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Guy Debord

**SOCIETY
OF THE SPECTACLE**

a Black & Red translation
unauthorized
DETROIT
1970



Guy Debord

SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

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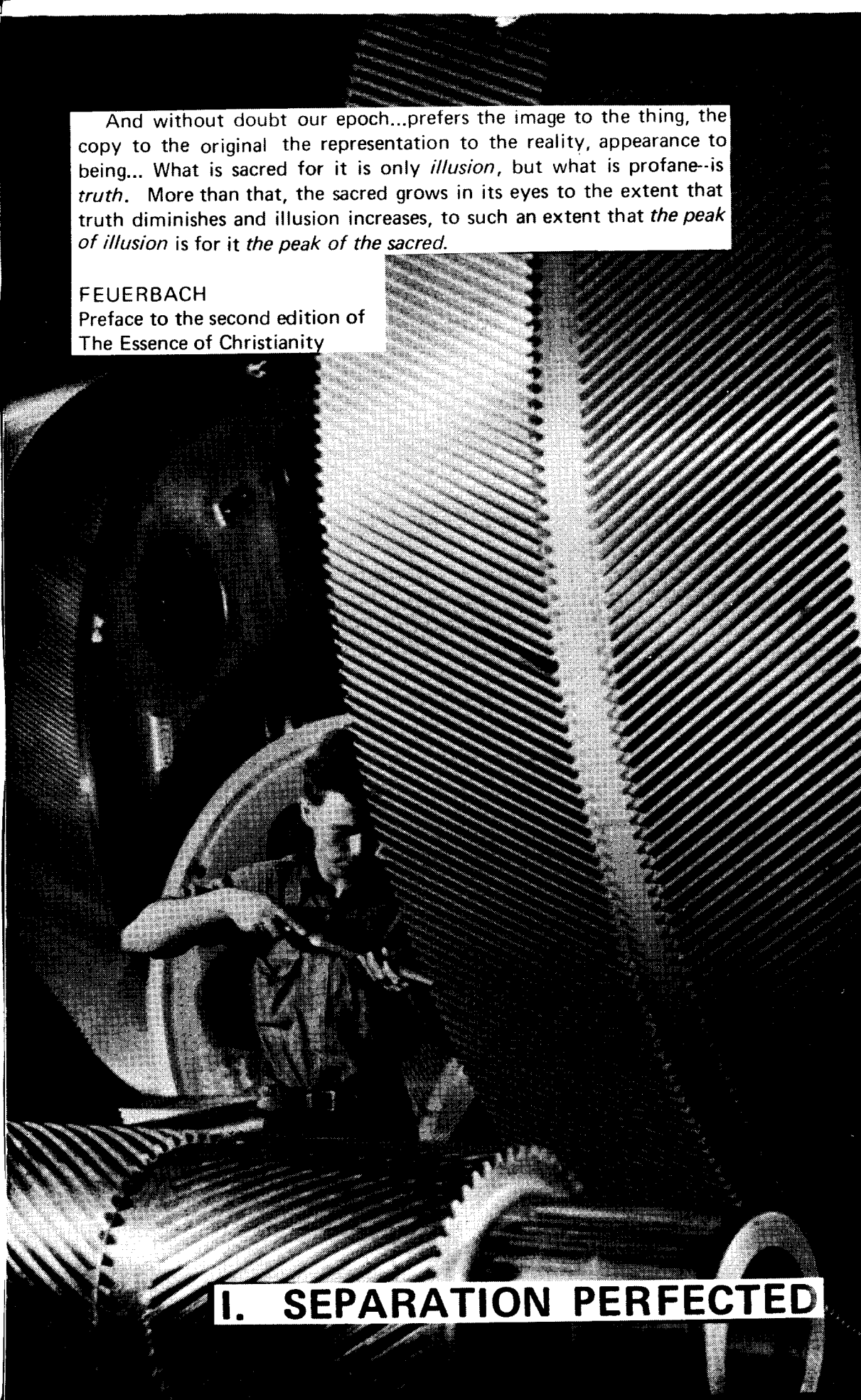
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And without doubt our epoch...prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original the representation to the reality, appearance to being... What is sacred for it is only *illusion*, but what is profane--is *truth*. More than that, the sacred grows in its eyes to the extent that truth diminishes and illusion increases, to such an extent that *the peak of illusion* is for it *the peak of the sacred*.

FEUERBACH

Preface to the second edition of
The Essence of Christianity

I. SEPARATION PERFECTED

1

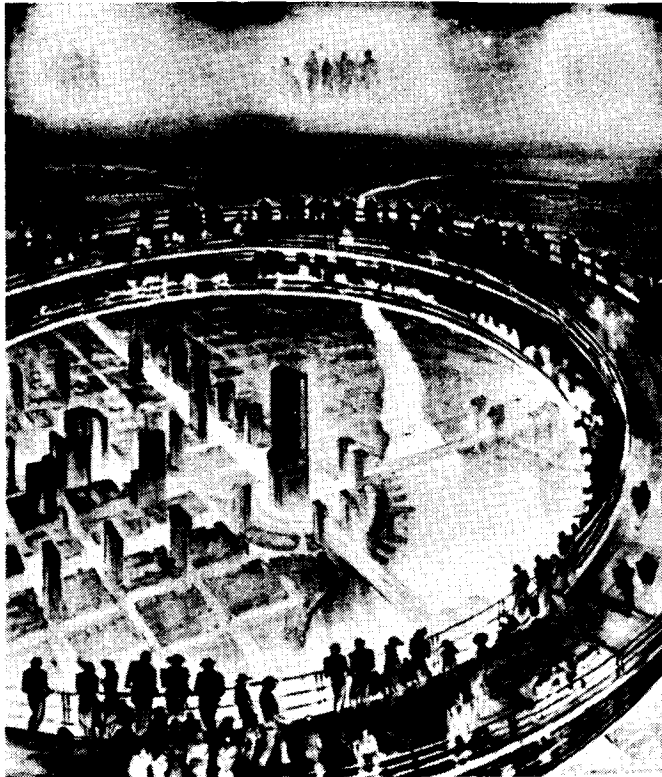
The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

2

The images which detached themselves from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream where the unity of life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered *partially* deploys itself in its own general unity as a pseudo-world apart, an object of contemplation only. The specialization of images of the world is rediscovered, perfected, in the world of the autonomized image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.

3

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as *instrument of unification*. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all looking and all consciousness. Because of the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is the location of the abused look and of false consciousness; and the unification which it accomplishes is nothing other than an official language of generalized separation.



4

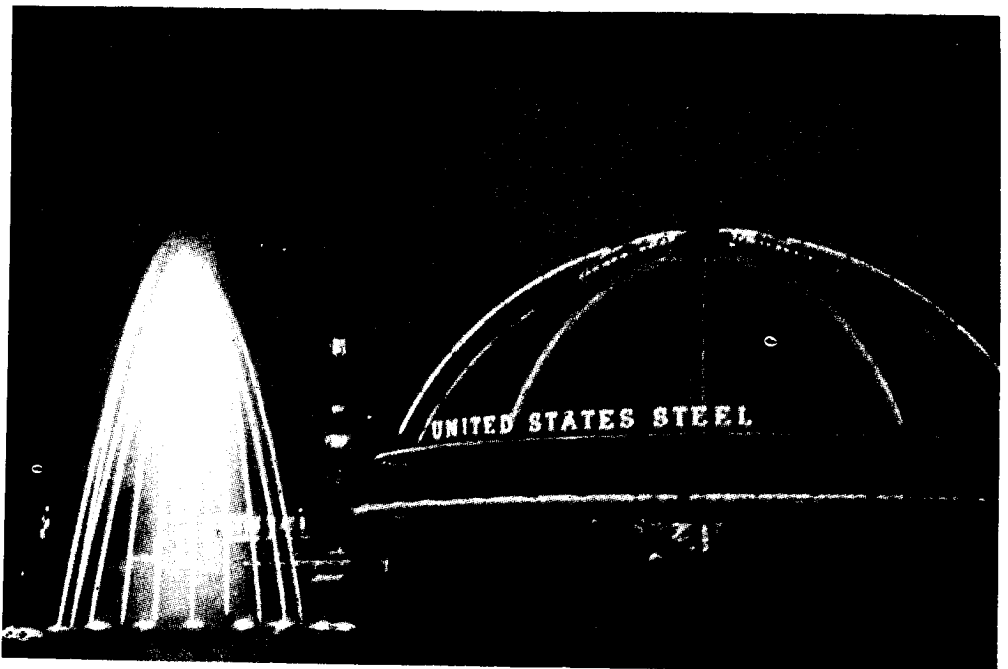
The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images.

5

The spectacle cannot be understood as the abuse of a world of vision, as the product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is, rather, a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a vision of the world which has become objectified.

6

The spectacle, understood in its totality, is simultaneously the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, its added decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, advertisement or direct consumption of entertainments, the spectacle is the present *model* of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The form and the content of the spectacle are identically the total justification of the conditions and the ends of the existing system. The spectacle is also the *permanent presence* of this justification, to the extent that it occupies the principal part of the time lived outside of modern production.



Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis which is split into reality and image. The social practice in front of which the autonomous spectacle parades is also the real totality which contains the spectacle. But the gash within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear to be its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.

One cannot abstractly contrast the spectacle to actual social activity: such a division is itself divided. The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. At the same time lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and it takes up the spectacular order within itself, giving it a positive adhesion. Objective reality is present on both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and the support of the existing society.

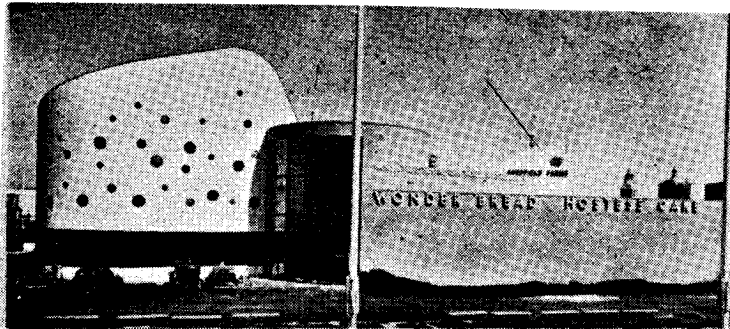
Within a world *really on its head*, the true is a moment of the false.

The concept of the spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are the appearances of this socially organized appearance which must itself be recognized in its general truth. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is the *affirmation* of appearance and the affirmation of all human, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle uncovers it as the visible *negation* of life; as a negation of life which *has become visible*.



To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions, and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish some inseparable elements. When analyzing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves across the methodological terrain of the society which expresses itself in the spectacle. But the spectacle is nothing other than the *sense* of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its *use of time*. It is the historical moment which contains us.

The spectacle presents itself as an enormous unutterable and inaccessible actuality. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears." The attitude which it demands in principle is this passive acceptance, which in fact it has already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.



The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are at the same time its goal. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally *spectaculist*. In the spectacle, image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development is all. The spectacle wants to get to nothing other than itself.

As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general exposé of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the *main production* of present-day society.

The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers.

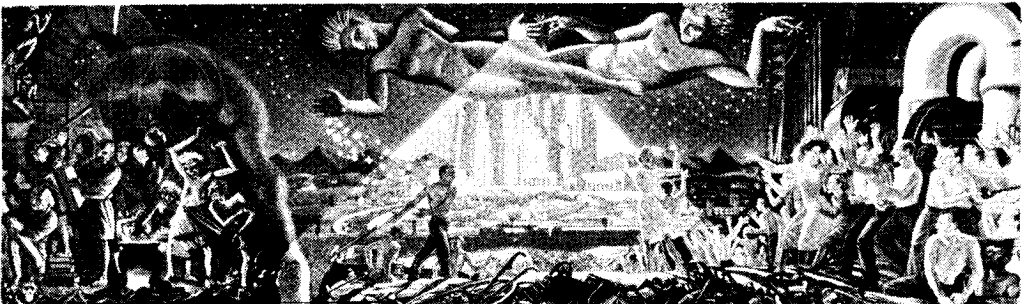


The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life had brought into the definition of all human realization an obvious degradation of *being* into *having*. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*, from which all actual "having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social, directly dependent on social force, shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only because it *is not*.

When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of a hypnotic behavior. The spectacle as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is no longer identifiable with the mere look, even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent *representation* the spectacle reconstitutes itself.

The spectacle is the heir of all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which was to understand activity, dominated by the categories of *seeing*; indeed, it is based on the incessant deployment of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. It does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. It is the concrete life of all which is degraded into a *speculative* universe.

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself overcome theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dissipated the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. Thus it is the most earthly life which becomes opaque and unbreathable. It no longer throws into the sky but houses within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; separation perfected within the interior of man.



To the extent that necessity is socially dreamed, the dream becomes necessary. The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.

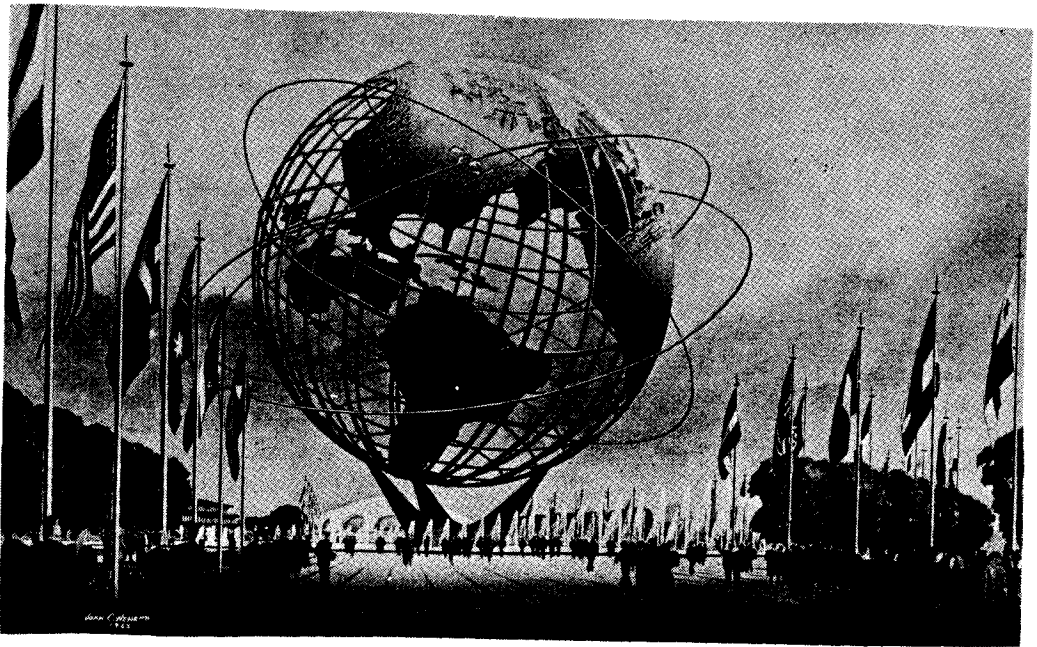


The fact that the practical power of modern society detached itself and built itself an independent empire in the spectacle can only be explained by another fact, the fact that this practical power continued to lack cohesion and remained in contradiction with itself.

The oldest social specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. The spectacle is thus a specialized activity which speaks for the ensemble of the others. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society in front of itself, where all other expression is banished. Here the most modern is also the most archaic.

The spectacle is the uninterrupted conversation which the present order maintains about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the

conditions of existence. The fetishist appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relations hides their character of relations among men and among classes: a second nature seems to dominate our environment with its fatal laws. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a *natural* development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "means of mass communication," which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, may seem to invade society as a simple instrumentation, this instrumentation is in fact nothing neutral but is the very instrumentation which is suited to the total self-movement of the spectacle. If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially *unilateral*. As a result the concentration of "communication" accumulates within the hands of the administration of the existing system the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *State*, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination.



Separation is the alpha and the omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor, the formation of classes, had

constructed a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order with which every power covers itself from the beginning. The sacred has justified the cosmic and ontological order which corresponded to the interests of the masters, it has explained and embellished that which society *could not do*. Thus all separate power has been spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation for the poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition. The modern spectacle, on the contrary, expresses what society *can do*, but in this expression the *permitted* is absolutely opposed to the *possible*. The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product, and it has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred. It shows what it *is*: separate power developing within itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labor into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever more expanded market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which the forces which could have grown have separated and have not yet been rediscovered.



With the generalized separation of the worker from his product every unitary viewpoint of accomplished activity and all direct personal communication among producers, are lost. Accompanying the progress of the accumulation of separate products and the concentration of the productive process, unity and communication become exclusively the attribute of the directorate of the system. The success of the economic system of separation is the *proletarianization of the world*.

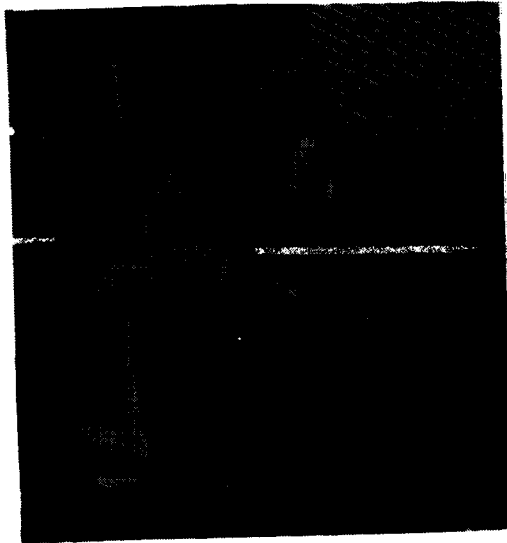
Through the very success of separate production in the sense of production of the separate, the basic experience related in primitive societies to a principal work is in the process of being displaced by non-work, by inactivity, at the pole of the system's development. But this inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity: it depends on productive activity, it is an uneasy and admiring submission to the necessities and the results of production; it is itself a product of its rationality. There can be no liberty outside of activity, and in the context of the spectacle all activity is negated, just as real activity has been captured in its entirety for the global erection of this result. Thus the present "liberation from labor," the augmentation of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor, nor a liberation of the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity stolen within labor can be rediscovered in the submission to its result.



The economic system founded on isolation is a *circular production of isolation*. The technology is based on isolation, and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to television, all the *goods selected* by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of "lonely crowds." The spectacle constantly rediscovers its own assumptions more concretely.

The origin of the spectacle is the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly translated in the spectacle, whose *mode of being concrete* is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world *represents itself* before the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What ties the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it *as separate*.

The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.



The worker does not produce himself; he produces an independent power. The *success* of this production, its abundance, returns over the

producer as an *abundance of dispossession*. All the time and space of his world become *strange* to him with the accumulation of his alienated products. The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which covers precisely its territory. The very powers which escaped us *show themselves* to us in all their force.



32

The spectacle within society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion is mainly the expansion of precisely this industrial production. That which grows with the economy moving for itself can only be the alienation which was precisely at its origin.

33

The man separated from his product himself produces all the details of his world with ever increasing power, and thus finds himself ever more separated from his world. The more his life is now his product, the more he is separated from his life.

34

The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.





II. THE COMMODITY

AS A

SPECTACLE

For it is only as the universal category of total social being that the commodity can be understood in its authentic essence. It is only in this context that reification which arises from the commodity relation acquires a decisive meaning, as much for the objective evolution of society as for the attitude of men towards it, for the submission of their consciousness to the forms in which this reification is expressed.

. . . This submission also grows because of the fact that the more the rationalization and mechanization of the work process increases, the more the activity of the worker loses its character as activity and becomes a contemplative attitude.

Lukacs

History and Class Consciousness.

In the essential movement of the spectacle, which consists of taking up within itself all that existed in human activity *in a fluid state*, in order to possess it in a coagulated state, as things which have become the exclusive value by their *formulation in negative* of lived value, we recognize our old enemy, *the commodity*, who knows so well how to seem at first glance something trivial and obvious, while on the contrary it is so complex and so full of metaphysical subtleties.

This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by "intangible as well as tangible things," which reaches its absolute fulfillment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which at the same time are recognized as the tangible *par excellence*.

The world at once present and absent which the spectacle *makes visible* is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived. And the world of the commodity is thus shown *as it is*, because its movement is identical to the *estrangement* of men among themselves and vis-a-vis their global product.

The loss of quality so evident at all levels of spectacular language,



of the objects it praises and the behavior it regulates, merely translates the fundamental traits of the real production which brushes reality aside: the commodity-form is through and through equal to itself, the category of the quantitative. It is the quantitative which the commodity-form develops, and it can only develop within the quantitative.

39

This development which excludes the qualitative is, as development, itself subject to a passage into the qualitative: the spectacle signifies that it has crossed the threshold of its own abundance; this is as yet true only locally at some points, but is already true on the universal scale which is the original context of the commodity, a context which its practical movement, encompassing the Earth as a world market, has verified.

40

The development of productive forces has been the real unconscious history which built and modified the conditions of existence of human groups as conditions of survival, and extended these conditions: the economic basis of all their enterprises. Within a natural economy, the commodity sector represented a surplus of survival. The production of commodities, which implies the exchange of varied products among independent producers, could for a long time remain craft production, contained within a marginal economic function where its quantitative truth was still masked. However, when commodity production met the social conditions of large scale commerce and of the accumulation of capitals, it seized the total domination of the economy. The entire economy then became what the commodity had shown itself to be during the course of this conquest: a process of quantitative development. This incessant deployment of economic power in the form of the commodity, which transformed human labor into commodity-labor, into *wage-labor*, cumulatively led to an abundance in which the primary question of survival is undoubtedly resolved, but in such a way that it is constantly rediscovered; it is posed over again each time at a higher level. Economic growth frees societies from the natural pressure which demanded their direct struggle for survival, but at that point it is from their liberator that they are not liberated. The *independence* of the commodity was extended to the entire economy over which it rules. The economy transforms the world, but transforms it only into a world of economy. The pseudo-nature within which human labor is alienated demands that it be *served* ad infinitum, and this service, being judged and absolved only by itself, in fact acquires the totality of socially permissible efforts and projects as its servants. The abundance of com-

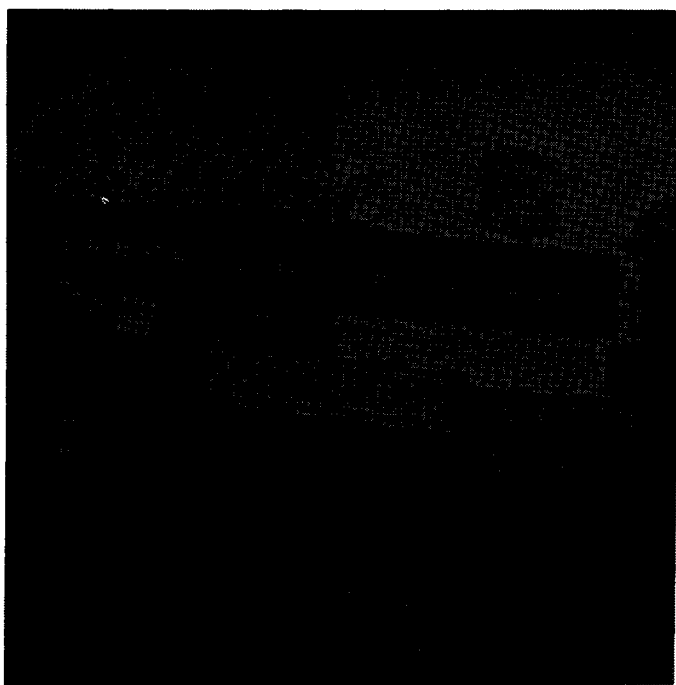
modities, that is, the commodity relation, can be no more than augmented survival.

