

Spectacle as World:  
Situationist Theories on the World of Images

By

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## Abstract

*Society of the Spectacle* (1967) (*La Société du Spectacle*) was not simply an expression of the ideas of its author, Guy Debord, but rather served as a definitive theory of the Situationist movement (SI) (1957-1972.) This dissertation aims to explain the Situationist theory of the Spectacle through the central theme of the Spectacle as world. Discourse regarding the theory of Spectacle as world is established through primary texts, images, and archival documents by members of the Situationist International (SI) and interlocutors. Central sources include the book, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), and the film, *Society of the Spectacle* (1972), both by Guy Debord. Context will be established through conflicts and comparisons with theories of worlds surrounding the Situationist milieu, particularly from Surrealism and the journal, *Arguments*.

The postwar period saw a proliferation of images through media to an extent that had not existed prior. However, according to the Situationist theory of “Spectacle,” this proliferation was a world, not a mere accumulation of images. Representations dominated architectural space, perception, and individual subjectivities. Aesthetes of the time including Surrealists and the journal, *Arguments*, characterized the postwar inundation of images as liberating, arguing that images presented possibilities for limitless voyages into Inner Worlds. These concepts of Inner Worlds were often blended with mystical and occultist notions. Unlike aesthetes and mystics, Situationists rejected the glorification of representation, art, and the limitations of subjectivity, which they argued created an alienated inner wasteland. Situationists questioned whether, instead of retreating within the Self, there were possibilities for transcending the limitations of perception, particularly insofar as perception was manipulated and socially defined. This transcendence was not intended to lead to a fixed utopian end, but rather a series of endings and beginnings because, unlike frozen images and reels of the past, the material world was in flux.

Situationist strategies that employed principles of flux and diversity (e.g., *détournement*) presented challenges to media and representation as a means of contesting authoritarian structures, including fascism, Stalinism, and colonialism.

This dissertation is organized into the following chapters: (1) *Weltanschauung* (worldview) (2) Pseudo-Worlds (3) Inner Worlds (4) Dreamworlds (5) The End of the World. (1) *Weltanschauung* begins by defining the limitations of perception through Situationist readings of European philosophy, as well as interpretations by their contemporaries, especially Surrealists and members of the journal, *Arguments*. Limitations to perception are especially considered in relation to art and representation. (2) Chapter 2, Pseudo-Worlds, considers how Debord defines the Spectacle as a “*Weltanschauung* materialized.” When materialized, worldviews become a pseudo-world separate from human thought and control. The illusory falsity of the pseudo-world is treated with regards to various designations including distortions, lies, and artificiality. (3) Inner Worlds considers how subjectivity is often located through discussions of an individual’s mind; an inner being. Surrealists interpreted this interiority as an escape wherein different manifestations of the Self could be found and unified. Contrarily, Situationists saw the Inner World as an alienated wasteland. (4) Chapter 4, Dreamworlds, places Surrealist and Situationist ideas into conversation. Surrealists saw dreams as emulations of subjective Inner Worlds that related directly to the creation of their art. Situationists saw the Self, art, and dreams as related but nevertheless emphasized ways in which each were distinct. The Spectacle, while not technically a dream generator, emulates aspects of dreams in ways that detach individuals from material reality and can be used as a mechanism for social control. (5) The End of the World considers possibilities for transcending Spectacle and subjectivity. If an individual contains an

Inner World, then that world will end. The Conclusion discusses transformation and possibilities for creating new worlds.

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## Dedication

“Personal meaning [...] is incommunicable, like all of the secrets of private life that leave us nothing but pitiful documents.”– Guy Debord<sup>1</sup>

“Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory.” – Herbert Marcuse<sup>2</sup>

In memory of Rita Grunwald.

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Debord, “Critique de la Séparation,” *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*, (Paris: Champ libre, 1978): 45. “Le sens qu’ils ont eu pour nous, personnellement, est intransmissible, comme toute cette clandestinité de la vie privée, sur laquelle on ne possède jamais que des documents dérisoires.”

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1991: 101.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation asserts that the concept of Spectacle is not simply attributable to Guy Debord but rather a wider conversation. So too are the pages that follow the product of many important conversations and contributions.

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This dissertation, like any other, is imperfect, I am sure. While it is a history, it is also, in some ways, a self-portrait, both of my internal world and the world around me. This dissertation is a testament to the past several years of my life. As a result, I find that it only makes sense for me to love it. It was written with dedication and care, and it was afforded all imaginable resources and support from many people who are important to me. People, life, and dissertations have flaws and imperfections. They are also beautiful and worthwhile. I have determined forcefully and decidedly to see this project in relation to beautiful and worthwhile aspects of my life.

“I will write of what I have loved and everything else will be made well enough understood.” – Guy Debord, *Panegyric*

## Introduction: Spectacle as World

The meaning of “world” (*monde*) contrasts from “planet” (*planète*) and “international” (*internationale*). A world is constructed and imbued with symbols and ideologies. It is finite. It does not equate to reality. However, a world encompasses a wide enough scope to create its own sense of a reality as an entirety. Many worlds can exist simultaneously. For example, a novel can contain a world; the Self contains inner worlds; a community or body of texts surrounding a genre can be considered a world. Given the multiplicity of worlds, discussions of a single world must be established within a scope, albeit a wide and encompassing scope, by identifying certain cohesive principles across a particular ideological framework.

Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (*La Société du Spectacle*) aims to define a singular world of the Spectacle, or the world of images that create a “society,” through a series of theses. He uses “world” as a descriptor for the Spectacle in many of these theses including references to the Spectacle as a “pseudo-world” (*pseudo-monde*) and “world in reverse” (*monde renversé*). When, for the title, he describes the Spectacle as a “society,” he suggests that the scope of the Spectacle’s worldness lie within social boundaries. The term “world” already provides some sense of definitive internal cohesion, which is also typically preceded with “the” rather than “a” or use of the plural. At times Debord explores the Spectacle as a plurality, “spectacles,” but ultimately prescribes the article “the” which further suggests cohesive and singular attributes. Despite the cohesion of the Spectacle, Debord argues, following Hegelian dialectics and the ideas of Karl Marx, that prescribing cohesive principles to constructed worlds is inherently flawed.<sup>3</sup> Prescribing cohesion to a world is the mission of ontology, which aims to identify

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<sup>3</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 151-152.

commonalities, generalizations, and cohesively definable principles that distinguish a world, reality, or the world.

In Situationist Mustapha Khayati's reading notes, Henri Birault defines ontology as the propensity to ascribe logic to being and being to logic. This necessarily results in "speculation," which Debord relates to the root of the word Spectacle.<sup>4</sup> Cohesive and definitive ontological principles, says Georges Gusdorf, depend on repetition to create a sense of constancy, which can be seen in philosophy, some approaches to the sciences, as well as myths. Both myths and ontologies aim to define the "only principal of reality."<sup>5</sup> However, proposing a reality of multiplicity and contradiction is itself a generalized view of the world at large. While ideological worlds like the Spectacle present certain cohesive principles or hold cohesive attributes that Debord aims to describe in the theses in *Society of the Spectacle*, their principles are not in fact mathematical constants or laws of nature. Rather, the Spectacle and its framework are brimming with contradictions. Debord like Hegel recognizes that proposing such a pervasive principle, that the world is defined by contradictions and conflict, is itself a universal, as in the dialectical principle that "conflict is the origin of all things in this world."<sup>6</sup> Debord endeavors not only to identify cohesive principles regarding the world of the Spectacle but also the contradictions within these principles as a means of combating spectacular ideology. Hegel considered "speculative logic" to be essential to dialectical progress, which was driven by contradictions as well as the disconnect between the world of the mind and the world outside of the mind.

Immanuel Kant feared unprovable speculation. *Society of the Spectacle* both applies dialectical

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<sup>4</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondances* 6 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006): 36. "Je ne saisis pas la nuance sur les deux traductions du mot 'spectacle' dans le titre. En français, spectacle a le mérite d'être lié au latin speculum, et donc au miroir, à l'image inversée, au concept de spéculation, etc."

<sup>5</sup> Georges Gusdorf, *Mythe et Métaphysique: Introduction à la Philosophie* (Chicoutimi: Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, 1984): 13. "Le mythe seul est principe de réalité."

<sup>6</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans Donald Nicholson-Smith: 138.

reasoning to combatting the Spectacle. It is wary not simply of the disconnect not between Self and World as Kant proposes but rather between a social accumulation of illusory images, Self, and World. This social accumulation of images emulates thought and the mind by visualizing ideas, concepts, and dreamlike projections. It emulates the World by mirroring it through photography.

This dissertation argues that Debord's critique of ontology and his understanding of the Spectacle extend from Immanuel Kant. This is not to say that Debord was a Kantian. First of all, he and the Situationist International rejected all "isms."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, his use of Kant was intended to analyze the Spectacle, an accumulation of images that operates separately from everyday experiences. He was not using Kant's ideas, as Kant did, to attempt to understand the *world of things* or everyday life. Debord took issue with how the "German origin" of "nearly all" of the concepts in *Society of the Spectacle* had been quietly ignored.<sup>8</sup> Many scholars have since treated this concern, largely through explorations of Georg Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx. Assessing Debord's Hegelian-Marxist influence is far from illegitimate; far from misguided. It is not the aspiration of this dissertation to prove otherwise. However, when Debord carefully places the term *Weltanschauung* in *Society of the Spectacle*, and when he argues that *Weltanschauung* is one of the best ways of understanding how the Spectacle operates, he references a discourse in philosophy that not only relates to Hegel and Marx, and not only French-Hegelian discourse, but also discussions that can be framed in relation to philosophical discussions extending from Kant. This point-of-reference is corroborated by Debord's extensive and close readings of neo-Kantian Marxist György Lukács, along with other reading notes, both from Debord and other members of the Situationist International who were integral to the formation of core Situationist ideas

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<sup>7</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 1 (Paris: Situationist International, 1958)

<sup>8</sup> Tom Bunyard, *Debord, Time, and Spectacle* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019): 21.

including the Spectacle. Thus, this dissertation begins with Kant. However, it does not end with Kant. The conversation leads, as it must, to Hegel and Marx, particularly in relation to ideas like transforming the world, movement, dialectics, and concepts of falsity. It also leads to Surrealism and Freud — to Freud, who dismantled philosophical projects wherein the Self was all that could be known (*cogito*), or the interior world of perception (Kant) by questioning to what extent humans in fact understood their own consciousness. From Kant as well as Freud, Situationists seem to glean limitations rather than opportunities for liberation. Limited by subjectivity, they navigate an inner “wasteland” (*terrain vague*).<sup>9</sup>

Situationists argued that Kant presented both insights and dangerous frameworks for creating weapons of social control. They similarly treated Surrealists, Freud, Hegel, and Marx. Existing scholarship provides intensive focus on Situationist influences from Hegel and Marx, typically portrayed as glowingly allegiant with little exploration of Situationist criticisms of these traditions. In terms of the methodology of this dissertation, which reflects aspects of Situationist methodologies for formulating concepts of Spectacle as World, dialectics is not contrarianism neither is it allegiance to Hegelian-Marxism but rather it is a strategy for shedding dogma and allegiance to any one historical figure or concept. Furthermore, when approaching Situationist writings, any vehement reproach should not be evaluated as the irredeemable dismissal it seems to connote. Instead, when Situationists intend to allow a figure to be forgotten, they silence the name of that figure, they decline to provide a citation; in other words, in Situationist terms, they “plagiarize,” a concept that appears in multiple Situationist writings, including *Society of the*

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<sup>9</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library. “L’intermonde est le terrain vague de la subjectivité.”

*Spectacle*, which draws from the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse.)<sup>10</sup> Thus, strong words against anyone who is addressed by name should be considered an opportunity to ask why.

Situationists were careful to consider who was enshrined, either in curses or, rarely, praise, in the context of their dialectic, apprehensive of power that they potentially would afford the negative of their thesis.

Thus, within the Situationist discourse on Kant is at once reliance and rejection. The Kantian question of limited subjectivity found Situationists conflicted as to whether there was any transcendence of subjectivity. They typically seemed to conclude that Kant's concern was irrefutable, finding themselves trapped in subjectivity like "eunuchs."<sup>11</sup> "I am a Kantian – how awful,"<sup>12</sup> writes Attila Kotányi.

In terms of the Situationist project, their aims differed from Kant in a core way that is perhaps the reason that their connection to Kantian discourse has been long overlooked: they do not aim to posit universals. Universals freeze time, they create dead reified truisms, and they uphold systems of control. Kant found solace in the order created by timeless universals, and his anxieties lie in the improbability of these universals. Contrarily, Situationists found timeless universals imprisoning, just as they found perception to be imprisoning, and they aspired for liberation through chance and creativity; through, as Marx suggests, transformation. It was the

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<sup>10</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 166. "Les idées s'améliorent. Le sens des mots y participe. Le plagiat est nécessaire. Le progrès l'implique. Il serre de près la phrase d'un auteur, se sert de ses expressions, efface une idée fausse, la remplace par l'idée juste."

<sup>11</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "Le cerveau métaphysique brûle les cheveux. Se méfier des philosophes chauves, ils ne se sont pas souciés de soigner leur 'système' pileux! Ce qui ne suffit nullement pour transformer un coiffeur chevelu du philosophe. Pourquoi écarteler idéologie et psychosociologie? Quel crime commet donc le réel à développer parallèlement ses fibres et ses reflets, qu'on en vienne chaque fois à amputer Lautréamont tantôt de sa raison, de ses facultés discursives, de son contrôle esthétique-- l'animal psychanalysé, l'Illuminé des bouches du Rêve--tantôt de sa psychologie, de sa nature sociale, de son siècle-- l'eunuque a priori, le révolté en soi (catégorie kantienne chère à Caillois), la carcasse conforme aux manuels scolaires, la pitance anatomo-philosophique des philosophes consacrés...Il suffit!"

<sup>12</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "Et je ne me regarde pas seulement dans la glace. Je me critique! Je suis un kantien [sic]. C'est affreux."

aim of the Spectacle to freeze, generalize, and control; these were not the aims of revolution. Rather, they were the aims of oppressive dominant power structures.

In this analysis of Debord's approach to Kant and ontology, nuance is important not only in the differentiation between analysis of the Spectacle everyday life, but also between the Spectacle and any historical ideas, principles, or frameworks that Debord references. The Spectacle, argues Debord, extends from the sacred and the ontological but it is not synonymous with either. It repetitively reproduces near identical (identical is impossible) images to materialize ideas which Gusdorf relates to ritual; ritual likewise materializes concepts through repetition.<sup>13</sup> However, the Spectacle can be distinguished from mythology and sacrality in that it rejects the aims of ontology and mythology which are to explain and understand the World. The cohesion of the Spectacle is only maintained under a chaotic and contradictory umbrella, a catch-all, an impossibly large accumulation that attempts to portray the entirety of worldness. Debord compares this broad aspiration to the Baroque, as explored in Chapter 4. Despite how the Spectacle "admits itself stripped of any ontological quality," "unity" is rediscovered through a "totality" of images, an "accumulation."<sup>14</sup> Debord represents the resulting diverse world of illusions through the Tower of Babel in the film, *Society of the Spectacle*. In this mythological tower, every language and every idea are housed within a single space creating confusion while at the same time held captive under a dominant order.

Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* coldly paints an intangible and ephemeral all-consuming picture of an image-driven society. Those images are comprised of material. In the place of what was formerly lived experience is a "pseudo-concreteness" that "idealizes matter."

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<sup>13</sup> Gusdorf, *Mythe et Métaphysique*: 23.

<sup>14</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 9. Thesis 1: "Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de spectacles. Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation"; 153, Thesis 189: "dépouillé de toute qualité ontologique."

Debord criticizes philosophies of materialism for “idealiz[ing] matter.” Both materialism and idealism aim to identify constants (the goal of ontology) and in doing so they see the world as “representation” rather than an activity in flux that where they are participants who can create change. Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* propose an alternative: that the goal should not be to understand the world; the goal should not be to identify constants; but rather to transform the world. Debord writes in *Society of the Spectacle*:

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 preserved 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 of the world as representation, not as activity – and which in the last reckoning idealizes matter – has found fulfillment in the spectacle, where concrete things are automatically masters of social life. Correlatively, idealism’s imaginary activity likewise finds its fulfillment in the spectacle, this through the technical mediation of signs and signals – which in the last reckoning endow an abstract ideal with material form.<sup>15</sup>

Kant is typically considered an idealist due to theories regarding the limitations of perception and *a priori* understandings of space and time. At the same time, Kant is also often credited for laying groundwork for positivism when he argues that dialectic must go beyond pure logic, even though it technically cannot, and attempt to relate to the *world of things*. This tendency seems present when Kant writes, “No one can venture with logic alone to judge objects or to make any assertion about them. We must first, independently of logic, obtain trustworthy information about objects.” Then, when logic can be applied to this “trustworthy” information, that is the “dialectic,” that is “criticism.”<sup>16</sup> These objects are relative, organized within the formative transcendental of space and time and they are merely knowable based on “trust.” This concept of “trust” recurs at multiple points in *Critique of Pure Reason*. One particularly direct acknowledgement of how trust and idealism relate is approached by Kant in the following way:

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<sup>15</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 152.

<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Marcus Weigelt (London: Penguin Books, 2007): 90.

However innocent idealism may be considered with respect to the essential purposes of metaphysics (without being so in reality), it remains a scandal to philosophy, and to human reason in general, that we should have to accept the existence of things outside us (from which after all we derive the whole material for our knowledge, even for that of our inner sense ) merely on trust, and have no satisfactory proof with which to counter any opponent who chooses to doubt it.<sup>17</sup>

Certain ideas from Kant can be found in Situationist thinking not simply to assess the functionality of the Spectacle, but also everyday experience outside of the Spectacle.

Situationists understood that perception is limited and yet they trusted in a “reality” outside of themselves. They trusted that reality is real not because they could prove it, but because without it, there is only nihilism. The trust of believing in a reality outside of the Self, which cannot be known, is uncomfortable. Meanwhile, nihilism is “irrefutable,” says Debord. Submission to this blanket irrefutability is “comfortable,” but it cannot be the conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the conclusion, that there must be something that constitutes reality, takes trust.

It may seem strange to bring Kant, who was deeply skeptical, together with the idea of trust, which is similar to faith, especially because in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century France, Kantian ideas were associated with intellectual camps that often framed themselves as direct opponents to Christianity, particularly in discussions of Kant among positivists and Hegelian-Marxists.<sup>19</sup> An association between German idealism and a secularization of Christianity is found in the work of academics who influenced Situationists like Henri Birault. Birault analyzed the tendency in German idealism toward universalization as “Christianity that had become atheistic,” as a secularized concept of God.<sup>20</sup> Following this model, Situationists eschewed aligning themselves within the framework of apparent oppositions, positivism and Christianity (or, more specifically,

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<sup>17</sup> Kant, “Preface to the Second Edition,” *Critique of Pure Reason*: Bxxxviii, xxxix, xl.

<sup>18</sup> Guy Debord, “Pour en finir avec le confort nihiliste,” *Internationale Lettriste* 3 (Paris: 1954.)

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 50.

<sup>20</sup> Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 12, GEN MSS 1480.

the French Catholicism present in their context.) Rather, they contested positivism and Christianity alike by identifying an apparent commonality: explanations of the world in universals or as “catholic,” which was referred to as “integralism” among 20<sup>th</sup> Century French Catholics.<sup>21</sup>

Such particular criticism of universalization certainly cannot apply to every trajectory of German idealism and Christianity broadly speaking. Examples to the contrary were appreciated. For example, in several instances discussed in this dissertation, Situationists appreciated Kant for his skeptical framework for criticism, particularly insofar as it introduced unknowns and mystery rather than universals. With regards to the context of a broader discourse between positivism and spiritualism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, unknowns were also present in a dialectic within Catholicism that countered Freudian positivism and scientism with the ephemeral and mystery. These elements appear in the turn-of-the-century avant-garde wherein peripheral yet influential Catholic artists like Joris-Karl Huysmans considered themes of “sexuality, sickness, insanity, crime, and poverty.”<sup>22</sup> Marx’s accusation that religion was opium seemed to register not only as a criticism but as an asset for such artists.<sup>23</sup> The ephemeral reemerged in discussions of Gnosticism and heresy contemporary to Situationists, which are addressed in Situationist readings of Meister Eckhart as well as interest in Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. Bossuet was read as canonical literature in French schools according to Situationist Michèle Bernstein.<sup>24</sup> While Situationists were ardently anti-religious, and while they attacked Surrealists for occultism,

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 50.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*: 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> Michèle Bernstein, *The Night*, trans. Clodagh Kinsella (London Everyone Agrees/Bookworks, 2020): 13. “Bossuet’s melancholy warning about ‘this green youth which won’t always last,’ about ‘the passing of time, and we who pas with it...’ A beautiful quotation, it has stayed with me since sixth-form.”

aspects of such discourse nevertheless influenced their writing, their stylistic approach to film and literature, and as a result, whether they would like it or not, their arguments and ideas.

Bossuet's reflections on the nature of time as transient greatly influenced Debord not only in his depictions of the ephemeral Spectacle but also his worldview regarding everyday life. Debord opposed the "opium" of religion following Marx, and Vaneigem critiqued the brutal history of the Catholic institution as a punishing authority that Vaneigem argued created established "reality" in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Situationists explored possibilities for creativity and liberation through secularized readings of Eckhart and Bossuet, particularly insofar as such discussions were framed by Surrealists. More generally, themes of the ephemeral, mysterious, and drug-induced characterized Situationist discussions of the *dérive*, the Situationist cities of Asger Jorn and Constant Nieuwenhuys, the support for Alexander Trocchi, and Debord's readings of Thomas de Quincey.

Despite such tendencies, Situationists were decidedly anti-religious and anti-occultist. Throughout the 1950s, Debord contributed to a journal run by Belgian Surrealist Marcel Mariën. Mariën criticized Parisian Surrealism's postwar trajectory toward apoliticism and he accused André Breton of disregarding fascist sympathies within Surrealist circles.<sup>26</sup> Debord supported Mariën's critiques of Surrealism when he bemoaned a postwar shift away from revolutionary wartime and interwar Surrealism that had opposed World War I and the rise of Adolf Hitler.<sup>27</sup> Together, Mariën and Debord used the periodical, *The Naked Lips (Les Lèvres Nues)*, as a platform for differentiating themselves from Breton and Parisian Surrealists. In the 1950s,

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<sup>25</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Reading Notes, Box 1, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>26</sup> Marcel Mariën, "Avertissement," *Apologies de Magritte*, (Brussels: Didier Devillez Éditeur, 1973): 70. Mariën denounced Marc Eemans, who proceeded to sue Mariën for defamation, leading to a long legal battle finally ending in Mariën's exoneration.

<sup>27</sup> Guy Debord, *Lettres à Marcel Mariën* ed. François Coadou (Laballery: La Nerthe, 2015): 97.

Parisian Surrealism began promoting overt overtures to occultist ideas, which Debord and Mustapha Khayati perceived as reactionary.<sup>28</sup> Many artists outside of the Situationists and Belgian Surrealists agreed that Parisian Surrealist occultisms seemed at least implicitly referential to the vestiges of Nazi ideology.<sup>29</sup> Criticisms of occultism led Situationists toward introspection of its own members, routinely proclaiming the exclusion of members and contributors at the end of each issue of their journal, *Potlatch* for reasons including “Theosophy.”<sup>30</sup> Occultism was not only suspect due to its relationship to Nazi ideology, but also because it reflected a worldview that aimed to reject: a view that mystical mysteries can be discovered in the world through ideological projection and generalization. This core notion counteracted the Situationist aim to “reinstatement reality in the world” through “demystification.”<sup>31</sup> Occultism was the opposite of the intention to demystify; occultism was mystification.

Art would come to be seen as mystifying and illusory in general, leading to exclusions of artists from the Situationist International in the early 1960s. In the early period of the Situationist International, key members included Asger Jorn, Jacqueline de Jong, a sculptor and painter, and Attila Kotányi, a previous member of the philosophical group, the Hungarian Dialogic School. All three of these influential figures would be excluded from the group by 1963 when Debord determined that the Situationists should be political rather than artistic, thereby rejecting the distorting illusions of the world of images by rejecting art. Raoul Vaneigem, a schoolteacher who had been writing on Surrealists and Isidore Ducasse (the Comte de Lautréamont), was chosen in 1961 as part of the shift toward politics. Vaneigem was introduced to Debord by Kotányi as well

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<sup>28</sup> Mustapha Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology*, Trans. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006): 225-227; Debord, *Lettres à Marcel Mariën*: 29; Debord, *Lettres à Marcel Mariën*: 29.

<sup>29</sup> Tessel Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> Simon Sadler, *The Situationists and the City*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998): 80.

<sup>31</sup> Guy Debord, “Critique of Separation,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*, (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005.)

as through the professor and political theorist, Henri Lefebvre.<sup>32</sup> In the political period of the Situationist International, Debord found that Mustapha Khayati's ideas represented a direction that the group should embrace<sup>33</sup> — a direction that was unafraid of the risks in the political nature of *situations*, or interruptions of the bourgeois order. These interruptions created possibilities for momentary change and flux rather than stagnation. At the University of Strasbourg, Khayati was profoundly influenced by Lefebvre's courses.<sup>34</sup> He was also influenced by the interdisciplinary theories<sup>35</sup> and the philosophies of history proposed by Georges Gusdorf, the chair of the Sociology Department at the University of Strasbourg who had hired Lefebvre.<sup>36</sup>

Over the course of this dissertation, one short text by Khayati recurs as both a reference and an underlying influence, "Captive Words."<sup>37</sup> It is within this text that a methodology can be derived from the worldview of a *world in flux* through the example of language. Meanings of words change over time. They are inconstant and dependent on historical context. Definitions matter precisely because of the shifts in meaning, but definitions matter within a certain context and based on particular intent. Words are treated as living and changing things; as material objects in a shifting world rather than abstract incantations from an idealist Platonic world beyond:

If the problem of ideology is how to descend from the heaven of ideas to the real world, our dictionary will be a contribution to the elaboration of the new revolutionary theory where the problem is how to affect the transition from language to life.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Vaneigem, *Rien n'est Fini*: 95-96.

<sup>33</sup> Mustapha Khayati, "Interview," *On the Poverty of Student Life* ed. Mehdi El Hajoui and Anna O'Meara (New York: Common Notions, 2022): 32.

<sup>34</sup> Khayati, *On the Poverty of Student Life*: 31

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Paul Resweber, "Georges Gusdorf et l'Enseignement," *Cahiers du Portique* 13 (OpenEdition Journals, 2013.)

<sup>36</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2014): 289.

<sup>37</sup> Mustapha Khayati, "Captive Words," *Situationist International Anthology*, Trans. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006): 225-227.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

The intention of this dissertation, according to Khayati’s methodology, is to define two terms – Spectacle and World – according to the ideas of the Situationist International. Definitions are inconstant, and thus explore these terms through discourse among interlocutors and within the historical context of the postwar. This dissertation is comprised of words. Often, it explores meanings of words etymologically and through translation. “Captive Words” suggests that this process of definition can be used to “tear the world apart” rather than to construct a world:

Our language aims first of all at a practice that tears the world apart, beginning with tearing apart the veils that cloak it. Whereas the [...] enthusiastic description of a world of objects in which the bourgeoisie and the commodity were already victorious, [...] we reject any authority, linguistic or otherwise: only real life allows a meaning and only praxis verifies it. Debates over the reality or unreality of the meaning of a word, isolated from practice, are purely academic.<sup>39</sup>

Situationist definitions are not stagnant and they contrast substantially from “academic” traditions of the time, including the stagnant “world of objects,” which is opposed to “real life.” They use meaning to break apart words and worlds; to demystify; to reject authority; and to redefine the real as something that is not abstract and academic, but, rather, practiced as a part of life.

