**Spectacle and Resistance in the Modern and Postmodern Eras**

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**Abstract**

The advanced stage of capitalism that we now live in has brought many changes to the way that society consumes and produces. One of the biggest shifts to the modern economy was the use of visual culture to distract, pacify, and exert power over the masses; a cultural change French theorist Guy Debord named the Society of the Spectacle. As a result, Debord and the Situationist International developed a movement of resistance to reclaim the territories of everyday life being eroded by the spectacle through separation and alienation. Since the term was coined the use of visual culture has accelerated and become even more pervasive in the postmodern world which led Jean Baudrillard to claim that the real has been replaced by simulation and hyperreality. This thesis explores this cultural shift to determine whether the practices of resistance theorized by Debord and the Situationists are still relevant as the reach of postmodernism increases.

**Keywords**

Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, Situationist International, Jean Baudrillard, Hyperreality, Media, Capitalism, Resistance, Cinema, Film, Avant-garde, Self-reflexivity, Alternative Media, Art, Video, Video Art

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## 1. Problematic

### 1.1 Introduction

Visual culture in modern society has undergone a rapid progression and is constantly in a state of evolution. The production of modern forms of media has been so pervasive that the integration and the effects it has on society is indisputable. As the reach of the media continue to expand it becomes all the more important to reflect on the role it plays in our society as well as the positive and negative influences it may impart. As the consumption of media continues to occupy more and more of people's time, it is important to understand whether this is time well spent or a sustained distraction from the important lived experiences of everyday life. The French theorist, Guy Debord, was very suspicious of the contributions of dominant media within modern society but more importantly about the ideological influences that could be at play within their production by those who could benefit by doing so. The media could therefore be seen as tools within capitalist society in order to generate profits and to sustain hierarchies of power. Media developed to serve these ends were labeled 'the spectacle' by Debord who felt that their only role was to arrest the attention of the masses and to indoctrinate them as a way to render them complacent to the status quo and to the systems of power. In order to resist the influence of the dominant forms of media, Debord developed theories and cinematic strategies to counteract and to bring attention to the discrete and omnipresent nature of the spectacle within society. These contributions were both avant-garde and revolutionary, however, since the 1960s when Debord coined the term 'the spectacle' there have been many technological and societal changes that raise the following question.  Are the theories and avant-garde cinematic practices of Guy Debord, which were revolutionary and influential in the modern era, still relevant and applicable in the postmodern world?

It will be the aim of this thesis to explore and understand the nature of the spectacle, as it was understood by Debord, to unearth whether his strategies of resistance could still be adopted within the shifting and illusory media landscape of the postmodern world. The thesis will begin with a look at the theoretical underpinnings of Debord's own work which was greatly influenced by the theoretical work of Marx and its continued manifestations within the explorations of the Frankfurt School. With an improved understanding of his influences we will be able to contextualize Debord's theory of the spectacle and the effects it has on the collective nature of society. As the influences of the spectacle are uncovered it will then be possible to explore the revolutionary and avant-garde cinematic practices adopted by Debord, as well as his group the Situationist International, to gauge their potential and effectiveness. Following the assessment of their revolutionary practices we will carry these notions through to the present postmodern era to discover whether or not they can sustain themselves beyond the implosion of reality and the onset of hyperreality both of which were theorized by Jean Baudrillard. The arrival of the qualities of the postmodern undoubtedly leads to changes in the way that capitalism and society operate in regards to the further evolutions of the spectacle. What remains to be seen is if society will continue to be awash with spectacular culture or whether a critical awareness can be promoted within the masses that will allow them to better understand their lives within the context of a media saturated world.

As the territories of the postmodern begin to reveal themselves through their theoretical exploration, the new and continued strategies of the spectacle will be explored as well as the areas of potential resistance available within this new era of media. Three realms of contemporary media production will be explored for their potential for providing resistance to dominant media and to systems of power. It will be important to begin looking at existing

productions of dominant media to see whether they have developed or have incorporated forms

of resistance, and to which extent, through their own transition to the postmodern. Additionally,

the contributions of alternative media will also be explored in regards to the alternative

perspectives they present that differ to those championed by the dominant media industry. The

development of the Internet is also vitally important in the way that it has afforded alternative

media and movements of resistance a second life within postmodern society. Finally, the work of

contemporary artists will also be explored to see if the revolutionary potential of art, developed

by Debord and the Situationists, are still practiced, possible and relevant within postmodernism.

The theoretical exploration of these three areas of production will also be accompanied by a

video piece which adopts and expands upon the examples raised within these three sectors, to

further add to the theoretical explorations of this thesis, and to suggest new and revitalized

strategies for raising critical consciousness and for resisting the ideological influences of

dominant media. The video piece presents content that strives to move the viewer towards greater

critical awareness, acts of postmodern resistance, and is also constructed in a way that it

contributes to both ends through its content as well as through its own formal qualities. The

combined phases of this thesis will provide a greater understanding of the spectacle, its influence

historically and presently, and its inherent aims.


**1.2 The Rise of the Spectacle**

The birth of industrialization has had far reaching effects, not just on the way that we

produce and circulate products, but also in the way that we relate to one another and create

communities. The masses throughout history have constantly been subjected to the whim and

power of different political or religious elites, but the industrialized way of life has introduced a

new form of power that would eventually transform society into its current postmodern condition.  This historical shift took place when the power of State had been rendered unstable due to feudalism.  At this point the bourgeoisie were able to gain an economic foothold which they were then able to leverage into power.  Having wrested the economy from the hands of the State, the bourgeoisie was then able to exert their own ideological influence.  This type of societal revolution was unprecedented, "the bourgeoisie is the only revolutionary class that has ever been victorious; the only class, also, for which the development of the economy was the cause and consequence of its capture of society." (Debord 1967, p.57) What was essentially set in motion was the framework necessary for modern day capitalism.

The continued control of the economy at the hands of the bourgeoisie would solidify their influence as a staple within society. They became a sector of society that the State needed to negotiate with rather than control, a negotiation that would ultimately blur the line in the sand between the two sectors. Marx foreshadowed the modern State bureaucracy as a fusion of capital and State which established "capital's national power over labor and a public authority designed to maintain social servitude." (Debord 1967, p.57) The transformation of the State into one essentially controlled by the interests of the bourgeoisie was the final lynchpin toward proletariat control. The rise to power of the bourgeoisie and the transformation of the power exerted on the proletariat is pivotal as it outlines "the sociopolitical bases of the modern spectacle." (Debord 1967, p.57) Although often underestimated as simple entertainment or benign distraction what the spectacle produces and stands for is far more complex. "If the spectacle – understood in the limited sense of those "mass media" that are its most stultifying superficial manifestation – seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a mere apparatus, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the

spectacle's internal dynamics." (Debord 1967, p.19) This citation by Debord theorizes that the sole purpose of the spectacle has not been strictly to inform or entertain the masses but that there are also ideological frameworks beneath the surface of the mass media and the cultural industry that are not made explicit to the masses. What the "spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social formation; it is, so to speak, that formation's agenda." (Debord 1967, p.15) Therefore, the ideologies of the bourgeoisie, since their rise to power, have gradually infiltrated and transformed our societal configuration as well as our economic structures.

**1.2.1 The Marxist Perspective**

It was thought by Marx that the emergence of the capitalist mode of production "generated a new form of modern society whose motor and infrastructure was organized around the production of commodities and the accumulation of capital." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.79) This new modern society differed from those that came before it because its evolving economy was no longer anchored in the traditional notions of meeting needs and uses, but was becoming increasingly driven by the imperative to fill the wants and desires that were being generated by new markets. "Use value was formerly understood as an implicit aspect of exchange value. Now, however, within the upside-down world of the spectacle, it must be explicitly proclaimed, both because its actual reality has been eroded by the over developed commodity economy and because it serves as a necessary pseudo-justification for counterfeit life." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.56) A life and a society whose focus is no longer uniquely axed on the sustainability and the well being of the collective but on the allure of the spectacle and its promise of personal status or contentment within a new economy underpinned by the need to accumulate capital. Marx anticipated that the new emphasis placed on capital within the modern economy was

leading capital to create "a world in its own image, and the commodity form of its products [have become] a constitutive principle of social organization." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.79) This evolution of our economic and societal constructs are shifting the mentality of the proletariat away from a needs based and community-driven economy to one dictated by desires and self-fulfillment. The rise of the bourgeoisie has allowed for the freedom and luxury that comes from having a steady income to span well beyond the prices and commodities necessary to fill the primary needs of the community. An economy once strictly based on use value has, with the rise of capital, spawned the new parallel form of exchange value.  Despite its humble beginnings, in service to use value, exchange value eventually became the economy's driving force by "mobilizing all human use value and monopolizing its fulfillment, [it] ultimately succeeded in *controlling use*." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.56) As exchange value progressed it quickly began to eclipse use value and subsequently worked against it to advance its own supremacy which ultimately changed the major driving force of the world economy.

The ramifications surrounding the bourgeoisie's rise in income is put forward by Marx as a form of dialectics. For Marx, "money, which is the external, universal means and power…to turn imagination into reality and reality into mere imagination, similarly turns real human and natural powers into purely abstract representations," (Marx 1975, p.378) which constitutes the first illusory shift towards the separation of authenticity and the real experience of life.  Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* are an exploration into this play between demand and need and the implications of prioritizing the later despite the detriment of the former. "[D]emand, supplied with money, can take active possession, even of things it does not really require, while need without money remains entirely in the realm of thought. Money can thus turn the rich man's passing fancy into reality, but the poor man's urgent requirements into torturing, ungraspable

figments of imagination" (Cubitt 2001, p.31) The disparity between these two poles reveal the

power dynamic that begin to take hold between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the social

relations which are developing under this new capitalist system are increasingly defined in the

way that the subordinate group labors to produce and consume commodities that are increasingly

mediated.  In Marx's 1867 work *Capital*, he illustrates that this new social dynamic does not

simply embody a new social matrix within which the active players identify with one another;

"rather, the mediation, initially analyzed as a means (of acquiring others' products'), acquire a

life of its own, independent, as it were, of the individuals that it mediates. It develops into a sort

of objective system over and against the individuals, and it increasingly determines the goals and

means of human activity." (Postone 1993, p.158) The influence that these mediated commodities

impose on society is fundamental in the way that they have altered society through the

transformation and negation of the natural world into goods. "People also transform themselves,

under the conditions of class society, as the goods they have made escape them to become an

alien reality, no longer part of them but bought and sold as separate objects over which their

makers have no further power." (Cubitt 2001, p.32) The progressive disassociation of the

proletariat from the commodities they produce as well as from their authentic realities becomes

an important aspect of the continued exploration of Marx's theories in the twentieth century. The

Frankfurt School's "analysis addresses this qualitative change in terms of increased alienation

and exploitation from a relatively traditional Marxist perspective." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.108)

They demonstrated in their critical theory, based on a thorough understanding of Marx, the

historical transformation of capitalism from "a liberal, market-centered form to an organized,

bureaucratic, state-centered form," (Postone 1993, p.15) through their reconceptualization of

capitalism.

**1.2.2 The Frankfurt School**

The evolution of Marxism undertaken by the Frankfurt School is the next phase in the understanding of the historical transformation of capitalism in modern society. For "modern theory – such as was developed by Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, the Frankfurt School, and others – is not only far from being obsolete, but is of central importance in making sense of our contemporary situation." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.80) The driving forces behind capitalism since the time of Marx have been subject to many changes over the course of the century that divides his theories and those of the Frankfurt School which requires a refinement of thought and an adjustment of focus in applying Marxist theory to these newer cultural dynamics.  "In the course of confronting and conceptualizing the significant transformations of capitalism in the twentieth century, they developed and placed at the center of their concern a critique of culture and ideology, and a critique of political domination." (Postone 1993, p.84) This represents a more sophisticated approach in assessing the next stages of capitalist influence.

The Frankfurt School is commended for having many influential contributors that have had great impacts on the theoretical landscape to this day and despite their unification around the project of revitalizing Marx's theories they have all developed a wide array of diverse theories that simultaneously work in concert with one another for the most part. Each theorist's exploration helps to bring into focus the different dynamics at play in the contemporary state of capitalism. Members of the school, like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse as well as some associated with the school such as Walter Benjamin explored the incremental bureaucratization and commodification of lived experiences as well as social relations. More thoroughly, Marcuse explored how the "the working class has been bought off by a society which allowed no dissent from the single dimension of a dominant capitalist ideology, and in his

work, the role of the proletariat was displaced by a new faith in the desires and imaginings of the unconscious mind and those social groups free to explore them." (Plant 1992, p.14) This further illustrates what was brought forward by Marx that the needs of the proletariat are being superseded to the further imaginings of the bourgeoisie. The focus is placed on the consumption of luxurious products despite their lack of necessary requirement within the lives of the proletariat. Working together, the Frankfurt School explored the ways that institutions, which were increasingly steeped in ideology, were beginning to have an impact on society while also suffocating all possibility of an alternative system. This notion was further explored by Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci who demonstrated that these institutions had "an unprecedented stranglehold on working-class consciousness, propagating a world view in which capitalism appears as the only possible system of social and economic relations." (Plant 1992, p.14) This economic determinism, outlined by the members of the Frankfurt School, is revealed to be the driving force and protected secret of the contemporary economy. However, despite their insightful contributions to the contextualization of the current state of the economy their theories are not without their own shortcomings.

The interpretation of Marxism developed by the Frankfurt School, had a more focused approach in their exploration of the capitalist economy. The result of this has led their theories to come up against some criticism in the way that it excludes the full breadth of the ideas developed by Marx.  It is argued by Moishe Postone (1993) that their focus on the categories of commodity and capital does not meet the totality of the Marxian categories of value and capital and plays to a contradictory nature of his original theories. He believes that the Frankfurt School specifies "only one dimension of capitalist society, the relations of distribution, which eventually comes to oppose its other dimension, social 'labor'. In other words, when the Marxian categories are

understood only in terms of the market and private property, they are essentially one-dimensional

from the outset: they do not grasp the contradiction but only one of its terms." (Postone 1993,

p.115) Postone believes that it is this oversight of the full breadth of the Marxist theory that

hindered the Frankfurt School from attaining its theoretical goals. Although they recognized the

shortfalls of a theory based on a nineteenth century reality they "remained bound to some

presuppositions of that very sort of theory, in particular, to its transhistorical conception of labor.

Their programmatic aim of developing a conception of capitalism adequate to the twentieth

century could not be realized on the basis of such an understanding of labor." (Postone 1993,

p.16) This misinterpretation of the intention of Marxist theory highlights that the Frankfurt

School failed in their attempts to establish links with the movements of the working class that

arose in the 1930s (Slater 1977, p.xv) which, if followed would give way to "a completely

administered, integrated, one-dimensional society, one that no longer gives rise to any imminent

possibility of emancipation." (Postone 1993, p.84) Therefore, although the theories of the

Frankfurt School allowed for greater understanding of the capitalist system there was no

consideration of how their theoretical insights could be used towards regaining the proletariat's

autonomy from an economic system that renders them subordinate.  In essence, the work of the

Frankfurt School raises a dilemma but offers no course of action. Despite this gap in their critical

theory, the insights they brought to our understanding of the cultural industry and the ways that it

dispels critical thought through spectacular bemusement is still vitally important, for the

spectacle is an important element in maintaining the capitalist economic hierarchy.


**1.2.3 The Breakdown of the Collective and the Dawn of Spectacular Life**

        The use of spectacle as a tool to maintain the control of the proletariat was ideal in that it

provided "the perfect framework. It captured the contemplative and passive nature of modern life

and accounted for the boredom and apathetic dissatisfaction which characterised social

experience." (Plant 1992, p.9) It also helped to usher forth a new phase of capitalist abstraction

as it takes the way people relate to commodities a step further. "Just as the commodity absorbed

and abstracted the economic relations that pre-dated it, so the spectacle absorbs and abstracts the

commodity form." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.114) The spectacle now operates differently relative

to commodities through a reinvention of the strategies that supplanted the earlier form of

exchange values with the commodity itself. The proletariat, rather than being enticed by

commodities they don't need are now enticed by the spectacular image of commodities and

lifestyles that only plunge them further into a world mediated by spectacle. The disruptive and

excessive distraction set in motion by the bourgeois has preoccupied many theorists like Charles

Henry and Charles Féré in their attempts to understand the effects of the spectacle on social

order. Figures like Féré were exploring "the contemporary social fantasy of 'solidarity', and he

cautioned against the dangers of collective overstimulation, sociopathic exhaustion and

ultimately of degeneration, which threatened the health and functional unity of solidarity." (Féré

quoted in Crary 2001, p.176) This degeneration of solidarity is of quintessential importance to

the spectacle, which is why it was cautioned by theorists that "individual pleasure ought not to

exceed the limits beyond which the long-term evolutionary interest of the collectivity were

threatened." (Crary 2001, p.177) This reticence towards allowing unfettered consumption of the

spectacle is warranted when confronted with a spectacle that, if left unchecked, "overstimulates,

distracts, and diverts people from the reality of their condition, often obscuring the real needs for

community, meaningful work, respect of difference, and an equitable distribution of wealth by

promoting an insatiable desire to consume."(Becker 2002, p.144) The distraction abetted by the

spectacle steers the attention of the proletariat away from the conditions and ideologies that

directly affect them towards behaviors that serve only to solidify the hold and influence of the bourgeoisie. It siphons the proletariat's time and energy, which previously would have been invested in actively living and constructing their life, and replaces it with a resigned apathy generated by a system that benefits from their lack of lucidity.

Prior to the onset of the spectacle, the desire for entertainment was fulfilled by turning to ones community or peers. This was often achieved through the exchange of stories, collective activities or through the performing or composing of music to name a few examples. What is most important to retain is that what occupied the everyday lives of the proletariat were the products of their own making or those of their entourage. The rise of the spectacle has had a profound effect on how society spends its time and invests its attention. This impact on society is the result of the spectacle's changes to the social relations found within the proletariat's communities shifting them away from their communal entertainment towards commodity spectacles which are consumed passively and leave no room for their own creative involvement. Rather than cultivating their own points of view and developing their own culture, the proletariat is now incorporating a commodity driven culture that is homogenized and out of touch with the genuine needs of the community. Additionally, this supplanting of community culture with the world of the spectacle is threatening because it "becomes the 'real' world of excitement, pleasure, and meaning, whereas everyday life is devalued and insignificant by contrast." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.90) The spectacle is driven by the imperative to sell commodities and to elevate a certain lifestyle and in so doing promotes an image of society that is beyond the reach of the proletariat. This allows the spectacle to draw their attention and to implant new desires that fuel the momentum of commodity culture.

> The philosophization of reality… separates thought from action as it idealizes and
> hypostatizes the world of the spectacle. It converts direct experience into a spectacular
> and glittering universe of images and signs, where instead of constituting their own lives,

> individuals contemplate the glossy surfaces of the commodity world and adopt the
> psychology of a commodity self that defines itself through consumption and image, look,
> and style, as derived from the world of the spectacle. (Best & Kellner 1997, p.90)

Society within the spectacle is transformed in such a way that what is seen becomes more important and interesting than what is directly created or experienced. Through the constant barrage of images and commodities that begin to represent their lives to them, people begin to experience their reality as 'second-hand'. (Plant 1992, p.10) The proletariat is presented with idealized instances which they struggle to attain and incessantly consume in order to reconcile it with their real lives. "These commodified moments are explicitly presented as moments of real life whose cyclical return we are supposed to look forward to. But all that is really happening is that the spectacle is displaying and reproducing itself at a higher level of intensity. What is presented as true life turns out to be merely a more truly *spectacular life*." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.72) The preoccupation with appearances over the needs of everyday reality becomes the pivotal change in society at large, because where time and attention are invested defines what is propagated and what is propagated is based on what society elevates as important. "The time spent consuming images (images which in turn serve to publicize all the other commodities) is both the particular terrain where the spectacle's mechanisms are most fully implemented and the general goal that those mechanisms present, the focus and epitome of all particular consumptions." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.72) As the proletariat's exposure to the spectacle increased, the commodity world that they elevated continued to gain in influence which resulted in further inaction on the part of those who abandoned their reality for spectacular life. "The concept of the spectacle therefore involves a distinction between passivity and activity and between consumption and production, condemning passive consumption of spectacle as an alienation from human potentiality." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.89) This dampening of human

potentiality by an acceptance of passive consumption is the most significant of the spectacle's

negative implications. It distracts society from the ways that it can push back against the

ideologies that disadvantage them. The spectacle infiltrating their concept of reality which helps

to conceal the ways that it is circumventing their ability to self actualize.


**1.2.4 Guy Debord and the Society of the Spectacle**

The book written by Guy Debord in 1968 entitled *The Society of the Spectacle* is

foundational when it comes to understanding the nature of the spectacle, but more importantly in

understanding the extent of its effects on society. "His impassioned, confident, unequivocally

enraged voice articulates the dilemma of the shrinking public sphere and the failures of social

criticism to permeate the phenomenon he terms *the spectacle*." (Becker 2002, p.1) Debord was in

many ways ahead of his time in his comprehension of the different incarnations of the spectacle

as well as the different manifestations it began to adopt with the establishment of the modern era.

It is important to note that Debord didn't view all media as being synonymous with spectacle

which becomes vitally important in his later work. He also stressed that any acceptable account

of the spectacle must trace its content to its source. Additionally the societal context must also be

considered to understand the spectacle's true nature within an industrial capitalist society.

(Taylor & Harris 2008, p.113) Tracing the spectacle back to its source is revelatory. Through the

discovery of how and why it came to be, we can better understand its reason for being and have a

more sophisticated sense of how it has evolved over time. "In presenting his thesis, Debord drew

heavily on the conceptual legacy of Hegelianism and Western Marxism, and in this regard he

employed the same theoretical frameworks as the Frankfurt School. This places him in a

transitional position, at once indebted to dialectics, while at the same time furnishing the insights

that allowed a later generation of media critics." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.107) He wanted to

demonstrate that although the basic economic structure developed by the capitalist system hadn't

evolved since Marx penned his theories there have still been many evolutions to the public

perception of commodities and their profound impacts on many aspects of life and culture.

Debord strived to illuminate the spuriousness and destructiveness of the commodity form within

this stage of capitalism. (Cubitt 2001, p.37) He wanted to bring Marxist thought into the

twentieth century in a way that would demonstrate "the increasing penetration of the spectacle

into life, both horizontally, as it extends across the globe, and vertically, as it extends further and

further into all reaches of everyday life." (Noys 2007, p.401) An expansion that doesn't cease to

accelerate through the aid of new systems of technology, information, and communication which

Debord felt required a new interpretation of Marxism that would reflect this new age.

    Much like the Frankfurt School, "Debord recognized the centrality of culture… to any

proper understanding of contemporary mass society. Unlike the Frankfurt School, however,

Debord was committed to what might be termed aesthetic terrorism - a direct intervention in

cultural production." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.109) His goals exceed those of the Frankfurt

School in the sense that he conceives of ways to reach and mobilize the proletariat. Debord's

theories are not only relevant in the decoding of the spectacle but they also offer strategies of

pushing back against its increasing terrain and influence. He "believed that a general social

liberation required an immediate self-emancipation and self creation. And as Marx sought the

'abolition' of philosophy in its merger with praxis, so Debord, in a broader conception, sought

the supersession of art in the aestheticizing of everyday life." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.94) This

aestheticization bolstered the spectacle's progress and resulted in a "concrete inversion of life, an

autonomous movement of the nonliving." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.44) The life established

through community, which constitutes actual living, is overshadowed by an inexhaustible

preoccupation with appearances that reflect life back to the viewer with varying degrees of

separation from their actual reality. "Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is an *affirmation*

of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances. But a critique that

grasps the spectacle's essential character reveals it to be a visible negation of life - a *negation* that

has taken on a *visible form*." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.46) A focus on appearance as the new

benchmark for what constitutes social life further entrenched the proletariat within behaviors that

impeded its own self-actualization outside of the spectacle.

The proletariat relied increasingly on being told what they wanted and desired rather than

it manifesting itself organically from their needs or that of their community. They also began to

labour with the goal of gaining the personal capital that had been elevated by the spectacle.