41

The domination of the commodity was at first exerted over the economy in an obscure manner; the economy itself, the material basis of social life, remained unperceived and not understood, like the familiar which remains unknown. In a society where the concrete commodity is rare or unusual, it is the apparent domination of money which presents itself as an emissary armed with full powers which speaks in the name of an unknown force. With the industrial revolution, the division of labor in manufactures, and mass production for the world market, the commodity appears in fact as a power which comes really to *occupy* social life. It is then that political economy takes shape, as the dominant science and as the science of domination.

42

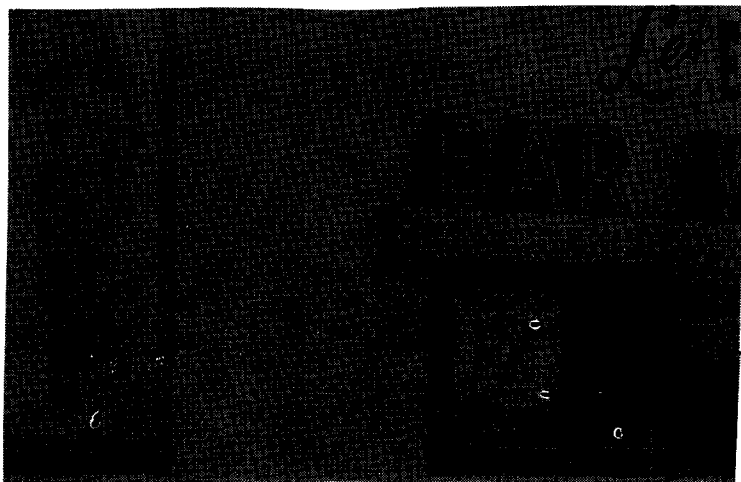
The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life. The relation to the commodity is not only visible, but one no longer sees anything but it: the world one sees is its world. Modern economic production extends its dictatorship extensively and intensively. In the least industrialized places, its domina-



tion is already present with a few star commodities and as imperialist domination by zones which are ahead in the development of productivity. In these advanced zones, social space is invaded by a continuous superimposition of geological layers of commodities. At this point in the "second industrial revolution," alienated consumption becomes for the masses a supplementary duty to alienated production. It is *all the sold labor* of a society which globally becomes the *total commodity* for which the cycle must be continued. For this to be done, it is necessary for this total commodity to return as a fragment to the fragmented individual, absolutely separated from the productive forces operating as an ensemble. Thus it is here that the specialized science of domination must in turn specialize: it fragments itself into sociology, psycho-technics, cybernetics, semiology, etc., watching over the self-regulation of all the levels of the process.

43

Whereas in the primitive phase of capitalist accumulation, "political economy sees in the *proletarian* only the *worker*," who must receive the minimum indispensable for the conservation of his labor power without ever considering him "in his leisure, in his humanity," this position of the ideas of the dominant class is reversed as soon as the degree of abundance attained in the production of commodities demands a surplus of collaboration from the worker. This worker suddenly washed of the total scorn which is clearly shown to him by all the modalities of organization and surveillance of production, finds himself each day, outside of production, seemingly treated as a grown up, with a zealous politeness under the mask of a consumer. *Then the humanism of the commodity* takes charge of the "leisure and humanity" of the worker, simply because political economy can and must now dominate these spheres as *political economy*. Thus the "perfected denial of man" has taken charge of the totality of human existence.



The spectacle is a permanent opium war whose aim is to make acceptable the identification of goods with commodities, and of satisfaction with survival augmenting according to its own laws. But if consumable survival is something which must always increase, this is because it never ceases to *contain privation*. If there is nothing beyond augmented survival, no point where it might stop its growth, this is because it is not beyond privation, but is privation become enriched.



With automation, which is both the most advanced sector of modern industry and the model where its practice is perfectly summed up, the world of the commodity must surmount the following contradiction: the technical instrumentation which objectively eliminates labor must at the same time *conserve labor as a commodity* and as the only source of the commodity. In order for automation (or any other less extreme form of increasing the productivity of labor) not to diminish the actual social labor necessary for the entire society, new jobs must be created. The tertiary sector, services, represents an immense extension of continuous rows of the army of distribution, and a eulogy of present-day commodities: the tertiary sector is thus a mobilization of supplementary forces which opportunely encounters the necessity for such an organization of rear-guard labor in the very artificiality of the needs for such commodities.

Exchange value could originate only as an agent of use value, but its victory by means of its own weapons created the conditions for its autonomous domination. Mobilizing all human use and seizing the monopoly of its satisfaction, exchange value has ended up by *directing use*. The process of exchange became identified with all possible use and reduced use to the mercy of exchange. Exchange value is the condottiere of use value, which ends up carrying on the war for itself.

The tendency of use value to fall, this constant of capitalist economy, develops a new form of privation within augmented survival. The new privation is not liberated to any extent from the old penury since it requires the participation of most men as wage workers in the endless pursuit of its attainment, and since everyone knows he must submit or die. The reality of this blackmail lies in the fact that use in its most impoverished form (eating, inhabiting) exists only to the extent that it is imprisoned within the illusory wealth of augmented survival, the real basis for the acceptance of illusion in general in the consumption of modern commodities. The real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this factually real illusion, and the spectacle is its general manifestation.

Use value, which was implicitly contained in exchange value, must now be explicitly proclaimed, in the inverted reality of the spectacle, precisely because its factual reality is eroded by the overdeveloped commodity economy; and because a pseudo-justification becomes necessary for counterfeit life.

The spectacle is the other side of money: it is the general abstract equivalent of all commodities. But if money has dominated society as the representation of the central equivalence, namely as the exchangeable property of the various goods whose uses remained incomparable,

the spectacle is its developed modern complement, in which the totality of the commodity world appears as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the totality of the society can be and do. The spectacle is the money which *one only looks at*, because in the spectacle the totality of use is already exchanged for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not only the servant of *pseudo-use*, it is already in itself the pseudo-use of life.

50

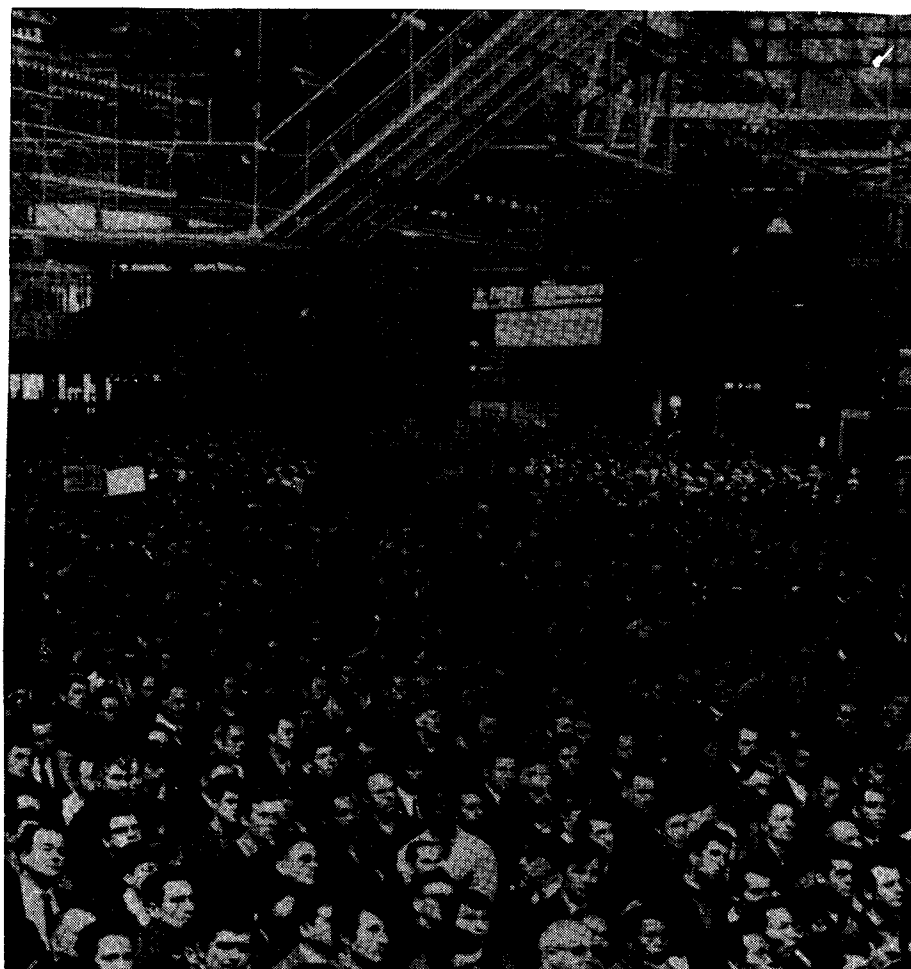
At the moment of *economic* abundance, the concentrated result of social labor becomes visible and subjugates all reality to appearance, which is now its product. Capital is no longer the invisible center which directs the mode of production: accumulation spreads it to the periphery in the form of tangible objects. The entire expanse of society is its portrait.

51

The victory of the autonomous economy must at the same time be its defeat. The forces which it has unleashed eliminate the *economic necessity* which was the immutable basis of earlier societies. When economic necessity is replaced by the necessity for boundless economic development, the satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs which are reduced to the single pseudo-need of maintaining the reign of the autonomous economy. But the autonomous economy separates itself forever from basic need to the extent that it emerges from the *social unconscious* which depended on it without knowing it. "All that is conscious is used up. That which is unconscious remains unalterable. But once freed, does it not fall to ruins in its turn?" (Freud)

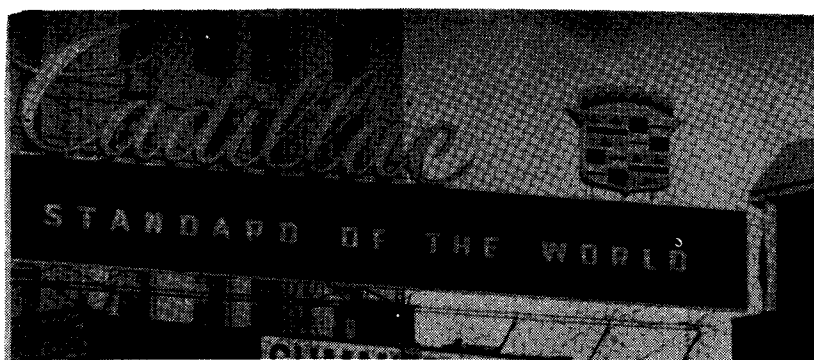
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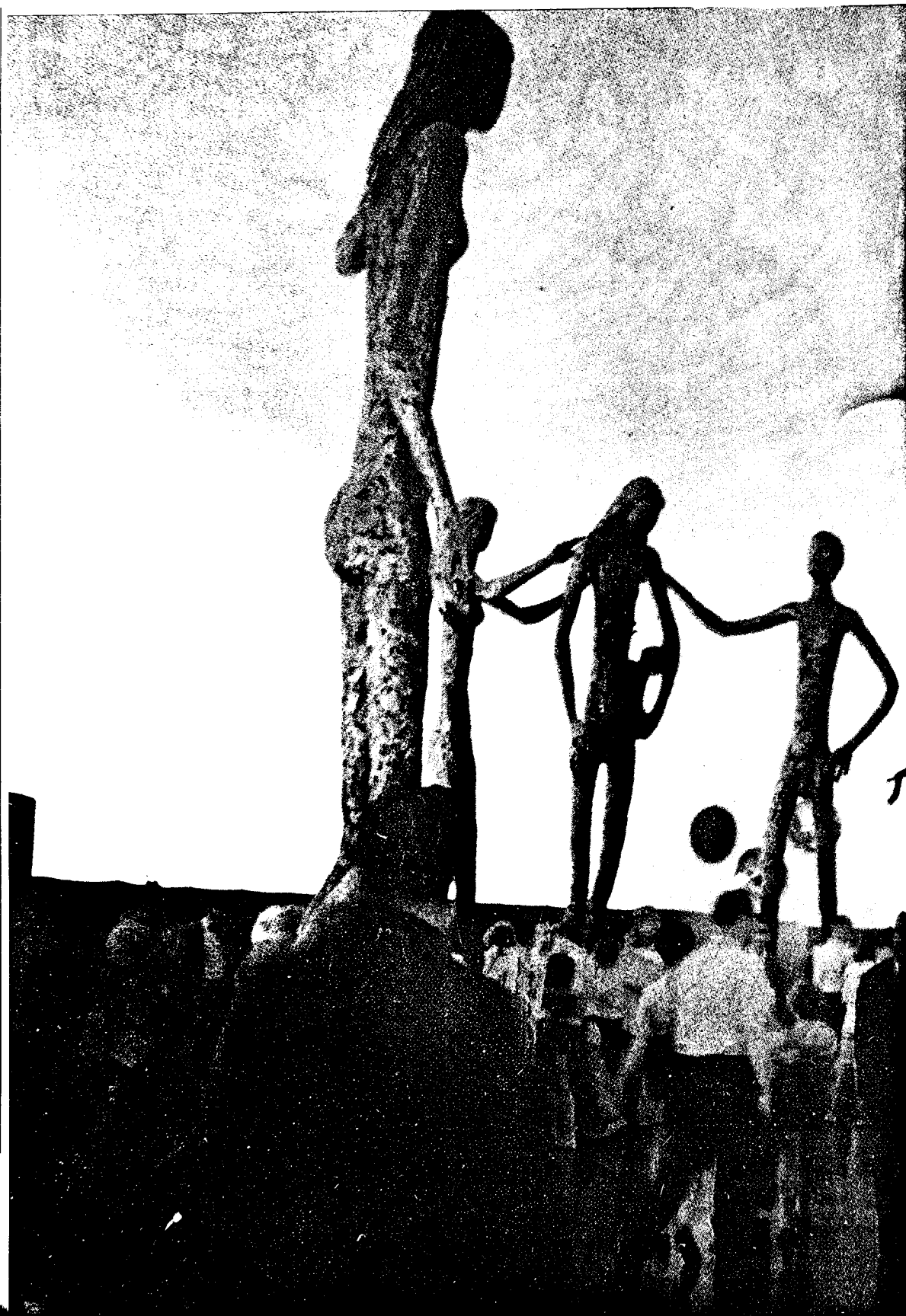
When society discovers that it depends on the economy, the economy, in effect, depends on it. This subterranean power, which has grown to the point of seeming to be sovereign, has lost its power. That which was the economic *it* must become the *I*. The subject can only emerge from society, namely ~~from~~ the struggle within it. The subject's possible existence hangs on the outcome of the class struggle which shows itself to be the product and the producer of the economic foundation of history.



53

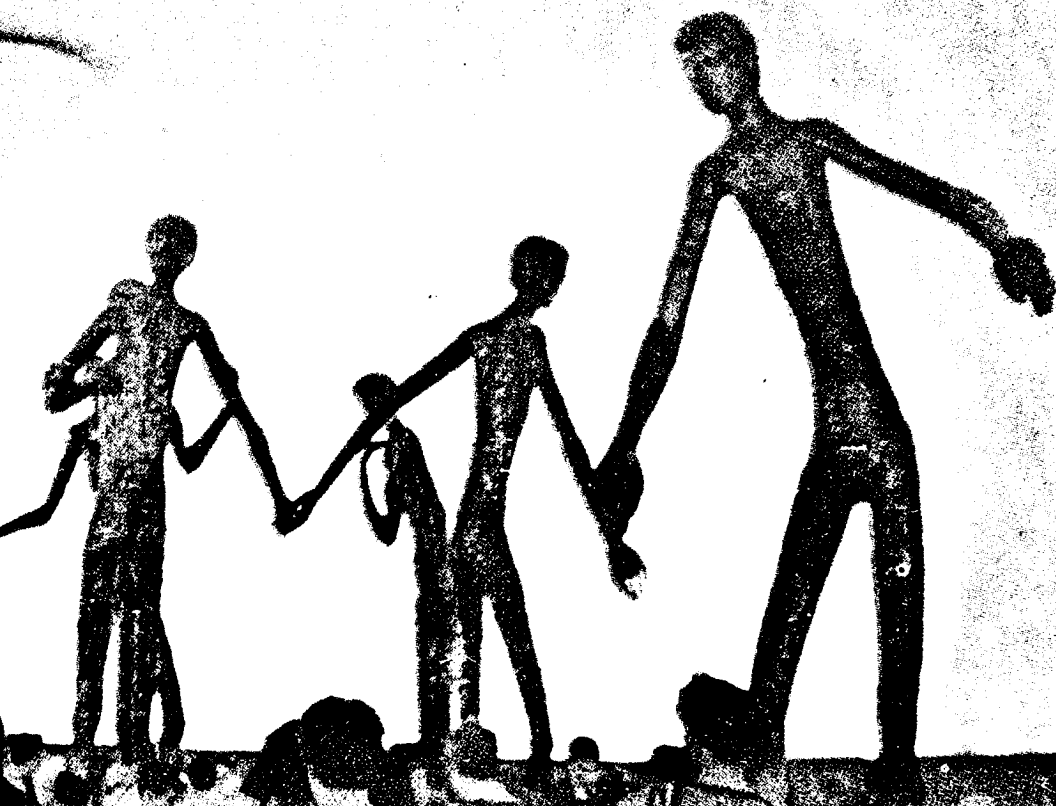
The consciousness of desire and the desire for consciousness are identically the project which, in its negative form, seeks the abolition of classes, that is, the direct possession by the workers over all the moments of their activity. Its *opposite* is the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world which it has created.





A new, animated polemic is unfolding in the country, on the philosophical front, with respect to the concepts "one divides into two" and "two fuse into one." This debate is a struggle between those who are against the materialist dialectic, a struggle between two conceptions of the world: the proletarian conception and the bourgeois conception. Those who maintain that "one divides into two" is the fundamental law of things are on the side of the materialist dialectic; those who maintain that the fundamental law of things is that "two fuse into one" are against the materialist dialectic. The two sides have drawn a clear line of demarcation between them, and their arguments are diametrically opposed. This polemic reflects, on the ideological level, the acute and complex class struggle which is unfolding in China and in the world.

*The Red Flag of Peking
September 21, 1964.*



III. UNITY AND DIVISION WITHIN APPEARANCE

The spectacle, like modern society, is at once unified and divided. Like society, it builds its unity on tearing apart. But the contradiction, when it emerges in the spectacle, is in turn contradicted by a reversal of its meaning, so that the demonstrated division is unitary, while the demonstrated unity is divided.

The struggle of powers constituted for the management of the same socio-economic system spreads as an official contradiction but is in fact a real unity—on a world scale as well as within every nation.

The spectacular sham struggles of rival forms of separate power are at the same time real in that they translate the unequal and conflictual development of the system, the relatively contradictory interests of classes or subdivisions of classes which acknowledge the system and define themselves as participants within its power. Just as the development of the most advanced economy is a confrontation between priorities, the totalitarian management of the economy by a State bureaucracy, and the condition of the countries within the sphere of colonization or semi-colonization, are defined by considerable specificities in the modalities of production and power. These different oppositions can be presented, in the spectacle, by completely different criteria, as absolutely distinct forms of society. But in terms of the factual reality of their specific sectors, the truth of their specificity resides in the universal system which encompasses them, the unique movement which has made the planet its field: capitalism.

The society which carries the spectacle does not dominate the under-developed regions only by its economic hegemony. It dominates them *as the society of the spectacle*. Where the material base is as yet absent, modern society has already invaded the social surface of each continent by means of the spectacle. It defines the program of a ruling class and presides over its formation. Just as it presents pseudo-goods to be coveted, so it offers to local revolutionaries false models of revolution. The spectacle of bureaucratic power, which holds sway over some in-

dustrial countries, is precisely a part of the total spectacle, its general pseudo-negation and its support. The spectacle in its varied localizations brings to view the totalitarian specializations of social communication and administration; these being to dissolve at the level of the functioning of the entire system into a *world division of spectacular tasks*.

58

The division of spectacular tasks which preserves the entirety of the existing order, preserves in particular the dominant pole of its development. The root of the spectacle is within the terrain of the abundant economy, which is the source of the fruits which dominate the spectacular market, in spite of the ideologico-police protectionist barriers of local spectacles with autarkic pretensions.

59

The movement of *banalization*, under the shimmering diversions of the spectacle, dominates modern society the world over and at every point where the developed consumption of commodities has multiplied the roles and the objects to choose from in appearance. The relics of religion and of the family (which remain the principal form of the heritage of class power) and the moral repression which they assure, can be combined into one with the repeated affirmation of the joy of *this* world—this world only being produced precisely as a pseudo-joy which contains repression within it. The smug acceptance of that which exists can also be combined into one, with purely spectacular rebellion: this translates the simple fact that dissatisfaction itself became a commodity as soon as economic abundance was able to extend its production to the treatment of such a raw material.

60

By concentrating in himself or herself the image of a possible role, the celebrity, the spectacular representation of a living human being, concentrates this banality. The condition of the star is the specialization of the *seemingly lived*, the object of identification with apparent life without depth, which must compensate for the fragments of productive specializations which are really lived. Celebrities exist in order to represent varied types of life styles and styles of comprehending society, free to express themselves globally. They incarnate the inaccessible result of social *labor* by miming the sub-products of this labor which are magically transferred above it as its goal: *power* and *vacations*, decision and consumption, which are at the beginning and at the

end of an undiscussed process. There, it's the governmental power which personalizes itself in a pseudo-celebrity; here it's the star of consumption which popularizes itself as a pseudo-power over the experienced. But just as the activities of the star are not really global, they are not really varied.



The agent of the spectacle, put on stage as a star, is the opposite of the individual; he is the enemy of the individual in himself as obviously as in others. Passing into the spectacle as a model for identification, the agent has renounced all autonomous qualities in order to identify himself with the general law of obedience to the course of things. The star of consumption, while being externally the representation of different types of personality, shows each of these types having equal access to the totality of consumption and finding similar happiness there. The celebrity of decision must possess a complete stock of recognized human qualities. Thus between stars official differences are wiped out by official similitude, the presupposition of their excellence in everything. Khrushchev became a general so as to decide on the battle of Kursk, not on the spot, but at the twentieth anniversary, when he was master of the State. Kennedy remained an orator even to the point of proclaiming the eulogy over his own tomb, since Theodore Sorensen continued to edit speeches for the successor in the style which had characterized the personality of the deceased. The admirable people in which the system personifies itself are well known for not being what they are; they became great men by descending beneath the reality of the smallest individual life, and everyone knows it.

False choice within spectacular abundance, a choice which consists of the juxtaposition of competing and united spectacles and in the juxtaposition of roles (signified and carried mainly by things) which are at once exclusive and overlapping, develops into a struggle of fantastic qualities destined to give passion to adhesion to quantitative triviality. In this manner, false archaic oppositions are reborn; regionalisms or racisms are charged with transforming the vulgarity of hierarchic places into a fantastic ontological superiority. In this manner, the interminable series of laughable confrontations is recomposed, mobilizing a sub-ludic interest, from the sport of competition to that of elections. Wherever abundant consumption is installed, the spectacular opposition between youth and adults gains importance among the fallacious roles. There are no adults, masters of their lives. Youth, the transformation of what exists, is in no way the characteristic of those who are now young; it is a property of the economic system, the dynamism of capitalism. It is *things* which rule and are young; which confront and replace each other.