Defining *Weltanschauung* throughout Chapter One, for example, is thus not intended as a stagnant and immutable act but rather a shifting conversation. *Weltanschauung* is ironically not defined definitively, but rather within the shifting context of a discourse among Situationists and interlocutors. This opens to a complex mapping of a conversation that explores different definitions provided by various philosophers, psychoanalysts, historians, and literary theorists. The word “Spectacle” as well has both a Situationist-specific and a historically changing definition. “Spectacle” was discussed among the avant-garde before Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, including in the Letterist group of Isidore Isou of which Debord was a member.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

“World” and “reality” are often defined in terms of their ubiquity but Situationists, as Sadie Plant argues, see these terms in relation to their “constraints” and limitations, as well as the possibilities for what “world” and “reality” *could* become. This premise lies at the heart of Marx’s world in flux and leads to the Situationist concept of *détournement*, or the use of existing materials to create new arguments. For example, an advertisement could be decontextualized and reused as *détournement* to provide emotionality or visual argumentation for something that it never initially intended. At the beginning of *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*, Plant summarizes the Situationist project as following:

While Dada railed against every constraint, the surrealists developed a more coherent and dialectical critique of existing society which demanded the complete reconciliation of subject and object, the individual and the world, reason and the imagination. Drawing on what they considered to be the most useful aspects of these movements, the situationists developed their recognition that language and artistic expression were implicated with all other social relations, their hostility to the separation of art and poetry from everyday life, and their demands for experiences disallowed by existing society. Dada and surrealism had interrupted and subverted the language and images with which they worked, invoking a wider world of meanings which challenged conventional arrangements of reality. And in their challenges to the inevitability and immutability of the spectacle, the situationists pursued this same attempt to conjure a totality of possible social relations which exceeds and opposes the totality of spectacular relations. They took the words, meanings, theories, and experiences of the spectacle, and placed them in an opposing context; a perspective from which the world was given a fluidity and motion with which the static mediocrity of the spectacle could be negated. [...] The spectacle circumscribes the reality it presents, but it does not preclude the possibility of identifying a bigger and better world of chosen relations and experiences beyond its constraints.<sup>40</sup>

“Tearing the world apart,” as Khayati describes, means tearing apart a human construct constructed through language. Images create a communicative world of meaning like language. While the “world,” “reality,” and the Spectacle often give the impression that they are inevitable and immutable, possibilities for change nevertheless exist through fluidity and motion, which becomes evident in the changeability of language. It was this fluidity and motion that allowed for

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<sup>40</sup> Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992): 3.

revolution. Plant argues that this creative motion differentiated Situationists from “orthodox Marxism.”<sup>41</sup> While it is true that Situationists opposed all forms of orthodoxy and dogmatism, the argument for a world in motion derived from Marx’s creative idea that, “Philosophers have aimed to understand the world, but the goal is to transform it.”<sup>42</sup> This influence from Marx provides the premise of this dissertation’s conclusion. When Plant defines the Situationist program in relation to concepts of “world” and “reality,” she reveals that these considerations are not obscure, peripheral, or tangential in relation to the Situationist International. Rather, they are central to Situationists and to *Society of the Spectacle*.

Plant’s monograph explores how, after the dissolution of the Situationists, concepts of World and reality would profoundly influence postmodernism, particularly that of Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard and Baudrillard, while influenced, would deviate significantly from Debord’s conclusion to oppose the Spectacle. Postmodernists liberated themselves from referents to any preexisting reality. Postmodernists, who were influenced significantly by Debord and the Situationist International, would differentiate themselves from Situationist ideas on the basis that reality was impossible to locate, define, or understand.<sup>43</sup> Many postmodernists found Situationist references to reality dubious. For example, Jean Baudrillard went so far as to characterize Situationist ideas about reality and “authenticity” as naïve.<sup>44</sup>

Martin Jay concludes in *Downcast Eyes*: “In the 1980s, postmodernist writers like Jean Baudrillard stopped worrying and found a way to celebrate what Debord and his colleagues had found so troubling: the ubiquity of images without referents and the reification of experience.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*: 9.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

<sup>43</sup> Marc Lafountain, *Dali and Postmodernism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture* (London: Routledge, 1992): 163.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1993): 433.

*Downcast Eyes* nevertheless sees Debord's ideas as crucial to a key aspect of Critical Theory in the call to critique the literal concept of "enlightenment" in relation to light and vision, opting to instead question or "disintegrate" a culture driven by visuals. Jay argues that, since Plato, throughout Christian tradition, and carrying into the Enlightenment, trends in philosophy have associated light and sight with power, conquest, and an ability to impose oneself in the world. Situationists and their intellectual legacy contested the dominion of sight. Indeed, this dissertation considers Situationist critiques of long trajectories of European philosophy, beginning with Plato, which allowed for prospects of a radical disintegration of a visually driven culture, and, with that, critiques of the concept of Self and dominant power structures, including control over sexuality. Sexuality and gendering are discussed specifically at the end of Chapter One, as well as at points throughout this dissertation.

Subjects of sexuality and the female body are far from a tangential imposition or a revisionist glance at the history of Situationist ideas. The influence of Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich on the thinking of Debord and interlocutors resulted in persistently sexualized interpretations of semiotics, the world, and reality, which is considered in Chapter 4, "Dreamworlds." If constructs of the world and reality are oppressive, Situationists assumed that this primarily meant sexually repressive, a perspective that would significantly influence the General Strike of 1968 and the sexual liberation movement associated with it. Debord's film, *Society of the Spectacle*, proliferates sexualized images of women and mothers. Chapter 5, "The End of the World," explores how Situationists, including Debord, Jacqueline de Jong, and Raoul Vaneigem, explored ideas like reproduction, parenthood, and motherhood, comparing biological reproduction to the reproduction of images. Henri Lefebvre<sup>46</sup> and Marcel Mariën<sup>47</sup> were invested

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<sup>46</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*.

<sup>47</sup> Mariën, *Theory of Immediate World Revolution*.

in concepts of the natural world as a mother as well as readings of women's literature. The natural world as mother was a common theme among Surrealists as well. Laura Mulvey and Julia Kristeva represent the feminist legacy of the Situationist International, as well as the Situationist legacy in philosophy. Baudrillard and Lyotard likewise demonstrate significant influence from the Situationists within philosophy. Giorgio Agamben is a notable philosopher and theorist who is notably influenced by the ideas of Guy Debord who appears in this paper as well. Sadie Plant and Martin Jay are two examples of historians who focus on a history of ideas rather than biography or cultural moments.

Most art historical explorations of the Situationist International and Guy Debord catalog events and biographical moments. While this widely explored venture to "situate the Situationists" in time has laid foundations for understanding that contribute to this dissertation, it is not the focus or goal of this dissertation to write biographical history or catalog events. The goal is more like that of Plant, to write a history of Situationist ideas. However, contrary to Plant, the focus is narrowed to one particular concept rather than a broad recounting and analysis of Situationist ideas and influence. That concept is Spectacle as World. While the subject of "Spectacle as World" is immense insofar as "Spectacle" and "World" are immense, the scope of this dissertation is narrow. It can be grounded in a few theses from within the same two parallel sources: the book (1967) *Society of the Spectacle* and the film (1972) *Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord. In the 1967 book, Debord presents the full title: *La Société du Spectacle: La Théorie Situationniste (Society of the Spectacle: The Situationist Theory)*, suggesting that the Spectacle is a Situationist theory rather than simply Debord's.<sup>48</sup> Following suit, this dissertation

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<sup>48</sup> According to Raoul Vaneigem, the subtitle "La Théorie Situationniste" was a decision made by the editor of the first edition, which included multiple printings, at Buchet-Chastel. Debord was not pleased with the subtitle. The subtitle appears on the title page. For a post-1968 printing of the first edition, a red banner was also included,

locates the concept of Spectacle as World within the Situationist milieu. In terms of historical scope, the Situationist International existed between 1957 and 1972, but, rather than focusing on this range of years, the discussion considers bodies of work by several key figures, including Situationists (Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Mustapha Khayati, Attila Kotányi, Jacqueline de Jong, Alice Becker-Ho, and Asger Jorn) as well as interlocutors from the journal *Arguments* (Henri Lefebvre, Joseph Gabel, and Karl Mannheim), academia (Gaston Bachelard and Georges Gusdorf), and the avant-garde (Isidore Isou, Marcel Mariën, Annie LeBrun, and André Breton.)

Debord's text and film *Society of the Spectacle* present a few key arguments that will be explored over the course of this dissertation. Chapter One, "*Weltanschauung*," and Chapter Two, "Pseudo-Worlds," define the Spectacle in terms of how it is a world. Following chapters explore how individuals relate to the world of the Spectacle ("Inner Worlds"), how individuals experience the world of the Spectacle ("Dreamworlds"), and how the world of the Spectacle can be changed and contested ("The End of the World"). Because Chapters One and Two are intended to define and connect key terms, Spectacle and World, they tend toward discussions from philosophy rather than specific visual examples. Once overarching conceptual frameworks have been established, specific functions and manifestations of how the Spectacle functions can be considered. "Inner Worlds" is divided into sections that explore visual motifs used to demonstrate aspects of the relationship of the Self to the World of the Spectacle: mirrors; labyrinths; and spirals. Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on specific examples as well to discuss the function, rather than the definition, of Spectacle as World. Chapter 4, "Dreamworlds," considers dreamworlds of André Breton, Max Ernst, Lautréamont, Sade, Kafka, and others. Chapter 5, "The End of the World," considers the ouroboros and the Tower of Babel as symbols for

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wrapped around the exterior, which read "la théorie situationniste qui allait exploser en mai," "the Situationist theory that would explode in May. Raoul Vaneigem, *Rien n'est Fini, Tout Commence*: 223.

particular interpretations of the “End of the World” as a beginning. It also considers the atomic bomb as a fear of the end of the world that was important to the context of the postwar. Tarot cards are considered as a mechanism for creating changeable narratives about reality.

Chapter One, “*Weltanschauung*,” considers how Debord uses the term, *Weltanschauung*, to define the Spectacle:

The Spectacle cannot be understood as either a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung*<sup>49</sup> that has been actualized, translated into the material realm – a world view transformed into an objective force.<sup>50</sup>

Chapter One provides a close reading of Debord’s thesis, including investigations into the original French as well as three translations. The chapter considers how the Spectacle is a *Weltanschauung* materialized, which necessitates a discussion of the concept of *Weltanschauung*, or worldview, among Situationists, interlocutors, and the history of philosophy.

Debord argues that “*Weltanschauung*” becomes Spectacle when worldview becomes “material.” Once materialized, worldview is no longer human or within the human mind. Chapter Two, Pseudo-Worlds, considers this representational manifestation of the world, particularly in relation to lies and falsity. The chapter extends from the second thesis from *Society of the Spectacle*:

Reality considered partially unfolds in its own general unity as a separate pseudo-world, an object of mere contemplation. Pre-created particular images are found in the autonomous world of the image wherein the liar has lied to themselves. The Spectacle in general, as a concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Regarding capitalization choices, when a publication decides to refer to a general concept like *Weltanschauung* or the Spectacle in lower-case, those choices are maintained for direct quotations.

<sup>50</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Zone Books, 1995): 12-13.

<sup>51</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 12. “La réalité considérée partiellement se déploie dans sa propre unité générale en tant que pseudo-monde à part, objet de la seule contemplation. La spécialisation des images du monde se retrouve, accomplie, dans le monde de l’image autonomisé, où le mensonger s’est menti à lui-même. Le spectacle en général, comme inversion concrète de la vie, est le mouvement autonome du non-vivant.”

This chapter asks how a “pseudo-world” relates to themes of lies, “false consciousness,”<sup>52</sup> and ideology. “Inversion” is considered further in relation to Debord’s use of the phrase, *monde réellement renversé*, or “world that is really in reverse.”<sup>53</sup>

While the Spectacle is detached from the human mind, it is nevertheless a human production based on human ideas. Spectacular productions including art and films are conflated with human identity through artists or filmmakers. Chapter 3, “Inner Worlds,” ventures into Thesis 15 of *Society of the Spectacle*:

The Spectacle subjects living human beings to its will to the extent that the economy has brought them under its sway. For the spectacle is simply the economic realm developing for itself – at once a faithful mirror held up to the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers.

The Spectacle as a mirror is explored as a visual and philosophical motif wherein the Self interacts with reproductions or images of the Self. The Self derives an “objectified” identity from production. If the Spectacle can be represented as a mirror, the individual *world in flux*, for Situationists, can be represented as a labyrinth or spiral. The lives of individuals are characterized by movement and change whereas the Spectacle as a mirror represents repetition and objectification. This chapter considers how critiques of Inner Worlds relate to various Surrealist concepts of Inner Worlds.

Worlds of representation and illusion can be seen as dreamlike, but they are not actual dreams, but rather shared experiences set into a material form in the waking world. Representational worlds carry political and social meanings. Nevertheless, the illusory nature of the Spectacle brings Debord to consider the Spectacle as dreamlike:

So long as the realm of necessity remains a social dream, dreaming will remain a social necessity. The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 152.

<sup>53</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 12.

Extending from the discussion of Surrealist concepts of artistic Inner Worlds, Chapter Four, “Dreamworlds,” considers the world of the Spectacle as dreamlike. This chapter considers how dreams are perceived through pacing and juxtapositions. It explores a few of Debord’s aesthetic influences: Johann Wolfgang von Göthe’s *Faust*; Isidore Ducasse’s (Lautréamont) *Chants de Maldoror*; the writings of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade; and various writings by Franz Kafka. These writings are contextualized within wider discussions among Situationists and interlocutors. The final chapter, “The End of the World,” continues to present the World of the Spectacle through visual explorations, this time in relation to beginnings and endings, or the “alpha and omega.” It is divided into sections that explore the following specific motifs: the atomic bomb; the Ouroboros (or a snake eating its tail); Tarot; and the Tower of Babel. Following Chapter Five, “The End of the World,” the conclusion focuses entirely on responses to Karl Marx’s idea that “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to transform it.”<sup>55</sup>

Debord wonders if the World of the Spectacle can be contested and transformed. He provides some solutions that seem insufficient (e.g. worker’s councils), but he admits that he is not the person who can effectively see outside of the world of the Spectacle in a way that can fully embrace something new. The Spectacle, says Debord, is an historical moment, an imposition, and a socio-cultural construct that can be transformed and subverted, he just (like Marx) is not entirely sure how.<sup>56</sup>

Interpretations of Marx are not the sole rationale for Situationists to conclude that the world was in flux. Their postwar context was plagued by anxieties of nuclear annihilation.

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<sup>54</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 18.

<sup>55</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

<sup>56</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 154. “This ‘historic mission to establish truth in the world’ can be carried out neither by the isolated individual nor by atomized manipulated masses.”

Situationists were raised in a context ravaged by perpetual war. Postwar realities influence conclusions and critiques of Debord and interlocutors throughout this dissertation. Experiences of rampant war and fears of the possible annihilation of the entire planet characterized the conclusions that the world is inconstant and ephemeral. Furthermore, Debord and Situationists resisted National Socialism (Nazism), which led to general critiques of the repercussions of dogmatic religious thinking, nationalism, propaganda, and *Weltanschauung*; a subject that derived from centuries of German philosophy, but that was important in Nazi ideology.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Todd Weir, "Hitler's Worldview and the Interwar Kulturkampf," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53.4. (Sage Journals, 2018): 597-621.

## Chapter 1. *Weltanschauung*

### 1.1. What is a *Weltanschauung* for Situationists?

The goal of this chapter is to develop a Situationist perspective on the intellectual history surrounding *Weltanschauung* (worldview) that will inform Situationist theories of the Spectacle. Defining the concept of *Weltanschauung* is first necessary. *Welt* translates to “world” while *Anschauung* can mean “experience,” “intuition,” “sense-perception” or “perspective.” It is derived from Middle German *aneschouwunge*, which can mean “to look” or “contemplation.” *Anschauung* takes on associations with intellect and a world of the mind that is removed from materiality.

*Weltanschauung* was originally introduced into philosophy by Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>58</sup> Kant’s work and impact extend from his analyses of how the world is framed and limited by human perception. “Kant’s lasting contribution to modern philosophy [...] is the thought that our minds autonomously create the world of our experience.”<sup>59</sup> He differentiates perception from the *world of things in themselves*. An impenetrable divide of unknowability exists between consciousness and materiality. This divide is not equivalent to existentialism, because Kant sees the *world of things* as real and existing despite how perception creates an unknowably vast divide between experience and reality. In lieu of true understanding, humans see the world through their own respective *Weltanschauungen*, which are easily manipulated, because perception is easily manipulated, and because humans, by nature, generalize about the perceived world to draw conclusions, as well as to simply to function and think. For Isidore Isou, the founder of the Letterists where Debord was a member in the early 1950s, Kant’s philosophies were a “seed” (*gène*) that initiated the context for discussion used by following major European

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander Englert, “The Conceptual Origin of Worldview in Kant and Fichte,” *Journal of Transcendental Philosophy* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023.)

<sup>59</sup> Marcus Weigelt, “Preface,” *Critique of Pure Reason* (Penguin Classics, 2007): lix.

philosophers including “Schopenhauer, Hegel, Fichte and Nietzsche.” Kant’s ideas were like a “cupboard that govern all of the drawers it contains.”<sup>60</sup> Georges Gusdorf similarly argued that he spurred a “generation” of thinkers, and, when identifying the products of that generation, he does not defer to Hegel and Marx, but rather Kierkegaard and Heidegger who are also considered over the course of this dissertation.<sup>61</sup> Prior to Kant, the alienated relationship between the inner world of the Self and the material *world of things* was sparked by René Descartes’ *cogito*. Kant argues, “Our internal experience, which was undoubtable for Descartes, is only possible under the condition of external experience,” a quotation which appears in Mustapha Khayati’s reading notes on a course by Jean Brun at the University of Strasbourg.<sup>62</sup> However flawed subjectivity may be, some relationship exists in the exchange between Self and World wherein significance is garnered. Kant compared this phenomenon to the Copernican Revolution, which revealed that humanity was not the center of the universe. Instead, human subjectivity was disconnected from the universe. The universe did not prescribe meaning. Rather, human beings “receive and give sense to things,” leading, according to Jean Brun, not to “an attitude” that “is the basis of all humanisms and breaks with the anthropocentric theology of the Middle Ages.”<sup>63</sup> In response to the Copernican Revolution, Kant re-positioned humanity at the center of a world, but in a new way: the limitations of perception defined imagined spatial borders or limits. When Kant

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<sup>60</sup> Isidore Isou, *Agrégation d’un Nom et d’un Messie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1947): 157. “...À l’égal d’une armoire que est maîtresse de tous les tiroirs qu’elle contient.”

<sup>61</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480. Cf. Georges Gusdorf, *Introduction à l’Histoire de la Philosophie*: 137. “Si une génération de penseurs allemands se donne pour mot d’ordre le *zurück auf Kant*, c’est que la génération précédente s’en était écartée. Kierkegaard, théologien danois paradoxal et brillant homme de lettres à Copenhague en 1840, devient un siècle plus tard un grand philosophe européen et trouve en Jaspers et Heidegger des disciples qui font autorité. D’autres jugements de valeur s’imposent à l’intérieur même on n’aura jamais fini de redécouvrir l’intention de Descartes ou l’essence du Kantianisme.

<sup>62</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480, Series II.

<sup>63</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480, Series II. “En effet, on peut dire que la ‘révolution copernicienne’ entreprise par Kant est un des moments essentiels de l’histoire dans lequel l’homme cesse de se considérer comme un être qui reçoit un sens pour devenir l’être qui donne un sens aux choses, l’être pour lequel il y a un sens. Une telle attitude se trouve à la base de tous les humanismes et rompt avec les théologismes anthropocentriques du Moyen Age.”

describes the world of the mind, he plays with the language of geography. Brun explains that “Kant [...] tries to make himself the ‘geographer of human reason.’ He tries to draw up the ‘map’ of the understanding.”<sup>64</sup> By disconnecting the world of the mind from the *world of things*, Kant defines a separate inner space. Raoul Vaneigem sees this inner space as a world that can be projected onto the *world of things*: each individual “*Weltanschauung* operates as a practical ontology that people use to try to save themselves by integrating [their] truth into the real.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, human experience necessitates the projection of the interior world onto the exterior world.

Nevertheless, this projection, for Debord, then becomes curated through social understandings before integration into the Spectacle. Just as there is both individual consciousness and collective consciousness in Marcuse’s sense of the term which is social rather than natural as Jung would have it, *Weltanschauung* can describe both individual Inner Worlds as well as broader cultural worldviews. Khayati’s notes from Henri Lefebvre’s course on Everyday Life describe courtly love as a medieval “*Weltanschauung*” wherein Platonic symbols and poetic acts have created a world of perception through ritual and social expectation:

The ritual [of courtly love] is neither magical nor everyday. This gestural symbolism becomes a social language, the ritual of politeness. [...] Only beauty remains, in the place of dreams.<sup>66</sup>

Social niceties dissipate the everyday allowing specific kinds of socially expected symbols to dominate. A world of reproduction and repetition becomes characterized by imposed

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<sup>64</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480, Series II. “C’est pourquoi Kant reprend une expression et tente de se faire le “géographe de la raison humaine,” il s’efforce de dresser la “carte” de l’entendement. Car pour lui la tâche de la philosophie transcendante est de connaître la configuration de la facticité humaine, tout comme la géographie cherche à connaître la configuration du terrain, et d’en connaître les limites, tout comme la géographie politique nous instruit des frontières d’un pays.”

<sup>65</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, “Reading Notes,” Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>66</sup> Mustapha Khayati, Mustapha Khayati Papers, “Course Notes from the University of Strasbourg,” Box 2, GEN MSS 1480, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

predictabilities. Additional course notes from Lefebvre define *Weltanschauung* as philosophy that intends to construct a complete system which reflects that natural world:

In the philosophical picture of the universe, philosophy dominates the sciences, as a kind of science of sciences. [...] Starting from the dialectical method, elements are taken from these sectors from which we compose a *Weltanschauung*, a complete or almost complete system which is based on a philosophy of nature.<sup>67</sup>

While *Weltanschauung* may be an impossibly large subject, the concept can be contextualized into a historical moment. Nevertheless, that historical moment is sweeping, originating with Kant, but carrying throughout German thought of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Situationists considered canonical examples of German theories of *Weltanschauung* by Kant, Hegel, Göthe, and others, but they seemed ultimately interested in the child of this discourse: National Socialism (Nazism.) The “National Socialist worldview gr[ew] from the womb of German idealism,” argues Hans Sluga.<sup>68</sup> Debord’s reading notes include György Lukács’ *Göthe and his Age*. In this text, Lukács interprets German philosophies of *Weltanschauung* to be precursors to the “anti-democratic thought” of National Socialism (Nazism): “It is no accident that anti-democratic thinking developed as a *Weltanschauung* precisely in this Germany; that in the imperialistic period Germany played the leading role in the formulation of reactionary ideology.”<sup>69</sup>

Philosophers were not the only German theorists who engaged in discourse on *Weltanschauung*: psychoanalysts debated the philosophical subject and whether it related to psychology; artists developed totalizing theories of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art.”

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<sup>67</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480, Series II. “Dans le tableau philosophique de l’univers, la philosophie domine les sciences, comme une sorte de science des sciences. On montre qu’il y a une dialectique dans la nature, l’histoire, la pensée. On oppose formellement le matérialisme philosophique à l’idéalisme. Pas de troisième voie. La pensée reflète (et seulement reflète) la dialectique objective dans la nature et l’histoire. En partant de la méthode dialectique, on prélève dans ces secteurs des éléments dont on compose une *Weltanschauung*, un système achevé ou presque qui se fonde sur une philosophie de la nature.”

<sup>68</sup> Hans Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 29.

<sup>69</sup> György Lukács, *Göthe and his Age* Trans. Robert Anchor (London: Merlin Press, 1979): 10.

Debord's reading notes highlight Wilhelm Reich's critiques of Sigmund Freud particularly in relation to the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Reich's "Psychoanalysis and *Weltanschauung*" accused Freud of attempting to separate psychoanalysis and science from culture and daily life.

Psychoanalytic theory could be a *Weltanschauung*, argued Reich, because it is political, cultural, and philosophical. Freud disagreed, retorting that psychoanalysis was not a *Weltanschauung* because it was science, and science was used to inform ideas and politics rather than determine them.<sup>70</sup> Politics, as a result of Freud's denial, was thus given free rein to manipulate scientific findings, said Reich, which led to fascism. The ramifications of ignoring the politics of psychoanalysis would mean: "We must look on while the world plunges into the abyss, at present in the form of the fascist plague."<sup>71</sup> Debord responds to Reich's specific passage with the following note: "A rational *Weltanschauung* is a social order that is scientifically regulated. Reactionary concepts with revolutionary emotion have resulted in the fascist mentality."<sup>72</sup> Instead of framing rationalism and the *Weltanschauung* as a modern distinction from traditions of the past, Debord sees the rationalist *Weltanschauung* as imbued with "reactionary concepts." The legalism of the rationalist *Weltanschauung* furthermore tends toward regulation through science and positivism as in Freudian theories. Science and positivism are often seen as deviating from emotionality toward an emphasis on observant and logical practicality as Freud encouraged, perhaps in fear of the dangers of that combination. In general, Freud feared human emotion as in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Fascism, Debord argues, is an example to the contrary: it blends the emotional with the scientific. What Debord is perhaps not exploring in this theory is how fascist rationalism adopted some aspects of the unemotionality encouraged by positivists leading

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<sup>70</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Question of a *Weltanschauung*," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Pelican, 1973.)

<sup>71</sup> Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973): 209.

<sup>72</sup> Guy Debord, "Fiches de Lecture," NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

to cold perspectives on murder and death in the name of rationality. *Society of the Spectacle* (book) argues that fascism used scientific findings from psychoanalysis to create a culture of “conditioning and illusion,” which would lend itself to the postwar Spectacle<sup>73</sup>: “[Fascism’s] technically equipped archaism [and] most modern means of conditioning and illusion [are] factor[s] in the formation of the modern spectacle.”<sup>74</sup> Despite the culture and verbiage of scientific rationalism, Hitlerism, argued Lefebvre, had no intention of basing the scientific influences that it referenced in any reality or any consistent internal logic. “Hitlerism is far from having any real base,”<sup>75</sup> Lefebvre argued in *Hitler au Pouvoir*.<sup>76</sup> *Weltanschauungen* are inherently geared toward contradictions because they aim to explain reality in its entirety, which can only result in the contradictory. They go beyond intellectual circles, into life, into World. “Hitlerism” replaced “science, literature and philosophy” with “flattery” and “sleepwalking.” It defined standards not only for academic subjects but for “false needs” and “old culture” that would determine whether or not to drink coffee and eat meat. The interdisciplinary and everyday life did merge under one ideological *Weltanschauung* which was dictated by “naïve unreflective hero exaltation.”<sup>77</sup>

## 1.2. Overcoming the “Wasteland of Subjectivity”

While Debord drew from Kant to define the Spectacle, Debord and Situationists drew from others to consider revolution and everyday life, others who contested Kant and Marx alike. The

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<sup>73</sup> When Spectacle is treated as a totalizing concept rather than a specific descriptor (e.g. this show is a spectacle), this dissertation refers to it with a capital “S.” However, many texts refer to “the spectacle” with a lowercase “s,” and, when citing these documents, the initial decisions regarding capitalization are maintained.

<sup>74</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 109.

<sup>75</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir*: “L’hitlérisme est loin d’avoir une base aussi réelle.”

<sup>76</sup> Donald Nicholson-Smith Papers, Finding Aid, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 2131, [archives.yale.edu](http://archives.yale.edu).

<sup>77</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir*: 55. “La flatterie s’est donné tout licence, et dans un style prétentieux, elle a remplacé la science, la littérature et la philosophie. On a découvert en la personne du Führer tous les dons et toutes les vertus. Il est l’incarnation vivante de l’Allemagne et de la Race. Il est humain et sur-humain. Il a un don spontané, ‘sommambulique.’”

counter-Kantian approach to time for Situationists can be located as extending from the work of Gaston Bachelard. At the University of Paris, Bachelard was considered a nonconformist oddity in a sea of Kantians. His context could be characterized as a community whose “training, that of the École Normale, was classical and above all Greco-Latin, more or less Kantian”<sup>78</sup> in a way that aimed to “soften and transform” the “rigid [...] forms of Kantian understanding” and “bring together practical and theoretical reason, and sometimes even to give the latter a quasi-religious function of spirituality. Nothing could be further from Bachelard’s plan.”<sup>79</sup> Bachelard likewise was not a Hegelian-Marxist.<sup>80</sup>

When confronted with Kant’s notion of the transcendental *a priori*, particularly in relation to time, Bachelard paved a new avenue wherein time and space could be treated as material. Once time has passed, even as soon as a moment is put into words, it is no longer in existence. This differs not only from the idealist immateriality of Kant’s *a priori* time, but also the “programmatically materiality”<sup>81</sup> of Hegelian concepts of progress. Kant’s *Weltanschauung* is held cohesively together by transcendental *a priori* aspects of perception, space and time. Bachelard challenges Kant’s predictable continuing universal of the concept of “time” while Henri Lefebvre similarly finds ways to move discourse on space away from universals and abstracts, and rather toward social and particular analyses. Bachelard’s philosophy of moments created a

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<sup>78</sup> René Poirier, "Autour de Bachelard Épistémologue," *Bachelard: Colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1974): 11. "Leur formulation, celle de l'École Normale, était classique et avant tout gréco-latine, plus ou moins kantienne par ailleurs..."

<sup>79</sup> Poirier, "Autour de Bachelard Épistémologue": 21. Certes la plupart des philosophes universitaires du début de ce siècle, ceux qui ont été nos maîtres, avaient, en général sous l'influence de Kant, réduit toute la philosophie à la réflexion sur la nature de la raison et singulièrement de la raison épistémologique, qu'ils refusaient seulement de réduire aux formes rigides et cristallisées de l'entendement kantien et qu'ils entendaient nuancer, assouplir et transformer au cours de l'Histoire. Mais ils essayaient aussi de réunir raison pratique et raison théorique, et même parfois de donner à celle-ci une fonction de spiritualité quasi religieuse. Rien n'est plus éloigné du dessein de Bachelard."

