.S.R. that takes in the Marines, C.I.A. and K.G.B. His journey is one of disillusionment, as DeLillo connects everything an abstract 'image' promises with its material actuality; poverty, bureaucracy, militarism and elites that reveal the U.S.S.R. is as equally repressive and economically exploitative as the U.S.A.

For, initially, Oswald believes capitalism and communism offer opposite paths to self-realization or routes out of poverty, convinced of this difference by 'Marxist books'.<sup>1705</sup> America offers Oswald an 'identity' in the satisfaction of desires through consumerism, Debord's white goods or 'pseudo-desires': '[h]e would start saving right away for a washing machine and car [...] standard ways to stop being lonely'.<sup>1706</sup> However, his marginalization precludes such self-realization, reserved for an aspiring middle-class that experience self-affirmation through status (i.e. brands); 'neighbours with their Hotpoint washers and Ford Fairlane cars'.<sup>1707</sup> DeLillo's collapse of the polarity that a Cold War narrative promotes is prefigured in Oswald, who, as a Marine, already recognizes in American patriotism an Orwellian control: '[i]t's like Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This isn't a book about the future [...] Ike is our own Big Brother'.<sup>1708</sup> DeLillo

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<sup>1704</sup> *Libra*, p.119.

<sup>1705</sup> *Libra*, p.41.

<sup>1706</sup> *Libra*, p.371.

<sup>1707</sup> *Libra*, p.107.

<sup>1708</sup> *Libra*, p.106.

makes Kennedy 'the hero of the age'<sup>1709</sup>; just as Debord's leaders claim to embody Hegelian 'universal will', Kennedy's image embodies the values of consumption, patriotism and nationalism, endorsing big business and the state.<sup>1710</sup> If Kennedy's 'image' promises to unify society economically, racially or nationally through material aspiration, mass consumption or patriotism, DeLillo sets the 'image' of Kennedy in contradiction with its socio-economic reality - Oswald and Dupard, a nominal working class that experience poverty, marginalization, racism and loss of life (i.e. the navy). DeLillo's 'image' alienates because it in fact negates class interests.

However, once Oswald defects, Soviet communism proves equally repressive. Initially, Marxism offers Oswald a theoretical lens through which his mother's single income is understood as 'the exploitation of wage labour'.<sup>1711</sup> Marxism explains the structure of Western society; 'I could lift my head from a book and see the impoverishment of the masses right there in front of me'.<sup>1712</sup> In Atsugi, Japan, Oswald sharpens his criticism of American imperialism, to reflect Debord's 'Americanisation of the world'<sup>1713</sup>:

[a]ll foreign troops are U.S. troops. Every Westerner is an American. Every American serves the cause of monopolistic capital.<sup>1714</sup>

However, once Oswald defects, Marxist theory in its abstract form - the 'idea of Russia'<sup>1715</sup>, 'the great theory come to life'<sup>1716</sup> - is replaced by its reality: the U.S.S.R. as a totalitarian, impoverished and militaristic society. Like Winston, Oswald must attend '[f]ifteen meetings a month', read 'propaganda'<sup>1717</sup> and take part in 'compulsory daily gym'.<sup>1718</sup> Here, Oswald's repetition that he is a 'zero in

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<sup>1709</sup> *Libra*, p.68.

<sup>1710</sup> Debord, p.39, Thesis.61. Debord explains Kennedy as an 'image', a construct: 'Kennedy the orator survived himself so to speak, and even delivered his own funeral oration, in the sense that Theodore Sorenson still wrote speeches for Kennedy's successor in the very style [of] the dead man's persona'.

<sup>1711</sup> Lentricchia, *Introducing Don DeLillo*, p.35.

<sup>1712</sup> *Libra*, p.110.

<sup>1713</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.8.

<sup>1714</sup> *Libra*, p.87.

<sup>1715</sup> *Libra*, p.82.

<sup>1716</sup> *Libra*, p.110.

<sup>1717</sup> *Libra*, p.198.

<sup>1718</sup> *Libra*, p.189.

the system'<sup>1719</sup> emphasizes the continuity between the U.S.S.R. and America, made clearer by Oswald's job; he manufactures *televisions* in Minsk - a symbol of this equivalence with American society and global dominance of an 'image'. At the end of the novel, Oswald's revolutionary desires are finally negated in an *image* of a 'pro-Castro' assassination plot, that is actually the work of *far-right* C.I.A. agents. DeLillo's theme of ideological sameness is reinforced by this final conflation of Left / Right at a single point or 'image' of the Kennedy assassination. However, Oswald is not initially conscious of this continuity of East and West, as he believes in their opposition and discovers their sameness. In other words, he takes the Cold War 'image' for reality in a form of 'false-consciousness'.

Examining DeLillo's construction of Oswald's 'false-consciousness' returns us to Lukács' distantiation and 'cognitive dissonance'. DeLillo gives Oswald a belief in a Marxist model of self-realization. Oswald writes that happiness does not lie in American consumption; 'does not consist of a small home, of taking and getting'. Rather, self-realization and identity comes from a transcendence of poverty by political action; 'taking part in struggle, where there is no borderline between one's own personal world, and the world in general.'<sup>1720</sup> However, DeLillo uses Oswald to illustrate how far visual ideology invalidates this assumption of history as a product of direct subject-object relations: '[h]istory means to merge [...] history is to climb out of your own skin'.<sup>1721</sup> DeLillo makes Oswald unaware of how far 'images' mediate his choices and identity, as Oswald mistakes the 'image' as a means of self-definition: a 'reverie of control', a 'perfection of desire'.<sup>1722</sup> Mistaking 'images' as a means of cementing identity first appears when Oswald describes John Wayne, visiting the marines, as 'doubly real'.<sup>1723</sup> The novel's socio-economic structure allows Oswald's working class identity to be opposed to a composite of Cold War 'images' he identifies with; the figure of a spy in a 'James Bond novel'<sup>1724</sup>, a 'Marine Corps manual'<sup>1725</sup>, a 'magazine photo of Castro'.<sup>1726</sup> Oswald sees himself reflected in President Kennedy - 'they both had

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<sup>1719</sup> *Libra*, p.151.

<sup>1720</sup> *Libra*, p.1 ; p.1.

<sup>1721</sup> *Libra*, p.101.

<sup>1722</sup> *Libra*, p.46.

<sup>1723</sup> *Libra*, p.93.

<sup>1724</sup> *Libra*, p.180.

<sup>1725</sup> *Libra*, p.41.

<sup>1726</sup> *Libra*, p.180.

bad handwriting'<sup>1727</sup> - but also, like Stalin, wants a 'secret name'.<sup>1728</sup> Oswald believes his defection to the U.S.S.R. is a *choice* within opposed capitalist and communist systems that will define his identity: 'some larger and deeper version of himself'.<sup>1729</sup> He believes his defection is an *action* - '[h]e was a man in history now'<sup>1730</sup> - that will cement his identity in terms of class and history.

However, Oswald's identity as a working class 'everyman' and its distortion by ideology is much like Debord's 'schizophrenia' or 'catatonia'. For example, at Atsugi, Oswald discloses military secrets (the height of a U-2 spy plane), confidential knowledge necessary for the U.S.S.R. to secretly move ballistic missiles to Cuba successfully. Instead of cementing his identity as a Soviet spy he feels 'softly split in two'.<sup>1731</sup> Instead of affirmation, he feels 'remote' from himself and ambivalent, reflected in DeLillo's surreal tone.<sup>1732</sup> The events at Atsugi split his identity to prefigure Oswald's later involvement in the assassination, whereby Green suggests Oswald watches the televised assassination: 'split into spectator and spectacle'.<sup>1733</sup>

DeLillo's narrative is political because his social world allows for this 'cognitive dissonance' to play out in a class context. If Oswald's 'false-consciousness' is schizophrenic it is because he is implicated in a larger Cold War narrative, the figures of Khrushchev and Eisenhower, the propaganda of East and West and not, as Lentricchia suggests, the result of a Postmodern aesthetic of multiplicity; 'the non-identity of sheer possibility - of the American who might play any part'.<sup>1734</sup> Oswald's non-identity derives from his *subjective* resistance being obstructed by 'images' that promise fulfilment and equality, yet dismantle any class action, struggle or 'history' which might achieve it by turning it to opposite ends. Oswald's journey, his desire as political ambition, finds the East and West merely an 'image' of difference, or, as Debord writes: 'no real choice'.<sup>1735</sup> Oswald's

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<sup>1727</sup> Frank Lentricchia, *Introducing Don DeLillo*, p.197.

<sup>1728</sup> *Libra*, p.41.

<sup>1729</sup> *Libra*, p.113.

<sup>1730</sup> *Libra*, p.149.

<sup>1731</sup> *Libra*, p.90.

<sup>1732</sup> *Libra*, p.90.

<sup>1733</sup> Green, *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, p.97.

<sup>1734</sup> *Libra*, p.201.

<sup>1735</sup> Debord, p.38, Thesis 60.

astrology sign, Libran scales, becomes a symbol of this ideological equivalence, rather than opposite possibilities.

DeLillo represents alienation as ultimately the severance of agency from self-authorship, in a form like Debord's 'catatonia'. For example, at Atsugi, Oswald believes his disclosure is historically significant and finds it 'strangely easy to have a say over men and events'.<sup>1736</sup> This parodies Oswald's actual irrelevance to K.G.B. officers and C.I.A. plotters who *do* control events - including Oswald's fate. On leaving Moscow, Oswald finally realizes the inaccessibility of history and that choices or decisions are made by '[m]en in small rooms'<sup>1737</sup>, men he wishes to emulate, as they establish the world in their terms (i.e. 'a world inside the world'<sup>1738</sup>). He is excluded from this class and despairs. Once he no longer mistakes a 'false' image for a self-authored, radical identity, he surrenders all choice and resigns himself to ideological inscription, much like Kundera's Ludovik: '[l]et others make the choices now.'<sup>1739</sup> This 'death' of agency, that Butler identifies in the Hegelian subject faced with its Postmodern condition, is caused here by external stakeholders and ideological inscription that severs desire from autonomous use. The result is a passivity, symbolized by Oswald watching his own assassination from a hospital bed. Subject-object relations are symbolically reversed in this television 'image', as his image wholly belongs to the C.I.A. narrative, a reversal of his class identity. Orwell's cautionary message of *Nineteen Eighty Four* echoes in Win Everett's prediction that the state's final purpose is to make subjective will obsolete, through removing opposition and achieving conformity in such passivity or 'catatonia': '[t]he more complex the systems, the less conviction in people.'<sup>1740</sup> The novel ends with Oswald's mother being somewhat comforted by the bittersweet satisfaction that Oswald's name 'belonged [...] to history'.<sup>1741</sup> She is unaware that history, that traditionally sustains a hero's fame (or 'anti-hero' in this case) has shifted to a new paradigm of 'pseudo history' and ideological repression. She stands over Oswald's open

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<sup>1736</sup> *Libra*, p.163.

<sup>1737</sup> *Libra*, p.41.

<sup>1738</sup> *Libra*, p.13.

<sup>1739</sup> *Libra*, p.153.

<sup>1740</sup> *Libra*, p.77.

<sup>1741</sup> *Libra*, p.456.

grave, perhaps DeLillo's metaphor for the 'end of history', a negative conclusion to Oswald's original, political ambition.