"Spectators do not find what they desire; they desire what they find." (Debord in Knabb 2003,

p.114) As the proletariat continued to mortgage their autonomy for the spectacle's commodities

they developed a false sense of connection to the world around them and the apathy caused by

this illusion effected their ability to voice their disenfranchisement because "spectacular

discourse leaves no room for any reply;" (Debord 1990, p.29) This is both the spectacle's best

defense and what generates its power. "Its sole message is: 'What appears is good; what is good

appears.' The passive acceptance it demands is already effectively imposed by its monopoly of

appearances, its manner of appearing without allowing any reply." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.46)

It is a communication structure that is not an equal opportunity disseminator.  In this way the

spectacle has full control of the consciousness of the proletariat by gate keeping what they can

and cannot see.  This system becomes the lens with which the proletariat sees the world, relying

on what they see and hear though the spectacle instead of relying on their peers or themselves for

their politics or desires. The proletariat's issues, politics or potential are not presented to them in the images they passively consume. The proletariat is left in the dark about the amplitude of the problems that they face. "In such a distorted situation, the more important that social issues become, the more they are hidden. It insidiously causes citizens to feel mistrustful of political discourse, impotent to effect change, and convinced that they must separate themselves from the political in order to live meaningful, joyful, creative lives." (Becker 2002, p.2) The lack of integration of issues and ideas that are important to the proletariat within the systems that seeks to control them renders them all the more vulnerable to its manipulations.

Having abandoned many of the traditional ways of building community, expressing discontent, exerting change and fostering political discourse, the proletariat became reliant on the spectacle's monopoly and breadth as the only method to reflect social problems. However, this is not a mandate that has ever been the goal of the spectacle nor will it ever be one of its priorities, unless profitable. "For Debord, the spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization; it is a 'permanent opium war' which stupefies social subjects and distracts them from the most urgent task of real life." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.84) The spectacle's erosion of proletariat collectivity enfeebles the power and momentum of their actions against an economy and society that disadvantages them. They protest that "power is unjust, its justice is a class justice, capital exploits us, etc.' - as if capital were linked by a contract to the society it rules. It is the left, which holds out the mirror of equivalence, hoping that capital will fall for this phantasmagoria of the social contract and fulfill its obligation towards the whole of society." (Baudrillard 1989, p.29) It is with great strife that the proletariat begins to realize that capital has never been bound to any social contract with the society that it dominates. The structures of current social relations are a challenge to society and when faced with this challenge the collectivity should act to reaffirm its

importance within capitalist hierarchies. (Baudrillard 1989, p.29) However, in the advanced

stages of the spectacle which extends far beyond the scope of what is merely visible, it is clear

that the proletariat is plagued with a challenge that when defined describes a large variety of

phenomena.

> In one sense, it refers to a media and consumer society, organized around the
> consumption of images, commodities, and spectacles. But the concept also refers to the
> vast institutional and technical apparatus of contemporary capitalism, to all the means
> and methods power employs, outside of direct force, which subject individuals to societal
> manipulation, while obscuring the nature and effects of capitalism's power and
> deprivations. (Best & Kellner 1997, p.84)

This more expansive understanding of the scope of the spectacle illustrates that although there

are visible facets of the spectacle within media culture its sprawl is integrated into a variety of

societal systems that span from education, to sports, to democracy. "The spectacle is the moment

when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life." (Beller 2006, p.259) This

illustrates that there are limited activities available within modern society that haven't in some

way, shape, or form been altered, integrated or completely created to suit the bourgeois agenda

whose primary goal is the breakdown of collectivity to circumvent resistance.


**1.2.5 Separation and Alienation**

Debord theorized that "Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (Debord

1967, p.20), he understood that the spectacle was essential to the breakdown of collectivity. "In

Debord's formulation, the concept of the spectacle is integrally connected to the concept of

separation, for in passively consuming spectacles, one is separated from other people and from

actively producing one's life." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.84) He understood that post industrial

society has experienced an ever increasing level of separation and isolation in service to the

modern day modes of production which has resulted in a division of labor. This new mode of

production has evolved past the assembly-line and has integrated itself into the way that society

functions.  Within assembly-line practices, laborers are isolated in their functions but contribute

to the greater whole as their part of the process adds to the efforts made by all those involved,

with the end result of a product. Although reliant on the other stages of production, at no point is

direct collaboration required to complete one's process within the sequence of events. Similarly

"spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their

isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its

*separateness*." (Debord 1967, p.22) This new culture of separation functions like the assembly

line whereby people count on others to ensure the progress and viability of society when in fact

their efforts should be weaved together to work towards a direction that is accountable and

acceptable to all those implicated. Capitalist society is strengthened and rendered more profitable

through increased separation and the isolation of people. Its production has separated products

from their labour but it has also endeavored to separate art from life as well as the spheres of

consumption from the areas of production. These separations combine to promote passivity in

the proletariat which persuades them to merely observe the products of social life. (Best &

Kellner 1997, p.84) It's a system that breaks down the associations between the different parts of

the capitalist system which further enhances the working class' obliviousness to the impacts of

the ways they produce and consume. Additionally, the increased mechanization of the production

also contributes to the disassociation the proletariat has with the products that are being produced

which exacerbates the alienation they experience between each other. "Workers are left debased,

exhausted, and denied, and the individual only 'feels himself outside his work, and in his work

feels outside himself." (Plant 1992, p.10) The proletariat, who work tirelessly to make their

livelihoods day in and day out are ignorant to the fact that their labor in a capitalist system is

perpetuating the system that dominates them. In many ways it becomes a self-generated

domination as workers submit rather than challenge the alienation that is imposed upon them.

(Postone 1993, p.159) When trying to understand the full extent of alienation it is important to

understand that this phenomenon…

> …refers to the externalization of a preexisting human essence. On another level, it refers
> to a situation in which capitalists possess the power of disposal over the workers' labor
> and its products. Within the framework of such a critique, alienation is an unequivocally
> negative process – although it is grounded in circumstances that can be overcome.
> (Postone 1993, p.161)

That alienation is circumstantial and not inevitable is vitally important because it illustrates that

challenge to this separation is possible and necessary for the proletariat. Additionally the

alienation that is endemic to the capitalist system is not only detrimental but is no longer entirely

necessary. At first this form of production was utilized at a time when people were desperate to

survive; "now that the forces of production unleashed by capitalism have rid us of this

desperation, the social relation which once facilitated human development have become its brake

and hindrance." (Plant 1992, p.22) Rather than allowing the workers to thrive, the current system

has stripped them of their ability to live in a way that strengthens their communities, improves

their well being and allows them to self-actualize.

Through the process of alienation the proletariat has been relegated to passively observing

the creation of their lives at the hands of the bourgeoisie and has done so contentedly to their own

detriment as they continue to labor to strengthen their own domination. Mankind's "self-alienation

has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the

first order." (Benjamin 1950, p.244) Unaware of the subtle nature of the spectacle, the proletariat

continues to passively consume its products and visual culture often oblivious of the undercurrents

that are eroding the foundation of their prosperity. The imperatives of hierarchical society

developed within the spectacle drill their way down to the isolated individual breaking apart all

social linkages to ensure that their experiences are filled with dominant images. The continued

bombardment also ensures that dominant images attain their full force due to the proletariat's

chronic exposure and isolation. (Debord 1967, p.122) Having no other source of information

outside of their own lived experiences, members of the proletariat become victims to the illusions

and mediations made by the spectacle, even worse, they are rendered complacent to them.

Throughout "the course of this development all community and critical awareness have ceased to

be; nor have those forces, which were able – by separating - to grow enormously in strength, yet

found a way to reunite." (Debord 1967, p.21) However, even if the aforementioned forces could be

reunited they would be faced with the difficult task of separating themselves from a pervasive

economic and cultural reality which has its own methods of managing dissent. "The spectacle is

the avowed enemy of all forms of community and (non-mediated) collective action. All

conceptions of collectivity are carefully policed, and are either incorporated or, if resistant,

stigmatized. The spectacle jealously guards its unifying force; it must be the only representation of

the life-world it denies." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.120) This strategy of control is what the new

economic power shift described above has brought, it has established a division of labor that

alienates people from their community and their surroundings and renders the public powerless to

the control of modern capital and the State. This is achieved through the illusions that mediate

members of society as part of the spectacle which is "the sun that never sets on the empire of

modern passivity." (Debord 1967, p.15)

The spectacle appears to be rendering a service, whereby it keeps the masses informed

and unified, but as "a part of society, it is the sector where all attention, all consciousness,

converges. Being isolated – and precisely for that reason – this sector is the locus of illusion and

false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized

separation." (Debord 1967, p.12) This demonstrates that the purpose of the spectacle is more

than just the presentation of visual culture. Spectacle "is a social relationship between people that

is mediated by images." (Debord 1967, p.12) With the loss of authentic interaction through

isolation, the proletariat has increasingly reliant on mediated images.  This reliance leaves the

proletariat vulnerable to the illusions and omissions made by the bourgeoisie, who are at the

spectacle's helm. The foundation of spectacular culture doesn't originate from an altruistic

source, an intention of educating or genuinely informing the masses, "but rather on strategies in

which individuals are isolated, separated, and inhabit time as disempowered." (Crary 2001, p.3)

This is the foundation of capitalism that has been developed by the bourgeoisie, for in order to

stay in power they have to exert that power over the working class to ensure economic control. It

has been witnessed in the past with the State, whose power was exerted through military

strength, as well as the Church, which used scripture to control the masses. Having developed a

new model of control method, the bourgeoisie continued to use the enticement of illusion and

desire as a means to isolate and exert their power.


## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 The Revolutionary Project of Guy Debord

For Guy Debord it wasn't enough to simply identify the spectacle and highlight its

effects, he wanted people to understand the spectacle in order to take action against it. This need

for action brought many like-minded individual together in thought and in practice which

eventually evolved into the group known as the Situationist International in the 1950's and

1960's. The group, largely comprised of the French avant-garde movement, was led by Guy

Debord and together they strived to develop theoretical critiques of the state of modern society

and its oppressive consumerism. Uniquely they strived to achieve their goals of critique through

the combination of radical artistic practices and social politics. (Best & Kellner 1997, p.79) In

many ways the group's mandate mirrors much of the theoretical exploration of Debord's work

described previously, they also "identified consumer capitalism as a new mode of social control,

as a 'society of the spectacle', that pacifies its citizens by creating a world of mesmerizing

images and stupefying forms of entertainment. " (Best & Kellner 1997, p.79) The politics behind

the theories developed by the Situationists were influenced by council Marxism, a thread of

libertarian Marxism, which was explored and popularized in the early careers of Luckács and

Gramsci and which had been adopted at the time by avant-garde groups in France as the

Situationist movement began to materialize. This school of thought was "radically democratic,

emphasizing the need for workers and citizens to democratically control every realm of their life

from the factory to the community, and it influenced Debord and the Situationists' positive

ideal."(Best & Kellner 1997, p.82) In the face of a rapidly evolving media and social landscape,

the Situationists were trying to discover ways to be proactive in order to raise awareness and

make change to what they felt was problematic about modern society.


### 2.1.1 The Situationist International

The Situationist International were developing their ideas and strategies at a time of great

economic and technological prosperity  causing many to view their project as obsolete due to the

proletariat knowing more wealth than ever before. This new prosperity characterized by

increased consumer choice and social movements like the sexual revolution, gay liberation and

the civil rights movement lead theorists to proclaim that the working class and ideological

conflict were disappearing. It was believed that the progressive society that was always needed

had been attained. "Others, however, including the Situationists, considered such complacency

superficial and premature." (Plant 1992, p.2) They agreed that much had progressed since the

time of Marx but much of his project had yet to be fulfilled and required reinvention within

contemporary cultural dynamics, since the economic structure in place was still fundamentally

the same. "Their program was to reinvigorate Marxian revolutionary practice and to supplement

Marx's critique of capital and the commodity, attempting to trace the further development of the

abstraction process inherent in commodity production." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.81) The

Situationists are an integral part of the thread that maps the abstraction process that increasingly

replaces society's lived experiences with spectacular representations which increasingly impedes

all self-actualization through distraction.

Debord was very much a Hegelian Marxist which had a profound impact on the direction

of the Situationist movement. The Hegelian influence meant that one of the major missions of

the group was to promote the development of human self-consciousness. The Situationists felt

that in this dialectical world, "the separation and antagonism between consciousness and the

world, the subject and the object, is necessary to human development: it is out of this difference

or friction that full self-consciousness emerges." (Plant 1992, p.21) Therefore, it is clear why the

Situationists set forth to attack this separation. Their goal was not to achieve "a Utopian world of

perfect stasis without the possibility of future change or development, but one in which the real

adventures of historical life could be played out in a society which, 'having brought down all its

enemies, will at last be able to surrender itself joyously to the true diversions and never-ending

confrontations of historical life.'" (Plant 1992, p.21) As a group the Situationists were working

towards reclaiming territories of authentic reality to return the focus and attention of the masses

to their lived experiences. They "saw negation in Hegelian terms, that is, as an *aufhebgen* or

*sublation* - in which something is negated to the extent that one moves beyond it, but in a process

of creative transformation in which elements of the old are contained in a radically new version, rather than the simple destruction of what went before." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.111) This notion of 'sublation' is key in understanding the mission of the Situationists. They did not strive to eliminate media or consumer society altogether. Nor did they hope for a return to a time prior to the existence of what they felt was eroding society but a negotiation between the system that exists and the reintegration of content and activities that would reinforce a failing collectivity. Their entire theory was "based on the assumption that both the objective and subjective ingredients of a new society are already present within the spectacle, so that all that is needed is a reversal of the perspective in which spectacular society is lived." (Plant 1992, p.31) This Situationist outlook demonstrates that a societal revolution does not require a total rebuilding of modern society, but simply a rethinking of how the great technological advancements since Marx can be better used to serve the collectivity instead of the capitalist system.

At their core, the Situationists were pro-active in their work towards changing the separation that was becoming increasingly more pervasive in society which was in part enabled by the inspiration they drew from Jean-Paul Sartre who stated that "there is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom." (Baudrillard 1990, p.189) Through his notion that "human existence is always lived within a particular context or situation and that individuals can create their own situations – as well as Lefebvre's concept of everyday life and his demand that it be radically transformed – Debord and his colleagues began devising strategies to construct new 'situations'." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.81) By endeavoring to promote creativity and interaction they hoped to reinstate the importance of time and history pioneered by Marx. They also strove to emphasize the production of alternative free spaces and the creation of

'liberated zones of desire'. (Best & Kellner 1997, p.81) These liberated zones become vital in

undermining the spectacle as it helps to negate the false desires manufactured within the

capitalist system. They also begin to break down the totality of spectacular relations which aids

in reinforcing and amplifying social relations. In order to transform the concept of liberated

zones of desire into reality "Debord and the Situationists champion active, creative, and

imaginative practice, in which individuals create their own 'situations', their own passionate

existential events, fully participating in the production of everyday life, their own individuality,

and, ultimately, a new society." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.89) This strategy, which would

eventually become their namesake, became a pivotal driving force behind the movement and

gave the group a direction toward which they could begin to make change. Situations "while

made to be lived individually, are at the same time necessarily collective. It could even be said

that the construction of situations is nothing other than a stimulus to community, an art of

sharing and participation." (Kaufmann 1997, p.59) The pro-active strategies and theories

developed by the Situationists enabled them to side step one of the pitfalls encountered by the

Frankfurt School which, as discussed, fell short of finding ways of leveraging what they

discovered in theory toward concrete attempts at a solution that involved the proletariat. The

strategies developed by the Situationists would "merge art and everyday life in the spirit of the

radical avant-garde and would require a revolution of both art and life." (Best & Kellner 1997,

p.82) Through the use of artistic strategies found in the avant-garde movements of the time the

Situationists hoped to recuperate everyday life which had suffered erosion since the onset of

modern day capitalism.

        In Marx's time the defining issue was the changes in labour practices and the effects they

were having on society but with the subsequent development of the capital system, and the

continued theoretical explorations of these phenomena, the focus has changed from class

struggle to a further exploration of the role cultural production plays in the construction of

modern day society. "The Situationists argued that the consumer society effectively subordinated

all aspects of human endeavor to capitalism. It follows from this that any political struggle to

change this would need to extend beyond challenging the economic relations of production."

(Taylor & Harris 2008, p.109) The increase in pervasiveness of the spectacle, steeped in

ideology, continued to be the predominate wedge affecting social relations and the fostering of

complacency. Regardless of the incessant erosion of the proletariats ability to control their own

life when faced with the ubiquity of the modern day capitalist system the call to create liberated

zones continues to affirm itself, and "the situationists were convinced that this demand is

encouraged by the increasingly obvious discrepancy between the possibilities awoken by

capitalist development and the poverty of their actual use." (Plant 1992, p.2) The Situationists

were working to expose that the promises of the capitalist system, and the labour invested into it,

was not granting people the dream that the system had promised. For all their laboring, class

struggle still exists and even more problematically has increasingly become accepted by the

masses as the status quo. The complacency instilled into the masses over generations had blinded

them to the possibility of another world.  The Situationists felt strongly that one of the pivotal

mechanisms that renders the masses passive to the capitalist system is the system's own

insistence that it is the only viable option for providing the necessary means of survival. (Plant

1992, p.22) Capitalism perpetuates the illusion that the system which is in place is the only one

that will allow them to fulfill their desires, that will grant happiness, or contentedness at the very

least, if they labour hard enough to achieve it. They are led to believe that they will be rewarded

for continual labour with opportunity, free time and leisure. However, in the advanced state of

the capitalist production, the alienated relations that were deemed necessary with the industrial

revolution to satisfy basic needs are now perpetuated without presence of past justifications for

doing so. (Plant 1992, p.22) It is a fallacy to think that the alienated labour practices instated

during the industrial revolution would still be necessary to the same extent given the

technological and economic advancements made since their onset; "the idea that we must

struggle to survive hinders human development and precludes the possibility of a life of playful

opportunity in which the satisfaction of desires, the realizations of pleasures, and the creation of

chosen situations would be the principal activities." (Plant 1992, p.2) The rehabilitation of the

proletariat's ability to develop their own labour practices, products and entertainment in order to

create bastions of activity outside of the capitalist system was a goal that was paramount to the

Situationists. The way society has developed, the proletariat has increasingly lived its life in

service to the technology that was lauded as having the potential of improving their lives when in

fact the opposite has become true. Technology has either stripped them of their livelihoods or has

increased productivity without any benefit to their class.

     The Situationists believed that life as it is lived under capitalism "is in some sense

alienated from itself, they postulated neither the inevitability of this alienation nor the

impossibility of its critique." (Plant 1992, p.2) As a group they were able to identify elements of

modern society that they felt were problematic but never lost sight of the potential for change and

the opportunities for subversion. Despite the singularity of the spectacle's voice, the

homogeneity of its content and its prioritization of commodity over life, the Situationists

understood that developing opposing fields could be just as effective as overthrowing those in

service to the subordination of the masses. The development of these new outlets of creation

would allow them to "transform into reality that which on the couch remains fantasy, to move

from a reclining position to the construction of lived situations, is to allot desire its time and space." (Kaufmann 1997, p.58) Rather than consuming the desires of the spectacle and being trapped in a perpetual cycle of the ever present the masses could produce and achieve their own desires and restore their sense of time and history. In practice "Situationism purges desire of its phantasmatic indolence and politicizes it, attempting to make its realization coincide with a moment of pure consciousness of this desire, made possible by the uprooting of representation, and more generally of the society of the spectacle." (Kaufmann 1997, p.56) They hoped to demonstrate to the proletariat that the economic structure in place was a choice, albeit a choice that was made for them, but nonetheless one that they could perpetuate or choose to reinvent. The Situationist theories and their practical applications were in service to the revolutionary aim of reinvigorating everyday life in order to get the masses to question their passivity and to revive their sense of critique. They believed that revolution "is not 'showing' life to people, but bringing them to life. A revolutionary organization must always remember that its aim is not getting its adherents to listen to convincing talks by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves in order to achieve, or at least strive towards, and equal degree of participation." (Situationist Internationale Anthology in Knabb 2003, p.216) It was paramount to them that they not replicate the same formula of inaction, passivity and lack of ability to reply that had been developed by the spectacle. But one in which the people would collaborate to ensure their stake in the undertaking.

**2.1.2 The Subversion of Spectacle Through Art**

One of the ways envisioned by the Situationists to improve the level of participation and engagement of the masses was through the production of, and interaction with, artistic endeavors. Debord and the Situationists believed that the movement must "manifest itself simultaneously as

an artistic avant-garde, and experimental investigation of the free construction of daily life, and

finally as a contribution to the theoretical articulation of a new revolutionary contestation."

(Debord, in McDonough 2004, p.159) The use of arts was seen as one of the ways that the

consciousness of the masses could be informed and radicalized. This remains in line with the

groups' roots in Marxist theory but they turn his theory on its head, for Marx "affirmed that art, as

a complementary and ideal world, can only be transcended by its realization in a classless

society. The Situationists take up this assertion, but with a difference, imperceptibly reversing

means and ends. It is as though realizing art through Situationist transcendence would make the

classless society possible." (Kaufmann 1997, p.57) Rather than art becoming the reward and pass

time of a society devoid of class struggle, art could take on a new role and responsibility in the

creation of a classless society. It could contribute to a movement looking to create balance in a

hierarchical society. The blending of art and politics had been foreshadowed by some theorists

associated with the Frankfurt School which prefigured this revolutionary project of merging art

and politics. This new endeavor undertaken by the Situationist would reinvigorate Walter

Benjamin's call for the politicization of art. (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.109) Through the merging

of these different fields they "hoped to produce an art that would break the spell of bourgeois

culture and so emancipate the revolutionary energies that Benjamin and Kracauer believed to lay

beneath mass-mediated culture." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.109) It was felt by the Situationists

that art could be a vital weapon against the enthrallment created by the spectacle. However,

throughout the progression of modernism, art had slowly become distanced from issues

concerning the collectivity. In its search for autonomy and its exploration of purely aesthetic

qualities, art had become disconnected from any service it could contribute to the battle against

class struggle. The Situationists felt that in order for it to "regain vitality or be transcended, art

must stop being a language of address, a 'speaking to', and transform itself into a 'speaking with'

that ... is no longer identified exclusively with either the author or the reader-spectator, but

becomes the work of everyone." (Kaufmann 1997, p.50) This vision for the field of art would

allow for the equal degree of participation which was expressed as one of the necessary

characteristics to reawaken the people's consciousness and their participation in everyday life.

  The revitalization of art away from modernist explorations was not conceived by the

Situationists alone but was developed through the integration of many avant-garde projects of the

time which were brought to the table by different members of the group. The variety of members

involved in this revolutionary project had links to Dadaism, Surrealism, Letterism as well as

other smaller movements that worked towards the same goal of blending politics with art.

"Drawing on what they considered to be the most useful aspects of these movements, the

situationists developed their recognition that language and artistic expression were implicated

with all other social relations, their hostility to the separation of art and poetry from everyday

life, and their demands for experiences disallowed by existing society." (Plant 1992, p.3) The

avant-gardes that prefigure the Situationist project were the genesis of artistic practices that

challenged reality and representations put forward by the spectacle as well as its claim of being

inevitable and incontestable.  As the hiatus of social and political exploration in mainstream

modernist art was beginning to draw to a close, these new artistic strategies developed by the

avant-gardes, and later repurposed by the Situationists, were looking to reinstate power and

influence within the field of art. "It was the 'art' dimension, to put it crudely – the continual

pressure put on the question of representational forms in politics and everyday life, and the

refusal to foreclose on the issue of representation versus agency – that made their politics the

deadly weapon it was for a while." (Clark & Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.29) Their works would

have the purpose of addressing those who are disenfranchised and who, up until this point, had

little influence due to their lack of a voice within the traditional political spectrum. One of the

integral and essential elements to their art was that they be "critiques of the current historical

moment and contain their own negation – that is, they should be in a sense anti-works." (Levin in

McDonough 2002, p.328) This enabled Situationists' artworks to side-step the pitfall of repeating

the same formula as the spectacle. This allowed their work to explore and deconstruct its own

apparatus, its agenda, and its limitations as a medium.

To avoid the trappings of spectacular representations and commodification the

Situationist ensured their artworks evaded the allures of visual consumption and standards of

publication. They only made their works available and consumable if they knew the works would

be allowed to exert their theoretical potential and would be presented in an obscure way.

