Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.*
The Society of the Spectacle

by Guy Debord
Translator's Note

There have been several previous English translations of The Society of the Spectacle. I have gone through them all and have retained whatever seemed already to be adequate. In particular, I have adopted quite a few of Donald Nicholson-Smith's renderings, though I have diverged from him in many other cases. His translation (Zone Books, 1994) and the earlier one by Fredy Perlman and John Supak (Black and Red, 1977) are both in print, and both can also be found at the Situationist International Online website (http://situationist.cjb.net).

I believe that my translation conveys Debord's actual meaning more accurately, as well as more clearly and idiomatically, than any of the other versions. I am nevertheless aware that it is far from perfect, and welcome any criticisms or suggestions.

If you find the opening chapters too difficult, you might try starting with Chapter 4 or Chapter 5. As you see how Debord deals with concrete historical events, you may get a better idea of the practical implications of ideas that are presented more abstractly in the other chapters.

The book is not, however, as difficult or abstract as it is reputed to be. It is not an ivory-tower academic or philosophical discourse; it is an effort to clarify the nature of the society in which we find ourselves and the advantages and drawbacks of various methods for changing it. Every single thesis has a direct or indirect bearing on issues that are matters of life and death. Chapter 4, which with remarkable conciseness sums up the lessons of two centuries of revolutionary experience, is simply the most obvious example.

--- Ken Knabb
February 2002

P.S. (March): In answer to a number of queries I have received: At the moment I have no plans to publish this translation in book form. For one thing, I'm not yet completely satisfied with it, and will be fine-tuning it over the next few months. Then I may start considering different publication possibilities, depending on what sort of interest has been expressed.

Another reason is that Alice Debord has asked me to prepare new translations of all of Debord's films, to be used in subtitling them for English-speaking audiences. One of those films, of course, is based on this book, so I will want to get that taken care of (which may involve minor last-minute changes in the portions of the book that are used in the film) before thinking about book publication.

P.P.S. (July): During the last few weeks I have made a considerable number of stylistic revisions in the Society of the Spectacle translation. Although I will continue to make any improvements that occur to me, the translation as it now stands is probably pretty close to final.

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In contrast to the project outlined in the "Theses on Feuerbach" (the realization of philosophy in a praxis transcending the opposition between idealism and materialism), the spectacle preserves the ideological features of both materialism and idealism, imposing them in the pseudo-concreteness of its universe. The contemplative aspect of the old materialism, which conceives the world as representation and not as activity — and which ultimately idealizes matter — is fulfilled in the spectacle, where concrete things are automatic masters of social life. Conversely, the dreamed activity of idealism is also fulfilled in the spectacle, through the technical mediation of signs and signals — which ultimately materialize an abstract ideal.

The parallel between ideology and schizophrenia demonstrated in Gabel's *False Consciousness* should be considered in the context of this economic materialization of ideology. Society has become what ideology already was. The repression of practice and the antithetical false consciousness that results from that repression are imposed at every moment of everyday life subjected to the spectacle — a subjectification that systematically destroys the "faculty of encounter" and replaces it with a *social hallucination*: a false consciousness of encounter, an "illusion of encounter." In a society where no one can any longer be recognized by others, each individual becomes incapable of recognizing his own reality. Ideology is at home; separation has built its own world.

"In clinical descriptions of schizophrenia," says Gabel, "the disintegration of the dialectic of totality (with dissociation as its extreme form) and the disintegration of the dialectic of becoming (with catatonia as its extreme form) seem closely interrelated." Imprisoned in a flattened universe bounded by the screen of the spectacle that has enthralled him, the spectator knows no one but the fictitious speakers who subject him to a one-way monologue about their commodities and the politics of their commodities. The spectacle as a whole serves as his looking glass. What he sees there are dramatizations of illusory escapes from a universal autism.

The spectacle obliterates the boundaries between self and world by crushing the self besieged by the presence-absence of the world. It also obliterates the boundaries between true and false by repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. Individuals who passively accept their subjection to an alien everyday reality are thus driven toward a madness that reacts to this fate by resorting to illusory magical techniques. The essence of this pseudosense to an unanswerable communication is the acceptance and consumption of commodities. The consumer's compulsion to imitate is a truly infantile need, conditioned by all the aspects of his fundamental dispossess. As Gabel puts it in describing a quite different level of pathology, "the abnormal need for representation compensates for an agonizing feeling of being at the margin of existence."

In contrast to the logic of false consciousness, which cannot truly know itself, the search for critical truth about the spectacle must also be a true critique. It must struggle in practice among the irreconcilable enemies of the spectacle, and admit that it is nothing without them. By rushing into sordid reformist compromises or pseudorevolutionary collective actions, those driven by an abstract desire for immediate effectiveness are in reality obeying the ruling laws of thought, adopting a perspective that can see nothing but the *latest news*. In this way delirium reappears in the camp that claims to be opposing it. A critique seeking to go beyond the spectacle must know how to wait.

The self-emancipation of our time is an emancipation from the material bases of inverted truth. This "historic mission of establishing truth in the world" can be carried out neither by the isolated individual nor by atomized and manipulated masses, but only and always by the class that is able to dissolve all classes by reducing all power to the de-alienating form of realized democracy.
The Culmination of Separation

"But for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, appearance to essence... truth is considered profane, and only illusion is sacred. Sacredness is in fact held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness."

—Fuerbach, Preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*

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1. In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived is now merely represented in the distance.

2. The images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream in which the unity of life can no longer be recovered. Fragmented views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudo-world* that can only be looked at. The specialization of images of the world evolves into a world of autonomized images where even the deceivers are deceived. The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving.

3. The spectacle appears simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is ostensibly the focal point of all vision and consciousness. But due to the very fact that this sector is separate, it is in reality the domain of delusion and false consciousness. The unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation.

4. The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.

5. The spectacle cannot be understood as a mere visual deception produced by mass-media technologies. It is a worldview that has actually been materialized.

6. Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society's unreality. In all its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle represents the dominant *model* of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production. In both form and content the spectacle serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system. The spectacle also represents the constant presence of this justification since it monopolizes the majority of the time spent outside the production process.

7. Separation is itself an integral part of the unity of the world, of a global social practice split into reality and image. The social practice confronted by an autonomous spectacle is at the

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212 Ideology is the intellectual basis of class societies within the conflictual course of history. Ideological expressions have never been pure fictions; they represent a distorted consciousness of realities, and as such they have been real factors that have in turn produced real distorting effects. This interconnection is intensified with the advent of the spectacle — the *materialization* of ideology brought about by the concrete success of an autonomized system of economic production — which virtually identifies social reality with an ideology that has remolded all reality in its own image.

213 Once ideology — the abstract will to universality and the illusion associated with that will — is legitimized by the universal abstraction and the effective dictatorship of illusion that prevail in modern society, it is no longer a voluntaristic struggle of the fragmentary, but its triumph. Ideological pretensions take on a sort of flat, positivistic precision: they no longer represent historical choices, they are assertions of undeniable facts. The particular names of ideologies thus tend to disappear. The specifically ideological forms of system-supporting labor are reduced to an "epistemological base" that is itself presumed to be beyond ideology. Materialized ideology has no name, just as it has no formulable historical agenda. Which is another way of saying that the history of different ideologies is over.

214 Ideology, whose whole internal logic led toward what Mannheim calls "total ideology" — the despotism of a fragment imposing itself as pseudoknowledge of a frozen totality, as a totalitarian worldview — has reached its culmination in the immobilized spectacle of nonhistory. Its culmination is also its dissolution into society as a whole. When that society itself is concretely dissolved, ideology — the final irrationality standing in the way of historical life — must also disappear.