Finally, DeLillo writes that the Kennedy assassination destroyed 'the sense of a coherent *reality* most of us shared'<sup>1742</sup> (my italics). DeLillo's novel presents the era's visual alienation, beyond Oswald, at this broader social level through the televised assassination that unites the American public in an experience Branch terms 'an aberration in the heartland of the real'.<sup>1743</sup> This recalls Debord's comment that 'spectacular' false-consciousness is: 'the very heart of society's real unreality'.<sup>1744</sup> Ostler and Johnston interpret DeLillo's loss of 'coherent reality' in Postmodern terms. Ostler, using Baudrillard, argues that reality is indistinguishable from, and limited to, its representation in images: 'reality becomes defined to the degree it exists within the contours of a photographic frame'.<sup>1745</sup> However, opposite to Ostler's claim, DeLillo's novel works to separate the 'image' from a reality which *it is not*. Johnston suggests DeLillo explores the 'image' as it impacts and undermines historical memory; 'its prolongation in time and space has rendered suspect both perception and memory'.<sup>1746</sup>

However, Debord's theory offers a more political interpretation of the novel's image. Once historical memory, facts and 'truth', both empirical and direct, are transferred to an 'image' that defines them, it allows time and space, as unified properties, to be ideologically distorted ('fragment'). As Debord writes: 'contemporary events themselves retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations'<sup>1747</sup>. This requires 'experts', Debord argues, to affirm facts (for example, the Warren Commission) whose legitimacy tautologically issues from the state itself: 'experts serve the state and the media and only in that way do they achieve their status'.<sup>1748</sup> Similarly, DeLillo's 'fragmented' history of many discrepancies stems

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<sup>1742</sup> Johnston, *Modern Fiction Studies*, p.320.

<sup>1743</sup> *Libra*, p.15.

<sup>1744</sup> Debord, p.13, Thesis 6.

<sup>1745</sup> Ostler, *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, p. 84.

<sup>1746</sup> Johnston, *Modern Fiction Studies*, p.320.

<sup>1747</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.21.

<sup>1748</sup> Debord, *Comments*, p.16.

from the 'image's deficit of truth. *This* creates epistemic uncertainty and explains the narrative instability at play.

DeLillo's 'blank spaces' make a 'coherent reality' impossible, but DeLillo ameliorates this, as his conspiracy story supplies an underlying class division and logic to demonstrate the 'image' assimilates working-class resistance within this context. Debord's 'spectacle' and class 'rift' reflects this social aspect of the novel. For DeLillo's 'image' superficially fractures a 'coherent reality' in terms of a class history ('totality') in which it is implied. If the novel's textual uncertainty is read as Postmodern 'fragmentation', this fails to identify DeLillo's more political depiction of history. As Lentichia argues:

who or what is responsible for the production of Lee Harvey Oswald (or John Fitzgerald Kennedy), is inseparable from the question of where DeLillo imagines power to lie in contemporary America.<sup>1749</sup>

DeLillo uses Oswald to undermine what Lentricchia calls 'public institutional targets'<sup>1750</sup> (i.e. the ruling class, the state). He reads DeLillo's characters as 'expressions of - and responses to - specific historical processes'.<sup>1751</sup> Through the relationship of Oswald and Kennedy's 'image', DeLillo fictionally observes a contemporary situation very similar to that which Debord theorizes.

### **5.3.2. American Psycho**

'Sometimes, Jean,' I explain, 'the lines separating appearance - what you see - and reality - what you don't - become, well, blurred'.

*American Psycho*<sup>1752</sup>

The final texts *American Psycho* (1989) and *Trainspotting* (1993) are considered as a pair. Moving on from *Libra* and the 1960s to Easton Ellis' 'Reagan-Thatcher time'<sup>1753</sup> and the 1980s, these novels oppose alienation from opposite sides of a class divide. If *Libra* presents the media 'image' as a novel but accepted aspect

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<sup>1749</sup> Lentricchia, 'The American Writer as Bad Citizen', *Introducing Don DeLillo*, p.203.

<sup>1750</sup> Lentricchia, p.205.

<sup>1751</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>1752</sup> Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London; Picador, 1991), p.378.

<sup>1753</sup> Nicci Gerrard, 'Bret and the Beast in the corner', *The Observer*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1994, p. 16.



of consumption and politics, this later setting finds screens more sophisticated, prolific and compelling as they promote brands and 'lifestyles'. Naomi Mandel's survey of Easton Ellis's later work (*Bret Easton Ellis: American Psycho, Glamorama, Lunar Park*, 2011), discussed in the conclusion to this section, is typical of a critical response overwhelmingly focused on Postmodern strategies of textuality and affect. Elizabeth Young, an early champion of *American Psycho*, makes a typical observation:

all the theoretical constituents of postmodern culture are there - the commodity fixation, the focus on image, codes and style, the proliferation of surfaces, the deindividualization [...] irony and paradox<sup>1754</sup>

However, as with the other 'anti-spectacular' novels, Debord's text is used to argue that Easton Ellis' 'image' is a more political construction than this suggests, and turns on a Lukácsian paradigm of 'essence' and 'appearance', or, as quoted above - 'appearance - what you see - and reality - what you don't' - that Jameson finds abandoned in Postmodernism.<sup>1755</sup>

*American Psycho* finds its unlikely antecedent in Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). Wolfe's self-confessed ambition was to write 'The Novel'<sup>1756</sup> about contemporary American life in a Realist tradition whose credibility had waned. Wolfe observes that '[b]y the 1970s there was a headlong rush to get rid of not only realism but everything associated with it'.<sup>1757</sup> These novels, written only a couple of years apart, share much yet their similarities have been overlooked due to their entirely different forms. They share a central subject - capitalism, period - the 1980s and setting - Pierce & Pierce on Wall Street. Their central character is an investment banker. They are also thematically congruent. For example, their tropes of commodification and consumption both rely on food and women. Wolfe satirizes commodification through New York's expensive restaurants. Sherman McCoy orders 'a dish called veal Boogie Woogie, which

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<sup>1754</sup> Elizabeth Young, 'The Beast in the Jungle, The Figure in the carpet: Bret Easton Ellis, 'American Psycho', in *Shopping in Space: Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction* by Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), pp.85-122 (p.121).

<sup>1755</sup> *American Psycho*, p.378.

<sup>1756</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of The Vanities* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. xviii. Wolfe's introduction describes his very unfashionable choice of Realist form, as Postmodernism was the popular aesthetic in the 1970s-80s.

<sup>1757</sup> Wolfe, p. xvii.

turned out to be rectangles of veal [...] and lines of puréed walnuts arranged to look like Piet Mondrian's painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie*'.<sup>1758</sup> Modernist culture has become subsumed by the economy and degenerated into a product that is literally consumed. McCoy divides women into two groups, 'X-rays' and 'Lemon Tarts', to demonstrate human objectification and exchangeability:

there were women in their late thirties and in their forties and older [...] all of them skin and bone (starved to near perfection) [...] no puffs, flounces, pleats, ruffles, bibs, bows, battings, scallops, laces, darts, or skirts on the bias were too extreme. They were the social X-rays [...] Second, there were Lemon Tarts. These were women in their twenties or early thirties, mostly blondes (the Lemon in the Tarts)<sup>1759</sup>

Wolfe's focus prefigures Easton-Ellis' satire of the same commodification and consumption. Patrick Bateman orders 'swordfish meat loaf with kiwi mustard'<sup>1760</sup> and 'pork loin with lime Jell-O'.<sup>1761</sup> Easton-Ellis uses exaggeration to satirize the nature of 'exchange-value' which entirely conditions modern life, a strategy that expresses the lengths to which commodities must go to stand out in being mass produced and interchangeable. Women take a 'universal' form of toned (rather than starved) 'hardbody' across a social spectrum, from 'hardbody rich girls'<sup>1762</sup> to waitresses ('our waitress is a little hardbody').<sup>1763</sup> Wolfe employs Realist conventions and devices; for example, a third person narrator and recognizable social world in which Sherman McCoy's downfall is an educational reversal of fortune, a generic device typical of Realism. While Easton Ellis' subject is capitalism, when interviewed he said that he refused to be 'derailed by classic tropes'<sup>1764</sup> implying Realist themes like injustice, generated by the social world of traditionally Realist novels such as those by Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo or even Wolfe. In a seemingly Postmodern mode of 'play', or intertextuality, *American Psycho* actually rhetorically alludes to *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *Les Misérables* (1862), which become points of referents to emphasize this formal,

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<sup>1758</sup> Ibid., p. 592.

<sup>1759</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>1760</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>1761</sup> Easton Ellis, p. 215.

<sup>1762</sup> Easton Ellis, p.198; p.198.

<sup>1763</sup> Ibid., p.95

<sup>1764</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, The Guardian Bookclub Interview with John Mullan, (17.7. 2010). My transcript of that event.

generic difference to his own novel. Hugo's novel is discussed in the conclusion, but in terms of Debord's theory not Postmodern 'play'.

Like other 'anti-spectacular' novels, while Easton Ellis rejects typically Realist conventions, he retains a socio-economic structure to frame the novel's visual alienation of his narrative world. While it is pared back and remains in the background, it is so polarized that attention is drawn to a world of stark and extreme class differences, equal to those of Dickens or Hugo. Patrick Bateman could be considered a Lukácsian 'typification' who epitomizes a class position, established through his job in banking ('he's pushing buttons while the latest commodities flash by'<sup>1765</sup>) and heredity or inheritance ('Moore's grandfather owns the company he works at'<sup>1766</sup>). The interests of the upper class are identified with 'Reaganomics', reflecting Debord's fusion of class and state interests. Bateman supports George Bush ( '[o]n the screen [...] are scenes from President Bush's inauguration'<sup>1767</sup>) and state militarism, decorating his apartment with a 'poster of Oliver North'.<sup>1768</sup> Reaganomics, a combination of tax cuts for the wealthy and a deregulated, competitive economy, prevalent at the time the novel was written, made Japan the U.S.A.'s main competitor. Thus, Bateman observes: 'Murphy [...] on a tirade about the Japanese - "They've bought the Empire State Building [...]". While Bateman's colleague, Carruthers, complains; 'I hate the Japanese' [...] they save more than we do [...] take, *steal*, our innovations' and Carnes warns 'the Japanese will own most of this country by the end of the 90s'.<sup>1769</sup>

At the opposite pole of the narrative's class structure are immigrants ('the driver, black, not American'<sup>1770</sup>), 'bums'<sup>1771</sup>, 'whores'<sup>1772</sup> and the 'homeless'<sup>1773</sup> who represent a nominal working class. Classically Realist novels give time and space objective form through a specific social world, which is the product of a historical past. History is not represented through past social conflict here, despite such social polarity. However, in the conclusion I argue that Easton Ellis intentionally

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<sup>1765</sup> Easton Ellis, p.394.

<sup>1766</sup> Easton Ellis, p.88.

<sup>1767</sup> Ibid., p.396.

<sup>1768</sup> Easton Ellis, p.341.

<sup>1769</sup> Easton Ellis, p.180; p.145; p.386.

<sup>1770</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>1771</sup> Ibid., p.128.

<sup>1772</sup> Ibid., p.169.