(Kaufmann 1997, p.60) Situationist artworks were purposefully made to be challenging by doing

away with practices that avoid disrupting spectacular viewing. Rather than replicate the

seamlessness of the spectacle the Situationists purposefully strove to be complex, arduous and

cerebral. Their artworks were displayed and made available sparingly and existed strictly for

"those who have eyes not to see, for those who are blind victims of the society of the spectacle,

anesthetized by the barrage of images." (Kaufmann 1997, p.50) The goal of these works was not

to achieve a mass audience but to revitalize the minds of those who experience it in order to

begin a chain reaction. Those privy to the exposure of the true nature of the spectacle would

rebound their experience to the society around them. With this in mind the Situationists made the

spectacle their primary target and also transformed it into a valuable tool. They "pursued this

same attempt to conjure a totality of possible social relations which exceeds and opposes the

totality of spectacular relations. They took the words, meanings, theories and experiences of the

spectacle, and placed them in an opposing context. (Plant 1992, p.3) It was important for the group moving forward that their efforts to contest the spectacle take place in the same forums as the spectacle itself. The Situationists felt that the only way out of "of the paralysis and anomie of the present is through mining and mimicking the lowest depths of nothingness, randomness, abjection, dispersal, insignificance – in the hope that out of the utter detritus of the 'modern' would come something charged and whole." (McDonough 2006, p.45) Rather than simply identifying and writing about the spectacle, much like the Frankfurt School, the Situationists would take what they felt was wrong with modern society to the people and into forums where the spectacle takes place. Their strong connection to the importance of everyday life meant that placed their works in direct juxtaposition to aspects of life appropriated by advanced capitalism. They would even adopt the debased forms of capitalism in order, through its appropriation, to change its meanings.  (McDonough 2006, p.45) The reutilization of the spectacle in a revelatory capacity is an aspect that is fundamentally important to Situationist practice and also to the investigation of this project in the way that these methods prefigure much of what is developed later on at the onset of postmodernism.

In their attempts to revolutionize the everyday, the Situationists used and attacked a variety of media but by far one of their most sophisticated attempts took place in their attacks on cinema, which, as a spectacle and revolutionary tool, is both very complex and effective by combining image, sound, time and movement. René Viénet, a filmmaker within the Situationist movement, believed that it made sense to make use cinema as it is "'the newest and without a doubt most useful means of expression of our epoch' – as a didactic, analytic, and critical tool: "Among other possibilities, the cinema lends itself particularly well to studying the present as a historical problem, to dismantling processes of reification." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.330)

The use of cinema was important to the group because they felt that spectacular nature of cinema, its seamlessness and otherworldliness, posed one of the biggest threats to active and critical participation. It's reification of the world is very thorough and its claims to authenticity are very convincing. The Situationists and Viénet felt that at large "the consciousness of the mediation is lacking and, on the other hand, the facts have been uprooted from the network of their determinations, placed in an artificial isolation, and poorly linked together again by the montage of classical cinema." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.331) It is vital to the Situationists that the practices employed in the production of cinematic materials and their effects not be glossed over by seamless edits and passive viewing.

> The resistance to a facile collapsing of cinema and spectacle is imperative if one is to understand the complex relationship between the Situationist International (SI) and the filmic medium. To the extent that cinema is synonymous with spectacle – a specialization of time, a staging of separation, a fostering of passivity, alienation, and so on – it is simply unacceptable and must be eliminated. (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.325)

However, rather than viewing the medium has wholly contaminated, essentially throwing the baby out with the bathwater, the Situationists called for it to be repurposed rather than eliminated entirely and in order to do so they developed strategies of appropriation to unlock the medium's revolutionary potential. Through this use of the medium to attack cinema itself, we continue to see their Hegelian influence. Rather than calling for complete destruction of this revolutionary advancement in aesthetics they work towards its negation instead, or its *aufheben* as mentioned earlier. This results in an act that "ends, abolishes or annuls at the same time as it raises, picks up or preserves. What are preserved are the moments of truth of cinema, that is, those moments which promise revolutionary negation of capitalism." (Noys 2007, p.396) This perspective on cinema reiterates the fact that the Situationists aren't calling for the obliteration of the tools in the hands of the spectacle, but rather that they be put to a better, more positive, use. The joys and pleasures that the masses derive from these materials are not inherently bad, just misguided. The

Situationists are not anti-pleasure but they are opposed to the false pleasures offered us by

capital, including the false, 'aesthetic pleasures' of existing cinema." (Noys 2007, p.397) It was

the belief of the Situationists that in "devaluing the false pleasures of cinema, we can revalue

cinema as the site of real pleasures that have been occluded." (Noys 2007, p.397) None in the

Situationists International understood or mastered this cinematic approach as sophisticatedly as

one of the founding members and filmmaker Guy Debord.


**2.1.3 The Techniques and Cinematic Works of Guy Debord**

As a historical figure, Guy Debord is known more as a theorist despite a large body of

filmic work which has the purpose, like his 1968 book *The Society of the Spectacle*, to

revolutionize peoples' viewing and consumption of the spectacle. "What Debord aimed to do

was put the 'unmaking' of cinema in the cause of the 'unmaking' of capitalism, and so to

unmake the world." (Noys 2007, p.395) The transition of his written theories into cinematic

productions was an important step in juxtaposing his abstract theories with concrete examples.

Out of the variety of mediums adopted by the Situationist International Debord chose film as his

primary artistic medium in order to shed light on the variety of issues addressed in his written

theoretical works. One of the appeals of film for Debord was that its theoretical capacity was

largely unexplored. (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.424) By expanding his project into the field

of cinema it allowed a greater diversity of reception which could help in accelerating the

revolutionary awareness he desired. For "Debord's writings and films, in his mind, were made to

be used on the spot, transformed immediately in revolutionary action." (Kaufmann 2006a, p.36)

As he expressed in his book, Debord wanted to render the masses less passive and more critical

of the spectacular society that was becoming increasingly omnipresent. "Many radical

filmmakers have given lip service to Brecht's notion of provoking spectators to think and act for

themselves rather than sucking them into passive identification with heroes or plots, but Debord

is virtually the only one who has actually achieved this goal." (Knabb 2003, p.viii) Rather than

replicating the same formulas as the spectacle, Debord was able to formulate a style that was his

own and stayed true to his beliefs. It is also important to note that his works are "neither ivory

tower philosophical discourses nor knee-jerk militant protests, but ruthlessly lucid examinations

of the most fundamental tendencies and contradictions of the society we live in." (Knabb 2003,

p.viii) His cinematic works side step the pitfall of simply venting anger about a system he

believes to be the cause of the ailments of modern society. "A critical theory that accompanies

the dissolution of a society does not concern itself with expressing rage, much less with

presenting mere images of rage. It seeks to understand, to describe, and to precipitate a

movement that is developing before our very eyes." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.119) By simply

opening a dialogue regarding the spectacle, Debord expands the breadth of understanding and

allows the spectator to critically come to their own conclusions.

  When viewing one of Debord's filmic works his "camera seems to bring out an

underlying melancholy. He brings out, I think, what we might call the melancholy of

consumption. What he seeks to reveal here is the fact that, despite the solid luxurious quality of

the décor, nothing carried the weight of personal or social associations." (McDonough 2006,

p.44) We see here again the importance of fostering the collectivity and how it is elevated

through interpersonal relationships and the free construction of everyday life. Debord's films

helped to highlight the importance of "Friendship – its costs, its joys, and the loss of it – is a

major theme here, a theme explored in every one of his films. For the bonds of friendship,

whether they endure or endure but a short while, offer the only alternative to the institutionalized

isolation of the spectacle." (Sanborn & Marcus 2006, p.187) By encouraging interactions with people around us in his films, Debord continues to develop the notion of 'situations' encouraged by the Situationists and himself. In this light, part of the goal of his work was to create new forums that could be catalysts of liberated zones of desire and that would encourage the free construction of everyday life. In his films, just like in his book, Debord is able to explore the full depth and breadth of contemporary dehumanization. He is also able to illustrate the extent that social relations and experiences are increasingly being mediated as image. (McDonough 2006, p.44) The goal of his films is very much in line with the theories outlined in his books, but in a medium that is so different from the written word, and at times less explicit, it is important to look at the practices used by Debord to cinematically communicate his theories and whether they are effective.

Letterism has been cited as a major influence to the Situationist movement within their goal of blending art and politics. Much of this influence was brought about by Debord who was a Letterist before he was a Situationist. The work and styles of the Letterist as a cinematic avant-garde is one of the biggest sources of inspiration and influence for Debord in his own filmic works. (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.337) When looking at Debord's films, the Letterist influence reveals itself in "the use of flicker, radical sound-image discontinuity, negative sequences, multiple simultaneous acoustic inputs, direct manipulation of the celluloid surface through tearing, writing, and scratching, and an active engagement of the spectator à la 'expanded cinema'." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.337) These practices are important in the realm of avant-garde film because they circumvent the glossy and seamless nature of the spectacle. They are methods that are an ever present reminder of the film's apparatus and constantly reinforce the elements of its own construction. In these types of films the emphasis is

placed on "the disjunctive, incomplete form that calls upon the reader/spectator to articulate

conclusions, the acknowledgement of the need for new means of expression, and the explicit

refusal to privilege beginning and end (the distinguishing feature of a paratactic construction) is

central to Debord's film practice." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.370) In an effort to distance

his works from the standard productions of cinema or television "Debord constructs a work that

continuously violates the semiotic redundancy of sound and image characteristic of commercial

cinema." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.365) His cinematic works bring in a variety of strategies

unexplored or avoided by the mainstream media that enables them to be set apart and makes their

revolutionary character more explicit. Debord's major strategy in creating "an 'anti-televisual'

[or anti-cinematic] work is the blank irony, which devolves from the simple quotation of a

careful selection of the horrors and stupidity that are the fabric of television cinema" (Sanborn &

Marcus 2006, p.187) as well as traditional forms of cinema. Through displaying the negative

aspects of mainstream media in juxtaposition to itself or the theses of his book Debord helps to

reveal to the spectator the redundancies and ideologies of the mainstream media. His films'

purpose is not to be viewed by those who have already come to this understanding of the media,

a simple reinforcing of their held beliefs, but to push those who are unaware or passive to

explore a side of the media system that they may not have yet considered or discovered.  In the

narration to the film *Réfutation* (1975) Debord makes this aspect to his films very clear. "I don't

make films for those who don't understand such things, or who make it their business to prevent

others from understanding." (Knabb 2003, p.118) His works are not intended for a mass

audience but are meant to be used with the distinct purpose of reaching those who are passively

unaware and inciting them to challenge the status quo.

In order to understand how Debord's cinematic practice can help expand the horizons of

the viewer it is important to look at how what is expressed in his films and how they are

constructed help in achieving his goals. The addition of his films to the theses presented in his

book and other writings allow Debord to take his revolutionary concepts to different terrains in

order to battle the spectacle in direct contest where it thrives rather than in silos. Debord explains

how the reception of the film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973) in the narration of *Réfutation*

(1975) highlights the importance of creating visual annexes to his theoretical work:

> They generally complain, however, that I have abused their indulgence by bringing the
> book to the screen. The blow is all the more painful because they had never dreamed that
> such an extravagance was possible. Their anger confirms the fact that the appearance of
> such a critique in a film upsets them even more than in a book. Here, as elsewhere, they are
> being forced into a defensive struggle, on a second front. (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.116)

Debord's filmic works allow him to expand the reach of the debate surrounding the spectacle and it

also provides him with the opportunity to defend and contest the undermining of his work in

unique ways as seen in *Réfutation* (1975). His use of film, which at the time was uncommon

outside of studios, also allowed Debord to adopt a strategy in which he could appear in a forum

and format where his critics could not.  (Sanborn & Marcus 2006, p.186) This allows his vision of

society to be heard and understood in places unavailable or inaccessible to those who would seek

to undermine it. In this way his films are important "not just because they express the most

profound radical perspective of the later century, but because they have had no real cinematic

competition." (Knabb 2003, p.viii) The shift to film also allowed Debord to have direct interaction

with the materials and images of the spectacle he sought to disempower. The use of the spectacle

itself in his revolutionary practices helped in directly demonstrating the elements of the media that

are devoid of any consideration other than the reinforcement of the status quo. Through use of the

spectacle in his own works Debord is able to make the role images plays in our society

unambiguous. The play of images in his films help to reveal the extent that individuals "find

themselves cut off from everything of concern to them, their only contact therewith mediated by

images chosen by others and distorted by interests other than theirs." (Jappe 1999, p.104) Debord

reiterates in his films that the spectacle is not simply a series of images, but is about the mediation

of relationships through images.  In his films "the highly distilled and allusive reflections presented

and in their presentation, a complex critical apprehension of the relationship between images and

text, individual and society is produced." (Sanborn & Marcus 2006, p.185) Through his filmic

practices he hoped to expose the process of mediation of images that was taking place and to

undermine its perceived inevitability and lack of authenticity.  Debord "expressed pride at having

made films which proved that, in the midst of such vacuity, a response beyond silent complacency

was possible." (Sanborn & Marcus 2006, p.186) His films, and most notably *The Society of the*

*Spectacle* (1973), appropriate and juxtapose the spectacle to itself as well as to Debord's own

theories and in doing so they highlight the power of images and the ways that they are changing

society, but most importantly they offer new pathways that can be explore to push back against the

spectacle in its own territory.

The creative use of the spectacle is not simply a pessimistic denunciation for it also helps

to illustrate the dual possibilities of the media and the ways that it can be revolutionized rather

than destroyed as expressed by the Situationists. "It is not simply that all images are images of

capital or that all images lie, rather it is that capital tries to neutralize the power of the image by

separating us from 'real life' and placing it 'behind the screen'." (Noys 2007, p.398) Therefore

the process initiated by Debord is a first step in reappropriating images in the service of real life

rather than letting spectacular imagery take over its territories. The effectiveness of Debord's

approach is revealed in the strategies that he employs to differentiate his films in order to bring

life to his revolutionary hope for the medium. "The film of *The Society of the Spectacle* recovers

'real life' by breaking up the usual narrative of cinema and isolating particular scenes and

images." (Noys 2007, p.398) Through his sense of timing, editing and narration, he is able to

take an example, plucked from the spectacular barrage of images, and give it emphasis allowing

for increased contemplation guided by the narration of his own theses. It is important to note that

his choices of images aren't simple representations of the thesis but visual support that put the

images and the narrated thesis in a dialectical relation to each other. (Noys 2007, p.397) The use

of narration and images aren't used as a redundancy but each contributes to further illustrate

what is present within the other. "Since his early films and ever more clearly as he went along,

Debord has shown us the image as such, that is to say, according to one of his principles from

*The Society of the Spectacle*, the image as a zone of undecidability between the true and

the false." (Agamben in McDonough 2002, p.319) The undecidability described is made more

visible through Debord's practice of montage which reveals the image for what it is. In his use of

montage Debord reveals two distinct elements of his techniques, that of repetition and stoppage.

When looking at the filmic work of Debord, and more specifically *The Society of the*

*Spectacle* (1973), we are privy to important and transcendental elements of the fundamentals of

montage which are the use of repetition and stoppage. These techniques predate Debord but he

was able to bring their use to the foreground through his explorations with the medium.

(Agamben in McDonough 2002, p.315) These elements of repetition and stoppage are similar to

what was described earlier as the use of spectacle against the spectacle in the sense that Debord

felt that there's was no longer any need to film new content. Through the use of repetition and

stoppage anything could reused or reworked in order to develop the desired meanings and

outcomes. They are the strategies that are truly innovative about Debord's films. (Agamben in

McDonough 2002, p.315) These strategies had very limited exploration prior to Debord's

experimentations and within his films they reach an application that is both reinvented and

purposeful. That nothing new need be filmed to produce new filmic work is something that

speaks to the saturation level of the spectacle. Although it champions the use of pre-existing

materials it does not maintain the same use. Repetition is not synonymous with redundancy in

this case. It is explained by Giorgio Agamben that "repetition is not the return of the identical; it

is not the same as such that returns...Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders it

possible anew; it's almost a paradox." (Agamben in McDonough 2002, p.316) The act of

adopting existing material and placing it within a new work and context transforms that material

and infuses it with new potentiality of meaning.

> On the one hand, montage operates through the repetition of particular images, and this repetition indicates their status as image. On the other hand it also operates through the power of 'freezing' particular images, which again reveals the image as such. What is revealed is the image as no longer the image of something but the image as a pure medium. (Noys 2007, p.399)

These techniques in film are revolutionary because in traditional media the medium must

"disappear in that which it gives us to see, in the absolute that shows itself, that shine forth in the

medium. On the contrary, the image worked by repetition and stoppage is a means, a medium,

that does not disappear in what it makes visible." (Agamben in McDonough 2002, p.318)

This illustrates what was so important to the Letterist, the Situationists, and eventually Debord,

that the spectators not only be awakened to the ideologies infused into the spectacle, but that they

also be aware of the apparatus of the spectacle and how it can be adopted and manipulated, either

positively or negatively. In Debord's film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973) repetition and

stoppage are made more evident through the use of elements of the spectacle that have been

appropriated and recontextualized in order to bring his revolutionary intent and the historical

character of images to light. "Debord did not invent the feature-length compilation film, his work

continues to throw into sharp and critical relief the use of preexisting material." (Sanborn &

Marcus 2006, p.190) Repetition and stoppage can be used in any number of ways and can serve

any ends, however Debord and the Situationists adopted a new term for this process to identify

works that had a specific revolutionary intent. They defined the offshoot of this method,

which worked counter to the spectacle, as détournement.

'Détournement' at its core is a "resource used by aesthetics, which consists in the citation

of fragments from other works done through a decontextualization of the original."

(Frederico 2010, p.182) This new configuration of materials drawn from the spectacle had the

"purpose of critique, which was the ultimate purpose of art in Situationist theory." (Trier 2007,

p.70) This term coined by the Situationists was also in line with the group's Hegelian view of

negation which uses and transforms what exists rather than calling for its total obliteration. "The

adaptation and reconstruction of a familiar image for serious political purposes, although

commonplace now, was rather novel and inventive in the sixties." (Ko n.d.) It is a technique that

grounds its purpose uniquely on its own ability to critique and reveal truths about the content it

addresses. It is a critique that is developed and revealed through a play of images and lucid

investigations of the capital infused therein. Through détournement anything can be used, two

different images or sequences can be brought together despite their original intent and through

coming together can develop a synergy which supersedes their origin to create entirely new

meanings through juxtaposition. The use of détournement was the reaffirmation of the

Situationist's belief that endeavors to critique the spectacle could be created through the use of

elements of the spectacle itself placed in a radicalized format. This technique also reinforces the

Situationist notion that the critique of society and its hierarchies does not need to take place at

the pinnacle of institutional explorations but can, through playing with the products and surfaces

of everyday life, be developed through the use of even the most common and mundane levels of

cultural production. (McDonough 2006, p.45) The use of this technique by Debord allowed him

to position his work in line with everyday life. His use of the debased forms of the spectacle

through this process allowed him to infuse the appropriated materials with new meaning.

Détournement is a strategy of "*devaluation* of existing elements, and then their *revaluing* in a

new ensemble, which is what distinguishes it from any 'method of combining neutral and

indefinitely interchangeable elements." (Noys 2007, p.396) This illustrates that, similarly to the

goals of repetition and stoppage, the reuse of preexisting materials is not done so redundantly but

implemented in order to create entirely new relationships and associations through intentioned

juxtaposition. Détournement is used to "demonstrate that when two objects are brought together,

no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed.

Restricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention." (Debord & Wolman

in Knabb 2003, p.208) By bringing the critique of the spectacle to the cinematic screen Debord

refuses to adhere to the prescribed method of critique, using strictly the written word, and opens

it up to different mediums and to new audiences outside of the academic arena which the

Frankfurt School was never able to achieve.

As we have seen, the role of détournement isn't to juxtapose disparate and incongruous

elements but to bring together pre-existing elements of culture in order to radicalize them and to

make a new product that is coherent but whose pieces are now imbued with new meaning.

Works that make use of détournement strive to criticize the existing world and the work's own

relation to that same world. Many attempts to replicate this technique but many fall short of

radicalizing the content or falling short in their critique. (Knabb 2003, p.viii) However, Debord

in his film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973), was able to produce a cinematic work that held

true to both aspects of critical détournement that have been outlined. The success of his

cinematic work allowed him to clash "head-on with all social and legal conventions," which

could not "fail to be a powerful cultural weapon in the service of real class struggle. The

cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of

understanding." (Debord & Wolman in Knabb 2003, p.209) Debord's cinematic works, more

than his book alone, enables him to bridge the gap between theory and everyday life in order to

reveal a culture whose images are decontextualized and axed on a continual present.

> At every turn, Debord notes the partial truths that allow the spectacle to appear plausible
> and even wholly true, while in fact, he argues, it proceeds by a process of
> 'détournement', of turning a legitimate historical tendency towards separation into a
> means for dehistoricising the present. And once the present has been isolated from
> history, it can stop changing: the status quo can replenish itself endlessly. His response is
> to apply the same principle of détournement to the language of the spectacle itself… in
> order to reveal the poverty, hypocrisy and deviousness of the spectacular society.
> (Cubitt 2001, p.33)

The citation above by Sean Cubitt (2001) reveals that part of what is at risk of being lost through

the processes of the spectacle is the innately historical character of the image as a record of

events and moments of the past. By removing society from its linkages to the past, the spectacle

is then capable of endlessly repeating the same formula and dynamics in perpetuity. Debord

believed that society had attained a point where "social significance is attributed only to what is

immediate, and to what will be immediate immediately afterwards, always replacing another,

identical immediacy, it can be seen that the uses of the media guarantee a kind of eternity of

noisy insignificance." (Debord 1990, p.15) Through this manufacturing of a constant and

immediate presence, images and information become unhinged from their specific place in time

and in history which leads to their decontextualization. This is the negative aspect of repetition

and stoppage, which further illustrates that, as a technique, it can be used as a means to any end.

Through the use of détournement in his own film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973),

Debord hoped to reinstate an awareness of the historical character and context of images. In the

aforementioned film he narrates that he is "introducing into the theoretical domain the same type

of *violent subversion* that disrupts and overthrows every existing order, détournement serves as a reminder that theory is nothing in itself, that it can realize itself only through historical action and through the *historical correction* that is its true allegiance." (Debord in Knabb 2003, p.52) In essence, works that adopt détournement as a technique are striving to influence to record in order to correct historical truths that are made biased or falsified by the spectacle. It is also a strategy employed to critique the techniques used by the mainstream media as well as those in its own production. Through his book and films "Guy Debord contributed something truly extraordinary to his era, even as he attempted to destroy it. Rather than confining these works to some cinematic pantheon, their destructive forces should be honored." (Sanborn & Marcus 2006, p.190) In his time he was insightful, proactive and clever, however, not all those that have studied his works share the same enthusiasm. Many have discounted his work for its generalizations, plagiarism, elitism and utopianism, most notably and vocally was the French theorist Régis Debray.


**2.1.4 Apposing Perspectives to Debord's Vision**

A French intellectual, Régis Debray is known for his theory of mediology and for his emphatic condemnation of the work and theories of Guy Debord. Debray dismissed and contested Debord's calls for a politics of authenticity which he felt, based on the current state of media culture, was out of touch with the times. Debray believed that conceiving of "spectacle as 'materialized ideology' left Debord's Situationism with no choice other than to erase all historical, social and technological determination, jeering at but essentializing *the* society, *the* spectacle, *the* action, *the* culture." (Debray 1995, p.137) It in essence refuses and excludes the complexity that exists within the media and the variety of incarnations and purposes it can adopt. Debray felt that "to encompass everything under the name 'the society of the spectacle' is

to partake of the ideological realm or of mythical abstraction, without the prior digestion of

substances: it allows one neither to think through the effective realities it designates, nor to

criticize the very roots what it denounces." (Debray 1995, p.137) By denouncing the aspects of

media that he abhors through the use of an umbrella term like 'the spectacle', Debord condemns

it all in its entirety rather than identifying the aspects of the media system that rightfully partake

in the practices of producing alienation. Debray felt that Debord's conceptualization of the

spectacle was too broad and lacked the refinement of the in depth analysis of the interplay of the

media and the different sectors of society and culture it intersects. In Debord's theories there is

"no careful discernment of the articulations and turning points in the development of a process,

no scrutiny of the joints and chinks in the armour, there can be no intellectual purchase on the

concrete course of things." (Debray 1995, p.137) Through the exclusion of a thoughtful

consideration of the complex dynamics and evolution of society, culture and technology over

time, Debray believed that Debord's theories remained only a surface investigation and lacked

true intellectual robustness. Although Debray would like explorations of the spectacle to be more

specific and focused on the ways that it intersects different sectors of society, it was felt that the

"concept of the spectacle cannot be parceled out to specialists – which has not, of course,

prevented them from grabbing what they could." (Kaufmann 2006b, p.274) Focusing only on

partial aspects of the spectacle would lose sight of the bigger picture. A sobering look at the way

society is affected by the spectacle would be replaced by smaller studies of its causes and effects.