<sup>80</sup> Poirier, "Autour de Bachelard Épistémologue": 17. "Bachelard est un contestataire permanent, qui appelle volontiers dialectique sa méthode de contestation. Non pas dialectique au sens hégéliano-marxiste [...] négation et négation de la négation [...]"

<sup>81</sup> Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tallly Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 10.

sense of time that was not transcendental or intuitive, but rather tangible, and yet he does not directly connect this to Marxist historical materialism. Perhaps ironically, the tangibility of moments was precisely what made them fleeting. This idea furthermore rejected Hegelian dialectics which, Bachelard argued, treated negation as a universal principle. Contrary to Wahl, Bachelard found negation for the sake of negation to be mere contrarianism. Zbigniew describes it as “like a shredder.”<sup>82</sup> Bachelard defines his method as “dialectical” but “not in the Hegelian-Marxist sense, with internal conflicts, negation and negation of negation.”<sup>83</sup> Bachelard’s criticisms of concepts of time by Kant, Hegel, and Marx alike characterizes Situationist critiques of dialectics, which appear when Kotányi describes dialectical contrarianism as “in the service of no one,” like Shiva’s dance of death. Lefebvre provides an indication that there are Hegelian trajectories that do not operate with such circular propensities for constant rejection, but he nevertheless dismisses “simple-minded Hegelianism.”<sup>84</sup>

In the mid-century, scientific paradigm shifts informed approaches to the philosophy of space and time in ways that undermined Kant, including Albert Einstein and Bernhard Riemann’s non-Euclidean geometry. In the opening to *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre recalls how the philosophy of space related to science through René Descartes and Cartesian geometry. Descartes’ science and philosophy of space were predicated on abstractions whereas non-Euclidean geometry adapted to physicality of the world, including cartography and mapmaking. Over the course of this dissertation, Lefebvre serves as a posterchild for the problematizing of idealism and materialism. While he rejected Kant’s depiction of space as an *a priori* (albeit relative) realm, and while he worked against generalizations (e.g. generalizing “mental space”),

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<sup>82</sup> Zbigniew Kotowicz, *Gaston Bachelard: A Philosophy of the Surreal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.)

<sup>83</sup> Poirier, "Autour de Bachelard Épistémologue": 17.

<sup>84</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, (New York: Verso, 2014): 133.

neither did he accept materialism or positivism. When Lefebvre engaged with abstract space, he related it to bureaucracy, Spectacle, and violence:

Abstract space [...] impl[ies] a ‘logic’ which misrepresents it and masks its contradictions, this space, which is that of bureaucracy, embodies a successful integration of spectacle and violence [...] We find that abstract space so understood is hard to distinguish from the space postulated by the philosophers, from Descartes to Hegel.<sup>85</sup>

While Lefebvre opens *The Production of Space* with Descartes and Kant, he seems to label Descartes as a point-of-origin. Differences in how to discuss introduce the philosophical lineage of the Spectacle differ in writings by Lefebvre, Bunyard, and this dissertation which demonstrate variability in any attempt to write an origin story. Any discussion of an origin, according to Situationists, creates a sense of identity similar to the identity projected on mythologies like Genesis.<sup>86</sup> This is a valuable concern, but every discussion needs to start somewhere. Given extensive reading notes on Kant and Kant’s relationship to *Weltanschauung*, it is likely that Debord, while critical of Kant, nevertheless did decide on *this* figure as a possible point-of-origin for discussions of the Spectacle.

The Spectacle, similar to Kant’s *Weltanschauung*, displays and argues coherence in its world, and uses its recurring internal arguments to control society. The shift from Kant’s *Weltanschauung* to the theory of the Spectacle is a shift from theories of perception to representation. In an illusory world, the “trust”<sup>87</sup> that Kant had in the reality of perceived experiences and objects becomes manipulated. Kant argues that all perception is in a way representation,<sup>88</sup> but Debord distinguishes the two in the very first sentences of *Society of the*

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<sup>85</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 1991): 308.

<sup>86</sup> This theme appears in letters between Guy Debord and Attila Kotányi as well as *Les Initiés d’Occident* by Jean-Louis Brau. Jean-Louis Brau, *Les Initiés d’Occident*, (Paris: MA Editions, 1986). Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

<sup>87</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*: 31.

<sup>88</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*: 203. “Experience is possible only through the representation of a necessary connection of perceptions.”

*Spectacle*: “All that was once lived has moved to representation.”<sup>89</sup> That is not to say that experiences of representations are not real insofar as they are experiences. These experiences create images that are real insofar as they are images and they relate to real social structures and real reactions, even if that reaction is passivity or “catatonic”<sup>90</sup> dreamlike spectatorship. If Kant is trapped in a world of perception, which moves to a world where perception is further entrapped in representation, then there is at least one limited *Weltanschauung* that might be broken: it might be possible to awaken from the world of illusory images even while it is not possible to move beyond the malleability and untrustworthiness of subjectivity itself.

Khayati’s course notes on Lefebvre regarding Hegel and Hippolyte observe: “Knowledge is the superseding (*dépassement*) of consciousness. Consciousness must be overcome.”<sup>91</sup> When Vaneigem thinks of Kant, he thinks of the limitations of entrapment in a world of perceptions—they result in “academic eunuchs.”<sup>92</sup> Khayati and Vaneigem hoped to transcend this disconnect between the Self and the World, but they nevertheless did not deny that there are essential separations between people even beyond the heightened alienation of the Spectacle. Despite an aim to transcend Kantian subjectivity, Situationist ideas are informed by Kant. Attila Kotányi looks in the mirror. “I am a Kantian! How awful”<sup>93</sup>: the limitations of subjectivity are framed as debilitating.

While Debord clearly deviates from Kant when it comes to an approach to universal ethics, Kantian ethics is nevertheless a precursor to the humanist circles that influenced Marx to

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<sup>89</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 9. Thesis 1: “Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s’annonce comme une immense accumulation de spectacles. Tout ce qui était directement vécu s’est éloigné dans une représentation.”

<sup>90</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 153.

<sup>91</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480, Series II. “Le savoir est le dépassement de la conscience. Il faut surmonter la conscience. ”

<sup>92</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

<sup>93</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. “Et je ne me regarde pas seulement dans la glace. Je me critique! Je suis kantien. C’est affreux.”

consider critiques of capitalism and working conditions,<sup>94</sup> which were central to Situationist political trajectories. Michael Stone-Richards argues that Debord was a sort of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century moralist.<sup>95</sup> It is true that Debord and Situationists did have strong opinions about right and wrong (e.g. Josef Stalin was wrong and oppressive), and they are, whether they like it or not, part of a legacy from Kant through Marxism as well as the French academy. Responding to the oppressive regulatory horrors of authoritarianism, which characterized the politics of World War II, Debord's collaborator, Marcel Mariën, argued that the most moral action was to oppose any law.<sup>96</sup> Laws universalized, which postwar Surrealists argued lead to prejudices and even atrocities.

Kant universalizes a philosophy of history in his argument for an "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," which, like his approach to ethics, is thinly tempered by caveats of the limitations of human perception. This text appears in Debord's notes on philosophy. History, like Keplerian and Newtonian systems, can be reducible to a few generalizable natural laws, says Kant. He sees labor and subjugation as laws of nature comparable to the "systemic structure of the cosmos." "Man is an animal which, if it lives among others of its kind, requires a master." "Nature wills that [humanity] should be plunged from sloth and passive contentment into labor and trouble."<sup>97</sup> Thus, Kant's reductive concept of universal history is reminiscent of what Debord calls a *second nature* (*seconde nature*) in *Society*

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<sup>94</sup> Philip Kain, "Aristotle, Kant, and the Ethics of the Young Marx," (Santa Clara: Santa Clara University, 1992.)

<sup>95</sup> Michael Stone-Richards, "Néo-stoïcisme et éthique de la gloire: le baroque chez Guy Debord," *Pleine Marge* 34 (Paris: CNRS, 2001).

<sup>96</sup> Marcel Mariën, "Le Portrait Moral du Surréalisme" *l'Activité Surréaliste en Belgique* (Brussels: Le Fil Rouge/Éditions Lebeer Hossman, 1979): 362.

<sup>97</sup> Guy Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Philosophie*, (Paris: Éditions l'Échappée, Forthoming). Included with permission. "Nous avons fait progresser l'exigence que Kant. (*Idée d'une histoire universelle au point de vue cosmopolite*) reconnaissait comme celle de 'la nature,' qui voudrait que l'intelligence de l'homme s'enrichisse jusqu'à lui permettre de se dérober à l'obligation d'assumer le travail. Notion de 'sociabilité asociale,' la tendance de l'homme à constituer une société, tendance qui s'accompagne cependant d'une résistance générale qui menace continuellement de dissoudre la société."

of the Spectacle,<sup>98</sup> which is ideological rather than the scientifically provable. Kant concedes, “it is strange and apparently silly to wish to write a history in accordance with an idea of how the course of the world must be if it is to lead to certain rational ends.” However, he does it anyway, calling universal history a “guiding thread for presenting a system.”<sup>99</sup>

There is a significant difference between building or supporting a philosophical *Weltanschauung* and arguing that the Spectacle takes on characteristics of *Weltanschauung*. The Spectacle, unlike Kant’s *Weltanschauung*, does not claim to be natural. The Spectacle, a materialized *Weltanschauung*, takes *Weltanschauung* out of the individual, the mind, and perception, instead extending into collective consciousness that is modern and located in an historical moment. The Spectacle, unlike those trapped in a Kantian subjectivity, can be transcended, and separated from associations with individual identity. Lefebvre argues that it is these tendencies in the history of philosophy that have led to a point where philosophy needs to be destroyed and transcended.<sup>100</sup> Lefebvre and the Situationists were not the first to approach philosophy and specifically *Weltanschauung* as insufficient and stagnant. Marx argued that “the goal is not to understand the world, but to transform it.”<sup>101</sup> Hegel argued that history was marked by dialectical shifts. Marx invited his audience to become the inventors of a transformed world; that Marxist revolution has a creative aspect. He locates and explains the history of his time, and then asks how it can be disrupted to the point that it could become something new and, hopefully, better. Debord similarly sees the Spectacle as historical. Recognizing its historicity

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<sup>98</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 18.

<sup>99</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Marxists Internet Archive) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/universal-history.htm>.

<sup>100</sup> Henri Lefebvre, “The Withering Away of the State,” *State/Space/World*.

<sup>101</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

rather than interpreting it as natural and universal provides the necessary consciousness for revolutionary action.<sup>102</sup>

Ontology, like the Spectacle, is “fixed;” “frozen,” says Debord. The study of philosophy, the attempt to explain what *is*, does not attempt to transform, says Marx, which Situationists quote and apply strategies of *détournement* repeatedly. Bertrand Cochard writes: “Debord does not enter into an ‘ontological’ critique of the image or representation-in-itself, which would create an obstacle to ‘authentic,’ direct understanding of the world.”<sup>103</sup> Cochard, instead, sees Debord’s view of the world as driven by movement and transformation rather than stagnation.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Debord identifies these issues with ontology, and does not consider his approach ontological but rather based on a *world in flux*. Nevertheless, Debord and Situationists do extensively consider ontological arguments and use them to create a theory of the Spectacle, which is in fact describable through themes of stagnation because the Spectacle is not the same as reality. The Spectacle is a cyclical loop ruled by the past that entraps. Reality, contrarily, for Situationists, can be characterized by movement and flux, particularly through revolutionary initiative. This allows for the possibility of transformation.

Transforming the predominant *Weltanschauung* of the Spectacle means conversing with the *Weltanschauung* that already exists. Through a range of literature, most of which was written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Debord curated ideas and images to reveal the structure of the modern *Weltanschauung* of the Spectacle and uses arguments against themselves. The Spectacle operates through a mimicry of reality, and therefore grains of truth can be found within

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<sup>102</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 116.

<sup>103</sup> Bertrand Cochard, “Spectacle et Représentation,” *Hermann Philosophie*, (2021): 245. “Debord n’insère pas une critique ‘ontologique’ de l’image ou de la représentation en soi, qui ferait obstacle à l’appréhension ‘authentique,’ directe, du monde.”

<sup>104</sup> Bertrand Cochard, “Spectacle et Représentation”: 246.

it, amid an atmosphere of “distortion:”<sup>105</sup> *Détournement* represents a dialectical worldview, which extends from Hegelian thought, but it contrasts starkly from Platonic idealism in that abstract meanings of words and images are easily detached from original meanings to the point of being arbitrary.

*Détournement* represents a *world in flux*; a world where ideas are malleable and inconstant. This transformative potential presents a strategy and an ideal that is contrary to the repetitive and predictable pacing that the Spectacle presents. While the Spectacle circulates recurring ideas and tropes, *détournement* takes the existing materials and twists them with new arguments, thereby creating an element of surprise that disrupts the sense of recurring circularity. In terms of pacing and circularity, the Spectacle represents a relationship to time wherein the past dominates the present.<sup>106</sup> However, representation is not actuality and, outside of the illusions it produces, the Spectacle, in its global expansion, moves.<sup>107</sup> Through globalization and in the greatly reduced amount of time that it takes to travel, sense of space has dissolved. The time of the Spectacle does not model itself based on nature, as historically cyclic societies did, but it does create a loop, trapped in a pseudo-world of a pseudo-past. In this loop, time is frozen, much like the sense of time in unchanging authoritarian societies, and frozen time, due to its lack of movement, acts like space: “Time was motionless — a sort of enclosed space.”<sup>108</sup> The frozen ontology of Kant’s *Weltanschauung* does not seem to adequately account for the potential for the agility of Spectacle and the possibilities that it presents for warping rationality.

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<sup>105</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Trans. Donald Nicholson Smith, (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 150.

<sup>106</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 85.

<sup>107</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 107.

<sup>108</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 92.

The film, *Society of the Spectacle*, and the book both use *détournement* as primary strategies. The book uses the literary tool of pastiche, which is called “plagiarism,”<sup>109</sup> to reinvent the ideas of philosophers, theoreticians, and literary figures. The film presents examples of spectacular production as evidence for its critique, but also as more than mere evidence. Debord manipulates the pacing and emotional investment garnered by spectacular materials with the intention of demystifying tricks as well as reapplying tactics that create emotional investment in ideas.

Slang provides another example that Situationists consider *détournement*. Etymology studies how words can adopt their opposite meanings over time, which Alice-Becker Ho discusses in relation to slang.<sup>110</sup> For example, in American slang, “bad” can mean “good.” To some degree, the dialectic between bad and good is historically definable, and bad as good could imply rebellion. In fact, in general, the warping or changing of words’ meanings often signifies an act of rebellion. Etymology is simply a series of mutable definability and historical movement, which Attila Kotányi’s teacher, Lajos Szabó, defines as “language materialism.”<sup>111</sup> The model for *détournement* found in slang involves intentionally altering the meanings of words, shifting the meaning away from the initial intention, often toward its opposite. Situationist Alice Becker-Ho considered slang — particularly slang of the “underworld” — to be a representation of a worldview with similar principles of negation as *détournement*:

Slang views the world as a dialectical totality where each thing contains its own negation; a place consequently where everything can be turned around and take on the opposite, or a complementary, meaning.<sup>112</sup>

Slang was not only a negation, but also the creation of an alternative worldview:

Popular language struggles on equal terms with official language, representing and defending its own values, its own conception of the world.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 166.

<sup>110</sup> Alice Becker-Ho, *The Essence of Jargon*, Trans. John McHale, (New York: Autonomedia, 2015.)

<sup>111</sup> Lajos Szabó and Béla Tábor, *Vádirat a Szellem Ellen* (Budapest: Pannon, 1991.)

<sup>112</sup> Alice Becker-Ho, *The Essence of Jargon*, Trans. John McHale, (New York: Autonomedia, 2015): 81.

As an action, *détournement* is a form of communication like a language, often employed through images but also through words, that takes on popular media, arguments, and images to shift it toward its “own conception of the world.” That conception of the world is variable based on the worldview of the creator, but even *détournement* itself (like slang) represents a view of the world. *Détournement* is an action and a strategy for creation, but, like Becker-Ho’s description of slang, it also represents a view of the world as a “dialectical totality wherein each thing contains its own negation; a place consequently where everything can be turned around and take on the opposite, or a complementary, meaning.”<sup>114</sup>

“Language materialism” is a notably different concept of materialism than definitions proposed by positivism or empiricism because it takes into account the concept of a material world that is in flux rather than stagnant. In this way, it is reminiscent of Bachelard’s materialist understanding of time as unique passing moments that, once gone, can never truly be recreated. Language, which inherently generalizes, can be considered materially through historical change over time and through association, but it nevertheless retains a certain detachment from the *world of things*. Situationist ideas, including the definition of the Spectacle, often blur traditional distinctions between materialism and idealism. If idealism can be defined as the concept that things in the world cannot be known outside of the mind, and if materialism can be defined as the concept that the physical world and objects can be perceived with some degree of actual empirical understanding, then the materialized *Weltanschauung* of the Spectacle blurs this distinction. Motivations for this blur to some degree extend from Lefebvre, as indicated in Lefebvre’s course notes which are in Khayati’s papers at Yale: “Choosing between materialism

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<sup>113</sup> Becker-Ho, *The Essence of Jargon*: 60.

<sup>114</sup> Becker-Ho, *The Essence of Jargon*: 81.

and idealism is based on debatable and outdated options.”<sup>115</sup> Idealism and materialism are blurred when the world of perception becomes the material world, bringing the limits of perception into existence. Both idealism and materialism represent similar and related limitations that are also mechanisms for social control present in the Spectacle:

The contemplative side 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 automatically the masters of social life. Reciprocally, the dreamed activity of idealism is equally fulfilled in the spectacle, through the technical mediation of signs and signals, which ultimately materialize an abstract ideal.<sup>116</sup>

### 1.3. What is a “World”?

“World” is distinguishable from “planet” because “world” implies human construction based on human ideas. A world, like the planet, is physical insofar as human constructions are physical. Urbanism for example leads to the construction of “worlds” because the construction of cities is informed by human invention and therefore human ideology. Paintings and novels, like constructed cities, have physicality as well insofar as words, paint, pages, and canvases are forms of material. Thus “world” is material but also ideological. “Planet” is not merely material either. Henri Lefebvre argues that by the postwar period the planet along with nature had become curated by humanity as though jungles were mere gardens, thus creating some degree of overlap between the concepts of “World” and “Planet.”<sup>117</sup> However, despite the ubiquity of human involvement with nature, aspects of the natural “planet” that remain include ecological repercussions of human involvement like pollution and the possibility for nuclear annihilation, which Debord addresses in *A Sick Planet*.<sup>118</sup> The journal *Planète* edited by Louis Pauwels and

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<sup>115</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 1480. “Sur l’option entre le matérialisme et l’idéisme, option dont les termes mêmes sont très discutables et qui se trouve dépassée [...]”

<sup>116</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977.)

<sup>117</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *State/Space/World*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 221.

<sup>118</sup> Guy Debord, *A Sick Planet*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Seagull Books, 2008.)

Jacques Bergier, forwarded contrary arguments that the planet and its cosmic surrounds were greater than human involvement, history, life, and society. *Planète*'s rejection of reality favored the *surreal* and the occult over a search for Truth, which they justified with nihilistic arguments from Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger.<sup>119</sup> Debord responded to the nihilistic idea that Truth and reality are unknowable and therefore should be disregarded. He considered nihilism to be "comfortable" and ultimately "irrefutable" but concluded that it nevertheless *must* be challenged. Dismissing the value of human existence, life, love, and human experience leads to a "prison." The defense of "new realities" thus becomes the "trade" of Situationists who simply do not know what else to do. Their revolution is based on "new realities" that are driven solely by the motivation of finding "a certain idea of happiness."<sup>120</sup>

The Situationist International both refutes and extends from a history of the avant-garde. Language surrounding the concept of the world in the early avant-garde can be useful to compare to Debord's word choice as well as similar language used pervasively by Situationists in *Internationale Situationniste*. For example, while Debord and Situationists often refer to "world" (*monde*) and "international" (*internationale*), they deter from related terms that were popular among their Dadaist predecessors including "transnational" (*transnationale*) and "cosmopolitan" (*cosmopolite*). Effie Rentzou describes how Dadaists rarely characterized themselves as

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<sup>119</sup> Sven Lütticken, "Shattered Matter, Transformed Forms," *E-Flux Journal* 96, (New York: *E-Flux*, 2019.)

<sup>120</sup> Guy Debord, "Pour en finir avec le confort nihiliste," *Internationale Lettriste* 3 (Paris: 1954.) "Nous savons que toutes les réalités nouvelles sont elles-mêmes provisoires, et toujours peu pour nous suffire. Nous les défendons parce que nous ne connaissons rien de mieux à faire ; et parce qu'est, en somme, notre métier. Mais l'indifférence ne nous est pas permise devant les étouffantes valeurs du présent ; quand elles sont garanties par une société de prisons, et quand nous vivons devant les portes des prisons. Nous ne voulons à aucun prix participer, accepter de nous taire, accepter. Ne serait-ce que par orgueil, il nous déplaît de ressembler à trop de gens. Le vin rouge et la négation dans les cafés, les vérités premières du désespoir ne seront pas l'aboutissement de ces vies si difficiles à défendre contre les pièges du silence, les cent manières de SE RANGER. Au-delà de ce manque toujours ressenti, au-delà de l'inévitable et inexcusable déperdition de tout ce que nous avons aimé, le jeu se joue encore, nous sommes. Toute forme de propagande sera donc bonne. Nous avons à promouvoir une insurrection qui nous concerne, à la mesure de nos revendications. Nous avons à témoigner d'une certaine idée du bonheur même si nous l'avons connue perdante, idée sur laquelle tout programme révolutionnaire devra d'abord s'aligner.

“international,” a classifier that was projected onto them by Marxist-Leninist academics.<sup>121</sup>

Given the strong influence of Karl Marx and the albeit contrary dialectic with Vladimir Illyich Ilyonv (Lenin)’s “internationalism” within Situationist discourse, it is logical that they would use this particular term to describe themselves given the qualifier that “internationalism” was a “*détournement*,” meaning that Debord specifically argued that the concept of the “international” would need to be reinvented to detach from Leninist circles and ideologies.<sup>122</sup> “Cosmopolitan” (*cosmopolite*) was often used by Dadaists and their interlocuters, but rarely appears in the literature of the Situationist International especially given its longstanding influence from Dada and the avant-garde.<sup>123</sup> A difference in connotation between “cosmopolitan” and “international” likely relates to class distinction. While Marxists saw the “workers of the world” as sharing attributes “internationally” like the exploitation of their labor, “cosmopolitanism” connotes the privilege to travel or, as Rentzou describes it, “the travelling elite.”<sup>124</sup> This privilege was politically characterized as a disconnect from connection to the material world, or the “real” world; a world that is defined by labor like working the physical land or, for Jules Méline, “a return to the land” (*retour à la terre*), the title of his 1905 conservative political text.<sup>125</sup>

Etymologically, “cosmopolitan” contains the root *polites* or citizens which Rentzou describes as

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<sup>121</sup> Effie Rentzou, *Concepts of the World: The French Avant-Garde and the Idea of the International, 1910-1940* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2022).

<sup>122</sup> *D’une révolution à l’autre*, ed. Sylvano Santini (Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2023):109. “La notion d’Internationale est à préciser, dans le sens qui doit être le nôtre. Pour nous, c’est déjà évidemment une notion détournée.”

<sup>123</sup> In 1958, Guy Debord wrote Patrick Straram, displaying a rare occasion when the word *cosmopolite* is used. It was also in this letter that he found the group centralizing in France, but that, nevertheless, the French group could be described as cosmopolitan. Guy Debord to Patrick Straram, October 3, 1958, *Correspondance* 1 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1999). “La tendance générale est à la centralisation. D’ailleurs la section situationniste est encore très inactives en Allemagne ou en Scandinavie ; absolument fantôme évidemment en Algérie (où Dahou est). La section française, elle-même cosmopolite, a jusqu’à présent servi de centre (position géographique, le français est notre seule langue commune) et a commencé l’édition de notre revue. À présent la conjoncture politique ici pose déjà le problème de son transfert en Belgique ou en Italie (surveillance de la police allant jusqu’à la table d’écoute, et qui risque de s’aggraver beaucoup à la parution du n° 2, en novembre je pense).”

<sup>124</sup> Effie Rentzou, *Concepts of the World: The French Avant-Garde and the Idea of the International, 1910-1940* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2022).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

taking a connotation of “moral, political, and cultural universalism.”<sup>126</sup> The Situationist critique of Spectacle as World, or materialized *Weltanschauung*, is a critique of universalist and moralizing thinking. Values differ when comparing Situationist rebellion against authority to the term citizenship insofar as citizenship carries the connotation of lawfulness toward an institutional structure, including if the scope of that structure is not a nation but the entire world.

In *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook*, Bertrand Cocharde briefly considers how Situationists considered the concepts of “international” and “world.”<sup>127</sup> There is one main issue with his short exploration: that “international” and “world” are not differentiated. Later, Cocharde focuses directly on the concept of “World” in relation to Spectacle in *Guy Debord et la Philosophie* (2021). He analyzes *Society of the Spectacle* according to descriptions of “the world of the Spectacle” (*le monde du spectacle*.)<sup>128</sup> In this exploration, he recognizes that Debord rejects ontology as “frozen,”<sup>129</sup> leading Cocharde to disregard ontology and instead focus on Debord’s readings of political thinkers like Karl Marx and Anton Pannekoek who find the revolutionary potential of a “world in flux.” Cocharde draws parallel conclusions to this dissertation, that the world is in flux, but, over the course of the next five chapters, this dissertation will show that Debord and Situationists did employ interpretations of ontology and philosophy as a means of understanding the Spectacle. Furthermore, while the world is in flux, Spectacle is not synonymous with the *world of things* or reality. It is a “pseudo-world” that circulates, repeats, and freezes images just as ontology “freezes” ideas. Thus, this dissertation will consider ontology as (1) a means of understanding Spectacle and (2) as a framework to

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook*, ed. Alastair Hemmens and Gabriel Zacarias (London: Pluto Press, 2020): 290-300.

<sup>128</sup> Bertrand Cocharde, “Le Monde du Spectacle,” *Hermann Philosophie* (2021).

<sup>129</sup> Bertrand Cocharde, “Spectacle et Représentation,” *Hermann Philosophie* (2021): 245. “Debord n’insère pas une critique ‘ontologique’ de l’image ou de la représentation en soi, qui ferait obstacle à l’appréhension ‘authentique,’ directe, du monde.”

dialectically converse with the Marxist concept of a *world in flux* wherein change is possible.

This Marxist *world in flux* will be informed by Situationist interpretations as well as by postwar theories of Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, and others.

“International” and “World” can be differentiated as following. “World” necessitates the consideration of ontological questions to define principles that create a cohesive environment within a society, a text, a Self, or various other human constructions. These ontological questions explore how “reality” is defined, which includes questions of perception and of representation through images, texts, mythologies and philosophies. Contrarily, “international” refers to a variety of physical points on the globe. The “international” can explore diverse national identities, the transcendence of national identity; liminal spaces between nationalities; or the interplay of different nationalities with one another (*inter-national*). This dissertation approaches the subject of “World” rather than “International.”

#### **1.4. Washing out Heidegger**

One German philosopher who wrote extensively on *Weltanschauung* and World was intentionally removed from nearly every Situationist exploration of the concept of World: Martin Heidegger. This does not mean that his name *never* appeared. On several occasions, he was openly denounced by Situationists for sympathies for the Nazi party.<sup>130</sup> However, several scholars, including Giorgio Agamben and Thomas Levin, analyze the Situationist concept of Spectacle in relation to Heidegger. Given Heidegger’s preeminence in 1950s and 1960s French academia, his continual treatment by Henri Lefebvre, and his appearances in *Arguments*, it seems not only reasonable but essential to consider Heidegger in relation to concepts of the Spectacle, particularly insofar as it relates to theories of World and ontology. If Debord’s “plagiarism” was

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<sup>130</sup> “The Adventures of a Partial Analysis,” *Internationale Situationniste* 10, (Paris: Situationist International, 1965.) *Internationale Situationniste* 10 expressed confusion and frustration as to why so many within the French academy “refuse[d] to admit that [Heidegger] [...] really could have been a Nazi.”

intended to use “expressions” by authors in order to make “wrong” ideas “right” while withholding their names, it is probable that he had Heidegger in mind. Many of Heidegger’s principles are flipped on their head in Situationist theories, which extends from Henri Lefebvre’s career-long effort to construct a philosophy where the everyday triumphs over timeless ontological Being. Direct critiques of Heidegger can be found in Situationist readings of texts like *The Jargon of Authenticity*.