<sup>1773</sup> Ibid., p.86.

presents a social world, mediated by 'images' which produce a 'false consciousness' that obscures society's historical situation. He intentionally effaces history from lived experience, to recall Jameson's 'society bereft of all historicity'.<sup>1774</sup> However, Easton Ellis also avoids ahistoricism. He uses referents to history to 'bookend' the text, lending it some historical parameters. The first is a reference to Dostoevsky's Realist novella *Notes from the Underground* (1864), used in the preface. This indicates that, like Dostoevsky's anonymous protagonist who 'represents a generation'<sup>1775</sup>, Bateman typifies the Reagan-Thatcher era. The 'anti-spectacular' strategy of re-introducing 'erased' history in contradiction with a false 'image' that replaces it, employed by Orwell, Kundera, Sebald and DeLillo operates here in slightly altered form. Easton Ellis removes history but isolates and reintroduces its class perspectives and opposition through the 'dehumanization' entailed in working class labour, symbolized by violence. Labour is inherent but concealed in commodities and is reintroduced in a form of violence at the level of 'appearances', from which it is ordinarily excluded, to deny an 'image' of society its false claim to reality.

If Hegel's Master does not recognize his dependence on a slave's labour, Lukács argues capitalism fosters this same delusional self-conception or 'false-consciousness' of independence;

'false' consciousness is [...] the objective result of the economic set-up [...] the bourgeoisie may well be able to reflect all the problems of organisation entailed by its hegemony [...] [b]ut it becomes obscured as soon as it is called upon to face problems that remain within its jurisdiction but which point beyond the limits of capitalism<sup>1776</sup>

The 'limit' referred to is a point beyond which the negative results of class dominance can be perceived as such; for example, the dehumanization which commodified labour requires, as this implies ethical responsibility and social

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<sup>1774</sup> Jameson, 'The Cultural Logic of Capital', in *New Left Review*, 146, (1984), (p.66). In 'Historicism Effaces History' Jameson uses Debord to suggest that history is replaced by pseudo-events or 'spectacles' and the past thus becomes a collection of images that cut society off from its organic relationship to that past: 'a society bereft of all historicity'.

<sup>1775</sup> Easton Ellis, p.1.

<sup>1776</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.54.

change. For Lukács, such 'recognition' would entail an abolition of class interest. However, this is a 'limit' *within* which Sherman McCoy's identity is formed:

On Wall Street he and a few others [...] had become [...] Masters of the Universe. There was [...] no limit whatsoever!<sup>1777</sup>

Marx argues capitalism converts social production to an economic relationship and economic relations, based on 'dehumanization', are mistaken for a social relationship. This explains the reified perspective McCoy and Bateman share; a delusional belief in an exercise of power with 'no limit', through a blindness to any ethical self-recognition obtained through a working class 'Other'. Easton Ellis satirizes Bateman's 'false-consciousness' of independence, like McCoy's: 'I am a noncontingent human being.'<sup>1778</sup> Every aspect of *American Psycho* relies on this paradigm for its satire of such 'false-consciousness': labour, excluded from a fetishized world of reified 'images', is re-introduced as violence to puncture and contradict or 'blur' this separation. It is a negative use of capitalism's hidden reality against its own image, that claims to reflect social reality.

Like Orwell's 'telescreen', or Kundera's propaganda, Easton Ellis' 'image' encroaches upon the personal territory of free time (leisure activities, romantic relationships) and ideologically shapes characters' identity through a 'pseudo-society' of media figures, models and celebrities. Characters emulate them and use fake tan ('Q.T. *Instatan*'<sup>1779</sup>), attend the gym (Bateman's is called *Xclusive*, an ironic reference to this general pursuit) and meet at restaurants, bars and clubs made fashionable by magazines. Bateman's identity turns on 'recognition' in its mediated form, as limited by resemblance to an 'image'; 'Bethany looks absolutely stunning, *just like a model*'.<sup>1780</sup> Bateman regularly replaces the 'image' for a human 'Other': 'I masturbate [...] about a near-naked model [...] in a Calvin Klein advertisement'.<sup>1781</sup> The 'image' allows human relations to be replaced by its commodified form: 'Sex happens - a hard-core montage'.<sup>1782</sup> Bateman starts to find the human form unfamiliar, rejecting it and preferring the 'inhuman',

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<sup>1777</sup> Wolfe, p.11.

<sup>1778</sup> Easton Ellis, p.377.

<sup>1779</sup> Easton Ellis, p.21.

<sup>1780</sup> *Ibid.*, p.231.

<sup>1781</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>1782</sup> *Ibid.*, p.303.

commodity form instead: 'I'm beginning to think that pornography is so much less complicated than actual sex, and because of this [...] so much more pleasurable.'<sup>1783</sup> This normalizes the reversal of the concrete and abstract, the human and 'image'; 'I am so used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies'.<sup>1784</sup> 'False-consciousness' thus prevails.

Thematically, erotic desire takes form through 'images', expressed through models and pornography. As in *Austerlitz*, the final logic of this objectification of human beings is death, which plays out here at an extreme through the trope of 'snuff' movies. This reappears in Easton Ellis' *Glamorama* (1998). Bateman tortures, rapes and murders women, re-introducing the 'image' as 'snuff' movie to its actual referent - the lived reality of women - bringing together the concrete and abstract aspects of commodification to thereby strain the ethical limits and moral acceptability of capitalism more generally.

Easton Ellis gives Bateman, as a first-person narrator, a Modernist form of subjectivity but in the negative. As in *Austerlitz*, instead of expressing unique, spontaneous emotion, Bateman's inner life is foregrounded to emphasize its emptiness and alienation. Media and technology occupy a central place in the social landscape and Bateman's consciousness records this excessive mediation; 'I take out a Panasonic pocket watch with a three-inch diagonal colour TV [...] before turning to my computer terminal'.<sup>1785</sup> At a textual level, Easton Ellis uses a technique of listing to reduce Bateman's interior monologue to brands and products, precluding any 'recognition' of identity conferred by a social, human 'Other'; 'Ralph Lauren monogrammed boxer shorts [...] a Fair Isle sweater [...] silk polka-dot Enrico Holdin slippers'.<sup>1786</sup> He uses an 'advertising' idiom to reinforce this absorption of personal identity in reified form: 'Foltene European Supplement [...] contains complex carbohydrates that penetrate the hair shafts for improved strength and shine'.<sup>1787</sup> Bateman's consciousness, as the negative of self-expression, sees Gordon's Modernist 'images' or Sartre's choices replaced by a sequence of 'spectacular', interchangeable, meaningless forms, whether

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<sup>1783</sup> Ibid., p.264.

<sup>1784</sup> Ibid., p.265.

<sup>1785</sup> Easton Ellis, p.67.

<sup>1786</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>1787</sup> Ibid., p.27.

commodities, movies, adverts or brands: 'J&B I am thinking [...] Fusilli I am thinking [...] Porsche 911 [...] sharpei I am thinking'.<sup>1788</sup> Although immediate, through fashionable fads and products, this records a historically specific period. As Debord writes: 'the world we see is the world of the commodity.'<sup>1789</sup> Bateman's 'fragmented' psyche resembles Debord's 'false-consciousness' and an alienation that results from screens, which is *all* that can be seen, thus all that there *is* - as far as Bateman is aware.

Easton Ellis' use of exaggeration demonstrates how 'spectacular' mediation enables laws of equivalence and exchange to condition society. Characters mistake one another as if equivalents; 'Paul Owen seems fairly sure that *I'm* Marcus'.<sup>1790</sup> Characters wear the same brands, becoming exchangeable; 'Charles Simpson - or someone who looks remarkably like him, slicked-back hair, suspenders, Oliver Peoples glasses.'<sup>1791</sup> The 'image' produces homogeneity not identity, like Debord's negation of 'real choices'.<sup>1792</sup> Interchangeability defines Bateman's most personal desires. On marriage, he muses: '*Why not end up with her?* [...] everyone is interchangeable anyway'.<sup>1793</sup> Identity, alienated in Debord's spectacular terms finds both 'Self' and 'Other' indeterminate, in being produced by the same economic rules: 'I've seen this look on someone's face before. Was it in a club? [...] Had it appeared on a movie screen recently? Or had I seen it in the mirror?'<sup>1794</sup> This exchangeability of subject and 'image' makes individual identity impossible yet the novel's final section explores Bateman's search for authenticity.

If the 'image's dominant logic is all that there *is*, Easton Ellis satirizes this by exaggerating serial exchange, pushing it to fantastical extremes. This reveals that exchange makes meaning contingent, to the point that meaning is thereby destroyed. Television chat show topics change daily but become untenable. As 'exchange' depends on form, not content, meaning is ultimately irrelevant: '[o]n the *Patty Winters Show* this morning a Cheerio sat in a very small chair and was

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<sup>1788</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>1789</sup> Debord, p.29, Thesis 42.

<sup>1790</sup> Easton Ellis, p.142.

<sup>1791</sup> Easton Ellis, p.127.

<sup>1792</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p.39, Thesis 60.

<sup>1793</sup> Easton Ellis, p.379.

<sup>1794</sup> Easton Ellis, p.369.

interviewed for close to an hour'.<sup>1795</sup> Food, given a fetishized form, becomes inedible through a similar seriality and exchange that sees Bateman's served a 'weird kind of gazpacho with raw chicken in it'.<sup>1796</sup> In a late capitalist world of 'exchange', epistemic knowledge is degraded to form, therefore 'meaning' only derives from Bateman's ability to differentiate between brands, which, Stephen Busonik observes is 'in a very real sense [...] the foundation of Bateman's epistemic commitments'.<sup>1797</sup>

However, Easton Ellis' chief purpose in creating this surface of screens or 'appearances', the substance of Bateman's false-consciousness, is to re-introduce the material 'essence' of commodities - labour - through a symbolic violence to insist that 'dehumanization' is an indivisible part of commodity production and thereby *contradict* its reified 'appearance'. The novel's infamous violence thus operates politically, in an 'anti-spectacular' mode of contradiction to express an oppositional position. Bateman embodies capitalism as both a venerated banker and murderous psychopath. Through characterization, profit and inhumanity are collapsed, drawing together what 'appearance' aims to keep separate. At the level of language, violence interrupts semiotic meaning to confuse the reified status of signs which denote mass consumption: 'I'll have a decapitated coffee [...] I mean *decaffeinated*'.<sup>1798</sup> Again, this strategy of reintroduction and contradiction works through the novel's themes; for example, the commodification of desire through prostitution - 'commodities' *literally* consumed in Bateman's acts of cannibalism: 'I'm [...] eating the girl's brain, gobbling it down, spreading Grey Poupon over hunks of the pink, fleshy meat'.<sup>1799</sup> Again, violence works through description, fixing the contemporary moment by associating fashionable brands with bloodshed; "[b]loodstained Kleenex will lie crumpled by [...] an empty carton of Italian seasoning salt I picked up at Dean & DeLuca".<sup>1800</sup> Violence is represented as inherent to commodification, recurring as

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<sup>1795</sup> Ibid., p.386.

<sup>1796</sup> Ibid., p.364.

<sup>1797</sup> Stephen Busonik, 'Epistemic Structuralism in the Postmodern Novel: The Examples of William Gaddis, J.G. Ballard and Bret Easton Ellis' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1993), p.239.

<sup>1798</sup> Easton Ellis, p.372.

<sup>1799</sup> Easton Ellis, p.328.