By only investigating the spectacle incrementally we begin to lose sight of the holistic view of

the spectacle replacing genuine critique of its reach and structure with clichéd statements

divorced from the full spectrum of the issue. It was important for Debord to keep the full view of

the spectacle in his sights and do his best to speak to the full scope of its nature and influence on

society. (Kaufmann 2006b, p.274) Debray views Debord's project as one that strictly addresses

the problem of the media and the technologies that accompany it. However, this only targets a

small portion of the full breadth of the spectacle as detailed earlier. The spectacle is, in part, the

media but it is also about the larger cultural and economic dynamics of modern day capitalism

that is left out by Debray. Since Debray's initial rebuke of Debord's work there have been others

who have come to the defense of Debord in order to refute Debray's claims, to shed light on his

intentions and to give clarification to Debord's process as a writer. As a theorist himself Debray

was also working on his own theory of mediology which was at odds with views of Debord.

Debray "searched to clearly define his project of creating a mediology of Debord's ideas, noting

that he had never mentioned this author, except as a 'counterexample". (Frederico 2010, p.185)

His investigation of Debord's work had the goal of attacking a theory that stood in the way of the

elevation of his own theory of mediology. This agenda did not go unnoticed by some of the

remaining members of the Situationist Internationale:

> Debray, who by his own (wholly unreliable) account had never before engaged with
> Debord in any way, now felt an urgent need to denounce Debord's ideas, and specifically
> the concept of the spectacle, for their supposed idealism, for their young-Marxism and
> young-Hegelianism, for their unreconstructed Feuerbachianism – but most of all for their
> strict incompatibility with Debray's own positivist sociology of mass communications,
> which goes by the name of 'mediology'. (Clark & Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.15)

Through his theory of mediology, Debray hoped to trace the forms and function of media over

the total span of its existence rather than as strict focus on its current and most advanced state.

"Debray launches mediology as a cross-disciplinary analysis of the material supports –

techniques, networks and forms of organization – that have constituted the coordinates of our

cultural present." (Papoulias 2004, p.166) He felt that it was important to not only look at the

current state of the media and pass judgment but to view full history and evolution of the media,

in relation to culture, in order to fully understand its reality and influence. In Debray's "brand of

cultural materialism, culture is what technologies make possible, and technology constitutes 'the

intimate prosthetics of cultural life'." (Papoulias 2004, p.166) Therefore, this opposes Debord's

view who felt that authentic life and culture should be created both inside and outside of the

media. Debray felt that the media played an equal, if not a more important, role in the

contemporary creation of culture.  Debray expressed that for Situationists "mediation is evil. For

us, mediation is not only a necessity, it is civilization itself. For man is man solely by virtue of

technological mediation, and he needs the spectacle to gain access to his truth. It is via illusion

that man discovers his reality." (Debray as cited in Clark & Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.16) Debray

felt that despite the inherent illusions created by the media, that they also allow the masses to

widen their horizons and expose themselves to culture outside of their own proximity. The

Situationists however, felt that Debray's view of Debord's work was simply an attempt to keep

his own theory "away from the very slightest taint of totalizing or negative thought" (Clark &

Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.15) which could threaten or undermine Debray's own positive view of

the media.

  The motives held by Debray and his continued criticisms of Debord's work are

disconcerting but not unexpected. The Situationists felt that "Debray's maunderings are typical.

And in a sense necessary. The efforts of organized knowledge to discredit the Situationists –

to pin on them a final dismissive label" (Clark & Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.16) in order for their

project to be forgotten or disregarded as no longer relevant, useful or to deny it a solid theoretical

foundation. One of Debray's most pointed attacks on Debord's work was its lack of authorial

authenticity. Debord's greatest theoretical works were lanced by Debray for what he felt was

outright plagiarism. Debray states in his argument that "Feuerbach provides not only an epigraph

for Debord, but a ready-made structure for his argument. Recognition of this plagiarism is a

generational matter, and I quite understand that it escapes the attention of the young."

(Debray 1995, p.134) In his reading of Debord's work Debray was able to identify the linkages

between what Debord had written without citations and the work of great thinkers that came

before him. Debray was able to recognize the use of past theories in Debord's work as well as

that of the Situationists. For he also felt that "the 'Situationist' discourse follows word-for-word

the tracks of Hegelianism: objectification, separation, negation, reversal, reversal of the

reversal." (Debray 1995. p.136) Debord and his contemporaries in the Situationist International

expressed a lot of theoretical ideas that were revolutionary, however Debray felt that in many

ways they were not their own and lacked the necessary referencing.  Even Debord's most

reputable theoretical work also came under fire by Debray who "complained once that *The*

*Society of the Spectacle* just repeats or plagiarizes the young Marx – and of course many people

repeat or plagiarize Debray's statement." (Kaufmann 2006a, p.36) Following Debray's criticisms

of Debord and the Situationists it then went on to others who adopted Debray's point of view and

who also began to doubt the credibility of the movement.  For an intellectual and academic like

Debray the writing techniques used by Debord break some of the fundamental rules of academic

writing which is why he condemns him for his lack of originality.

> The originality of *The Society of the Spectacle* was to bring together two banalities,
> overlaying the 1840s themes of alienation, absolutely unmodified, with 1960s objects –
> consumer society, culture, publicity. The encounter between the old stencil and the new
> artifact – or the shadow which it cast – doubtless produced the effect of reality, with
> existential resonances, but not an effect of real knowledge, bearing new insights.
> (Debray 1995, p.135)

The truth is that Debray's accusation of plagiarism isn't entirely ill-founded; it does however

ignore the different arena within which Debord was working. "The plagiarist, one could say, is

more interested in the use value of Marx than in his official exchange value as authority."

(Kaufmann 2006a, p.36) Debord's goal was not to impart upon the world of academia an original

contribution to knowledge, but to amass and synthesize the wisdom of others in order to reveal

the big picture of the modern day capitalist system. "Debord would have probably agreed with

such a negative judgment, since his purpose was never to become an original author, i.e.,

to submit himself to the authority of Marx or a few other masters in order to be recognized later

as their heir or peer." (Kaufmann 2006a, p.36) In fact, the methods used by Debord to write his

book are not even something that is denied by the Situationist International in their rebuttal of

Debray's attack. "We are not saying the book does not suffer from the strategy it thinks it has to

adopt. Of course it does. But we are saying that the strategy made possible a kind of sanity –

inseparable from the book's overweening hubris, its determination to think world-historically in

the teeth of specialists from Left and Right – which could be purchased no other way." (Clark

& Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.25) Therefore, when we think of Debord's work it is important to

ask and to think about which vein of Marxism or any other thinker influenced his work and in

taking those influences into account we should avoid confusing his practice of intellectual

détournement with mere plagiarism as Debord makes little effort to mask his sources of

inspiration. To conflate the two would unjustly discredit Debord's work. (Kaufmann 2006b,

p.73) The writing of Debord is indicative of one that exists outside the confines of academia that

explores new forms and styles. It adheres to a different framework that is rooted in the avant-

garde roots of the Situationist International and not an institutionalize way of working.

   *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) written by Debord illustrates a pivotal point in the

Situationist project which demonstrates that their significance lies "in their attempts to bring two

major strands of the manifesto, namely, the communist manifesto and the avant-garde manifesto,

to a new conjuncture." (Puchner 2006, p.221) Drawing heavily on the creative manifestos of the

historical avant-garde, they produced a manifesto that adopts its own style. "The most important

lesson the situationists learned from the historical avant-garde, however, was to emphasize that

aspect of the *Manifesto* that had mostly been ignored in twentieth-century socialism, namely, its

poetic form and language." (Puchner 2006, p.222) The development of this new manifesto was

in essence a continuation of Marx's call for a poetry of the revolution. It can be said that Debord

was inspired by this concept in the creation of the Situationist manifesto because "in everything

he has written, we find an insistence on style, on singularity, on whatever situates him effectively

within a poetic rather than theoretical framework." (Kaufmann 2006b, p.272) In other words,

Debord's works were never meant to be scrutinized based on institutional standards of form or

citation. His works should be considered based on the relevance and merit of the ideas he was

presenting. "*The Society of the Spectacle* provides a 'theoretical' form for a unique subjective

position, for a life. Or rather, for a life that Debord never stopped mourning and which, in 1967,

seemed more lost than ever." (Kaufmann 2006b, p.74) Debord's need to recuperate a society

outside the spectacle, his nostalgia for a time that was slipping away, was also another aspect of

his point of view that, although respected, was seen as an impossible utopia.

It seems odd that Debord who devoted his life to restoring and reinforcing the

collectivity outside the spectacle, would eventually be accused of utopianism and elitism in his

attempts to be true to his beliefs. He lived a life that was very secluded and included only a select

few into his group or entourage because his criteria and lifestyle were so stringent. "All in all, he

was an example of someone who should not be followed, and was exemplary only because he

could not be followed, because he invented a life for himself that was impossible to imitate."

(Kaufmann 2006b, p.271) Debord's lifestyle was very unconventional but also very difficult to

match as a life outside of spectacle, as its pervasiveness continues to grow, becomes increasingly

difficult to maintain and follow. Debord in essence practiced what he preached and in doing so

showed the steep price one has to pay to be a revolutionary. "He shows it by representing himself

as a man who made no compromises, unlike the rest of humankind… but at the same time, he is

a negative example, and example that cannot be followed, just as he himself never followed

anybody." (Kaufmann 2006a, p.38) Despite the difficulty of following in his footsteps and the

acknowledgement of its impossibility it is also the aspect of Debord that has garnered him

respect. Even Debray, one of his most vocal critics, was able to concede when it came to his

integrity. "In his lifetime, Debord refused to play this game, and that in itself is enough to elicit

esteem for him as an individual. Professional moralists rarely have a personal moral code, this

one did." (Debray 1995, p.140) This element to his character that afforded him much credibility

is also the same element that, in the end, undermined his revolution due to his constricted

allowances. Debord and the Situationists frequently and systematically rejected many that would

have lent them support in their endeavors. This eventually led to accusations of Stalinism and the

claim that the group was elitist. (Kaufmann 2006a, p.35) Although there is no necessity to

include anyone, in the end it did impact their visibility as this gatekeeping extended to their

works as well, both written and visual. "Of course, one could argue that obscurity is a tactical

means to even greater fame, and Debord was sometimes suspected of such premeditation. But

one has to recognize the fact that Debord never got any *benefits* from his decision to remain

'obscure'". (Kaufmann 2006a, p.35) Although remaining obscure was in line with his beliefs, it

did not lead to Debord to riches, fame or even a full-time job. The obscurity may have even

hindered the Situationist revolution in that it kept the theories and works from a mass audience

which could have added more fuel to the fire of their revolution but caution needed to be

exercised to avoid becoming spectacle or being appropriated by spectacle. As it stands, the

obscurity of the movement may have made it miss its moment in time as many things have

changed since they were at their most active. The spectacle has continued to expand and evolve

and with it came a transformation that seems to have outmoded the project. Transformations that

Debord couldn't deny and would eventually address.


**2.2 The Rise of the Postmodern Era**

As the decades since the release of Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967)

have passed there have been many changes in regards to the media. Moreover, the technology

used by the media has changed the nature of the spectacle irrevocably. The Spectacle "largely

absorbing whatever critical opposition it may once have received from the quarters of everyday

life. Having had two more decades to penetrate into the mass psyche, the spectacle has not only

been extended quantitatively, it has also changed qualitatively, developing a new hybrid form."

(Best & Kellner 1997, p.118) What Debord had once defined as both diffuse and concentrated

forms of the spectacle had become a conglomeration of both.  With the onset of all of this change

Debord began to despair at the evolving nature of the spectacle and about the power of his own

radical endeavors to stem the tide. The cultural revolution that he once thought possible was

beginning to recede further and further into the distance. These new developments are allowing

the spectacle to infiltrate all aspects of social life. (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.122) The territories

once free of the reach of the spectacle are being colonized and erased at a pace that perturbed

Debord who felt that the spectacle is integrating "itself into reality to the same extent as it was

describing it, and that it was reconstructing it as it was describing it." (Debord 1990, p.9) No

longer hovering above society there is no longer any room for revolutionary action or liberated

zones of desire. The places once still open for acts like détournement had completely receded,

either forgotten or recuperated by the spectacle. Previously in Debord's view there always

remained a level of reality that could be recuperated, but within the integrated spectacle "reality

itself has been so profoundly altered by its infection and ultimate integration into spectacle that

there is no outside, no remaining reality, to compare the simulation with." (Cubitt 2001, p.42)

With the reality principle disapearing and the spectacle is now producing simulation rather than

representations anchored in reality. This results in is a distinct shift in the continued development

of the modern industrial capitalist system. This is a change that is untenable for Debord and

threatens the goals he had for his revolutionary project for in "the world of simulation there will

be no revolution" (Cubitt 2001, p.42) and a world with no possibility of revolution sees the

territories of the real recede under the eclipsing power of the map as was described by media

theorist Jean Baudrillard.


## 2.2.1 Jean Baudrillard and the Implosion of Reality

Jean Baudrillard is considered a precursor to concepts that would later be termed

postmodernism. "As the word itself suggests, this break is most often related to notions of the

waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old modern movement (or to its ideological or aesthetic

repudiation)." (Jameson 1984, p.53) As will be seen through the exploration of Baudrillard's

theories the introduction of the postmodern brings many of the goals and held beliefs of the

modernist movement into question. The transition from the modern to the postmodern

underscores major changes to the way that culture and the economy operate.  As the next stage in

economic and cultural relations postmodern culture "does more than merely replicate the logic of

late capitalism; it reinforces and intensifies it." (Jameson 1984, p.85) The further understanding

afforded by the theories of Baudrillard will illustrate how the modernist spectacle has been

magnified. For with the onset of postmodernism, culture "is no longer ideological, disguising the

economic activities of capitalist society, it is itself an economic activity, perhaps the most

important economic activity of all." (Storey 1997, p.188) No longer concerned about the collapse

between the distinction between high and popular culture, the new era of postmodernism focuses

on the ways that culture has become circumscribed to the realm of economic activity. Using as

its base the despair Debord felt regarding the integrated spectacle, postmodernism continues to

put reality further into question as notions of the 'real' become increasingly less stable and the

use of 'simulation' becomes increasingly more prevalent.  Within the context of this new stage in

economic activity Baudrillard presents the argument that "the very distinction between original

and copy has itself now been destroyed." (Storey 1997, p.178) In his own book *Simulations*

(1983), Baudrillard outlines the difference in the use of the modernist sign versus a

postmodernist sign.  The ideology of signs in modernism "only corresponds to a betrayal of

reality by signs; simulation corresponds to a short-circuit of reality and to its reduplication by

signs." (Baudrillard 1989, p.48) Based on Baudrillard's take on the transformation of the sign

under postmodernism we can see that the abstraction of the commodity has become absolute as

the distinction of what is real and what is simulation begins to fade away.  In this new

environment of postmodernism the spectacle becomes even more meaningless as the signs rather

than pointing to reality becomes mercurial. "The arbitrary sign begins when, instead of linking

two persons in an unbreakable reciprocity, the signifier starts referring back to the disenchanted

universe of the signified" (Baudrillard 1989, p.85) which in essence illustrates the breakdown of

reality by an interrelated network of simulation. The result of this process is that we speak

continuously and increasingly of the copy without any original as well as to appearances that

have no foundation in reality.

  The recession of reality reinforces Baudrillard's notion that "postmodernism is not

simply a culture of the sign, rather it is a culture of the simulacrum" (Storey 1997, p.177) a term

he coined himself. It is used by Baudrillard to denote the "generalized paralysis which

characterizes all social movement. It is an extension of the concept of immobilization of self into

the realm of the socialized relations which is partly anticipated by Debord and which, for

Baudrillard also means the erasure of real meaning in political strategy or strategies." (Hussey

2001, p.67) Here we see that the simulacrum has many similarities to the spectacle as defined by

Debord with the exception that in Baudrillard's view there is no longer further room for true

political discourse and no possibility to resist. "We inhabit a world with neither truth nor history,

and for Baudrillard therefore permanently divorced from that historical truth which alone, in

Debord's revolutionary version, could bring an end to the endless spectacle." (Cubitt 2001, p.42)

The onset of the integrated spectacle and postmodern culture increased Debord's pessimism in

regards to his revolutionary project but he continued to hold that there were still realms and

strategies that could be explored to push back against the spectacle. Baudrillard however felt that

all was lost and that there could no longer be any differentiation between reality and

representation, that the omnipresence of simulacrum had obliterated any distinction between the

two.  For Baudrillard the postmodern age "is one in which we must finally accept that the 'will to

spectacle and illusion' is stronger than the 'will for knowledge and power' to which it is

opposed." (Plant 1992, p.158) As the development of postmodernism continues to progress

society becomes increasingly disconnected from their needs and what they value as important.

The shift to simulacrum outlined in Baudrillard's theory indicates that the system that was

described in the work of Marx no longer exists as it once did. "In Baudrillard's analysis, in

addition to use value and exchange value, the commodity sign radiates sign value, whereby a

system of meaning differentially organizes images, objects, and practices into hierarchy of

prestige and value." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.98) Production within this new stage of capitalism

no longer functions based the quality or usability of the product, it "does not even have the

rationale of providing for our needs. Instead under the rule of the code, it produces only more

and more signifiers without referents and commodities that do not match our needs". (Cubitt

2001, p.45) Through the separation of signifier from the signified the structure of signification

has been subjected to an entirely new revolution similar to that which was brought about through

the separation of exchange-value and use-value. (Cubitt 2001, p.43) For this reason, Baudrillard

states with confidence that we no longer live in a time of traditional production. Modern

production has been "superseded by the general law of equivalence (the structural law of value)

in which all differences are repressed, since the only one that matters, the difference between the

real and the copy, no longer holds." (Cubitt 2001, p.45) What becomes quintessential during this

new stage of capitalism is no longer production but reproduction. This transition is what

Baudrillard has theorized.  As society becomes based on self-reproduction, consumption, media,

information and technology, all levels of exchange now exist as a form of sign, image or

information. As exchange-value is eclipsed by sign-value the differentiation that Debord held

between appearance and reality begins to evaporate. (Best & Kellner 1997, p.96) Beginning with

Marx and continued through the work of Debord, the abstraction process of the commodity has

been traced and now "Baudrillard describes an even more advanced state of abstraction in which

the object is absorbed altogether into the image and dematerializes in closed cycles of semiotic

exchange." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.96) With the onset of this new stage of abstractions

Baudrillard declared that the "political economy and the era of production are finished, and we

live in a new, dematerialized society of signs, images, and codes." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.80)

These changes to the way that commodities are perceived and the loss of the golden thread that

connects them to reality allowed Baudrillard to conclude that representations within the postmodern era had attained the level of hyperreality.

### 2.2.2 Hyperreality and the Economization of the Senses

The term 'hyperreality' itself illustrates that there has been a fissure in what, up until now, has been considered the reality principle in representation which has been brought on by an era of mass reproduction which typifies the postmodern era. In his own words Baudrillard believed that the hyperreal is indicative of a more advanced phase where the natural dichotomy of real and imaginative is disappearing. The loss of contradiction between these two poles leads to the implosion of notions of the real and the imaginary as they increasingly collapse one into the other. "The result is that reality and simulation are experienced as without difference - operating along a roller-coaster continuum." (Storey 1997, p.178) As the proliferation of signs without signifiers increases exponentially it eventually attains a point where speaking of the image as representation is impossible and that what is produced is a simulation that is more vivid and replicates reality better than the actual experience of reality. This new phase of hyperreality also affects what Debord was striving for in his quest to preserve and foster liberated zones of desire. Within the postmodern era "what we desire is no longer a real satisfaction, but a hyperreal simulation of satisfaction that begins with the desire for commodities but ends in desire for the hyperreal glamour of their simulation." (Cubitt 2001, p.46) The result is a manufactured dissatisfaction, which rather than spurring resistance engenders further passivity towards a system that works feverishly to maintain its illusions of reality. Ironically, the goal of the endless procession of simulacra is to maintain a reality that its own process destroys."What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it."

(Baudrillard 1989, p.44) The exponential proliferation of images without referents is an attempt

to persuade people into believing that reality still persists beyond the onset of hyperreality. In

this regard Baudrillard puts forward that "subjectivity is produced by a host of networks of social

relations and discursive constructions so complex that it cannot be unraveled to reveal uses,

directions, or meanings." (Plant 1992, p.6) This illustrates that the level of interconnectivity

between these signs develops a network of meanings that are able to support and reaffirm

themselves with no need of any anchors in the realm of reality. Baudrillard argues that the

endless production of this type baseless image "has never merely threatened to distort or

manipulate the real: rather, it has always been in danger of revealing the essential absence of that

which it represents; it has always threatened to make the real disappear." (Plant 1992, p.159) The

overarching mediation of reality by the spectacle has continued in the postmodern era to further

isolate and alienate the masses from reality as the signs they consume with increasing vigor draw

them further away from any level of authenticity."This position ultimately led Baudrillard to a

complete rejection of any possibility of criticism, negativity, or political contestation: the

hyperreal world is seamless and complete, allowing no contradiction or challenge to emerge."

(Plant 1992, p.135) The loss of reality to the hyperreal world theorized by Baudrillard offers no

opportunities to abstain which instills a sense of inevitability and fosters a level of complacency.

All of the revolutionary optimism supported by Debord is drained of its power in Baudrillard

deterministic take on the postmodern hyperreal spectacle.

The further displacement of the masses from a tangible reality marks an important

threshold in the new postmodern nature of capitalist society, as it evolves from a strategy of

isolation and alienation towards the further strategy of maneuvering itself into their minds by

existing solely as sign. As capital begins to change and become increasingly postmodern and

hyperreal the strategies of the spectacle have responded in step focusing its efforts on the realm

of the visual and moving away from the realm of material. "Since the spectacle's job is to cause a

world that is no longer directly perceptible to be seen via different specialized mediations, it is

inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place of once occupied by

touch." (Debord 1967, p.17) In this new era of the sign economy visual products and culture

become an important element to the reinforcing of ideologies, mediation of reality and

economization of vision. This process of rendering the visual profitable has been eloquently

described by Jonathan Crary:

> This autonomization of sight, occurring in many different domains, was a historical
> condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the task of 'spectacular'
> consumption. Not only did the empirical isolation of vision allow its quantification and
> homogenization but it also enabled new objects of vision (whether commodities,
> photographs, or the act of perception itself) to assume a mystified and abstract identity,
> sundered from any relation to the observer's position with a cognitively unified field.
> (Crary 1992, p.19)

This change in the nature and focus of the economy in its move towards the hyperreal and the

postmodern was prefigured by György Lukács who felt that as labour becomes "progressively

rationalized and mechanized man's lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity

becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative." (Lukács as cited in Debord

1967, p.25) This signals that the traditional notion of labour under these new circumstances

extends itself beyond the physical and begins to have a mental component. The economy once

solely based on the production and exchange of material commodities, has now matured into

something far less concrete as new commercial industries emerge that don't rely on physical

labor but on mental energy. "The becoming-image of the world, or rather the increasing

dematerialization of the commodity is also necessary for capital development. Capital's

fundamental transformation during the twentieth century is cinematic, that is, it becomes visual."