Heidegger was a definitive influence on the work of two groups that *Internationale Situationniste* targeted and denounced: *Arguments*, an academic journal run by Edgar Morin that included members like Lefebvre, Kostas Axelos, Joseph Gabel, and Roland Barthes; as well as *Planète*, an anti-Marxist occultist journal run by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier to which Axelos ardently contributed. *Internationale Situationniste* followed *Arguments* with significant closeness and precision,<sup>131</sup> but persistently critiqued the aestheticism that continually appeared in articles as well as their interpretations of *Arguments*’ political leanings which they saw as indicated by the presence of Heidegger’s ideas, as well as Stalinism<sup>132</sup> and monarchism.<sup>133</sup> *Arguments* reread Marx through Heidegger, which, Anselm Jappe argues, resulted more in a denouncement of Marx than a dialectical use of Marx’s ideas. Anselm Jappe argues that it was the “critical Marxism” and academicism of *Arguments* that resulted in Situationist spite:

Marx was in turn Hegelian-ized, Kierkegaard-ized, abundantly Heidegger-ized, in short, ‘revised’ one way or another before having been properly assimilated. The unsatisfactory results of such enterprises, along with their proponents were for the most part thinkers, whether within universities or elsewhere, who were paid by the state, generally meant that ‘critical Marxism’ was rapidly transformed into a critique of Marx himself and ultimately into a condemnation of him. A kind of

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<sup>131</sup> Debord followed *Arguments* closely enough to, for example, opt for Axelos’ translations of Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*, and Hegel’s *Differences in the Philosophical Systems of Fichte and Schelling*. Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>132</sup> Guy Debord, Mustapha Khayati, and René Viénet to Aletheia, 1966, *Correspondence* 3 (Paris: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 2008).

<sup>133</sup> “Renseignements Situationnistes,” *Internationale Situationniste* 5, (Paris: Situationist International, 1960): 13.

champion and pioneer here was the journal *Arguments*—a favorite target of the Situationists’—which followed this trajectory perfectly during a few years of its existence (1957-63). The *Arguments* group nevertheless contributed a good deal by way of translations into French—many of which the Situationists made use of—including the first publication in French of works by the young Lukács, Korsch, Marcuse, Reich, and Adorno.<sup>134</sup>

Given that Guy Debord himself called this biography by Jappe the best available,<sup>135</sup> it can perhaps be assumed that Debord did not take particular issue with this assessment. Nevertheless, given the Situationist penchant for criticism and negation, it is plausible that their issue was not so much that *Arguments* critiqued Marx, which Situationists did as well, and not so much that *Arguments* was interested in Hegel and Kierkegaard, who the Situationists were actively reading and using as well. Rather, *Arguments* propelled Marxist ideas into poetic opacity contrary to *praxis* that was driven by psychoanalysis as well as the ideas of Heidegger. Situationists rejected all “isms,” including “Situationism,” and they stated that they were “not Marxists in the same way that Marx was not a Marxist” because they were opposed to all dogma. However, their distancing from Marxism was not only a means of distancing from isms and doctrines, but they also were open to criticizing Marx.<sup>136</sup> Situationists did not intend to deviate entirely from Marx’s aims, but rather they intended to update his ideas for a new century. Odes to Marx can be seen through the cover of Mustapha Khayati’s *On the Poverty of Student Life*, which donned a greyish mint green intended to replicate the color of the cover of Marx’s *On the Poverty of Philosophy*.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oakland: PM Press, 2018).

<sup>135</sup> Guy Debord to Anselm Jappe, April 21, 1994, *Correspondences*, 7 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2008). "Je vous remercie pour votre livre reçu hier. Je l'ai lu avec intérêt. J'ai bien apprécié son niveau de pensée, son information, et la sympathie compréhensive qu'il manifeste à mon égard: par là il se détache extraordinairement de tous les autres textes traitant le sujet."

<sup>136</sup> Guy Debord, *A Sick Planet*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (London: Seagull, 2007): 91. "Nineteenth-century scientific optimism founded over three main issues. The first was the claim that revolution was certain and that it would ensure the happy resolution of existing conflicts; this was the left-Hegelian and Marxist illusion. (...) The second issue was the view of the universe, or even simply of matter, as harmonious." This quotation will be discussed in greater depth in the chapter, "The End of the World."

<sup>137</sup> Members of the Situationist International and Students from Strasbourg, *On the Poverty of Student Life* (Pennsylvania: Common Notions, 2022).

Open engagement with Heidegger from even the “finest minds” propelled academic French salons like *Arguments* and Jacques Lacan to what Situationists saw as “obscure” “poetic[ism]”:

For the admiration of idiots in the salons of Paris, Lacan reprises Heidegger’s formula (which has been so successful lately in the salons of Paris that even the finest minds refuse to admit that such a profound thinker could really have been a Nazi.) Between them, and with no other motive than that of dazzling the gallery, Heidegger and Lacan carry out the obscure dispersal of language that they discovered in the final phase of modern poetic writing.<sup>138</sup>

*Internationale Situationniste* 5 characterizes *Arguments* as the “pseudo-Leftist intelligentsia,”<sup>139</sup> which was published in 1961, the same year that Situationists boycotted all contributors to *Arguments*, including Lefebvre. At this point, Situationists decided that it had evolved to be “counter revolutionary.” The language used by the members of *Arguments* often coincided with Situationist language. This presented an issue with language — the thinkers of *Arguments* “infected”<sup>140</sup> words and ideas that were necessary to use. “The word alienation, for example, one of the key concepts for the comprehension of modern society, must be disinfected after having passed through the mouths of people like [Kostas] Axelos,”<sup>141</sup> a core contributor to *Arguments*. In 1966, Debord, Khayati, and Viénet wrote a journal influenced by Heidegger and Axelos, *Aletheia*, wherein they argued: “There is no point in asking for us to continue to refuse you at greater length when it comes to a journal that does not even understand what Heidegger is and which makes space for Axelos, an active Stalinist.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> “The Adventures of a Partial Analysis,” *Internationale Situationniste* 10, (Paris: Situationist International, 1965.)

<sup>139</sup> “Renseignements Situationnistes,” *Internationale Situationniste* 5, (Paris: Situationist International, 1960): 13.

<sup>140</sup> Mustapha Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bop Secrets, 2006): 222-227.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondence*, 3 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003): 16. “Il est inutile de motiver plus longuement notre refus quand il s'agit d'une revue qui n'a même pas compris ce qu'est Heidegger, et qui fait sa place à un Axelos, à un stalinien encore en activité, etc.”

Insight into the Situationist contentions with *Arguments* can be found within *Arguments* 19, which *Internationale Situationniste* directly references as an example of a reprehensible issue of the journal. The introduction by Axelos, “L’Art en Question,” discusses how art creates a world within the world. Contemporary politicization and social explorations of works of art distance viewers from the experience of the world of a work of art, depriving art of its former celebratory role as a sacred world, argues Axelos. Art is derived from nature (or, for Heidegger, the “Earth”), but it links to divinity through a “cosmic game,” thereby transcending an age-old dichotomy between the physical world and the heavens. Axelos in *Arguments* 19 aims to rejoin art to its sacred roots where it can constitute “worlds and to constitute the world,” as apparently suggested by “Hegel and Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger.”<sup>143</sup> Axelos’ search for sacred origins rejects political arguments. He hopes for the possibility of re-immersion into the worlds created by art. Situationists were consistent in their contrary stance against the mystifying worlds created by art. Their goal, clearly contrary to Axelos, was demystification.<sup>144</sup> The idea that art was mystifying would lead the group to an overt anti-art platform in the early 1960s.

The relationship of “Worldness” to art for Heidegger is in the connection between the essence and Being of an artist and their creation that uses elements of the physical “Earth.” In “The Origin of a Work of Art: Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger marks differences between Earth and World that influenced Lefebvre:

We are told, on the one hand, that the work of art in the World is ‘opened-up,’ on the other, that this World ‘reposes’ in the ‘earth,’ sc. The material elements (e.g. pigments, marble, musical notes) out of which the work is fashioned. Both are complementary ‘... the World is grounded on earth and earth permeates the

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<sup>143</sup> Kostas Axelos, “L’Art en Question,” *Arguments* 19 (La Rochelle: l’Ouest, 1960): 5. “Cependant la poésie et l’art rejoignent leur origine énigmatique—que personne ne saurait nommer explicitement ni figurer—d’où ils se détachés pour se constituer en mondes et pour constituer le monde; ainsi la poésie et l’art, débordant étrangement le poème et l’œuvre autonomisés, tendraient à trouver leur fin et à se dépasser—Hegel et Marx, Nietzsche et Heidegger l’ont entrevu—dans ce et par ce qu’on appelle, en bal et en butinant, monde et devenir, vie et être.”

<sup>144</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10 (Paris: Situationist International, 1965.)

World.’ [...] The world and earth are in continual contention with the result that in a work of art the struggle between the positivity and negativity of truth takes place. ‘...The earth permeates the World, the World is grounded in earth, and only insofar as truth, the primordial Discord between effulgence and concealment, comes to pass.’<sup>145</sup>

Technology, Heidegger says, allows humanity to cultivate the Earth, as in Hölderlin’s references to the Homeric hymn, *To Earth, Mother of All*.<sup>146</sup> While Heidegger sees this cultivation as at

once nourishing and encouragingly open to conquest, Debord sees the human creation of the World through image production, art, and technology as destructive to the natural Earth.<sup>147</sup>

Lefebvre seems to argue similarly to Debord at times, but at other times appears inclined toward a celebration of technological conquest similar to Heidegger. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden write in the Introduction to *State/Space/World*, an anthology of Lefebvre’s writings:

One of the analyses Lefebvre considered most productive was Axelos’s 1961 book [...], *Marx, Thinker of Technology, from the Alienation of Man to the Conquest of the World*. Lefebvre reviewed this Heideggerian reading of Marx for the journal *Esprit* in 1962. In that review, Lefebvre suggested that through technology, humans are conjoined to the process of ‘becoming worldwide and planetary’ and that, as a consequence, they may ‘finally be able to enjoy or command the Earth.’<sup>148</sup>

Giorgio Agamben aims to situate “the heritage of Debord” in “thought” through comparisons to Heidegger’s discussion of technology (*Gestell*) in *Being and Time*. Spectacle, like Heidegger’s *Gestell*, removes humanity from its Being, rendering autonomy over Being impossible, says Agamben.<sup>149</sup> In this way, Heidegger does not simply see technology and art as conquest, but also as an externalization of being that separates producers from their products. “The World is grounded on Earth and the Earth permeates the World.” Creating the World means creating

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<sup>145</sup> Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, “Introduction,” *State/Space/World: Lefebvre and the Survival of Capitalism*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2009): 24.

<sup>146</sup> Taylor Carman, “Forward,” Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Harper, 2008): 141.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, “Introduction,” *State/Space/World: Lefebvre and the Survival of Capitalism*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2009): 24.

<sup>149</sup> Agamben, “Difference and Repetition”: 14-15.

something outside of the Self. However, this created world houses individual being just as it is also created by it (*Dasein*).

Lefebvre was interested in a text that analyzed Heidegger's theories of technology and conquest: Axelos' *Marx: penseur de la technique de l'alienation de l'homme à la conquête du monde* (*Marx on the Technology of Human Alienation and the Conquest of the World*), a Heideggerian reading of Marx. Axelos argued that technology is the center of Marxist ideas, and that it creates alienation but that it is a necessary alienation: "the suppression of the alienation of the Self is the road to the alienation of the Self."<sup>150</sup> Situationists perhaps were frustrated with this argument because it seemed to suggest that alienation and technology, and likely therefore capitalism and the Spectacle, were necessary, but neither did they argue for luddite ideas or primitivism. Rather, they considered how to exist in an alienated world from the perspective of those who opposed the Spectacle and their opposition was carried out through the same technologies that created it: not simply film and media but also language.

Heidegger's idea of "removing autonomy from its Being" needs to be considered in terms of Situationist critiques of Being, along with how Situationist concepts of "authenticity" differ from Heidegger's. The World, for Heidegger, relates to ontology. When it is generalized into a singularity, the World, like Being, detaches from a multiplicity of worlds as in a "mathematical world" or existence that connects to everyday experiences and specific objects. Instead, "World names the essential mystery of existence, the transcendence..."<sup>151</sup> It is a "structural whole of significant relationships that *Dasein* experiences."<sup>152</sup> *Dasein* refers to Being within subjective human experience, an essence that Heidegger encourages can, through a process of becoming,

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<sup>150</sup> Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, "Introduction," *State/Space/World: Lefebvre and the Survival of Capitalism*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2009): 24.

<sup>151</sup> Taylor Carman, "Forward," Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (London: Harper, 2008): 1.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

enter into an “authentic” connection to idealism through detachment from the everyday. Adorno critiques this concept of authenticity as an “aura” built more on a sense of sacrality than anything that could be proven. Heidegger understands this and in fact revels in it. Taylor Carman outlines Heidegger’s concept of Being in a Forward to *Being and Time*:

The question of Being is a question about everything and, in a sense, nothing [...] What would ‘entities lacking being be? They would not be entities at all. As Kant observed in his refutation of the ontological argument for the existence of God in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, existence may be a linguistic predicate, but it is not a ‘real predicate’ or property.

While Heidegger decided, based on a sense of sacralized unprovability, that Being existed, his realization that it could not be proven, for Debord, introduced the “veiled essence of nihilism” which emerges in a text by Heidegger in *Arguments* which appears in Debord’s reading notes. Heidegger’s “The Word of Nietzsche, ‘God is Dead’” was translated by *Arguments* 15 in 1959.

Debord directly responds to this *Arguments* translation in his reading notes:

Any analysis of the situation has its basis, whether it knows it or not, in the metaphysics of subjectivity. What about Being? It is not. Could this be where the veiled essence of nihilism is revealed?<sup>153</sup>

Debord recognizes an ephemeral and subjective existence to the concept of the situation; a ghostlike existence in the aftermath of action, similar to how he describes the premise of his film, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*: “The water of time remains which carries away the fire and extinguishes it.”<sup>154</sup> Being is fleeting to the point that its existence becomes questionable.

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<sup>153</sup> “Exposition Guy Debord: Un Art de la Guerre,” *Chroniques de la Bibliothèque Nationale de la France* 66 (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de la France, 2013). “Pensée métaphysiquement, la situation n’est jamais rien d’autre que la station de l’action du sujet. Toute analyse de la situation a son fondement, qu’elle le sache ou non, dans la métaphysique de la subjectivité. Qu’en est-il de l’Être? Il n’en est rien. Serait-ce là que s’annoncerait l’essence jusqu’ici voilée du nihilisme?”

<sup>154</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603. “Tout le film (aussi à l’aide des images, mais [...] dans le texte de ‘commentaires,’ est bâti sur le thème de l’eau. On y cite donc les poètes de l’écroulement de tout (Li Po, Omar Khayyam, Héraclite, Bossuet, Shelley ?) qui tous ont parlé de l’eau : c’est le temps. Il y a, secondairement, le thème de feu ; d’éclat de l’instant : c’est la révolution, Saint-Germain-des-Près, la jeunesse, l’amour, la négation dans la nuit, le Diable, la bataille et les ‘entreprises inachevées’ où vont mourir les hommes, éboulés en tant que ‘voyageurs qui passent,’ en tant que le désir dans cette nuit du monde (‘nocte

In “To Have Done with the Comforts of Nihilism,” Debord admits: “We know that all new realities are themselves provisional.” However, Debord resists nihilism, which is a “comfort,” and instead declares: “We have to testify to a certain idea of happiness, even if we have known it to fail.” Nihilism is easy, but it is insufficient. “The first truths of despair will not be the outcome of these lives that are so difficult to defend against the traps of silence.”<sup>155</sup> Nihilism is anti-life, and Debord instead proclaims defending life “revolutionary.”<sup>156</sup>

When Debord describes a “veiled essence of nihilism,” he finds Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche in *Arguments* 15 focuses on the power that nihilism grants modern society. Heidegger argues that Nietzsche’s nihilism presents an “historical movement”<sup>157</sup> that “elevates” humanity through their subjectivity; through the “*me-ness* of the ego’s *cogito*.”<sup>158</sup> Nihilism creates the modern “superman.” Nihilism is a *dépassement* that allows “humanity to surpass humanity.”<sup>159</sup>

Heidegger sees the power of Nietzschean nihilism as a product of Kant’s subjectivism. It allows for an individualism, a selfishness, that surpasses any concern for the material world as well as the world of heaven. It is beyond materialism as well as beyond the idealist, Platonic, or Gnostic:

‘God’ is the name for the realm of Ideas and Ideals. Since Plato, more precisely since the Hellenistic and Christian interpretation of Platonic philosophy, this super-sensible world has been considered the true world, the properly real world. The sensible world, on the contrary, is only here below, a changing world, therefore purely apparent and unreal. [...] If we recall, as Kant did again, the sensible world the ‘physical’ world in the broad sense of the mountain, then the supersensible world is the metaphysical world. Thus the phrase ‘God is dead’

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consumimur igni’). Mais l’eau du temps demeure qui emporte le feu, et l’éteint. Ainsi l’éclatante jeunesse de Saint-Germain-des-Près, le feu de l’assaut de l’ardente ‘brigande légère’ ont été noyés dans l’eau courante du siècle quand elles se sont avancées ‘sous le canon du temps.’ »

<sup>155</sup> Guy Debord, “To Have Done with the Comforts of Nihilism,” *Internationale Lettriste* 3, 1954 (New York: Not Bored).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Le Mot de Nietzsche ‘Dieu est Mort,’” *Arguments* 15 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959): 5. “Le nihilisme est un mouvement historial.”

<sup>158</sup> Heidegger, “Le Mot de Nietzsche ‘Dieu est Mort’: 12. “L’homme s’est levée n la moi-tié de l’ego *cogito*.”

<sup>159</sup> Heidegger, “Le Mot de Nietzsche ‘Dieu est Mort’: 12. “L’homme [...] surpasse l’homme.”

means: the supersensible world now lacks power. It produces no life. Metaphysics (that is to say for Nietzsche, the Western philosopher understood as Platonism) is at its end. As for Nietzsche, he himself sees his philosophy as an anti-metaphysical movement, meaning against Platonism.<sup>160</sup>

Heidegger, unlike Nietzsche, would himself defer to Platonism. The super-sensible and true relate to God for Heidegger, which he secularizes as “the realm of Ideas and Ideals” which is more real than everyday experience. In fact, the “sensible world” is “purely apparent and unreal.” The Spectacle, like Heidegger’s World-Picture and rejection of appearances, detests the apparent, Debord relates these appearances to the created World of ideology that unifies both “the realm of Ideas and Ideals” to materialism.

Heidegger’s ideas can be analyzed in relation to the Spectacle through this idea of the artist as a dialectic between World, Earth, and Being. In “The Time of World-as-Picture,” Heidegger considers *Weltanschauung* as “being-in-the-world” wherein perspective creates real yet finite temporal beings. Thomas Levin suggests interpreting the Spectacle as a Heideggerian World-Picture,<sup>161</sup> which perhaps encapsulates the Spectacle’s worldness as more than a mere representation, but as a structured system. Furthermore, when considered in relation to *Weltanschauung*, World-Picture (*Weltbildes*) emphasizes the aspects of looking and seeing in relation to World, but rather than allowing a subject to view, they are subjected to viewing without agency and the object of the “picture” is afforded power oversight. Sometimes “The

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<sup>160</sup> Heidegger, “Le Mot de Nietzsche ‘Dieu est Mort’”: 4. “‘Dieu’ est le nom pour le domaine des Idées et Idéaux. Depuis Platon, plus exactement depuis l’interprétation hellénistique et chrétienne de la philosophie platonicienne, ce monde supra-sensible est considéré comme le vrai monde, le monde proprement réel. Le monde sensible, au contraire, n’est qu’ici-bas, un monde changeant, donc purement apparent et irréel. [...] Si on appelle, comme l’a fait encore Kant, le monde sensible le monde ‘physique’ au sens large du mot, alors le monde suprasensible est le monde métaphysique. Ainsi le mot ‘Dieu est mort’ signifie : le monde suprasensible est désormais sans pouvoir efficient. Il ne prodigue aucune vie. La métaphysique (c’est-à-dire pour Nietzsche, la philosophie occidentale comprise comme platonisme) en est à son terme. Quant à Nietzsche, conçoit lui-même sa philosophie comme un mouvement antimétaphysique, c’est-à-dire pour lui : contre le platonisme.”

<sup>161</sup> Thomas Levin, *Dismantling the Spectacle: Cinema of Guy Debord*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989): 75.

Time of World-as-Picture” was translated into English as “World View” rather than “Picture” by Marjorie Grene (1951).

Debord accuses Heidegger of a tendency toward nihilism due to the nothingness at the core of the ontological everythingness of the concept of Being. Heidegger related this path toward a nothingness in Being to negations and negations of negations, or the Hegelian dialectic. As a result, Marcel Mariën argued that Heidegger demonstrated how Hegelian dialectics could become contrarian to the point of nihilism. Mariën’s *Les Lèvres Nues* 7, “Handheld Horror,” includes Heidegger in a series of quotations alongside a timeline describing Nazi atrocities. Beside a segment from the trial of a man named Ehrmantraut, who denied atrocious war crimes, Heidegger argues that negation does not mean opposition, but that a series of negations of negations lead to Nothingness in general. Ehrmantraut continually replies “nein” to a list of crimes. Mariën’s juxtaposition seems to argue that Heidegger’s obsession with nothingness and negation created a state of denial, eschewing a sense of guilt or accountability. Similar quotations are included in “Handheld Horror” such Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who Mariën quotes as saying, “Let the Jews die!” as well as Simone Weil attesting that torture and misfortunes are “divine marvels.”<sup>162</sup> Despite denouncement of Heidegger in the 1950s, which is when he collaborated with Debord, Mariën would become invested in Heidegger’s ideas later in life.

Edgar Morin of *Arguments* demonstrated similar apathy toward human existence and used the grand cosmic everythingness to justify modern atrocities. Like Heidegger, events in life and specifics are the mundane, the everyday, and nothing in comparison to all-encompassing everythingness. Morin writes:

A certain cosmic and deterministic “pure thought” was unofficially established in the Stalinist universe. I remember discussions with Hungarian comrades, where we spoke of Stalinism (in 1949) as a contemptible little event in human

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<sup>162</sup> “L’Horreur à Portée à la Main,” *Les Lèvres Nues*, 2, 1954. (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1995).

prehistory: from a cosmic perspective, the massacres were nothing but dust. The important thing was the historical movement. Intoxicated with cosmicity, we watched the torrent of centuries pass by.<sup>163</sup>

The rationale that ahistorical cosmic expanse justifies apathy toward human experience and existence relates to the “planetism” of *Planète* and it appears not only in Morin, but also in the writings of other contributors to *Arguments*, including Kostas Axelos, who contributed to *Planète* as well. In *Internationale Situationniste* 10, “Socialisme où Planète,” Situationists write:

Starting in June 1964, Axelos threw himself into *Planète* no. 17, presented by its editorial board as swimming in ‘a meditation that is ours’ and attempting to promote ‘an open and multi-dimensional thought, questioning and global.’<sup>164</sup>

This leads them to conclude that Planetism represented “organized confusion” of the Spectacle, which was a pervasive theme that could describe aims of the Spectacle that were not simply encompassed by *Planète*.<sup>165</sup> *Planète*, they argued, presented conspiracy theories and occultist articles that seemed to aim at glamor or appeal to fascination which intentionally distorted verifiable facts. Influenced by Breton, *Planète* acted as interest-producers rather than journalists or philosophers, and, indeed, they did garner a popular following.<sup>166</sup>

An important Situationist reference point for critiques of Heidegger appears in their readings of *The Jargon of Authenticity* according to Mustapha Khayati. This text criticizes Heidegger as a representative of an era of philosophers who used abstract terms like “authenticity” in ways that were similar to religious dogma. While Heidegger challenged meaning, religiosity, and

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<sup>163</sup> Edgar Morin, “La Dialectique et l’Action,” *Arguments* 7 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959): 11. “Une certaine ‘pensée pure’ cosmique et déterministe s’installa officieusement dans l’univers stalinien. Je me souviens de discussions avec des camarades hongrois, où nous parlions du stalinisme (en 1949) comme d’un méprisable petit événement de la préhistoire humaine : sous l’angle cosmique, les massacres n’étaient que poussières. L’important était le mouvement historique. Grisés de cosmicité, nous regardions passer le torrent des siècles.”

<sup>164</sup> “Socialisme où Planète,” *Internationale Situationniste* 10 (Paris: Situationist International, 1966): 77.

<sup>165</sup> “Socialisme où Planète,” *Internationale Situationniste* 10: 78. “Cette frontière même du ‘planétisme’ n’est pas évidente pour qui n’a vraiment rompu avec rien de la confusion organisée d’aujourd’hui.”

<sup>166</sup> Stéphane François, *Nazi Occultism: Between the SS and Esotericism* (London: Routledge, 2023): 8-9.

reification, his criticisms became in themselves like what they aimed to challenge, gaining a similar following through the “aura” of thingly “jargon.” Criticism became devoid of radicalism.

Nihilism turns into farce, into mere method, as has already happened to Cartesian doubt. The question – a favorite prerequisite of the jargon – must sound all the more radical the more loyally it directs itself to the kind of answer which can be everything except radical.

The philosophical lineage of subjectivity and abstractions of space are again raised and again framed as debilitating to action, as a form of producing what Vaneigem characterizes as Kantian “eunuchs.”<sup>167</sup> The comfort of nihilism and its passivity is attributed to an era by Adorno, his contemporary era, which extended from Heideggerian thought.<sup>168</sup>

In terms of the concept of “authenticity,” Situationists did use the word much to Baudrillard’s dismay.<sup>169</sup> In 1958, Debord wrote in “Theses on the Cultural Revolution”:

If we are ever to arrive at authentic direct communication (in our working hypothesis of higher cultural means: the construction of situations), we must bring about the destruction of the forms of pseudo-communication.<sup>170</sup>

This distinction between “direct communication” and “pseudo-communication” appears weak given Kotányi’s theories on language materialism and Khayati’s critiques of stagnant definitions in “Captive Words.” Debord seems to admit its weakness when he calls it a “working hypothesis,” but it still perhaps sheds light on the critique and apparent reference to Heidegger. Authenticity means something connected to the everyday. It has directness and it is situational.

This is the opposite of Heidegger’s definition of “authenticity” as in the realm of pure thought, a

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<sup>167</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. “Le cerveau métaphysique brûle les cheveux. Se méfier des philosophes chauves, ils ne se sont pas souciés de soigner leur ‘système’ pileux! Ce qui ne suffit nullement pour transformer un coiffeur chevelu en philosophe. Pourquoi écarteler idéologie et psychosociologie? Quel crime commet donc le réel à développer parallèlement ses fibres et ses reflets, qu’on en vienne chaque fois à amputer Lautréamont tantôt de sa raison, de ses facultés discursives, de son contrôle esthétique--l’animal psychanalysé, l’Illuminé des bouches du Rêve – tantôt de sa psychologie, de sa nature sociale, de son siècle--l’eunuque a priori, le révolté en soi (catégorie kantienne chère à Caillois), la carcasse conforme aux manuels scolaires, la pitance anatomo-philosophique des philosophes consacrés...Il suffit!”

<sup>168</sup> Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge, 1964.)

<sup>169</sup> Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture* (London: Routledge, 1992): 163.

<sup>170</sup> Guy Debord, “Theses on the Cultural Revolution, *October* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997): 91.

realm that Situationists consider a “jargon,” a mere reverent “aura,” a form of pseudo-communication.

Adorno argues that Heidegger evaded associations between authenticity and Nazism through the convenient “vagueness” that comes with the aura of jargon, but Adorno nevertheless remained skeptical of Heidegger’s intentions. At the heart of Heidegger’s concept of the “authentic” is a questioning of Truth as well as a questioning of methods of negation. Defining the “authentic” means defining what is real and genuine. For Situationists as well as for Belgian Surrealists who corresponded with them, it is a flawed venture to consider any illusory art to be “authentic.” Situationists instead found authenticity in everyday life and the creation of *situations*. The *pseudo-world* created by art permeates inauthenticity into the fabric of daily life. Similarly, language is inherently representational and therefore cannot be authentic. Georges Gusdorf considers how Peter Schlemihl, an ontologist, located the authentic in the spirit beyond the intelligible. Just as Mircea Eliade saw the myth as more real than reality,<sup>171</sup> Schlemihl saw the spirit of human beings as more real than being in the world.<sup>172</sup> Such notions are quite similar to Gnostic ideas of the spirit and are reflected at times in the Surrealist venture. For Debord, there is a reality to the Spectacle, a deceptive pseudo-reality which has changed the shape of “concrete life” and transformed it into a “speculative universe.”<sup>173</sup> Spirit, ontology, myth, and image are not more real than reality, but rather they invade or “colonize” reality and dilute it into a mystified form of life. Despite reservations about Heidegger’s concepts of Being and “authenticity,” Debord nevertheless finds aspects of these ideas permeating his own thought. Kotányi especially was influenced by Heidegger in certain regards, and receptive to certain

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<sup>171</sup> Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1963): 36.

<sup>172</sup> Gusdorf, *Mythe et Métaphysique*: 183.