215 The spectacle is the acme of ideology because it fully exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life. The spectacle is the material "expression of the separation and estrangement between man and man." The "new power of deception" concentrated in it is based on the production system in which "as the mass of objects increases, so do the alien powers to which man is subjected." This is the supreme stage of an expansion that has turned need against life. "The need for money is thus the real need created by the modern economic system, and the only need it creates" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*), Hegel's characterization of money as "the self-moving life of what is dead" (*Jenaer Realphilosophie*) has now been extended by the spectacle to all social life.
Détournement is the opposite of quotation, of appealing to a theoretical authority that is inevitably taints by the very fact that it has become a quotation — a fragment torn from its own context and development, and ultimately from the general framework of its period and from the particular option (appropriate or erroneous) that it represented within that framework. Détournement is the flexible language of anti-ideology. It appears in communication that knows it cannot claim to embody any definitive certainty. It is language that cannot and need not be confirmed by any previous or supracritical reference. On the contrary, its own internal coherence and practical effectiveness are what validate the previous kernels of truth it has brought back into play. Détournement has grounded its cause on nothing but its own truth as present critique.

The element of overt détournement in formulated theory refutes any notion that such theory is durably autonomous. By 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.

The real values of culture can be maintained only by negating culture. But this negation can no longer be a cultural negation. In a sense it may take place within culture, but it points beyond it.

In the language of contradiction, the critique of culture is a unified critique, in that it dominates the whole of culture — its knowledge as well as its poetry — and in that it no longer separates itself from the critique of the social totality. This unified theoretical critique is on its way to meet unified social practice.

same time the real totality which contains that spectacle, But the split within this totality mutates it to the point that the spectacle seems to be its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of signs of the dominant system of production — signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that system.

The spectacle cannot be abstractly contrasted to concrete social activity; each side of such a duality is itself divided. The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality. Conversely, real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it. Objective reality is present on both sides. Each concept established in this manner has no other basis than its transformation into its opposite: reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and support of the existing society.

In a world that is really turned upside down, the true is a moment of the false.

The concept of "the spectacle" interrelates and explains a wide range of seemingly unconnected phenomena. The apparent diversities and contrasts of these phenomena stem from the social organization of appearances, whose essential nature must itself be recognized. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is an affirmation of appearances and an identification of all human social life with those appearances. But a critique that grasps the spectacle's essential character reveals it to be a visible negation of life — a negation of life that has taken on a visible form.

In order to describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions, and the forces that work against it, it is necessary to make some artificial distinctions. In analyzing the spectacle we are obliged to a certain extent to use the spectacle's own language, in the sense that we have to move through the methodological terrain of the society that expresses itself in the spectacle. For the spectator is both the meaning and the agenda of our particular socio-economic formation. It is the historical moment in which we are caught.

The spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. 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.

The tautological character of the spectacle stems from the fact that its means and ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the globe, endlessly basking in its own glory.

The society based on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally spectacleist. In the spectacle — the visual reflection of the ruling economic order — goals are nothing, development is everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.

As indispensable embellishment of currently produced objects, as general articulation of the system's rationales, and as advanced economic sector that directly creates an ever-increasing mass of image-objects, the spectacle is the leading production of present-day society.

The spectacle is able to subject human beings to itself because the economy has already totally subjugated them. It is nothing other than the economy developing for itself. It is at once a faithful reflection of the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers.

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rationality from collapsing. Daniel Boorstin, for example, whose book *The Image* describes spectacle-commodity consumption in the United States, never arrives at the concept of the spectacle because he thinks he can treat private life and “honest commodities” as separate from the “excesses” he deplores. He fails to understand that the commodity itself made the laws whose “honest” application leads both to the distinct reality of private life and to its subsequent reconquest by the social consumption of images.

199 Boorstin describes the excesses of a world that has become foreign to us as if they were excesses foreign to our world. When, like a moral or psychological prophet, he denounces the superficial reign of images as a product of “our extravagant expectations,” he is implicitly contrasting these excesses to a “normal” life that has no reality in either his book or his era. Because the real human life that Boorstin evokes is located for him in the past, including the past that was dominated by religious resignation, he has no way of comprehending the true extent of the present society’s domination by images. We can truly understand this society only by negating it.

200 A sociology that believes that a separately functioning industrial rationality can be isolated from social life as a whole may go on to view the techniques of reproduction and communication as independent of general industrial development. Thus Boorstin concludes that the situation he describes is caused by an unfortunate and almost fortuitous encounter of an excessive technology of image-diffusion with an excessive appetite for sensationalism on the part of today’s public. This amounts to blaming the spectacle on modern man’s excessive inclination to be a spectator. Boorstin fails to see that the proliferation of the prefabricated “pseudo-events” he denounces flows from the simple fact that the overwhelming realities of present-day social existence prevent people from actually living events for themselves. Because history itself haunts modern society like a specter, pseudo-events have to be concocted at every level in order to preserve the threatened equilibrium of the present frozen time.

201 The current tendency toward *structuralist* systematization is based on the explicit or implicit assumption that this brief freezing of historical time will last forever. The antihistorical thought of structuralism believes in the eternal presence of a system that was never created and that will never come to an end. Its illusion that all social practice is unconscious determined by preexisting structures is based on illegitimate analogies with structural models developed by linguistics and anthropology (or even on models used for analyzing the functioning of capitalism)—models that were already inaccurate even in their original contexts. This fallacious reasoning stems from the limited intellectual and imaginative capacity of the academic functionaries who have been exposed to this thought, who are so thoroughly caught up in their avant-garde celebration of the existing system that they can do nothing but reduce all reality to the existence of that system.

202 In order to understand “structuralist” categories, one must bear in mind that such categories, like those of any other historical social science, reflect forms and conditions of existence. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, one cannot judge or admire this particular society by assuming that the language it speaks to itself is necessarily true. “We cannot judge such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, that consciousness must be explained in the light of the contradictions of material life...” Structures are the progeny of established powers. Structuralism *is thought underridden by the state*, a form of thought that regards the present conditions of spectacular “communication” as an absolute. Its method of studying code in isolation from content is merely a reflection of a taken-for-granted society where communication takes the form of a cascade of hierarchical signals. Structuralism does not prove the transhistorical validity of the society of the spectacle; on the contrary, it is the society of the spectacle, imposing itself in its overwhelming reality, that validates the frigid dream of

24 The spectacle is the ruling order’s nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life. The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relations conceals their true character as relations between people and between classes: a second Nature, with its own inescapable laws, seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the inevitable consequence of some supposedly natural technological development. On the contrary, the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technological content. If the spectacle, considered in the limited sense of the “mass media” that are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to be invading society in the form of a mere technical apparatus, it should be understood that this apparatus is in no way neutral and that it has been developed in accordance with the spectacle’s internal dynamics. If the social needs of the age in which such technologies are developed can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact between people has become totally dependent on these means of instantaneous communication, it is because this “communication” is essentially *unilateral*. The concentration of these media thus amounts to concentrating in the hands of the administrators of the existing system the means that enable them to carry on this particular form of administration. The social separation reflected in the spectacle is inseparable from the modern state—that product of the social division of labor that is both the chief instrument of class rule and the concentrated expression of all social divisions.

25 *Separation* is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor in the form of class divisions had given rise to an earlier, religious form of contemplation: the mythical order with which every power has always camouflaged itself. Religion justified the cosmic and ontological order that corresponded to the interests of the masters, exalting and embellishing everything their societies could not deliver. In this sense, all separate power has been spectacular. But this earlier universal devotion to a fixed religious imagery was only a shared acknowledgment of loss, an imaginary compensation for the poverty of a concrete social activity that was still generally experienced as a unitary condition. In contrast, the modern spectacle depicts what society could deliver, but in so doing it rigidly separates what is possible from what is permitted. The spectacle keeps people in a state of unconsciousness as they pass through practical changes in their conditions of existence. Like a factitious god, it generates itself and makes its own rules. It reveals itself for what it is: an autonomously developing separate power, based on the increasing productivity resulting from an increasingly refined division of labor into parcelized gestures dictated by the independent movement of machines, and working for an ever-expanding market. In the course of this development, all community and all critical awareness has disintegrated; and the forces that were able to grow by separating from each other have not yet been reunited.

26 The general separation of worker and product tends to eliminate any consistent sense of accomplished activity and any direct personal communication between producers. With the increasing accumulation of separate products and the increasing concentration of the productive process, accomplishment and communication are monopolized by the managers of the system. The triumph of this separation-based economic system *proletarianizes* the whole world.