(Beller 2006, p.20) Although this new incarnation of capital exists outside the physical world and

functions differently than it had traditionally, it still exerts the same strategy of separation onto

the masses.  "The image structures the visible and invisible, absorbs freeing power, and sucks up

solidarity time." (Beller 2006, p.5) The use of visual culture as it evolves into a hyperreal world

is a continuation of the spectacle's strategy of isolation.

The formation and acquisition of capital, as we saw earlier, has evolved over time. In its

present day incarnation "capital no longer posits merely 'labor time' as alienated and productive for

capital, but all human time." (Beller 2006, p.177) This evolution has cleverly allowed labor to

infiltrate the lives of the masses outside of traditional production.  Cinema was developed as a

"means to extend the range and effect of capitalized machinery and the logic of capitalization.

The cinematic mode of production becomes the necessary means of extending the work day while

reducing real wages on a global scale. 'Elevating' commodity production to the visual realm,

cinema extracts labor and pays in fun." (Beller 2006, p.13) Through the investment of attention,

spectators allow the commodities or ideologies within the visual spectacle to bombard their

unconscious.  The process of "exchanging time for image, provides the counterflow to the moving

image and as advertising revenues would indicate, is itself productive of value." (Beller 2006, p.79)

The investment of time and attention the viewer brings to the items that stem from the cinematic

mode of production produce value and profit in their own right. "[T]he cinema builds its pathway

of circulation directly into the eyes and sensoriums of its viewers. It is the viewers who perform the

labor that opens the pathways for the flow of new commodities." (Beller 2006, p.209)

The inadvertent laboring towards the propagation of the spectacle is another example of the ways

that the spectacle takes advantage of its subordination of the masses. It is a process to which they

have no control other than to renounce image culture completely which in a hyperreal world is

almost inconceivable. "The generalized blindness with respect to the economization of the senses

is a constitutive element of hegemony. This leveraged theft of sensual labor is the postmodern version of capital's dirty secret." (Beller 2006, p.6) The omnipresence of the spectacle in the postmodern era means that the hegemony of its messages should be a factor of great concern. "The spectacle's programmers minimize the opportunity or temptation for independent thought. This editorial control of the image and, equally importantly, of the juxtaposition of images, presents the spectacle with new tools for subjugation of thought." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.125) This factor combined with the increased reach of the spectacle is a strategy that greatly concerned Debord as he feared it would erode and eventually destroy rational thought. "In losing their immediate access to the external world in favor of the mediation of the image or screen, the individual is deprived of their autonomy of thought, since the processed pseudo-experience of the spectacle entirely determines thought." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.125) The masses existing within this new phase of the spectacle are not only persuaded to consume visual culture but bombarded to the extent that there is little room for anything else. They are in essence "drowned in a flow of images which 'carries everything before it' and leaves the spectator with neither time nor the space to think, reflect, remember, or judge." (Plant 1992, p.152) In its incessant pushing of its ideologies and mediations the masses have little opportunity to come up for air and to take a step back to consider what they are being presented. This leaves them once again vulnerable to the influence of power.

In his reaction to the integrated spectacle and to postmodernism Debord cautioned that it is "someone else who controls at will this simplified summary of the sensible world; who decides where the flow will lead as well as the rhythm of what should be shown, like some perpetual, arbitrary surprise, leaving no time for reflection, and entirely independent of what the spectator might understand or think of it." (Debord 1990, p.28) Even when the spectator has a

different point of view to the procession of hegemonic media they are hard pressed to find their

alternative perspective within the standard and dominant channels of communication.

This therefore illustrates that the "problem with mimesis, then, is not one of aesthetics but one of

social power." (Crary 1989, p.98) The images found within the spectacle are not in and of

themselves negative, it is how they are mediated and juxtaposed that unlocks their latent

influence. These uses of the image are orchestrated and become a platform from which it is

possible to exert power. The endless stream of hegemonic ideologies found within the mass

media exerts a subtle but imposing influence on its spectators and has increased its reach beyond

its economic boundaries.  Postmodern industry with the onset of the integrated and hyperreal

spectacle has seen a fusion between itself and the economy as well as the state."The condition of

generalized secrecy is the direct result and ultimate aim of this integration; in other words, the

successful concealment of the true centre of power." (Taylor & Harris 2008, p.125) This new

stage of the spectacle leaves the spectator totally disoriented within a hyperreal environment as

they are endlessly distracted from their real lives and are subjected to power whose origin is

untraceable. It is therefore very difficult for the masses to push back against a system that

disadvantages them and that touches every aspect of contemporary social life. In this advanced

state Baudrillard put forward that in a world where reality is so nebulous "power itself eventually

break[s] apart in this space and becom[es] a simulation of power (disconnected from its aims and

objectives, and dedicated to *power effects* and mass simulation)" (Baudrillard 1989, p.42) Power

as it was once understood no longer exists for Baudrillard and the only way the system can

generate power is by constantly reaffirming the reality of its own simulations which perpetuates

the hyperreal world and the subordination as well as the complacency of the masses.

The postmodern incarnation of the spectacle in its abandonment of reality has increasingly entrenched itself in dominance, "ideology ceases to be a partial account of the world and becomes the only account, a lie because we are unable now to recognize that it is only a partial version. And having achieved this dominance, ideology as spectacle deprives us of change." (Cubitt 2001, p.40) It is important to make the distinction that the spectacle doesn't deprive society of all change only meaningful change. The spectacle is always in constant evolution but only in the most arbitrary of senses in order to continue to draw our attention and maintain a heightened level of distraction. As society becomes saturated with spectacle, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain societal passivity, which requires constant vigilance on the part of the spectacle to maintain its hold. The challenge is to continuously create "conditions that individuate, immobilize, and separate subjects, even within a world in which mobility and circulation are ubiquitous. In this way attention becomes key to the operation of noncoercive forms of power." (Crary 2001, p.74) As capitalism continues to change its configurations over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to capture the attention in order to maintain the subtle nature of its power. This inevitably leads to an ongoing crisis of attentiveness which forces capitalism to "continually push attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an endless sequence of new products of stimulation, and streams of information and then respond with new methods of managing and regulating perception. (Crary 2001, p.14) The spectacle must constantly maintain a rhythm of production, while simultaneously breaking new ground to maintain attention in order to avoid the collapse of the spectacular isolation imposed on the masses which, as has been revealed, is the foundation of the spectacle's structure. This requires that the mode of domination maintain a fluid state "in order to maintain hierarchical society. As spectators begin to value their attention, corporations struggle to get more of what they previously got for nothing."(Beller 2006, p.5) The invariable state of fear

that the dominant system has of inattention has contributed to the interminable circulation of

commodities. This is not a system that is renewable, "new commodities must continually be

thrown into it from without, like fuel into fire. Otherwise, it goes out in indifference." (Beller 2006,

p.67) The state of constant flux found within modern capitalism has resulted in a society where

nothing is fixed or permanent but merely passing as any moment of stagnation could lead to

inattention or to the self actualization of the masses which the spectacle has work so hard to

dissuade. The continual evolution of the visual landscape as integral to the cultural logic of

capitalism requires that the masses accept a constant reorientation of attention, darting from one

thing to another, as a natural state. "Capital, as accelerated exchange and circulation, necessarily

produced this kind of human perceptual adaptability and became a regime of reciprocal

attentiveness and distraction." (Crary 2001, p.30) The adaptability and importance of attention

detailed above is paramount, as it enables people to sift through the bombardment of hyperreal

images and sounds of late capital to find a point of interest which allows them to become

specialized in their habits of consumption which simulates choice, desire and consumer power.

## 2.2.3 The Return of the Reality Principle and Critical Consciousness

With further understanding of Baudrillard's theorization of a hyperreal world and its

implications to the economy, culture and society, it is clear that the concept of the spectacle raised

by Debord continues to have relevance when it comes to analyzing the current state of society. As

the spectacle continues to spread though these different realms, it continues the same processes

outlined by Debord but employing the new technological advancements with ever greater

sophistication in service to the capitalist order. However, as "Jonathan Crary has repeatedly

pointed out, the social conditions described by the terms 'spectacle' and 'hyperreality' are not

parallel but successive, the hyperreal superseding an earlier spectacle-culture in Baudrillard's

chronology." (McDonough 1997, p.8) The successive nature of these two theories and their current

levels of adoption is the biggest point of contention between Debord and Baudrillard's theories.

The extent to which the hyperreal has been absorbed into all levels of society is a determining

factor to whether real life outside of the spectacle can still be accessed and whether resistance is

still possible. The rift between these two perspectives has led to the belief that "Baudrillard is

wrong when he says that we are no longer within a disciplinary society, or a society of the

spectacle, but are completely within a fully processed simulatory, cybernetic, postmodern society,"

(Best & Kellner 1997, p.105) much like any change to society, its effects are not immediate and

over-arching. Change always occurs in stages and changes that are so technologically specific take

even longer to become commonplace and adopted by all. Therefore, although the most

technologically advanced societies find themselves within a hyperreal world, not all those within

that society or at its perimeter are subject to the same reality. With this is mind it is more "prudent

to theorize the postmodern as an emergent form of society and culture, albeit a constellation that is

growing in power and influence." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.108) To believe that everyone lives in a

hyperreal world is to "accept Baudrillard's technologically deterministic reading of contemporary

culture." (McDonough 1997, p.8) It is not necessary to contrast the different realities of separate

countries to witness the disparities between different technological cultures as even within the

same country people's immersion is greatly different based on their class, generation or attitude

towards a totally technological and visual existence. When looking at the globe holistically it is

possible to see that even at the present moment it could be argued that the world is made up of

different groups that exist within modern, postmodern and even pre-modern stages of social and

technological development. (Best & Kellner 1997, p.108) To believe that all are subjected to the

full extent to hyperreality is to greatly generalize the current state of society. "Baudrillard's trips

through hyperreality take both situationist theory and poststructuralist discourse to an untenable

extreme." (Plant 1992, p.154) It is in this rift created by Baudrillard's overzealous account of the

present day media culture that allows Debord's theory to have further use decades after its

conceptualization.

In the world of hyperreality where thought is subjugated and where political action is

dismissed it is possible to see links to the situationist notion of spectacle. "both are realms in

which the real and the meaningful have slipped away amidst a confusion of signs, images,

simulations, and appearances. But Baudrillard is content to take the spectacle at face value,

removing all sense in which it can be considered as an inversion of the real." (Plant 1992, p.154)

Baudrillard's take on Debord is that his vision of the spectacle is nostalgic in its efforts to

rediscover historical reality and a subjective experience. "And to Debord, Baudrillard's work is

based on a fundamental error, signaled, perhaps, by his specialized obsession with the media.

Mistaking the appearances, simulations, and signs of reality for reality itself. Baudrillard has

happily accepted the spectacle's own account of itself." (Plant 1992, p.169) This is not to say

that Baudrillard's account of the later stages of the spectacle isn't useful, it is simply a rejection

of "their extreme phrasing, their linkage to an apocalyptic concept of rupture, and their

pessimistic and quietistic political conclusions." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.105) In confronting the

emergence of a hyperreal culture Baudrillard's answer is not to work against the system but to

allow it to get increasingly negative until it self-destructs. Where the apathy it generates leads to

its own self destruction. "This marks the complete inversion of the situationist theory, with

which Baudrillard remains engaged throughout his work. Convinced that all desires for

participation in creating situations have been replaced by the drive for spectacle, Baudrillard

pours scorn on the situationist dream." (Plant 1992, p.165) By going against Marx and Debord's

belief in the freedom that could be achieved through revolution , Baudrillard "abandons the

project of individual transformation as well as of social transformation, declaring both

subjectivity and sociality to be illusions." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.96) The moments of

authenticity and the liberated zones of desires advocated by Marx and Debord is a mission

viewed as entirely naïve by Baudrillard. He felt that the goal of building a world of immediate

engagement and lived situations was always doomed to fail against the onslaught of

commodified images and experiences.  For Baudrillard the reality that Debord sought was

always "merely the seductive fictions which have deceived us into working and waiting for their

fulfillment for more than a century." (Plant 1992, p.163) In his own theories Baudrillard tried to

reveal the hopelessness of any attempt maintain or return to the idea of real life and meaningful

experiences. He believes that the human potential that has been negated by the spectacle can no

longer be circumscribed, that "there can be no historical movement in which, through the

dialectical negation of the negation, we might arrive at the synthesis of the idea of humanity with

its actuality." (Cubitt 2001, p.51) There is therefore, through Baudrillard, no way to reconcile

representation in a postmodern, hyperreal world with situationist notions of authenticity and

reality.

   Regardless of Baudrillard's work being both provocative and persuasive, his ideas are

sometimes felt to be devoid "of  both direction and origin, his most astute observations are mere

descriptions made from some indeterminate realm too shifting and diffuse to constitute a critical

perspective." (Plant 1992, p.168)  The constant state of flux of the spectacle and with levels of its

consumption remaining relative there still remains an opportunity for the situationist mission to

continue to have relevance. For it remains true that  "only by re-asserting the full force of the

negative as a lived experience… can the social be fully integrated into political thought; although they have long since abandoned the possibility of synthesis or transcendence, Debord and Baudrillard are still fascinated by the potential forms of mutation which spectacular or simulated society allows the spectator." (Hussey 2001, p.69) Even though the reach of the spectacle is increasing it does not exclude the possibility of territories that still exist beyond it and in some cases annexed within the spectacle itself. In contrast to Baudrillard complacent pessimism, Debord still posits a "world behind the spectacle, where the forces of oppression and resistance struggle to live." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.111) As a result, Debord holds to his theories which affirm that the reality principle and referential reason remain and not only are they still intact but there are still methods available to recover them. The continued recoverability of these principals breathes new life into the attempts of revolutionary transformation of individuals and capitalist society. Rather than succumb to the pessimistic vision of Baudrillard, Debord "critically deciphers the congealed image object, the spectacle; penetrates its reified surface; and situates it within its context of social and historical relations." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.112) In his attempts to outline the advanced stages of reification, Debord puts forward the argument that "no object is fully opaque or inscrutable, standing outside of a social context that it cannot ultimately refer to, betray, and be interpreted against." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.112) Despite the radical transformation of referentiality with the onset of the postmodern era it is still believed by Debord that the source can be traced no matter how reified. This is based on Debord's argument that "signs do not simply move out of their orbit. They are historically produced and circulated, and though they may not translucently refer to some originating world, they nonetheless can be sociohistorically contextualized, interpreted, and criticized." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.112) By mapping the complex interconnections of society and by tracing the signs of the spectacle back to their source Debord is

able to "discover the sources and mechanisms of oppression, to undertake interpretation and

ideological critique, and to engage theory toward the cause of human emancipation and social

transformation." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.110) Therefore in trying to deconstruct the postmodern

capitalist world there are still interpretations that are accessible and which can still be leveraged

towards active transformation. The postmodern mentality put forward by Baudrillard is not entirely

resolute. "Whereas Baudrillard would have us believe in the 'fantastic perfection' of the schemes

of control, Debord reminds us that we need to remain vigilant to the 'new signs of negation

multiplying in the economically developed countries' that 'already enable us to draw the

conclusion that a new epoch has begun:" (Best & Kellner 1997, p.116) This marks another

threshold in the battle between appearance and reality which has at its centre the need for critical

thought due to its ability to probe behind appearances.

The introduction of this new perspective "suggests that 'simulation' can be critically

deconstructed and resolved into 'dissimulation,' an activity that reveals simulation to be wholly

constructed, serving the interests of specific social groups and hiding certain alternative

realities." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.113) The awareness of the need for critical thought becomes

vitally important and necessary to impart to the masses as it is one of the only remaining

strategies that challenge the hegemony of the media and that deconstruct the undisclosed

influences of power. "Critical hermeneutics can always uncover the constructedness of the

hyperreal, which is, afterall, nothing more than a construct and model of the real; the hyperreal

can always be contextualized, deconstructed, and unmasked."(Best & Kellner 1997, p.112) All

that is required is an active and critical consumption of what was previously taken at face value.

"This critical reversal, implicit in Debord's radical hermeneutics, foregrounds what

Baurdillardian postmodern theory consistently obscures: the continued existence of the capitalist

mode of production, of consumer society, of the culture industries, of the state, and of coercive

violence in the repression and determination of social being." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.114)

Through exercising critical hermeneutics the masses can begin to break apart the hyperreal

environment by holding its producers to account. This influence, over time, can begin to grow

and allow the necessary societal transformation to take place. Once the masses are made aware

of the need to be critical when consuming media, dominant or otherwise, the act of consumption

can begin to more active and less passive. This will render the masses more alert in their

consumption rather than simply allowing distraction which Theodor Adorno viewed as a

"'regression', as perception that has been 'arrested at the infantile stage' and for which deep

'concentration' is no longer possible." (Crary 2001, p.49) With the perception of the masses

being freed from an unfocused state, it spurs their critical ability to challenge dominant

ideologies which up until now has been dormant. The dominant class came to power, in part, by

developing the cultural industry and Debord cautions that the "proletariat will never come to

embody power unless it becomes the class of consciousness." (Debord 1967, p.58) The masses

need to refine their critical abilities in order to exert their influence and bring forth the change

they want to integrate into the system which leaves them powerless. "For [Antonio] Gramsci,

understanding how we make popular culture from the commodities given to us 'requires

vigilance and attention to the details of the production, distribution, and consumption of culture."

(Bishop 2000, p.15) Vigilance is fundamental in order to overcome the "administered perception

of spectacular culture", which will make us "attentive to everything but itself" (Crary 2001,

p.359). The spectacle will work to keep the masses focused on the banal and mundane, to avoid a

collective criticism of the system to which they have been subsumed.

The employment of critical hermeneutics "rightly tries to recover the distinction between reality and illusion as the preliminary basis for sociopolitical criticism. It is the work of the culture industry to erase this distinction, and it should be the task of radical criticism to recover it". (Best & Kellner 1997, p.113) This new outlook on media consumption grants the masses the opportunity to empower themselves by contributing and heeding each other's criticisms. Critical hermeneutics doesn't necessarily reveal a reality beyond the façade of the spectacle, it exposes the "actors, groups, policy makers, spin doctors, and institutions still identifiable and subject to a critically informed resistance." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.113) It is not always possible to plumb down to an authentic reality within a realm that is so heavily mediated, but it is possible to reveal the source of the content to allow the masses to manage their impressions of what they are being presented based on the social, political or economic origin of what they are consuming. Any critical investigation of the products of the mass media is simultaneously a step toward resisting the hegemonic ideologies that are being reinforced.  The need to remain critical was maintained by Debord, even at the most pessimistic of times, and was what he hoped to incite in people through his works and theories.  For Debord it is pivotal that "a critical hermeneutics that seeks to decipher and critique the underlying basis of a frozen history and social order" (Best & Kellner 1997, p.110) be fostered in an increasingly pervasive media saturated society. Regardless of the advanced stages of media saturation, Debord continued to hold that this is still "a moment in history which, despite the apparent end of categorical language and organized critique, still offers not only a space for resistance but also demands that new, strategic positions be found in a political landscape yet to be defined by immanent alterity and the timeless, chiliastic spirit of Marx". (Hussey 2001, p.70) It is now possible to see that critical hermeneutics is pivotal part of resistance and an effective tool at the disposal of the masses to identify the dominant ideologies

of the media. Additionally, it is also an important means to uncover the fallacies told about the current capitalist system.

The first error "is to see capitalism as a reflection of the natural order and the second error is to see it as inevitable." (Strangelove 2005, p.218) The perceived inevitability of the capitalist system is a major driving force behind the increased complacency of the masses. However, when evaluating this notion of inevitability "it must be kept in mind that history's largest and most sophisticated propaganda system is constantly telling us that it is the only valid form of economic organization." (Strangelove 2005, p.205) Through an uncritical acceptance of capitalism's own messages about itself the masses are wholeheartedly abandoning all ability to resist the status quo that is being imposed upon them.  They lose all incentive to imagine and create an alternative way of being under the weight and perception that things aren't capable of changing. However, it is critical for the masses to remember that the "denial of the utility of resistance and the defence of capitalism as a permanent mode of organization is itself a product of the capitalist ideology." (Strangelove 2005, p.157) Bearing this in mind it is crucial that masses reinvest a little faith in the importance of critical resistance and the possibility of change. For if it is "to change, and in a positive way, it is important that people who are dissatisfied with the status quo should not be overcome and rendered truly powerless by a sense of hopelessness and cynicism." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.205) It is a level of pessimism that is common and that even Debord wasn't totally able to escape but giving up the belief that things can change is the first step towards total domination. "As Noam Chomsky said, 'if you act like there is no possibility for change, you guarantee that there will be no change.'" (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.205) Debord's attempts to create his own brand of media, one that would be an alternative to the dominant media, was done in the hope of transforming and diversifying the media landscape to flesh out a forum that

could be a catalyst for change. Unlike Baudrillard, Debord believed that media technologies could

be used in a different way that would work against existing society and culture. Despite his initial

project existing within a modernist framework, it is still possible for his practices and radical

critique to be employed and rejuvenated within the postmodern era with an undiminished

relevance. As Debord and his contemporaries begin to fade away as a canon of modernist theory

"radical critique must continue to focus on the full extent of human potential… and how its

development requires an altogether different social order than is possible under capitalism." (Best

& Kellner 1997, p.116) As the masses continue to remain passive, they increasingly benefit from

the help of critics to continue the radical perspective adopted by Debord. The critics play a vital

role of leadership within society as they help to identify and contest the ideologies at work within

the media. Also, through their discovery they can highlight the effects of the spectacle and often

begin the work of formulating sites of resistance to the status quo. As for the masses, many are

currently ignorant to their own ignorance and "without the critic, they are unable even to hear their

own cries of hopelessness. Hopeless they are and shall remain, presumably until someone else

provides them with the necessary maps of intelligibility and critical modes of resistance."

(Grossberg as cited in Storey 1997, p. 186) This, therefore, introduces the purpose of the

accompanying video piece to this thesis as a continuation of radical critique and resistance within

the postmodern era. It also serves to highlight areas of resistance in different sectors of production

still in practice today, some of which have been created since the time of Debord.

## 3. Video Production

### 3.1 Reclaiming Territories of Resistance in a Postmodern Era

The accompanying video piece *Spectacle & Resistance* (2013) was conceptualized as the

necessary next step to this type of theoretical exploration. As it was illustrated by the theories of

the Frankfurt School, it is at times important that theoretical assertions be followed by necessary

action to apply to what has been learned in theory to aspects of the real world. Otherwise all

practical use or application of the theory becomes enfeebled. It can be insufficient to merely

theorize, when that theory could lead to some level of action to concretize its relevance and to

address the issues that are raised by the theory itself. "If one is to say all, one must become an

agent; the word must be immediately convertible into action. The authenticity, the totality in

question cannot be solely a matter of speech: acts must follow, acts that deprive the prior

utterances of all reason for being." (Kaufmann 1997, p.50) In regards to the media, theory "is

constantly at risk of slipping into the domain of fictionality by our too quickly dismissing the

possibility of the transparent, real, and authentic" (Strangelove 2010, p.79) providing only

continued deconstruction and exploration of abstract notions leaving behind real world

relevance. This highlights one of the strengths of the full breadth of Debord's work as it not only

creates theories that allow us to understand the effects and nature of the spectacle but it also

provides, through his cinematic works, an example of counter-spectacle which helps to give a

basis and real world direction to his theories. The cinematic component is just as, if not more,

important than the theoretical work as it achieves a more direct influence on the desired end.

"[S]uch cinematic experiences would in turn 'intensify' the written articulation of the same

problem." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.333) The accompanying video piece strives to achieve

similar goals by illustrating and intensifying the ideas explore within the thesis. Debord's

cinematic works also help to put the spectacle into stark contrast with works of resistance

highlighting the difference between media products that foster passivity and those that enrich

self-actualization and critical awareness. Similarly the viewing of the accompanying video piece

strives to be challenging and thoughtful which also develops a contrast to the veneered and facile

viewing of spectacle's own productions. Debord's video pieces enable the products of resistance

to exist in the same forums as the spectacle allowing those who receive the works a gateway

towards further exploration and understanding of the full extent of his theories. The video piece

not only provides the necessary examples of postmodern resistance but it also helps to illustrate

and to bring awareness to the social, political and economic problems explored within the thesis.