<sup>173</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 16.

aspects of Heidegger's ideas about dwelling. Living in a colonized reality was reminiscent of Heideggerian theories on "dwelling" in Being for Kotányi:

Living is a pulsation. Its fabric, the lived experience, constitutes a richer system of association, obviously, like the act of building (Hölderlin, Heidegger and a Situationist concept on the development of the ever-colonialized territory.)<sup>174</sup>

While Situationists may not resonate with the term "Being," the idea of "dwelling" in hostile space and a hostile world made sense, but it is a dwelling that they, at least during the period of the Situationist International, aimed to do as a group, as was typical of avant-gardes, and with certain communal principles that were not isolated to the Self. Nevertheless, certain aspects of individualism likely characterized the formation of the Situationist group, for example Isidore Isou's defiant individualistic heroism when he proclaimed: "For the sake of my soul, I will run my own risks."<sup>175</sup>

For Heidegger, authenticity is located in the Self, in identity. Andreas Wirsching considers *Mein Kampf* an attempt to justify the authenticity of how Hitler found himself as true to himself through his backstory.<sup>176</sup> The idea of authenticity as defined by personal identity is challenged by Situationists when they separate the Self from the past, from origins, and from a cohesive construction of individual identity. *Internationale Situationniste* 5 insisted on remembering "what Heidegger is," meaning his affiliation with the Nazi party. For Situationists, political affiliations mattered. Heidegger's theories of sight, perception, and human power do in fact resonate with themes of conquest that exist in the history of discourse on *Weltanschauung*, and Nazism related human empowerment to historical discourse on *Weltanschauung* as well. Sight as

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<sup>174</sup> Vaneigem, *Rien n'est Fini*. "Habiter, c'est pulsionnel. Son tissu, le vécu, constitue un système d'association plus riche, évidemment, comme l'acte de bâtir (Hölderlin, Heidegger et un concept situationniste sur l'aménagement du territoire toujours colonisé.)"

<sup>175</sup> Isou, *Traité de Bave et d'Éternité*.

<sup>176</sup> Andreas Wirsching, "Hitler's Authenticity: A Functionalist Interpretation," *German Yearbook of Contemporary History* 3 (University of Nebraska Press, 2018): 23-57.

a form of conquest likewise appeared in the translation of Heidegger in *Arguments* 15. The philosophical *Weltanschauung* of Nazism, after all, led to atrocities which, as René Viénet writes, German academics not only supported but created.<sup>177</sup> Heidegger's philosophy weaves in and out of moments of ecstatic power trips and extreme powerlessness. To frame nihilism as empowering, for example, is, in a way, to see absolute disempowerment as synonymous with absolute empowerment.<sup>178</sup> "Time of World-Picture" aims to locate Being within a material world. It postulates a human essence that exists beyond materiality and superior to the *world of things*, but also impossibly distant.<sup>179</sup> In "Time of World Picture," Heidegger presents perception as a power that allows grasping — metaphorically and physically — views and objects around the Self. He considers how the Latin, *per-capio*, relates to words for "to seize," "to take hold of," "take possession of."<sup>180</sup> *Society of the Spectacle* similarly characterizes the goal of Spectacle as conquest, wherein the materialized *Weltanschauung*, like Heidegger's *per-capio*, desires the possession of all things and all people in the world.

In *Society of the Spectacle* (film), battle scenes dwell on soldiers focusing through the sights of their rifles, indicating that the control of sight and Spectacle is not just intangible and abstract forms of control, but also physical and enforced through violence [FIGURE 1.1]. Aerial views of Paris and maps are juxtaposed with aerial bombings [FIGURE 1.2], raising the idea that cartography as a field that allowed for and intended conquest, as was aviation, and the empty frivol of tourism during peacetime is product of these wartime technologies. "Peacetime" is a

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<sup>177</sup> René Viénet, *Sobibor*, Paris: Éditions René Viénet, 1978. "En Allemagne, comme on le sait, l'antisémitisme fut une doctrine d'État bien avant la Guerre de 1939-45. Pain béni des propagandistes nazis, il devint partie intégrante de la "philosophie de la vie" (*Weltanschauung*). Le fameux slogan 'die Juden sind uner Unglueck' (les juifs sont notre malheur) devint le credo d'hommes politiques et d'intellectuels."

<sup>178</sup> Heidegger, "Le Mot de Nietzsche 'Dieu est Mort,'" *Arguments* 15.

<sup>179</sup> The impossible distance between "the world of things" and perception also appears as a theme in Heidegger's analysis of Nietzsche for *Arguments* 15.

<sup>180</sup> William Richardson, *Heidegger, Through Phenomenology to Thought*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003): 419.

misnomer for the postwar era when military occupations and colonialism continued. Military technologies continued to secure their domination over territory, over life, and over people globally. The Spectacle is the “the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity.”<sup>181</sup>

The postwar was a time of World-Picture insofar as media expanded globally, and this spectacular World-Picture can be described in different ways according to contrasts between Debord and Heidegger. Debord’s World-Picture is an inhuman conquest machine whereas Heidegger’s World-Picture is a heroic triumph of sight and perception as an empowering aspect to humanity that, despite tragic limitations, seeks rightful dominion over the material world.

Theories of “authenticity” did not simply relate to Heidegger or Nazism but appeared in other German thought by anti-Nazi and Jewish philosophers contemporary to Heidegger, as in Walter Benjamin. In his reading notes, Vaneigem reference Walter Benjamin’s *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, shedding more light on the influence of the Frankfurt School particularly in relation to concepts of “aura” and “authenticity.” For Benjamin, the concept of authenticity is antithetical to reproduction and repetition, therefore rendering technological reproduction of art contrary to authenticity. An “aura” is “strange web of space and time.” Photography and repetition destroy the “aura.” Benjamin sees “aura” as the presentness of the “here and now,” which is in fact notably different from Adorno’s use of the term in *The Jargon of Authenticity*. For Adorno, the “aura” ascribed to words like “authenticity” is rather a “mode of magical expression.”<sup>182</sup>

The fact that the words of the jargon sound as if they said something higher than what they mean suggests the term ‘aura.’ It is hardly an accident that Benjamin introduced the term at the moment when, according to his own theory, what he understood by ‘aura’ became impossible to experience.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 14. “Il est le soleil qui ne se couche jamais sur l’empire de la passivité moderne. Il recouvre toute la surface du monde et baigne indéfiniment dans sa propre gloire.”

<sup>182</sup> Trent Schroyer, “Forward,” *The Jargon of Authenticity* (New York: Routledge, 2003): 15.

<sup>183</sup> Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*: 38.

Words that depend on “effect” and “connotations” for Adorno are related to the conception of the “sacred.” Prior to ontology and prior to the Spectacle, Spectacular power was exhibited in the “liturgical space” and movement of Cathedrals, a concept that appears in the work of Georges Gusdorf and which Debord discusses explicitly in *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*. The sacrality of the Spectacle’s aura could also be discussed in terms of ritual according to Gusdorf as well as fetishism in relation to Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*.

The frozen images of *Society of the Spectacle* recall Benjamin for their stillness. Zooming in and evaluating photographs gives a sense of an autopsy. Art and photographs are treated equally. Debord rejects notions of authenticity and aura, instead attempting to give a sense of materiality, but he nevertheless appears interested in the effects of aura. His monotone perhaps provides a sense of seriousness and reverence in approaching these images, a strategy which, when looking at an ongoing procession of “cheap-and-nasty”<sup>184</sup> pinups would be merely humorous if not for their juxtapositions with bombings and with the at once serious concerns about the manipulative nearly inescapable society of accumulated images that has colonized life and the world. Debord argues that it is his aim to “reinststate reality” in *Society of the Spectacle*, but the film begs the question about whether either the real or life are possible under the Spectacle’s oppressive regime. The unreal aura of authenticity, life, and dwelling remains, but as a trick wherein the “liar has lied to themselves.” Humanity has become strangers to their everyday existence. Spectators watch images as though they are real – they are integrated into a sense of aura, of sacred ritual. There is deadness in the photographs of *Society of the Spectacle* similar to Benjamin’s theories about the relationship of death to photography, as well as a ghostliness that

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<sup>184</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Verso, 2014): 189.

allows for ritual connection to the image wherein a sense of originality or authenticity in Benjamin's words, "authentic" "life" in Situationist terms, is lacking.

### 1.5. Spectacle as *Weltanschauung* in *Society of the Spectacle* (book)

On the first page of *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord defines Spectacle as a *Weltanschauung* that has become material. Donald Nicholson-Smith, a former Situationist who consulted Debord on his translation, translates Thesis 5 from *Society of the Spectacle* as following:

The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm – a world view transformed into an objective force.<sup>185</sup>

*Le spectacle ne peut être compris comme l'abus d'un monde de la vision, le produit des techniques de diffusion massive des images. Il est bien plutôt une Weltanschauung devenue effective, matériellement traduite. C'est une vision du monde qui s'est objectivée.*<sup>186</sup>

Debord chose the German term *Weltanschauung* over simply *vue de monde* or worldview to emphasize a specifically German discourse. *Society of the Spectacle* hypothesizes and rejects certain possible interpretations of the Spectacle in this passage: the Spectacle as an implemented *Weltanschauung* is "far better" than viewing it as "a deliberate distortion of the visual world or the mass dissemination of images."<sup>187</sup> This phrase reads in the original French: *Le spectacle ne peut être compris comme l'abus d'un monde de la vision, le produit des techniques de diffusion massive des images.*<sup>188</sup> Nicholson-Smith translates *abus* as "a deliberate distortion." *Abus* can mean "misuse," "abuse," or "indulgence." He also cuts *le produit des techniques*, or "the product of techniques," which describes the Spectacle as a result of strategies for diffusion, e.g. media, in the sense of a medium or infrastructure for disseminating images. However, Nicholson-Smith

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<sup>185</sup> Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 13.

<sup>186</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 10.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 10.

maintains Debord's key point: the Spectacle is not simply a distortion of reality or an accumulation of images. While the Spectacle involves distortions and an accumulation of images, it is better viewed as a *Weltanschauung* become material; a materialized worldview in a particular German sense of the term.

Debord predicts that it might seem easiest to define the Spectacle through its products: images and the dreamworlds produced to distort our visual perception, but this is the Spectacle on the surface. This interpretation misses how it relates to ideological perception through a view of the world. The entire world is enveloped by the Spectacle, not as a mere product of technological advancement, but ideological structures and dominant powers. This is similar to how religious icons are not merely images, but represent an ideological structure materialized into a relic or fetish object. Debord seems to avoid explicit discussion of the postwar context when, in this passage, he rejects direct references to media technology. Following World War II, systems for the dissemination of images and information were adapted for peacetime, marking an influx of commercial marketing and news cycles that contained events, parades, and political stunts. For example, aerial photography was developed for military strategy, especially bombings, and aerial photography and bombings appear prolifically in the film, *Society of the Spectacle* [FIGURE 1.2]. While Debord rejects the specific discussion of postwar media in the book, *Society of the Spectacle*, the film, *Society of the Spectacle* is composed almost entirely of appropriated examples of postwar news reels, advertisements, and films. In this way, Debord does not entirely disregard the subject, but rather shifts emphasis to a decontextualized ideological phenomenon to allow for a wider encompassing *Weltanschauung*. Despite this emphasis in his text and script, context is reestablished, albeit broadly, through the specific clips of the film which aim to traverse various types of media from across the globe.

The second sentence of Thesis 5 argues that the Spectacle is “*un Weltanschauung devenue effective, matériellement traduite. C’est une vision du monde qui s’est objectivée.*”<sup>189</sup> English translations of this passage vary from Donald Nicholson-Smith, Fredy Perlman, to Ken Knabb. Nicholson-Smith and Knabb both prided themselves in writing translations that served as *textes de combat* wherein original meaning did not take precedent over the potential impact of the English text.<sup>190</sup> While there is value in this approach, it does serve as an obstacle for historians seeking to understand original meaning. Evaluating each word in this passage can facilitate some degree of nuance regarding how *Weltanschauung* creates Spectacle. Fredy Perlman translates the passage: “[The Spectacle] is a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a vision of the world which has become objectified.”<sup>191</sup> Most aspects of this translation will be maintained in this analysis, including “materially translated,” and “objectified.” Perlman translates *devenue effective* as “become actual.” *Devenue effective* is often used in legal and political terminology that, in English, is often translated as “become effective.” For the purposes of this dissertation, *devenue effective* will be translated as “implemented” to distinguish the created world of the spectacle from reality, given that questions of what is real are at the heart of the coming arguments, and a word like “actual” could give impressions of Truth or Reality that do not seem to be present in the original *devenue effective*.

Donald Nicholson-Smith translated the passage as: “[The Spectacle] is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm — a world view transformed into an objective force.”<sup>192</sup> As a result of his involvement with the Situationists and his collaboration with Debord, his translations can be taken as canonical, but still can be assessed

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<sup>189</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1971): 10.

<sup>190</sup> Members of the Situationist International and Students from Strasbourg, *On the Poverty of Student Life*, (Pennsylvania: Common Notions, 2022): 25, 81.

<sup>191</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman (Detroit, Black & Red: 1970): 5.

<sup>192</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 13.

in relation to the original text of *La Société du Spectacle*. For a *texte de combat*, loose translations cannot be characterized as at fault and in fact they can be seen to add complexity and novel interpretation, because they aim to address a new context and new language rather than fixating on meanings of the original. However, for this passage, which is central to the arguments of this dissertation, is important to identify changes. “Objective” in English typically means “unbiased,” “clear,” or “understandable.” The specific object-ness of the “objective” becomes somewhat lost in the common use of tangibility as a metaphor for understanding, which could confuse the intended literal tangibility of, for example, Marxist materialism. The common use of the word “objective” creates a sense of clear and solid truth. Nicholson-Smith uses the word “objective” for *objectivée*. *Objectivée* is most literally translated to “objectified:” *object-i-vée*, wherein *-vée* means that it has been rendered into something new, parallel to the English *-fi*, and *-é* is a past participle like *-ed*. These words, combined, translate to “to have been made into an object,” and directly can be aligned in English to *object-i-fi-ed*. “Objectified” typically does not have the same meaning as “objective.” In English, “objective” finds material truth in unbiased analysis, which is a substantially different meaning from “objectified,” despite common roots. “Objectified” and carries a positive connotation whereas “objectified” has a negative connotation of being “degraded to [...] a mere object,” especially in instances of people and groups of people.<sup>193</sup> This negative connotation carries more strongly after the 1980s, gaining critical popularity through feminist theories that were influenced to some degree by Debord, like Laura Mulvey.<sup>194</sup> While Debord would not have had Mulvey’s definition of objectification directly in mind, he did, however, have a sense of a distinction between “objective” and “objectified” in

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<sup>193</sup> “Objectify,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, [oed.com](https://www.oed.com), accessed April 11, 2024.

<sup>194</sup> Laura Mulvey’s relationship and artistic collaborations with Peter Wollen suggest influence from Debord given Wollen’s many writings on the Situationists and Debord, including articles for *New Left Review* like “The Situationist International” in 1989 and “Situationists and Architecture” in 2001; as well as *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

connotation as well as the idea that “objectified” (*objectivée*) has gone through a transformation that nevertheless only “takes on the character” of an object,<sup>195</sup> but is nevertheless removed from some type of material essence that was originally intended. “The character of an object” is not the same thing as “an object.” Transformations and attempts to create replicas always have some degree of detachment from originals. Giorgio Agamben argues in response to Debord’s films that repetition and reproduction are never the same as an original.<sup>196</sup> *Objectivée* typically describes a freezing of movement and a deprivation of life from something living. For example, a model is a living and breathing person which a photo renders as a frozen object for consumption.

Nicholson-Smith’s use of the word “actualized” perhaps simply intends the meaning “become actual,” but it also has an association with actualization or betterment that could connect to a sense of evolution. Given the Hegelian influence, this connotation could make some degree of sense as a perverse evolution of a new world. The use of the word “realm” creates a division between the imagined and the real, wherein a transformation can serve as a bridge. The decision to add the verb “transform” gives special emphasis to form and materiality, and it does seem to clarify *devenue* (become) and *-vi* in *objectivée*. “Transform” and “realm” are colorful additions to Debord’s text that do not appear in the original translation but nevertheless remain within the scope of canonical Situationist discourse. Marx argued that philosophers understood the world, while the goal was to transform it.<sup>197</sup> However, transformation does not always carry a positive connotation for Situationists. *Society of the Spectacle* traces many transformations of the world throughout history, seeing history as a series of transformations.<sup>198</sup> It was a historical

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<sup>195</sup> “Objectivier,” Le Robert, [dictionnaire.lerobert.com](http://dictionnaire.lerobert.com), Accessed April 11, 2024. “Rapporter à un objet.”

<sup>196</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “On Guy Debord’s Films,” *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.)

<sup>197</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

<sup>198</sup> Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018): 25.

transformation of the world that led to the spectacle, and the alienation of people from others, from their everyday lives, and from their relationship to the world.

The act of creating an image or a physical manifestation of an idea is in itself important. If a *Weltanschauung* is not merely an image, but it *becomes* something material or visual, then, something that changes through that process when it is translated (*traduite*) or, in Nicholson-Smith's addition, when it has undergone "transformation." Just as, in Marx's *Capital*, a transformation occurs when labor is converted into economic value, there is an "objectification" of something that was once more real that now is exchangeable through its abstract falsification. However, unlike Marx's *Capital*, the thing that is transformed is not physical, material, or tangible. It is already an abstraction. When the world is made up of such abstractions, the result is a materialized *Weltanschauung*.

Debord's understanding of the transformation into an image was informed by the Neo-Kantian Marxist, György Lukács, who developed a theory of "reification" or "a relation between people [that] takes on the character of a thing." Reification is a consequence of commodity fetishism, a "fetish character of commodities" created by the logic of capitalist production.<sup>199</sup> According to *Society of the Spectacle*, "all that once was directly lived has become mere representation."<sup>200</sup> Reification is no longer merely a philosophy, it has become a form of existence. Lukács defines reification as fetishism, taking a religious connotation like idolatry when an object is more than an object; when it becomes revered. Even though the reverence is toward the object itself, it is abstracted as beyond object-ness. At this point, it may seem as though Lukács is simply describing commodity fetishism, but reification is not simply the act of reverence, but the results of reverence which transform the object into an abstraction.

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<sup>199</sup> György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988): 83-84.

<sup>200</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 12.

Abstractions are projected onto the object, and the object is revered as a Platonic ideal of itself. When an entire world of perception is reified, reification is a *Weltanschauung* twice removed: a *Weltanschauung* in which there is not only a disconnect between the mind and reality, but also one that is mediated through representational symbols. Such symbols, through reification, remove individuals from reality, and carry them into what has escalated into “a universal form for existence,” says Lukács.<sup>201</sup> *Society of the Spectacle* describes this universal form for existence as a pseudo-world that uses “the world of vision” but does not amount to it because it defines more than vision, it defines existence. Individuals have been reduced to passive spectators. This amounts not only to what they see, but how they act, and that action is a removal from one another, from materiality, and from the act of living. This can be reduced to a simple trick: an audience in a theater watches a film [FIGURE 1.3]. In the film, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, Debord zooms out on a still frame of them watching. They continue to watch. They do not engage with each other. Their positions do not change. Such removal can be defined as alienation. There is a possibility of an existence outside of that removal — an existence wherein individuals live and connect with one another. However, that reality is becoming “paradoxically invisible.”<sup>202</sup>

Ken Knabb translates Thesis 5 as: “[The Spectacle] is a worldview that has actually been materialized, that has become an objective reality.”<sup>203</sup> By translating *Weltanschauung* as “worldview,” Knabb removes Debord’s reference to German schools of thought, which is the very intellectual history that this chapter has aimed to explore. In a French language text, a reference to a German word indicates a German history to the word that may not be present in the French version. Knabb’s translation choice, “objective reality,” introduces a sense of the true

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<sup>201</sup> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*: 110.

<sup>202</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>203</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014): 2.

or authentic that does not appear in Debord's text, *du monde qui s'est objectivée*. In this passage, he does not mention "real" (*réel*) at all. The same issue with Nicholson-Smith's translation of *objectivée* as "objective" rather than "objectified" appears in Knabb's translation.

Debord's use of *s'est objectivée* is reflexive: the world objectifies *itself*; it makes itself into something with the character of an object. In Mulvey's theories on objectification, patriarchy objectifies women through their perception or representation of women. Debord's Spectacle operates on its own. It has no masters who are in ultimate control of it. The producers of images are detached from their productions and detached from power over what an accumulation of images create.<sup>204</sup>

Finally, a tailored translation of the passage can be presented that will be used throughout this text. The Spectacle is "*un Weltanschauung devenue effective, matériellement traduite. C'est une vision du monde qui s'est objectivée*"—"The Spectacle is an implemented *Weltanschauung* translated materially. It is a worldview that objectifies itself."

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<sup>204</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Perlman: 26. "With the generalized separation of the worker from their product every unitary viewpoint of accomplished activity and all direct personal communication among producers are lost."

## Chapter 2. Pseudo-Worlds

If the Spectacle is a “*Weltanschauung* materialized,”<sup>205</sup> then it is not a *Weltanschauung*. A *Weltanschauung* can be interpreted as either a subjective perspective within the mind or a philosophical theory of the world which is removed from material reality. Materialization transforms a *Weltanschauung* into something that is no longer a *Weltanschauung* because both definitions refer to something that is definitively immaterial. A collective worldview may birth the Spectacle, but once materialized, the product resides outside of the mind and among the *world of things*. It becomes part of the architecture of the world. Nevertheless, this architecture maintains significations and illusions that detach spectators from their sense of the material aspects of the created world. This detachment creates the sense of participation in a false world, a “pseudo-world” which is inhuman and yet it has control over everyday life. Thus, an inherent tendency toward falsity exists in the illusory aspects of the Spectacle. This chapter, “Pseudo-Worlds,” explores the material illusory aspects of the Spectacle once it has detached from the ideas and the collective consciousness that birthed it. Subjects of discussion include the concept of lies, false consciousness, and the unreality of realism, insofar as they are discussed within the book and film *Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord and by interlocutors. The ideas within this chapter can specifically be seen as an exploration into Thesis 2 of *The Society of the Spectacle*:

The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to themselves. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 10.

<sup>206</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman; Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967): 9. “Les images qui se sont détachées de chaque aspect de la vie fusionnent dans un cours commun, où l’unité de cette vie ne peut plus être rétablie. La réalité considérée partiellement se déploie dans sa propre unité générale en tant que pseudo-monde à part, objet de la seule contemplation. La spécialisation des images du monde se retrouve, accomplie, dans le monde de l’image autonomisée, où le mensonger s’est menti à lui-même. Le spectacle en général, comme inversion concrète de la vie, est le mouvement autonome du non-vivant.”

Debord argues that the pseudo-world appears in “reverse” like a mirror image. Just as a mirror inverts reality, so too does the pseudo-world invert truth, or a “world” that is “really in reverse” where the “true is the moment of the false.”<sup>207</sup> Images truly create falsities or illusions. Falsities hold some degree of truthfulness in their genuine artificiality.

For a “liar to lie to themselves,” they must somewhat understand that they are not telling the truth. While audiences do not believe that the movies that they are watching are unfolding as tangible realities before their eyes, they nevertheless are able to integrate their experience and perception into the film, and, in that process, come to some degree of belief in a certain reality to the world within the film that was presented to them.

### **2.1. Materializing the Book, *Society of the Spectacle*, into film**

If philosophy is a transition from conceptual ideas to written words, then the Spectacle takes another step. Words and concepts become images and materials. By making *Society of the Spectacle* a film, Debord allows his ideas to enter into this process of spectacularization, of materialization. This leads to a discussion on the differences between words and images.

Words have power for Situationists. Situationists sought change and empowerment but they were likewise wary to aligning themselves with power through reifying forms like language, as Khayati warns in “Captive Words.” Words are necessary, but treating words as ahistorical concepts creates a false sense of universality that can be used as a weapon for social control. “Language is the house of power.”<sup>208</sup> The power of the word recalls theological idealisms in their context, including André Breton’s reference to the Gospel of John — “in the beginning was the word” — to present a semi-Hegelian, semi-Medieval concept of an “Alchemy of the Word” that he suggested should be shifted into “a real chemistry,” or, in other words, a demystified

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<sup>207</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 12.

<sup>208</sup> Mustapha Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets: 222.

mysticism, an Alchemy made chemistry, and a secularized religious concept.<sup>209</sup> In Khayati's reading notes, Henri Birault criticizes the "Hegelian Word (*Verbe*)" for inciting a "loving battle between the Earth (*Terre*) and Heaven" in a way that Alexandre Kojève described as "Christianity that had become atheistic," or a concept of God that had been secularized.<sup>210</sup> Debord both intones this power and challenges it. The title *In Girum Imus Igni* is a medieval incantation, a spell, wherein words manifest realities. The voiceover of the imageless *Howls for Sade* (*Hurlements en Faveur de Sade*) intones monotone laws and poeticisms in a way that reinforces the sense of omnipotence that words without images creates, a concept that derived from Isidore Isou's Letterism. Unlike *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* and *Howls for Sade*, the images of *Society of the Spectacle* provide examples of Spectacle that disempower the textual voiceover. Kitsch mocks theory, but the repetition of the kitsch affords images iconic power which Debord discusses most explicitly in terms of "celebrity" (*vedette*). Furthermore, Debord chooses images that bring some of his own prior conclusions into question. While the book *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) suggested optimism for change and possible revolution, the images in the film (1972) show students of 1968 brutally beaten with batons. In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 1968, Debord no longer saw hope for "optimistic strategies that he formerly proposed;" these strategies were "bankrupt."<sup>211</sup> If words were a means of seeking power or empowerment through changes in meaning, then the images combat that venture in *Society of the Spectacle* in a disheartening way. If the project of *Society of the Spectacle* (book) is to understand society in order to find ways to combat it, then the project of the film is to reinforce a sense of individual powerlessness in the face of a massive nearly inescapable oppressive structure.

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<sup>209</sup> Khayati, "Captive Words": 224.

<sup>210</sup> Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 12, GEN MSS 1480.

<sup>211</sup> Paul McDonald, "Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*," *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 4, 492.

The language materialism of the Hungarian Dialogic School disempowered the symbolic idealism of individual words by historicizing them in etymology and discourses on a multiplicity of meanings. Words are the vehicle of ontology, which, due to its aim at vast universality, and due to its secularization of totality away from theological representations of God, is rarely represented in images. Debord's film, *Society of the Spectacle*, asks the question as to what would change about the book and its verbiage if it were represented as images. Is it possible to represent a theoretical text as images? The conclusion seems to be yes, though there is also perhaps a degree of facetiousness or mockery of Debord's own engagement with philosophy. However, just as something changes between transformations from ideas to words, notable changes occur in the transformation between words and images. Debord engages with the concept of the symbolic by showing the recurrence and banality of images that represent basic concepts: women as sexual desire, cars as consumption. The concept of the Spectacle resists the particular, and thus Debord's text does as well. His film reintroduces particularities into the discussion. A woman in the Spectacle is a vehicle for an idea: articulated by an advertising company, she stands in for a desired result. Outside of *Society of the Spectacle*, Situationist *détournement* divorces the materiality of this symbolic woman or spectacular representation from its original intended meaning, its symbolic significance. In doing so, they propose that revolution can be sexually exciting, for example. They also propose that the photograph breaks from the original celebrity, model, or object (and the celebrity and model are both rendered objects through reification.)

One of the most pressing insights of the transformation from words to film is the overwhelming incessance of repetition and the banality of it. Debord alludes to fine arts with *The Tower of Babel* and a few other paintings, but the universal ubiquity that the concept of Babel

depicts is a unity of incessant “cheap-and-nasty” sexualized images that are “in the end” “not strange at all” as metanarratives might suggest.<sup>212</sup> Juxtaposed with a seemingly unending procession of bombings, the effect on the viewer is perhaps overwhelm or stomach sickness; a sort of anti-eroticism. The woman as spectacle is referenced by McKenzie Wark in *Spectacle of Disintegration*, who writes of “the Girl,” drawing attention to age and agism, as well as the designation that Debord applied to these images of young women, *les filles*; a term that Wark situates in Tiquun’s *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young Girl*. “The disintegrating spectacle is not presided over by the law of the Father but the figure of the Girl. [...] She does not deny or repress sex. Rather, she makes it something abstract.”<sup>213</sup> Prior to Wark, Laura Mulvey interpreted “spectacle as woman.”<sup>214</sup> Situationist concepts of Spectacle as World would shape discourse on feminism, particularly that of Laura Mulvey. While woman as Spectacle was distinct from real women and represented through cinema and advertising, this feminized Spectacle presented repercussions for everyday life. “The body in everyday life is very different from the body circulated in images,” but the “semiotics” of the represented body render the actual body a “site of oppression.”<sup>215</sup> Mulvey defines the “pensive spectator” as a viewer who “can now look not at the world through the movie(s) but at the movie(s) as a world of images and codes that can be dismounted and remounted.” While Mulvey theorizes agency in a “possessive spectator,” Situationist alienation can be seen as the idea that the Spectacle aims for humanity in general to be subdued under Mulvey’s description of the “pensive spectator,” who can only see the world through visual codes. Mulvey sees the distinction between the everyday and representation as “closely associated with contemporary 1960s and 1970s consciousness of

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> McKenzie Wark, *Spectacle of Disintegration* (New York: Verso, 2013): 80.