It is the *unity of misery* which hides under the spectacular oppositions. If varied forms of the same alienation struggle under masks of total choice, it is because they are all built on real contradictions which are repressed. The spectacle exists in a *concentrated* or a *diffuse* form depending on the necessities of the particular stage of misery which it denies and supports. In both cases, it is the same image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and horror, in the tranquil center of unhappiness.

The concentrated spectacle essentially belongs to bureaucratic capitalism, even though it may be imported as a technique of state power in mixed backward economies, or at certain moments of crisis in advanced capitalism. In fact, bureaucratic property itself is concentrated in the sense that the individual bureaucrat relates to the ownership of the global economy only through an intermediary, the bureaucratic community, and only as a member of this community. Furthermore, less developed commodity production also takes on a concentrated form: the commodity which the bureaucracy possesses is the total social labor, and that which it sells to society is survival as a whole. The dictatorship of the bureaucratic economy cannot leave the ex-

exploited masses any significant margin of choice, since the bureaucracy itself must choose everything; external choices, whether they concern food or music, already represent the choice of the total destruction of the bureaucracy. This must be accompanied by permanent violence. The image of the good which is imposed within this spectacle gathers up the totality of what officially exists, and is usually concentrated in one man, who is the guarantee of totalitarian cohesion. Everyone must magically identify with this absolute celebrity, or disappear. Master of non-consumption, he is the heroic image of an acceptable direction for absolute exploitation which is in fact primitive accumulation accelerated by terror. If every Chinese must learn Mao, and thus be Mao, it is because *he can be nothing else*. Wherever the concentrated spectacle rules, the police also rules.

65

The diffuse spectacle accompanies the abundance of commodities, the unperturbed development of modern capitalism. Here every commodity taken alone is justified in the name of the grandeur of producing the totality of objects of which the spectacle is an apologetic catalogue. Irreconcilable claims seize the stage of the affluent economy's unified spectacle; different star-commodities simultaneously support contradictory projects for the management of society: the spectacle of automobiles demands a perfect transport network which destroys old cities, while the spectacle of the city itself requires museum-cities. Therefore the already problematic satisfaction which is supposed to come from the *consumption of the ensemble*, is immediately falsified since the real consumer can directly touch only a succession of fragments of this commodity happiness, fragments in which the quality attributed to the ensemble is obviously missing every time.

66

Every given commodity fights for itself, cannot acknowledge the others, and attempts to impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one. The spectacle, then, is the epic poem of this struggle, an epic which cannot be concluded by the fall of any Troy. The spectacle does not sing the praises of men and their weapons, but of commodities and their passions. In this blind struggle every commodity, pursuing its passion, unconsciously realizes something higher: the becoming-world of the commodity, which is also the becoming-commodity of the world. Thus, by means of a *ruse of commodity reason*, the *specific* of the commodity-form moves on towards its absolute realization.



The satisfaction no longer given by the use of the abundant commodity is now sought in its value as a commodity: it is the use of *the commodity* being sufficient to itself; for the consumer there is religious fervor for the sovereign liberty of the commodity. Waves of enthusiasm for a given product, supported and spread by all the means of information, are thus propagated with lightning speed. A clothing style emerges from a film; a magazine promotes night spots which launch varied fads. The *gadget* expresses the fact that, at the moment when the mass of commodities slides toward aberration, the aberrant itself becomes a special commodity. Supplementary gifts accompanying prestigious objects which are sold or which flow from exchange in their own sphere, represent a manifestation of a mystical abandon to the transcendence of the commodity. One who collects the gifts which have just been manufactured for collection, accumulates the *indulgences of the commodity*, a glorious sign of his real presence among the faithful. Reified man advertises the proof of his intimacy with the commodity. As in the convulsions or miracles of the old religious fetishism, the fetishism of the commodity sometimes reaches moments of fervent exaltation. The only use which is still expressed here is the fundamental use of submission.

Without doubt, the pseudo-need imposed by modern consumption cannot be opposed by any genuine need or desire which is not itself shaped by society and its history. But the abundant commodity is an absolute rupture of an organic development of social needs. Its mechanical accumulation liberates unlimited artificiality, in the face of which living desire is disarmed. The cumulative power of independent artificiality is followed everywhere by the *falsification of social life*.



In the image of the society happily unified by consumption, real division is only *suspended* until the next non-accomplishment in the consumable. Every specific product which must represent the hope for a dazzling shortcut to the promised land of total consumption, is ceremoniously presented as the decisive unit. But as in the case of the instantaneous diffusion of fads of apparently aristocratic first names which are carried by nearly all individuals of the same age, the object from which one expects a singular power could not have been suggested for the devotion of masses unless it had been produced in numbers large enough to be consumed massively. The prestigious character of a product comes to it only from its having been placed for a moment at the center of social life, as the revealed mystery of the final goal of production. The object which was prestigious in the spectacle

becomes vulgar the moment it enters the house of the consumer, at the same time that it enters the house of all the others. Too late it reveals its essential poverty, which naturally comes to it from the misery of its production. But it is already another object which carries the justification of the system and the demand to be acknowledged.

70

The imposture of satisfaction denounces itself by replacing itself, by following the change of products and the change of the general conditions of production. That which affirmed its own definitive excellence with the most perfect impudence nevertheless changes, both in the diffuse spectacle and in the concentrated spectacle, and it is the system alone which must continue: Stalin as well as the outmoded commodity are denounced precisely by those who imposed them. Every *new lie* of advertising is also an *avowal* of the previous lie. Every fall of a figure of totalitarian power reveals the *illusory community* which approved him unanimously, and which was nothing more than an agglomeration of solitudes without illusions.

71

What the spectacle gives as eternal is founded on change, and must change with its base. The spectacle is absolutely dogmatic and at the same time cannot really achieve any solid dogma. Nothing stops for it: this is the state which is natural to it and nevertheless the most contrary to its inclination.

72

The unreal unity proclaimed by the spectacle is the mask of the class division on which the real unity of the capitalist mode of production rests. That which obliges the producers to participate in the construction of the world is also that which separates them from it. That which creates relations among men liberated from their local and national limits is also that which pulls them apart. That which requires a more profound rationality is also that which nourishes the irrationality of hierarchic exploitation and repression. That which creates the abstract power of society creates its concrete *non-liberty*.



IV.

THE PROLETARIAT AS SUBJECT AND AS REPRESENTATION



The equal right of all to the goods and joys of this world, the destruction of all authority, the negation of all moral obstacles—there, if one goes to the bottom of things, is the reason for the insurrection of March 18th and the charter of the suspicious association which furnished it with an army.

Parliamentary inquest on the
insurrection of March 18th.

The real movement which suppresses existing conditions rules over society from the moment of the victory of the bourgeoisie within the economy, and visibly after the political translation of this victory. The development of productive forces made the old relations of production explode, and all static order falls to dust. Whatever was absolute becomes historical.

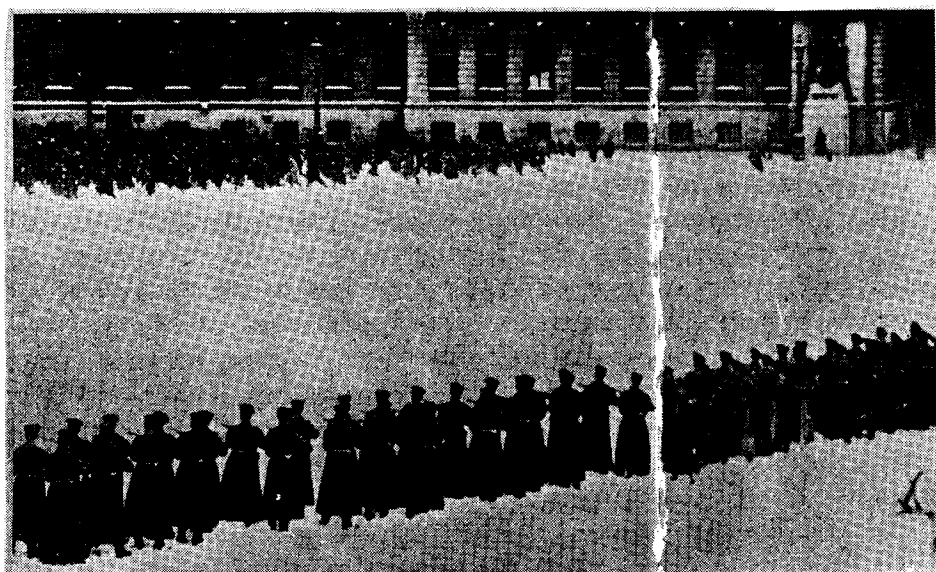
It is by being thrown into history, by having to participate in the work and the struggles which make up history, that men find themselves obliged to see their relations in a clear manner. This history has no object which is distinct from that which takes place within it, even though the last unconscious metaphysical vision of the historical epoch could look at the productive progression through which history is deployed as history's goal. The *subject* of history can be none other than the living producing itself, becoming master and possessor of its world which is history, and existing as *consciousness of its game*.

The class struggles of the long *revolutionary-epoch* inaugurated by the rise of the bourgeoisie, develop together with *the thought of history*, the dialectic, the thought which no longer stops to look for the meaning of what is, but rises to a knowledge of the dissolution of all that is, and in its movement dissolves all separation.

Hegel no longer had to *interpret* the world, but the *transformation* of the world. By *interpreting only* the transformation, Hegel is only the *philosophical* completion of philosophy. He wants to understand a world *which makes itself*. This historical thought is as yet only the consciousness which always arrives too late, and which pronounces the justification after the fact. Thus it has gone beyond separation only in *thought*. The paradox which consists of making the meaning of all reality depend on its historical completion, and at the same time of revealing this meaning as it constitutes itself into the completion of history, flows from the simple fact that the thinker of the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries sought in his philosophy only a *reconciliation* with the results of these revolutions. "Even as a phil-

osophy of the bourgeois revolution, it does not express the entire process of this revolution, but only its final conclusion. In this sense, it is not a philosophy of the revolution, but of the restoration." (Karl Korsch, *Theses on Hegel and Revolution*). Hegel did, for the last time, the work of the philosopher, "the glorification of what exists;" but what existed for him could already be nothing less than the totality of historical movement. The *external* position of thought having in fact been preserved, it could only be masked by the identification of thought with an earlier project of Spirit, absolute hero who did what he wanted and wanted what he did, and whose accomplishment coincides with the present. Thus philosophy, which dies in the thought of history, can now glorify its world only by renouncing it, since in order to speak, it must presuppose that this total history to which it has reduced everything is already complete, and that the only tribunal where the judgment of truth could be given is closed.

When the proletariat manifests by its own existence through acts that this thought of history is not forgotten, the exposure of the conclusion is at the same time the confirmation of the method.



The thought of history can only be saved by becoming practical thought; and the practice of the proletariat as a revolutionary class cannot be less than historical consciousness operating on the totality of its world. All the theoretical currents of the *revolutionary workers'* movement grew out of a critical confrontation with Hegelian thought—Marx as well as Stirner and Bakunin.

The inseparable character of Marx's theory and the Hegelian method is itself inseparable from the revolutionary character of this theory, namely from its truth. This relationship has been misunderstood and even denounced as the weakness of what fallaciously became a marxist *doctrine*. Bernstein, in his *Theoretical Socialism and Social-Democratic Practice*, perfectly reveals the connection between the dialectical method and historical *partisanship*, by deploring the unscientific forecasts of the 1847 *Manifesto* on the imminence of proletarian revolution in Germany: "This historical auto-suggestion, so erroneous that the first political visionary who arrived could hardly have found better, would be incomprehensible in a Marx, who at that time had already seriously studied economics, if one could not see in this the product of a relic of the antithetical Hegelian dialectic from which Marx, no less than Engels, could never completely free himself. In those times of general effervescence, this was all the more fatal to him."

The *overturning* which Marx brings about for a "recovery through transfer" of the thought of bourgeois revolutions does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in the place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit moving towards its encounter with itself in time, its objectification being identical to its alienation, and its historical wounds leaving no scars. History become real no longer has an *end*. Marx has ruined the *separate* position of Hegel in the face of what happens, and the *contemplation* of any supreme external agent. Theory must now know only what it does. However, the contemplation of the movement of the economy in the dominant thought of the present society is the *untranscended* heritage of the *undialectical* part of Hegel's search for a closed system: it is an approbation which has lost the dimension of the concept and which no longer needs a Hegelianism to justify itself, because the movement which it seeks to praise is no more than a sector without a worldly thought, a sector

whose mechanical development effectively dominates everything. Marx's project is the project of a conscious history. The quantitative which arises in the blind development of merely economic productive forces must be transformed into a qualitative historical appropriation. The *critique of political economy* is the first act of this *end of prehistory*: "Of all the instruments of production the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself."

81

That which closely links Marx's theory with scientific thought is the rational understanding of the forces which in fact exert themselves in society. But Marx's theory is fundamentally *outside* of scientific thought, and it preserves scientific thought only by transcending it: what is in question is an understanding of *struggle*, and not of *law*. "We recognize only one science: the science of history," says *The German Ideology*.

82

The bourgeois epoch, which wants to give a scientific foundation to history, overlooks the fact that the economy first had to give a historical foundation to this science. Inversely, history radically depends on economic knowledge only to the extent that it remains *economic history*. The degree to which the role of history in the economy (the global process which modifies its own basic scientific premises) could be overlooked by the viewpoint of scientific observation is shown by the vanity of those socialist calculations which thought they had established the exact periodicity of crises. When the constant intervention of the State succeeded in compensating for the effect of tendencies toward crisis, the same type of reasoning sees in this equilibrium a definitive economic harmony. The project of surmounting the economy, the project of taking possession of history, if it must know—and take into itself—the science of society, cannot itself be *scientific*. In the movement which thinks it can dominate present history by means of scientific knowledge, the revolutionary point of view remains *bourgeois*.

83

The utopian currents of socialism, although themselves historically grounded in the critique of the existing social organization, can rightly be called utopian to the extent that they reject history—namely the real struggle taking place—as well as the movement of time beyond the immutable perfection of their picture of a happy society—but not because

they rejected science. On the contrary, the utopian thinkers are completely dominated by the scientific thought of earlier centuries. They sought the completion of this general rational system: they did not in any way consider themselves disarmed prophets, since they believed in the social power of scientific proof and even, in the case of Saint-Simonism, in the seizure of power by science. How, asked Sombart, "did they want to seize through struggle what must be *proved*?" Nevertheless, the scientific conception of the utopians did not extend to the knowledge that some social groups have interests in the existing situation, the forces to maintain it, and also the forms of false consciousness corresponding to such positions. This conception remained outside of the historical reality of the development of science itself, which was largely oriented by the *social demand* which came from such groups who selected not only what could be admitted, but also what could be studied. The utopian socialists, remaining prisoners of the *mode of exposition of scientific truth*, conceived this truth in terms of its pure abstract image—an image which had been imposed at a much earlier stage of society. As Sorel observed, it is on the model of *astronomy* that the utopians thought they would discover and demonstrate the laws of society. The harmony envisaged by them, hostile to history, flows from an attempt to apply to society the science least dependent on history. This harmony tries to make itself visible with the experimental innocence of Newtonianism, and the happy destiny constantly postulated "plays in their social science a role analogous to that which falls to inertia in rational mechanics." (*Matériaux pour une théorie du prolétariat*).

The deterministic-scientific side in the thought of Marx was precisely the gap through which the process of "ideologization" penetrated into the theoretical heritage left to the workers' movement when he was still alive. The coming of the historical subject is still pushed off until later, and it is economics, the historical science par excellence, which tends increasingly to guarantee the necessity of its own future negation. But what is pushed out of the field of theoretical vision in this manner is the revolutionary practice which is the only truth of this negation. What becomes important is to patiently study economic development, and to continue to accept suffering with a Hegelian tranquility, so that the result remains a "cemetery of good intentions." One discovers that now, according to the science of revolutions, *consciousness always comes too soon*, and has to be taught. "History has shown that we, and all who thought as we did, were wrong. History has clearly shown that the state of economic development on the continent at that time was far from being ripe. . .," Engels was to say in 1895. Throughout his life, Marx had maintained a unitary point of view in his theory, but the *exposition* of the theory was carried out over the *terrain* of the dominant



thought by becoming precise in the form of critiques of particular disciplines, principally the critique of the fundamental science of bourgeois society, political economy. It is this mutilation, later accepted as definitive, which has constituted "marxism."

85

The shortcoming of Marx's theory is naturally the shortcoming of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of his time. The working class did not set off the permanent revolution in the Germany of 1848; the Commune was defeated in isolation. Revolutionary theory thus cannot yet achieve its own total existence. Marx's being reduced to defending and clarifying it within the separation of scholarly work, in the British Museum, implied a loss in the theory itself. It is precisely the scientific justifications drawn about the future of the development of the working class, and the organizational practice combined with these justifications, which were to become the obstacles to proletarian consciousness at a more advanced stage.

86

All the theoretical insufficiency of the *scientific* defense of proletarian revolution can be traced, in terms of content as well as form of exposition, to an identification of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie *from the standpoint of the revolutionary seizure of power.*

The tendency to base a proof of the scientific validity of proletarian power on *repeated* experiments in the past obscures Marx's historical thought, from the *Manifesto* on, forcing Marx to support a *linear* image of the development of modes of production brought on by class struggles which end, each time, "with a revolutionary transformation of the entire society or with a mutual destruction of the classes in struggle." But in the observable reality of history, as Marx observed elsewhere, the "Asiatic mode of production" preserved its immobility in spite of all the confrontations among classes, just as the serf uprisings never defeated the landlords, nor the slave revolts of Antiquity the free men. The linear schema loses sight of the fact that *the bourgeoisie is the only revolutionary class that ever won*; at the same time it is the only class for which the development of the economy was the cause and the consequence of its taking hold of society. The same simplification led Marx to neglect the economic role of the State in the management of a class society. If the rising bourgeoisie seemed to liberate the economy from the State, this only took place to the extent that the former State was the instrument of class oppression in a *static economy*. The bourgeoisie developed its autonomous economic power in the medieval period of the weakening of the State, at the moment of feudal fragmentation of balanced powers. But the modern State which, through Mercantilism, began to support the development of the bourgeoisie, and which finally became its *State* at the time of "laissez faire, laissez passer," was to reveal later that it was endowed with a central power in the calculated management of the *economic process*. Marx was nevertheless able to describe, in *Bonapartism*, the outline of the modern statist bureaucracy, the fusion of capital and the State, the formation of a "national power of capital over labor, a public force organized for social enslavement," in which the bourgeoisie renounces all historical life which is not its reduction to the economic history of things, and would like to "be condemned to the same political nothingness as other classes." Here the socio-political foundations of the modern spectacle are already established, negatively defining the proletariat as *the only pretender to historical life*.

The only two classes which effectively correspond to Marx's theory, the two pure classes towards which the entire analysis of *Capital* leads, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, are also the only two revolutionary classes in history, but in very different conditions: the bourgeois revolution is over; the proletarian revolution is a project born on the foundation of the preceding revolution but differing from it qualitatively. By neglecting the *originality* of the historical role of the bourgeoisie,

one masks the concrete originality of the proletarian project, which can attain nothing if not by carrying its own flags and by knowing the "immensity of its tasks." The bourgeoisie came to power because it is the class of the developing economy. The proletariat cannot itself be the power except by becoming the *class of consciousness*. The growth of productive forces cannot guarantee such a power, even by the detour of the increasing depossession which it creates. A Jacobin seizure of power cannot be its instrument. No *ideology* can serve the proletariat to disguise its partial goals into general goals, because it cannot preserve any partial reality which is really its own.

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If Marx, in a given period of his participation in the struggle of the proletariat, expected too much from scientific forecasting, to the point of creating the intellectual foundation for the illusions of economism, it is known that he did not personally succumb to them. In a well known letter of December 7, 1867, accompanying an article where he himself criticized *Capital*, an article which Engels would later present to the press as the work of an adversary, Marx clearly exposed the limits of his own science: "...The *subjective* tendency of the author (which was perhaps imposed on him by his political position and his past), namely the manner in which he sees and presents to others the ultimate results of the real movement, the real social process, has no relation to his own actual analysis." Thus Marx, by denouncing the "tendentious conclusions" of his own objective analysis, and by the irony of the "perhaps" with reference to the extra-scientific choices imposed on him, at the same time shows the methodological key of the fusion of the two aspects.

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The fusion of knowledge and action must be realized in the historical struggle itself, so that each of these terms places the guarantee of its truth in the other. The formation of the proletarian class into a subject means the organization of revolutionary struggles and the organization of society at the *revolutionary moment*: it is then that the *practical conditions of consciousness* must exist, conditions in which the theory of praxis is confirmed by becoming practical theory. However, this central question of organization was the question least developed by revolutionary theory at the time when the workers' movement was founded, namely when this theory still had the unitary character which came from the thought of history. (Theory had undertaken precisely this task in order to develop a unitary historical *practice*.) This question is in fact the locus of *inconsistency* of this theory, allowing the return of statist and hierarchic methods of application borrowed from the

bourgeois revolution. The forms of organization of the workers' movement developed on the basis of this renunciation of theory have in turn prevented the maintenance of a unitary theory, separating it into varied specialized and partial disciplines. This ideological estrangement from theory can then no longer admit the practical verification of the unitary historical thought which it had betrayed when this verification arises out of the spontaneous struggle of the workers; it can only compete in repressing the manifestation and the memory of it. Yet these historical forms which appeared in struggle are precisely the practical milieu which the theory needed in order to be true. They are requirements of the theory which have not been formulated theoretically. The *soviet* was not a theoretical discovery. Yet its existence in practice was already the highest theoretical truth of the International Workingmen's Association.



The first successes of the struggle of the International led it to free itself from the confused influences of the dominant ideology which survived in it. But the defeat and repression which it soon encountered brought to the foreground a conflict between two conceptions of the proletarian revolution. Both of these conceptions contained an *authoritarian* dimension through which the conscious self-emancipation of the working class is abandoned. In effect, the quarrel which became irreconcilable between Marxists and Bakuninists was two-edged, referring at once to power in the revolutionary society and to the organization of the present movement, and when the positions of the adversaries passed from one aspect to the other, they reversed themselves. Bakunin fought the illusion of abolishing classes by the authoritarian use of state power, foreseeing the reconstitution of a dominant bureaucratic class and the

dictatorship of the most knowledgeable, or those who would be reputed to be such. Marx, who thought that a maturing process inseparable from economic contradictions, and democratic education of the workers, would reduce the role of the proletarian State to a simple phase of legitimating the new social relations imposing themselves objectively, denounced Bakunin and his followers for the authoritarianism of a conspiratorial elite which deliberately placed itself above the International and formulated the extravagant design of imposing on society the irresponsible dictatorship of those who are most revolutionary, or those who would designate themselves to be such. Bakunin, in fact, recruited followers on the basis of such a perspective: "Invisible pilots in the center of the popular storm, we must direct it, not with a visible power, but with the collective dictatorship of all the *allies*. A dictatorship without badge, without title, without official right, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power." Thus two *ideologies* of the workers' revolution opposed each other, each containing a partially true critique, but losing the unity of the thought of history, and instituting themselves into ideological *authorities*. Powerful organizations, like German Social-Democracy and the Iberian Anarchist Federation faithfully served one or the other of these ideologies; and everywhere the result was greatly different from what had been desired.