<sup>1800</sup> Ibid., p.176.



part of Bateman's 'everyday life', rupturing the surface of 'appearances': 'I buy a Dove bar, a coconut one, in which I find part of a bone.'<sup>1801</sup>

Any survey of criticism of *American Psycho* establishes it is categorized as a Postmodern novel. For example, Martin Weinreich uses Baudrillard's theory of 'simulation' and 'hyperreality' to identify its narrative techniques, writing that its 'description of the environment [...] differs from traditional realistic narrative strategies because Patrick's detailed account [...] only supply an immaculate surface.'<sup>1802</sup> Thus, Easton Ellis is said to 'simulate' or create epistemic meaning through branding; 'Patrick's fixation on the commodity and [...] "objects-come-signs" [...] create a form of hyperrealist aesthetics.'<sup>1803</sup> Using Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) he explains that labour is done away with to create a simulation of value 'according to the structural definition' of late capitalist society, i.e. signification. Therefore, Bateman consumes objects whose value derives from 'a signifying relation' and, echoing Young, concludes this mimetic strategy aligns 'the novel's form and content.'<sup>1804</sup>

Michael P. Clark's Postmodern interpretation focuses on textuality and affect. He defends the novel's violence as a Lacanian 'Real' that integrates with language (Lacan's 'Symbolic' order), to perform an aesthetic demonstration of ethics constructed through language. Novelistic language, Clark argues, gains distance in a work of art as it depends on a rhetorical relation to readers that relies on the *difference* between words and the actions they represent.<sup>1805</sup> Thus, Easton Ellis is said to represent violence, which need not be *real*, in order to appeal to ethical judgement, an obligation inherent to language as a social form; 'readers [...] responsible for [...] others [...] through the rhetoric of address.' This demonstrates that the epistemological function of language, its implied ethics, shared by readers and Bateman as narrator, is entirely undermined by a non-referential, unstable relationship between signifiers and signifieds; 'discourse fails to provide

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<sup>1801</sup> Ibid., p.386.

<sup>1802</sup> Martin Weinreich, "'Into the Void': The Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*", in *American Studies*, 49, (2004), pp.65-78, (pp.67).

<sup>1803</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1804</sup> Weinreich, "'Into the Void': The Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*", p.66; p.67.

<sup>1805</sup> Michael P. Clark, 'Violence, Ethics and the Rhetoric of Decorum in "*American Psycho*"', *Bret Easton Ellis, American Psycho, Glamorama, Lunar Park*, ed. by Naomi Mandel, (London: New York: Continuum, 2011), p.21.

stable points of authority and expression'.<sup>1806</sup> This is Jameson's Postmodern or 'postreferential epistemology'.<sup>1807</sup> Language isolates rather than binds characters as Lyotard's: 'purely rhetorical relation between speakers and listeners'.<sup>1808</sup> For Clark, this explains why it is impossible for Bateman to elicit condemnation from other characters for the violence he perpetuates. Young suggests this use of language is evidence of Derrida's 'endless circularity and deferral of meaning'.<sup>1809</sup> Mandel's analysis of Young's critique also defines the novel's violence as aesthetic, i.e. not *real* and meaningful only at Lacan's textual level of language:

the violence in the novel is not real, it merely appears real, and thus evokes or performs, a different kind of reality <sup>1810</sup>

Clark, Young and Mandel argue violence is only textually 'real', required to establish an ethical response through a reader as 'Other'. Through horror and affect, a reader is aligned with Bateman's victims to produce condemnation. Mandel argues that despite a confusion between factual acts and their literary representation, we are expected to make ethical judgements, but, with no clear dichotomy between representation and the 'real', the text itself practices a familiar tabloid style of violence we cannot separate ourselves from as 'not real', as Baudrillard suggests. However, Clark, Young and Mandel never investigate the source of the text's divorce between words and their referents, beyond Derridean theory, undertaken below using Debord's theory.

Key to understanding Bateman's language is class and capitalist economics. Despite Bateman's 'Mastery' of the circuit of capital and commodities, he suffers from 'false-consciousness', from capitalism's subject-object reversals reinforced by media, which objectify and dehumanize *him*. Bateman is defined by his wealth and his fiancée looks at him 'not with adoration but with something closer to greed'.<sup>1811</sup> Bankers are equivalent to commodities, emphasized by the pun on his

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<sup>1806</sup> Ibid., p.24; p.27.

<sup>1807</sup> This thesis, p.193.

<sup>1808</sup> Clark, *Bret Easton Ellis: American Psycho, Glamorama, Lunar Park*, ed. by Naomi Mandel, p.23.

<sup>1809</sup> *Shopping in Space*, p.100.

<sup>1810</sup> Naomi Mandel, "'Right Here in Nowheres": 'American Psycho and Violence's Critique', in *Novels of the Contemporary Extreme*, (London: New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 9-19, (p.11).

<sup>1811</sup> Easton Ellis, p.338.

friend Tim *Price*'s name and self-description: 'I am an *asset*'.<sup>1812</sup> *The Bonfire of the Vanities* relies on a conventionally Realist strategy of a reversal of fortune to bring McCoy to a working class position and correct his 'reified' perspective or self-perception through his fall in a *social* world. In Easton Ellis' narrative, the 'image' makes such social recognition impossible. The working class are objectified, beyond 'humanity', beyond Hegelian 'recognition' as images assume society's place. Easton Ellis makes a virtue of Lukács' criticisms of a Modernist solipsistic narrative subject. Bateman's lack of emotional, psychological motivation issues from the screen's alienation, a lack of *social* self-recognition, reinforced by media, that leaves Bateman isolated. Recognition becomes a defunct process, reflected in his empty, affectless tone: 'she is searching for a rational analysis of who I am, which is [...] an impossibility: there ... is ... no ... key'.<sup>1813</sup> Bateman gives full meaning to Lukács' description of the capitalist as a 'puppet' ('the capitalist is nothing but a puppet'<sup>1814</sup>) as there is no individual psychology or 'key'; he is the economy's object as much the novel's 'bums'. Easton Ellis uses Bateman's delusion of a 'limitless', unaccountable, unrestrained use of power, inherent to his class position, to undermine it through extreme violence (sometimes to comic effect) that recalls the Master/Slave dialectic. Bateman's *social* position is the 'key' that unlocks his acts of humiliation, sadism and murder, designed to make his lack of ethics both shocking and ridiculous: 'I brush past a crying bum [...] he's also *blind* and I step on his foot'.<sup>1816</sup> However, the systemic nature of Lukácsian reification prevents Bateman from recognizing that *this* - class dominance - causes his psychopathy and he instead mistakes himself for an isolated case, a 'monster of reality'.<sup>1817</sup> Like Frankenstein's monster, Bateman is formed by, but oblivious to, the negative consequences of capitalist mastery that shape him.

If the novel has a plot, the last half of the novel is driven by Bateman's anguish and determination to find his identity, or at least the source of his psychopathy. Again, this is satirical; his class position precludes any revelation or 'recognition' beyond 'images'. This fruitless search is underpinned by the novel's textual

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<sup>1812</sup> Easton Ellis, p.3.

<sup>1813</sup> Easton Ellis, p. 264.

<sup>1814</sup> *History and Class Consciousness*, p.133.

<sup>1816</sup> Easton Ellis, p.82.

<sup>1817</sup> Easton Ellis, p.304.

descent into a linguistic, epistemic lack of meaning. Postmodern criticism (like Clark's or Mandel's) suggest this aesthetically recreates Derrida's circuitous signs that replace a relationship of signifier and objective world. However, like De Lillo's Oswald, Bateman's relationship to an 'image' defines his identity by divorcing it from actual, class relations and the struggle therein, which is the wider frame of the novel's action, discussed in the following paragraph. Bateman's self-conception is indeterminate, because of equivalence:

I'm imagining myself on television, in a commercial for a new product - wine cooler? tanning lotion? <sup>1818</sup>

The screen's mediation of identity results in interchangeability and *this* is the source of language's problematic instability, for example, its non-referential status, evident in Bateman's confusion of Proper Nouns, which threatens epistemic knowledge:

"that's not Madison for Christ sakes, that's Turnball," and the guy who I thought was Madison is *greeted* by two other guys [...] then Price [...] shakes Ebersol's hand and says, "Hey Madison"<sup>1819</sup>

If a basic function of language is to name, proper nouns are no longer textually fixed and Bateman's name changes to 'Davis'<sup>1820</sup> and 'Donaldson'<sup>1821</sup> in the same sentence, bringing interchangeability to the textual surface, causing the breakdown of language's 'use-value' by exchange (i.e. its ability to make meaning). Such dysfunction problematizes subjectivity itself, as language is unfit for self-expression, making 'identity' impossible. If Hegel's subject arrives at equality as an *objective* property through 'recognition', the basis of both ethics and language (i.e. a community of speakers), the 'image' destroys such a premise. If Bateman has no such identity, he cannot be *recognized* and therefore cannot be *heard* or *seen* by characters (a community) - a state like Debord's 'spectacular' alienation; 'I mean does anyone really see anyone else? Did *you* ever see *me*? [...] What does that mean?'<sup>1822</sup> Here, signifiers are defunct due to

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<sup>1818</sup> Easton Ellis, p.372.

<sup>1819</sup> *Ibid.* p.55.

<sup>1820</sup> *Ibid.* p.387.

<sup>1821</sup> Easton Ellis, p.388.

<sup>1822</sup> Easton Ellis, p.238.

an *image* whose circuitry delimits their meaning through exchange and contingency - a failure not inherent to language, as Derrida argues.

*American Psycho* is less often read through Marxist, materialist criticism. Linda Kaufman uses Debord to suggest that Bateman's labels need to be seen, implying a necessary social world beyond the image.<sup>1823</sup> Likewise, James Annesley argues the novel presents; 'contradictions of the free market system [in] conflict with moral values'.<sup>1824</sup> Finally, John Conley makes critical use of the period's 'war on the poor' in late 1980s New York and this historical context best supports my argument that Easton Ellis reconstructs antagonistic class relationships, a context in which its 'image' operates through themes of desire, identity, conflict and madness.

Conley suggests Mayor Dinkins' gentrification of New York's Lower East side, (like the urbanism Debord opposes) lends Bateman's hostility a *historical* class context:

On December 14, 1989, while Bret Easton Ellis was finishing *American Psycho*, the entire park population was forcibly evicted, their belongings hauled away [...] That night also happened to be the coldest one of the winter, to which then parks commissioner Henry J. Stern cynically quipped, 'It would be irresponsible to allow the homeless to sleep outdoors' (qtd. in Smith, *New Urban* 5).<sup>1825</sup>

Hence Tim Price's dismissal of 'a mayor who won't [...] let the fucking bitch freeze to death'.<sup>1826</sup> Price's callousness is satirized as seemingly worse than the Mayor's, whose inhumanity is disguised by a false display of decency, of reified feeling. The novel aligns a dominant class position with the state, making it adversarial toward the working class. Easton Ellis' 'anti-ideological' strategy of re-introducing violence, as labour's hidden reality, back into abstract, reified 'appearances' or 'images' in terms of contradiction is a strategy Conley observes

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<sup>1823</sup> Linda Kaufman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (CA: University of California Press, 1998), p.250. She observes that 'use-value' is no longer important in comparison to an image or label's 'cachet in the market place'.

<sup>1824</sup> James Annesley, 'Violence', in *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel*, (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp.11-37, (p.17).

<sup>1825</sup> John Conley, 'The Poverty of Bret Easton Ellis' in *Arizona Quarterly*, 65, (2009).