27 Due to the very success of this separate production of separation, the fundamental experience that in earlier societies was associated with people’s primary work is in the process of being replaced (in sectors near the cutting edge of the system’s evolution) by an identification of life with nonworking time, with inactivity. But such inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity; it remains dependent on it, in an uneasy and adoring submission to the requirements and consequences of the production system. It is itself one of the consequences of that system. There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle activity is nullified— all real
The effects of capital accumulation on the demand for labor...

The capital stock is made up of the capital goods that are available for use in production. These capital goods include buildings, machinery, and other physical assets that are used to produce goods and services. The capital stock is an important determinant of the supply of labor, as it affects the productivity of workers.

The capital stock is determined by the accumulation of capital over time. This accumulation is influenced by factors such as the rate of savings, the rate of investment, and the efficiency of the capital stock.

The effects of capital accumulation on the demand for labor can be seen in the relationship between the capital stock and the demand for labor. As the capital stock increases, the demand for labor also increases, as more workers are needed to produce the additional capital goods.

The capital stock is an important determinant of the productivity of workers. As the capital stock increases, the productivity of workers also increases, as they have access to more efficient capital goods and can produce more output per unit of labor.

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which, from romanticism to cubism, continually renewed its assaults until it had fragmented and destroyed the entire artistic sphere. The disappearance of historical art, which was linked to the internal communication of an elite and which had its semi-independent social basis in the partially playful conditions still experienced by the last aristocracies, also reflects the fact that capitalism is the first form of class power that acknowledges its own total lack of ontological quality—a power whose basis in the mere management of the economy is symptomatic of the loss of all human mystery. The comprehensive unity of the baroque ensemble, which has long been lacking in the world of artistic creation, has in a sense been revived today in the wholesale consumption of the totality of past art. As all the art of the past comes to be recognized and appreciated historically, and is retrospectively reclassified as phases of a single "world art," it is incorporated into a global disorder that can itself be seen as a sort of baroque structure at a higher level, a structure that absorbs baroque art itself along with all its possible revivals. For the first time in history the arts of all ages and civilizations can be known and accepted together, and the fact that it has become possible to collect and recollect all these art-historical memories marks the end of the world of art. In this age of museums in which artistic communication is no longer possible, all the previous expressions of art can be accepted equally, because whatever particular communication problems they may have had are eclipsed by all the present-day obstacles to communication in general.

Art in its period of dissolution—a movement of negation striving for its own transcendence within a historical society where history is not yet directly lived—is at once an art of change and the purest expression of the impossibility of change. The more grandiose its pretensions, the further it is from its grasp is its true fulfillment. This art is necessarily avant-garde, and at the same time it does not really exist. Its avant-garde is its own disappearance.

Dadaism and surrealism were the two currents that marked the end of modern art. Though they were only partially conscious of it, they were contemporaries of the last great offensive of the revolutionary proletarian movement; and the defeat of that movement, which left them trapped within the very artistic sphere whose decrepitude they had denounced, was the fundamental reason for their immobilization. Dadaism and surrealism were historically linked yet also opposed to each other. This opposition involved the most important and radical contributions of the two movements, but it also revealed the internal inadequacy of their one-sided critiques. Dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it; surrealism sought to realize art without abolishing it. The critical position since developed by the situationists has shown that the abolition and realization of art are inseparable aspects of a single transcendence of art.

The spectacular consumption that preserves past culture in congealed form, including coopted rehashes of its negative manifestations, gives overt expression in its cultural sector to what it implicitly is in its totality: the communication of noncommunication. The most extreme destruction of language can be officially welcomed as a positive development because it amounts to yet one more way of flaunting one's acceptance of a status quo where all communication has been smugly declared absent. The critical truth of this destruction—the real life of modern poetry and art—is obviously concealed, since the spectacle, whose function is to use culture to buy all historical memory, applies its own essential strategy in its promotion of modernistic pseudoinnovations. Thus a school of literati that baldly admits that it does nothing but contemplate the written word for its own sake can pass itself off as something new. Meanwhile, alongside the simple claim that the death of communication has a sufficient beauty of its own, the most modern tendency of spectacular culture—which is also the one most closely linked to the repressive practice of the general organization of society—seeks by means of "collective projects" to construct complex neoartistic environments out of decomposed elements, as can be seen in urbanism's attempts to incorporate scraps of art or hybrid aesthetico-technical forms. This is an expression, in the
Negation and Consumption Within Culture

"Do you really believe that these Germans will make a political revolution in our lifetime? My friend, that is just wilder thinking... Let us judge Germany on the basis of its present history—and surely you are not going to object that all its history is falsified, or that all its present public life does not reflect the actual state of the people? Read whatever newspapers you please, and you cannot fail to be convinced that we hear not stop (and you must concede that the censorship prevents no one from stopping) celebrating the freedom and national happiness that we enjoy."
—Burg to Mars, March 1844

180 Culture is the general sphere of knowledge and of representations of lived experiences within historical societies divided into classes. It is a generalizing power which itself exists as a separate entity, as division of intellectual labor and as intellectual labor of division. Culture detached itself from the unity of myth-based society "when human life lost its unifying power and when opposites lost their living connections and interactions and became autonomous" (The Difference Between the Systems of Fichte and Schelling). In thus gaining its independence, culture embarked on an imperialistic career of self-enrichment that ultimately led to the decline of that independence. The history that gave rise to the relative autonomy of culture, and to the ideological illusions regarding that autonomy, is also expressed as the history of culture. And this whole triumphant history of culture can be understood as a progressive revelation of the inadequacy of culture, as a march toward culture's self-abolition. Culture is the terrain of the quest for lost unity. In the course of this quest, culture as a separate sphere is obliged to negate itself.

181 In the struggle between tradition and innovation, which is the basic theme of internal cultural development in historical societies, innovation always wins. But cultural innovation is generated by nothing other than the total historical movement—a movement in which, in becoming conscious of itself as a whole, tends to go beyond its own cultural presuppositions and thus to move toward the suppression of all separations.

182 The rapid expansion of society's knowledge, including the understanding that history is the underlying basis of culture, led to the irreversible self-knowledge reflected by the destruction of God. But this "first condition of any critique" is also the first task of a critique without end. When there are no longer any tenable rules of conduct, each result of culture pushes culture toward its own dissolution. Like philosophy the moment it achieved full independence, every discipline that becomes autonomous is bound to collapse—first as a credible pretension to give a coherent account of the social totality, and ultimately even as a fragmented methodology that might be workable within its own domain. Separate culture's lack of rationality is what dooms it to disappear, because that culture already embodies a striving for the victory of the rational.

183 Culture grew out of a history that dissolved the previous way of life, but as a separate sphere within a partially historical society its understanding and sensory communication inevitably remain partial. It is the meaning of an insufficiently meaningful world.

44 The spectacle is a permanent opium war designed to force people to equate goods with commodities and to equate satisfaction with a survival that expands according to its own laws. Consumable survival must constantly expand because it never ceases to include privation. If augmented survival never comes to a resolution, if there is no point where it might stop expanding, this is because it is itself stuck in the realm of privation. It may goy poverty, but it cannot transcend it.

45 Automation, which is both the most advanced sector of modern industry and the epitome of its practice, obliges the commodity system to resolve the following contradiction: The technological developments that objectively tend to eliminate work must at the same time preserve labor as a commodity, because labor is the only creator of commodities. The only way to prevent automation (or any other less extreme method of increasing labor productivity) from reducing society's total necessary labor time is to create new jobs. To this end the reserve army of the unemployed is enlisted into the terytory or "service" sector, reinforcing the troopy responsible for distributing and glorifying the latest commodities; and in this it is serving a real need, in the sense that increasingly extensive campaigns are necessary to convince people to buy increasingly unnecessary commodities.