The fact of looking at the goal of proletarian revolution as *immediately present* marks at once the greatness and the weakness of the real anarchist struggle (in its individualist variants, the pretensions of anarchists are laughable). Collectivist anarchism retains only the conclusion of the historical thought of modern class struggles, and its absolute demand for this conclusion is also translated into a deliberate contempt for method. Thus its critique of the *political struggle* has remained abstract, while its choice of economic struggle is affirmed only as a function of the illusion of a definitive solution brought about by one single blow on this terrain, on the day of the general strike or the insurrection. The anarchists *have an ideal to realize*. Anarchism is *still* an *ideological* negation of the State and of classes, namely of the social conditions of separate ideology. It is *the ideology of pure liberty* which equates everything and which does away with all idea of historical evil. This viewpoint which fuses all partial desires has given anarchism the merit of representing the rejection of existing conditions in favor of the whole of life, and not around a privileged critical specialization; but this fusion being considered in the absolute, according to individual caprice, before its actual realization, has also condemned anarchism to an incoherence too easily seen through. Anarchism has merely to say over again and to

put into play the same simple, total conclusion in every single struggle, because this first conclusion was from the beginning identical to the entire goal of the movement. Thus Bakunin could write in 1873, when he left the *Fédération Jurassienne*: "During the past nine years, more ideas have been developed within the International than would be needed to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I challenge anyone to invent a new one. It is no longer the time for ideas, but for facts and acts." There is no doubt that this conception preserves, from the historical thought of the proletariat, the certainty that ideas must become practice, but it leaves the historical terrain by assuming that the adequate forms for this passage to practice have already been found and will never change.

93

The anarchists, who distinguish themselves explicitly from the ensemble of the workers' movement by their ideological conviction, reproduce this separation of competences among themselves; they provide a terrain favorable to informal domination over all anarchist organizations by propagandists and defenders of their ideology, specialists who are generally more mediocre the more their intellectual activity strives to rehearse certain definitive truths. Ideological respect for unanimity of decision has on the whole been favorable to the uncontrolled authority, within the organization itself, of *specialists in liberty*; and revolutionary anarchism expects, from the liberated population, the same type of unanimity, obtained by the same means. Furthermore, the refusal to take into account the opposition between the conditions of a minority grouped in the present struggle and the society of free individuals, has nourished a permanent separation among anarchists at the moment of common decision, as is shown by an infinity of anarchist insurrections in Spain, limited and destroyed on a local level.

94

The illusion entertained more or less explicitly by genuine anarchism is the permanent imminence of an instantaneously accomplished revolution which will prove the truth of the ideology and of the mode of practical organization derived from the ideology. Anarchism in fact led, in 1936, to a social revolution and the most advanced foreshadowing in all time of a proletarian power. In this context it must be noted that the signal for a general insurrection had been imposed by a proclamation of the army. Furthermore, to the extent that this revolution was not

completed during the first days (because of the existence of Franco's power in half the country, strongly supported from abroad while the rest of the international proletarian movement was already defeated, and because of survivals of bourgeois forces or other statist workers' parties within the camp of the Republic) the organized anarchist movement showed itself unable to extend the demi-victories of the revolution, or even to defend them. Its known chiefs became ministers and hostages of the bourgeois State which destroyed the revolution only to lose the civil war.

95

The "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International is the scientific ideology of the socialist revolution: it identifies its whole truth with objective processes in the economy and with the progress of a recognition of this necessity by the working class educated by the organization. This ideology rediscovers the confidence in pedagogical demonstration which had characterized utopian socialism, but mixes it with a *contemplative* reference to the course of history: this attitude has lost as much of the Hegelian dimension of a total history as it has lost the immobile image of totality in the utopian critique (most highly developed by Fourier). This scientific attitude can do no more than revive a symmetry of ethical choices; it is from this attitude that the nonsense of Hilferding springs when he states that recognizing the necessity of socialism gives "no indication of the practical attitude to be adopted. For it is one thing to recognize a necessity, and it is quite another thing to put oneself at the service of this necessity." (*Finanzkapital*). Those who failed to recognize that, for Marx and for the revolutionary proletariat, the unitary thought of history *was in no way distinct from the practical attitude to be adopted*, regularly became victims of the practice they simultaneously adopted.

96

The ideology of the social-democratic organization gave power to *professors* who educated the working class, and the form of organization which was adopted was the form most suitable for this passive apprenticeship. The participation of socialists of the Second International in political and economic struggles was admittedly concrete but profoundly *uncritical*. It was conducted in the name of *revolutionary illusion* by means of an obviously *reformist* practice. Thus the revolutionary ideology was to be shattered by the very success of those who held it. The separation of deputies and journalists in the movement drew toward a bourgeois mode of life those bourgeois intellectuals who had already

been recruited to the movement. The union bureaucracy shaped even those who had been recruited from the struggles of industrial workers, and who were themselves workers, into brokers of labor power who sold labor as a commodity, for a just price. If their activity was to retain some appearance of being revolutionary, it would have been necessary for capitalism to find itself conveniently unable to support economically this reformism which it tolerated politically in the legalistic agitation of the social-democrats. This type of incompatibility was guaranteed by their science; but history constantly gave the lie to it.

97

Bernstein, the social-democrat furthest from political ideology and most openly attached to the methodology of bourgeois science, had the honesty to want to demonstrate the reality of this contradiction. The English workers' reformist movement had also demonstrated it, by depriving itself of revolutionary ideology. However, the contradiction was definitively demonstrated only by historical development itself. Though full of illusions in other respects, Bernstein had denied that a crisis of capitalist production would miraculously force the hand of socialists who wanted to inherit the revolution only by this legitimate rite. The moment of profound social upheaval which arose with the first world war, though fertile with the awakening of consciousness, twice demonstrated that the social-democratic hierarchy had not educated revolutionarily, and had in no way rendered the German workers *theoreticians*: the first time when the vast majority of the party rallied to the imperialist war, and then, in defeat, when it squashed the Spartakist revolutionaries. The ex-worker Ebert still believed in sin, since he admitted that he hated revolution "like sin." And the same leader showed himself a good precursor of the socialist *representation* which shortly after opposed itself to the Russian proletariat as its absolute enemy, moreover formulating exactly the same program of this new alienation: "Socialism means working a lot."

98

As a Marxist thinker Lenin was no more than a *faithful* and consistent *Kautskyist* who applied the *revolutionary ideology* of this "orthodox Marxism" to Russian conditions, conditions which did not allow the reformist practice carried on by the Second International. In the Russian context, the *external* direction of the proletariat, acting by means of a disciplined clandestine party subordinated to intellectuals who had become "professional revolutionaries," becomes a profession which will not negotiate with any leading profession of capitalist society (the Czarist political regime being in any case unable to offer such an opening, which is based on an advanced stage of capitalist power). It therefore became the *profession of the absolute direction* of society.

The authoritarian ideological radicalism of the Bolsheviks deployed itself all over the world with the war and the collapse of the social-democratic international in the face of the war. The bloody end of the democratic illusions of the workers' movement transformed the entire world into a Russia, and Bolshevism, reigning over the first revolutionary breach brought on by this epoch of crisis, offered to proletarians of all lands its hierarchic and ideological model, so that they could "speak Russian" to the ruling class. Lenin did not reproach the Marxism of the Second International for being a revolutionary *ideology*, but for ceasing to be one.



The same historical moment when Bolshevism triumphed *for itself* in Russia and when social-democracy fought victoriously *for the old world* marks the complete birth of the state of affairs which is at the heart of the domination of the modern spectacle: the *representation* of the working class has opposed itself radically to the working class.

"In all previous revolutions," wrote Rosa Luxemburg in *Rote Fahne* of December 21, 1918, "the combatants faced each other directly: class against class, program against program. In the present revolution, the troops protecting the old order did not intervene under the insignia of the ruling class, but under the flag of a 'social-democratic party.' If the central question of revolution had been posed openly and honestly: capitalism or socialism?—the great mass of the proletariat would today have no doubts and no hesitations." Thus, a few days before its destruction the radical current of the German proletariat discovered the secret

of the new conditions which had been created by the preceding process (toward which the representation of the working class had greatly contributed): the spectacular organization of defense of the existing order, the social reign of appearances where no "central question" can any longer be posed "openly and honestly." The revolutionary representation of the proletariat had at this stage become both the main factor and the central result of the general falsification of society.

102

The organization of the proletariat on the Bolshevik model, born out of Russian backwardness and out of the resignation from revolutionary struggle of the workers' movement of advanced countries, found in the backwardness of Russia all the conditions which carried this form of organization toward the counter-revolutionary reversal which it unconsciously contained at its source. The repeated retreat of the mass of the European workers' movement in the face of the *Hic Rhodus, hic salta* of the 1918-1920 period, a retreat which included the violent destruction of its radical minority, favored the completion of the Bolshevik development and let this false result present itself to the world as the only proletarian solution. The seizure of a state monopoly of representation and of the defense of the workers' power, which justified the Bolshevik party, made the party *become what it was*, the party of the *proprietors of the proletariat*, essentially eliminating the earlier forms of property.

103

For twenty years the varied tendencies of Russian social-democracy had examined all the conditions for the liquidation of Czarism in a theoretical debate that was never satisfactory. They had pointed to the weakness of the bourgeoisie, the weight of the peasant majority, the decisive role of a concentrated and combative but hardly numerous proletariat. These conditions finally found their solution in practice, but because of a given which had not been present in the hypotheses of the theoreticians: the revolutionary bureaucracy which directed the proletariat seized State power and gave society a new class domination. Strictly bourgeois revolution had been impossible; the "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants" had no meaning. The proletarian power of the Soviets could not maintain itself simultaneously against the class of small landowners, against the national and international White reaction, and against its own representation externalized and alienated in the form of a workers' party of absolute masters of the State, of the economy, of expression, and soon of thought. The theory of permanent revolution of Trotsky and Parvus, which Lenin

adopted in April 1917, was the only theory which became true for countries where the social development of the bourgeoisie was retarded, but this theory became true only after the introduction of the unknown factor: the class power of the bureaucracy. The concentration of dictatorship in the hands of the supreme representation of ideology was defended most consistently by Lenin in the numerous confrontations of the Bolshevik directorate. Lenin was right every time against his adversaries in that he supported the solution implied by earlier choices of absolute minority power. The democracy which was kept from peasants *by means of the state* would have to be kept from workers as well, which led to keeping it from communist leaders of unions, and in the entire party, and finally up to the top of the party hierarchy. At the 10th Congress, when the Kronstadt Soviet had been defeated by arms and buried under calumny, Lenin pronounced the following conclusion against the leftist bureaucrats organized in a "Workers' Opposition," the logic of which Stalin would later extend to a perfect division of the world: "Here or down there with a rifle, but not with the opposition. . . We've had enough opposition."

104

After Kronstadt, at the time of the "new economic policy," the bureaucracy, remaining sole proprietor of a *State Capitalism*, assured its power internally by means of a temporary alliance with the peasantry. Externally it defended its power by using workers regimented into the bureaucratic parties of the 3rd International as supports for Russian diplomacy, thus sabotaging the entire revolutionary movement and supporting bourgeois governments whose aid it needed in international politics (the power of the Kuomintang in China in 1925-27, the Popular Front in Spain and in France, etc.). But the bureaucratic society was to continue its completion by exerting terror on the peasantry in order to realize the most brutal primitive capitalist accumulation in history. The industrialization of the Stalin epoch reveals the reality behind the *bureaucracy*: it is the continuation of the power of the economy, the



salvaging of the essentials of commodity society preserving commodity labor. It is the proof of the independent economy, which dominates society to the point of recreating for its own ends the class domination it requires. In other words the bourgeoisie has created an autonomous power which, so long as its autonomy lasts, can even do without a bourgeoisie. The totalitarian bureaucracy is not "the last owning class in history" in the sense of Bruno Rizzi; it is only a *substitute ruling class* for the commodity economy. Declining capitalist private property is replaced by a simplified subproduct, one which is less diversified, which is concentrated into the collective property of the bureaucratic class. This under-developed form of ruling class is also the expression of economic under-development, and it has no other perspective than to overcome the retardation of this development in certain regions of the world. It was the workers' party organized according to the bourgeois model of separation which furnished the hierarchical-statist cadre for this supplementary edition of a ruling class. Anton Ciliga observed in one of Stalin's prisons that "technical questions of organization turned out to be social questions." (*Lenin and the Revolution*).

105

Revolutionary ideology, the *coherence of the separate*, of which Leninism represents the greatest voluntaristic attempt, maintaining control over a reality which rejects it, *returns to its truth in incoherence* with Stalinism. At that point ideology is no longer a weapon, but a goal. The lie which is no longer challenged becomes lunacy. Reality as well as the goal dissolve in the totalitarian ideological proclamation: all it says is all there is. It is a local primitivism of the spectacle, whose role is nevertheless essential in the development of the world spectacle. The ideology which is materialized in this context has not economically transformed the world, as has capitalism which has arrived at the stage of abundance; it has merely transformed *perception* by means of the police.

106

The totalitarian-ideological class in power is the power of an overturned world: the stronger it is, the more it claims not to exist, and its force serves above all to affirm its inexistence. It is modest only on this point, because its official inexistence must also coincide with the *nec plus ultra* of historical development which one simultaneously owes to its infallible command. Extended everywhere, the bureaucracy must be the *class invisible* to consciousness; as a result all social life becomes false. The social organization of absolute falsehood flows from this fundamental contradiction.

Stalinism was the reign of terror within the bureaucratic class itself. The terrorism at the base of the power of this class must also strike this class because it possesses no juridical guarantee, no recognized existence as owning class, which it could extend to every one of its members. Its real property is dissimulated; the bureaucracy became proprietor through the path of false consciousness. False consciousness preserves its absolute power only by means of absolute terror, where all real motives are finally lost. The members of the bureaucratic class in power have a right of ownership over society only collectively, as participants in a fundamental lie: they have to play the role of a leading proletariat in a socialist society; they have to be actors loyal to a script of ideological disloyalty. But effective participation in this lying being must see itself recognized as a real participation. No bureaucrat can support his right to power individually, since proving that he's a socialist proletarian would mean presenting himself as the opposite of a bureaucrat, and proving that he's a bureaucrat is impossible since the official truth of the bureaucracy is that it does not exist. Thus every bureaucrat depends absolutely on the *central guarantee* of the ideology which recognizes the collective participation in its "socialist power" *of all the bureaucrats it does not annihilate*. If all the bureaucrats taken together decide everything, the cohesion of their own class can only be assured by the concentration of their terrorist power in a single person. In this person resides the only practical truth of falsehood *in power*: the indisputable permanence of its constantly adjusted frontier. Stalin decides without appeal who is finally to be a possessing bureaucrat; in other words who should be named "proletarian in power" or "traitor in the pay of the Mikado or of Wall Street." The bureaucratic atoms find the common essence of their right only in the person of Stalin. Stalin is the world sovereign who in this manner knows himself as the absolute person for the consciousness of which there is no higher spirit. "The sovereign of the world has effective consciousness of what he is—the universal power of efficacy—in the destructive violence which he exerts against the Self of his subjects, the contrasting others." Just as he is the power that defines the terrain of domination, he is "the power which ravages this terrain."

When ideology, having become absolute through the possession of absolute power, changes from partial knowledge into totalitarian falsehood, the thought of history is so perfectly annihilated that history itself can no longer exist at the level of the most empirical knowledge. The totalitarian bureaucratic society lives in a perpetual present where everything that happened exists for it only as a place accessible to its



police. The project already formulated by Napoleon of "directing the energy of memory from the throne" has found its total concretization in a permanent manipulation of the past, not only of meanings but of facts as well. But the price paid for this emancipation from all historical reality is the loss of all rational reference which is indispensable to the *historical* society, capitalism. It is known how much the scientific application of insane ideology has cost the Russian economy, if only through the imposture of Lysenko. The contradiction of the totalitarian bureaucracy administering an industrialized society, caught between its need for rationality and its rejection of the rational, is one of its main deficiencies with regard to normal capitalist development. The bureaucracy cannot resolve the question of agriculture the way capitalism had done, and ultimately it is inferior to capitalism in industrial production, planned from the top and based on generalized unreality and falsehood.

Between the two world wars, the revolutionary workers' movement was annihilated by the joint action of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of fascist totalitarianism which had borrowed its form of organization from the totalitarian party tried out in Russia. Fascism was an extremist defense of the bourgeois economy threatened by crisis and by proletarian subversion. Fascism is a *state of siege* in capitalist society, by means of which this society saves itself and gives itself stop-gap rationalization by making the State intervene massively in its management. But this rationalization is itself marked by the immense irrationality of its means. Fascism rallies to the defense of the main points of a bourgeois ideology which has become conservative (the family, property, the moral order, the nation), reuniting the petite-bourgeoisie and the unemployed routed by crisis or deceived by the impotence of socialist revolution. However, fascism is not itself fundamentally ideological. It presents itself as it is: a violent resurrection of *myth* which demands participation in a community defined by archaic pseudo-values: race, blood, the leader. Fascism is *technically-equipped archaism*. Its decomposed *ersatz* of myth is revived in the spectacular context of the most modern means of conditioning and illusion. Thus it is one of the factors in the formation of the modern spectacle, and its role in the destruction of the old workers' movement makes it one of the fundamental forces of present-day society. However, since fascism is also the most costly form of preserving the capitalist order, it must naturally leave the front of the stage to the great roles played by capitalist States; it is eliminated by stronger and more rational forms of the same order.

When the Russian bureaucracy finally does away with the remains of bourgeois property which hampered its rule over the economy, when it develops this property for its own use, and when it is recognized externally among the great powers, it wants to enjoy its world calmly and to suppress the arbitrary element which had been exerted over it. It denounces the Stalinism of its origin. But the denunciation remains Stalinist, arbitrary, unexplained and continually corrected, because *the ideological lie at its origin can never be revealed*. Thus the bureaucracy can liberalize neither culturally nor politically because its existence as a class depends on its ideological monopoly which, whatever its weight, is its only title to property. The ideology has no doubt lost the passion of its positive affirmation, but what still survives of indifferent triviality still has the repressive function of prohibiting the slightest competition, of holding the totality of thought captive. Thus the bureaucracy is bound to an ideology which is no longer believed by anyone. What used to be terrorist has become a laughing matter, but this laughter itself can

preserve itself as a last resort, only by holding on to the terrorism it would like to be rid of. Thus precisely at the moment when the bureaucracy wants to demonstrate its superiority on the terrain of capitalism it reveals itself a *poor relative* of capitalism. Just as its actual history contradicts its right and its vulgarly entertained ignorance contradicts its scientific pretensions, so its project of becoming a rival to the bourgeoisie in the production of a commodity abundance is blocked. This project is blocked by the fact that this abundance carries its *implicit ideology* within itself, and is usually accompanied by an indefinitely extended freedom in spectacular false choices, a pseudo-freedom which remains irreconcilable with the bureaucratic ideology.

111

At the present moment of its development, the bureaucracy's title of ideological property is already collapsing internationally. The power which established itself nationally as a fundamentally internationalist model must admit that it can no longer pretend to uphold its false cohesion beyond every national frontier. The unequal economic development of some bureaucracies with competing interests who succeeded in possessing their "socialism" outside of a single country has led to the public and total confrontation between the Russian lie and the Chinese lie. From this point on, every bureaucracy in power, or every totalitarian party which is a candidate to the power left behind by the Stalinist period in some national working classes, must follow its own path. The global decomposition of the alliance of bureaucratic mystification is further aggravated by manifestations of internal negation which began to be visible to the world with the East Berlin workers' revolt, opposing the bureaucrats with the demand for "a government of steel workers," manifestations which already once led all the way to the power of workers' councils in Hungary. However, the global decomposition of the bureaucratic alliance is in the last analysis the least favorable factor for the present development of capitalist society. The bourgeoisie is in the



process of losing the adversary which objectively supported it by providing an illusory unification of all negation of the existing order. This division of spectacular labor comes to an end when the pseudo-revolutionary role in turn divides. The spectacular element of the collapse of the workers' movement will itself collapse.

112

The Leninist illusion has no contemporary base outside of the various Trotskyist tendencies. Here the identification of the proletarian project with a hierarchic organization of ideology unwaveringly survives the experience of all its results. The distance which separates Trotskyism from revolutionary critique of the present society also permits the respectable distance which it keeps with regard to positions which were already false when they were used in a real combat. Trotsky remained basically in solidarity with the high bureaucracy until 1927, seeking to capture it so as to make it undertake a genuinely Bolshevik action externally (it is known that in order to dissimulate Lenin's famous "testament" he went so far as to slanderously disavow his supporter Max Eastman, who had made it public). Trotsky was condemned by his basic perspective, because at the moment when the bureaucracy recognizes itself in its result as a counter-revolutionary class internally, it must also choose to be effectively counter-revolutionary externally in the name of revolution, *just as it is at home*. Trotsky's subsequent struggle for a Fourth International contains the same inconsistency. All his life he refused to recognize the power of a separate class in the bureaucracy, because during the second Russian revolution he became an unconditional supporter of the Bolshevik form of organization. When Lukacs, in 1923, showed that this form was the long-sought mediation between theory and practice, in which the proletarians are no longer "spectators" of the events which happen in their organization, but consciously choose and live these events, he described as actual merits of



the Bolshevik party everything that the Bolshevik party *was not*. Except for his profound theoretical work, Lukacs was still an ideologue speaking in the name of the power most grossly external to the proletarian movement, believing and making believe that he found himself, with his entire personality within this power as if it were *his own*. The rest of the story made it obvious just how this power disowns and suppresses its lackeys. Lukacs, repudiating himself without end, made visible with the clarity of a caricature exactly what he had identified with: with the *opposite* of himself and of what he had supported in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukacs is the best proof of the fundamental rule which judges all the intellectuals of this century: what they *respect* exactly measures their own *despicable* reality. However, Lenin had hardly called for this type of illusion about his activity; in his view "a political party cannot examine its members to see if there are contradictions between their philosophy and the party program." The real party whose imaginary portrait Lukacs had presented was coherent only for one precise and partial task: to seize State power.

113

The neo-Leninist illusion of present-day Trotskyism, constantly exposed by the reality of modern bourgeois as well as bureaucratic capitalist societies, naturally finds a favored field of application in "under-developed" countries which are formally independent. Here the illusion of some sort of state and bureaucratic socialism is consciously dished out by local ruling classes as *simply the ideology of economic development*. The hybrid composition of these classes is more or less clearly related to a level on the bourgeois-bureaucratic spectrum. Their games with the two poles of existing capitalist power in the international arena, and their ideological compromises (notably with Islam), which express the hybrid reality of their social base, remove from this final sub-product of ideological socialism everything serious except the police. A bureaucracy is able to form by uniting a national struggle with an agrarian peasant revolt; from that point on, as in China, it tends to apply the Stalinist model of industrialization in societies less developed than Russia was in 1917. A bureaucracy able to industrialize the nation is able to constitute itself out of the petite-bourgeoisie, or out of army cadres who seize power, as in Egypt. On certain points, as in Algeria at the beginning of its war of independence, the bureaucracy which constitutes itself as a para-statist leadership during the struggle seeks the equilibrium point of a compromise in order to fuse with a weak national bourgeoisie. Finally in the former colonies of black Africa which remain openly tied to the American and European bourgeoisie, a bourgeoisie constitutes itself (usually on the basis of the power of traditional tribal chiefs), *by seizing the State*. These countries, where foreign imperialism remains the real master of the economy, enter a stage where the *compradorés* have gotten an indigenous State as compensation for

their sale of indigenous products, a State which is independent in the face of the local masses but not in the face of imperialism. This is an artificial bourgeoisie which is not able to accumulate, but which simply *dilapidates* the share of surplus value from local labor which reaches it as well as the foreign subsidies from the States or corporations which protect it. Because of the obvious incapacity of these bourgeois classes to fulfill the normal economic function of a bourgeoisie, each of them faces a subversion based on the bureaucratic model, more or less adapted to local peculiarities, and eager to seize the heritage of this bourgeoisie. But the very success of a bureaucracy in its fundamental project of industrialization necessarily contains the perspective of its historical defeat: by accumulating capital it accumulates a proletariat and thus creates its own negation in a country where it did not yet exist.