<sup>1826</sup> Easton Ellis, p.6.

operating in *Glamorama* (1998). Conley relates how the consumption of luxuries at a glamorous party is interrupted by a contradictory phenomenon of a smell:

“the smell of shit rising up and faintly floating over the room” [...] this olfactory recrudescence hijacks Ellis’s sentence [...] radically estranging its content [...] the olfactory is able to break through this almost exclusively visual universe<sup>1827</sup>

Therefore, contrary to the arguments of Clark, Young and Mandel, while Easton Ellis uses Realist detail to specify a brand and create a surface, the violence described must be equally *real* for its horror to obtain the force necessary to displace the reified experience successfully. The novel is not mimetic, as Weinreich argues, in attempting to align the novel’s ‘form and content’. Rather the surface is recorded in painstaking detail to allow a very different ‘content’ (dehumanization) to be represented, in contradiction its reified ‘form’.

In conclusion, Easton Ellis is as concerned as Wolfe, or Realists like Dickens and Hugo, to present class inequalities inherent to capitalism. Conley even suggests Easton Ellis attempts to make ‘yuppies’ and ‘bums’ “typifications” in the Lukácsian sense’.<sup>1828</sup> However, his radical innovation produces a very different novel to *Les Misérables*. Hugo presents characters, such as Fantine, in abject poverty and key events are described in terms of a violence and horror equal to any passage of *American Psycho*:

“Jesus!” said Marguerite. “What’s wrong with you, Fantine?”  
“There’s nothing wrong with me,” replied Fantine.  
“On the contrary, now my little girl won’t die of that terrible disease [...]”  
As she spoke, she showed the old maid two napoléons [...]  
“Where did you get these gold louis?”  
“I got them,” replied Fantine.  
And with that, she smiled. The candle lit her face.  
It was a bloody smile. Reddish saliva besmirched the corners of her mouth and inside her mouth was a black hole.  
The two teeth had been ripped out. She sent forty francs to Montfermeil.<sup>1829</sup>

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<sup>1827</sup> Conley, p.7.

<sup>1828</sup> Conley, p.11.

<sup>1829</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, (London: Vintage, 2008), p.156.

Fantine is known for her pretty smile. The differences between the novels lies in generic convention and style, not subject or sympathies. Easton Ellis presents a social world (narrative time and space) through Bateman's mind, whereas Hugo or Dickens present characters as part of objectively, directly opposed classes, as in *Les Misérables*, where conflict unfolds upon barricades. However, just as Debord builds on Luxemburg's position to theorize working class opposition subsumed by an 'image', Easton Ellis similarly represents inequality recuperated in an 'image' of the working class and this complicates any traditional use of Realist structure.

New York is the setting for Easton Ellis' class war. Although 'Reaganomics' entrenches a gulf between classes, the narrative seems to locate class opposition at the city's surface, through 'images', to suggest superficiality; walls, buildings and buses are plastered with 'faded posters of Donald Trump on the cover of *Time* magazine'<sup>1830</sup>, interchangeable with 'another poster for *Les Misérables*'.<sup>1831</sup> Such opposite 'images' might at first appear modelled on Baudrillard's 'copy' without an original. For Hugo's novel, once critical, is turned into a cultural commodity and takes multiple media forms: 'the advertisement for *Les Misérables*'<sup>1832</sup> reappears as 'the British cast recording of *Les Misérables*'<sup>1833</sup> and is the equivalent of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* that, as the musical *Oliver!*, appears in the text as; 'the new British musical *Maggie!*'<sup>1834</sup> However, despite this seriality, Easton Ellis presents a different vision to Baudrillard's, to make a different point.

Realist novels construct a social world through class, given a historical background, and identify characters through class coordinates which are a biting point of conflict and social change. Easton Ellis demonstrates this social context is replaced by interceding 'images', accompanied by a correlative loss of 'recognition' of class opposition, that seems relegated to only superficial representation. However, his narrative retains a class situation external to this 'spectacular' consumption; the 'bums', hungry homeless and prostitutes that resemble Hugo's poor. This enables Easton Ellis to present the shift from Hugo's

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<sup>1830</sup> Wolfe, p.163.

<sup>1831</sup> Easton Ellis, p.4.

<sup>1832</sup> Easton Ellis, p.3.

<sup>1833</sup> Easton Ellis, p.182.

<sup>1834</sup> Easton Ellis, p.142.

direct class contradictions to a contradiction between Bateman's consumption of 'false' images of society but *real*, hidden hostility to the working class. For example, asked to suggest a graduation gift for a colleague, he replies; '[a] poster from *Les Misérables*?'<sup>1835</sup> Bateman reacts to a poster of Eponine as to a Calvin Klein advert: 'I kiss the drawing of Eponine's lovely face'.<sup>1836</sup> However, Bateman, while he consumes an 'image' of the working class, perceives no continuity whatsoever between Eponine and the prostitutes he murders, to whom he feels no social, ethical recognition or obligation. Realism's socio-historical construction suggests a possible 'recognition' of class perspectives that vanishes in this novel; Jean Valjean's desperate poverty and subsequent wealth does not preclude him from taking Fantine's perspective, just as McCoy finally takes a working-class perspective.

Readers may find the novel's class contradictions pointed and obvious, but, once replaced by the screen, Bateman cannot understand society in such terms; class is as arbitrary and contingent as any other form that requires indeterminate seriality for meaning. Bateman demonstrates this when he mistakes a female student for a homeless person:

I find myself eyeing a very pretty homeless girl sitting on the steps [...] and dropping a dollar into the Styrofoam cup I say, "Good luck."  
Her expression changes and because of this I notice the book - Sartre - in her lap and then the Columbia book bag by her side and finally the tan-coloured coffee in the cup and my dollar floating in it [...] she looks at me [...] and shouts, "Hey, what's your goddamn problem?"<sup>1837</sup>

This reference to Sartre suggests Bateman's error in believing his alienation (psychopathy) is an existential, personal condition, for Easton Ellis alternatively constructs alienation and 'recognition' through a material, class paradigm. The same grounds upon which Debord opposes Sartre.

Easton Ellis, like Orwell, engages with a paradox, as he gives the 'image' a historical context while screens circumscribe any consciousness of historical

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<sup>1835</sup> Easton Ellis, p. 122.

<sup>1836</sup> Easton Ellis, p.150.

<sup>1837</sup> Easton Ellis, p. 86.



context. Eponine is presented like Debord's 'static image'<sup>1838</sup>, stripped of the social struggle in which she was conceived; her 'image' substitutes for possibilities of an ethics present to Hugo's period, supported by his narrative class inequalities and addressed through his liberalism (he supported the July Revolution of 1830). Eponine's 'image', for Easton Ellis, obstructs a concept of opposed classes or a historical 'totality', and the ethical principle is supplanted by the commodity relation with a subsequent loss of social responsibility. Easton Ellis' novel cautions that 'static images' halt Hugo's revolutionary history, resulting in Debord's 'frozen time'<sup>1839</sup>, allowing the development of an extreme social 'rift' represented in *American Psycho*.

However, Easton Ellis 'bookends' the novel by using a final reference to history, impossible to record within the limits of Bateman's 'false consciousness'. The novel opens with Dostoevsky's novella to emphasize the *historical* premises of Bateman's character; 'such persons [...] must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed'.<sup>1840</sup> The novel closes with another historical cognate, spoken by Bateman as narrator, as he negatively acknowledges the period's typically ahistorical sensibility; 'History is sinking and only a very few seem dimly aware that things are getting bad.'<sup>1841</sup> 'Bad' here refers to the disappearance of social context and a correlative lack of ethical responsibility to an impoverished class which leads to Bateman's self-acknowledged '[d]isintegration'<sup>1842</sup> that, like Debord's 'catatonia', results from 'images' severing identity or 'self-conception' from a formative, socio- historical context.

The novel ends with Bateman's monologue, an ironic enactment that mirrors, but fails to achieve, the social and historical status of Dostoevsky's subject. For Bateman is unconscious that class conflict, rather than 'images', determines him, inviting a comparison between Dostoevsky's period, when Realism was still viable, and Easton Ellis' redeployment of elements of Realist structure (social

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<sup>1838</sup> Debord, p.65, Thesis 95.

<sup>1839</sup> Debord, p.141, Thesis 200.

<sup>1840</sup> Easton Ellis, p.1.

<sup>1841</sup> Easton Ellis, p.385.

<sup>1842</sup> Easton Ellis, p.395.

class oppositions), required to make class relevant to identity in the Reagan-Thatcher period:

this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar or in a club in New York, maybe anywhere, at the end of the century and how people, you know, me, behave, and this is what being Patrick means to me I guess, so, well, yup, uh...<sup>1843</sup>

Easton Ellis' 'image' effects an ahistoricism that severs the connection of identity to society and history, which causes Bateman's 'disintegration' (alienation) but ironically presents this contemporary condition as a historical fact.

### **5.3.3. Trainspotting**

Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting on a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit crushing game shows

*Trainspotting*<sup>1844</sup>

*Trainspotting* (1993) by Irvine Welsh, the last 'anti-spectacular' novel under discussion, was published two years after *American Psycho* and continues to engage with the Reagan-Thatcher era. However, Welsh confronts alienation from the opposite side of its class divide, offering a working-class point of view and voice. Grant Farred observes it invokes a tradition of working class fiction; 'Trainspotting is the voice of the disaffected, the postmodern, the postindustrial'.<sup>1845</sup> Again, the novel is overwhelmingly interpreted as Postmodern

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<sup>1843</sup> Easton Ellis, p.399.

<sup>1844</sup> Welsh, p.188.

<sup>1845</sup> Grant Farred, 'Wankerdome: "Trainspotting" as a Rejection of the Postcolonial', in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103 (2004), p. 217.

(Lucy Burke<sup>1846</sup>; Ian Haywood<sup>1847</sup>; Alan Freeman<sup>1848</sup>) due to its incidental plotting, multiple characters and non-linear, episodic structure, said to 'fragment' the narrative through multiple perspectives that make the narrative open-ended. However, as Welsh also makes the 'image', class and consumption central, it might also be interpreted through Debord's theory. In part, Haywood's approach supports this, as he places Welsh in a working class literary tradition of experimentation that includes James Kelman and Alan Warner (i.e. the rejection of punctuation, use of a 'low' rather than 'high' register) which explores 'the decline of traditional industrial society, and the [...] impact this process has on [...] the formation of subjectivity, and class consciousness'.<sup>1849</sup> Further, Haywood suggests Welsh represents a youth underclass facing a crisis of class identity in a 'new landscape of insidious oppressions'<sup>1850</sup>, signalled by widespread drug addiction.

Welsh relates the 'image', as a vehicle of class dominance and consumption, to the protagonist, Mark Renton as he struggles to define his identity and, like Easton Ellis, situates this within an extreme socio-economic divide. The 'image' might be considered one of Haywood's 'oppressions'. Families on deprived housing estates endlessly watch television; '*Bruce Forsyth's Generation Game*'<sup>1851</sup> on 'the box'<sup>1852</sup>, which Sick Boy derisively calls the 'pox-box'.<sup>1853</sup> As Debord argues, Welsh's youth underclass is defined by its relationship to media:

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<sup>1846</sup> Lucy Burke, 'Consuming Subjects: Choice, Ethics and Individualism in *Trainspotting*', in *Consuming for Pleasure; Selected Essays on Popular Fiction*, ed. by Julia Hallam & Nickianne Moody (Media Critical and Creative Arts, Liverpool John Moores University, Association for Research in Popular Fictions: Liverpool, 2000). p. 62-76 (p.63). She interrogates the politics of choice through postmodernism; the multiplicity of choice lends characters freedom from traditional forms of identity, authority and universal morality, but this risks amorality: 'postmodernity marks a liberation from 'absolute obligations' and thus heralds the demise of ethics and moral responsibility'.