46 Exchange value could arise only as a representative of use value, but the victory it eventually won with its own weapons created the conditions for its own autonomous power. By mobilizing all human use value and monopolizing its fulfillment, exchange value ultimately succeeded in controlling it. Usefulness has come to be seen purely in terms of exchange value, and is now completely at its mercy. Starting out like a mercenary in the service of use value, exchange value has ended up waging the war for its own sake.

47 The constant decline of use value that has always characterized the capitalist economy has given rise to a new form of poverty within the realm of augmented survival—alongside the old poverty which still persists, since the vast majority of people are still forced to take part as wage workers in the unending pursuit of the system's ends and each of them knows that he must submit or die. The reality of this blackmail—the fact that even in its most impoverished forms (food, shelter) use value now has no existence outside the illusory riches of augmented survival—accounts for the general acceptance of the illusions of modern commodity consumption. The real consumer has become a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this materialized illusion, and the spectacle is its general expression.

48 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 overdeveloped commodity economy and because it serves as a necessary pseudo justification for a counterfeit life.

49 The spectacle is the flip side of money. It, too, is an abstract general equivalent of all commodities. But whereas money has dominated society as the representation of a universal equivalence—the exchangeability of different goods whose uses remain incomparable—the spectacle is the modern complement of money: a representation of the commodity world as a whole which serves as a general equivalent for what the entire society can be and can do. The spectacle is money. It can only look at, because it is all use has already been exchanged for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not just a servant of pseudo-use, it is already in itself a pseudo-use of life.
Urbanism is the modern method for solving the ongoing problem of safeguarding class power by atomizing workers who have been dangerously brought together by the conditions of urban production. The constant struggle that has had to be waged against anything that might lead to such coming together has found urbanism to be its most effective field of operation. The efforts of all the established powers since the French Revolution to increase the means of maintaining law and order in the streets have finally culminated in the suppression of the street itself. Evoking a “civilization . . . moving along a one-way road,” Lewis Mumford, in The City in History, points out that “with the advent of long-distance mass communications, the isolation of the population has become an even more effective means of control.” But the general trend toward isolation, which is the underlying essence of urbanism, must also include a controlled reintegration of the workers based on the planned needs of production and consumption. This reintegration into the system means bringing isolated individuals together as isolated individuals. Factories, cultural centers, tourist resorts and housing developments are specifically designed to foster this type of pseudo-community. The same collective isolation prevails even within the family cell, where the omnipresent receivers of spectacular messages fill the isolation with the ruling images — images that derive their full power precisely from that isolation.

In all previous periods architectural innovations were designed exclusively for the ruling classes. Now for the first time a new architecture has been specifically designed for the poor. The aesthetic poverty and vast proliferation of this new experience in habitations stem from its mass character, which character in turn stems both from its function and from the modern conditions of construction. The obvious core of these conditions is the authoritarian decision-making which abstractly converts the environment into an environment of abstraction. The same architecture appears everywhere as soon as industrialization has begun, even in the countries that are furthest behind in this regard, as an essential foundation for implanting the new type of social existence. The contradiction between the growth of society’s material powers and the continued lack of progress toward any conscious control of those powers is revealed as glaringly by the developments of urbanism as by the issues of thermonuclear weapons or of birth control (where the possibility of manipulating heredity is already on the horizon).

The self-destruction of the urban environment is already well under way. The explosion of cities into the countryside, strewing it with what Mumford calls “formless masses of urban debris,” is directly governed by the imperatives of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile — the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance — has left its mark on the landscape with the dominance of freeways, which tear up the old urban centers and promote an ever-wider dispersal. Within this process various forms of partially reconstituted urban fabric fleetingly crystallize around “distribution factories” — giant shopping centers built in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by acres of parking lots. But these temples of consumerism are subject to the same irresistible centrifugal momentum, which casts them aside as soon as they have engendered enough surrounding development to become overburdened secondary centers in their turn. But the technical organization of consumption is only the most visible aspect of the general process of decomposition that has brought the city to the point of consuming itself.

Economic history, whose entire previous development centered around the opposition between city and country, has now progressed to the point of nullifying both. As a result of the current paralysis of any historical development beyond the independent movement of the economy, the incipient disappearance of city and country does not represent a transcendence of their separation, but their simultaneous collapse. The mutual erosion of city and country, resulting from the failure
Terrorism

Domination
The unavoidable biological limitations of the work force — evident both in its dependence on the natural cycle of sleeping and waking and in the debilitating effects of irreversible time over each individual's lifetime — are treated by the modern production system as strictly secondary considerations. As such, they are ignored in that system's official proclamations and in the consumable trophies that embody its relentless triumphant progress. Fixed on the delusory center around which the world seems to move, the spectator no longer experiences life as a journey toward fulfillment and toward death. Once he has given up on really living he can no longer acknowledge his own death. Life insurance ads merely insinuate that he may be guilty of dying without having provided for the smooth continuation of the system following the resultant economic loss, while the promoters of the "American way of death" stress his capacity to preserve most of the appearances of life in his post-mortem state. On all the other fronts of advertising bombardment it is strictly forbidden to grow old. Everybody is urged to economize on their "youth-capital," though such capital, however carefully managed, has little prospect of attaining the durable and cumulative properties of economic capital. This social absence of death coincides with the social absence of life.

As Hegel showed, time is the necessary alienation, the terrain where the subject realizes himself by losing himself, becomes other in order to become truly himself. In total contrast, the current form of alienation is imposed on the producers of an estranged present. In this spatial alienation, the society that radically separates the subject from the activity it steals from him is in reality separating him from his own time. This potentially surmountable social alienation is what has prevented and paralyzed the possibilities and risks of a living alienation within time.

Behind the fashion that come and go on the frivolous surface of the spectacle of pseudocyclical time, the grand style of the era can always be found in what is governed by the secret yet obvious necessity for revolution.

The natural basis of time, the concrete experience of its passage, becomes human and social by existing for humanity. The limitations of human practice imposed by the various stages of labor have humanized time and also dehumanized it, in the forms of cyclical time and of the separated irreversible time of economic production. The revolutionary project of a classless society, of an all-embracing historical life, implies the withering away of the social measurement of time in favor of a federation of independent times — a federation of productive individual and collective forms of irreversible time that are simultaneously present. This would be the temporal realization of authentic communism, which "abolishes everything that exists independently of individuals."

The world already dreams of such a time. In order to actually live it, it only needs to become fully conscious of it.

by an endless succession of ludicrous competitions, from sports to elections. Wherever abundant consumption is established, one particular spectacular opposition is always in the forefront of illogical roles: the antagonism between youth and adults. But real adults — people who are masters of their own lives — are in fact nowhere to be found. And a youthful transformation of what exists is in no way characteristic of those who are now young; it is present solely in the economic system, in the dynamism of capitalism. It is things that rule and that are young, vying with each other and constantly replacing each another.

Spectacular oppositions conceal the unity of poverty. If different forms of the same alienation struggle against each other in the guise of irreconcilable antagonisms, this is because they are all based on real contradictions that are repressed. The spectacle exists in a concentrated form and a diffuse form, depending on the requirements of the particular stage of poverty it denies and supports. In both cases, it is nothing more than an image of happy harmony surrounded by desolation and horror, at the cain center of misery.

The concentrated spectacle is primarily associated with bureaucratic capitalism, though it may also be imported as a technique for reinforcing state power in more backward mixed economies or even adopted by advanced capitalism during certain moments of crisis. Bureaucratic property is itself concentrated, in that the individual bureaucrat takes part in the ownership of the entire economy only through his membership in the community of bureaucrats. And since commodity production is less developed under bureaucratic capitalism, it too takes on a concentrated form: the commodity the bureaucracy appropriates is the total social labor, and what it sells back to the society is that society's wholesale survival. The dictatorship of the bureaucratic economy cannot leave the exploited masses any significant margin of choice because it has had to make all the choices itself, and any choice made independently of it, whether regarding food or music or anything else, thus amounts to a declaration of war against it. This dictatorship must be enforced by permanent violence. Its spectacle imposes an image of the good that subsumes everything that officially exists, an image which is usually concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system's totalitarian cohesion. Everyone must magically identify with this absolute star or disappear. This master of everyone else's nonconsumption is the heroic image that disguises the absolute exploitation entailed by the system of primitive accumulation accelerated by terror. If the entire Chinese population has to study Mao to the point of identifying with Mao, this is because there is nothing else they can be. The dominion of the concentrated spectacle is a police state.