114

In this complex and terrible development which has carried the epoch of class struggles toward new conditions, the proletariat of the industrial countries has completely lost the affirmation of its positive perspective and also, in the last analysis, *its illusions*, but not its being. It has not been suppressed. It remains irreducibly in existence within the intensified alienation of modern capitalism: it is the immense majority of workers who have lost all power over the use of their lives and who, *once they know this*, redefine themselves as the proletariat, the negation to the core within this society. The proletariat is objectively enlarged by the movement of disappearance of the peasantry and by the extension of the logic of factory labor to a large sector of "services" and intellectual professions. It is *subjectively* that the proletariat is still far removed from its practical class consciousness, not only among white collar workers but also among wage workers who have as yet discovered only the impotence and mystification of the old politics. Nevertheless, when the proletariat discovers that its own externalized power competes constantly to reinforce capitalist society, not only in the form of its labor but also in the form of unions, of parties, or of the state power it had built to emancipate itself, it also discovers from concrete historical experience that it is the class totally opposed to all congealed externalization and all specialization of power. It carries the *revolution which can leave nothing external to it*, the demand for the permanent domination of the present over the past, and the total critique of separation. It is this that must find its suitable form in action. No quantitative amelioration of its misery, no illusion of hierarchic integration is a lasting cure for its dissatisfaction, because the proletariat cannot truly recognize itself in a particular wrong it received nor *in the reparation of a particular wrong*. It cannot recognize itself in the reparation of a large number of wrongs either, but only in the *absolute wrong* of being relegated to the margin of life.

From the new signs of negation which multiply in the economically most advanced countries, signs which are misunderstood and falsified by spectacular arrangement, one can already draw the conclusion that a new epoch has begun. After the first attempt at workers' subversion, *it is now capitalist abundance which has failed*. When anti-union struggles of Western workers are repressed first of all by unions, and when rebellious currents of youth launch their first informed protest which directly implies a rejection of the old specialized politics, of art and of daily life, we see two sides of a new spontaneous struggle which begins under a *criminal* guise. These are the signs of forerunners of a second proletarian assault against the class society. When the lost children of this still immobile army reappear on this terrain, become other and yet remain the same, they follow a new "General Ludd" who, this time, throws them into the destruction of the *machines of permitted consumption*.

"The political form at last discovered in which the economic liberation of labor could be realized" has in this century acquired a clear outline in the revolutionary workers' Councils which concentrate in themselves all the functions of decision and execution, and federate with each other by means of delegates responsible to the base and revocable at any moment. Their actual existence has as yet only been a brief sketch, immediately fought and defeated by different forces of defense of the class society, among which one must often count their own false consciousness. Pannekoek rightly insisted on the fact that the choice of a power of workers' Councils "poses problems" rather than bringing a solution. But this power is precisely where the problems of the revolution of the proletariat can find their real solution. This is where the objective conditions of historical consciousness are reunited. This is where direct *active* communication is realized, where specialization, hierarchy and separation end, where the existing conditions are transformed "into conditions of unity." Here the proletarian subject can emerge from his struggle against contemplation: his consciousness is equal to the practical organization which it undertakes because this consciousness is itself inseparable from coherent intervention in history.

In the power of the Councils, which must internationally supplant all other power, the proletarian movement is its own product and this product is itself the producer. It is to itself its own goal. Only there is the spectacular negation of life negated in its turn.

The appearance of the Councils was the highest reality of the proletarian movement in the first quarter of this century, a reality which was not seen or was travestied because it disappeared with the rest of the movement which was denied and eliminated by the entire historical experience of the time. In this new moment of proletarian critique, this result returns as the only undefeated point of the defeated movement. The historical consciousness which knows that this is the only milieu where it can exist can now recognize it, no longer at the periphery of what is ebbing, but at the center of what is rising.

A revolutionary organization existing before the power of the Councils (it will find its own form through struggle), for all these historical reasons, already knows that it *does not represent* the working class. It must only recognize itself as a radical separation with *the world of separation*.



The revolutionary organization is the coherent expression of the theory of praxis entering into non-unilateral communication with practical struggles, in the process of becoming practical theory. Its own practice is the generalization of communication and of coherence in these struggles. At the revolutionary moment of dissolution of social separation, this organization must recognize its own dissolution as a separate organization.

The revolutionary organization can be nothing less than a unitary critique of society, namely a critique which does not compromise with any form of separate power anywhere in the world, and a critique proclaimed globally against all the aspects of alienated social life. In the struggle of the revolutionary organization against the class society, weapons are nothing other than the *essence* of the combatants themselves: the revolutionary organization cannot reproduce within itself the conditions of separation and hierarchy of the dominant society. It must struggle constantly against its deformation in the ruling spectacle. The only limit to participation in the total democracy of the revolutionary organization is the recognition and self-appropriation of the coherence of its critique by all its members, a coherence which must be proved in the critical theory as such and in the relation between the theory and practical activity.

Ever-increasing capitalist alienation at all levels makes it increasingly difficult for workers to recognize and name their own misery, thus placing them in front of the alternative of rejecting *the totality of their misery or nothing*. From this the revolutionary organization must learn that it can no longer *combat alienation with alienated forms*.

Proletarian revolution depends entirely on the condition that, for the first time, theory as intelligence of human practice be recognized and lived by the masses. It requires workers to become dialecticians and to inscribe their thought into practice. Thus it demands more of *men without quality* than the bourgeois revolution demanded of the qualified men which it delegated to its task (the partial ideological consciousness built by a part of the bourgeois class had the economy at its basis, this central *part* of social life in which this class *was already* in power). The very development of class society to the point of the spectacular organization of non-life thus leads the revolutionary project to become *visibly* what it already was *essentially*.

Revolutionary theory is now the enemy of all revolutionary ideology *and knows it*.

*"O, gentlemen, the time of life is short! . . .
And if we live, we live to tread on kings. . ."*

Shakespeare
Henry IV.

A black and white photograph of a parade float moving down a city street. The float carries a vintage car and a truck. A large crowd of people lines the sidewalks, and confetti is falling from the sky. The street has tram tracks. The image is grainy and has a high-contrast, historical feel.

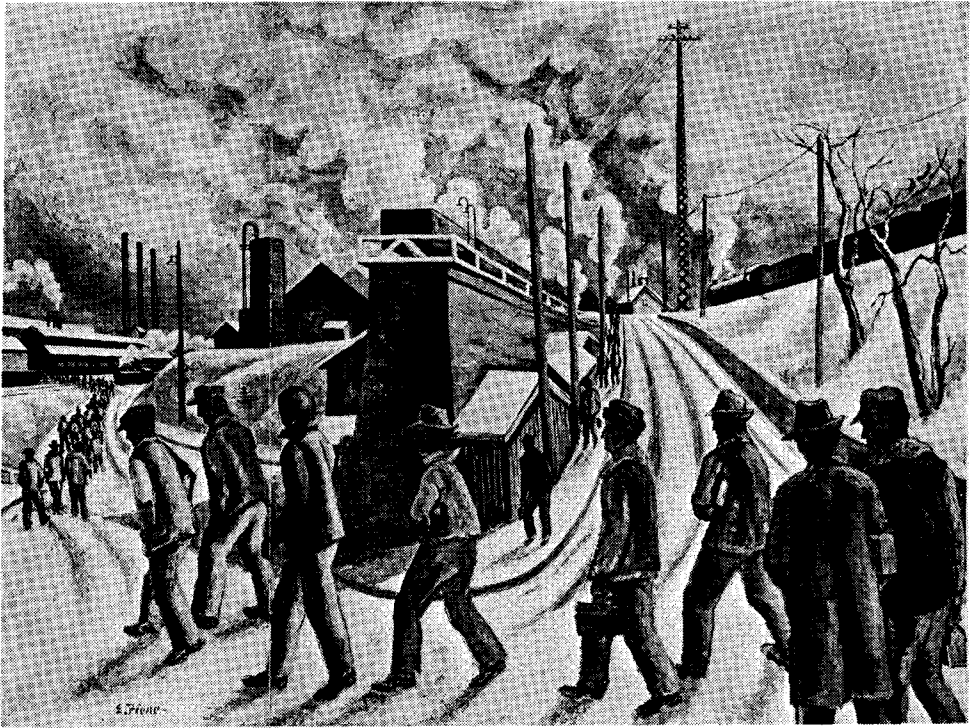
V. TIME AND HISTORY

Man, "the negative being who *is* uniquely to the extent that he suppresses Being," is identical to time. Man's appropriation of his own nature is at the same time his seizure of the deployment of the universe. "History is itself a real part of *natural history*, of the transformation of nature into man." (Marx). Inversely this "natural history" has no actual existence other than through the process of human history, the only part which captures this historical totality, like the modern telescope whose sight captures, *in time*, the retreat of nebulae at the periphery of the universe. History has always existed, but not always in a historical form. The temporalization of man as effected through the mediation of a society is equivalent to a humanization of time. The unconscious movement of time manifests itself and *becomes true* within historical consciousness.



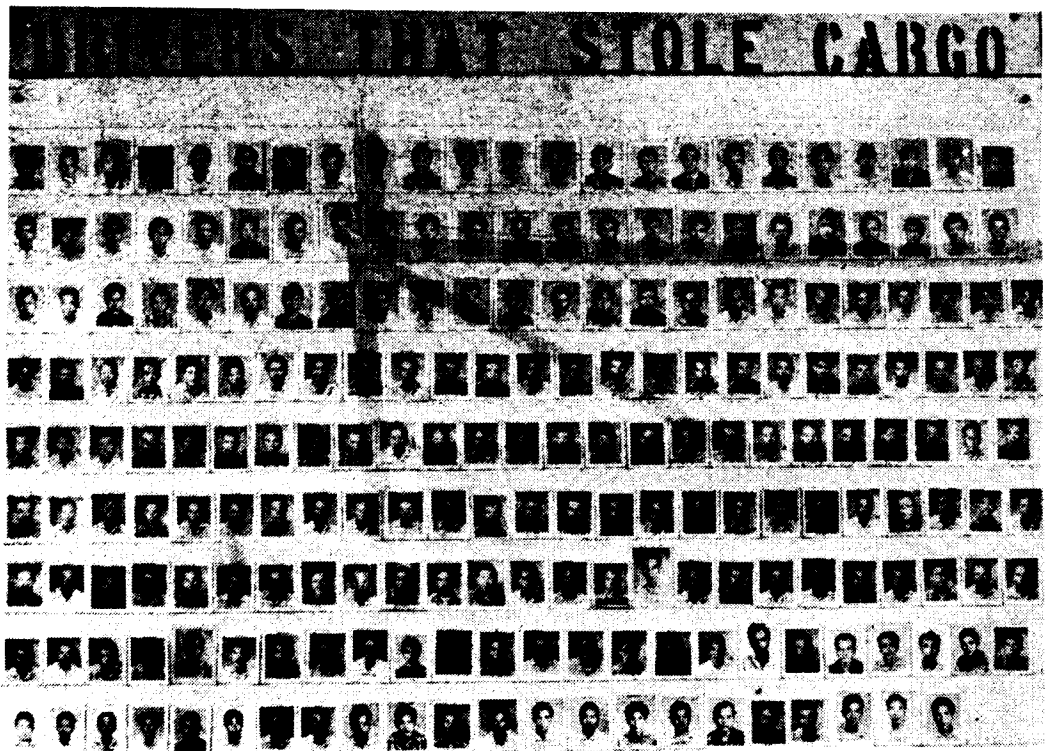
Historical movement as such, though still hidden, begins in the slow and intangible formation of the "real nature of man," this "nature born within human history—within the generating action of human society—", yet the society, which has developed a technology and a language, is conscious only of a perpetual present, though it is itself already the product of its own history. All knowledge limited to the memory of the oldest is always carried by the *living*. Neither death nor procreation are

grasped as a law of time. Time remains immobile, like a closed space. When a more complex society becomes conscious of time, its task is rather to negate it because it does not see in time that which happens, but that which is repeated. A static society organizes time in terms of its immediate experience of nature, on the model of cyclical time.



Cyclical time already dominates the experience of nomadic populations because the same conditions repeat themselves before the nomads at every moment of their journey: Hegel notes that “the wandering of nomads is only formal because it is limited to uniform spaces.” The society which, by fixing itself in place locally, gives space a content by arranging individualized places, thus finds itself enclosed within the interior of this localization. The temporal return to similar places now becomes the pure return of time in the same place, the repetition of a series of gestures. The transition from pastoral nomadism to sedentary agriculture is the end of the lazy liberty without content, the beginning of labor. The agrarian mode of production in general, dominated by the rhythm of the seasons, is the basis for fully constituted cyclical time. Eternity is *internal* to it; it is the return of the same here on earth. Myth is the unitary construction of the thought which guarantees the entire cosmic order surrounding the order which this society has in fact already realized within its frontiers.

The social appropriation of time, the production of man by human labor, develop within a society divided into classes. The power which constituted itself above the penury of the society of cyclical time, the class which organizes this social labor and appropriates the limited surplus value, at the same time appropriates the *temporal surplus value* of its organization of social time: it possesses for itself alone the irreversible time of the living. The only wealth which can exist in concentrated form within the realm of power is materially spent in sumptuous feasts and also in the form of a squandering of the *historical time at the surface of society*. The owners of historical surplus value possess the knowledge and the enjoyment of lived events. This time, separated from the collective organization of time which predominates with the repetitive production at the basis of social life, flows above its own static community. This is the time of adventure and war in which the masters of the cyclical society traverse their personal history, and it is also the time which appears in confrontations with foreign communities, in the derangement of the unchangeable order of the society. History then passes before men as an alien factor, as that which they never wanted and against which they thought themselves protected. But through this detour also returns the negative anxiety of the human, which had been at the very origin of the entire development which had fallen asleep.



Cyclical time in itself is time without conflict. But conflict is installed within this infancy of time: history first of all struggles to be history within the practical activity of the masters. This history superficially creates the irreversible; its movement constitutes precisely the time it uses up within the interior of the inexhaustible time of cyclical society.

"Frozen societies" are those which slowed down their historical activity to the limit, those which kept their opposition to the natural and human environment, and their internal oppositions, in a constant equilibrium. If the extreme diversity of institutions established for this purpose demonstrates the flexibility of the self-creation of human nature, this demonstration becomes obvious only for the external observer, for the ethnologist who *returns* from historical time. In each of these societies a definitive structuring excluded change. Absolute conformism in existing social practices, with which all human possibilities are identified for all time, has no external limit other than the fear of falling back into formless animality. Here, in order to remain human, men must remain the same.

The birth of political power, which seems to be related to the last great technological revolutions (cast iron), at the threshold of a period which would not experience profound shocks until the appearance of industry, also marks the moment when blood ties begin to dissolve. From then on, the succession of generations leaves the sphere of pure cyclical nature and becomes oriented to events, to the succession of powers. Irreversible time is now the time of those who rule, and dynasties are its first measure. Writing is its weapon. In writing, language attains its full independent reality of mediating between consciousnesses. But this independence is identical to the general independence of separate power as the mediation which forms society. With writing there appears a consciousness which is no longer carried and transmitted directly among the living: an *impersonal memory*, the memory of the administration of society. "Writings are the thoughts of the State; archives are its memory." (Novalis).

The chronicle is the expression of the irreversible time of power. It is also the instrument which preserves the voluntaristic progression of this time. Time begins with the end of the predecessor, since this orien-

tation of time collapses with the force of every particular power, falling back to the indifferent oblivion of the only cyclical time known to the peasant masses who, during the collapse of empires and their chronologies, never change. The *owners of history* have given time a *meaning*: a direction which is also a signification. But this history deploys itself and succumbs separately; it leaves the underlying society unchanged because it is precisely that which remains separated from common reality. This is why we reduce the history of Oriental empires to the history of religions: the chronologies which have fallen to ruins left no more than the apparently autonomous history of the illusions which enveloped them. The masters who *make history their private property*, under the protection of myth, possess first of all a private ownership of the mode of illusion: in China and Egypt they long held a monopoly over the immortality of the soul; their first known dynasties are an imaginary arrangement of the past. But this illusory possession of the masters is also the entire possible possession, at that moment, of a common history and of their own history. The growth of their real historical power goes together with a popularization of mythical and illusory possession. All this flows from the simple fact that, to the extent that the masters took it upon themselves to guarantee the permanence of cyclical time mythically, as in the rites of the seasons of Chinese emperors, they themselves achieved a relative liberation from cyclical time.

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The dry unexplained chronology of divine power speaking to its servants, which wants to be understood only as the earthly execution of the commandments of myth, can be surmounted and become conscious history; this requires that real participation in history be lived by extended groups. Out of this practical communication among those who *recognized each other* as possessors of a singular present, who experienced the qualitative richness of events as their activity and as the place where they lived—their epoch—arises the general language of historical communication. Those for whom irreversible time has existed discover within it the *memorable* as well as the *menace of forgetting*: "Herodotus of Halicarnassus here presents the results of his study, so that time may not abolish the works of men. . ."

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Reasoning about history is inseparably *reasoning about power*. Greece was the moment when power and its change were discussed and understood: the *democracy of the masters* of society. Greek conditions were the inverse of the conditions known to the despotic State, where power settles its accounts only with itself within the inaccessible ob-

scurity of its densest point: through *palace revolution*, which is placed beyond the pale of discussion by success or failure alike. However, the power shared among the Greek communities existed only with the *expenditure* of a social life whose production remained separate and static within the servile class. Only those who do not work live. In the division among the Greek communities, and in the struggle to exploit foreign cities, the principle of separation which internally grounded each of them was externalized. Greece, which had dreamed of universal history, did not succeed in unifying itself in the face of invasion; or even in unifying the calendars of its independent cities. In Greece historical time became conscious, but not yet conscious of itself.

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After the disappearance of the locally favorable conditions known to the Greek communities, the regression of western historical thought was not accompanied by a rehabilitation of ancient mythic organizations. Out of the confrontations of the Mediterranean populations, out of the formation and collapse of the Roman State, appeared *semi-historical religions* which became fundamental factors in the new consciousness of time, and in the new armor of separate power.

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The monotheistic religions were a compromise between myth and history, between cyclical time which still dominated production and irreversible time where populations confront each other and regroup. The religions which grew out of Judaism are a universal abstract recognition of irreversible time which is democratized, opened to all, but in the realm of illusion. Time is totally oriented toward a single final event: "The Kingdom of God is near." These religions were born on the threshold of history, and established themselves there. But there they still preserve themselves in radical opposition to history. Semi-historical religion establishes a qualitative point of departure in time: the birth of Christ, the flight of Mohammed, but its irreversible time—introducing an actual accumulation which in Islam can take the shape of a conquest, or in Christianity of the Reformation the shape of an increase of capital—is in fact inverted in religious thought: the expectation, in the time which diminishes, of entrance to the genuine other world; the expectation of the last Judgment. Eternity came out of cyclical time. It is outside. It is the element which holds back the irreversibility of time, which suppresses history within history itself by placing itself *on the other side of irreversible time* as a pure punctual element in which cyclical time entered and abolished itself. Bossuet will still say: "And by means of the time that passes we enter into the eternity which does not pass."

The middle ages, this incomplete mythical world whose perfection lay outside it, is the moment when cyclical time, which still reigns over the greater part of production, is really chewed away by history. A certain irreversible temporality is recognized individually in everyone, in the succession of stages of life, in the consideration of life as a *journey*, a passage with no return through a world whose meaning lies elsewhere: the *pilgrim* is the man who leaves cyclical time to be actually this traveller that everyone is symbolically. Personal historical life still finds its fulfillment in the sphere of power, within participation in the struggles led by power and in the struggles of dispute over power; but the irreversible time of power is shared to infinity under the general unification of the oriented time of the Christian era, in a world of *armed faith*, where the game of the masters revolves around fidelity and the challenge of owed fidelity. This feudal society, born out of the encounter of "the organizational structure of the conquering army as it developed during the conquest" and of "the productive forces found in the conquered country" (*German Ideology*)—and in the organization of these productive forces one must count their religious language—divided the domination of society between the Church and the state power which was in turn subdivided in the complex relations of suzerainty and vassalage of territorial tenures and urban communes. Within this diversity of possible historical life, the irreversible time which unconsciously carried the underlying society, the time lived by the bourgeoisie in the production of commodities, the foundation and expansion of cities, the commercial discovery of the Earth—practical experimentation which forever destroyed all mythical organization of the cosmos—slowly revealed itself as the unknown work of this epoch, when the great official historical undertaking of this world collapsed with the Crusades.

At the decline of the middle ages, the irreversible time which invades society is felt, by the consciousness attached to the ancient order, in the form of an obsession with death. It is the melancholy of the dissolution of a world, the last in which the security of myth still gave balance to history; and for this melancholy everything earthly ends up merely by being corrupted. The great revolts of the European peasants are also their attempt to *answer history*, which violently pulled them out of the patriarchal sleep which had guaranteed the feudal tutelage. This is the millenarian utopia of *terrestrial realization of paradise*, which revives

what was at the origin of semi-historical religion, when Christian communities, like the Judaic messianism from which they arose (as answers to the troubles and unhappiness of the epoch) expected the imminent realization of the realm of God and added a disquieting and subversive factor to ancient society. When Christianity reached the point of sharing power within the empire, it exposed as a simple superstition what still survived of this hope: that is the meaning of the Augustinian affirmation, archetype of all the *satisfecit* of modern ideology, according to which the established Church has already for a long time been this kingdom one spoke of. The social revolt of the millenarian peasantry is naturally defined first of all as a will to destroy the Church. But millenarianism plays itself out in the historical world, and not on the terrain of myth. Modern revolutionary expectations are not irrational continuations of the religious passion of millenarianism, as Norman Cohn thought he had demonstrated in *The Pursuit of the Millenium*. On the contrary, millenarianism, revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time, is already a modern revolutionary tendency which as yet lacks *the consciousness that it is historical*. The millenarians had to lose because they could not recognize the revolution as their own operation. The fact that they waited to act on the basis of an external sign of God's decision is the translation into thought of a practice in which the insurgent peasants followed chiefs taken from outside their ranks. The peasant class could not attain an adequate consciousness of the functioning of society and of the manner to lead its own struggle; it is because it lacked these conditions of unity in its action and in its consciousness that it expressed its project and led its wars with the imagery of a terrestrial paradise.