<sup>1847</sup> Ian Haywood, *Working Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Northcote House Publishers: Plymouth, 1997). Chapter 4, Post-Industrial Fictions (pp.139-160) An extremely brief account of Welsh's novel as a postmodern 'debunking of the western Enlightenment tradition', by representing 'codes [as] dead narratives' (p.158).

<sup>1848</sup> Alan Freeman, 'Ghosts in Sunny Leith: Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*', in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* ed. by Susanne Hagemann, Scottish Studies 19 (1996). See p.252. Freeman presents the novel's language and philosophical position through Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault; 'our world is not founded upon the totalising structures of grand narratives'.

<sup>1849</sup> Haywood, p.151.

<sup>1850</sup> Ibid., p.151.

<sup>1851</sup> Welsh, p.36.

<sup>1852</sup> Welsh, p.4.

<sup>1853</sup> Welsh, p.28.

a 'video generation'<sup>1854</sup>, who read the 'NME'<sup>1855</sup> and watch televised sport ('Scottish Football Today'<sup>1856</sup>). Sick Boy refuses to be seduced by entertainment: 'I fucking detest televised football'.<sup>1857</sup> As Renton relapses into heroin addiction, he watches Van Damme action movies ('jist leave us wi Jean-Claude'<sup>1858</sup>) to suggest his passivity, disengagement and damage is as much a product of 'images' as drugs. This is clear from Sick Boy's disapproval: 'you choose tae sit in darkened rooms watchin videos aw day long'. Desire, agency and identity are all formed in relation to media images. Sick Boy models himself on James Bond: 'the young Sean Connery'.<sup>1859</sup> Begbie models himself on action heroes: 'some gratuitously violent video [...] demonstrating karate blows, throttlings, stabbings'.<sup>1860</sup> As Debord theorizes, (masculine) identity takes on interchangeable media forms; 'Chuck Norris', 'Jean-Claude Van Damme' and films worthy of Easton Ellis' satire - '*Braddock: Missing in Action*'.<sup>1861</sup>

However, Welsh's 'image' does not shape identity as Butler's Foucauldian, performative form of subjectivity, a socially shifting construct. Whether screens, mass consumption, leisure or low skilled service sector jobs, these aspects of 'everyday' life are all framed by a narrative objectivity, constructed on a basis of class division, enabling Welsh's 'image' to be represented in oppositional terms. Welsh's 'image' is an instrument of class oppression, just as Orwell's Proles are diverted from their common oppression by 'films, football [and] beer'.<sup>1862</sup>

Michael Gardiner compares Welsh to Alexander Trocchi, on the basis of Debord's 'anti-urbanism' and *dérives*. Trocchi, a novelist, was briefly a member of the I.S. and a heroin user. Gardiner writes that Trocchi's *dérives* in Glasgow were aimed at combatting urban redevelopment; 'Glasgow's rehousing [that] took place between 1958 and 1965'.<sup>1863</sup> Welsh's characters have grown up in Edinburgh,

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<sup>1854</sup> Welsh, p.198.

<sup>1855</sup> Welsh, p.32.

<sup>1856</sup> Welsh, p.15.

<sup>1857</sup> Welsh, p.42.

<sup>1858</sup> Welsh, p.3.

<sup>1859</sup> Welsh, p.12; p. 29.

<sup>1860</sup> Welsh, p.77.

<sup>1861</sup> Welsh, p.73; p.3; p.152

<sup>1862</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.88.

<sup>1863</sup> Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting; Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2006), p.73.

specifically the housing estates of Leith and Muirhouse. Just as *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *Austerlitz* use this narrative mode of wandering to express an experience of socio-economic repression, so too Welsh uses Edinburgh's landscape to give the novel's present, or narrative space and time, an *ongoing* relationship to a historical class dominance.

This point is best made by the eponymous passage near the end of the novel. Renton arrives at Waverley station, at the top of Leith Walk, that connects Edinburgh to London in a symbolic representation of England as a colonial power. Waverley is the main route to the Edinburgh Festival, a symbol of both dominant and consumer culture. Renton watches 'middle-class cunts [...] troop out ay the opera [...] making for the restaurants at the top ay the Walk'.<sup>1864</sup> Class division and oppression is reflected in accents; the Festival contrasts a 'posh English-colonial'<sup>1865</sup> register with Renton's vernacular. Welsh thereby sets up class oppression through a post-colonial sensibility present to the city and language. The first day of the Festival is also the first day of Renton's detox. Class positions are mirrored in these parallel but contradictory experiences. The novel gradually establishes addiction as a working-class counterpoint, or resistance, to class dominance. As in *American Psycho*, where *Les Misérables* represents the loss of art's critical potential through mass culture, Welsh demonstrates that Brecht is a degraded commodity, in a narrative context of a similar class 'rift'. For, ironically, middle class students from Nottingham University stage:

Brecht: The Caucasian Chalk Circle [...] a miserable pretension  
tae the arts before graduating to work in [...] investment  
consultancies which shut doon factories, throwing people into  
poverty and despair.<sup>1866</sup>

Renton drifts downhill from Leith Walk - 'downhill all the way'<sup>1867</sup> - taking in an urban topography that maps his working class position as one of decline, of reaching not simply a spatial 'bottom' but an economic one, in the abandoned Central Station which lies at 'the Fit ay the Walk'. Closer to the docks and housing estates this landscape simultaneously recalls both the thriving trade of Empire

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<sup>1864</sup> Welsh, p.306.

<sup>1865</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>1866</sup> Welsh, p.29.

<sup>1867</sup> Welsh, p.306.

and full employment of a skilled working-class and a current state of mass unemployment. As Renton observes; 'Git a train tae anywhair fae here, at one time'. The novel records a past, English, colonialism turn inward, to make the working class the butt of Thatcher's socio-economic policies, replacing opportunities - a 'future' destination symbolized by train travel - with mass unemployment, symbolized in the now 'barren, desolate hanger'.<sup>1868</sup>

Welsh represents historical time through landscape and topography – for example, the two stations - but in terms of class. This class history is given generational measure, for example, through an encounter with Begbie's destitute father who asks: 'What yis up tae lads? Trainspottin, eh?'<sup>1869</sup> If the British Empire made labour centrally important and 'trainspotting' possible, in Leith this term is used ironically to refer to junkies who take heroin in derelict stations and are not 'trainspotting'. Welsh's working-class perspective thereby reverses the meaning of the station, as a positive symbol of Empire to replace it with Thatcher's disenfranchisement through class positions present in the narrative sweep of historical time.

Welsh's 'image' does not function in Foucault's performative terms but within such class opposition; for the imperative to 'choose life'<sup>1870</sup> is an ideological management of the 'everyday' desires, self-conception and identity of the working class, as in *Libra*. Working-class characters find their *choices*, identity or oppositional possibilities subsumed once determined by consumerism (i.e. football, white goods etc.). For example, if football is considered Debord's 'leisure' activity, Edinburgh's working class are divided into Hearts and Hibbs supporters, a tribalism that destroys their unitary identity, leading Steve to reflect; 'Football divisions were a stupid and irrelevant nonsense [...] ensuring that the bourgeoisie's hegemony went unchallenged.'<sup>1871</sup> This conversion of identity into a 'false' tribal form is, further, easily converted into a nationalism that serves the

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<sup>1868</sup> Welsh, p.308; p.308; p.308.

<sup>1869</sup> Welsh, p.309.

<sup>1870</sup> Welsh, p.188.

<sup>1871</sup> Welsh, p.48.

army and state, as supporters shout 'Jambo' before racist taunts of 'Fuckin Paki'.<sup>1872</sup>

For the conversion of working-class identity by consumption and leisure benefits big business and the state. Welsh describes Edinburgh as altered by speculation and capital, 'spectacular' in Debord's sense. Pennnywell Lane is a 'shopping centre' built 'twenty years ago', served by a 'dual carriage way', but its 'steel shuttered units have never been let', like the 'car park where cars never parked'.<sup>1873</sup> If Central station is symbolic of the central place 'labour' once held, it is: 'soon tae be demolished and replaced by a supermarket and swimming centre.'<sup>1874</sup> A Thatcherite programme of regeneration erases both communal memory as a context of identity, as in the novels of Sebald and Kundera. Edinburgh's pubs turn into 'American-theme bar[s]'.<sup>1875</sup> Renton describes Edinburgh's transformation as 'deadened by tourists and shoppers, the twin curses of modern capitalism' and his comments on tourism and the interchangeability of urban space reflect Debord's position: 'the castle [is] just like the British Home Stores or Virgin Records.'<sup>1876</sup> Leith's shipbuilding industry is replaced by tourism, resulting in mass unemployment and non-unionized, less skilled, poorly paid service industry jobs. This is reflected in Spud's ambivalence when, in an interview for a job as a hotel porter, he is asked; 'what specifically attracts you to the leisure industry?'<sup>1877</sup>

Welsh suggests the state promotes British nationalism and military ambition through 'images', in contradiction to working-class interests. Renton's brother Billy, a soldier, dies in Northern Ireland and is described as an 'imperialist lackey'<sup>1878</sup>, an 'ignorant victim ay imperialism'.<sup>1879</sup> Similarly, the son of a family's friend dies in the Falklands: 'Brian nivir came back [...] ah'll hate that Thatcher till ma dyin day'.<sup>1880</sup> Billy's identity, like Oswald's, is subsumed by his televised 'image'; 'He made the *News at Ten* [...] the cunt had a posthumous fifteen

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<sup>1872</sup> Welsh, p.49.

<sup>1873</sup> Welsh, p.18.

<sup>1874</sup> Welsh, p.308.

<sup>1875</sup> Welsh, p.62.

<sup>1876</sup> Welsh, p.228.

<sup>1877</sup> Welsh, p.67.

<sup>1878</sup> Welsh, p.133.

<sup>1879</sup> Welsh, p.210.

<sup>1880</sup> Welsh, p.320.

minutes ay fame'.<sup>1881</sup> Welsh might construct multiple forms of identity, but read as Debord's 'spectacular' forms not Foucault's performative forms, they demonstrate a conversion of working class interest into that of an opposite class, in a dialectical fashion.

Welsh's contradiction of the screen, as ideological surface, operates through the narrative's class oppositions, as with the other 'anti-spectacular' novels. Space and time are established through class conflict and dialectical, historical conversions, as evidenced by the urban topography. Characters like Renton and Tommy attempt to be oppositional and seek an identity beyond the screen's forms, as, respectively, consumer and football hooligan, while Billy and Sickboy assume the identities of soldier and playboy. Even Begbie's 'anti-Englishness' can be read as an attempt to be oppositional. However, if resistance is possible, Renton rejects Begbie's Scottish nationalism, as Farred notes, because it re-inscribes Scottish failure in relation to colonial power, to make Scots 'porridge wogs'.<sup>1882</sup> Farred argues that if Scottish nationalism is a form of oppositional identity, it draws on a *myth* of Highlands resistance; a 'national self-delusion [...] clothed in [...] a heroic oppositionality'.<sup>1883</sup> Compare this with the class context Welsh supplies as a motivation for opposition; for example, Thatcher's sale of council houses (Thatcher's Housing Act, 1980) which abandons a post-war socialist vision of good council housing, replacing it with the ambition of private ownership. Tommy's flat is 'a prison', but Renton explains: '[i]t's no really the council's fault; the Government made them sell off all the good hooses, leaving the dross for the likes ay Tommy.'<sup>1884</sup> Those unable to buy are left in estates that become 'ghettos' of unemployment, decay and addiction.