<sup>214</sup> Laura Mulvey and Roberta Sassateli, “Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture,” *Theory Culture & Society* September 28.5 (Sage, 2011): 131.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

the society of the spectacle (a concept that was articulated by [Guy] Debord but very important to [Jean-Luc] Godard's 1970s films.)"<sup>216</sup> Kelly Baum would go on to apply Mulvey's theories to readings of Situationist films in the article "Sex and the Situationist International."<sup>217</sup> Baum marks a distinction between Situationist attacks on images of women who represent desire from Situationist ideas about women in everyday life. Representations of woman in advertisements, Situationists argued, are deprived of an existence outside of consumption.<sup>218</sup>

The images of women that Debord uses in *Society of the Spectacle* include typically models from advertisements; semi-pornographic magazine cut-outs; photographs of women from his own life. Spectacular women recur as stills while other clips of war move. Mulvey considers how Jean-Luc Godard, who was greatly influenced by Guy Debord, believed that the "simplest close-up is also the most moving" because it "mak[es] the beauty of the object signified burst forth in the sign."<sup>219</sup> Mulvey goes on to reflect on how the close-up freezes narrative to fixate on spectacle, relating sexuality to stasis:

On the one hand, the cinema was developing the conventions of continuity editing that gave the Hollywood product its movement and excitement, on the other hand, the star close-up would hold the story in stasis, cutting her out from the general flow of the narrative, emphasizing her function as spectacle in its own right. Thus, a disjuncture appeared between the image of woman on the screen enhanced as spectacle and the general flow of narrative continuity organizing the action. Film theorists have drawn attention to the way in which cinema echoes the excitement of other kinds of modern movement [...] but the discourse of sexuality develops its own rhetoric of stasis, holding back the excitement of movement into a moment of eroticized visual pleasure.<sup>220</sup>

There are a few exceptions to the frozen image of women and the silent slow-moving fixation on bodies: Joan Crawford in *Johnny Guitar* as well as Gene Tierney and Ona Munson in *The Shanghai Gesture*. Joan Crawford and Ona Munson both portray powerful women who run

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Kelly Baum, "Sex and the Situationist International," *October* 115 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.)

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 40.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid: 41.

casinos and bars. They differ from young, happy, frivolous “girls” Debord shows elsewhere. Images of “girls” could be described as kitsch. They do not appear in films described as classic or reputable. Contrarily, Crawford and Munson’s characters carry a different sense of authority as actors as well as drivers in the cinematic aspects and even narrative aspects of Debord’s film. In *Johnny Guitar* and *The Shanghai Gesture* respectively, Crawford and Munson are outsiders. Their role as casino owners takes them to the fringes of society where they find both opportunities for power and moments that necessitate violence. Debord seems to project himself onto these characters as the leader of a peripheral avant-garde group with revolutionary aspirations. This projection could be hypothesized as related to various possible analyses, but perhaps simply the Otherness of strong women is an Otherness that Debord also sees in himself. These women are given lines both in their respective films and in Debord’s film. They speak in sultry transatlantic accents. Crawford speaks of how memories relate to dreams. Their juxtaposition with images that Lefebvre describes as “cheap-and-nasty” pronounce what Debord seems to see as admirable qualities. There is a sense of a “real” woman, or at least women who depict “kernels of truth” about lived realities. These characters are constructed in relation to the unreal women who are young.

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord discusses the replaceability of products in terms of a mythology of youth: “Youth is in no way the property of those who are now young, but of the economic system, of the dynamism of capitalism.” Meanwhile, “the adult,” the “master” of “their life, does not exist.” “Things rule and are young; things confront and replace one another.”<sup>221</sup> The young women from advertisements and magazines have similarities to the

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<sup>221</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 46. “Là où s’est installée la consommation abondante, une opposition spectaculaire principale entre la jeunesse et les adultes vient en premier plan des rôles fallacieux: car nulle part il n’existe d’adulte, maître de sa vie, et la jeunesse, le changement de ce qui existe, n’est aucunement la propriété de

young women in Debord's life, but there are also notable differences. The women who surround Debord sport decidedly boyish hairstyles. At times, they indicate happiness, but more typically they glare into the camera with a sense of anger and sadness. They also appear visibly ragged – stylish, maybe, but it is clear that they do not represent the same class or spend the same time pruning their appearances as the advertisements. Nevertheless, Debord seems to argue through juxtaposition of similar pin-up structures that he sees the young women in his life in relation to the young women in ads. He does not seem to draw conclusions about what this means for him apart from a sense of falsity and objectification that he relates specifically to images of women.

## 2.2. World in Reverse (*Monde Renversé*)

Debord's films aim to demonstrate how representations of people are shadows of their everyday selves. In notes for *Society of the Spectacle* and *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, Debord does not indicate names for portraits of his friends, but instead versions of their names that begin with the prefix "pseudo-" including "pseudo-Isabelle" and "pseudo-Debord."<sup>222</sup> This designation informs his overall treatment of the photos in his film: he uses grainy still photos of himself, his friends, and romantic interests in many of the shots, which fixate on the image, at times pan up and down to show the body. [FIGURE 2.1] Debord shows the insufficiency of the image as it desperately tries to grasp every inch of a real person to the point of voyeurism. In the case of images of Alice Becker-Ho at the beginning of *Society of the Spectacle*, he intercuts still photos with semi-pornographic images. Reflections of friends and himself fade like his memories. In the end, reflections are all they are. Not only is Debord a pseudo-Debord in an image, but the entire world produced by the Spectacle, not in one image but all around, is a *pseudo-world* that encapsulates overarching modern mythologies which, as a

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ces hommes qui sont maintenant jeunes, mais celle du système économique, le dynamisme du capitalisme. Ce sont des choses qui règnent et qui sont jeunes ; qui se chassent et se remplacent elles-mêmes."

<sup>222</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

result of repetitive inundation, come to feel more real than reality, itself. “The world runs the risk of becoming paradoxically invisible,”<sup>223</sup> while an empire of illusion presents a *pseudo-world* in its place. The alienating distance of the *pseudo-world* from reality through generalization and mythologizing is the “material reconstruction of the religious illusion.”<sup>224</sup>

In his reading notes, Debord cites Marx, who argues that the religious illusion exists not to create God, but to create a reductive representation of a false world to explain a reality that cannot ever truly be explained. God is a socially produced world, says Marx, and his revolutionary program against religion is to battle this illusory, hallucinatory, metaphorically opium-induced world:

This State, this society, produces religion, an erroneous consciousness of the world, because they themselves constitute a false world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritual point of honor (...) because the human essence has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore [...] the struggle against this world.<sup>225</sup>

The idea of God as a false world is maintained by Karl Mannheim of *Arguments*, a Hungarian sociologist from the intellectual circle of György Lukács. The Spectacle was referenced in *Society of the Spectacle* for his idea that a “total ideology” is “a totalitarian worldview” that creates “frozen” “pseudo-knowledge.” In other words, the totalizing aims of the Spectacle are the root of both its oppressive dominance and its falsity, because, in fact, it only presents “fragments” of knowledge.<sup>226</sup> Mannheim does not see God as a tangible world, but as a world beyond time and space. Mannheim argues:

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<sup>223</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>224</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 17. “Le spectacle est la reconstruction matérielle de l’illusion religieuse.”

<sup>225</sup> Guy Debord, *Les Libreries de Guy Debord: Hegel, Marx* (Paris: Éditions l’Échappé, 2022): “Cet État, cette société, produisent la religion, une conscience erronée du monde, parce qu’ils constituent eux-mêmes un monde faux. La religion est la théorie générale de ce monde, son compendium encyclopédique, sa logique sous une forme populaire, son point d’honneur spirituel [...] parce que l’essence humaine n’a pas de réalité véritable. La lutte contre la religion est donc par ricochet la lutte contre ce monde.”

<sup>226</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 150-151.

The mystic lives either in the memory of ecstasy or in its ardent expectation. His metaphor describes ecstasy as a psychic situation that cannot be conceived in spatial and temporal terms, as a union with the closed world beyond.<sup>227</sup>

However, the creation of idols, or art objects, materializes mystical otherworldliness in an effort to represent a world beyond space and time. It is this manifestation of materialized mythologies that renders the Spectacle, just as it created physical representations of “religious illusions” prior to the Spectacle. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord explains how Mannheim’s “total ideology” manufactured Spectacle as a totality based on false knowledge: “Ideology, whose whole internal logic led to ‘total ideology’ in Mannheim’s sense [...] imposes itself as pseudo-knowledge of a frozen totality.”<sup>228</sup> In the Surrealist single-edition journal, *The Conquest of the World by the Image (La Conquête du Monde Par l’Image)*, Marcel Mariën, wrote that painting creates a “second reality [...] a false reality.” Marie Godet describes how Mariën “directly targeted” Surrealist art, wherein the “astonishing, the fanciful, the bizarre, and the never-before-seen” become redundant and boring.<sup>229</sup> On the cover of the volume appeared a quote from Göthe that seems reminiscent of the alchemical principles of the historical Faust:

The creative force of the artist must bring forth images, idols from inside of the organism, memory, and imagination [...] They must unfold, grow, expand and contract in order to no longer be fleeting, but true and concrete objects.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Idéologie et Utopie*, trad. Pauline Rollet (Montreal: Université de Québec, 2003): 73. “Le mystique vit soit dans le souvenir de l’extase, soit dans son attente ardente. Ses métaphores décrivent l’extase comme une situation psychique qui ne peut être conçue en termes spatiaux et temporels, comme une union avec le monde fermé de l’au-delà.”

<sup>228</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman: 214.

<sup>229</sup> Marie Godet, “L’Art n’est pas Immortel,” *Il Créait des Choses Désagréables* (Limoges: Art Book Magazine, 2022): 76. “En 1942, il écrit dans *La Conquête du Monde par l’Image* que, par le dépaysement, la peinture a créé “une réalité seconde, en apparence plus bouleversante mais immobile en fait, une fausse réalité.” Il estime que “cette cohue de dépaysements” risque de “retourner au conventionnel et au normal.” “L’étonnant, le fantasque, le bizarre, le jamais-vu, peut-on décevoir les croire imperméables à l’ennui, irrésistibles à l’usure d’un emploi réitéré ?” À nouveau, c’est la perte d’efficacité des créations de l’esprit qui le préoccupe, et cette fois les œuvres surréalistes sont directement visées.”

<sup>230</sup> *La Conquête du Monde par l’Image* (Paris: La Main à Plume, 1942). “Il faut que la force créatrice de l’artiste fasse surgir ces images, ces idoles demeurées dans l’organisme, dans le souvenir, dans l’imagination; qu’elle le fasse librement sans y mettre d’intention ni de vouloir; il faut qu’elles se déploient, croissent, se dilatent et se contractent, afin de devenir non plus des schèmes fugitifs, mais des objets véritables et concrets.”

The repercussions of Faust's dream create an ephemeral world. While perhaps it would be preferable to return to a materialist world unencumbered by "metaphysical" qualities<sup>231</sup> the return is impossible.

Images shown by the Spectacle are perceived as though they were specific: a specific woman; a specific car. However, *Society of the Spectacle* (film) argues that each specific illusion is abstract; it is a symbol presented to the viewer for an ideological purpose. In *Society of the Spectacle*, a woman is not a woman, but an incarnation of sexual desire, and a car is not a car but rather a commodity that intends to provide a sense of identity, likely through masculinity. These archetypal symbols cannot merely be discussed as Jungian. Mariën recalls the medieval morality play in *Snowdrop*, which writes characters as symbols for Death, Love, etc.<sup>232</sup> Given Debord's investment in medievalism and influence from Mariën, it is likely that Debord saw the archetypal figures represented by the Spectacle similarly. Repetition solidifies their lack of individuality. This symbolism is reductive to the point that it eschews much of the open-endedness of semiotics, but it is also influenced by Freudian dream interpretations in ways that eschew description as iconographical interpretation. The film displays many women, many cars, and many planes, all from different regions. Some of the women have markers to exoticize them or associate them with another region of the world. [FIGURE 2.2] Cars and planes are easy to identify: French; American; English; German. [FIGURE 2.3] One after another, they are displayed in nearly the same way, almost always rotating on a pedestal platform like an enormous lazy Susan. The film can, for the most part, be described as following a rhythm of rotating movements that emulate the movement of what Debord describes as "pseudo-cyclical

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<sup>231</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990): 1001.

<sup>232</sup> Marcel Mariën, *The Snowdrop*, 1989. "Published somewhere and nowhere."

time.”<sup>233</sup> Rotations are metaphors that emphasize seemingly endless repetition that does not exist in nature, like the natural cyclical revolutions of the earth, but exists in a manmade structure for a society that does not move forward or change. The constant circular movement of *Society of the Spectacle* makes the film hypnotic, but it also creates a sense of cohesiveness and pacing. Similar movement helps to draw comparisons. Debord wants the viewer to be able to look at images that seem disparate at first and find what recurs. Identifying recurring themes take viewers away from specifics, they can start to see how the overall Spectacle operates. Such is the “coherence” internal to Debord’s films, as described by Olivier Assayas.<sup>234</sup>

These symbols of people (or pseudo-people) in the Spectacle, these “machines with a human face”<sup>235</sup> as Vaneigem calls them, have thematic consistencies that operate more like Platonic abstractions than unique material things. As in idealism, abstractions render material reality phantom; the world becomes simply a collection of recurring ephemeral fleeting symbols. Heaven is similarly characterized as abstract and ephemeral. As in religious thinking, idealism does often aim to find perfection or goodness or a root of human ethics, e.g. in Hegel and Kant. Karl Marx inverted his view of heaven and earth “in direct contrast to German philosophy” as a whole:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of

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<sup>233</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 9. “Pseudo-monde.”

<sup>234</sup> Assayas, *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*: 111. “Le sentiment le plus fort et le plus intime que me donnent *Sur le Passage...* et *Critique de la Séparation*, que je viens de voir, touche à la cohérence qu’ils inscrivent d’emblée.”

<sup>235</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 214.

consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.<sup>236</sup>

Marx sees life as creative and existence as created through transformations. Attempts to solidify universal concepts of heaven and metaphysics do not create the world, people do. Human consciousness perceives the world and draws imagination from it. Marx's metaphor of "heaven" and "earth" is a literal critique of religious ideology, but also can translate to "abstract" (or "ideological" or "idealism") and "material." A complexification of the traditional divide between heaven and earth does appear in Hegelian dialectics as it was presented to Mustapha Khayati. In his course notes, Henri Birault describes Hegelian dialectics as an "alliance between Heaven and Earth," and "the loving battle of [...] Heaven and Earth, the wedding of nature and Spirit." Truth is a "bacchanalian delirium" for Hegel — it is changed and created by ideas, by "the Word" of dialectics, and by the developing conversation between spirit and materiality.<sup>237</sup> If Heaven is Spirit and Earth is Nature, then abstraction is heavenly and materialism is earthly or, in medieval terms for sin, worldly, making Marx's theory essentially a theory based on worldliness.

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord considers the "journey of the Hegelian Spirit" to be "objectification" "identical to alienation," and instead promotes "the inversion carried out by Marx," which can be seen as the revolutionary goal to "ascend from earth to heaven" rather than "descend from heaven to earth."<sup>238</sup> However, Debord does not consider this descent wholly materialist. Rather, it blurs abstraction and materiality through *dialectical* materialism, which is

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<sup>236</sup> Karl Marx, *A Critique of the German Ideology*, (Marx/Engels Internet Archive, 2000) [marxists.org](http://marxists.org): 6.

<sup>237</sup> Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 12, GEN MSS 1480.

<sup>238</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 51.

not reducible to stagnant material objects, but it is in motion. Debord says that Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* "supersedes the opposition between idealism and materialism":

The spectacle simultaneously preserves, and imposes within the pseudo-concrete universe, the ideological characteristics of materialism and idealism. The contemplative side of the old materialism which conceives the world as representation and not as activity — and which ultimately idealizes matter — is fulfilled by the spectacle, where concrete things are automatically the masters of social life. Reciprocally, the dreamed activity of idealism is equally fulfilled in the spectacle, through the technical mediation of signs and signals — which ultimately materialize an abstract ideal.<sup>239</sup>

The ideal becomes material through the Spectacle (the materialized *Weltanschauung*) and the material becomes ideal through the concept that materiality is stagnant and representable. Before the Spectacle, capitalism materialized an ideal wherein monetary value was stagnant in its determinability. Khayati argues that the materiality of capitalism was not a given aspect of the material world, but, rather, "the bourgeoisie [...] introduced the economy into history."<sup>240</sup> This materialization contrasted with German idealism because power and ideology are not only were represented but actualized through capital:

For the first time, universal history ceased to be some metaphysical fantasy or some act of the World Spirit and became a material reality as concrete as the trivial existence of each individual.<sup>241</sup>

If a *situation* is a means of transforming truth and reality, then reality is not set or unchangeable. Rather, it is on a timeline that exists as the product of action.<sup>242</sup> "Reality must bend to transformation," Debord transcribes from Marx in his reading notes.<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, like writing and all forms of representation, as soon as the *situation* is identified, understood, and disseminated, it has passed; it has become reified. Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfurt School

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<sup>239</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 151.

<sup>240</sup> Khayati, *Situationist International Anthology*: 225.

<sup>241</sup> Khayati, *Situationist International Anthology*: 225.

<sup>242</sup> Guy Debord, *Chroniques de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France* 66 (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2013).

<sup>243</sup> Guy Debord, *Marx, Hegel* (Paris: Éditions d'Échappée, 2022): 128. "La réalité ne peut se plier à cette transformation."

divides the real from the true based on the idea that everything exists on a timeline of becoming.<sup>244</sup> Truth of the present cannot be known:

That which is cannot be true [...] The world of immediate experience — the world in which we find ourselves living — must be comprehended, transformed, and even subverted in order to become that which it really is. The equation Reason = Truth = Reality [...] joins the subjective and objective world into one antagonistic unity. (...) The truth for men and things [...] is the conditions in which men and things become what they really are.<sup>245</sup>

Marcuse argues that the ontological concept of Truth is “the logic of a two-dimensional universe of discourse” that ironically, in its search for Truth and reality, serves to hide tangible truths and realities of the world outside of philosophy:

Those who bore the brunt of the untrue reality [of Plato’s ideal state] and who, therefore, seemed to be most in need of attaining its subversion were not the concern of philosophy. It abstracted from them and continued to abstract from them. (...) The rationality in the name of which philosophy passed its judgments obtained that abstract and general ‘purity’ which made it immune against the world in which one had to live. With the exception of the materialistic ‘heretics,’ philosophic thought was rarely afflicted by the afflictions of human existence.<sup>246</sup>

Marcuse, who Jean-Louis Brau classifies as “unrevolutionary,” nevertheless was of interest to Brau because supported the revolutionary struggles of the “colonized” and oppressed because he was worried that the concentration camps of World War II would lead to a future wherein the entire planet could become like a concentration camp; a “planetary Mauthausen.”<sup>247</sup> Brau, a member of the Letterist International which was founded by Debord in 1952, would, by 1968, become invested in Third World Liberation struggles in ways that Situationists were not, but Brau’s thinking and relationship to the formation of the Situationist movement are nevertheless relevant. If the goal of the Spectacle is control, it is not control for the sake of assisting or uniting

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<sup>244</sup> Herbert Marcuse appears as a reference in Debord’s notes for the film *Society of the Spectacle*, and he also appears as an influence for insurgents of 1968 in Jean-Louis Brau’s *Cours Camarade, Le Vieux Monde est Derrière Toi*.

<sup>245</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991): 128.

<sup>246</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*: 139.

<sup>247</sup> Jean-Louis Brau, *Cours, Camarade, le Vieux Monde est Derrière Toi* (Paris: Albin, 1968): 38.

individuals. The goal of the capitalist Spectacle is to conquer, in part through hypnotic repetition and in part by ubiquitous violence around the world, as Debord shows in the prolific amounts of military footage in *Society of the Spectacle*. Violence earns profit through colonialism and imperialism as it did through concentration camps. If capitalist exploitation partnered with dreamlike ideological mythologies took full hold over the planet, perhaps the world under the Spectacle would devolve into a “planetary Mauthausen.”

When writing *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord was interested in Marcuse’s theories on false consciousness. False consciousness is the *pseudo-world* that unfolds based on false initial premises. Abstractions in “all fields of knowledge” create the “science” of false consciousness. When fields of knowledge, as Marcuse argues, divert from those who “bore the brunt of the untrue reality” by “abstract[ing],” they move away from material basis, and therefore solidify the *pseudo-world* or *Weltanschauung*. They do so purposefully, to gain “immunity” from the world of lived experience.

In Debord’s reading notes on Marcuse, he reminds himself to return to the following themes: memory (*mémoire*); time (*le temps*); and forgetting (*l’oubli*).<sup>248</sup> In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse writes that we live in a “one-dimensional universe” where we are “trained to forget — to translate the negative into the positive so that [we] can continue to function.”<sup>249</sup> This “Orwellian” society “is repulsing and forgetting historical reality — the horror of fascism” and it instead presents “redefinitions” that are “falsifications which [...] serve to transform falsehood into truth.”<sup>250</sup> “Industrial society [...] liquidates time and memory”<sup>251</sup> partly because of the faultiness inherent in memory, but also because “remembrance of the past may give rise to

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<sup>248</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>249</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*: 107.

<sup>250</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*: 101.

<sup>251</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*: 102.

dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory.”<sup>252</sup> As a result, “suppression of history [...] is not an academic but a political affair.”<sup>253</sup>

Debord notes, in response to Marcuse, that “the society of the spectacle that lives on the past hides the past.”<sup>254</sup> Spectacle presents “diversions” that cover vision of the real to the point that reality and truth approach invisibility. “The world runs the risk of becoming paradoxically invisible.”<sup>255</sup> The Spectacle creates images of the past — such is an integral component of image production — but, for Debord, with the intention of making historical knowledge “disappear”:

The primary intention of spectacular domination is to make historical knowledge disappear in general. [...] The spectacle organizes ignorance [...] and, shortly after, the most important things are forgotten. The most important is the most hidden.<sup>256</sup>

In his preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel dissects notions of “true” and “false,” questioning the dichotomy. He does not even simply argue that falsehoods hold grains of truth, but rather that truth and falsity are inexorably linked. Understandings of truth are informed by understandings of falsity, making it part of truth.

‘True’ and ‘false’ belong among those determinate notions which are held to be inert and wholly separate essences [...] which [...] [have] nothing in common. [...] Nor is there such a thing as the false any more than there is such a thing as evil. [...] The false [...] [is] the negative of the substance, which as the content of knowledge is the True [...] Of course, one can know something falsely. Out of this distinguishing, of course, comes [...] identity, and this resultant identity is the truth. But it is not truth as if the disparity had been thrown away [...] Yet we cannot [...] say that the false is a moment of the true, let alone a component part of it. To say that in every falsehood is a grain of truth is to treat the two like oil and water, which cannot be mixed and are only externally combined. It is precisely on account of the importance of designating the moment of complete

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<sup>252</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*: 101.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Guy Debord, “Fiches de Lecture,” NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>255</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, NAF 28603, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>256</sup> Pascal Dumontier, *Les Situationnistes et Mai 68* (Paris: Éditions Ivrea, 1995): 1.

otherness that the terms ‘true’ and ‘false’ must no longer be used where such otherness has been annulled.<sup>257</sup>

It is from this passage that Debord derives the line in *Society of the Spectacle*: “In a world that is really on its head, the true is the moment of the false,”<sup>258</sup> responding to Hegel’s claim that “We cannot [...] say that the false is a moment of the true, yet a component part of it.” Hegel complexifies and blurs the distinctions between truth and falsity, while Debord proposes a world where they are inverted. Nazi propagandist Göbbels argued that artists were necessary in politics when “the world is turned upside down.” Surrealist Georges Henein agreed with the principle as ammunition for opposition to Göbbels:

A sentence of Dr. Göbbels with which it is difficult for me not to absolutely agree: ‘At the moment when politics writes the drama of a people, when a world is turned upside down, when all values sink to be replaced by new ones, at this time the artist has no right to say that it does not concern him in any way.’ The only formality to settle, a formality already settled for most of them, is to know on which side of the world, on which side of the people, on which side of old and new values, on which side of drama it belongs to the artists bother. Certainly not on the same side as Mr. Göbbels.<sup>259</sup>

Lefebvre considers how Hegel complexifies the true and false as “like oil and water” in relation to mystification. Like the truth and falsity, “appearance and reality are [...] not separated like oil and water, but rather amalgamated like water and wine.”<sup>260</sup> Lefebvre’s analogy changes two immiscible liquids, oil and water, to two miscible liquids, water and wine. The biblical

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<sup>257</sup> Georg Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 22.

<sup>258</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 14.

<sup>259</sup> Georges Henein, “L’Art dans la Mêlée,” Mustapha Khayati Papers, GENMSS1480, Egyptian Surrealism, Box 12 Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University: 59. “Je terminerai même en citant une phrase du Dr. Goebbels avec laquelle il m’est difficile de n’être pas absolument d’accord: ‘Au moment où la politique écrit le drame d’un peuple, où un monde est renversé, où toutes les valeurs sombrent et où d’autres s’élèvent, à ce toutes les valeurs sombrent et où d’autres s’élèvent, à ce moment l’artiste n’a pas le droit de dire que cela ne le concerne en rien.’ En effet, tout cela le concerne. Et l’artiste, lui-même, est le premier à en convenir. La seule formalité à régler, formalité déjà réglée pour la plupart d’entre eux, est de savoir de quel côté du monde, de quel côté du peuple, de quel côté des valeurs anciennes et Nouvelles, de quel côté du drame il appartient aux artistes de se ranger. Certainement pas du même côté que M. Goebbels.”

<sup>260</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (New York: Verso, 2014): 167.

illusion to turning water into wine suggests a sense of the miraculous in the illusory, or “appearance.”

The irony of Spectacle as an invisibility generator is in the fact that it is likewise a generator of vision. Daniel Boorstin (1914-2004), an American historian and social theorist, is referenced in *Society of the Spectacle* and he also appears in Debord’s reading notes.<sup>261</sup> Boorstin argues:

By a diabolical irony, the very facsimiles of the world which we make on purpose to bring it within our grasp, to make it less elusive, have transported us into a new world of blurs. By sharpening our images we have blurred all our experience. The new images have blurred traditional distinctions. The broadest of the old distinctions which no longer serve us as they did is the distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false.’<sup>262</sup>

For Boorstin, media and modern image production are to blame for the blurring of “true” and “false.” Advertisers, by profession, are dedicated historically dedicated to “Truth,” but advertising “has survived on its power to give Truth a new meaning.”<sup>263</sup> Modern experiences have a “new ambiguity” that can be traced to images, themselves, which have inherent vagueness through the “uncertainty of relation between the image and the thing imagined.”<sup>264</sup> Such new ambiguities make “the simple question ‘Is it true?’ as obsolete as the horse and buggy.”<sup>265</sup> However, it is not simply advertising which embodies this trend. “Rather, it is the whole world.”<sup>266</sup> While Debord decided to redact references to media, television, and film entirely, Boorstin’s conclusions nevertheless were cited in the book, *Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>267</sup>

Boorstin argues that capitalistic media is not simply made up of lies, but rather of “pseudo-events,” crafted moments intended to create news. Hypothetical actual news would report on an essential reality, whereas pseudo-events manufacture news as a consumable product.

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<sup>261</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, NAF 28603, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>262</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961): 213.

<sup>263</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 214.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 160.

For example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," Boorstin argues, were essentially speaking for the sake of being heard. A pseudo-event is distinguishable from propaganda. "While a pseudo-event is an ambiguous truth, propaganda is an appealing falsehood."<sup>268</sup> "We cannot say that we are being fooled. It is also not entirely accurate to say that we are being 'informed.'"<sup>269</sup> Unlike Nazi or Soviet propaganda, American media overloads the public with events that it, itself, creates in order to report "pseudo-events"<sup>270</sup> e.g. *Meet the Press* or the Emmy's. Political screenings in *Society of the Spectacle* hint at a formula established by Fireside Chats, including a broadcast by Ché Guevara, as well as various political speeches by French figures connected to Charles De Gaulle. Immense crowds from different countries are juxtaposed to reveal their similarities. Packed auditoriums with circular seating allow viewing of a central point for a speech by Lenin filmed by Eisenstein. Multiple locations display similar auditorium architectures and similar fervor among audiences. Ticker-tape parades welcome political figures and soldiers with enthusiasm.

For Boorstin, "true" and "false" once existed. Debord agrees, at least, that the Spectacle is a twentieth-century development. Debord's comparisons between the Spectacle and false consciousness connect Boorstin's analysis of modern media back to Marxist philosophy. Boorstin, while a Communist as a student, adopted conservative nationalism after being questioned by the House of Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAAC). Debord's connections transcend Marxist dogmatism by placing ideas from multiple backgrounds into a conversation about the nature of power, and in fact it seems that Debord aims to ask representatives of hegemonic power how they see it operating. It is particularly interesting that he picks Boorstin, almost as though Debord is curious as to why and how Marxist worldviews and descriptions of

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<sup>268</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961): 34.