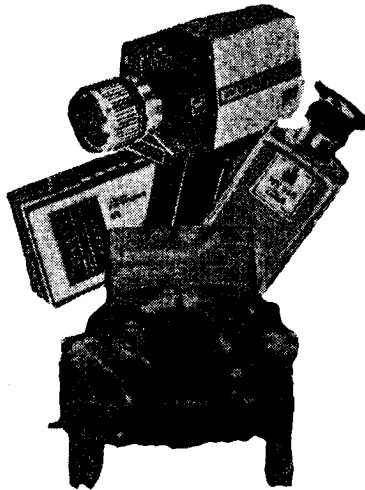
The new possession of historical life, the Renaissance which finds its past and its legitimacy in Antiquity, carries with it a joyous rupture with eternity. Its irreversible time is that of the infinite accumulation of knowledge, and the historical consciousness which grows out of the experience of democratic communities and of the forces which ruin them will take up, with Machiavelli, the analysis of desanctified power, saying the unspeakable about the State. In the exuberant life of the Italian cities, in the art of the festival, life is experienced as enjoying the passage of time. But this enjoyment of passage is itself a passing enjoyment. The song of Lorenzo di Medici considered by Burckhardt to be the expression of the "very spirit of the Renaissance" is the eulogy which this fragile feast of history pronounces on itself: "How beautiful the spring of life—which vanishes so quickly."

The constant movement of monopolization of historical life by the State of the absolute monarchy, transitional form toward complete domination by the bourgeois class, brings into clear view the new irreversible time of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is tied to *labor time*, which is only now liberated from the cyclical. With the bourgeoisie, work becomes *labor which transforms historical conditions*. The bourgeoisie is the first dominant class for which labor is a value. And the bourgeoisie which suppresses all privilege, which recognizes no value which does not flow from the exploitation of labor, has justly identified with labor its own value as a dominant class, and has made the progress of labor its own progress. The class which accumulates commodities and capital continually modifies nature by modifying labor itself, by unleashing its productivity. All social life has already been concentrated within the ornamental poverty of the Court, trimmings of the cold state administration which culminates in "the vocation of king;" and all particular historical liberty has had to consent to be lost. The liberty of the irreversible temporal game of the nobles is consumed in their last lost battles with the wars of the Fronde or the insurrection of the Scotch for Charles-Edward. The world has changed at its roots.



The victory of the bourgeoisie is the victory of *profoundly historical time*, because it is the time of economic production which transforms society, continuously and from the bottom up. So long as agrarian production remains the principal labor, the cyclical time which remains present at the root of society nourishes the coagulated forces of *tradition* which stop movement. But the irreversible time of the bourgeois economy extirpates these vestiges on every corner of the globe. History, which until then had seemed to be only the movement of individuals of the dominant class, and thus was written as the history of events, is now understood as the *general movement*, and in this severe movement individuals are sacrificed. The history which discovers its foundation in political economy now knows of the existence of that which had been its unconscious, but it nevertheless remains the unconscious which it cannot bring to the light of day. It is only this blind prehistory, a new fatality dominated by no one, that the commodity economy has democratized.

The history which is present in all the depths of society tends to be lost at the surface. The triumph of irreversible time is also its metamorphosis into the *time of things*, because the weapon of its victory was precisely the mass production of objects according to the laws of the commodity. The main product which economic development has transferred from luxurious scarcity to daily consumption is therefore *history*, but only in the form of the history of the abstract movement of things which dominates all qualitative use of life. While the earlier cyclical time had supported a growing part of historical time lived by individuals and groups, the domination of the irreversible time of production tends to socially eliminate this lived time.

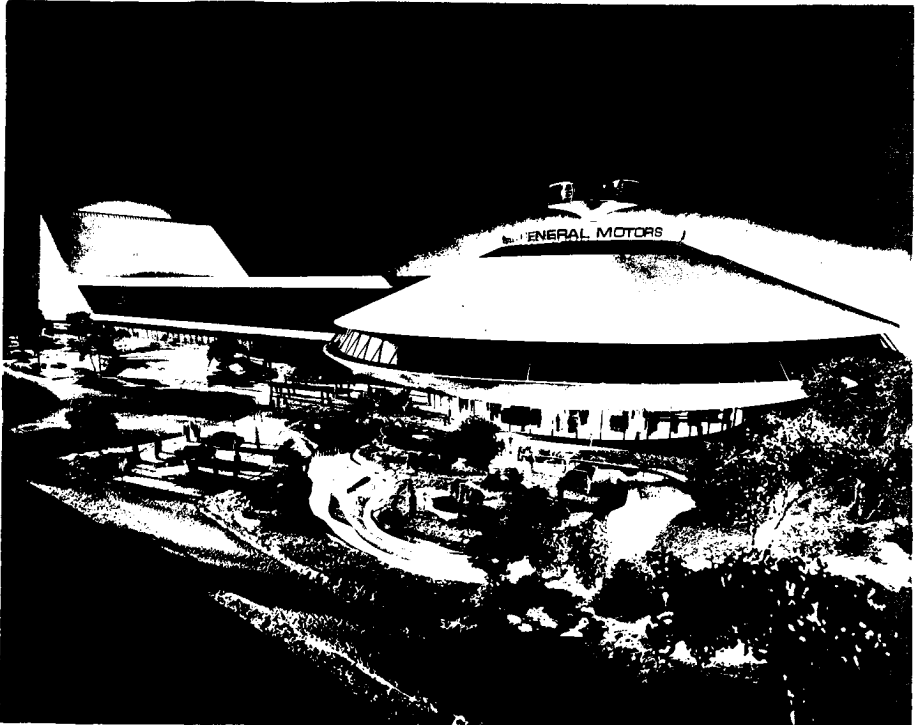


Thus the bourgeoisie made known to society and imposed on it an irreversible historical time, but refuses society its *use*. "There was history, but there is no more," because the class of owners of the economy, which cannot break with *economic history*, must also push back as a direct menace all other irreversible use of time. The dominant class, made up of *specialists in the possession of things* who are themselves therefore a possession of things, must link its fate with the preservation of this reified history, with the permanence of a new immobility *within history*. For the first time the worker, at the base of society, is not materially a *stranger to history*, because it is now the base that irreversibly moves society. In the demand to *live* the historical time which it makes, the proletariat finds the simple unforgettable center of its revolutionary project; and every one of the attempts until now broken to realize this project marks a point of possible departure for new historical life.

The irreversible time of the bourgeoisie, master of power, at first presented itself under its proper name, as an absolute origin, Year 1 of the Republic. But the revolutionary ideology of general liberty which had destroyed the last remainders of the mythical organization of values and the entire traditional regulation of society, already made visible the real will which it had clothed in Roman dress: *the liberty of generalized commerce*. The commodity society, now discovering that it had to reconstruct the passivity which it had shaken fundamentally to establish its own pure reign, finds that "Christianity with its *cultus* of abstract man. . . is the most fitting form of religion." (*Capital*). Thus the bourgeoisie establishes a compromise with this religion, a compromise which also expresses itself in the presentation of time: its own calendar abandoned, its irreversible time returns to unwind within the Christian era whose succession it continues.

With the development of capitalism, irreversible time is *unified on a world scale*. Universal history becomes a reality because the entire world is gathered under the development of this time. But this history which is everywhere at one time the same, is still only the inter-historical refusal of history. It is the time of economic production cut up into equal abstract fragments which is manifested over the entire planet as *the same day*. Unified irreversible time is the time of the *world market* and, as a corollary, of the world spectacle.

The irreversible time of production is first of all the measure of commodities. Therefore the time officially affirmed over the entire expanse of the globe as the *general time of society*, signifying only the specialized interests which constitute it, *is only a particular time*.



*We have nothing of our own but time,
which is even enjoyed by those who have no rest.*

Balthasar GRACIAN
L'Homme de cour.



VI. SPECTACULAR TIME



The time of production, commodity-time, is an infinite accumulation of equivalent intervals. It is the abstraction of irreversible time where all the segments of the chronometer must only prove their quantitative equality. This time is in reality exactly what it is in its *exchangeable* character. It is in this social domination by commodity-time that "time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the carcass of time." (*Poverty of Philosophy*). It is devalued time, the complete inversion of time as "the field of human development."

The general time of human non-development also exists in the complementary form of a *consumable time* which returns to the daily life of the society with this determined production as a *pseudo-cyclical time*.

Pseudo-cyclical time is in fact no more than the *consumable disguise* of the commodity-time of production. It contains the essential properties of commodity-time, namely homogeneous exchangeable units and the suppression of the qualitative dimension. But being the sub-product of commodity time, destined to retarding concrete daily life—and to maintaining this retardation—it must be charged with pseudo-valuations and must seem to be a sequence of falsely individualized moments.

The pseudo-cyclical time of modern economic survival is the time of consumption, of augmented survival, where what is lived daily is deprived of decision and is subject, no longer to the natural order, but to the pseudo-nature developed in alienated labor; and thus this time *naturally* rediscovers the ancient cyclical rhythm which regulated the survival of pre-industrial societies. Pseudo-cyclical time leans on the natural remains of cyclical time and at the same time composes new homologous combinations: day and night, work and weekly rest, the recurrence of vacations.

Pseudo-cyclical time is a time *transformed by industry*. The time which has its basis in the production of commodities is itself a consumable commodity which includes everything previously (during the phase of dissolution of the old unitary society) distinguished into private life, economic life, political life. All the consumable time of modern society comes to be treated as a raw material for varied new products which impose themselves on the market as uses of socially organized time. "A product which already exists in a form which makes it suitable for consumption can nevertheless in its turn become a raw material for another product." (*Capital*).

In its most advanced sector, concentrated capitalism orients itself towards the sale of blocks of "completely equipped" time, each of which constitutes a single unified commodity which has integrated a certain number of varied commodities. In the expanding economy of "services" and leisure, this gives rise to the formula of calculated payment in which "everything's included" for a spectacular environment, the collective pseudo-displacement of vacations, subscriptions to cultural consumption, and the sale of sociability itself in the form of "passionate conversations" and "encounters with personalities." This sort of spectacular commodity, which can obviously pass only as a function of the acute poverty of corresponding realities, just as obviously fits among the pilot-articles of the modernization of sales by being payable on credit.

Consumable pseudo-cyclical time is spectacular time, at once as the time for the consumption of images in the limited sense, and as the image of the consumption of time in the broad sense. Time for the consumption of images, the medium of all commodities, is inseparably the field where the instruments of the spectacle fully take over, as well as the goal which these instruments present globally as the place and the central aspect of all particular consumptions: it is known that the saving of time constantly sought by modern society—whether in the form of the speed of transport vehicles or in the use of dried soups—is positively translated for the population of the United States by the fact that

merely the contemplation of television occupies an average of three to six hours a day. The social image of the consumption of time, in turn, is exclusively dominated by moments of leisure and vacation, moments represented *at a distance* and desirable by postulate, as are all spectacular commodities. This commodity is here explicitly given as the moment of real life whose cyclical return is awaited. But even in these assigned moments of life, it is again the spectacle which is to be seen and reproduced, attaining a more intense degree. That which was represented as genuine life is exposed as simply more *genuinely spectacular life*.

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This epoch which shows itself its time as being essentially the sudden return of multiple festivities is at the same time an epoch without festivals. What had been the moment of participation of a community in the luxurious expenditure of life within cyclical time is impossible for the society without community and without luxury. When its vulgarized pseudo-festivals, parodies of the dialogue and the gift, incite a surplus of economic expenditure, they only lead to deception always compensated by the promise of a new deception. The more its use value is reduced, the higher the claims of modern survival time are in the spectacle. The reality of time has been replaced by the *advertisement* of time.

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While the consumption of cyclical time in ancient societies was consistent with the real labor of these societies, the pseudo-cyclical consumption of the developed economy is in contradiction with the abstract irreversible time of its production. While cyclical time was the time of immobile illusion, really lived, spectacular time is the time of changing reality, lived in illusion.

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That which is constantly new in the process of production of things is not found in consumption, which remains the expanded repetition of the same. Because dead labor continues to dominate living labor, in spectacular time the past dominates the present.

Another side of the deficiency of general historical life is that individual life as yet has no history. The pseudo-events which take place in the spectacular dramatization have not been lived by those informed of them; furthermore they are lost in the inflation of their sudden replacement at every pulse of the spectacular machinery. Furthermore, that which is really lived has no relation to the official irreversible time of society and is in direct opposition to the pseudo-cyclical rhythm of the consumable subproduct of this time. This individual experience of separate daily life remains without language, without concept, without critical access to its own past which has been left nowhere. It is not communicated. It is not understood and is forgotten to the profit of false spectacular memory of the unmemorable.

The spectacle, as the present social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, of the abandonment of history built on the foundation of historical time, is the *false consciousness of time*.



The condition required for reducing workers to the status of "free" producers and consumers of commodity time was *the violent expropriation of their time*. The return of time as spectacular time did not become possible until after this first depossession of the producer.

The irreducible biological part which remains within labor, as much in the dependence on the natural cycle of waking and sleep as in the fact of individually irreversible time in the expenditure of a life, become no more than *incidental* from the viewpoint of modern production. As such, these elements are neglected in the official proclamations of the movement of production and in the consumable trophies which are the available translation of this incessant victory. Immobilized in the falsified center of the movement of its world, the consciousness of the spectator no longer knows in its life a passage towards its realization and towards its death. Whoever has renounced the expenditure of his life can no longer admit his death. Life-insurance advertisements merely suggest that he is guilty of dying without having insured the regulation of the system after this economic loss; and the advertisement of the *american way of death* insists on his capacity to maintain in this encounter the greatest possible number of *appearances* of life. On all other fronts of advertising bombardment, it is strictly forbidden to grow old. One would have to arrange, for each and for all, a "youth-capital" which, for having been used in a mediocre way, cannot pretend to acquire the durable and cumulative reality of financial capital. This social absence of death is identical to the social absence of life.

Time is the *necessary* alienation, as Hegel showed; it is the environment where the subject realizes himself by losing himself, where he becomes other in order to become truly himself. But its opposite is precisely the dominant alienation which is undergone by the producer of an *alien present*. In this *spatial alienation*, the society that at the root separates the subject from the activity it takes from him, separates him first of all from his own time. Surmountable social alienation is precisely that which prohibits and petrifies the possibilities and risks of *living* alienation in time.

Under the apparent *modes* which annul and recompose themselves at the futile surface of contemplated pseudo-cyclical time, the *grand style* of the epoch is always within that which is oriented by the obvious and secret necessity of the revolution.

The natural basis of time, the experienced given of the flow of time, becomes human and social by existing *for man*. It is the limited state of human practice, labor at different stages, that has until now humanized and also dehumanized time as cyclical time and separate irreversible time of economic production. The revolutionary project of a classless society, of a generalized historical life, is the project of a withering away of the social measure of time, to the benefit of a playful model of irreversible time of individuals and groups, a model in which *independent federated times* are simultaneously present. It is the program of a total realization, within the context of time, of communism which suppresses "all that exists independently of individuals."

The world already possesses the dream of a time whose consciousness it must now possess in order to actually live it.

VII.

THE

ORGANIZATION

OF

TERRITORY

And whoever becomes ruler of a city accustomed to living freely and does not destroy it, let him expect to be destroyed by her, because as refuge for her rebellions she always has the name of liberty and her old customs, which neither through the length of time nor for any good deed will ever be forgotten. And whatever one does there and whatever one provides, if it is not to persecute or disperse the inhabitants, this name and these customs will never be forgotten. . . .

*Machiavelli
The Prince.*

Capitalist production has unified space, which is no longer bounded by external societies. This unification is at the same time an extensive and intensive process of *banalization*. The accumulation of commodities produced on the assembly line for the abstract space of the market, which broke through all regional and legal barriers and all the corporate restrictions of the middle ages that preserved the *quality* of craft production, also destroyed the autonomy and quality of places. This power of homogenization is the heavy artillery which brought about the fall of all the walls of China.

It is in order to become ever more identical to itself, in order to continue moving toward immobile monotony, that *the free space of the commodity* is nevertheless constantly modified and reconstructed.

This society which eliminates geographical distance reproduces distance internally as spectacular separation.



A by-product of the circulation of commodities, tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, is basically reduced to the leisure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organization of the frequentation of different places is already in itself the guarantee of their *equivalence*. The same modernization which has removed time from travel has also removed from it the reality of space.

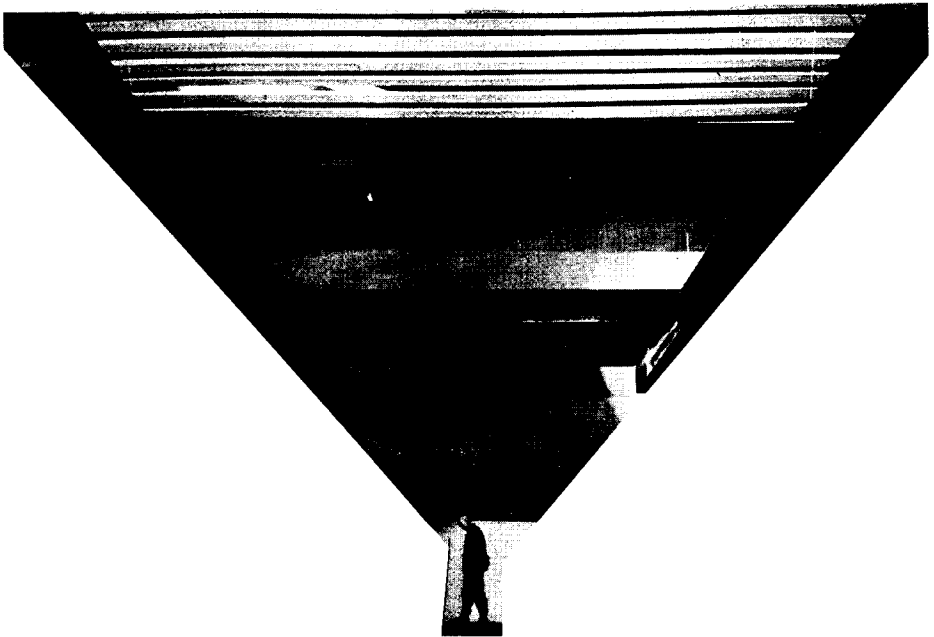
The society which shapes its entire environment has constructed its special technique for working the concrete base of this collection of tasks—its own territory. Urbanism is this taking hold of the natural and human environment by capitalism; developing logically into absolute domination, it can and must now remake the totality of space as *its own stage-setting*.

The capitalist necessity satisfied by urbanism as a visible freezing of life can be expressed—by the use of Hegelian terms—as the absolute predominance of “the peaceful coexistence of space” over the “restless becoming in the passage of time.”

If all the technical forces of capitalism can be understood as tools for the making of separations, in the case of urbanism we confront the basis of these technical forces, the treatment of the earth which is suitable for their deployment, the very technique *of separation*.

Urbanism is the modern accomplishment of the uninterrupted task which safeguards class power: the preservation of the atomization of workers whom urban conditions of production had dangerously *brought together*. The constant struggle which had to be fought against all aspects of the possibility of encounter finds its privileged field in urbanism. The exertion of all established powers, after the experiences of the French Revolution, to enlarge the means of maintaining order in the

streets, finally culminates in the suppression of the street. "With the mass media of communication over great distances, the isolation of the population showed itself a much more efficient means of control," says Lewis Mumford in *The City in History*, describing "henceforth a one-way world." But the general movement of isolation, which is the reality of urbanism, must also contain a controlled reintegration of workers in terms of the necessities of production and consumption subject to planning. Integration into the system must recapture isolated individuals as individuals *isolated together*: factories as well as culture houses, resort towns as well as grand ensembles are especially organized for the ends of this pseudo-collectivity which also accompanies the isolated individual within the *family cell*. The generalized use of receivers of the spectacular message makes it possible for the individual to repopulate his isolation with dominant images, images which acquire their full power only because of this isolation.



For the first time a new architecture, which in all previous epochs had been reserved for the satisfaction of the dominant classes, is directly aimed *at the poor*. The formal poverty and the gigantic spread of this new experience of habitat both come from its *mass* character, which is conditioned both by its destination and by modern condi-

tions of construction. *Authoritarian decision*, which abstractly organizes territory into territory of abstraction, is obviously at the heart of these modern conditions of construction. The same architecture appears wherever the industrialization of countries backward in this respect begins; they are a suitable terrain for the new type of social existence which is to be implanted there. Just as clearly as in questions of thermonuclear armament or of birth—which already approaches the possibility of a manipulation of heredity—the threshold crossed by the growth of society's material power, and the retardation of conscious domination of this power, are displayed in urbanism.

174

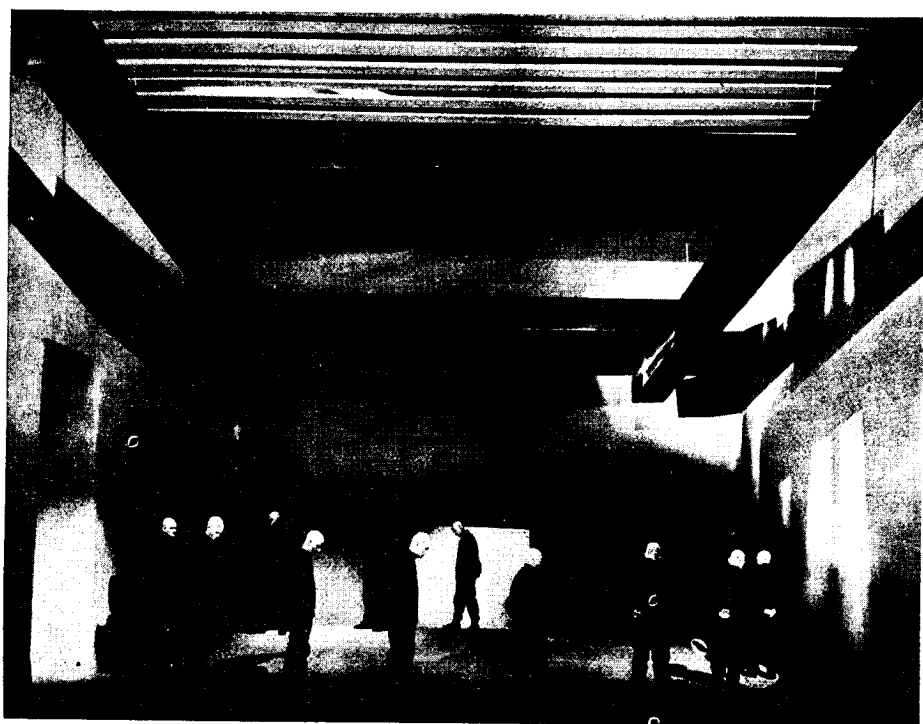
The present moment is already the moment of the self-destruction of the urban milieu. The expansion of cities over countrysides covered with "unformed masses of urban residues" (Lewis Mumford) is directly officiated by the imperatives of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile, pilot-product of the first phase of commodity abundance, inscribed itself on the earth with the domination of the highway, which dislocates ancient centers and requires an ever-larger dispersion. At the same time, the moments of incompleted reorganization of the urban tissue polarize temporarily around "distribution factories," enormous supermarkets constructed on bare ground, on a parking lot; and these temples of hurried consumption themselves flee within the centrifugal movement which rejects them when they in turn become overburdened secondary centers, because they brought about a partial recomposition of agglomeration. But the technical organization of consumption is only the first element of the general dissolution which has led the city to the point of *consuming itself*.

175

Economic history, which developed entirely around the opposition between town and country, has arrived at a level of success which simultaneously annihilates both terms. The current *paralysis* of total historical movement, to the profit of the sole pursuit of the independent movement of the economy, makes the moment when town and country begin to disappear, not the *transcendence* of their cleavage, but their simultaneous collapse. The reciprocal erosion of town and country, product of the failure of the historical movement through which existing urban reality should have been surmounted, appears in the eclectic melange of their decomposed elements, which covers the zones most advanced in industrialization.