Socialism and punk are respectively political and cultural forms of identity and resistance that are alternatives to Scottish nationalism. Renton struggles with both. His belief in socialism is born from his attraction to freedom. However, socialism is framed negatively in dogmatism, as Sick Boy complains; 'socialists

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<sup>1881</sup> Welsh, p.211.

<sup>1882</sup> Welsh, p.180.

<sup>1883</sup> Farred, 'Wankerdome: "Trainspotting" as a Rejection of the Postcolonial', in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* p.220.

<sup>1884</sup> Welsh, p.315; p.135.



go on about your comrades, your class, your union, and society'.<sup>1885</sup> Punk also embraces freedom, but is co-articulated with drug use, represented by Iggy Pop and Elvis Costello. Renton remembers an Iggy Pop concert:

he sings the line: "America takes drugs in psychic defence" only he changes "America" for "Scatlin", and defines us mair accurately in a single sentence than all the others<sup>1886</sup>

Easton Ellis uses Bateman's 'false-consciousness' to illustrate how an 'image' erodes his perception of class conflict through cultural consumption, thus Bateman fails to read Iggy Pop's band, The Stooges, as the originators of punk rebellion: 'I used to hate Iggy Pop, but now that he's so commercial I like him a lot better'.<sup>1887</sup> In opposite terms, Welsh uses Iggy Pop to identify Renton's working class position, but through drug use which coarticulates confrontation with disaffection and damage. Costello is therefore the backing track, so to speak, of Renton's heroin use: 'that new Elvis Costello [...] Fuckin magic man'.<sup>1888</sup> Punk, co-articulated with drug use, indicates an oppositional agency defeated by Tory economic policy, in the consequent apathy that erodes rather than defines working-class identity.

Nevertheless, Welsh does make heroin addiction a symbolic resistance, opposed to ideological forms of identity; i.e. consumer, football supporter, soldier. Apart from Begbie, all characters are addicts. Welsh thus creates an oppositional class perspective, in contradiction to any ideological appropriation and reverses its claims, a reversal that belongs to the narrative, historical class context. For example, Renton's identity as a heroin addict is a refusal chosen in contradiction to, and negates the positivity of, the consumer values of a dominant class: 'ah choose no tae choose life'.<sup>1889</sup> Gardiner suggests that Welsh, like Trocchi, presents heroin use as an 'anti-work form of action'<sup>1890</sup>, a refusal of work Debord articulates as a negation of capitalism ('*Ne Travaillez Jamais!*'<sup>1891</sup>). Welsh

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<sup>1885</sup> Welsh, p.30.

<sup>1886</sup> Welsh, p.75.

<sup>1887</sup> Easton Ellis, p.217.

<sup>1888</sup> Welsh, p.7.

<sup>1889</sup> Welsh, p.188.

<sup>1890</sup> Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting*, p.90.

<sup>1891</sup> Merrifield, p.23. 'Debord [...] daubed in chalk [...] on a wall [...]: *Ne Travaillez Jamais!* ('never work')'.

negatively reflects dominant ideology through Renton's addiction, as a counterpoint that creates a wider sense of a working-class resistance to consumerism: 'ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer'.<sup>1892</sup> For example, advertised goods (washing machines, cars, television) that define 'life' are reflected in Renton's life revolving around heroin: 'Ah love nothing (except junk) [...] and ah fear nothing (except not scoring)'.<sup>1893</sup> Desire, fulfilled in a 'false' form of pleasure through consumption is negatively reflected in the heroin high. If Easton Ellis uses prostitution to symbolize this corruption of desire by consumption, Welsh similarly uses the sexualized body to reflect capitalist corruption, but through addiction, as Renton admits: 'Yesterday ah hud tae shoot intae ma cock'.<sup>1894</sup> Alison similarly injects with 'an orgasmic groan'.<sup>1895</sup> Addiction like consumption involves credit or debt; Renton likens heroin to a credit card that 'always seems tae gie, before it takes back, wi interest. [*sic*]'<sup>1896</sup>

Welsh's narrative class 'rift' is the material basis that underpins this negative correspondence between Thatcherite ideology and an addict's code. Consumer 'images' break society apart through greed and competition to alienate any 'recognition' of identity in the 'Other', an ideology reflected in addiction, as Sick Boy attests: 'the real junky [...] doesnae gie a fuck aboot anybody else'.<sup>1897</sup> Renton complains of the alienation involved: 'ah've nivir felt so alone'.<sup>1898</sup> He repeats his dealer's mantra, suggesting it might equally apply to consumer society: "'We are all acquaintances now" [...] seems [...] a brilliant metaphor for our times'.<sup>1899</sup> However, this negative correspondence proves more accurately an opposition, with a dialectical aspect, as the working class perspective almost entirely subsumes the positive values attached to Thatcherism through Welsh's intense, negative descriptions of addiction. Welsh's topography consistently draws out this dialectical tension. For example, Edinburgh's 'spectacular' identity as Europe's capital of culture, the home of the Edinburgh Festival, also has the highest number of cases of A.I.D.s in Europe, the result of heroin, not cultural,

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<sup>1892</sup> Welsh, p.187.

<sup>1893</sup> Welsh, p.21.

<sup>1894</sup> Welsh, p.86.

<sup>1895</sup> Welsh, p.9.

<sup>1896</sup> Welsh, p.79.

<sup>1897</sup> Welsh, p.7.

<sup>1898</sup> Welsh, p.175.

<sup>1899</sup> Welsh, p.11.

'consumption'. Renton's heroin use becomes a microcosm of such dialectical reversals of dominant values that operate at a macrocosmic level. Such narrative dialectical transformations of the symbols of dominant culture by a counter-cultural working-class is, in principle, a *détournement*.

Renton resists multiple, 'false' forms of identity that operate like Debord's 'schizophrenia' to the benefit of the economy and state. Renton rejects them all; whether football tribalism (the 'international male language ay fitba [...] its [...] tediousness depresses the fuck oot ay us'<sup>1900</sup>), masculine violence ('Ye think ah'm Jean-Claude Van Fuckin Damme?'<sup>1901</sup>) or consumption ('[d]esire [...] stimulated by advertising [...] the media and popular culture'<sup>1902</sup>). Easton Ellis constructs Bateman's *bourgeois* consciousness within the limits of the 'spectacular' consumer forms he can afford. Renton experiences an opposite working-class social exclusion, a marginalization that makes him conscious of living outside of this limit; there is no Althusserian 'interpellation'. Yet, finally, Welsh suggests that addiction is not a radical opposition but a stasis, captured in Debord's term 'catatonia'. Drug induced 'passivity' results from sustained oppression and political defeat, demonstrated in the permanence of Renton's addiction; 'ah don't think change is an option fir us'.<sup>1903</sup> Class dominance achieves an end to resistance, a historical stasis suggested by the state's methadone program ('state-sponsored addiction'<sup>1904</sup>) and benefits system ('git-a-man, git-a-bairn, git-a-house [...] lassies [...] hud no real chance ay defining herself outside ay they [...] terms ay reference'.<sup>1905</sup>) Through Billy, Renton's brother, Welsh suggests that addiction is an ironically self-defeating mode of opposition ('negation'). Billy's pun on 'shooting' ('shooting up') relates but *conflates* 'soldier' and 'junky' as only superficially different identities: 'Bein in the army, it's like bein a junky. The only difference is thit ye dinnae git shot at sae often bein a junky.'<sup>1906</sup> The working class are profoundly oppressed, whether by

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<sup>1900</sup> Welsh, p. 237.

<sup>1901</sup> Welsh, p.5.

<sup>1902</sup> Welsh, p.185.

<sup>1903</sup> Welsh, p.57.

<sup>1904</sup> Welsh, p.177.

<sup>1905</sup> Welsh, p.220.

<sup>1906</sup> Welsh, p.133.

Thatcher's domestic policy of de-industrialization, British foreign policy or the marginalization and risks (i.e. A.I.D.S.) that addiction involves.

*American Psycho* ends by focusing on a sign next to a fire-escape that declares; 'This is not an exit'.<sup>1907</sup> Easton Ellis thus suggests that cultural representations of aestheticized horror do not provide entertainment as an escape from the economic situation thereby represented. Welsh, in a final part the novel called 'Exit', differently gestures toward working class emancipation. Renton's refusal of 'spectacular' forms of identity is only a self-perceived resistance (i.e. as a punk or junky) that appears to *him* to be a *choice*. Welsh stresses the Romantic nature of this concept of subjectivity, or belief that individual expression is a form of transcendence; '[m]ost junkies [...] were closet romantics'.<sup>1908</sup> However, Welsh sustains Renton's working-class resistance, as an 'anti-spectacular' subject who refuses to submit and 'choose life', at an authorial level. Renton gets clean and abandons Edinburgh - an exit - and the Romantic impulse of the 'junky', or formlessness of another possible identity, is retroactively converted into a space of denial thus resistance. Renton's absence reinforces a refusal of dominant ideology as a tangible space in the text, a space of resistance left open by his departure. This creates a stronger contradiction of reification, suggesting possibilities beyond its forms.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This thesis has explored cultural movements and critique as responses to the contemporary alienation of 'everyday' life, a result of what Braverman calls: 'monopoly, militarism, imperialism, nationalism' and 'the [...] "breakdown" tendencies of the capitalist system'.<sup>1909</sup> From the Russian Revolution (1917), through the First (1914) and Second World Wars (1939) to the later collapse of Soviet Communism (symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall) responses to alienation take vastly different forms, even under the umbrella of Modernism - or Postmodernism. Different approaches perhaps relate to political positions, class or national identity, especially if affiliated to the Russian revolution, for example, the distorted official art of Socialist Realism. Mayakovsky's Futurist poetry and

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<sup>1907</sup> Easton Ellis, p.?

<sup>1908</sup> Welsh, p.295.

<sup>1909</sup> Braverman, p.10

Russian Formalism (i.e. Victor Shklovsky) for example initially embrace the revolution's positive vision of socialism, but its approach comes to take on scientific, structuralist features that later define Stalinism (the second period of Communism, 1924-28). A very different approach to Modernist innovation inspires Musil and Woolf, exemplified in Ezra Pound's demand to 'make it new' and renew a European literary tradition.<sup>1910</sup> Russian Formalists hoped to make literature widely accessible but the ex-Cambridge Bloomsbury set, who thrived despite a small circulation of their works, often published by the Hogarth Press or *The Criterion* (1922-39), could be accused of elitism.

In 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin, yet Soviet troops crushed the Hungarian Revolution; thus, a widespread disillusionment with Communism on the European 'Left' contributed to cultural criticism in France developing in a direction sceptical of Marxism, through figures such as Sartre, Barthes and Derrida, leading Sartre to exclaim that from 1924 to 1968 Marxism stopped.<sup>1911</sup> The ambitions of the Russian Revolution, betrayed by totalitarianism, ended in *Glasnost* and the uprisings of Eastern Europe from 1989-1991 (Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia) that dismantled the Soviet Union. The Cold War competition between East and West became more clearly economic and strategic, rather than principally ideological. Like nation states, Russia, China, America and Europe were understood to participate in the same global markets and institutions and to depend on media for their domestic success, whether advertising or propaganda. Debord's account of the 'image' as society's most prevalent form of contemporary alienation perhaps appears more convincing than it seemed initially.