<sup>269</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 36.

<sup>270</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 34.

hegemonic power structures translate into conservative thought. In general, Debord speaks transhistorically, making connections to medieval and ancient history. “The most modern aspect of the Spectacle is also [...] the most archaic.”<sup>271</sup> The Spectacle may be a modern development, but it is derived from a long ideological lineage. Boorstin’s focus on media and contemporary politics provide a limited historical scope.

False consciousness is the belief in falsity, which differentiates it from a lie, as a lie implies intentionality. When false consciousness becomes a World, it resembles Mannheim’s theory of “total ideology,” which appears in *Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>272</sup> “Total ideology,” says Mannheim, is not the materialized form of ideology, but rather a worldview that “aims at its total conception of the world (*Weltanschauung*).”<sup>273</sup> When “total ideology” is powered by “propaganda,” it creates the social conditions of the world.<sup>274</sup> “Total ideology” can apply to individuals, trapped in individual *Weltanschauung*. When applied to collective consciousness, material ramifications of that pervasive total ideology amount to the Spectacle. In a world ubiquitously “colonized” by the Spectacle, it becomes essentially impossible to *not* have false consciousness, given the pervasiveness of image production. As a result, it becomes incredibly difficult to discern what can be distinguished as real, what is *false consciousness*, and to what extent false consciousness has become reality. On the level of the simple fact that the world is dominated by illusory images, the illusions and the tangible blend together like, as Lefebvre argues, “water and wine.” *Society of the Spectacle* perpetually relates film stars to real women; life experiences to film clips. Daily life becomes defined by images in a way that is inseparable.

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<sup>271</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 19.

<sup>272</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 172.

<sup>273</sup> Debord, “Fiches de Lecture,” NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>274</sup> Debord, “Fiches de Lecture,” NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Surrealist painter Marcel Jean (1900-1993) argues that hallucination is merely a necessary outcome of the biological process of seeing. The difference between sight and hallucination is that hallucinations are not based in the real, but sight is not ultimately based in the real either. Following Kant, sight is necessarily disconnected from the essence of the *world of things*. “The image, like the sensation it repeats, is, in its very nature, hallucinatory. Thus hallucination, which seems a monstrosity, is the very fabric of our mental life.”<sup>275</sup> Regardless of the limitations of sight and seeing, the realism of painting is not the same as experiencing the world of perception. A second layer removal due to illusion does indeed apply. Realism especially cannot escape falsity. According to György Lukács, realism in artistic representation results in lies because it claims to show the truth. Lukács discusses a common argument that Hitler was opposed to nonrepresentational art, or “degenerate art.”<sup>276</sup> Hitler opposed nonrepresentational art because it claimed that realism was related to Truth, which was inherently flawed, as well as misleading for an ideology that saw “truth [as its] enemy.”<sup>277</sup> Similarly, while many opponents of Stalinism argued against Soviet Realism because it championed realistic representations, Lukács argued that Soviet Realism was particularly unrealistic because it typically portrayed “childish happy endings.”<sup>278</sup>

Lefebvre argues that people are less drawn to the truly realistic and tend to be seduced by immateriality and falsity, particularly when it is attractive or enjoyable. Lefebvre comments on Marc Bloch (1886-1944)<sup>279</sup> that we are unable to see the many facts around us like “the shape of fields, of ploughs.” Instead of gravitating to facts, the “humble,” and the “familiar,” people are

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<sup>275</sup> Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting* (New York: Grove Press, 1959): 117.

<sup>276</sup> György Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1969): 49.

<sup>277</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: 49.

<sup>278</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: 49.

<sup>279</sup> A historian at the University of Strasbourg from 1920 to 1936, Bloch purveyed methods for social history that shaped Lefebvre’s social theories of space and society. Both Bloch and Lefebvre had been resistance fighters in the Second World War.

drawn to “clouds” and “mysteries.”<sup>280</sup> However, says Lefebvre, even in the humble everyday, there are complexities. “Truth is wrapped in veils; it can only be defined by an endless succession of points of view.”<sup>281</sup>

People are attracted to fictions and even lies, but fictions and lies can also be discussed as holding certain truths or sometimes in relation to a certain internal logic or, when logic is not intentionally applied, psychology. Alice Becker-Ho extensively cites Marc Bloch’s *Apologie pour l’Histoire* in her 1993 *Princes of Jargon*, including the following: “A lie [...] is in its own way a testimony.”<sup>282</sup> Bloch argues that the testimony of the lie reveals the mechanics of society at the time, the society that birthed and fostered the lie. It also reveals a legacy that extends from the initial lie, which, as Debord says, “unfolds [...] as a pseudo-world apart.” Becker-Ho quotes Bloch as follows:

A lie [...] is in its own way a testimony [...] There have existed many mythomantic times. [...] Admittedly, most of the false diplomas, false papal decrees, false capitulars, that were forged in large numbers were done so with interest [...] The characteristic fact remains that these deceptions were assisted by characters of unquestioned piety and, often, virtue. [...] Fraud by nature gives birth to fraud.<sup>283</sup>

Bloch references the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries as mythomantic times, especially in terms of the myths produced by Celtic revivalists, particularly fabricated ancient and medieval texts that were produced far more recently. In “Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War,” Bloch argues that “false news is a mirror wherein the ‘collective consciousness’ contemplates its own features.”<sup>284</sup> Truths about systems can be learned from lies and fabrications. Moments when lies are especially prevalent, like mythomantic times, are revealing. Wars are times when lies spread

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<sup>280</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 20.

<sup>281</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 39.

<sup>282</sup> Alice Becker-Ho, *Les Princes du Jargon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993): 30.

<sup>283</sup> Becker-Ho, *Les Princes du Jargon*: 30.

<sup>284</sup> Marc Bloch, “Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War,” *Michigan War Studies Review* (Ypsilanti: Eastern Michigan University, 2013):10.

“like sand,” due to censorship but also the panic of the “collective imagination.”<sup>285</sup> Myths, themselves, however, are not inherently lies — they can be intended as means of explaining the world in common language, argues Christophe Kotányi. However, Bloch argues that, when myths are perpetuated, manipulation becomes easy and lies can be told with few consequences. Attila Kotányi would likely respond: which times are *not* mythomaniac? The postwar era and modernity were entrenched in myths as were other times in history.<sup>286</sup>

False consciousness can be differentiated from lies because it implies actual belief in falsehood rather than a mere intention to deceive. Bloch discusses fabrications. Initially, fabrications can begin as intentional deceptions, but later lend themselves to a litany of sincere beliefs in those fabrications. Bloch references other instances wherein the initial flaw was merely a flaw that was not intended as a deception, and that led to a legacy of misunderstanding.<sup>287</sup>

Debord defines the Spectacle as a world where “the liar has lied to themselves,”<sup>288</sup> which complicates the concept of a “lie” seeing that the definition of a lie implies intentionality. Thus, a “liar [who] has lied to themselves” would seem to not be a liar at all, but rather someone who had false consciousness. However, when Debord introduces lying to oneself as opposed to false consciousness, he presents the idea that there is willful and semi-conscious participation. Individuals know that images are not real, but they believe them anyway.

Debord states “the liar has lied to themselves” in the voiceover as he shows a crowd on a train platform being recorded by CCTV [FIGURE 2.4]. By the end of the shot, it becomes hard to tell that the camera is viewing a screen, because the recording of the recording makes the

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<sup>285</sup> Bloch, *Michigan War Studies Review*: 4.

<sup>286</sup> Christophe Kotányi and Anna O’Meara, Interview, April 16, 2024 (New York: Common Notions, forthcoming.)

<sup>287</sup> Marc Bloch, “Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War,” trans. James Holoka (Ann Arbor: Michigan War Studies Review, 2013).

<sup>288</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967): 9. “Le mensonger s’est menti à lui-même.” Typically, this paper refers to Donald-Nicholson Smith’s translation of *The Society of the Spectacle*. However, based on the original French, I have decided to refer to Fredy Perlman’s translation in this instance. *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977): 2.

initial appear to be the first reproduction. Filmmakers, artists, and novelists attribute themselves to their work which is non-living and imagistic. They tend to believe that they have power or autonomy over their creations. The creations are lies because they intentionally create falsities; illusions – such is the inherent quality of image production. Creators tend to believe that their creations have a singularity or uniqueness; that they are not part of a broader false consciousness. CCTV is a means of crowd control that, while surveilled and maintained by humans, is an inhuman, non-living machine that replicates images of people, reducing them to possible subjects of police profiles. The Voice-Over states:

Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in a world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.<sup>289</sup>

Not only is the artist detached from the product of the image, but their words and images were never ultimately theirs.<sup>290</sup> Words are all taken, images are all based on the world of the senses (even abstract images, which use physical paint or other media. Artists change or warp, but they do not produce anything which did not already exist in some way in the world beforehand. However, as soon as artists or philosophers or whomever solidifies an image, truism, or story in their creation, the image or idea “freezes;” it is stagnated as a mere representation of a complex world. In *Society of the Spectacle* (film), Debord pairs the idea of a “pseudo-world apart” with a set of a jungle for a strip tease [FIGURE 2.5]. The set itself is composed of roughly abstracted silhouetted cut-outs of leaf shapes, strongly lit to cause dramatic shadows. A woman in a furry

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<sup>289</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 12.

<sup>290</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 23. “Workers do not produce themselves: they produce a force independent of themselves.”

bikini convulses, as though possessed, as she takes off the top piece.<sup>291</sup> The falsity is emphasized by the set in the way the song “It’s Only a Paper Moon” flattens cardboard seas, or in the way that Mao Zedong reduces supposedly false threats to paper tigers. However, the sentiments that the image targets, e.g. desire, are real. Lefebvre marks the difference between real sexuality and sexualized advertising in sensuality. “There is nothing really sensual” about sexualized images; “that is probably its most profound characteristic.”<sup>292</sup> When considering this woman in *Society of the Spectacle* as though she inhabited the lived world, it seems strange in its otherworldly pseudo-worldliness, but, Lefebvre says, “How strange the split between the real world and the reverse image is. For in the end it is not strange at all, but a false strangeness, a cheap-and-nasty, all-pervasive mystery” of a “false world.”<sup>293</sup> Intellectualizing the concept can further exoticize it while its everyday function is banal and intentionally so. A fictionalized version of Debord speaks about strip teases in a 1961 autobiographical novel, *The Night*, by Michèle Bernstein: “I think that very few people have a sense of the erotic [...] but that pornographers abound.”<sup>294</sup> This differentiation finds a truth in eroticism that relates to desire, tangibility, and human connection, which is distinguishable from pornography because pornography monopolizes on desire without the tangibility or human connection.

When producers create objects that divorce them from daily life, and when these producers then are removed from other people, from the objects of their production, and from a sense of autonomy over what they have created, when they become ruled by the “non-living,”<sup>295</sup> this is alienation, not self-expression. Alienation is an unreality, says Lefebvre, but it is

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<sup>291</sup> Guy Debord, “The Society of the Spectacle,” *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

<sup>292</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 57.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Michèle Bernstein, *The Night* (London, Book Works, 2020): 91.

<sup>295</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 12.

a “practical illusion” that results in how daily life is organized. In fact, alienation is directed entirely toward control over daily life. As a result, “This unreality appears to be infinitely more real than anything authentically human [...] Thus, the unreal is taken for the real and vice versa.”<sup>296</sup> If the kernels of truths within the Spectacle were revealed, and if lies or falsities were made apparent, the result would continue to represent a world of confusion. That world of confusion would be turned on its head and revealed not as tangible or understandable, but as the illusory network of untruths, lies, and falsities that comprise it. This inversion differs from the aesthetic of other frameworks of the truth and truisms which often attempt to create a framework for understanding the world comprehensibly. Reality, itself, is contradictory and confusing, and the Spectacle reflects these aspects in a way that is removed and reductive. In *Situationist Times* 4 (1963) Jacqueline de Jong references Balthasar Gracian, an author referenced at other points by Debord and Vaneigem as well:

‘The whole universe is made up of contradictions, and its agreement consists of discrepancies.’ – ‘One era stands against the other, even the stars wage war among themselves and conquer one another.’ ‘The things of the world must all be looked at upside down in order to see them correctly.’ For this, PARMIGIANINO has a convex mirror, COMENIUS has glasses, and GRACIÁN has a miraculous mirror that transforms everything that seems natural into illusions. This is a mirror of disappointment, since it shows the other side of the deceptive natural reality, the world in general, which is nothing other than its ‘labyrinth of intrigues, untruths and illusions.’<sup>297</sup>

The Situationist tactic of *détournement* aims to turn existing truths, lies, and materials (e.g. media and advertisements) on their heads to see them clearly and reveal the concealed.

*Détournement* does not just inform, it also transforms, creating a dialectical discussion with the

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<sup>296</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 189.

<sup>297</sup> *The Situationist Times* 4, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris: Situationist International, 1963): 154. “‘Die einen Zeiten stehen gegen die anderen, selbst die Gestirne führen Krieg unter sich und besiegen einander.’ ‘Die Dinge der Welt muss man sämtlich verkehrt herum betrachten, damit man sie richtig sieht.’ Dafür gibt es bei PARMIGIANINO einen Konvexspiegel, bei COMENIUS eine Brille, bei GRACIÁN einen Wunderspiegel, der alles anscheinend Natürliche in Chimären verwandelt.”

old world and proposing something new. *Society of the Spectacle* references Søren Kierkegaard in reference to *détournement*:

The device of *détournement* restores all (...) subversive qualities to past critical judgments that have congealed into respectable truths—or, in other words, that have been transformed into lies. Kierkegaard too made use of *détournement*, and offered his own pronouncement on the subject: ‘But how you twist and turn, so that (...) you inevitably always manage to introduce some little word or phrase that is not your own, and which awakens disturbing recollections.’ (*Philosophical Fragments*.) The defining characteristic for this use of *détournement* is the necessity for *distance* to be maintained toward whatever has been turned into an official verity. As Kierkegaard acknowledges in the same work, “One further remark I wish to make, however with respect to your many animadversions, all pointing to my having introduced borrowed expressions in the course of my exposition. That such is the case I do not deny, nor will I now conceal from you that it was done purposely, and that in the next section of this piece, if I ever write such a section, it is my intention to call the whole by its right name, and to clothe the problem in its historical costume.”<sup>298</sup>

Speaking in the language of the contemporary moment is unavoidable. The nature of language is to employ words that are defined and created by societies and associated with contexts and connotations, or, as Kierkegaard says, clothed in “historical costume.” Kierkegaard sees how his language is necessarily derived from his historical moment, and embraces it, including borrowed expressions. He imagines a piece of writing where he analyzes borrowed expressions as a means of understanding his own historicity. Debord agrees in the necessity of borrowed language, and the necessity of existing within and in response to a contemporary moment. However, any acceptance of contemporary truisms means the acceptance of lies. Vaneigem explains the significance of Kierkegaard for Situationists:

It wasn’t by chance that [...] we were big readers of Kierkegaard. We still are. Kierkegaard was at the limit of religious bullshit [...] At the same time, Kierkegaard cast a lucid glance on the mysteries of existence.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 144.

<sup>299</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures* (New York: Not Bored, 2015): 52.

For Kierkegaard, *objective* truth is an *object* which is the problem with it. Objective truth, for example, does not recognize how individuals relate to the words that they choose, their context, or the illusions that they produce. As a result, Kierkegaard is more interested in understanding subjective truth because he finds it more knowable. However, it only comes into being through the person contemplating it, and the relationship between a person and a truth is always in a process of becoming. The subject's thinking and concrete being define their relationship to the truth, "in contrast with Kant, who defined truth as the static correspondence between thought and its object."<sup>300</sup> Debord argues that objective truth is "frozen," objectified, and that objectification transforms it into a "lie." The world, contrarily, is in motion, in a process of becoming, and it is constantly changing. In general, Kierkegaard "appears to have severed religious truth claims from their alleged objective reference and made them entirely self-referential."<sup>301</sup> A world of understanding like "religious truth" can operate through internal logic. Religious thought can be true in the context of its own system. This venture is essentially reflecting the logical project of ontology, but Kierkegaard decides to apply preferential treatment to the truths of everyday life and subjective experience. In his thought process toward reaching the conclusion that religious and ontological thinking are less reliable than everyday experience, Kierkegaard does venture beyond the self-referential limitations of religious logic into a worldview that attempts to compromise religiosity with the absurdity of reality. Reality is characterized by paradoxes, Kierkegaard is famous for arguing, and he finds marvels in the concept of the paradox. It is this wonder and awe that bring him to what could be seen as a sense of ecstasy, because he sees a world beyond reason that he only finds explicable through divinity. Situationists were anti-religious but, like Kierkegaard, theorize a world beyond rationality wherein contradictions

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<sup>300</sup> Matthew Gerhard Jacoby, "Kierkegaard on Truth," *Religious Studies* 38.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 28.

<sup>301</sup> Jacoby, *Religious Studies*: 27.

presented their own paradoxical truths. Arguments are less reductive if they consider multiple possible realities. This could take humanity beyond the limitations of their perception argue Situationists; beyond what Vaneigem calls the “wasteland of subjectivity.”<sup>302</sup> Reality, says Vaneigem, has a contradictory nature.<sup>303</sup>

In *Society of the Spectacle*, “Truth” represents “fragments” of “pseudo-knowledge.”

When made into a totalizing worldview, “truth” becomes a “despotic” “total ideology”:

Ideology, whose whole internal logic led toward what Mannheim calls ‘total ideology’ – the despotism of a fragment imposing itself as the pseudo-knowledge of a frozen whole, as a totalitarian worldview—his now fulfilled itself in the immobilized spectacle of non-history.<sup>304</sup>

For Mannheim, ideology and reality are moving targets: they change over time. Reality is “the outcome of constant reorganization of the mental processes which make up our worlds.”<sup>305</sup> There are multiple worlds for multiple people. Mannheim argues, like Debord, that the problem with ontology is that it envisions a “fixed”<sup>306</sup> and “unchanging universe.”<sup>307</sup> It lacks a sense of history. Religion and mythology lack a sense that they are historical. Their claim to universal and infinite makes them fixed, and it is this lack of changeability that makes religion incapable of revolutionary thinking, which necessitates change rather than stagnation and traditionalism. *Society of the Spectacle* argues that the issue with millenarian Christians was not their instinct toward revolt, but rather that their revolt “lack[ed] only the consciousness of being historical and

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<sup>302</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library. “L’intermonde est le terrain vague de la subjectivité.”

<sup>303</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library. “la nature contradictoire du réel.”

<sup>304</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 150.

<sup>305</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*: (New York: Routledge, 2000): 84.

<sup>306</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*: 59.

<sup>307</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*: 84.

nothing more.”<sup>308</sup> Mannheim suggests, “It is only now that the new historical sense is beginning to penetrate, and a dynamic concept of ideology and reality can be conceived of.”<sup>309</sup>

Flexibility of truth, for Debord and Mannheim, is closer to the actual truth than universal propositions. However, flexibility of truth can be a disorienting tactic for creating an environment of submission to a rotating and intangible series of lies. This flexibility, for political lies and propaganda, has powerful and dangerous potential. For Mariën, flexibility of lies is more powerful, politically, than dogmatism. Mariën compares Communist and Nazi propaganda, arguing that the first follows formulae for self-referential ideological systems, while the second has a flexible perspective of reality that changes over time. Mariën, while anti-fascist, agrees, in fact, with the “Hitlerian” concept of Truth: that it is “relative.”<sup>310</sup>

A large portion of the clips in the film, *Society of the Spectacle*, are dedicated to depicting Nazi propaganda. When the Situationists aim to embody the negation and contradiction of the existing world, they define that world as the Spectacle, and wish for greater connection to something outside of the anti-democratic domination of the Spectacle. For postwar fascists, “negation” at times meant rewritings of history or historical denialism. *Society of the Spectacle* displays Herbert Meyer after a sequence depicting German communists who resisted Hitler. Meyer was no such communist. A former SS officer, he led HIAG (*Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen Waffen-SS*) in the 1950s, which aimed for “image polishing” of Nazism.<sup>311</sup> The Spectacle, which is malleable like perception, mediates knowledge through strategies like public relations. Situationists did aim to erase history, but rather to present it, and the lies told, analytically, revealing something that was previously hidden

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<sup>308</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 102.

<sup>309</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*: 84.

<sup>310</sup> Marcel Mariën, “Théorie de la Révolution Moniale Immédiate,” *Les Lèvres Nues* 10 (Paris: Allia, 1998): 30.

<sup>311</sup> David Large, “Reckoning without the Past,” *The Journal of Modern History* 59 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 79-113.

in the arguments presented through an image. *Détournement* aims to find the “grain of truth”<sup>312</sup> amid untruths, which often means contradicting what is said on the surface, but it also can be *détournement* as a “diversion”<sup>313</sup> tactic from previous ideas. Carl von Clausewitz, a military strategist with whom Debord was deeply familiar, dedicated a chapter to diversions in *On War*. Clausewitz defines diversions:

Diversion is understood such an incursion into the enemy’s country as draws off a portion of his force from the principal point. It is only when this is the chief end in view, and not the gain of the object which is selected as the point of attack, that it is an enterprise of a special character, otherwise it is only an ordinary attack.<sup>314</sup>

Clausewitz says that diversions always focus an attack on an object e.g., a city, with the intention of withdrawing from the attack or allowing it to become a subordinate attack, always for the enemy’s distraction that can benefit of an alternate primary attack. Diversions often fail. Sending unprepared troops into an attack can end in their demise. Debord argues that *détournement* is a form of diversion because *détournements* are detached from the original source, and even that they are detached from a sense of the “Truth:”

The truth, says Hegel, is not ‘detached (...) like a finished article from the instrument that shapes it.’ Such a theoretical consciousness of dialectical movement, which must itself bear the stamp of that movement, is manifested by the reversal of established relationships between concepts and by the diversion (or *détournement*) of all the attainments of earlier critical efforts.<sup>315</sup>

Debord argues that fascism was “one of the factors in the formation of the modern Spectacle,” particularly in relation to its creation of myths, conditioning, and technocracy.<sup>316</sup> Understanding the Spectacle can be compared to understanding fascism in the sense that it adjusts reality and truth based on what is convenient in the moment. However, in the end, the

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<sup>312</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967): 167 “Noyau de vérité.”

<sup>313</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 144.

<sup>314</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*; Trans. J.J. Graham (Project Gutenberg, 2006). [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

<sup>315</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 144.

<sup>316</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 77.

goal remains the same, consistent, fixed, and predictable: power. In *Hitler au Pouvoir*, Henri Lefebvre argues, “Hitlerism is far from having a base in the real.”<sup>317</sup> He describes its dexterity:

Many people think of fascism as a *coup de force* and a brutal tyranny. This image is much too simple and risky to diminish popular vigilance. Fascism is much more skillful. He knows how to use all the means that democracy allows him to employ: press, TSF, financial maneuvers, panic or slander campaigns, false news, etc. [The Führer] is the creator of truth and justice.<sup>318</sup>

Lefebvre cites a wartime journalist: “One of the characteristics of Hitlerian sadism is to rob things of their meaning, to plunge its victims into a disorienting world.”<sup>319</sup> Mariën’s ardently anti-Nazi political marketing strategies were dialectically derived from Adolf Hitler and Joseph Göbbels. He argued that Nazi success in influencing public opinion came from their “flexibility,” particularly in terms of how they adjusted their ideology based on what worked in given situations and changed reality in ways that benefited them, including rewritings of history and the production of fake news. For Hitler, Göbbels, and some Surrealists like Paul Nougé, lies could be told because they would become true:

[Göbbels] was particularly aware that truth is relative, and he hailed the well-organized lie as the most powerful means of moral action available. ‘Lies stop being lies when they succeed,’ says Paul Nougé. Göbbels created the necessary falsity to birth and expand Nazism. His greatest accomplishment was probably his false radio broadcast that was skillfully transmitted through the BBC’s frequency, which created short but serious internal chaos in English and American command during the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>320</sup>

Communist propaganda differed from Nazi propaganda. While “Communists have no more trouble misrepresenting the facts than the fascists,”<sup>321</sup> Communist propaganda was dense, doctrinal, and inflexible. Hitler, on the other hand, would “align himself with a more fruitful

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<sup>317</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir* (Paris: Bureau d’Éditions, 1938): 55.

<sup>318</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir*: 55.

<sup>319</sup> Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir*: 52.

<sup>320</sup> Mariën, “Théorie de la Révolution Moniale Immédiate,” *Les Lèvres Nues* 10: 30.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

reality”<sup>322</sup> to the point that he “transcended reality.”<sup>323</sup> Unlike Communists, he had a rough understanding of history, and instead aimed to reach the “spiritual level” of the “least intelligent.”<sup>324</sup> Meanwhile, Communists “are like prisoners in a maze of justifications” to “conceal” weaknesses.<sup>325</sup> “We live as though we are in a dream, nestled comfortably in our hermetic groups that endlessly deliver vehement speeches to the walls.”<sup>326</sup>

Debord compared the book-to-film format of *Society of the Spectacle* to Sergei Eisenstein’s *Strike!* which sought to depict Marx’s *Capital* in the form of a film.<sup>327</sup> This is interesting not only for the ode to Marx, but also for Debord’s persistent connections to Leninism. Despite how Debord criticizes and disassociates himself from Leninism, which he describes as spectacular in his *détournements* of Eisenstein, and Lenin’s speeches in *Society of the Spectacle*, he nevertheless sees *Society of the Spectacle* as formulated like Eisenstein’s *Strike!* and he uses characters from Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* to depict tough proletarians with whom the audience should emotionally relate and consider the heroes of the story. *Society of the Spectacle* triumphantly plays the *Internationale*, perhaps with a tinge of pessimism, but also with an apparent degree of hopefulness. The use of Leninist film connects to Debord’s his own vision of how revolutionaries look, act, and think. In *Society of the Spectacle*, he finds irony in how the Bolshevik image of the proletariat came to oppose the proletariat, itself, when Leninism became a totalitarian bureaucracy:

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<sup>322</sup> Mariën, “Théorie de la Révolution Moniale Immédiate,” *Les Lèvres Nues* 10: 32. “Mais que la force de Hitler fût de s’être fondé sur une réalité plus fertile que la réalité économique, au point de transcender celle-ci et de la reléguer au second plan, voilà qui donne à réfléchir et qui ravive notre doute quant à la valeur de la propagande communiste, sinon de certains traits généralement admis de la doctrine; voilà qui nous jette à nouveau en pleine contradiction.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Mariën, “Théorie de la Révolution Moniale Immédiate,” *Les Lèvres Nues* 10: 18. “Les propagande est acculée à une attitude défensive, prisonnière dans le dédale des justifications, elle qui se devrait tout au contraire d’attaquer partout et toujours. On vit comme dans une manière de rêve, confortablement blotti dans un milieu hermétique d’où l’on adresse sans fin [...] de véhéments discours aux murailles.”

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Gabriel Zacarias, “Détournement in Language and the Visual Arts,” *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook*, (London: Pluto Press, 2020): 224.

When Bolshevism triumphed for itself in Russia [...] marks the definitive inauguration of an order of things that lies at the core of the modern spectacle's rule: this was the moment when an *image of the working class* arose in radical opposition to the working class itself.<sup>328</sup>

The apparent hopefulness in Debord's use of the *Internationale* could be seen as a *détournement* of a propagandistic "childish happy ending." While Lukács chides the "happy ending" as unrealistic, lack of realism does not discredit the appeal, and Situationists were not opposed to happiness (*bonheur*).<sup>329</sup> One issue with a "happy ending," is that happy endings are endings, perhaps somewhat in the sense of Hegel's "end of history." There is a utopianism to the wishful thinking that lacks adventure in its conclusive blissfulness. Debord's film, *Sur le Passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (1959) references a socially constructed "idea of happiness" that was a "diversion" that was necessary to critique.<sup>330</sup> *Society of the Spectacle* considers "commercial happiness" (*bonheur marchand*) which is "immediately falsified." The "world of becoming" (*devenir-monde*) of the Spectacle is a world of transformation, but rather than transforming reality into new realities, it transforms the real into the false and real happiness into commercial happiness.<sup>331</sup> In terms of the "happy ending" (*destinée heureuse*), Debord criticizes abstractions and the stagnant thinking of utopian socialism and rationalism to have a similar childish folly. Utopian

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<sup>328</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 69.

<sup>329</sup> Guy Debord, "Hurlements en Faveur de Sade," *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes* (Paris: Champ-Libre, 1978): 8. "Le bonheur est une idée neuve en Europe."

<sup>330</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes* (Champ-Libre): 17.