Universal history is born in the cities and comes of age at the moment of the decisive victory of city over country. Marx considers it one of the greatest revolutionary merits of the bourgeoisie that "it subjected the village to the city" whose *air emancipates*. But if the history of the city is the history of liberty, it is also the history of tyranny, of state administration which controls the country and the city itself. As yet the city was only able to be the terrain of the struggle for historical liberty, and not its possession. The city is the *milieu of history* because it is at once concentration of social power which makes the historical undertaking possible, and consciousness of the past. The present tendency toward the liquidation of the city thus expresses in a different way the retardation of the subordination of the economy to historical consciousness, the unification of society taking back the powers which became detached from it.

"The countryside shows precisely the opposite: isolation and separation" (*German Ideology*). The urbanism which destroys cities re-composes a *pseudo-countryside* which loses the natural relations of the ancient countryside as well as the direct social relations directly put into question by the historical city. It is a new artificial peasantry which is re-created by the conditions of dwelling and of spectacular control within the present "organized territory"; the scattering in space and the limited mentality which had always prevented the peasantry from undertaking an independent action and from affirming itself as a creative historical force, become characteristics of the producers—the movement of a world which they themselves fabricate remaining as completely out of their reach as the natural rhythm of tasks was for the agrarian society. But when this peasantry, which was the unmovable base of "Oriental despotism" and whose very fragmentation called for bureaucratic centralization, reappears as the product of conditions of growth of the modern state bureaucracy, its *apathy* must now be *historically fabricated* and maintained; natural ignorance has been replaced by the organized spectacle of error. The "new cities" of the technological pseudo-peasantry clearly inscribe into the ground their rupture with the historical time on which they were constructed; their motto could be: "On this spot nothing will ever happen, and *nothing has ever happened*." It is obviously because the history which must be liberated in the cities has not yet been liberated that the forces of *historical absence* begin to compose their own exclusive landscape.



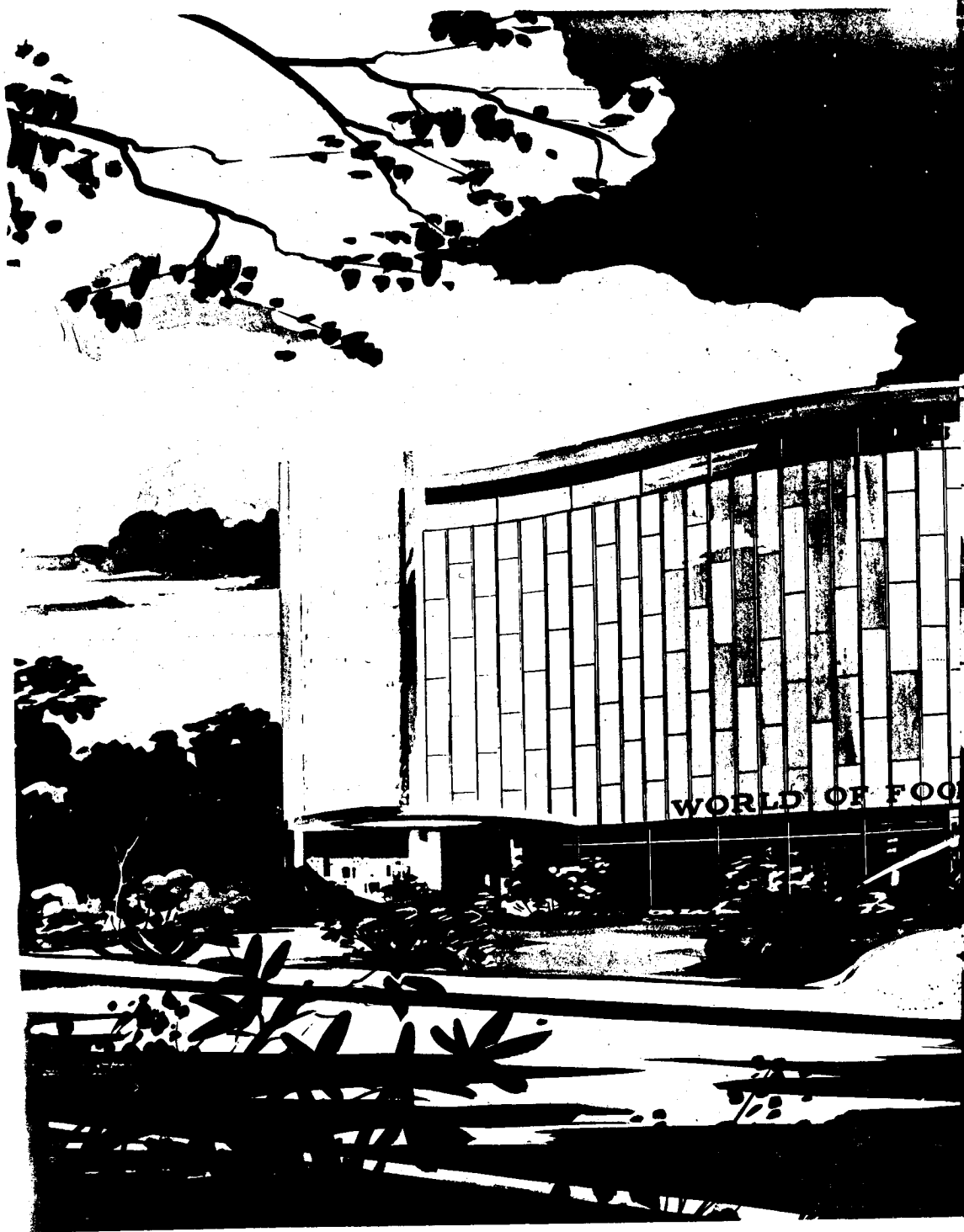
178

The history which threatens this twilight world is also the force which could subject space to lived time. Proletarian revolution is the *critique of human geography* through which individuals and communities must construct the places and the events corresponding to the appropriation, no longer only of their labor, but of their total history. Within this moving space of the game and of freely chosen variations of rules of the game, the autonomy of place can be regained without re-introducing an exclusive attachment to the land, thus bringing back the reality of the journey and of life understood as a journey containing within itself all of its sense.

179

The greatest revolutionary idea with reference to urbanism is not itself urbanistic, technological or esthetic. It is the decision to reconstruct the environment completely in accordance with the needs of the power of the Workers' Councils, of the *anti-statist dictatorship* of the proletariat, of enforceable dialogue. And the power of the Councils, which can only be effective by transforming the totality of existing conditions, cannot assign itself a smaller task if it wants to be recognized and *to recognize itself* in its world.

VIII.
NEGATION AND CONSUMPTION
WITHIN CULTURE



We're going to live long enough to see a political revolution? we, the contemporaries of those Germans? My friend, you believe what you desire . . . Since I judge Germany in terms of its present history, you cannot object that its whole history is falsified and all its present public life does not represent the real condition of the people. Read any newspaper you want, convince yourself that one does not cease—and you will concede that censorship stops no one from ceasing—to celebrate the liberty and national happiness we possess. . .

Ruge,
Letter to Marx
March 1844.

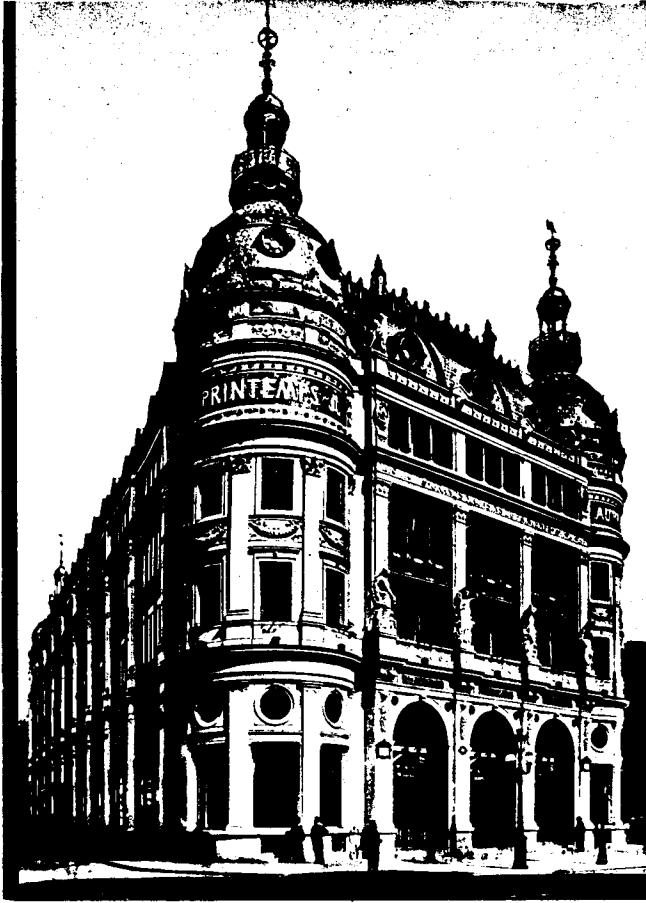


Culture is the general sphere of the knowledge and the representations of the lived, in the historical society divided into classes; which is to say that culture is the power of generalization existing *apart*, as a division of intellectual labor and as the intellectual labor of division. Culture detaches itself from the unity of the society of myth "when the power of unification disappears from the life of man and when opposites lose their relation and their living interaction and acquire autonomy. . ." (*Difference des systems de Fichte et de Schelling*). By gaining its independence, culture begins an imperialist movement of enrichment which is at the same time the decline of its independence. The history which creates the relative autonomy of culture and the ideological illusions about this autonomy also expresses itself as history of culture. And all the conquering history of culture can be understood as the history of the revelation of its inadequacy, as a march towards its self-suppression. Culture is the location of the search for lost unity. In this search for unity, culture as a separate sphere is obliged to negate itself.

The struggle between tradition and innovation, which is the principle of internal development of culture in historical societies, can only be carried on through the permanent victory of innovation. Yet innovation in culture is carried by nothing other than the total historical movement which, by becoming conscious of its totality, tends to go beyond its own cultural presuppositions and moves toward the suppression of all separation.

The rise of studies of society which contain the understanding of history as the heart of culture, takes from itself a knowledge without return, which is expressed by the destruction of God. But this "first condition of all critique" is also the first obligation of a critique without end. When it is no longer possible to maintain a single rule of conduct, every *result* of culture forces culture to advance towards its dissolution. Like philosophy at the moment when it gained its full autonomy, every discipline which becomes autonomous has to fall apart, first of all as a pretention to explain social totality coherently, and finally even as a fragmented instrumentation which can be used in its own boundaries. The *lack of rationality* of separate culture is the element which condemns it to disappear, because within it the victory of the rational is already present as a requirement.

Culture grew out of the history which abolished the type of life of the old world, but as a separate sphere it is still no more than sensible intelligence and communication, which remain partial in a *partially historical* society. It is the sense of a world which has too little sense.



The end of the history of culture manifests itself on two opposite sides: the project of its transcendence in total history, and the organization of its preservation as a dead object in spectacular contemplation. One of these movements has tied its fate to social critique, the other to the defense of class power.

Each of the two sides of the end of culture—all the aspects of the sciences as well as all the aspects of tangible representations—exist in a unitary manner in what used to be *art* in the most general sense. In the case of the sciences, the accumulation of fragmentary learnings, which become unusable because the *approval* of existing conditions must finally *renounce knowledge of itself*, confronts the theory of praxis which alone holds the truth of them all by being the only one that holds the secret of their use. In the case of representations, the critical self-destruction of society's ancient *common language* and its artificial recomposition in the commodity spectacle confronts the illusory representation of the not-lived.

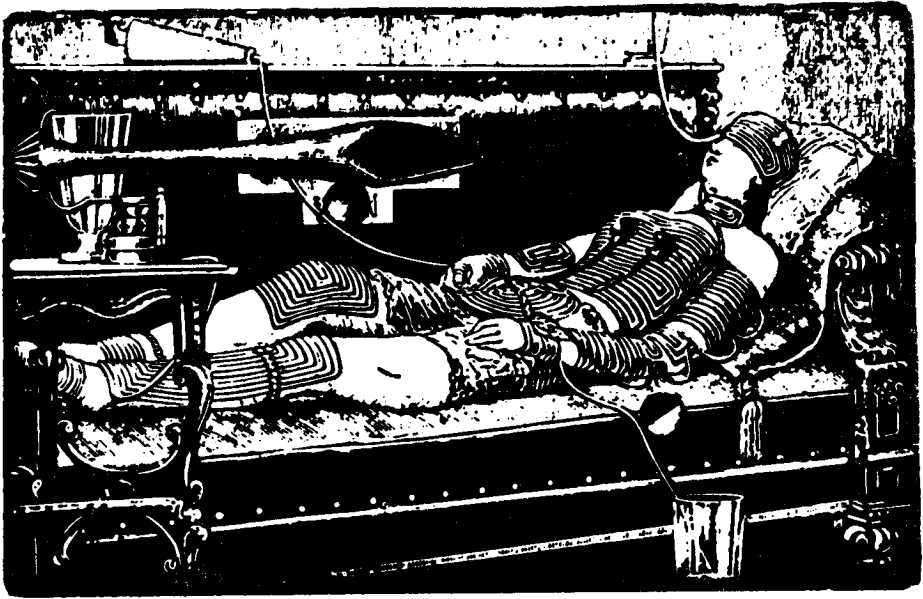
By losing the community of the society of myth, society must lose all the references of a really common language, up to the moment when the separation of the inactive community can be surmounted by accession to the real historical community. Art was the common language of social inaction; from the moment when it constitutes itself into independent art in the modern sense, emerging from its original religious universe and becoming individual production of separate works, it knows, as a special case, the movement which dominates the history of the ensemble of separate culture. Its independent affirmation is the beginning of its destruction.

The fact that the language of communication is lost—this is what is *positively* expressed by the modern movement of decomposition of all art, its formal annihilation. What this movement expresses *negatively* is the fact that a common language must be rediscovered—no longer in the unilateral conclusion which *always arrived too late* in the art of the historical society, speaking *to others* about what was lived without real dialogue, and admitting this deficiency of life—but it must be rediscovered in praxis, which gathers within it all direct activity and its language. The problem is to effectively possess the community of dialogue and the game with time which have been *represented* by poetico-artistic works.

When art which has become independent represents its world with dazzling colors, a moment of life has grown old and it cannot be rejuvenated with dazzling colors. It can only be evoked in memory. The greatness of art only begins to appear at the fall of life.

The historical time which invades art expressed itself first of all in the sphere of art itself, starting with the *baroque*. Baroque is the art of a world which has lost its center: the last mythical order in the cosmos and in the terrestrial government accepted by the Middle Ages—the unity of Christianity and the phantom of an Empire—has fallen. The *art of change* must carry within it the ephemeral principle which it discovers in the world. It has chosen, says Eugenio d'Ors, "life against eternity." Theater and the feast, the theatrical feast, are the dominant moments of baroque realization within which all particular artistic expression becomes meaningful only through its reference to the setting of a constructed place, to a construction which must be its own center of unification; and this center is the *passage*, which is inscribed as a threatened equilibrium within the dynamic disorder of the whole. The somewhat excessive importance given to the concept of the baroque in the contemporary discussion of esthetics translates the growing awareness of the impossibility of artistic classicism: for three centuries the attempts to realize a normative classicism or neo-classicism were no more than brief artificial constructions speaking the external language of the State, of the absolute monarchy, or of the revolutionary bourgeoisie in Roman clothes. From romanticism to cubism, it is in the last analysis an ever more individualized art of negation, perpetually renovating itself up to the point of the crumbling and complete negation of the artistic sphere which followed the general course of the baroque. The disappearance of historical art, which was tied to the internal communication of an elite, which had its semi-independent social basis in the partly playful conditions still lived by the last aristocracies, also translates the fact that capitalism experiences the first class power which confesses itself bare of any ontological quality, and whose root of power in the simple management of the economy is equally the loss of all human *mastery*. The baroque ensemble, which is itself a long-lost unity for artistic *creation*, is rediscovered in some manner in the present *consumption* of the totality of the artistic past. Historical knowledge and recognition of all the art of the past, retrospectively constituted into a world art, relativizes it into a global disorder which in its turn constitutes a

baroque edifice on a higher level, an edifice within which the production of baroque art itself, and all its revivals, dissolve. The arts of all civilizations and all epochs can for the first time be known and admitted together. It is a "recollection of souvenirs" of the history of art which by becoming possible, is also *the end of the world of art*. It is in this epoch of museums, when artistic communication can no longer exist, that all the ancient moments of art can be equally admitted, because none of them suffer more from the loss of their particular conditions of communication than from the present loss of conditions of communication *in general*.



Art in the epoch of its dissolution, a negative movement which seeks the transcendence of art in a historical society where history is not yet lived, is simultaneously an art of change and the pure expression of impossible change. The more grandiose its reach, the more its true realization is beyond it. This art is forcibly in the *vanguard*, and it *is not*. Its vanguard is its disappearance.

Dadaism and surrealism are the two currents which could mark the end of modern art. Though only in a relatively conscious manner, they are contemporaries of the last great assault of the revolutionary proletarian movement; and the defeat of this movement, which left them imprisoned in the same artistic field whose decay they had announced, is the basic reason for their immobilization. Dadaism and surrealism are at once historically related and opposed. This opposition, which constitutes the most important and radical part of the contribution of each, reveals the internal inadequacy of their critique, developed one-sidedly by each. Dadaism wanted *to suppress art without realizing it*; surrealism wanted *to realize art without suppressing it*. The critical position later elaborated by the *situationists* has shown that the suppression and the realization of art are inseparable aspects of the same *overcoming of art*.

Spectacular consumption which preserves congealed ancient culture, including the recuperated repetition of its negative manifestations, openly becomes in the cultural sector what it is implicitly in its totality; the *communication of the incommunicable*. The extreme destruction of language can here be found acknowledged flatly as an official positive value, since the task is to advertise a reconciliation with the dominant state of things, where all communication is joyously proclaimed absent. The critical truth of this destruction with reference to the real life of poetry and modern art is obviously hidden, since the spectacle, whose function is *to make history forgotten within culture*, applies in the pseudo-novelty of its modernist means the very strategy which constitutes it in depth. Thus a school of neo-literature, which simply admits that it contemplates what is written for its own sake, can present itself as something new. Furthermore, alongside the simple proclamation of the sufficient beauty of the dissolution of the communicable, the most modern tendency of spectacular culture—and the one most closely tied to the repressive practice of the general organization of society—seeks to recompose, by means of “integral works,” a complex neo-artistic environment made up of decomposed elements; notably in the researches of integration of artistic garbage or of esthetico-technical hybrids in urbanism. This is a translation on the level of spectacular pseudo-culture of the general project of developed capitalism, which aims to re-

capture the fragmented worker as a "personality well integrated in the group," a tendency recently described by American sociologists (Riesman, Whyte, etc.). It is everywhere the same project of a *restructuring without community*.

193

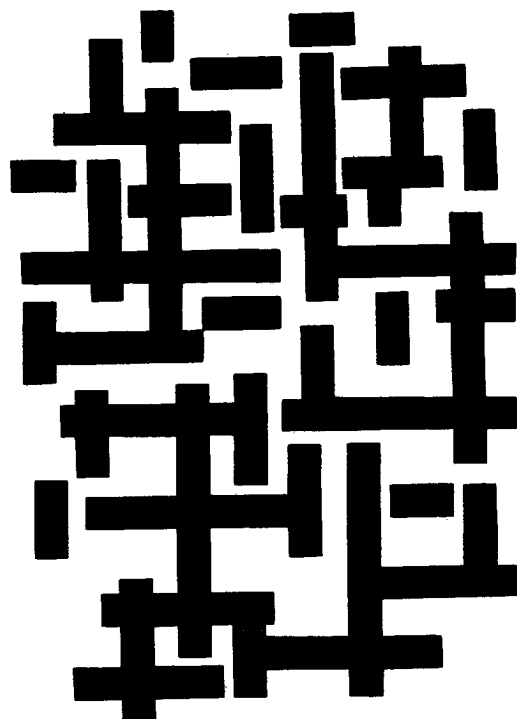
Culture turned completely into commodity must also turn into the star commodity of the spectacular society. Colin Kerr, one of the most advanced ideologues of this tendency, has calculated that the complex process of production, distribution and consumption of *knowledge* already gets 29% of the yearly national product in the United States; and he predicts that in the second half of this century culture will hold the key role in the development of the economy, a role played by the automobile in the first half, and by railroads in the second half of the previous century.

194

The ensemble of learnings which continue to develop today as the *thought of the spectacle* must justify a society without justifications, and must constitute themselves into a general science of false consciousness. This thought is completely conditioned by the fact that it cannot and does not want to think of its own material basis in the spectacular system.

195

The thought of the social organization of appearance is itself obscured by the generalized *sub-communication* which it defends. It does not know that conflict is at the origin of all things in its world. The specialists of the power of the spectacle, an absolute power within the context of its system of language without answer, are absolutely corrupted by their experience of contempt and the success of contempt; they find their contempt confirmed by the knowledge of the *contemptible man* who the spectator really is.



196

Within the specialized thought of the spectacular system a new division of tasks takes place to the extent that the improvement of this system itself poses new problems: on one hand the *spectacular critique of the spectacle* is undertaken by modern sociology which studies separation by the sole means of the conceptual and material instruments of separation; on the other hand the *apology for the spectacle* constitutes itself into the thought of non-thought, into the *official forgetting* of historical practice, within all the various disciplines where structuralism takes root. Nevertheless, the false despair of non-dialectical critique and the false optimism of pure advertising of the system are identical as submissive thought.

197

The sociology which began, first of all in the United States, to focus discussion on the conditions of existence brought about by present development, was able to bring to view much empirical data, but could

in no way know the truth of its own object because it does not find within it the critique immanent to it. The result is that the sincerely reformist tendency of this sociology leans on morality, on common sense, on completely senseless appeals with regard to measure, etc. Because this type of critique is not familiar with the negative which is at the heart of its world, it only insists on the description of a type of negative surplus which seems deplorably to hinder it on the surface, like an irrational parasitic proliferation. This indignant good will, which even as such arrives at blaming only the external consequences of the system, thinks itself critical, forgetting the essentially *apologetic* character of its assumptions and its method.

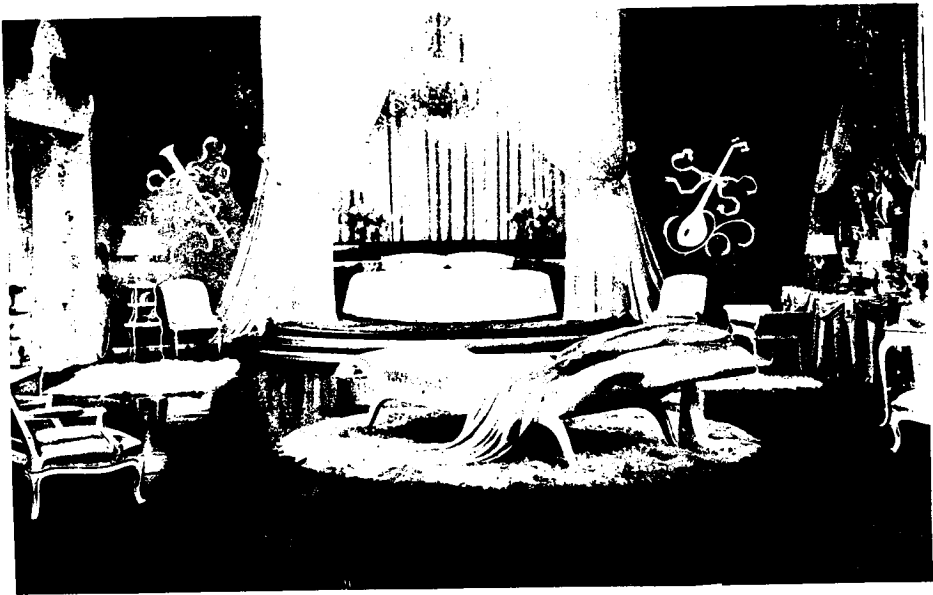
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Those who denounce the absurdity or the perils of incitement to waste in the society of economic abundance do not know the purpose of waste. They condemn with ingratitude, in the name of economic rationality, the good irrational guardians without whom the power of this economic rationality would collapse. And Boorstin, for example, who in *The Image* describes the commodity consumption of the American spectacle, never reaches the concept of spectacle because he thinks he can leave private life, or the notion of "the honest commodity," outside of this disastrous exaggeration. He does not understand that the commodity itself made the laws whose "honest" application leads to the distinct reality of private life and to its ulterior reconquest by the social consumption of images.