The continued relevance of this video piece, or a project similar to it, was prefigured by the

Situationists themselves:  "Sooner or later the history of the S.I. is bound to serve in the construction of

a new project of resistance… What that project will be like is still guesswork. Certainly it will have to

struggle to reconceive the tentacular unity of its enemy and articulate the grounds of a unity capable of

contesting it." (Clark & Nicholson-Smith 1997, p.30) The written portion of the thesis is therefore the

reconception of the 'enemy' described above. The thesis has explored the genesis of the spectacle and

has traced its evolution, and the resistance to it, all the way through to the postmodern era. It has also,

through its passage from the modern to postmodern, rearticulated the grounds that need to be fostered

in order to continue to resist. In what follows in this thesis, as well as within the video piece, will be the

exploration of the continued areas of resistance that are still occurring. These new and traditional

strategies of resistance will be reinforced by examples that have been integrated into the video piece

itself.  Moving forward the present day bastions of resistance to the media will be shown to still exist

within the media itself, in endeavors to create alternative media and also within the artistic productions

created by people who have rediscovered their ability to self-actualize and raise awareness. It is

important to explore these three categories of production as the "distinction between all genres of film,

television, and video practice have become increasingly blurred with each passing decade."

(Strangelove 2010, p.72) It is also one of the factors that render the discussion surrounding any one of

these categories so problematic. Just as it difficult to speak of bodily systems in silos, such as

discussing the circulatory system without addressing the respiratory system, the same can be said of the

different aspects of cultural production within their own systems. This type of symbiosis between

different sectors of cultural production contributes to the use of varied and related examples in the

video piece, as many of the video clips integrated can speak to one or all of the categories listed above.

The use of a variety of video clips also speaks to the strategy of détournement conceptualized by the

Situationists.  For Debord "it was absolutely necessary to work with whatever lay at hand, with the

most degraded images produced by the culture industry and its adjuncts – and that such images would

form the contemporary visual horizon, and that only their tendentious refunctioning through

détournement would allow one to take up a valid position on the field of sociocultural struggle."

(McDonough 2006, p.43) Similarly, the video clips included in the video piece have been plucked from

the world of online video which are universally accessible, circulated endlessly, touch on all three

categories and mirror Debord's tactic of using degraded cultural products. The use of détournement

also helps to reveal certain problematic operations of the mainstream media and the strategies to

overcome them. Such as Jean-Luc Godard's suggestion that we 'trace the images back to their source'

which "should be the impulse behind a critical mapping of the postmodern terrain." (Best & Kellner

1997, p.114) Tracing the origin of media back to their source enables the masses to restore a sense of

history that the spectacle works tirelessly to erode.  It also reveals the way that postmodern media

works intertextually and how resistance to it is often absorbed and deradicalized. The subversion of

subversion practiced by the media system is critical as it indicates that it is necessary to remain

critically vigilant and that the need to push against the spectacle must be a standard practice that should

evolve perpetually.

**3.1.1 Sublimation and Resistance within Intertextual Media**

In a cultural environment that believes that all has been explored and that there is nothing new to say it would seem an inevitability that further cultural production would need to cannibalize itself in order to move forward. The days of pure and unique cultural production has been replaced by a postmodern culture of quotation and intertextuality. It is an era where new developments in culture are spawned from previous cultural productions. As was explored by Fredric Jameson (1984), cultural production has become a play of surfaces without any dormant possibilities. These cultural productions draw their strength, not from their uniqueness, but from other surfaces and the interplay of intertextual imagery. (Storey 1997, p.185) The implosion of reality within traditional media has led to a loss of authenticity and credibility that, in this new era, is remedied and fortified through an intensification of self-referential and self-reflexive practices. These new tactics become the trademark of the postmodern era. Within this climate it is clear that the spectacle's referential and recuperative ability is what gives it its strength and what reinforces its latent power. In an action that is even more clever, the spectacle has also developed strategies that allow it to recuperate and sublimate even the most radical actions made against it from outside and within its own territories. This illustrates that the spectacle has a "new kind of power of recuperation and absorption, a capacity to neutralize and assimilate acts of resistance by converting them into objects or images of consumption." (Crary 1989, p.100) Once recuperated by the spectacle these acts of resistance serve as method of reinforcing the status quo through consumption of spectacular rebelliousness in which "dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economy of abundance develops the capacity to process that particular raw material." (Debord in Knabb 2003 p.59) Much like the cultural industry that preceded it, the postmodern spectacle has the uncanny ability to subjugate even the most radical of critiques

and make it profitable. The spectacle introduces and integrates forms of counter-culture and

resistance through which "passivity is maintained precisely through the illusion of involvement

in 'rebellion'; the 'revolution' becomes a spectacle." (Noys 2007, p.398) The dissent that is

present within the spectacle has almost always been recuperated by the system it abhors.

The contestations of the spectacle simply exist within the pervasive network of power which

seeks to determine and create the reality and society that surround us as well as our own

individuality. This process, which continues to intensify, has become more pervasive and subtle

the more that the spectacle has had to rely on intertextuality and appropriation as a way of

reinforcing and rejuvenating itself.

The strategy of the appropriation and assimilation adopted by the media is one that

operates with increased sophistication which enables it to continue in an uncontested fashion.

The masses may not acknowledge the full breadth of this process, but sensibility to it may be

growing, especially in areas that touch on particular aspects of people's identities or beliefs.

"We all, in one way or another, dimly feel that not only punctual and local countercultural forms

of cultural resistance and guerrilla warfare, but also even overtly political interventions like those

of The Clash, are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they

themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it."

(Jameson 1984, p.87) The example of The Clash helps to shed light on why Debord and

the Situationists worked so tirelessly to avoid a level of popularity in the hopes of avoiding

institutional acknowledgement or the appropriation of their ideas into popular culture. There are

a few examples within the video project which seek to illustrate the gradual appropriation of

counterculture and sub-culture into the mainstream in order to render them profitable to the

spectacle and media system. The first of these examples is the integration of queer culture into

the mainstream media which takes a counterculture, once viewed as deviant, and renders it

profitable. The first example of this progression can be seen in the evolution of the 'Voguing'

dance style which was created by the ball culture of New York City during the 1980s. The origin

of this dance style is captured in the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) which illustrates

the realities of drag culture and of being part of a marginalized LGBT community of

New York City in the 80s. The video piece illustrates the progression of this dance style from its

point of origin to its eventual popularity and profitability within popular culture through its

appropriation by one of the period's biggest stars, Madonna. This illustrates how an element of

counterculture, which was meant to be an expression of sexual freedom, is made popular to the

masses, not for its resistance to heteronormativity, but as an innovative dance style of the

Queen of Pop. This may not have been Madonna's intention but it does illustrate how

counterculture is used to make a profit regardless of its original intent or meaning. A second

example from the video project which demonstrates this appropriation but from a different field

is the example of the work of Canadian artist Jana Sterbak and her most popular piece

*Vanitas:  Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987), known more commonly as the

Meat Dress. This piece that deals with fashion, consumption and the women's body has also

been appropriated by popular culture while simultaneously being divorced of its original intent.

The video project traces the use of this concept in the television show America's Next Top

Model as well as by Lady Gaga where in both cases it is used in order to shock or draw attention

but neither refers to the original piece or its intended meanings. These instances are not unique

when it comes to postmodern culture and even within the video piece there are further examples

of how counterculture is divested of meaning and rendered profitable through its appropriation.

Appropriation, although gaining in popularity and frequency, is not an entirely new phenomenon and was also a factor in the time of Debord and the Situationists who viewed it as being problematic.  However, they felt that the "recognition that weapons can be turned against those who wield them is no reason to dispense with them altogether." (Plant 1992, p.181) As long as the cultural productions that exist outside of the mainstream continue to initially strive to reinstate a level of authenticity and to promote a critical consciousness then a pivotal facet of their purpose has still been attained. Whether or not they are appropriated after their onset is secondary and unforeseeable, what is important is that the territories of resistance continue to evolve and exert a level of pressure. The fact that these radical gestures of culture and identity can be appropriated "cannot be allowed to lead to petrification and silence. It must, on the contrary, serve as a springboard for subversive strategies of interruption and provocation. With both the situationists and the postmodernists, it is certainly true that we live in an age in which anything can be used for any purpose." (Plant 1992, p.183) The continued insistence that spectacular culture and cultural resistance can be used for diametrically opposed ends is a notion that continues to return in discussions surrounding media culture and the factional tensions therein. What is certain is that any assertion that the spectacle is immutable "fails to recognize, above all, that the spectacle can be made to serve various ends, including those of a critical theory that 'understands, describes and works to overthrow a movement that is effectively taking place under our eyes.'" (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.403) The notion that any product of the media whether spectacle or resistant can be used to serve either end puts into stark contrast the difference between the media itself versus the ideologies and contexts established within. If we take for example  cinema, which was an area viewed by Debord as domain rife with possibilities of exploring economic and societal problems, we can see that what may be at issue here is not

"cinema as such, but rather a historically, specific set of cinematic practices, a certain cinema –

classic, commercial, industrialized, narrativized, and so forth." (Levin in McDonough 2002,

p.324) This therefore begins to absolve the medium itself from culpability and instead focuses on

the internal dynamics and ideologies that are placed within, not by the medium itself, but by the

external actors who are steering the production to serve their own ends. Debord agreed with this

view of the media when he asserted that "it is society and not technology that has made cinema

what it is. The cinema could have been historical examination, theory, essay memories. It could

have been the film which I am making at this moment." (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.408)

This indicates that the media itself has limitless potential in regards to the perspective that can be

adopted within, what is problematic is that within the realm of mass media, there is an exorbitant

amount of media, with identical or similar ideologies, which drown out or blanket the resistant

variety. However, despite the uneven playing field that is sharply coming into focus, there are

examples of resistance within the dominant media system itself which also help to render

the masses more critical, despite the vulnerability that these practices highlight within the system

itself. These practices, which one would think would be abhorrent and careless of the part of the

media system, also have their role to play.


### 3.1.2 Self-Reflexivity within the Media System

The postmodern practice of self-reference is a critical aspect of the evolution of the modern

day media system. The increased instances of referring back to previous cultural products, in a

myriad of ways, inevitably leads to moments where what is investigated or brought up are the

processes that initially created the referenced media in the first place. In this way "self-reference in

the media can serve the ideal of self-criticism and, in turn, how the ideal of such criticism is vital to

the disclosure of reality" (Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.36) Practices where the media

refer to itself can become a contributing factor to the fostering of a critical consciousness in the

minds of those who are learning about the intricacies of the media through its consumption.

Therefore, "[s]elf-reference is a condition for self-criticism and, in turn, self-criticism is

indispensible for responsibly establishing what is so." (Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.36)

In essence, self-reflexivity in the media bestows a wider breadth of topics and content to explore

that enables the media to reinforce its own claims. However, in doing so it also creates a gateway

towards learning and understanding more about the media system, which grants to those that are

consuming it the tools necessary to raise critical awareness. This perspective becomes very

important for, as we will see, the masses are likely to have more exposure to these forms of self-

reflexive techniques than those that exist on the boundaries of the mass media. This impetus of the

media system towards self-reflexivity attests to the level of intricacy and complexity required to

withstand the added demands of postmodern culture. Resistance now exists within the media

system because the "more complex the system becomes and the more it exposes itself to irritations,

the more variety the world can permit without relinquishing any reality." (Luhmann 2000, p.7)

Resistance or irritation to the media system is therefore allowed to persist and thrive in order to

reinforce its own framework. This interplay between the dominant media and resistance can

therefore be viewed in some cases as natural opposites within the same system. This illustrates a

system where "[p]olitical opposition is integrated within the structures it thinks it is opposing

because the forms, mediations, and discourse in which it operates constitute the very relations of

power it imagines itself capable of negating." (Plant 1992, p.118) The internal struggle within the

media system to resist is fundamentally created using the same relations of power that it is trying to

work against. Its creation and the ways that it expresses itself all function within the confines and

limits of the exercises in power it is trying to defy. An analogy of sorts can be seen in the playing

of video games. The goal is to labour in order to overcome the challenges within, however the only

means of doing so is by submitting to the rules and parameters of the game itself. The video game

is not overcome by going outside its boundaries.  In all efforts to resist the media system, it is

"important, even urgent, to stress the critical function made possible by the open-ended reflexivity

so characteristic of distinctly human uses of sign and media."(Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007,

p.36) In the many ways that the media system explores self-reflexivity it also exposes the masses

to its operations that are continually in a state of revision which sometimes takes on a radical

perspective. It does so in order to offer a reliable account of the world to avoid jeopardizing its

credibility and its claims of accuracy. (Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.36) In this sense the

media system will operate self-reflexively, taking on the role fact checker or radical, in order to

secure the confidence of the masses and in so doing protect the reign of its dominance.

In order to camouflage the mercurial nature of reality within the media, their system is

willing to endure self-contestation of its own productions and apparatuses in order to maintain

the more crucial aspects of the status quo. However, this new requirement of the system allows a

gateway that can serve, not only the reinforcement of the aforementioned system but also the

critical consciousness of those consuming it. For reflexivity, "especially in the form of reflexive

interrogation (more simply, in the form of self-questioning), is required for disclosing the

contours, facets, and dimensions of reality, insofar as this is possible." (Colapietro in Nöth &

Bishara 2007, p.39) Therefore the strategies the media system employs in order to reinforce its

own reality principle is necessary for the system but also offers a much needed gateway to a

greater critical awareness of its operations.  The system allows this portal because all

"operationally closed systems have to generate their indicators of reality at the level of their own

operations; they have no other alternative. Resistance can then crop up internally as a problem of

consistency". (Luhmann 2000, p.89) Self-reflexivity therefore pushes the system to reveal and

demonstrate parts of itself that are at odds with reality while simultaneously reinstating

confidence in itself by bringing the inconsistencies to light in the first place. The system's own

acknowledgement of its inconsistencies and distortions are vital to resistance from within the

system and outside it. The light shed on the "distortions and fabrications so vital to the

maintenance of power… are, in turn, vital to the ever unfinished work of humane

critique."(Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.39) This practice of self-reflexivity is how the

system has been able to evolve into the postmodern era it is also one of the operations that allows

for the appropriation of elements that once played out at the fringes which are now adding fuel to

the fires of the spectacle.  This is how the media system allows tests of its habits and

transgressive perspectives to flow in while still upholding its codes and operations.

(Luhmann 2000, p.89) Through the adoption of self-reflexive strategies the media system can;

> produce 'changes in values', it can give preference to minority opinions that push
> themselves to the fore, perhaps especially because they appear as spectacular, full of
> conflict, deviant, and therefore trigger the 'spiral of silence' identified by Elisabeth
> Noelle-Neumann. So there are very many different individual possibilities, but they all
> basically lead to the media generating resistance to themselves. (Luhmann 2000, p.89)

It may seem foolish for the media system to invite its own demise through the incorporation of

self-reflexive practices, however in order to maintain its relevance it has little choice in the

matter. The media system's use of self-reflexivity is vital because "communication in the social

system cannot exclude the framework of tests of consistency, recursivity. If it did, it would lose

all daily necessary meaning." (Luhmann 2000, p.92) The media system would become an

archive of past developments that occurred through the use of old codes and outdated operations

which would lose all relevance to the present state of society and its realities. Despite making the

system vulnerable to the pressures of self-reflexivity and reality it is better to have vulnerability

than no relevance for without any relevance the system begins to lose its dominance and power.

In order to remain current the system incorporates communication that "poses the questions of

acceptance and rejection anew, puts consensus at stake, knowing full well that it is still possible

to communicate further even and especially where dissent exists." (Luhmann 2000, p.100) As the

system continues to search for relevance through self-reflexivity it is up to the masses to explore

the media system's exposed vulnerabilities in service of the improvement of their own critical

awareness. The 14th issue of the second series of the comic book Uncanny X-Men, which has

been transformed into a motion comic for the video piece, uses allegory within a popular

medium to convey much about the complex relationship between systems and their internal

capacity of resistance. Its inclusion in the video piece helps to represent the self-reflexive nature

of modern day systems, while also illustrating the limits of this type of resistance which is

inescapably a part of the system itself. The illustration of a resistant body within an otherwise

harmonious system was also mirrored in the Wachowskis movie *Matrix: Reloaded* (2003). In

this particular example we see the protagonist Neo, who is endeavoring to destroy an oppressive

system, in discussion with The Architect of that system regarding the very nature of the system

they both play a part in. The conversation between these two pivotal aspects of the system

known as the Matrix reveals that the actions of Neo are in fact part of the self-reinforcing tactics

of the system itself. The role played by the anarchist of the system is revealed to be a reoccurring

and necessary aspect of the larger system.  These examples help to illustrate the role of resistance

but more importantly the limits of resistance generated by the system itself.

    References to self-reflexivity in the media, as above, are often very theoretical but with a

closer look at the specific devices used by the media system, highlighted with further examples

present in the video piece, the practices employed will become clearer and the ways that they can

also induce a higher level of awareness will also be revealed. The methods used by the media since

the time of Guy Debord have changed and their purposes are far more sophisticated than ever

before. "This is also the general condition of the contemporary audience. We know quite a bit

about the production techniques of film, television, and advertising." (Strangelove 2010, p.74) As a

result of this further understanding of the production techniques used by the contemporary media

"the audience has greater awareness of the constructed true reality of things." (Strangelove 2010,

p.75) As the media reveal more about their internal processes, the more they empowers the

spectators to take what they have learned from years of consuming media and leverage it towards

the critique and assessment of subsequent media they encounter. The seeds of critical awareness

have been planted here and there throughout the evolution of the media. Particularly in the movies

where "references from the film to the film itself is as old as the history of film. The device can be

found in all times, in all genres, and at several levels of cinematic communication." (Withalm in

Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.125) This legacy within cinema has been a contributing factor in raising

the awareness of audiences to aspects of a film's production. As the media continues to work self-

reflexively this process is accelerated due to the media being more forthright and transparent about

its production. These types of self-reflexive films work differently than traditional media as they

shed light on the filming of the film itself which exposes some of the hidden facets of the media.

This style of movie often works against what was traditionally done in Hollywood productions

where the camera itself and the behind the scenes processes are intentionally left out to ensure a

seamless, uninterrupted viewing. Self-reflexive film draws attention to the circumstances of its

production which allows the viewer to understand the role the camera plays in the production and

how it constructs the overall scene or movie they are watching. (Withalm in Nöth & Bishara 2007,

p. 133) "Various cinematic devices are used to draw the spectators' attention to the film itself in

this sense: lines of the dialog, the 'materialization' of filmic means, and in some less frequent

cases, to the showing of the dispositive, the technical device of film production and film showing."

(Withalm Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.130) The aspect of revealing the material nature of the film is

important and also speaks to one of the strategies within the video piece itself in regards to the use

of digital pixels as a backdrop which serves to constantly remind the viewer of the constructed and

material nature of the video piece. The strategy of revealing the film as a product represents the

most common application of self-reflexivity in cinema; however there are also other strategies that

focus on the production, distribution and reception of cinematic products as well. (Withalm Nöth,

Bishara 2007, p.130) All of these strategies, although similar, all have a unique way of bestowing

onto the spectator a higher awareness of multiple aspects of the media production.

The behind the scenes facets of the making of films within film are demonstrated in the

video piece through the inclusion of clips from the Coen brothers' film *Barton Fink* (1991).

This film about a character making the transition from artistic milieu to the commercially driven

world of Hollywood demonstrates many facets of media production that are often hidden.

"This company, as a representative of the studio system is used by the Coen brothers to

demonstrate that cinema is at once a factory for the production and representation and

an economic form, this is, a site of economic production." (Beller 2006, p.194) This movie is

particularly good at demonstrating how creativity can be transformed into capital for the industry

and sheds light on the goals and motivations of this stage of cultural production.

Another Hollywood example of the following stage of cultural production can be seen in the

opening sequence of the movie *Postcards from the Edge* (1990). The movie begins like any other

with establishing shots and dialogue that places the audience somewhere is South America.

While the main character played by Meryl Streep is taken away by the local police the story

begins to unfold, or so it would seem.  As the story begins to develop momentum it quickly

dissolves into something entirely different after Streep says 'mommy' instead of 'money' and

begins to act with a levity that is at odds with the scene. It is quickly revealed from then on that

the beginning of the film is in fact the filming of a film within the film as the shot becomes wider

and we begin to see cameras, the crew and the director. As the true nature of the film is exposed

the audience begins to realize that what they believed to be South America is actually

Los Angeles and that the characters thought to be one thing are in fact actors playing their part

within a fictional production. This self-reflexive trick played on the audience will only ever be

a fictional film within a film, however it does shed light on the constructed nature of, not only

the fictional film, but of films in general.  Despite the role that these types of films play in raising

the critical awareness of the audience it can also be argued that these inclusions do not raise true

critical awareness but are an attempt a diffusing it.

Ronald Bishop's (2000) article affords a lot of valuable insights into the strategies of the

cultural industry but most importantly into the way that media criticism, even at its most meager

level, can be co-opted by the media themselves in order to negate any true insights into their

strategies. Although on the surface movies like *The Truman Show* may come across as an

exploration into the nature of the media the "danger comes when moviegoers accept this

purposeful self-reflexivity as genuine media criticism." (Bishop 2000, p.8) It is important that the

criticism presented by the media be a catalyst for further education toward critical awareness and

not be the sole source for media criticism. This film is an example of how the cultural industry

only allows a certain level of transgression for the audience to derive limited pleasure before

hegemony is re-established. What Bishop reveals is "the fact that this incipient media criticism

has been created by design, or engineered for effect."(Bishop 2000, p.7) People view *The*

*Truman Show* as an inciter of critical awareness, but "we do not realize that the tool we have been given to accomplish this is a commodified version of genuine media criticism." (Bishop 2000, p.7) Although it may offer some insight into the machinations of the dominant media, these films also have a counter purpose which is "to exploit, and at the same time dissipate, our desire to engage in genuine media criticism." (Bishop 2000, p.7) The final result is that the media bring forth the topic of media criticism on their own terms which results in the diffusing of any genuine debate regarding the media. This leaves the consumer feeling blissfully clever without truly being aware of the true breadth of their subordination to dominant media. These types of media products are essentially a smokescreen that mask the real issues through devaluing "genuine media criticism by reducing it to a concern about one's privacy and prattling about celebrities who are famous only for being famous." (Bishop 2000, p.9) Rather than focusing on the ways that media effect society, the media creates decoys that distract on an individual level to avoid a collective critical awareness. "They will tell us what aspects of their impact to fear." (Bishop 2000, p.11) These types of films focus the debate and discussion surrounding the media and cultural industry towards what the system itself finds appropriate for discussion. It is a level of criticism that expands the breadth of media content within the system without any challenge to its limits or boundaries. The "creation of films like *Truman* is an act of negotiation that moves 'oppositional voices on to a terrain which secures for the dominant groups a continued position of leadership." (Gramsci as cited in Bishop 2000, p.12) Therefore, self-reflexive practices within dominant media, although capable of raising critical awareness, can in some cases be produced in such a fashion that its own dominance is assured before audiences have even finished consuming the film. This, however, is not true of all films that gain a certain level of popularity within the cultural industry and many of these films can be found in

the documentary genre, which in many cases put less emphasis on replicating the standard mode

of production that is a contributing factor in maintaining the status quo.

The self-reflexivity in documentary film that  contributes to raising the critical awareness

of the audience can be seen in examples such as *The War Tapes* (2007) in which the audience is

pushed further in their understanding of production and the view point of dominant media. In the

world of documentary film *The War Tapes* (2007) is unique because it includes methods

described by Fernando Andacht as the "ethically and aesthetically justified inclusion of scenes of

the making of the documentary in the film itself." (Andacht as cited in Nöth & Bishara 2007,

p.165) The means of producing and filming the documentary are included in within the film

itself which enables further transparency and greater authenticity. This type self-reflexivity in

documentary film is described by Jeanne Allen (1977) as important because in so doing "the film

draws attention to the process of selecting and reconstructing events to convey meaning.

Self-reflexivity becomes then a reaction against or a way of countering the traditional mode of

documentary which emphasizes verisimilitude." (Allen as cited in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.166)

Therefore the film *The War Tapes* (2007) is different from other documentaries because it

displays its construction in the film itself rather than presenting itself as a window to a different

world. It also raises critical awareness of the media in the ways that it displays the discrepancies

of what is happening on ground in Iraq and what is presented to Americans via their traditional

media channels. The dissatisfaction that the American soldiers express in the way that their

actions and contributions are being portrayed in the media incites the viewer to think critically

about how news stories are one perspective among many to be considered.  The notion of media

functioning as gateway to different and inaccessible areas of the world is common and not only

true of film, but of television and its productions as well.