The diffuse spectacle is associated with commodity abundance, with the undisturbed development of modern capitalism. Here each individual commodity is justified in the name of the grandeur of the total commodity production, of which the spectacle is a laudatory catalog. Irreconcilable claims jockey for position on the stage of the affluent economy's unified spectacle, and different star commodities simultaneously promote conflicting social policies. The automobile spectacle, for example, strives for a perfect traffic flow entailing the destruction of old urban districts, while the city spectacle wants to preserve those districts as tourist attractions. The already dubious satisfaction alleged to be obtained from the consumption of the whole is thus constantly being disappointed because the actual consumer can directly access only a succession of fragments of this commodity heaven, fragments which invariably lack the quality attributed to the whole.

Each individual commodity fights for itself. It avoids acknowledging the others and strives to impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one in existence. The spectacle is the epic poem of this struggle, a struggle that no fall of Troy can bring to an end. The spectacle does not sing of men and their arms, but of commodities and their passions. In this blind struggle each commodity, by pursuing its own passion, unconsciously generates something beyond itself: the globalization
The Proletariat as Subject and Representation
not irrational continuations of the religious passion of millenarianism, as Norman Cohen thought he had demonstrated in The Pursuit of the Millennium. On the contrary, millenarianism, revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time, was already a modern revolutionary tendency, a tendency that lacked only the consciousness that it was a purely historical movement. The millenarians were doomed to defeat because they were unable to recognize their revolution as their own undertaking. The fact that they hesitated to act until they had received some external sign of God’s will was an ideological corollary to the insufferable villagers’ practice of following leaders from outside their own ranks. The peasant class could not attain a clear understanding of the workings of society or of how to conduct its own struggle, and because it lacked these conditions for unifying its action and consciousness, it expressed its project and waged its wars with the imagery of an earthly paradise.

139 The Renaissance was a joyous break with eternity. Though seeking its heritage and legitimacy in the ancient world, it represented a new form of historical life. Its irreversible time was that of a never-ending accumulation of knowledge, and the historical consciousness engendered by the experience of democratic communities and of the forces that destroy them now took up once again, with Machiavelli, the analysis of secularized power, saying the previously unsayable about the state. In the exuberant life of the Italian cities, in the creation of festivals, life is experienced as an enjoyment of the passage of time. But this enjoyment of transience is itself transient. The song of Lorenzo de’ Medici, which Burchard considered “the very spirit of the Renaissance,” is the eulogy this fragile historical festival delivers on itself: “How beautiful the spring of life — and how quickly it vanishes.”

140 The constant tendency toward the monopolization of historical life by the absolute-monarchist state — a transitional form on the way to complete domination by the bourgeois class — brings into clear view the nature of the bourgeoisie’s new type of irreversible time. The bourgeoisie is associated with a labor time that has finally been freed from cyclical time. With the bourgeoisie, work becomes work that transforms historical conditions. The bourgeoisie is the ruling class for which work is a value. And the bourgeoisie, which suppresses all privilege and recognizes no value that does not stem from the exploitation of labor, has appropriately identified its own value as a ruling class with labor, and has made the progress of labor the measure of its own progress. The class that accumulates commodities and capital continually modifies nature by modifying labor itself, by unleashing labor’s productivity. At the stage of absolute monarchy, all social life was already concentrated within the ornamented poverty of the Court, the gaudy trappings of a bleak state administration whose apex was the “profession of king”; and all particular historical freedoms had to surrender to this new power. The free play of the feudal lords’ irreversible time came to an end in their last battle — in the Fronde and in the Scottish uprising in support of Bonny Prince Charlie. The world now had a new foundation.

141 The victory of the bourgeoisie is the victory of a profoundly historical time, because it is the time corresponding to an economic production that continuously transforms society from top to bottom. So long as agrarian production remains the predominant form of labor, the cyclical time that remains at the base of society reinforces the joint forces of tradition, which tend to hold back any historical movement. But the irreversible time of the bourgeois economy eradicates these vestiges throughout the world. History, which until then had seemed to involve only the actions of individual members of the ruling class, and which had thus been recorded as a mere chronology of events, is now understood as a general movement — a relentless movement that crushes any individuals in its path. By discovering its basis in political economy, history becomes aware of what had previously been unconscious; but this basis remains unconscious because it cannot be externality could be masked only by identifying that thought with a preexisting project of the Spirit of that absolute heroic force which has done what it willed and willed what it has done, and whose ultimate goal coincides with the present. Philosophy, in the process of being superseded by historical thought, has thus arrived at the point where it can glorify its world only by denying it, since in order to speak it must presuppose that the total history to which it has relegated everything has already come to an end, and that the only tribunal where truth could be judged is closed.

77 When the proletariat demonstrates through its own actions that this historical thought has not been forgotten, its refutation of that thought’s conclusion is at the same time a confirmation of its method.

78 Historical thought can be saved only by becoming practical thought, and the practice of the proletariat as a revolutionary class can be nothing less than historical consciousness operating on the totality of its world. All the theoretical currents of the revolutionary working-class movement— Stirner and Bakunin as well as Marx — grew out of a critical confrontation with Hegelian thought.

79 The inseparability of Marx’s theory from the Hegelian method is itself inseparable from that theory’s revolutionary character, that is, from its truth. It is in this regard that the relationship between Marx and Hegel has generally been ignored or misunderstood, or even denounced as the weak point of what became fallaciously transformed into a doctrine: “Marxism.” Bernstein implicitly revealed this connection between the dialectical method and historical partitioning when in his book Evolutionary Socialism he deplored the 1847 Manifesto’s unscientific predictions of imminent proletarian revolution in Germany: “This historical self-deception, so erroneous that the most naive political visionary could hardly have done any worse, would be incomprehensible in a Marx who at that time had already seriously studied economics if we did not recognize that it reflected the lingering influence of the antithetical Hegelian dialectic, from which Marx, like Engels, could never completely free himself. In those times of general effervescence this influence was all the more fatal to him.”

80 The inversion carried out by Marx in order to “salvage” the thought of the bourgeoisie revolutions by transferring it to a different context does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit toward its eventual encounter with itself — the Spirit whose objectification is identical to its alienation and whose historical wounds leave no scars. For once history becomes real, it no longer has an end. Marx demolished Hegel’s position of detachment from events, as well as passive contemplation by any supreme external agent whatsoever. Henceforth, theory’s concern is simply to know what it itself is doing. In contrast, present-day society’s passive contemplation of the movement of the economy is an untranscended holodeck from the undialectical aspect of Hegel’s attempt to create a circular system; it is an approval that is no longer on the conceptual level and that no longer needs a Hegelianism to justify itself, because the movement it now praises is a sector of a world where thought no longer has any place, a sector whose mechanical development effectively dominates everything. Marx’s project is a project of conscious history, in which the quantitative that arises out of the blind development of merely economic productive forces must be transformed into a qualitative appropriation of history. The critique of political economy is the first act of this end of prehistory: “If all of the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself.”

81 Marx’s theory is closely linked with scientific thought insofar as it seeks a rational understanding of the forces that really operate in society. But it ultimately goes beyond scientific thought,
develops and perishes separately, leaving the underlying society unchanged, because it remains separated from the common reality. This is why we tend to reduce the history of Oriental empires to a history of religions: the chronologies that have fallen into ruins have left nothing but the seemingly independent history of the illusions that veiled them. The masters who used the protection of the state to make history their own property did so first of all in the realm of illusion. In China, for example, they long held a monopoly on the immortality of the soul; and their earliest officially recognized dynasties were nothing but imaginary reconstructions of the past. But this illusion ownership by the masters was the only ownership then possible, both of the common history and of their own history. As their real historical power expanded, this illusion-mythical ownership became increasingly vulgarized. All these consequences flowed from the simple fact that as the masters played the role of mythically guaranteeing the permanence of cyclical time (as in the seasonal rites performed by the Chinese emperors), they themselves achieved a relative liberation from cyclical time.