199

Boorstin describes the excesses of a world which has become foreign to us as if they were excesses foreign to our world. But the "normal" basis of social life, to which he implicitly refers when he qualifies the superficial reign of images in terms of psychological and moral judgments as the product of "our extravagant pretensions," has no reality either in his book or in his epoch. It is because the real human life Boorstin speaks of is for him in the past, which includes the past of religious resignation, that he cannot understand all the profundity of a society of images. The *truth* of this society is nothing other than the *negation* of this society.

The sociology which thinks it can isolate from the whole of social life an industrial rationality functioning apart can go so far as to isolate from the general industrial movement the techniques of reproduction and transmission. It is thus that Boorstin finds that the results he depicts are caused by the unhappy, almost fortuitous encounter of an oversized technical apparatus for the diffusion of images with an excessive attraction to the pseudo-sensational on the part of the people of our epoch. Thus the spectacle would be caused by the fact that modern man is too much of a spectator. Boorstin does not understand that the proliferation of the pre-fabricated "pseudo-events" which he denounces flows from the simple fact that, in the massive reality of present social life, men do not themselves live events. It is because history itself haunts modern society like a spectre that one finds the pseudo-history constructed at every level of consumption of life, to preserve the threatened equilibrium of the present *frozen time*.



The affirmation of the definitive stability of a short period of frozen historical time is the undeniable basis, unconsciously and consciously proclaimed, of the present tendency toward a *structuralist* systematization. The vantage point from which anti-historical structuralist thought views the world is that of the eternal presence of a system which was never created and which will never end. The dream of the dictatorship

of a pre-existing unconscious structure over all social praxis was abusively drawn from models of structures elaborated by linguistics and ethnology (see the analysis of the functioning of capitalism), models *already abusively understood in these circumstances*, simply because the academic imagination of average functionaries, quickly filled, an imagination completely entrenched in the celebration of the existing system, flatly reduces all reality to the existence of the system.

202

As in all historical social science, in order to understand "structuralist" categories it must always be kept in mind that the categories express forms of existence and conditions of existence. Just as one cannot appraise the value of a man in terms of the conception he has of himself, one cannot appraise—and admire—a determined society by taking as indisputably true the language it speaks to itself; "... so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary; this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life. . ." Structure is the daughter of present power. Structuralism is the *thought guaranteed by the State* which thinks the present conditions of spectacular "communication" as an absolute. Its method of studying the code of messages is itself nothing but the product, and the recognition, of a society where communication exists in the form of a cascade of hierarchic signals. Consequently it is not structuralism which serves to prove the transhistorical validity of the society of the spectacle; it is on the contrary the society of the spectacle imposing itself as massive reality which serves to prove the cold dream of structuralism.

203

Undoubtedly the critical concept of *spectacle* can also be vulgarized into some kind of hollow formula of sociologico-political rhetoric to explain and abstractly denounce everything, and thus serve as a defense of the spectacular system. It is obvious that no idea can lead beyond the existing spectacle, but only beyond the existing ideas on the spectacle. For an effective destruction of the society of the spectacle, what is needed is men putting a practical force into action. The critical theory of the spectacle can only be true by uniting with the practical current of negation in society; and this negation, the resumption of the revolutionary class struggle, will become conscious of itself by developing the critique of the spectacle which is the theory of its real conditions, practical conditions of present oppression, and inversely by unveiling

the secret of what it can become. This theory does not expect miracles from the working class. It envisages the new formulation and the realization of proletarian wants as a long-range task. To make an artificial distinction between theoretical struggle and practical struggle—since on the basis here defined, the very constitution and the communication of such a theory cannot even be conceived without a rigorous practice—it is certain that the obscure and difficult path of critical theory should also be the lot of the practical movement acting on the scale of society.

204

Critical theory must be *communicated* in its own language. This is the language of contradiction, which must be dialectical in its form as it is in its content. It is critique of the totality and historical critique. It is not a "zero degree of writing" but its overcoming. It is not a negation of style, but the style of negation.

205

In its very style, the exposition of dialectical theory is a scandal and an abomination in terms of the rules of the dominant language and for the taste which they have educated, because in the positive use of existing concepts it at the same time includes the knowledge of their rediscovered *fluidity*, of their necessary destruction.

206

This style which contains its own critique must express the domination of the present critique *over its entire past*. Through it the mode of exposition of dialectical theory makes visible the negative spirit within it. "Truth is not like a product in which one can no longer find any trace of the implement." (Hegel). This theoretical consciousness of movement within which the very trace of movement must be present, manifests itself by *overturning* the established relations between concepts and by *displacement* of all the acquisitions of previous critique. The overturning of the genitive is this expression of historical revolutions, consigned to the form of thought, which was considered the epigrammatic style of Hegel. The young Marx, advocating the replacement of the subject by the predicate after the systematic use Feuerbach made of this, achieved the most consistent use of this *insurrectional style* which, out of the philosophy of misery, drew the misery of philosophy. Displacement leads to the subversion of past critical conclusions which were frozen into respectable truths, namely transformed

into lies. Kierkegaard already used it deliberately, adding his own denunciation of it: "But despite all the tours and detours, just as jam always returns to the pantry, you always end up by sliding in a little word which isn't yours and which bothers you by the memory it awakes." (*Philosophical Fragments*). It is the obligation of *distance* toward that which was falsified into official truth which determines the use of displacement, as was acknowledged by Kierkegaard in the same book: "Only one more comment on your numerous allusions aiming at all the grief I mix into my statements of borrowed subjects. I do not deny it here nor will I deny that it was voluntary and that in a new continuation to this brochure, if I ever write it, I intend to name the object by its real name and to clothe the problem in a historical attire."

207

Ideas improve. The meaning of words participates in the improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It squeezes the phrase of an author, makes use of its expressions, rubs out a false idea, replaces it with a true idea.

208

Displacement is the opposite of citation, of the theoretical authority which is always falsified by the mere fact of becoming a citation; a fragment torn out of its context, its movement, and finally its epoch as a general reference and as a precise choice which it was within this reference, exactly recognized or erroneous. Displacement is the fluid language of anti-ideology. It appears within communication which knows that it cannot pretend to hold any guarantee in itself and definitively. It is, at its highest point, the language which cannot be confirmed by any ancient and supra-critical reference. On the contrary, it is its own coherence, within itself and with practicable facts, which can confirm the ancient grain of truth which it brings out. Displacement has not grounded its cause on anything external to its own truth as present critique.

209

That which, in theoretical formulation, openly presents itself as *displaced*, exposing all durable autonomy of the sphere of the theoretically expressed, *through this violence* bringing about the intervention of ac-

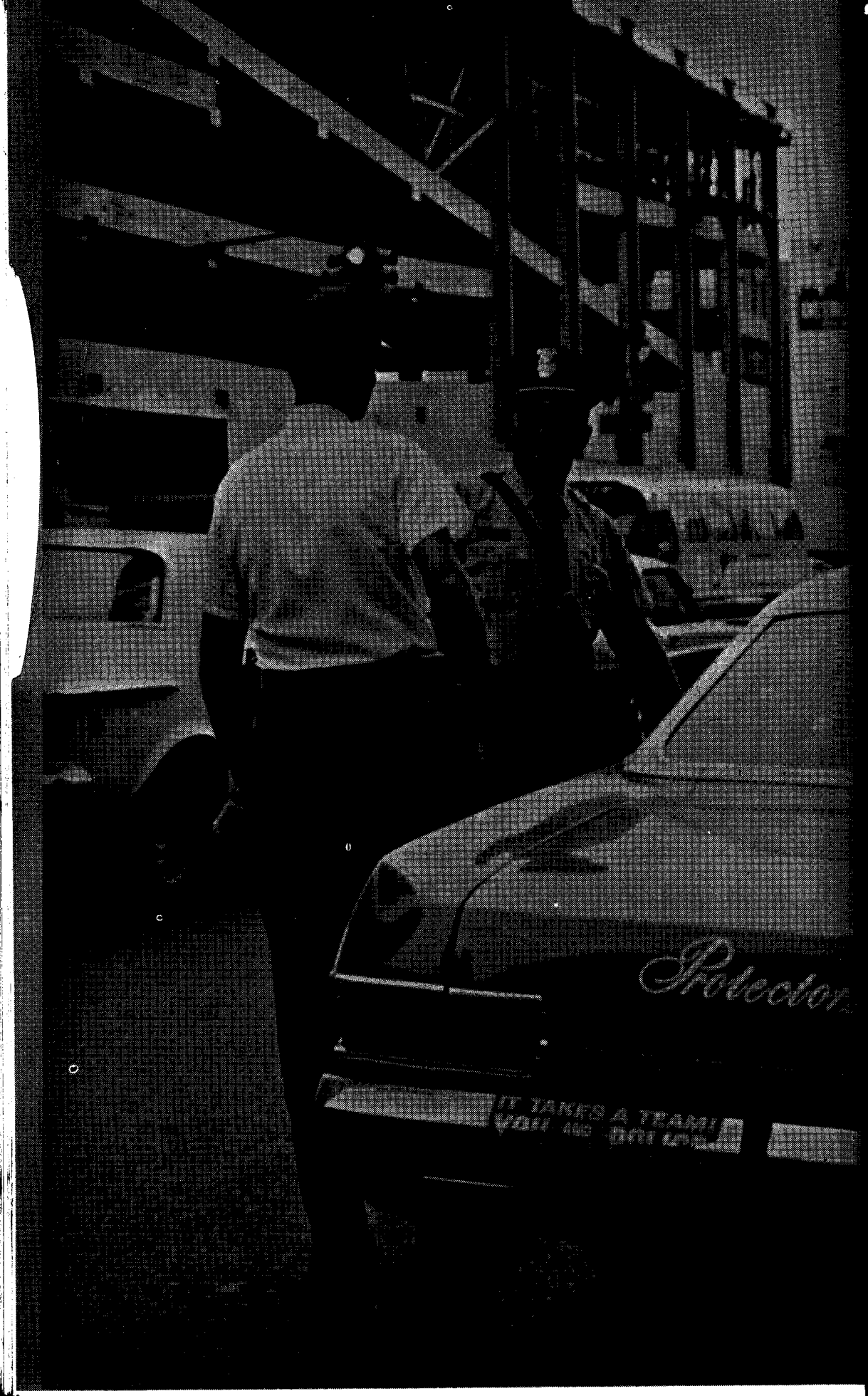
tion which deranges and carries away the entire existing order, is a reminder that this existence of theory is nothing in itself, and can only know itself with historical action and the *historical correction* which is its real loyalty.

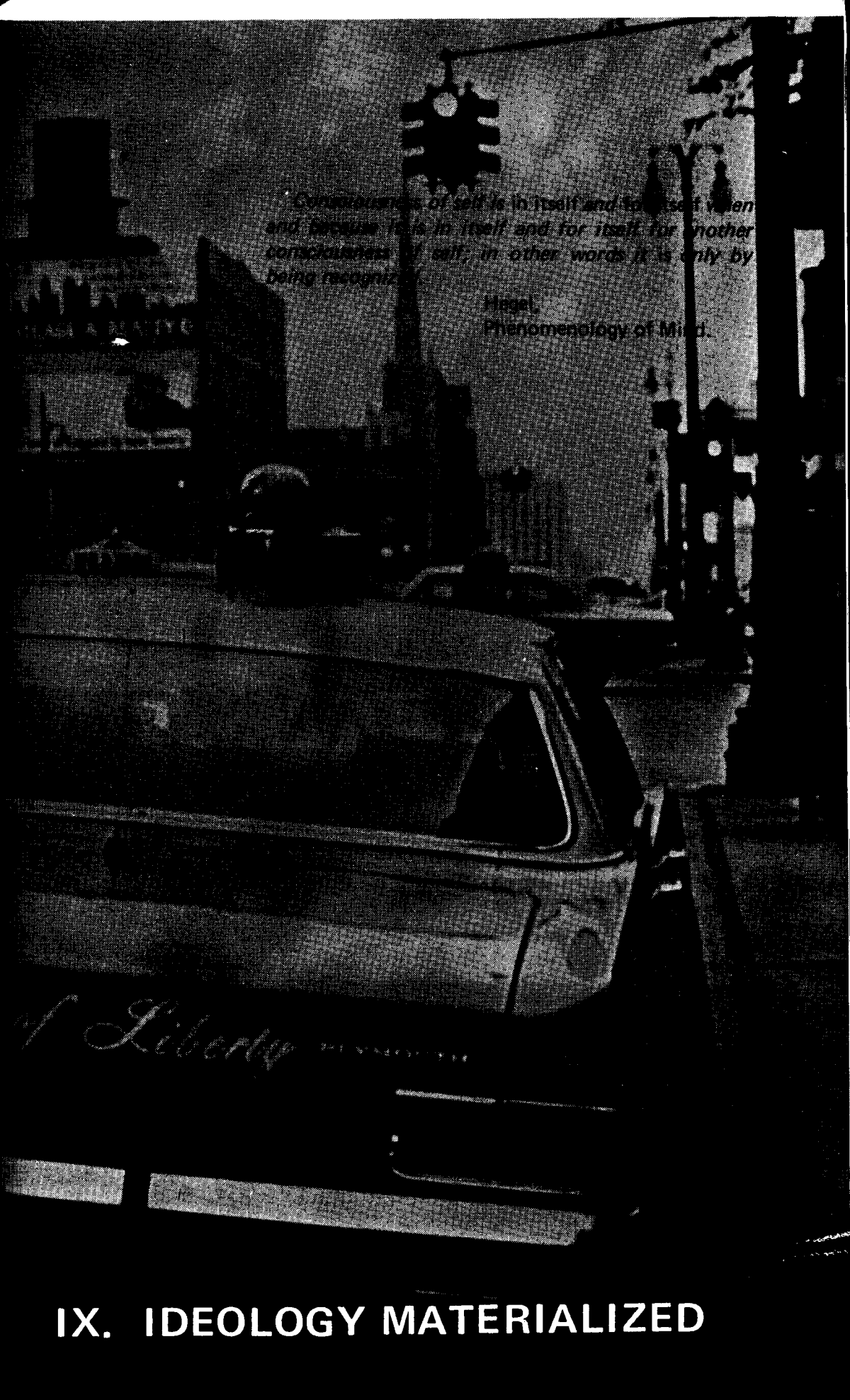
210

The real negation of culture is the only preservation of its meaning. *It can no longer be cultural.* As a result it is what remains in some way at the level of culture, although in a completely different sense.

211

In the language of contradiction, the critique of culture presents itself *unified*: in the sense that it dominates the whole of culture—its knowledge as well as its poetry—, and in the sense that it no longer separates itself from the critique of the social totality. It is this *unified theoretical critique* which goes alone towards the encounter with *unified social practice*.





*Consciousness of self is in itself and for itself when
and because it is in itself and for itself for another
consciousness of self, in other words it is only by
being recognized.*

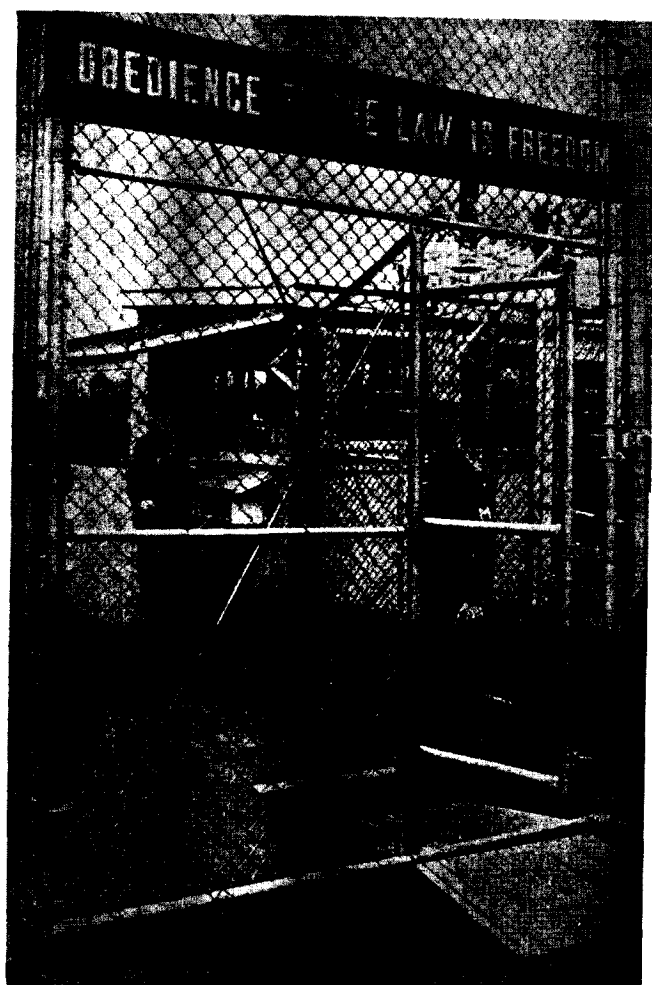
Hegel,
Phenomenology of Mind.

IX. IDEOLOGY MATERIALIZED

Ideology is the *basis* of the thought of a class society within the conflictual course of history. Ideological facts have never been simple chimaeras, but deformed consciousness of realities, and as such they have been real factors in turn exerting real deforming action. All the more reason why the *materialization* of ideology brought about by the concrete success of autonomized economic production, in the form of the spectacle, is in practice confused with the social reality of an ideology which was able to reduce everything real to its own model.

When ideology, which is the *abstract* will of the universal and its illusion, finds itself legitimated by the universal abstraction and the effective dictatorship of illusion in modern society, it is no longer a voluntaristic struggle of the partial, but its victory. From this point, ideological pretention acquires a sort of flat positivistic exactitude: it is no longer a historical choice but a fact. Within such an affirmation, the particular *names* of ideologies have disappeared. The very role of properly ideological labor in the service of the system no longer conceives of itself as more than the recognition of an "epistemological platform" which wants to be outside of all ideological phenomena. Materialized ideology is itself nameless, just as it is without an expressible historical program. This is another way of saying that the history of *ideologies* is over.

Ideology, whose whole internal logic led to "total ideology" in Mannheim's sense, the despotism of the fragment which imposes itself as a pseudo-knowledge of a frozen *totality*, the *totalitarian* vision, is now accomplished within the immobilized spectacle of non-history. Its completion is also its collapse within the whole of society. Ideology, the *last unreason* which blocks access to historical life, must disappear with the *practical collapse* of this society.



The spectacle is ideology par excellence, because it exposes and manifests in its fullness the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, the servitude and the negation of real life. The spectacle is materially "the expression of the separation and estrangement between man and man." Through the "new power of fraud" concentrated at the basis of the spectacle in this society, ". . . the new domain of alien beings which man serves grows together with the mass of objects." It is the highest stage of an expansion which has turned need against life. "The need for money is thus the real need produced by political economy, and the only need it produces" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*). The spectacle extends to all of social life the principle which Hegel (in the *Realphilosophie* of Jena) conceives as the principle of money: it is "the life of what is dead, moving within itself."

In opposition to the project summarized in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (the realization of philosophy in praxis which overcomes the opposition between idealism and materialism), the spectacle simultaneously preserves and imposes (within the pseudo-concrete of its universe) the ideological character of materialism and of idealism. The contemplative side of the old materialism which conceives the world as representation and not as activity—and which ultimately idealizes matter—is completed in the spectacle, where concrete things are automatically the masters of social life. Reciprocally, the *dreamed activity* of idealism is equally completed in the spectacle, through the technical mediation of signs and signals—which finally materialize an abstract ideal.

The parallel between ideology and schizophrenia established by Gabel (*La Fausse Conscience*) must be placed within the economic process of materialization of ideology. Society has become what ideology already was. The removal of praxis and the anti-dialectical false consciousness which accompanies it are imposed during each hour of daily life subjected to the spectacle; this must be understood as a systematic organization of the "failure of the faculty of encounter" and as its replacement by a *hallucinatory social fact*: the false consciousness of the encounter, the "illusion of the encounter." In a society where no one can any longer be *recognized* by others, every individual becomes unable to recognize his own reality. Ideology is at home; separation has built its own world.

"In the clinical bulletins of schizophrenia," says Gabel, "the decadence of the dialectic of totality (with its extreme form in dissociation) and the decadence of the dialectic of becoming (with its extreme form in catatonia) seem solidly united." The consciousness of the spectator, prisoner of a flattened universe, limited by the *screen* of the spectacle, behind which his own life has been deported, knows only the *fictional speakers* who entertain him unilaterally with their commodity and with the politics of their commodity. The spectacle, in all its extent, is his "sign in the mirror." The stage is here set with a false exit from a generalized autism.

The spectacle, which is the elimination of the limits between self and world through the destruction of the self besieged by the presence-absence of the world, is equally the elimination of the limits between true and false through the repression of all truth lived under the *real/presence* of the lie ensured by the organization of appearance. One who submits passively to his alien daily fate is thus pushed toward a folly which reacts illusorily toward this fate by turning to magical techniques. The acceptance and consumption of commodities are at the heart of this pseudo-response to a communication without response. The need to imitate which is felt by the consumer is precisely the infantile need conditioned by all the aspects of his fundamental dispossession. In the terms applied by Gabel to a completely different pathological level, "the abnormal need for representation here compensates for a torturing feeling of being on the margin of existence."

If the logic of false consciousness cannot truly know itself, the search for critical truth about the spectacle must also be a true critique. It must struggle in practice among the irreconcilable enemies of the spectacle and admit that it is absent where they are absent. It is the laws of the ruling thought, the exclusive point of view of the *here and now*, that accept the abstract will of immediate efficacy when the ruling thought throws itself into the compromises of reformism or into the common action of pseudo-revolutionary garbage. In this way delirium reconstitutes itself within the very position which pretends to combat it. On the contrary, the critique which goes beyond the spectacle must *know how to wait*.

Emancipation from the material bases of inverted truth—this is what the self-emancipation of our epoch consists of. This "historical mission of installing truth in the world" cannot be accomplished either by the isolated individual, or by the atomized mass subjected to manipulation, but still and always by the class which is able to be the destruction of all classes by taking all power into the dealienating form of realized democracy, the Council in which practical theory controls itself and sees its own action. Only there are individuals "directly tied to universal history;" only there does dialogue arm itself to make its own conditions conquer.

ERRATA

Chapter III, Title page: the second sentence of the quotation from *The Red Flag* of Peking should read: "This debate is a struggle between those who are for and those who are against the materialist dialectic, . . ."

Chapter III, paragraph 63: line six begins with "denies."