Television is an important aspect to consider regarding self-reflexivity because it is far more prevalent than film and cinema and more than ever the products of film and cinema live a second life over television. However in its own right, television operates self-reflexively in ways that are even more direct and in line with the notion of tests of consistency within the media system. These tests of consistency are often seen and employed within televised news.  Not only are newscasts reporting on societal problems or world events they also adopt a self-regulating perspective in the way that they underscore the inconsistencies or fallacies of rival newscasts. In these cases "reflexivity is not operating in the service of insularity. Rather it is pushing to render a system vulnerable to the pressures – ultimately, the reality – of what this system has so strenuously tried to exclude. In other words, reflexivity here is operating in the service of registering a reality resolutely ignored. Reflexivity is fulfilling this function through a process of self-questioning:" (Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.38) The news media is increasingly holding their competitors to account which not only puts into question the validity of certain news sources but also, as was discussed, reinforces the credibility and reality of the news cast that is pointing out these inconsistencies. Although it is self-serving to cut down your rivals it also presents valuable opportunities for the inciting of critical awareness within the spectators. It also reveals the importance of basing one's opinions on a multitude of sources rather than relying on a unique source as the contrast between different reports can often illuminate a truer version of events. Relying on a single source for information divorces a person from these tests of consistency which helps to foster their critical consciousness.  The video piece presents instances where these inconsistencies are found and revealed in order to demonstrate the need for multiple sources and also the need to question even the most convincing of reports.
The examples present cases of misinformation, lies and distortions made by prominent news

sources like Sun News, CNN and Fox News. Although these instances of self-reflexivity are

often undertaken by rival networks there are also examples where networks point the finger at

themselves, even if only in a comedic capacity. There is an interesting and paradoxical example

within the video piece regarding Fox News that is presented by the long running cartoon series

The Simpsons in which they poke fun at their own network and its image of being fair and

balanced. This example is representative of the a subcategory of self-reflexivity in which

television characters "talk about their own show and particular features of their network"

(Withalm in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.135) which shouldn't be overlooked because of its comedic

and somewhat banal origin. This tactic demonstrates that "the marked presence of the aesthetic

and ludic functions of increasingly reflexive media does not preclude the effective operation of

a critical function, one operating often in the name of the strenuously repressed, the

systematically ignored, and the grossly distorted." (Colapietro in Nöth & Bishara 2007, p.39)

This is important to note, especially within the media system, that even though a product is

entertaining or humorous doesn't mean that there aren't any truths or catalysts for raising critical

awareness.   These examples help to illustrate that self-reflexivity and resistance are possible

within mainstream media, however, due to certain factors it is important to not rely exclusively

on its products. An increase in the diversity of perspectives can only ever enhance the

authenticity of the media landscape and for that reason alone it important to foster an alternative

to the mainstream media.

   The production of an alternative to the mainstream media is important due to the

increased centralization of perspectives caused by the oligarchical nature of the companies that

produce the television and film presented above.  One of the problems with a "market-based

mass media is that its increasing centralization of ownership, links to advertisers, and

dependence on politicians makes it conservative and hostile to dissent and debate on issues that

challenge the status quo." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.191) The mass media are able act

self-reflexively and are open to incremental change but never to the extent that any true

contestation of their supremacy would be allowed to thrive.  Additionally, the mass media will

only promote an alternative perspective if it finds it to be profitable and will give little attention

to important perspectives if they cannot be spectacularized. The mainstream media's "bottom

line objectives, along with the force of competition, cause it to marginalize the public sphere."

(Herman & McChesney 1997, p.190) Therefore it is important to recognize and celebrate the

instances of resistance within mainstream media but it is unwise to rely solely on its products and

perspectives as its ultimate goal will always be its profitability and dominance, not any service it

may provide to the masses. It is and always will be the spectacle of the dominant class.

We should continue to strive to understand the apparatuses and perspectives of mainstream

media but only in an effort to simultaneously produce alternative perspectives that contribute to

creating a contrast to dominant ideology.

> [O]n the one hand, it is important to gain access to the means of the spectacle
> production in order to begin producing 'other' types of images that explore the
> heretofore largely unexamined utopian capacities of this technology; on the other
> hand, a media literacy must be developed that will expose the politics of hegemonic
> spectacle and thereby also simultaneously prepare a sensibility for an alternative
> employment of the medium in the future. (Levin in McDonough 2002, p.362)

Alternatives to the mainstream media have existed for decades and continue to be developed.

Their proliferation is a key aspect to the diversification of the media landscape and the

perspectives offered help to foster media literacy and critical awareness. Within these new

outlets "a so-called civic sector exists and is growing as grassroots movements respond to the

centralization-commercialization process. Finding and developing a democratic alternative to

market-driven or exclusively governmentally dominated media systems may well be one of the

central political tasks of our era." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.197) One of the major ways

these grassroots movements get their perspectives across, other than word of mouth, is through

the development of alternative media which, in the technological age that we now live, is

becoming increasingly accessible and easy. In the following section we will explore the nature of

alternative media, the contributions it makes towards resisting spectacular culture, and the ways

it addresses the important task of raising the critical awareness of the masses.

### 3.1.3 Resistance through Alternative Media and the Internet

For as long as dominant media have existed there have been opposing movements that

have, in their own way, been communicating alternative perspectives that have been excluded

from the mainstream. Whether referred to as alternative, critical or independent these new

perspectives are media for the masses "that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media

production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception." (Fuchs 2010, p.178) In many

ways they function in a similar way to self-reflexive media, but rather than adopting a critical

view from within, alternative media is a critical view from outside the dominant mainstream

media. The role that alternative media play in modern society is something that was previously

envisioned by Marx. He believed that the essence of the media is that it served a critical function

within society that was at odds and not in collaboration with commercial interests. (Fuchs 2010,

p.180) Their contribution to the contemporary media landscape is that they present "oppositional

content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives that reflect

the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc." (Fuchs 2010, p.179) It is

important source of information and news that exists, for the most part, outside of capitalist

structures which can be detrimental to the uninhibited critical expression necessary for an open

and unbiased exploration of modern day issues. It colonizes spaces of discussion which allow for

the deconstruction of dominant ideologies within mainstream media and their persistent claims

that things couldn't exist any differently. Alternative media put forward alternative perspective

and therefore helps in presenting alternative ways that society could develop. It brings attention

and advances the social struggles that society is faced with and promotes cooperative ways of

addressing them. (Fuchs 2010, p.181) The interests and value systems within alternative media

are different than those present in mainstream media. Alternative media are "interested in why

there is a difference between actuality and potentiality, existence and essence, and aim at finding

ways of bridging this difference. They aim at and express the need for the establishment of a co-

operative, participatory society." (Fuchs 2010, p.182) In their attempts to raise different or

divergent issues from those present in mainstream media they endeavor to stimulate debate that

is embedded in societal concerns and not the concerns of commercial interests. "Critical media

product content shows suppressed possibilities of existence, antagonisms of reality, potentials for

change. It questions domination, expresses the standpoints of the oppressed and dominated

groups and individuals and argues for the advancement of a co-operative society." (Fuchs 2010,

p.182) It is a medium that understands society as multifaceted and attempts to present a more

representative and unbiased outlook with the aim of diversifying the media landscape. Although

it may be difficult to be heard next to the appeal and distraction offered by the mainstream media

the contributions of alternative media should not be underestimated.

        The production of alternative media is smaller in scale and in reach; however, regardless of

their size, it would be irresponsible to deny their existence and influence. "Social theory is guilty of

philosophical excess when the social system is described as existing without any significant means

to resistance and evasion, when power is described as absolute, and when consequences are

foreseen as inescapable and utterly dystopic." (Strangelove 2005, p.216) The creation and

continued proliferation of alternative media can attest to the existence of resistance within the

present day media landscape which refutes the pessimistic assessments of theorist who share the

dystopic vision described above. From its onset to the present, alternative media has taken on a

variety of formats from newspaper, radio, television, magazines and more recently the Internet.

There continues to be a "global grassroots resistance, of individuals, groups, organizations who

perceive their (and society's) interests ignored, damaged, or threatened by the globalization and

commercialization of the media and communication." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.197)

These groups aren't against the media system as a whole, but feel that global communication needs

to serve ends other than commercial considerations and should stem from a variety of perspectives

rather than those dominated by a select few corporations. These burgeoning alternative media

outlets face an almost insurmountable task as they take on the mainstream media which is

notoriously known for controlling the flow of information that would challenge their power.

(Herman & McChesney 1997, p.197)  However there is little doubt that these new sources of

information developed by marginalized groups, now made insurgent through their acts of

resistance, are beginning to have an impact on the messaging and gatekeeping of the mainstream

media. These new alternative forms of media allow for greater public interaction and participation

which is in stark contrast to the one way communication of the mainstream media. "They are

democratic media in the true sense, and they regularly provide a community public sphere

(which the mainstream media fail to do)." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.201) The popularity

and proliferation of alternative media in recent years has been greatly aided by the shift to digital

communication and additional technological developments which are helping to break down the

boundaries separating alternative and mainstream media. One of the main equalizing technologies

available is the Internet which is "providing a superior mechanism for individuals and groups

marginalized by the commercial media system to communicate and share information quickly,

in large quantity, and on a global basis." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.196) This new

technology has helped to enable alternative media to leap over many of the hurdles that stood in its

way in regards to distribution and reach and has revitalized a sector of discussion that was at risk of

failure due to lack of funding and high operational costs. The coming of the Internet has greatly

contributed to the diversity of perspectives and the democratization of knowledge.

In the advanced stages of modern day capitalism where separation is endemic it would

appear that the Internet, which is increasingly accessible, includes a diversity of perspectives and

fosters online communities. This online environment can be viewed as a place "of resistance to

many forms of alienation and to the silences" (Turkle 1995, p.242) imposed by dominant society.

In this light it would seem that the Internet is able to create a new public sphere that is able to

bolster the physical public sphere which has been eroding due to distraction and apathy.  This new

public sphere within the Internet is "uniquely suited to the expression of resistance." (Strangelove

2005, p.203) This format is conducive to resistance because the technology is now so available that

anyone can produce a website, the physical scarcity associated with broadcasting is erased and the

costs compared to creating a traditional publication are negligible. (Herman & McChesney 1997,

p.123) The alternative media are now able to produce content in service to the public sphere

which the mainstream media have long since abandoned. The public sphere once occupied by the

mainstream media has since been "threatened by government control, the bias and self-censorship

of private systems of control, or by external intrusions into media systems that shape them in

accord with ends sought by powerful foreign interests." (Herman & McChesney 1997, p.4)

These factors have combined to necessitate the continued creation of alternative media to deliver

information unfettered by these biases so that the masses can make informed decisions based on

the full breadth of perspectives regarding any given issue. In its attempt to create media in service

to the public sphere, alternative media has been transforming the Internet "into a highly politicized

cultural environment." (Strangelove 2005, p.211) This politicized environment is what many

hoped the Internet would become as the technology was being developed. Since its development it

has contributed to the democratization of information and has been used as a platform for

discussion. "The Internet carries a political message about the importance of direct, immediate

action and interest-group mobilization. It is the symbol and tool of a postmodern politics."(Turkle

1995, p.243) As the Internet continues to thrive as a public sphere the dominant ideologies of the

mainstream media continue to be subject to pressures imposed by its democratizing power.

As people continue to have unprecedented access to free flowing information over the

Internet it is becoming increasingly difficult to create and control messaging. "The quality of an

online space as a public sphere can be assessed by the following: the presence or absence of

access in terms of inclusivity; recognition in terms of formal discourse space; and deliberation in

terms of dialogue and resolved differences across different positions." (Pickard 2008, p.632)

With the continued presence of the Internet those who wish to be informed on any given topic or

political position have a globalized pool of knowledge to draw from which results in their own

empowerment. "The intense cultural debate that has arisen in reaction to the growth of the

Internet is a result of this democratization of access to knowledge." (Strangelove 2005, p.229)

Therefore the ways that people use the Internet are multifaceted and limited only by their own

interest and imagination. The video piece illustrates one of these sources of globalized and

democratized knowledge with its inclusion of a variety of talks given at TED conferences hosted

throughout the world. These talks given by some of the world's best thinkers are recorded and

made available for free to the public on their website. It is a resource of advanced thought and

innovation that lives up to its motto of 'Ideas worth spreading'. Not only does this valuable

resource touch on a variety of fields but there are also many that illustrate the interrelatedness of

many aspects of contemporary society which enables viewers to see and understand the world as

interdisciplinary rather than categorical. One important aspect of these conference videos is that

in addition to presenting societal problems but they also offer potential solutions which enhances

critical thought but also possibilities for engagement. For the purposes of the video piece this

source of alternative media presents content that investigates and reveals elements of commercial

media as well as the ways that media are being used to promote critical thinking and resistance.

Covering a variety of fields it also presents and explains subversive qualities of art and the role it

and artists play in our society which will be explored in greater detail later on. The resource of

videos supplied by TED illustrate that despite the fact that much of cyberspace mirrors the

dominant ideologies that exist outside of it, there are still territories online that continue to

function the way that alternative media has for decades. These types of resources that promote

democratized knowledge are helping to shape and communicate the new movements of

resistance in the postmodern era. "Instead of becoming the next great site for consumer activity

and commercial propaganda, the Internet is proving to be one of capitalism's greatest threats."

(Strangelove 2005, p.212) There is irony in the fact that the Internet, which became mainstream

through its development and adoption by commercial interests, is becoming one of the biggest

threats to the dominant culture and economy.

Alternative media when compared to the production and reach of mainstream media has

always been eclipsed. However with the Internet it is just as easy to visit one website as another

and within this equalizing environment the effects of critical perspectives on the Internet are far

more imposing. Within this new communication environment we can see that the

"[u]nconstrained expression, resistance, and the Internet's archival capabilities (it is a memory

system) have combined to create an alternative symbolic economy." (Strangelove 2005, p.199)

The new expressive freedoms and the democratized knowledge pools are allowing the masses to

formulate and communicate their own alternative view of the culture and economy that has

developed within the postmodern era. "This alternative economy of meaning substantially

contradicts the meanings embedded within commercial media." (Strangelove 2005, p.199)

This allows the masses to hold corporate media to account by being able to reference sources of

information outside of what is presented through commercial media. Rather than having to wait

for rival information sources to confirm or refute the claims being made, the masses are now able

to verify or unmask the truth for themselves. "We see evidence of this resistance everywhere on

the internet, from subversive hackers culture-jamming corporate symbols to political blogs

taking down public figures." (Pickard 2008, p.626) However, this latent power within the

Internet is only as strong as the critical awareness of the people who can find empowerment

through the knowledge available.  It is currently still under question whether "cyberspace will

simply reinforce cultural domination or continue to challenge the beliefs and values of

capitalism. Obviously, at present the Internet is both collaborative and subversive." (Strangelove

2005, p.221) The climate of cyberspace allows for many opportunities to resist and to enlighten

the masses but there is simultaneously just as much or more spectacular distraction available to

overshadow the positive critical territories online. As mentioned earlier it is just as easy to visit a

website that promotes resistance as the websites of corporate media, however, to find critical

content the user has to have a want to find it. For evidence continues to accumulate that "our

internet system is being restructured along corporate lines, from the privatization of internet

culture to the corporate gate keeping of internet content." (Pickard 2008, p.626) As the Internet

develops the corporate content also reinforces itself by prioritizing itself. Search engines which

once functioned democratically are now prioritizing results based on the popularity of a site,

whether a webpage has paid to improve their standing or because of content filters that present

results based on algorithms which attempt to predict what a specific user will find interesting.

These examples attest to the fact that the environment online is still in rapid evolution and that

critical exploration will only follow a fostering of critical awareness. However, despite these

commercial encroachments the Internet still provides all of the potential for self-actualization

presented above as well as political opportunities, bottom-up political forms, and will always be

a platform to promote alternative perspectives. (Pickard 2008, p.626) For "until we see a

substantial reduction in online communicative freedoms the Internet will continue to play a

significant role in facilitating resistance." (Strangelove 2005, p.203) Even if the Internet is

beginning to replicate the favoritism towards corporate media that has existed for traditional

media for ages, it is important to not adopt a pessimistic perspective in regards to the positive

aspects of the Internet that still remain and that still have potential to grow.

It is clear that the Internet is a site for increased freedom of expression and in many cases

it can transform itself into social action. If the Internet continues to evade the pressures that have

been imposed on commercial media it will continue to serve these purposes. "If the Internet

remains an environment for unconstrained communicative action, it will be increasingly difficult

to frame such dissent as illegitimate." (Strangelove 2005, p.208) The credibility of online

resistance has often been overlooked or disregarded because of its virtual nature but as

discussions online intensify and continue to represent multiple perspectives it begins to reinforce

its own credibility. The simple fact that the activism represented online spans the full breadth of

the ideological continuum speaks volumes about the diversity and abundance of these virtual

discussions.  The notion that oppositional cultures can find their own public spheres online and

that discussions between oppositional forces can also take place is an indicator of the full

potential of the Internet as a democratic and unbiased medium. (Strangelove 2005, p.212)

Additionally, it is becoming increasingly problematic to label these public spheres as illegitimate

as now more than ever these online communities are beginning to have concrete real world

effects. "Online activist groups are harnessing the potential of the internet to help democratize

different areas of life to varying degrees. (Pickard 2008, p.629) One only needs to look at the

effective use of the Internet and social media during the Arab Spring to understand the power

that these platforms hold for fostering debate and organizing collective action. The Arab Spring

would likely have occurred with or without this technological support but the ways it facilitated

and accelerated action is indisputable. The development of these new public spaces helps to

create a populace that is more aware of the ways that the communication systems are controlled

and as a result they're developing their own methods of communicating to avoid being a passive

subordinate. "This new public is learning to evade and resist control, learning new methods of

mass action, and developing new techniques of decommodified cultural production and group

communication." (Strangelove 2005, p.199) The new ways that people are able to find and

develop communities online is bringing the world into closer proximity to themselves. Beyond

the world as it is portrayed within corporate media, the Internet is exposing people to realities

that they have ignored up until now, not in the pejorative sense, but in the sense that you don't

know what you don't know. This rise in awareness enables them to not only know, but also

engage in the struggles of the real world. This isn't the case for all users of the Internet and it is

important to refrain from utopian thinking, but at its base the potential does exist and is being

implemented by those whose critical awareness pushes them beyond the limits of the commercial

media. This connection and engagement in the real world is pivotal because online resistance is

beneficial but it, like all media has its limits. "If the politics of virtuality means democracy online

and apathy offline, there is reason for concern." (Turkle 1995, p.244) As activism online

continues to evolve it is important that links to real world counterparts be maintained.

The video piece includes a segment from TVO's *The Agenda* which illustrates the point

that online activists should continue to simultaneously develop real world action. As social media

continues to be an important avenue towards raising awareness it is important that people refuse

the complacency of simply 'liking' or 'retweeting' any given issue in order to soothe their

conscience. Additionally, the video segment pulled from the RSA website (a website dedicated to

21$^{st}$ century enlightenment), also addresses the duality of the Internet as simultaneously

revolutionary and distracting and that both perspectives need to be addressed to truly understand

the nature and potential of this platform. That being said, we can see that the Internet replicates the

capitalist system that exists outside of it but that there areas of resistance and content that can spark

the critical conscious of its consumers is what remains key. That the Internet remains an outlet for

every day citizens to voice their own perspectives is also important as only with the "Internet do

we see a substantial change in the audience's ability to produce and disseminate high-bandwidth,

multimedia cultural products." (Strangelove 2005, p.221) This has been enabled by the falling

price of video equipment and advancements in bandwidth which has lead to people becoming their

own author. Over platforms like YouTube people are able to advance their own perspectives that

challenge the status quo and allow users to give more insight in what it's like to be a racial

minority, a sexual minority, male, female and so on within modern day society. (Strangelove 2010,

p.70) In addition to giving voice to those, who without the Internet would not be heard, these video

contributions are also helping to "undermine television's claims to authenticity and the real."

(Strangelove 2010, p.65) Through the act of producing and viewing these contributions the masses

are beginning to unveil the techniques used by the mainstream media and are also beginning to

disrupt its hierarchies of production and reception. The accompanying video piece also explores

the benefits of this type of user contribution through the inclusion of video diaries. In the YouTube

post by VazVlog we are able to listen to his conclusions about the abundance of time he has spent

consuming the online spectacle of MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online Game) and his realization

of his own dissatisfaction with the experiences therein. The video piece also presents a YouTube

post by TheAmazingAtheist in which he discusses the dissipation of resistance and the silencing

and diffusing of the arts and their potential for raising critical awareness and inciting change. These

examples and those presented above combine to support the claim that the Internet as an alternative

media is raising debate and getting people to think in ways that they may not have otherwise as a

result of consuming online sources that exist outside the mainstream media. "The one thing the

Web has demonstrated from its beginning is that valuable, useful, informative, factual, scientific,

scholarly, entertaining, and popular information and cultural products can be produced on the

fringes and completely outside of an economy of market-based exchange." (Strangelove 2005,

p. 223) Divorced from any corporate or governmental incentives these sources online are able to

communicate freely and in an uncensored fashion. That the Internet continues to be a bastion of

alternative perspectives, despite all the additional online noise and potential apathy, is what should

be at the forefront of considerations regarding resistance to dominant culture online.  Moving

forward we will continue to explore some of the potential that is touched upon by

TheAmazingAtheist. Another bastion of alternative perspectives that often takes on a format that is

more creative and symbolic that develops its own form and resistance and its own vision of the

future.

### 3.1.4 Resistance Through Art

Art has always been present in society regardless of any particular form or era. It has

always served society whether for ritual, history or cultural memory. In either case it has been a

conduit for reflecting society back to itself either to reaffirm shared values or to highlight

dissatisfaction. The history of art is varied, therefore, for the purpose of this exploration particular

attention will be placed on the point in time when "[i]nstead of being based on ritual, it begins to

be based on another practice – politics." (Benjamin 1950, p.226) This stage in art precedes the

work of Debord and the Situationist International but is one of the key shifts in the understanding

of art that enabled their project to be both artistic and political. Even in his own time Theodor

Adorno, member of the Frankfurt School, understood that "art could not completely solve social

dilemmas, but he believed it could bear witness to them, and save the honor of the species by

magnificently articulating its concerns and its distress and, in so doing, point a finger in the

direction of change." (Becker 2002, p.27) With art's capacity to highlight pathways of change it is

easy to see why Guy Debord and the Situationists were attracted to this medium in their political

efforts to exercise their own brand of change. They used art in revolutionary ways and which, in its

own way, revolutionized art. Their projects helped to fortify the use of art as a political tool that

can be used to raise the awareness of society. Despite this great potential, Debord was also

pessimistic in regards to forms of art that served apolitical purposes. This point of view also

continued with Baudrillard who also felt that art was dead. Art and social change, they felt, had

become abandoned values in most postmodern art which was fixated on appropriation, repetition

and surfaces. Despite this general trend, "a more activist wing of postmodernism advanced the

anarchist spirit of the avant-garde through a deconstruction and demystification of meaning, but

while breaking with its notions of agency, its idealist definition of language, and its utopian vision

of political revolution." (Best & Kellner 1997, p.130) Therefore although the combination of

politics and art as an essential feature has receded, it would be overzealous to claim that works that

contain the two are no longer being produced or no longer relevant.  To this day artists are still an

important aspect of social life "since cultural changes are typically explored first

phenomenologically, as experiences and moods, and only later reflexively, as theories." (Best &

Kellner 1997, p.135) This means that art explores issues and sentiments that are brewing under the

surface of society and give them voice. Artists capture these undercurrents and give them physical

shape which begins the discussion around these impending topics that will or have had an affected

on society. These artistic avant-gardes help to raise "many possibilities of thought, fights against

conformity and uniformity, makes strong statements about the psychic state of individuals and the

arbitrariness of power, and refuses to be dictated to or function as a servant of ideology, in either

form or content." (Becker 2002, p.21) In this sense, we can see how artistic practices can be

viewed as acts of resistance towards aspects of society that are at odds with the authentic

experiences of those producing the artwork. The discrepancy between the way society presents

itself, through the media and institutions, and the reality of the artist's lived experiences is where

they begin to formulate their visions of change. Through their work they are able to renounce,

implode, deconstruct, subvert, and parody the ideological frameworks of society. Artists are also

testing and questioning the arbitrary delineations society imposes, whether between high or low

art, reality and unreality or artists and spectacle, their artistic practices are challenging these

categorizations. Postmodern artists are also testing the separations built between different artistic

media and are expanding the parameters of what is admissible as art in increasingly creative ways.