133 The dry, unexplained chronology that a defied authority offered to its subjects, who were supposed to accept it as the earthly fulfillment of mythic commandments, was destined to be transcended and transformed into conscious history. But for this to happen, sizeable groups of people had to have experienced real participation in history. Out of this practical communication between those who have recognized each other as possessors of a unique present, who have experienced a qualitative richness of events in their own activity and who are at home in their own era, arises the general language of historical communication. Those for whom irreparable time truly exists discover in it both the memorable and the threat of oblivion: "Herodotus of Halicarnassus here presents the results of his researches, so that time will not abolish the deeds of men..."

134 Examining history amounts to examining the nature of power. Greece was the moment when power and changes in power were first debated and understood. It was a democracy of the masters of society—a total contrast to the despotic state, where power settles accounts only with itself, within the imperceptible obscurity of its inner sanctum, by means of palace revolutions which are beyond the pale of discussion whether they fail or succeed. But the shared power in the separate and static domain of the servile class. The only people who lived were those who did not work. The divisions among the Greek communities and their struggles to exploit foreign cities were the externalized expression of the principle of separation on which each of them was based internally. Although Greece had dreamed of universal history, it did not succeed in unifying itself in the face of foreign invasion, or even in unifying the calendars of its independent city-states. Historical time became conscious in Greece, but it was not yet conscious of itself.

135 The disappearance of the particular conditions that had favored the Greek communities brought about a regression of Western historical thought, but it did not lead to a restoration of the old mythic structures. The clashes of the Mediterranean peoples and the rise and fall of the Roman state gave rise instead to semihistorical religions, which became a new armor for separate power and basic components of a new consciousness of time.

136 The monotheistic religions were a compromise between myth and history, between the cyclical time that still governed the sphere of production and the irreversible time that was the theater of conflicts and regroupings among different peoples. The religions that emerged were not structured universal acknowledgments of an irreversible time that had become democratized and open to all, but only in the realm of illusion. Time is totally oriented toward a single final event: "The Kingdom of God is soon to come." These religions were rooted in the soil of history, but they remained radically opposed to history. The semihistorical religions establish a qualitative time was far from being ripe." Throughout his life Marx had maintained a unitary point of view in his theory, but the exposition of his theory was carried out on the terrain of the dominant thought insofar as it took the form of critiques of particular disciplines, most notably the critique of the fundamental science of bourgeois society, political economy. It was in this mutilated form, which eventually came to be seen as orthodoxy, that Marx's theory was transformed into "Marxism."

85 The weakness of Marx's theory is naturally linked to the weakness of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of his time. The German working class failed to inaugurate a permanent revolution in 1848; the Paris Commune was defeated in isolation. As a result, revolutionary theory could not yet be fully realized. The fact that Marx was reduced to defending and refining it by cloistered scholarly work in the British Museum had a debilitating effect on the theory itself. His scientific conclusions about the future development of the working class, and the organizational practice apparently implied by these conclusions, became obstacles to proletarian consciousness at a later stage.

86 The theoretical shortcomings of the scientific defense of proletarian revolution (both in its content and in its form of exposition) all ultimately result from identifying the proletariat with the bourgeoisie with respect to the revolutionary seizure of power.

87 As early as the Communist Manifesto, Marx's effort to demonstrate the legitimacy of proletarian power by citing a repetitive sequence of precedents led him to oversimplify his historical analysis into a linear model of the development of modes of production, in which class struggles invariably resulted "either in a revolutionary transformation of the entire society or in the mutual ruin of the contending classes." The plain facts of history, however, are that the "Asiatic mode of production" (as Marx himself acknowledged elsewhere) maintained its immobility despite all its class conflicts; that no serf uprising ever overthrew the feudal lords; and that none of the slave revolts in the ancient world ended the rule of the freemen. The linear schema loses sight of the fact that the bourgeoisie is the only revolutionary class that has ever won; and that it is also the only class for which the development of the economy was both the cause and the consequence of its taking control of society. The same oversimplification led Marx to neglect the economic role of the state in the management of class society. If the rising bourgeoisie seemed to liberate the economy from the state, this was true only to the extent that the previous state was an instrument of class oppression within a static economy. The bourgeoisie originally developed its independent economic power during the medieval period when the state had been weakened, and feudalism was breaking up the stable equilibrium between different powers. In contrast, the modern state—which began to support the bourgeoisie's development through its mercantile policies and which developed into the bourgeoisie's own state during the laissez-faire era—was eventually to emerge as a central power in the planned management of the economic process. Marx was nevertheless able to describe the "Bourgeoisie" prototype of modern statist bureaucracy, the fusion of capital and state to create a "national power of capital over labor, a public force designed to maintain social servitude"—a form of social order in which the bourgeoisie renews all historical life apart from what has been reduced to the economic history of things, and which would like to be "condemned to the same political nothingness as all the other classes." The sociopolitical foundations of the modern spectacle are already discernible here, and these foundations negatively imply that the proletariat is the only pretender to historical life.

88 The only two classes that really correspond to Marx's theory, the two pure classes that the entire analysis of Capital brings to the fore, are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These are also the only two revolutionary classes in history, but operating under very different conditions. The bourgeois revolution is done. The proletarian revolution is a yet-unrealized project, born on
Time and History

5

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

—Shakespeare, Henry IV; Part I

Man, "the negative being who is solely to the extent that he suppresses Being," is one with time. Man's appropriation of his own nature is at the same time his grasp of the development of the universe. "History is itself a real part of natural history, of the transformation of nature into man" (Marx). Conversely, this "natural history" has no real existence other than through the process of human history, the only vantage point from which one can take in that historical totality (like the modern telescope whose power enables one to look back in time at the receding nebulae at the periphery of the universe). History has always existed, but not always in its historical form. The "temporalization of humanity," brought about through the mediation of a society, amounts to a humanization of time. The unconscious movement of time becomes manifest and true within historical consciousness.

True (though still hidden) historical movement begins with the slow and imperceptible development of the "real nature of man"—the "nature that is born with human history, out of the generative action of human society." But even when such a society has developed a technology and a language and is already a product of its own history, it is conscious only of a perpetual present. Knowledge is carried on only by the living, never going beyond the memory of the society's oldest members. Neither death nor procreation is understood as a law of time. Time remains motionless, like an enclosed space. When a more complex society finally becomes conscious of time, it tries to negate it—"it views time not as something that passes, but as something that returns." This static type of society organizes time in a cyclical manner, in accordance with its own direct experience of nature.

Cyclical time is already dominant among the nomadic peoples because they find the same conditions repeated at each moment of their journey. As Hegel notes, "the wandering of nomads is only nominal because it is limited to uniform spaces." When a society settles in a particular location and gives space a content by developing distinctive areas within it, it finds itself confined within that locality. The periodic return to similar places now becomes the pure return of time in the same place. The repetition of a sequence of activities. The transition from pastoral nomadism to sedentary agriculture marks the end of an idle and contentless freedom and the beginning of labor. The agrarian mode of production, governed by the rhythms of the seasons, is the basis for fully developed cyclical time. Eternity is within this time, it is the return of the same here on earth. Myth is the unitary mental construct which guarantees that the cosmic order conforms with the order that this society has in fact already established within its frontiers.

Bakunists, which eventually became irreconcilable, actually centered on two different issues—the question of power in a future revolutionary society and the question of the organization of the current movement—and each of the adversaries reversed their position when they went from one aspect to the other. Bakunin denounced the illusion that classes could be abolished by means of an authoritarian implementation of state power, warning that this would lead to the formation of a new bureaucratic ruling class and to the dictatorship of the most knowledgeable (or of those reputed to be such). Marx, who believed that the concomitant maturation of economic contradictions and of the workers' education in democracy would reduce the role of a proletarian state to a brief phase needed to legitimate the new social relations brought into being by objective factors, denounced Bakunin and his supporters as an authoritarian conspiratorial elite who were deliberately placing themselves above the International with the barefaced scheme of imposing on society an irresponsible dictatorship of the most revolutionary (or of those who would designate themselves as such). Bakunin did in fact recruit followers on such a basis: "In the midst of the popular tempest we must be the invisible pilots guiding the revolution, not through any kind of overt power but through the collective dictatorship of our Alliance—a dictatorship without any badges or titles or official status, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power."