If Rodney Livingstone calls the *Das Wort* debate a battle 'over the historical meaning of modernism'<sup>1912</sup>, perhaps Lukács perceives it more as a battle for the relevance of a Marxist method of criticism, distinguished from Stalinist Socialist Realism, despite a prevailing critical aversion to Hegelian-Marxism. Adorno's comment in 'Commitment' (1962) that '[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is

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<sup>1910</sup> Ezra Pound, poet and editor of T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) contributed to early issues of Eliot's *The Criterion* (1922-1939) and published a selection of critical essays entitled *Make it New* (1934). His translation of a French translation of a Chinese anecdote led to this injunction that demands creation as renewal and reinvention.

<sup>1911</sup> Anderson, p.42. Although Sartre's later work embraces Marxism's dialectics and is credited with renewing critical interest in Marxism.

<sup>1912</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 5.

barbaric'<sup>1913</sup>, articulates a wider rejection of Hegelian rationalism and associated nineteenth century cultural forms (such as the Realist novel), as a logic that seemed to legitimate a nationalistic Nazi state, leading Adorno to support autonomous, if apparently apolitical, art. Wollen suggests that because Hegel was studied in pre and post-war France, French intellectuals were able to absorb the Lukácsian, dialectical model of 'false-consciousness' of *History and Class Consciousness* when it was translated in 1958.<sup>1914</sup> However, this later political climate explains why Debord's renewal of Lukács' method in a critique of the contemporary alienation of his own day was not embraced like Baudrillard's theory of the 'simulacrum'. Like Lukács before him, Debord attempts to isolate this method from both Stalinism and the anti-Hegelian, anti-Marxist critical currents of his day, almost replaying Lukács' struggle.

This thesis takes a retrospective, counter-factual position and uses Debord's theory as a tool of Marxist criticism. For the method of *The Society of the Spectacle* no longer appears enmeshed in Stalinism, as it did in 1960s France. Debord's prescience merits this. He offers a more political method of analysing the 'image' and alienation in novels than Postmodern theories. While Modernist movements of course vary, what they have in common is a reaction against nineteenth century Realism, perceived as entirely mimetic. However Realism, Lukács argues, valuably constructs a character's 'thoughts and feelings'<sup>1915</sup> in relationship to a socio-historical world; their concepts 'grow out of the life of society'<sup>1916</sup> which provides 'the general structure of immediate reality'.<sup>1917</sup> Realism constructs society from a historical standpoint, through which its class structure and a character's inner life are viewed together; history becomes a method of distinguishing a character's ideologically mediated thought, by relating it to an economically dominant class, allowing its bias to be perceived as unjust or untrue. Modernism sacrifices this critical potential, removing the historically conditioned 'essence' of characters for a stream of consciousness in a form (imagery) Lukács calls a 'vacuity of content'.<sup>1918</sup> Representing alienation and

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<sup>1913</sup> Adorno, *Prisms*, p. 34.

<sup>1914</sup> Wollen, p.30.

<sup>1915</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 30

<sup>1916</sup> *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 30

<sup>1917</sup> Ibid. See 'Expressionism; Its significance and decline', p.2

<sup>1918</sup> Ibid., p.15

'false-consciousness' without social causes makes it appear a natural condition: a 'reflection of a distortion becomes a distorted reflection' of reality.<sup>1919</sup>

Using Debord's theory to read alienation in the novel is not intended to be a reductive analysis of the socio-economic factors of texts, nor revive or endorse Realism. This thesis has shown that Barthes' re-footing of high and low culture as semiotic forms thus equivalents is pivotal and validated mass culture, which originally threatened the autonomous status Adorno gives culture, as articulated by Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935). While Postmodernism claims this marriage of high and low culture is a liberation, expansive in place Eliot's exclusivity (which it undermines), culture becomes implied in mass culture due to a lack of distinction.

Modernist innovation and exaggeration ('distortion') is a self-consciousness of form that develops in Postmodernism to emphasize 'form' over 'content' and technical novelty, which often becomes a thrilling part of the sensory aesthetic experience itself. If Modernist formalism sacrifices the social territory of class structure and history, this develops in Postmodernism; for example, textual 'play' is often a self-conscious, technical pleasure in the reuse of literary devices and genres. However, this ironic repetition or parody of genres, the exclusive focus on form, might also be said to demonstrate a 'vacuity of content'.

For example, Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) might be compared to a photograph of Marilyn Monroe used in I.S. Journal No. 8 (1963) as a critique of the alienation of desire that late capitalism and mass culture involves. However, like Warhol's *Sixty Last Suppers* (1986), whereby Leonardo de Vinci's famous religious painting is represented as overly reproduced, Postmodernism ultimately reflects on mass reproduction, alienation (and even the construction of aesthetic form itself) as a revelation of meaninglessness. The Modernist innovation that stakes its value on achieving profundity, in Postmodernism indicates that form cannot impart any meaning or significance, often to comic effect as, for example, in Jeff Koon's *Balloon Dog* (1994) that recreates the form (surface) of a balloon from stainless steel. However inventive, thrilling and amusing, the Postmodern focus tends towards meaninglessness. Debord, however, considers aesthetic

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<sup>1919</sup> Ibid., p.53.

innovation justified only if serving politically meaningful ends ('extremist innovation is historically justified'<sup>1920</sup>).

Postmodern novels are the literary equivalent of this direction taken in art. Perec's *Things* could be said to prefigure Houellebecq's *Atomized*, as it reflects alienation and 'everyday' life in terms of meaninglessness, similarly found in Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991). In the 1990s, Coupland, Jay McInerney and Tama Janowitz, alongside Easton Ellis, were celebrated as Postmodern authors who defined the late-capitalist alienation of their generation. *Generation X* focuses on expensive rents in cities, competitive, uncertain professional careers and the accumulation of commodities as life's main goal, thus might appear comparable with *American Psycho*. Characters respond by deciding to 'quit everything'<sup>1921</sup> and drop out. Taking a deskilled 'McJob'<sup>1922</sup> characters save to travel, ending up in an inexpensive suburb of Palm Springs ('a failed housing development from the 1950s'<sup>1923</sup>) - again, seemingly comparable to Welsh's characters, who refuse to 'chose life'. The central characters of *Generation X* 'drop out' and move to the desert to: 'make new lives for themselves in the [...] quest to find a personal truth'.<sup>1924</sup> Coupland draws on the Modernist practice of aestheticization (i.e. Sartre's daily choices as a mode of self-narration) in this attempt to live 'life as art' and record personal 'significant moments' as an authenticity in the face of alienation, meaninglessness. Elvissa asks: 'What one moment [...] defines what it's like to be alive on this planet? [...] Fake yuppie experiences that you have to spend money on, like white water rafting [...] don't count.'<sup>1925</sup> Although deployed as a resistance to alienation, conformity, the banality of media, this creativity proves a defeated, Postmodern, self-conscious use of narration as a 'form' that fails: 'most of us will be lucky if any [...] moments connect together to form a story that anyone would find remotely interesting.'<sup>1926</sup> The reduction of social conflicts and history to a self-conscious use of aesthetic form, the Postmodern approach to representation, expresses resistance only in

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<sup>1920</sup> Debord, 'Methods of *Détournement*', in *Situationist International Anthology*, Knabb, p.8.

<sup>1921</sup> *Generation X*, p.42

<sup>1922</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>1923</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>1924</sup> *Ibid.* p.100.

<sup>1925</sup> *Ibid.* p.104.

<sup>1926</sup> *Generation X*, p.29.



a narrative *form* (storytelling), relative to other dominant, alienating *forms* the novel records (i.e. fashion).

The external class situation implied in history is not represented. Coupland foregoes the context in which alienation operates. For example, Claire Baxter's alienation is common to her generation, but articulated through fashion: 'unable to afford what few [...] overpriced apartments exist in the city [...] their money all goes on their backs.'<sup>1927</sup> She dresses in a style called 'decade blending', using '*time* as a colour' to combine styles of various decades that characters term '*time* cannibalizing' (my italics).<sup>1928</sup> Alienation is represented through the commodity form (fashion), that bears typical Postmodern features of irony and relativity, in the narrative's synchronic temporality; historical time is thereby replaced by 'form' that alone must historicize the governing terms of the world, a *time implied* in commodification (fashion), not distinct from Claire's alienation. The novel is set in the Californian desert, reinforcing the present or 'space' as socially and historically featureless. Modernist innovation becomes Postmodern gimmick as slogans and cartoons, related to late-capitalist themes of mass consumption and alienation, are interspersed with the text to comic effect, but lie outside its borders, as if to compensate for relationships that are not represented within it. Rather than representing inequality to challenge it, a chapter is entitled: 'Why Am I Poor?' In terms of language, a glossary of slang produced by capitalist mediation, which identifies this generation, runs along the bottom of pages wherever it is used: 'O'Propriation: The inclusion of advertising, packaging, and entertainment jargon [...] for ironic and/or comic effect'.<sup>1929</sup> This self-conscious device defines the inclusion of mediated terms, whereas the *détournement* of 'anti-spectacular' novels by Orwell, Kundera or Easton Ellis represents the conversion of mediated terms into their opposite meaning, to demonstrate class perspectives and resistance.

If 'reification' is imperceptible as dominant thought, Marxist literary criticism strives to identify its presence in a text. Debord's theory identifies an 'image' as the mouthpiece of 'everyday' ideological influence and his paradigm of 'false-

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<sup>1927</sup> Ibid, p.121.

<sup>1928</sup> Ibid. p.17.

<sup>1929</sup> *Generation X*, p.123.

consciousness', connected to a class structure, indicates its bias. His theory offers a political framework for considering the 'image' in contemporary fiction. Debord's terminology enables a character's alienated self-conception or 'inner life' to be considered in terms of economics, class and history: internal struggles between agency and an 'image' can be read within historical conflicts of the last century, whether the U.S.S.R.'s invasion of Prague in Kundera's novel, DeLillo's Cold War or Welsh's Thatcherite policies in Scotland. Outer conflicts are implied in inner conflicts. However, we are unaccustomed to reading characters and an 'image' in political, historical contexts that challenge Postmodern assumptions of de-totalization and fragmentation. Postmodern narratives strip historical context from dominant forms - whether language or an 'image' - removing Debord's class situation, in which 'images' are actively disempowering within an ongoing, historical class struggle.

In 'anti-spectacular' fiction the 'image' is not significant as McLuhan's *medium*, (i.e. how rules of 'form' determine 'content' or *meaning*). It is significant because its mediation is shown to be repressive in relation to the collective identity and objective goals it retards, offering a historical perspective of an 'image's authoritarian or commercial purpose, giving the 'image' its political aspect. *This* context determines an 'image's meaning, as in Orwell's Big Brother, DeLillo's Kennedy or Easton Ellis' media, distinguishing a more political literary response to alienation than novels by Perec, Houellebecq or Coupland. Ironically, despite the title, Coupland cannot construct a generation's alienation; his novelistic form lacks the context to demonstrate a collective, alienated experience, where resistance to ideological conditioning might play out, as in *Trainspotting*. To identify an 'anti-ideological' approach to representing reification, or differentiate *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting* from *Generation X*, requires Debord's Marxist framework.

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