(Best & Kellner 1997, p.115) Therefore despite fear of its death, art continues to find new ways of

exploring contemporary political and societal issues and is doing so in new and different ways.

Art is always in a state of flux and must continue to be in order to continue to question

dominant ideologies and conventionality. "Through interventions into the status quo and

reclamation of what has been lost in our understanding of our collective situation, artists have

performed acts of 'reparative cultural symbolization'," (Becker 2002, p.149) which mirrors one

of the outcomes of alternative media. Where unconstrained expression and resistance over the

Internet have led to an alternative symbolic economy we can see that similar freedoms in art are

also repairing the gaps and disparity in cultural symbolism. With this example present in both

these areas of cultural and societal critique we can see that criticism of the status quo can take

different forms. In the juxtaposition of these two forms of resistance it is possible to see that;

> Critical form is possible without critical content. Critical content is possible without
> critical form. But both can also be present simultaneously. There are alternative media
> where form is generally more important than content, and vice versa. In those media that
> are types of art (such as theatre, literature, visual arts, films, music, concerts), form is of
> specific importance because art lives through non-identical forms that aim at
> strengthening imagination. (Fuchs 2010, p.188)

The quote above is important as it illustrates that works of art can be critical not only through the

content they adopt but also through the forms that they take. With this in mind we can consider

the accompanying video piece and see that through the content it explores, viewers can come to a

further understanding of the contemporary media landscape in a way similar to the exploration of

alternative media. Simultaneously, the video piece also adopts abstract and non-linear forms

which push the mind and imagination of the viewer in ways that critical and political art

normally strives to achieve.  This illustrates that the video piece and "forms of critical political

art that are critical at the content level are also alternative media," while also being "radically

focused on artistic forms, their functionless character can be considered a protest against the

capitalist world of instrumental reason." (Fuchs 2010, p.188) As the nature and purpose of

political and critical art becomes clearer we can see that it aligns itself with Herbert Marcuse's

notion that "art can only be a societal factor as autonomous art. Art would be a part of society,

but one that transcends capitalism." (Fuchs 2010, p.188) The field of art needs to distance itself

from the parameters and incentives of capitalism. In the past, particularly in the 80s, artistic

practices and their value were greatly influenced on the capital and market value of art which is

likely one of the primary reasons for Debord and Baudrillard's pessimistic assessment of the role

of art in postmodern society. Critical and political art should remain true to their form and

content above all influences in order to be true to the perspectives and challenges they put

forward. This autonomy from capitalism will help to ensure that the art produced functions in

resistance to the spectacle rather than being a part of it.

Appropriation and assimilation are so prevalent in the postmodern era that it becomes

near impossible to protect authentic and autonomous works from being incorporated into the

spectacle. Art because it also exists as a part of society and within history must often "fight

against the same trends, banalities, conflicts, obscurities, and complexities that can stifle and

paralyze other aspects of society. It too must counteract the effects of the spectacle."

(Becker 2002, p.6) Many postmodern artistic explorations have had the effect of reducing

artworks to commodities and artists to commodity creators. As postmodern artists and the public

continue to qualify success based on monetary gain and celebrity rather than on the strength of

the vision or their theoretical explorations the more the perception of art's role changes. For the

masses the role of art begins to be associated with entertainment and leisure instead of its

positive insights and impacts to the individual and to the collective. (Becker 2002, p.32) What is

lacking in much postmodern artwork and what separates it the most from popular culture is "its

commitment to serious interrogation of the world as it is and the imagining of what it might

become, over and beyond the accumulation of capital." (Becker 2002, p.145) Art must once

again distinguish itself as an area of original thought that interrogates the status quo in order to

no longer be conflated with entertainment. In order for art to continue to resist the spectacle,

artists need to return to pursuits that are more intellectually challenging, that "remain on the

margins, asking the difficult questions, resisting assimilation and socialization in the traditional

ways, refusing to accept simplistic moral values that reflect the present political climate,"

(Becker 2002, p.13) a return to these values will create more potential within the field of art to

continue to resist the spectacle and resist becoming spectacle.

       The spectacle and the nature of the mainstream media have been, and continue to be, an

important issue undertaken by visual artists who have come at it in critical and non-traditional

fashion. The way that artists have used and manipulated the content and technologies of the

mainstream media is yet another example of another important perspective that contributes to

society and to our understanding the consumption and effects of the media and its technologies.

This can be seen in how artists manipulate television in an "attempt to interrupt the signal, so to

speak, of a commercial medium and transform it into a material for art," (Rush 2007, p.56)

which serves the purpose of understanding the adopted media and allowing the opportunity to

reveal something beyond its face value. The increased accessibility to technologies of

production, especially for video, has allowed artists outside the mainstream media to develop

their own discourse. "This availability made it possible to build an alternative production,

distribution, and exhibition program out of video, once the exclusive domain of commercial

broadcasting." (Hanhardt & Villanseñor 1995, p.21) This accessibility has not only helped the

field of alternative media, as we explored previously, but also had a great impact in the field of

visual art in the way that it has allowed artists to produce and create their own content. The

Korean born American artist Nam June Paik, who spent a lifetime creating art (a large portion

video and installation art), is a good example of the ways that video has been adopted by artists

in order to discuss the medium itself and its use by the mainstream media.  Paik, who is often

referred to as the father of video art, took a "leading role in removing television from its context

of corporate control and privatized entertainment and turning it into a tool for creative image

making." (Hanhardt & Villanseñor 1995, p.21) Paik witnessed the increased pervasiveness of

television and could see that it was changing the nature of society forever. Rather than simply

bear witness to its omnipresence, he decided to take control over the medium rather than allow it

to control him. He was interested in taking on the role of critic and to reveal the material nature

of the medium. (Rush 2007, p.56) The accompanying video piece includes filmed segments of

his piece *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii* (1995), which stands as an

excellent example of cultural criticism. "This work consisted of a vast neon map of the country

fronting banks of monitors of various sizes showing images (from banks of laser disc players)

relating to the fifty states; " (Quall 1996, p.2) the video imagery within reflects what Paik has

learned about each State or what he believes he knows about each state through television's

mediations. Where states he's familiar with show the works of fellow artists, other that he has

little frame of reference for are illustrated through appropriated media (i.e. the musical

Oklahoma for the state of Oklahoma or the Wizard of Oz for the state of Kansas). His video

installation piece offers up an excellent commentary on American culture and the ways that the

masses increasingly understand themselves and the world around them through the mediations of

television. An important aspect to Paik's work is that it doesn't solely despair at the rise of

television but he also some benefits to its content and the investment of attention it demands.

"Implicit in Paik's suggestion that TV be used as a means of meditation is a claim that TV (at

least when employed in certain ways) might require and reward our sustained, rapt observation."

(Wilson 2007, p.89) Like all other forms of meditation, the form proposed by Paik in relation to

television was also seen, based on the type of media, as a way of reaching a certain level of

enlightenment. This dual nature of the medium is also reflected in his piece which contains both

mainstream media and artistic media.

The work of Nam June Paik touched on many themes regarding television, the media and

video art which in many ways opened the doors for the further explorations made by the artist

group known as General Idea. This group of Canadian artists which was comprised of

Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson, was greatly influential due to the group's creation of

media-based works. General Idea believed in "a free economy, in the abolition of copyright,

and in a grassroots horizontal structure that prefigured the Internet… General Idea defined the

territory between art and commerce, and challenged the battle lines of copyright that define

culture today." (Bonnet 2011, p.118) The works of General Idea spanned many mediums and

expressed its jocular take on the mass media and the state of the art market. "With an incisive

irony and joyful subversiveness, General Idea playfully and intelligently appropriated the

language and the aesthetics of the mass media. With its unique creative approach, General Idea

mastered the art of critically dissecting media methods." (Citation at the 2001 Bell Canada

Award in Video in Wyman 2004, p.150) The group's in depth understanding of mainstream

media and their aggressive attempts at dissecting it eventually lead them to creating *FILE*

*magazine* (which was cheeky take on the look and name of LIFE magazine).  The magazine was

part of their artistic practice but quickly became known as an alternative to alternative media

because of its content and playful form. This illustrates the further loss of distinction between fields and genres that takes place within the postmodern landscape. *FILE magazine* eventually gained popularity beyond its underground roots in Toronto due to its subversive nature gaining it much notoriety. From issue to issue the magazine would freely pilfer from the mainstream media and culture in an effort to criticize or reveal aspect of the dominant society and culture. The group also produced videos such as *Test Tube* (1979) and *Shut the Fuck Up* (1984) that also adopt a critical view of the media and also addressed the artist's relationship to the media as well. "In *Shut the Fuck Up*, General Idea underline the media's insistence that only gossip and spectacle make art and artists interesting to the public. On the contrary, General Idea point out, artists are no fools, nor do they operate within 'a passive yet cleverly deceitful, alienated cult of the imbecile'." (Gale 2006) These video contributions by General Idea have also been used in the accompanying video piece to help to illustrate and articulate the power of the media but also the inherent potential that artists have to react to the media's dominance. Artists like Nam June Paik and General Idea give good examples of how artists address aspects of the media explicitly. However, by continuing the exploration through the work of Douglas Gordon we can see how this can also be achieved subtly and with a greater focus on the materiality of the medium.

Douglas Gordon is a Scottish multi-media artist who is known internationally primarily because of his video pieces. Of his works, one of the most successful has been his appropriation of the iconic Hitchcock film *Psycho* in his piece entitled *24 Hour Psycho* (1993). In this groundbreaking piece Gordon slows "Hitchcock's film to the rate of one frame every two seconds, Gordon drains *Psycho* of its familiar narrative drives and pleasures, foregrounding instead aspects of the film's cinematic materiality, rendering opaque what was once transparent, confronting the viewer with images that were previously fleeting, immaterial

and transient." (Birtwistle 2012, p.103) Through the act of slowing down Hitchcock's original

film, Gordon is able to refocus the audience's attention not on the content of the film but of the

nature of film, its material properties and the ease with which it creates the illusion of real time.

The original film is drained of all of its original rhythm and of the spectacular drama created

through the use of editing and sound.  Although focusing audience's attention on things

previously invisible, "Gordon's appropriated image still speaks of cinema, referring us to the

cinematic image and to cinematic experience, but without necessarily adopting the modality of

cinema itself." (Birtwistle 2012, p.103) The techniques used by Gordon echo Debord's vision of

the unmaking of capitalism through the unmaking of cinema. Revealing the material nature of

the medium, as Gordon does, relates the work to Debord's Letterist influence and the importance

they placed on the audience awareness of film's physical properties. Gordon also achieves

similar ends with the medium of television in his piece *Zidane: A 21$^{st}$ Century Portrait* (2006) in

which Gordon and fellow artist Philippe Parreno film soccer star Zinedine Zidane through the

use of seventeen synchronized cameras and appropriated video. The footage is all combined to

create a variation on portraiture and to comment on the nature of celebrity in contemporary

society. What is interesting about this portrait, in what relates to this thesis, is what is done

during the half-time interval. At that point in the piece "the directors cut away from the football

stadium to a series of video clips taken mainly from television news reports and

Internet websites. What we witness in the repeated movement between video and film is a kind

of Brechtian interruption, a change of gear." (Birtwistle 2012, p.108) This interruption and the

juxtaposition of the different formats of moving images heighten the audience's awareness of the

different mediums and their different physical qualities. This type of juxtaposition of mediums is

also mirrored in the accompanying video piece which brings together video from a variety of

sources and with different material origins. The move from one medium to another, in Gordon's

piece as well as the video piece, breaks up the audience's viewing experience. This technique is

important in regard to works that deal with the spectacle because if the audience were only

presented with one format or medium they would soon slip into the phantasmic world that ensues

from uninterrupted viewing. (Birtwistle 2012, p.109) Therefore it is a valuable technique in

getting people to consume and understand media in a different way. Gordon's works and those

explore above also reaffirm the importance of alternative practices outside of the mainstream

media in order to the raise critical awareness of the masses and as forums to resistance the status

quo.

     Protecting the territory of art as a bastion of resistance will continue to allow the

individual and the other to be seen, noted and understood by the collective rather than allowing

the mainstream media to exclusively dictate what it believes are valid and important aspects of

society. It is true that the arts like the mainstream media are both attempting to reach large

audiences however the important element is that art refuses to render itself benign in order to do

so. The work of artists also differs because it brings "new ideas about seeing, fabricating,

and responding to history into the society, their work encourages disequilibrium, creates its own

type of unpredictable disorder." (Becker 2002, p.5) Artists often live on the margins or outside

mainstream society they have a vantage point that is unique and valuable. Negotiating their

position of being both inside and outside of society affords them insights that they benefit from

but that society can benefit from as well.  Through the artists' use of "unorthodox, often intuitive

means to question the status quo, their work can alert society to new ways of thinking about how

we organize, govern and explore our lives together." (Wyman 2004, p.43) This is one of the

greatest benefits to art and the best it has to offer to our collectivity. Although the endeavors of

artists are often rooted in their own explorations and self-expression, it is impossible to separate

their work from society because, no matter how subtle the connection between the two, the work

always stems from the effects of society and exists as a reflection on the society within which it

was created. (Wyman 2004, p.30) Those who interact with the work of artists gain access to the

full range of lived experiences expressed in the works. "Each time, through the act of seeing with

the eyes of another, we amplify what we know of the life we live. We enrich the reality of our

everyday." (Wyman 2004, p.30) Through the powerful and political work of Shirin Neshat, who

is both a photographer and video artist and whose talk is included in the video piece, we gain an

understanding of the plight of those who are exiled from their home countries. It also grants us

access to the changing culture of Iran through her experiences that mirror the vantage point of

existing at the margins but also as a part of that Iranian society. Through exposure to the works

of Neshat and other artists like her the "[a]cceptance of difference becomes easier. We recognize

the validity of the other. Strand by strand, the fiber of our society strengthens. We see more

clearly where we want to go." (Wyman 2004, p.31) It is easy to see the benefits that society

gains though the long term exposure to works that allow those within it to see each other, and the

collective as a whole, in greater depth and with better understanding. The more people

experience these types of artworks, the more it helps to change the collective consciousness

allowing them to be more aware of each other and more critical of societal problems. It begins

the work of getting the public on the same page in order to address and solve problems from a

place of collective understanding rather than on their personal perspectives. This highlights one

of the beauties of art as "a metaphor for society as it could be." (Fuchs 2010, p.188) The

important part is to get the public to start thinking differently and to start imagining that it can be

different rather than allowing them to continue to passively accept the status quo.

The potential for art to unlock the imagination of the public is a critical aspect of its role

in society and likely one of the reasons Debord and the Situationists were so attracted to it as tool

for raising the critical awareness of the masses. One of the unique aspects of art as a tool is that it

not only imparts societal ideation but it also a great catalyst for inciting their engagement.

"Artists are also conscious of negotiating audience involvement and response, skills that are not

taken into account when most people describe the work of artists." (Becker 2002, p.12) Rather

than continuing to operate as simple spectators, art offers the public the opportunity to explore

ideas but also opportunities to act and implement those new perspectives. As society continues to

be plagued by the ever increasing isolation and alienation caused by the spectacle, as described

by Debord, we can begin to see the ways that art is able to combat the breakdown of the

collectivity by getting communities to engage in art. "Participation in artistic activity is quite

different from being a member of an audience. Community artistic activity… lets people see

local problems from a different perspective. It not only teaches skills such as problem-solving,

critical thinking and collaboration, it fosters reflection on ways to contribute to the greater good

of the community." (Wyman 2004, p.34) By getting different factions of the same community

together to work on a community or public art piece it affords a chance for collaboration and

proximity that may not have existed before. These types of collective art projects have a ripple

effect within the community which encourages people to value their neighborhoods and

the people within them. It can also be a catalyst for some who, after a first foray, continue to look

for other ways to improve their community. Where community involvement was once the

primary incentive for instigating these community art projects we can see that community art is

now playing "a useful role in broader issues such as social justice, public safety and community

revitalization – what is sometimes referred to as arts-based community development."

(Wyman 2004, p.33) With the coming of the postmodern era, there are increasingly more and

more artists that have taken their work outside of artistic institutions and into the streets in order

to engage and bring their creative visions to those who normally wouldn't encounter art. The

semi-anonymous French street artist named JR is key example of this type of art practice.

Through the pasting of his photographs on buildings and on structures throughout the world he is

able to challenge people's notions of 'the other'. In the video piece we can see how through his

project *Face 2 Face* (2007) he is able to build bridges between two cultures, Israel and Palestine,

who are deadlocked in conflict. His project which juxtaposes Palestinian faces to Israeli faces

sheds light on both cultures and the discrepancies between each cultures perception of the other

as well as the differences from how they are both portrayed in the media. Throughout the

process, not only is JR able to get members of both cultures to pose for photographs, he is also

able to gain the help of Palestinians and Israelis in pasting the photographs to the buildings in

their neighborhoods. JR's work illustrates that through the development of "citizen involvement

in local issues it encourages people to take action to help shape public debate and bring about

change – emancipation through cultural engagement." (Wyman 2004, p.34) JR's artwork and the

work of artists like him are becoming catalysts for getting people to think differently and

potentially more critically about their commonly held assumptions. His works present a vision of

society that when supported by the community begins to bring about the change it hoped to bring

to light. In projects such as this, art and community conspire to create both a new society and the

*image* of that new society. (Wyman 2004, p.46) As projects such as this continue to develop, it is

possible that Debord, if he were still alive to witness it, would become reinvigorated in his belief

in the power of art to reinforce the collectivity and to bring about social change.

**4. Conclusion**

The explorations undertaken in this thesis have covered a wide range of perspectives in regards to the media and the role that it plays in western society. Through the support of the theories of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard we have been able to follow the evolution of the spectacle from its genesis to its current state within the postmodern world. What is undeniable, in regards to the spectacle of the mainstream media, is that it has the capacity to pacify and render the masses complacent to hierarchies of power and to the systemic separation and alienation embedded in the modern and postmodern forms of consumption and production. The spectacle is distracting people's attention away from the lived experiences of everyday life which is casting an illusory shadow over the genuine needs and desires of the masses. For this reason, it is important for the masses to understand the nature of and the driving force behind the spectacle in order to side-step the enthrallment offered by its hyperreal version of life and to avoid the indoctrination offered through the ideologies that have been embedded by the systems of power. The qualities and effects that exist under the veneer of the spectacle are the pivotal reason why it is important that self-actualizing members of society ensure that their education, information and awareness of the world come from a diversity of sources and not uniquely from those that originate from the dominant system. Only through adopting and fostering a diversity of perspectives will society once again be able to drill down to a more authentic and representative outlook. Although it is impossible for any representation to fully account for the full breadth of reality, viewing any given topic from different points of view will better enable an engaged society to identify the truth based on multiple sources. Despite the pessimism incurred by the pervasiveness of the spectacle, we have seen through the work of the Guy Debord, the Situationist International, and the subsequent postmodern works, that resistance to the spectacle is still occurring and that the creation of alternative perspectives is still possible beyond the

implosion of reality heralded by Baudrillard. All that is needed is a critical awareness of the

spectacle, a greater openness to new sources, and at times a little creativity.

The work of Guy Debord and the Situationist International illustrates that it is important

to push past the limitations of purely theoretical endeavors and to translate advanced

understanding of the spectacle into concrete actions that affect the understanding everyday life.

This is true for theoretical practices whether within the modern or postmodern eras and is one of

the fundamental reasons why their creative works are so important to the discussion of resistance

to the spectacle.  The translation of theory into action has also been a catalyst for this thesis' own

accompanying video piece, which strives to emulate the results and to reinvigorate its relevance

within the postmodern media landscape. The focus on détournement in both eras is pivotal as it

clearly illustrates the Hegelian Marxist perspective which is critical to the work of the

Situationists but also in ensuring that the messages transmitted by the media aren't conflated

with the apparatus of the media itself. Détournement clearly illustrates that it is how media are

used and not their nature that defines its effects. The technologies of mass communication are

neutral carriers of information, a tool to be used which can serve a variety of ends. To say that

cinema, television or the Internet, are negative influences on society is not only a sweeping

statement, but it also throws the baby out with the bath water. It is important to make the

distinction that the masses need to be critically aware of the origin, production and ideologies of

any given source of media as it is the way that they are used, and not their nature, that render

them a positive or negative influence on society. The understanding of the media's duality has

led to an exploration of three categories of production which illustrate that resistance and the

raising of critical awareness are not exclusive to any given type of media or mode of production.

The advanced stages of postmodernism have resulted in practices that are self-reflexive as the mainstream media increasingly uses itself as the subject of its content and as a method to reinforce its own claims to authenticity. These developments within mainstream media culture have afforded the masses an unprecedented view of the practices and production that take place behind the scenes. A greater understanding of all the stages of the media's production is an important aspect toward raising the critical awareness of the masses to the constructed and mediated aspects of the media. There are also rival forces within mainstream media that hold each other to account to re-establish their own claims to authenticity. However, despite mainstream media's efforts at transparency, they would never act or reveal anything that would truly jeopardize their own dominance. Therefore it is important to remain critical of the media's own account of itself and to compare it to other sources of information in order to assess the legitimacy of its claims. The role of alternative media, as we have seen, has been a pivotal source of information that exists outside the influences of dominant media. It has allowed people to explore a diversity of perspectives and has provided the necessary information to allow for the assessment of the dominant media's legitimacy. With the rise of the Internet the role and reach of alternative media have been reinvigorated which has led to new and innovative acts of resistance. The democratic nature of the Internet has allowed people to access knowledge like never before which can empower those who capitalize on its potential and avoid the plethora of spectacular distraction within. The inclusion of art has contributed the perspective that critical awareness can be achieved not only through critical content but also by adopting critical forms. Art considers that the way that things are presented and viewed can be just as effective in generating critical awareness and resistance as the content explored. The contributions of art also offers the idea that the separation and alienation caused by the spectacle can also be remedied through the

understanding of the 'other' it provides and the community and cultural awareness that is

stimulated by artists. The resistance and critical awareness raised by these three categories of

production demonstrate that the efforts made by Debord are still being made in a postmodern

climate, albeit in ways that he may not of have foreseen or imagined, and attest to the continued

relevance of his theoretical and artistic explorations to contemporary society. As long as there is

resistance to a society of spectacle there will always be an element of Debord therein.

It is the nature of any theoretical exploration that it begets further explorations.

Considering the holistic approach of this thesis, there are many avenues of thought that have

been touched upon that could be explored even further, in truth it has been one of the difficulties

of this thesis to determine which avenues to pursue and which to simply mention. This thesis

touches on a variety of theorists and contributions from throughout the world but has always

been mindful of literature and production taking place here in Canada. Following this

preliminary research an interesting direction for further research could explore the nature and

pervasiveness of the spectacle in Canada, or any other country or region, and explore the level

and effectiveness of their own acts of resistance. As many discussions regarding the mainstream

media focus on productions from American sources it would be interesting to compare and

contrast the American media climate to those of other countries. In regards to the three areas of

resistance within contemporary production, there seemed to be a disproportionate amount that

touched on alternative media and the Internet. The debate surrounding the issues of this thesis

could be strengthened by continued explorations of self-reflexivity in the media and the raising

of resistance and critical awareness in art. The outlook on art adopted by this thesis is not one

that is commonly explored. The merging of art and politics as a catalyst for social change is still

in many ways an abandoned value in much of postmodern art and is another area where research

could further explore art's potential for getting people to think in new ways and view things from

a different perspective for the betterment of society. Having outlined these avenues of future

research, I would say that any investigation into the nature of the society of the spectacle would

be of value if only to enlighten the writer themselves. My own thesis has afforded me much

insight that I would wish to all others in their own explorations of the spectacle.

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