Thus two ideologies of working-class revolution opposed each other, each containing a partially true critique, but each losing the unity of historical thought and setting itself up as an ideological authority. Powerful organizations such as German Social Democracy and the Italian Anarchist Federation faithfully served one or the other of these ideologies, and everywhere the result was very different from what had been sought.

The fact that anarchists have seen the goal of proletarian revolution as immediately present represents both the strength and the weakness of collectivist anarchist struggles (the only forms of anarchism that can be taken seriously—the pretensions of the individualist forms of anarchism have always been ludicrous). From the historical thought of modern class struggles collectivist anarchism retains only the conclusion, and its constant harping on this conclusion is accompanied by a deliberate indifference to any consideration of methods. Its critique of political struggle has thus remained abstract, while its commitment to economic struggle has been channeled toward the mirage of a definitive solution that will supposedly be achieved by a single blow on this terrain, on the day of the general strike or the insurrection. The anarchists have saddled themselves with fulfilling an ideal. Anarchism remains a merely ideological negation of the state and of class society—the very social conditions which in their turn foster separate ideologies. It is the ideology of pure freedom, an ideology that puts everything on the same level and loses any conception of the "historical evil" (the negation at work within history). This fusion of all partial demands into a single all-encompassing demand has given anarchism the merit of representing the rejection of existing conditions in the name of the whole of life rather than from the standpoint of some particular critical specialization; but the fact that this fusion has been envisaged only in the absolute, in accordance with individual whim and in advance of any practical actualization, has doomed anarchism to an all too obvious incoherence. Anarchism responds to each particular struggle by repeating and reapplying the same simple and all-embracing lesson, because this lesson has from the beginning been considered the be-all and end-all of the movement. This is reflected in Bakunin's 1873 letter of resignation from the Jura Federation: "During the past nine years the International has developed more than enough ideas to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I challenge anyone to come up with a new one. It's no longer the time for ideas, it's time for actions." This perspective undoubtedly retains proletarian historical thought's recognition that ideas must be put into practice, but it abandons the historical terrain by assuming that the appropriate forms for this transition to practice have already been discovered and will never change.
spontaneous struggle that is at first taken on a criminal appearance. They foreshadow a second proletarian assault against class society. As the lost children of this as yet immobile army reappear on this battleground—a battleground which has changed and yet remains the same—they are following a new "General Ludd" who, this time, urges them to attack the machinery of permitted consumption.

116 "The long-sought political form through which the working class could carry out its own economic liberation" has taken on a clear shape in this century, in the form of revolutionary workers councils which assume all decision-making and executive powers and which federate with each other by means of delegates who are accountable to their base and revocable at any moment. The councils that have actually emerged have as yet provided no more than a rough hint of their possibilities because they have immediately been opposed and defeated by class society's various defensive forces, among which their own false consciousness must often be included. As Pameleoek said, "But it is precisely within this form of social organization that the problems of proletarian revolution can find their real solution. This is the terrain where the objective preconditions of historical consciousness are brought together—the terrain where direct action is realized, marking the end of specialization, hierarchy and separation, and the transformation of existing conditions into 'conditions of unity.'" In this process proletarian subjects can emerge from their struggle against their contemplative position; their consciousness is equal to the practical organization they have chosen for themselves because this consciousness has become inseparable from coherent intervention in history.

117 With the power of the councils—a power that must internationally supplant all other forms of power—the proletarian movement becomes its own product. This product is nothing other than the producers themselves, whose goal has become nothing other than their own fulfillment. Only in this way can the spectacle's negation of life be negated in its turn.

118 The appearance of workers councils during the first quarter of this century was the most advanced expression of the old proletarian movement, but it went unnoticed, except in travesties of the form, as it was repressed and destroyed along with all the rest of the movement. Now, from the vantage point of the new stage of proletarian critique, the councils can be seen in their true light as the only undeveloped aspect of a defeated movement. The historical consciousness that recognizes that the councils are the only terrain in which it can thrive can now see that they are no longer at the periphery of a movement that is subsiding, but at the center of a movement that is rising.

119 A revolutionary organization that exists before the establishment of the power of workers councils must discover its own appropriate form through struggle; but all these historical experiences have already made it clear that it cannot claim to represent the working class. Its task, rather, is to embody a radical separation from the world of separation.

120 Revolutionary organization is the coherent expression of the theory of praxis entering into two-way communication with practical struggles, in the process of becoming practical theory. Its own moment when social separations are dissolved, the organization must dissolve itself as a separate organization.

121 A revolutionary organization must constitute an integral critique of society, that is, it must make a comprehensive critique of all aspects of alienated social life while refusing to compromise with any form of separate power anywhere in the world. In the organization's struggle with class it. The elevation of socialist journalists and parliamentary representatives above the rest of the movement encouraged them to become habituated to a bourgeois lifestyle (most of them had in any case been recruited from the bourgeois intelligentsia). Even industrial workers who had been recruited out of struggles in the factories were transformed by the trade-union bureaucracy into brokers of labor-power, whose task was to make sure that that commodity was sold at a "fair" price. For the activity of all these people to have retained any appearance of being revolutionary, capitalism would have had to have turned out to be conveniently incapable of tolerating this economic reformism, despite the fact that it had no trouble tolerating the legalistic political expressions of the same reformism. The social democrats' scientific ideology confidently affirmed that capitalism could not tolerate these economic antagonisms; but history repeatedly proved them wrong.

122 Bernstein, the socialist democrat least attached to political ideology and most openly attached to the methodology of bourgeois science, was honest enough to point out this contradiction (a contradiction which had also been implied by the reformist movement of the English workers, who never bothered to invoke any revolutionary ideology). But it was historical development itself which ultimately provided the definitive demonstration. Although full of illusions in other regards, Bernstein had denied that a crisis of capitalist production would miraculously force the hands of the socialists, who wanted to inherit the revolution only by way of this orthodox sequence of events. The profound social upheaval touched off by World War I, though it led to a widespread awakening of radical consciousness, twice demonstrated that the social-democratic hierarchies had failed to provide the German workers with a revolutionary education capable of turning them into theorists: first, when the overwhelming majority of the party rallied to the imperialist war; then, following the German defeat, when the party crushed the Spartakist revolutionaries. The ex-worker Ebert, who had become one of the social-democratic leaders, apparently still believed in sin since he admitted that he hated revolution "like sin." And he proved himself a fitting precursor of the socialist representation that was soon to emerge as the mortal enemy of the proletariat in Russia and elsewhere, when he accurately summed up the essence of this new form of alienation: "Socialism means working a lot.

123 As a Marxist thinker, Lenin was simply a faithful and consistent Kantian who applied the revolutionary ideology of "orthodox Marxism" within the conditions existing in Russia, conditions which did not lend themselves to the reformist practice carried on elsewhere by the Second International. In the Russian context, the Bolshevik practice of directing the proletariat from outside, by means of a disciplined underground party under the control of intellectuals who had become "professional revolutionaries," became a new profession—a profession which refused to come to terms with any of the professional ruling strata of capitalist society (the Czarist political regime was in any case incapable of offering any opportunities for such compromise, which depends on an advanced stage of bourgeois power). As a result of this insurrectionary, the Bolsheviks ended up becoming the sole practitioners of the profession of totalitarian social domination.

124 With the war and the collapse of international social democracy in the face of that war, the authoritarian ideological radicalism of the Bolsheviks was able to spread its influence all over the world. The bloody end of the democratic illusions of the workers movement transformed the entire world into a Russia, and Bolsheviks, reigning over the first revolutionary breakthrough engendered by this period of crises, offered its hierarchical and ideological model to the proletariat of all countries, urging them to adopt it in order to "speak Russian" to their own ruling classes. Lenin did not reproach the Marxism of the Second International for being a revolutionary ideology, but for failing to be a revolutionary ideology.
The effects of communication on the organization of work is a topic of concern in many organizations today. The ability to effectively communicate within and across departments and divisions can significantly impact the overall efficiency and productivity of an organization.

Effective communication involves more than just the exchange of information. It involves understanding the needs and perspectives of others, being clear and concise in your messages, and being open to feedback and input from others. In order to improve communication within an organization, it is important to identify areas where communication breakdowns may occur and take steps to address them.

One common issue in communication is the misinterpretation of messages. This can occur when people fail to fully understand the intended meaning of a message, either due to a lack of clarity or to preconceived notions and biases. To address this, it is important to encourage open and honest communication, to be clear and concise in your messages, and to actively listen to the perspectives of others.

Another issue in communication is the lack of feedback. When people are not given the opportunity to provide feedback on the communication process, they are less likely to feel engaged and invested in the process. To address this, it is important to encourage feedback and to actively seek it out.

Effective communication is also essential in managing change within an organization. When people are not informed of changes in a timely and clear manner, they are more likely to resist the change or to feel confused and uncertain about how to proceed. To address this, it is important to communicate changes clearly and to provide support and resources to help people adapt to the new situation.

In conclusion, effective communication is a critical component of any organization. By taking steps to improve communication within the organization, organizations can increase efficiency, productivity, and overall success.
all opposition to the existing order. This division of labor between two mutually reinforcing forms of the spectacle comes to an end when the pseudorevolutionary role in turn divides. The spectacular component of the destruction of the worker-class movement is itself headed for destruction.

112 The only current partisans of the Leninist illusion are the various Trotskyist tendencies, which stubbornly persist in identifying the proletarian project with an ideologically based hierarchical organization despite all the historical experiences that have refuted that perspective. The distance that separates Trotskyism from a revolutionary critique of present-day society is related to the respectful distance Trotskyists maintain regarding positions that were already mistaken when they were acted on in real struggles. Trotsky remained fundamentally loyal to the upper bureaucracy until 1927, while striving to gain control of it so as to make it assume a genuinely Bolshevik foreign policy. (It is well known, for example, that in order to help conceal Lenin's famous "Testament" he went so far as to slanderously disavow his own supporter Max Eastman, who had made it public.) Trotsky was doomed by his basic perspective, because once the bureaucracy became aware that it had evolved into a counterrevolutionary class on the domestic front, it was bound to opt for a similar counterrevolutionary role in other countries (though still, of course, in the name of revolution). Trotsky's subsequent efforts to create a Fourth International reflect the same inconsistency. Once he had become an unconditional partisan of the Bolshevik form of organization (which he did during the second Russian revolution), he refused for the rest of his life to recognize that the bureaucracy was a new ruling class. When Lukács, in 1923, presented this same organizational form as the long-sought link between theory and practice, in which proletarians cease being mere "spectators" of the events that occur in their organization and begin consciously choosing and experiencing those events, he was describing as merits of the Bolshevik Party everything that that party was not. Despite his profound theoretical work, Lukács remained an ideologue, speaking in the name of the power that was most grossly alien to the proletarian movement, yet believing and giving his audience to believe that he found himself completely at home with it. As subsequent events demonstrated how that power disavows and suppresses its lackeys, Lukács's endless self-justifications revealed with caricatural clarity that he had identified with the total opposite of himself and of everything he had argued for in History and Class Consciousness. No one better than Lukács illustrates the validity of the fundamental rule for assessing all the intellectual movements of this century: What they respect is a precise gauge of their own degradation. Yet Lenin had hardly encouraged these sorts of illusions about his activities. On the contrary, he acknowledged that "a political party cannot examine its members to see if there are contradictions between their philosophy and the party program." The party whose idealized portrait Lukács so inappropriately drew was in reality suited for only one very specific and limited task: the seizure of state power.

113 Since the neo-Leninist illusion carried on by present-day Trotskyism is constantly being contradicted by the reality of modern capitalist societies (both bourgeois and bureaucratic), it is not surprising that it gets its most favorable reception in the nominally independent "underdeveloped" countries, where the local ruling classes' versions of bureaucratized state socialism end up amounting to little more than a mere ideology of economic development. The hybrid composition of these ruling classes is more or less clearly related to their position within the bourgeois-bureaucratic spectrum. Their international maneuvering between these two poles of capitalist power, along with their numerous ideological compromises (notably with Islam) stemming from their heterogeneous social bases, end up removing from these degraded versions of ideological socialism everything serious except the police. One type of bureaucracy establishes itself by forging an organization capable of combining national struggle with agrarian peasant revolt; it then, as in China, tends to apply the Stalinist model of industrialization in societies that are even less developed than Russia was in 1917. A bureaucracy able to industrialize the nation may also develop out of the petty members in general, and finally to the highest ranks of the party hierarchy. At the Tenth Congress, as the Kronstadt soviet was being crushed by arms and buried under a barrage of slander, Lenin attacked the radical bureaucrats who had formed a "Workers' Opposition" faction with the following ultimatum, the logic of which Stalin would later extend to an absolute division of the world: "You can stand here with us, or against us out there with a gun in your hand, but not within some opposition. . . . We've had enough opposition."

104 After Kronstadt, the bureaucracy consolidated its power as sole owner of a system of state capitalism — internally by means of a temporary alliance with the peasantry (the "New Economic Policy") and externally by using the workers regimented into the bureaucratic parties of the Third International as a backup force for Russian diplomacy, sabotaging the entire revolutionary movement and supporting bourgeois governments whose support it in turn hoped to secure in the sphere of international politics (the Komintern regime in the China of 1925-27, the Popular Fronts in Spain and France, etc.). The Russian bureaucracy then carried this consolidation of power to the next stage by subjecting the peasantry to a reign of terror, implementing the most brutal primitive accumulation of capital in history. The industrialization of the Stalin era revealed the bureaucracy's ultimate function: continuing the reign of the economy by preserving the essence of market society, commodified labor. It also demonstrated the independence of the economy: the economy is here to dominate society so completely that it has proved capable of recreating the class domination it needs for its own continued operation; that is, the bourgeoisie has created an independent power that is capable of maintaining itself even without a bourgeoisie. The totalitarian bureaucracy was not "the last owning class in history" in Bruno Rizzi's sense; it was merely a substitute ruling class for the commodity economy. A tottering capitalist property system was replaced by a cruder version of itself — simplified, less diversified, and concentrated as the collective property of the bureaucratic class. This underdeveloped type of ruling class is also a reflection of economic underdevelopment, and it has no agenda beyond overcoming this underdevelopment in certain regions of the world. The hierarchical and statist framework for this crude remake of the capitalist ruling class was provided by the working-class party, which was itself modeled on the hierarchical separations of bourgeois organizations. As Ante Ciligia noted while in one of Stalin's prisons, "Technical questions of organization turned out to be social questions" (Lenin and the Revolution).

105 Leninism was the highest voluntaristic expression of revolutionary ideology; it was a coherence of the separate, governing a reality that resisted it. With the advent of Stalinism, revolutionary ideology returned to its fundamental incoherence. At that point, ideology was no longer a weapon, it had become an end in itself. But a lie that can no longer be challenged becomes insane. The totalitarian ideological pronouncement obliterates reality as well as purpose; nothing exists but what it says exists. Although this crude form of the spectacle has been confined to certain underdeveloped regions, it has nevertheless played an essential role in the spectacle's global development. This particular materialization of ideology did not transform the world economically, as did advanced capitalism; it simply used police-state methods to transform people's perception of the world.

106 The ruling totalitarian-ideological class is the ruler of a world turned upside down. The more powerful the class, the more it claims not to exist, and its power is employed above all to enforce this claim. It is modest only on this one point, however, because this officially nonexistent bureaucracy simultaneously attributes the crowning achievements of history to its own infallible leadership. Though its existence is everywhere in evidence, the bureaucracy must be invisible as a class. As a result, all social life becomes insane. The social organization of total falsehood stems from this fundamental contradiction.