<sup>331</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 43. "The questionable satisfaction allegedly derived from the consumption of the whole is adulterated from the outset because the real consumer can only get his hands on a succession of fragments of this commodity [happiness]." Nicholson-Smith translates "bonheur" as "heaven," but its typical use is "happiness." Debord, *La Société Du Spectacle*: 49.

socialists acted as though they “were the new Newtons discovering universal scientific laws,” but, in writing happy endings, they were essentially writing fairy tales.<sup>332</sup>

*Happy endings* are unrealistic. Realism is also inherently unrealistic due to its illusory nature. Kotányi’s reading notes argued that Marcel Duchamp’s readymades were the closest art to true realism, because they took from the real but even readymades were removed from everyday life when they entered museums, and particularly when they became reproduced as images.<sup>333</sup> Sight and perception do not fully integrate into the real. Yet Situationists and many philosophers before them argued that reality did exist. The premise of Descartes *cogito*, for example, finds realism within the limitations of perception: “I think therefore I am.” The following chapter will consider how the concept of the Inner Self and the mind relate (or do not relate) to the real, and to what extent Inner Worlds are illusory, according to Situationists, Surrealists, and Situationist critiques of Surrealism.

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<sup>332</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 64. “L’harmonie visée par [les socialistes utopiques], hostile à l’histoire, découle d’un essai d’application à la société de la science la moins dépendante de l’histoire. Elle tente de se faire reconnaître avec la même innocence expérimentale que le newtonisme, et la destinée heureuse constamment postulée ‘joue dans leur science sociale un rôle analogue à celui qui revient à l’inertie dans la mécanique rationnelle.’”

<sup>333</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 1499.

### Chapter 3. Inner Worlds

The Spectacle disconnects from perception when it materializes, but it nevertheless relates to perception. A *pseudo-world* is a type of world, and, therefore, it integrates into the relationship between Self and World, which raises questions about the nature of subjectivity and the concept of the individual. As an ideological world imbued with signification, the Spectacle seeks to define the Self, which means establishing constraints dictated by socially constructed codes and meanings. Definition means stagnation. Such stagnating concepts of identity render individuals less changeable and instead reified like the dead repetition of the images reproduced by the Spectacle.

This chapter explores Situationist concepts of Self and the Spectacle of Self, particularly in their critiques and discussions with Surrealism. Surrealism interpreted art as a mechanism for liberating the Inner World, or the multiplicity of Selves within the Self. Situationists saw Surrealist depictions of Inner Worlds as constraining spectacular representations. Surrealists were especially invested in Gnostic depictions of Self and representations of the Self in mirrors, conversations with which Situationists engaged but critiqued in efforts to demystify Selfness and combat reification. While critical of many aspects Surrealism, Situationists did adopt some Surrealist symbols of the Self while maintaining similar arguments, meanings, and conclusions, especially the idea the Self can be changeable, as represented by both Surrealists and Situationists through spirals and mirrors. Surrealists located the Self through an Inner World, which Situationists considered but critiqued in terms of its relationship to materiality. This chapter asks where the Self is located according to Situationists and Surrealists, as well as whether representation can depict or locate any reliable aspects of Selfness. The location of the

Self shifts in both instances. It can both be materially located as well as characterized by ephemeral qualities.

Subjects of discussion include how the Self might be located relative to the world, or “the Self as Axis Mundi;” Gnostic concepts of Self-World relationships, which influenced Surrealists and which Situationists critiqued; the concept of mirrors as mechanisms for Self-representation; and symbols that Situationists and Surrealists used to depict the changeable Self through spirals and labyrinths. Each of these chapter headings explore visualizations that aim to locate the Self in art, literature, philosophy, and daily life, to ultimately distort and confuse locations of Self through depictions of displacement, movement, and depersonalization from images of the Self.

### **3.3. The Self as Axis Mundi**

Individualism, for Henri Lefebvre, means seeing the individual as “the axis of everything.” As a result, individualists entrap themselves within themselves, shrinking progressively into a microcosm wherein they are detached from the world, while falsely believing that they have power over their own disconnected interior universe.<sup>334</sup> Despite Marxist influence and influence from Lefebvre, it is not possible to conclusively argue that Debord was anti-individualist. Instead, Debord aims to reconsider the definition of Self, which can be multifaceted and defined through a process of becoming. “The individual is, in itself, a history of the world,” Debord writes. He continues:

When Fichte says, ‘the Self is everything,’ this seems to be in perfect harmony with my theories, except that the self is not everything but that the Self destroys everything, and only the Self can decompose itself, the Self that never was. The final Self is the real Self. Fichte speaks of an ‘absolute’ Self, but when I speak of the Self, I speak of the perishable.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, (London: Verso, 2014): 159.

<sup>335</sup> Guy Debord, “Fiches de Lecture,” NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Contrary to Fichte, Debord argues that each individual changes over time to the extent that there are many selves within a single Self, each fleeting and dying. This notion of the multiplicity of the Self is an important theme in work of Breton as well,<sup>336</sup> which likely influenced Debord's interpretation. Vaneigem compares the "multiple me" to a labyrinth, whose beginning represents birth and whose end represents death.<sup>337</sup> The middle of a labyrinth represents the center of the world, or *axis mundi*, as well as the destiny that individuals seek.<sup>338</sup>

The labyrinth of the Self and the labyrinth of the world are one and the same place. It is there where each second, my destiny is shaped, scribbles its sketches, rejuvenates itself again, determines itself according to or against my desires.<sup>339</sup>

Vaneigem notes that the "symbolism of the center" in a labyrinth represents an "*axis mundi*," or a "junction between heaven, hell, and earth," in his reading notes on Mircea Eliade. Using the metaphor of the axis, Vaneigem wrote in *Internationale Situationniste* 8 that the Situationists were an axis around which international ideas on radical theory could turn.

The SI must act as an axis, which, receiving its movement from the revolutionary impulses of the entire world, precipitates, in a unitary manner, the radical turning of events.<sup>340</sup>

If an "axis" is a form of identification, it is identification based on multiplicity, intersections, and interdisciplinarity. Regardless, the axis marks cohesion. It finds commonality rather than difference. Vaneigem references Eliade in "Banalités de Base"<sup>341</sup> when he considers how planes of existence were "divorced" in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Distinguishing between planes of existence, e.g. the material and the ideal, or illusion and reality, there is a "brutal[ity]" against the fluidity

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<sup>336</sup> Abigail Susik, "Picturing Eden: Automatism, Autobiography, and Thanatography in the Surrealist Novel," *A History of the Surrealist Novel*, ed. Anna Watz (Cambridge University Press, 2023): 56-71.

<sup>337</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, La Dame, le Diable et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 46.

<sup>338</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, "Reading Notes," Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>339</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, La Dame, le Diable et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 46.

<sup>340</sup> Bertrand Cocharad, "Internationalism," *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook*. (London: Pluto Press, 2020): 298.

<sup>341</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, "Banalités de Base," *Internationale Situationniste* 7 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997): 272.

between planes like temporarily, becoming, illusion, eternity, substance, and reality.

“Reformism” then was able to “dissolve Becoming in eternity and Reality in illusion.”<sup>342</sup> By finding cohesion in multiplicity, by locating an *axis mundi* of revolutionary theory, a cohesive critique of the context of the Spectacle could be launched.

Eliade defined *axis mundi* as the “center of the world,” represented through maypoles and other markers of an axis. However, historically, *axis mundi* was not necessarily a center, but an axis similar to the Prime Meridian, which divided the earth (e.g. the representation of *axis mundi* in *Imago Mundi* by Peter d’Ailly) as Jean-Louis Brun describes in *Les Initiés d’Occident*.<sup>343</sup> In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade describes three cosmic levels of the Kwakiutl: the underworld, earth, and sky. Penetrating each, the *axis mundi* is the Milky Way, but it is also the Self: “I am at the Center of the World!”<sup>344</sup> Vaneigem relates Eliade’s *axis mundi* to “new cosmologies” of the Chthonic Gods. “Chthonic” means “earth” in Ancient Greek, and particularly relates to the underworld. Vaneigem is especially interested in Chthonic Gods (βοδοι) and Realms (δοχος) which included an underworld and a garden of knowledge. The *axis mundi* was the meeting place between realms. According the Plato, the lost city of Atlantis as *axis mundi* placed at the “center of the world,” allowing it to “behold all created things.”<sup>345</sup> Mustapha Khayati’s reading notes on Lefebvre include a section on *Critias* by Plato. The lost city of Atlantis was a “microcosm of the world,” Khayati writes.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, “Banalités de Base,” *Internationale Situationniste* 7: 272. ‘Any act,’ writes Mircea Eliade, ‘can become a religious act.’ Human existence is realized simultaneously on two parallel planes, that of temporality, becoming, illusion, and that of eternity, substance, reality.’ In the nineteenth century the brutal divorce of these two planes demonstrated that power would have done better to have maintained reality in a mist of divine transcendence. But we must give reformism credit for succeeding [...] in dissolving Becoming in eternity and Reality in illusion.

<sup>343</sup> Brun, *Les Initiés d’Occident*: 40.

<sup>344</sup> Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1963): 36.

<sup>345</sup> Plato, *Critias*, Trans. Benjamin Jowett (Cambridge: MIT Classics.) <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/critias.html>.

<sup>346</sup> Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480.

Mircea Eliade was an influence on Surrealists, including André Breton.<sup>347</sup> He supported the anti-Marxist nihilism of the journal, *Planète*.<sup>348</sup> His ethnography actively supported theorizing intentionally mystifying “*Weltanschauung*” and mythologies as psychological necessities, and saw the relationship between these ideas to fascist mysticisms as natural and essential to the human condition.<sup>349</sup> Eliade’s collaborator, Emil Cioran, and Adolf Hitler all supported the Iron Guard in Romania, which enacted genocidal massacres against Jewish people, including the attempted killing of Letterist Isidore Isou, who founded the first avant-garde group that Debord joined. Strangely, Isou would later become friends with Cioran,<sup>350</sup> although in the postwar, Cioran regretted his former “pact with the devil.” (Cioran’s regret does not explain Isou’s avid support and correspondence with Céline.)<sup>351</sup> Andrew Hussey drew the connection between Eliade and the Iron Guard in his biography of Isou:

[Isou] was beaten...this time on the palms of his hand with a wooden club. He was then shoved into a pile of Jews, all lying on top of each other. The weak and the old were unconscious. Some were either dying or already dead [...] The ‘excesses’ of the Iron Guard Legionnaires were an expression of frustration with the government and they had the backing of Adolf Hitler [...] These were the demon ‘hooligans’ of Mircea Eliade now come to life.<sup>352</sup>

Kotányi is explicit about his criticism of Eliade in *l’Architecture du Silence*:

For a long time, I admired how Mircea Eliade and other ethnologists were able to create tremendous solidarity among traditionalists, through a political sorcery that creates a miracle of distancing from worries and hopes both locally and around the world. They birth a sort of alienation far from Hegel and Marx. The effect it produces, be it from a trance, peyote, a dream state...<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique* (Paris: Phébus, 1991): 132.

<sup>348</sup> Mircea Eliade, “Pauwels, Bergier, and the Planet of the Wizards,” *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.)

<sup>349</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: 211.

<sup>350</sup> Andrew Hussey, *Speaking East: The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021): 278.

<sup>351</sup> Andrew Hussey, “An Anti-Humanist Acquittal: ‘Résistantialisme’ and the Lettrist Defense of Louis-Ferdinand Céline,” (Taylor and Francis, 2019): 1537-1547.

<sup>352</sup> Andrew Hussey, *Speaking East: The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021): 53.

<sup>353</sup> Attila Kotányi, *L’Architecture du Silence*, Trans. Christophe Kotányi (Paris: Essai: 2022): 161.

“Solidarity among traditionalists” through “political sorcery” creates a trance that pleases because it rests on illusions that are taken as real. When alienation is not acknowledged as alienation, that is when individuals not only glorify it, but ardently self-identify with it, Eliade argues that the illusory becomes more real than reality for believers.<sup>354</sup> Eliade’s mythologies extend beyond direct and empirical sustenance and relate more to other human needs like the need to connect to a group or a culture, as well as a need to integrate the dream and the real. There is a power in myth that relates to unifying cultures through identity. Lacoue Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy suggest in *The Nazi Myth*:

Myth is the power to bring together the fundamental forces and directions of an individual or of a people, the power of a subterranean, invisible, nonempirical identity. [...] Against these identities dissolved in abstraction, myth designates identity as an exclusive difference, and its affirmation. But, also, above all, it designates this identity as the identity of something which is not given, neither as fact, nor as discourse, but which is dreamed.<sup>355</sup>

Vaneigem, in his notes on Eliade, defines the dreamworld created by believed symbolism as a *Weltanschauung* because it is a “practical ontology that people use to try to save themselves by integrating [their] truth into the real.”<sup>356</sup>

In *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre discusses the centralization (and decentralization) of the world of the Self through Jean Cassou’s novel, *Le Centre du Monde* (*The Center of the World*). Cassou wrestles with the conversation between the real and unreal. Readers expect “mysteries to come,” wondering what and where the center of the world lies: “Where is the Center of the World? Everywhere, nowhere, within us, within each of us perhaps.”<sup>357</sup> This novel represents, for Lefebvre, a “conflict growing between the attractions of magic, the expectation of

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<sup>354</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, (New York: Harper, 1961.)

<sup>355</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Brian Holmes, “The Nazi Myth,” *Critical Inquiry* 16.2 (Chicago: Chicago Journals, 1990): 305.

<sup>356</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, “Reading Notes,” Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>357</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 148.

a magical sense or aspect of life, and the desire, the necessity, of breaking the spell.”<sup>358</sup> Cassou, a friend of le Corbusier, belonged to the Masonic Grande Loge de France. He worked in politics to support fine arts, modernists, architects, and the École des Beaux Arts. In the novel, an architect “uses architectural symbols to evoke a visionary world” but he sees the symbols that he creates as fictional. “Is it only a symbol,” he asks himself, “How disappointing. Anyone can invent symbols. And then what? Once you discover that it was a symbol, you have made little progress.”<sup>359</sup> In the development of ideas – philosophy, political theories, and mythologies – the center of the theory is created through not simply one act of distancing between an object or event and its representation, but many, as a means of representing an intersection that can hold a broad *Weltanschauung* together. This process distances not only the *world of things* from meaning, but it also distances words from their material meanings. Once the world has one representation of a center, it loses its meaning as a world, and a single image, idea, or locality dominates through alienated abstraction. Because a world is definitively extensive, it must be diverse, but because it is singular, it has cohesion. The conflict between cohesion and diversity defines the inherent contradiction in worldness.

In *Pursuit of the Millennium*, which is referenced in *Society of the Spectacle*, Norman Cohn fears the logic of recentering the world in oneself and one’s own locale particularly if the person presenting themselves as the center of the world is a demagogue. When he analyzes historical attempts to make Germany “the spiritual center of the world,” he sees distinct similarities with the advent of Nazism. One such historical movement believed “the spiritual center of the world would not be Rome by Mainz.” The group asserted that “The Germans once held the whole

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<sup>358</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 148.

<sup>359</sup> Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*: 169.

world in their hands, and they will do so again.” Cohn sees an “uncannily similar” resemblance with “the phantasies which were at the core of National-Socialist ideology.”<sup>360</sup>

In response to fascism as well as ideology-driven atmosphere of the Cold War, philosophers could no longer act as “the mediator between heaven and earth”<sup>361</sup> according to Lefebvre. Politicians, specialists, and ordinary people all aimed to be philosophers, defining their identities on broad metaphysical ideas. Because the history of metaphysics brought not only Hitler but humanity in general toward reverence for the “inhuman” “superhuman,”<sup>362</sup> philosophy as a whole had to be “overcome.”<sup>363</sup>

Debord argues that the Spectacle does not claim a physical center in the same way that Ancient Christians claimed Jerusalem, Ancient China claimed the Middle Kingdom, or the medieval Germans referenced by Cohn claimed Mainz. Despite the Spectacle’s coherence as a repetitive *Weltanschauung* filled with redundant mirrors, its wide proliferation of artistic and “poetic worlds” make the world “lose its center.” It is thus more like an echo chamber than a centralized power. Debord gives a preemptive example of Baroque theater:

Baroque was the art of a world that had lost its center with the demise of the last mythic order recognized by the Middle Ages, an order founded, both cosmically and from the point of view of the earthly government, on the unity between Christianity and the ghost of an Empire. An art of change was obliged to embody the principle of the ephemeral that it recognized in the world.<sup>364</sup>

In his reading notes, he responds to *The Baroque Universe (l’Univers du Baroque)* by Richard Alewyn:

Life is a dream, the world is a theater [...] The theater is the world in the melancholy eyes of the Baroque: felt but not real [...] It is real illusion in an illusory reality.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970): 124-125.

<sup>361</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 107.

<sup>362</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 146.

<sup>363</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 277.

<sup>364</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 133-134.

<sup>365</sup> Guy Debord, “Fiches de Lecture,” NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

According to Debord's analysis, the Baroque alienates from the real, but it creates its own uncentered *pseudo-world*.

If the goal of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* was to "reinststate the real in the world," this can be interpreted in a couple of ways. First of all, the alienation of the Spectacle can be seen as a product of a process of theorizing and symbol-creation similar to Cassou's *Center of the World*: the symbols become unreal, and therefore, if the decentralizing and alienating fixation on symbols is removed, a real sense of grounding in everyday life can be reinstated. However, as a theorist who aims to consider the Spectacle as a totality, Debord is also arguing that interpreting the many repetitive symbols within the Spectacle and life as unique creates a sense of discontinuity that does not realize the cohesiveness of overarching *Weltanschauung*. To contest the principles of an overarching world, it is necessary to recognize and centralize them on an *axis*; a unifying theory.

### **3.2. Surrealist Gnosticism**

Copernicus proposed a view of the world that gravitated around the sun rather than human destinies. This influenced Kant, who argued that our worlds of perception and meaning do not directly cohere with the material *world of things*. Despite Kant's significant shift, neither his philosophical "Copernican Revolution" nor Copernicus ended traditional beliefs in astrology and medieval cosmologies, which notably reemerged as a central topic for Surrealists. Surrealists were certainly aware and appreciative of modern philosophy, particularly Hegel, but these influences did not result in modernist values like rationalism or humanism. Their influence from Hegel was curated in a way that both conversed with and deviated from canonical modernist interpretations, e.g. Marxism, and instead, according to Lefebvre, carried forward "exponents

[that] have ended up in mysticism.”<sup>366</sup> Hegel’s idealism is considered to be influenced by Gnosticism by many, while contested by others.<sup>367</sup> Lefebvre suggests the idea that Hegel was influenced by Gnosticism, proposed as early as 1835 in Ferdinand Christian Baur’s *Die christliche Gnosis*, emerged as significant topic among Surrealists as well. This section considers Surrealist discourse on Gnosticism as a means of unraveling the following questions: (1) How did Surrealists see the function of the Inner World of the Self? (2) To what extent were Surrealists idealists, materialists, both, or neither? (3) How did Situationists critique Surrealist Inner Worlds and related Surrealist interpretations of philosophy?

Gnosticism developed pre-Copernican cosmologies that not only mapped a structure of heaven and earth, but also found relationships between the human spirit and an invisible ethereal realm. The relationship between the material world and the heavenly was dichotomous wherein the heavenly realm was good and the material world was evil. The human soul, while trapped in the material world, was alien to it and contained aspects of a distant heavenly realm.

Understanding the predominant Gnostic and alchemical influences of Surrealist cosmology will help establish the Situationist critique of Surrealism as well as the Situationist development of the concept of Spectacle.

According to Lefebvre, a desire to live outside of reality birthed the concept of Surrealism,<sup>368</sup> which believed that abstract worlds should triumph over the everyday material existence:

They maintained a desperate, deliberate, and well-nurtured duality through which they tried to live outside of the real world, without it, against, it. As a symptom, maybe Surrealism was important. The most unfortunate thing the Surrealists did was to condemn the abject reality of the inter-war years along with human reality itself.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 91.

<sup>367</sup> Jason Barton, “The Gnostic Accusation: A Hegelian Response,” *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion* 5.1 (Brill: 2023): 27-50.

<sup>368</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 137.

<sup>369</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 132.

A mystical version of Hegelian dialectics tore apart the real to unleash an invisible world of the spiritual and abstract, argues Lefebvre.<sup>370</sup> Tearing apart what exists, or so-called progress, is simply a way of making “certain things disappear.”<sup>371</sup> Martin Jay writes that it was actually Breton who first introduced Lefebvre to Hegel through the 1924 text, *Science of Logic*.<sup>372</sup> Vaneigem asserted: “Truth to tell, Hegel was discovered very belatedly by the Surrealists, and, even more important, they made barely any *practical* use of him.”<sup>373</sup> Despite influence from Hegel and Marx, Surrealism is not solidly or formally Hegelian-Marxist, Kantian, entirely idealist, or entirely materialist, despite its tendency toward idealism. This Gnostic-influenced idealism should not be conflated with German idealism or Kantian thought. In terms of Kant’s legacy, which can include Hegel and many so-called German Idealists, Lefebvre and his cohort specifically strove to separate the notion of Kantianism from the false dichotomy of idealism and materialism. Every idea has its own reality that is both material and ideological argued Gil Delannoï of *Arguments*.<sup>374</sup>

While Kant argued, extending from the Copernican Revolution, that the earth did not mirror heaven, Surrealists rediscovered pre-Copernican beliefs in Gnostic cosmology wherein the earth was a shadowy reflection of heaven and wherein humanity was special in the universe. Similar to *détournement*, Breton’s pre-1935 discussions of Surrealism argued that it modified these beliefs,

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<sup>370</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 137.

<sup>371</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 93.

<sup>372</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). In *Science of Logic*, Hegel discusses, in a section on “Illusory Appearance,” that “Kantian Appearance” defines the perception of a subject, but contrarily concludes that “illusory being is in itself a nullity” which is a “reflection” This “reflection” is perception as it sees in an immediate moment, which only exists in the “immediate” and whose truth can only be defined as “becoming.” *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. Clemence Dutt, *Lenin Miscellany IX*, 1929, Marxists Internet Archive.

<sup>373</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1977): 23.

<sup>374</sup> Gil Delannoï, “Arguments 1956-1962,” *Revue Française de la Science Politique* 34 (Persée, 1984): 127-145. “Un niveau de réalité propre aux idées, à la fois matériel et idéologique, et par conséquent hors de tout présupposé matérialiste ou idéaliste.”

depriving them of their former religiosity, to a greater or lesser extent, and instead finding means of melding these idealist beliefs with materialist notions.<sup>375</sup> Contrary to Lefebvre's criticisms, some scholars, including Jacob Taubes, who appears in Attila Kotányi's reading notes, argued in favor of Surrealism as a materialist philosophy. Taubes, in "Noten zum Surrealismus," argues that Surrealism can be interpreted "beyond the Platonic-Christian horizon." He considers the prefix, *sur*, to indicate something that is not beyond realism, but rather transcendental in the essence of its materiality. Taubes argues the logic of a materialist Surrealism through a combination of nihilism and art for art's sake:

Surrealism knows that it is rooted in the modern unified universe beyond which there is no hereafter. Atheism and materialism are his touchstones [...] Poetry is the only hereafter, not because it spaces the arc between 'this world' and 'beyond,' between above and below: it is the beyond itself. The word does not testify but it is itself transcendence.<sup>376</sup>

The atheistic beyond within Surrealism, for Taubes, leads to a nihilism that shatters the unreality of realism as well as the "medieval model of a symbolic universe" by taking away meaning from symbols. "The surrealist allegory instrumented the worldlessness of a nihilistic experience."<sup>377</sup>

Surrealism would incorporate materialism into its "cosmology," wrote Michel Carrouges as cited by Raoul Vaneigem's reading notes.<sup>378</sup> He sees the contradiction between its abstracted

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<sup>375</sup> Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 135.

<sup>376</sup> Jacob Taubes, "Noten zum Surrealismus," *Immanente Ästhetik, Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1966): 143. "Der Surrealismus weiß sich verwurzelt im modernen einheitlichen Universum, darüber hinaus es kein Jenseits gibt. Atheismus und Materialismus sind ihm Prüfsteine seiner Redlichkeit. Dennoch läßt sich der anthropologische Materialismus und Atheismus surrealistischer Observanz nicht bruchlos vom metaphysischen Materialismus und Atheismus des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts herleiten. Es bleibt ein Rest, den die Vorsilbe *sur* im Titel "Surrealismus" andeutet. Welchen Sinn kann die Vorsilbe *sur* in diesem materialistischen Kontext haben? Die Antwort Aragons: *Seule signification du mot au-delà, tu es dans la poésie*— wird jetzt verständlicher. Die Poesie ist das einzige Jenseits, nicht weil sie den Bogen spannt zwischen "Diesseits" und "Jenseits," zwischen Oben und Unten: sie ist das Jenseits selbst. Das Wort bezeugt nicht, sondern, ist selber Transzendenz." This article appears in the Attila Kotányi Papers.

<sup>377</sup> Jacob Taubes, "Noten zum Surrealismus," *Dritte Sitzung: Surrealismus und Gnosis*: 141. "Mittelalterlichen Modell eines symbolischen Universums;" "Die surrealistische Allegorie instrumentiert die Weltlosigkeit einer nihilistischen Erfahrung."

<sup>378</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455.

world and materialism as a “threat” to Surrealism’s worldview.<sup>379</sup> Surrealism represented a dialectic between the self and the “external universe,” which meant that it investigated a dialectic that encompassed “the entire world.” Carrouges sees Surrealism as neither idealist nor materialist, but rather a synthesis of the two:

The world is not intangible. Even though it is not, as the idealists would have it, an illusion created by the mind, and even though it is the very rock of exterior objectivity, it is not the exclusive basis of reality, in spite of the contrary claim of materialists.<sup>380</sup>

Carrouges asks whether Surrealism is a philosophy and decides that it is not a philosophy insofar as it contests abstractions, but it is a philosophy insofar as it aims to define a *Weltanschauung*:

Surrealism is not a philosophy, in the scholarly sense of the word; it takes no stock in demonstrating theses by setting up a framework of abstract reasoning. It is plunged deep into life itself and not into the twilight zone of abstractions. And yet it is a philosophy, in the full sense of the word, because it expresses a new conception of the world and seeks to possess the secret of the universe. It is not mere empiricism. It is action and at the same time reflection on the means of the end of that action. Like religion, Marxism, and modern physics, it is both *praxis* and *Weltanschauung*. These two aspects are inseparable. It is impossible to understand the concrete advances of surrealism while ignoring the tenets of Surrealist cosmology, and, by the same token, impossible to understand that cosmology if one is unaware of the concrete explorations on which it is built.<sup>381</sup>

Surrealism, Carrouges argues, is not above earthly reality, and it “should not be confused with the unreal,” but it is instead a “living synthesis of the real and the unreal, of the immediate and the virtual, of the banal and the fantastic.”<sup>382</sup>

The publication of *l’Art Magique* in 1957 marks a moment when André Breton revealed the depth of his investment in magic and occultism. Prior, Breton had claimed materialist interpretations, but even as early as 1947, in *Les Corrections Naturelles*, Mariën was already

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<sup>379</sup> Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, trans. Maura Pendergast, (Alabama: The University of Alabama, 1974): 25.

<sup>380</sup> Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*: 1.

<sup>381</sup> Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*: 35.

<sup>382</sup> Carrouges, *Basic Concepts of Surrealism*: 12.

defying the occultist themes that were appearing in Surrealism and proposing “a different conception of Surrealism”<sup>383</sup> wherein Surrealism could clearly embrace a materialist concept of the world while still metaphysically transmuting life in a verifiable way. “There is no world outside of this one,” he argued as a contrary principle for his materialist “new conception of Surrealism.”<sup>384</sup>

Breton has been considered the strawman of the Situationist International, receiving vehement criticisms from Debord sometimes as personal character attacks. Many scholars have characterized Debord’s criticisms of Breton as “killing the father,”<sup>385</sup> veering toward Oedipal drives rather than discussion. Breton is characterized as a “father” because he did influence Debord’s early development — Debord initially entered the avant-garde through Surrealist projects as well as Letterism. In the late 1940s, when Debord first left his home in Cannes for Paris, he imagined himself as a Dadaist and Surrealist in letters to Hervé Falcou.<sup>386</sup> Noting a change in the Surrealist mindset between the 1930s and 1960s, Debord continued to express attraction to the history of the Surrealist movement. American Surrealist Penelope Rosemont recalls the following conversation:

[Debord] said he too had been attracted to Surrealism, but found it difficult to be [politically] active in a group dominated by artists. He did not think the group was open to new ideas. He expressed a passion for Surrealism and said that if it were in the 1930s, he would be a member of the Surrealist group.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> François Coadou, “Politique de Marcel Mariën,” *Il Créait des Choses Désagréables*, (Limoges: ESNA, 2022): “Une conception différente du surréalisme.”

<sup>384</sup> François Coadou, “Politique de Marcel Mariën,” *Il Créait des Choses Désagréables*, (Limoges: ESNA, 2022): 90-91.

<sup>385</sup> Christophe Bourseiller, *La Vie et Mort de Guy Debord*, (Paris: Agora, 1994), 1296. [Amazon Kindle.]; Similarly, it has been argued that Debord was motivated by “an oedipal struggle to at once honor and annihilate its Bretonian father-figure,” Soyoung Yoon, “Cinema against the Permanent Curfew of Geometry: Guy Debord’s *Sur le Passage de Quelques Personnes à Travers une Assez Courte Unité de Temps* (1959),” *Grey Room* 52, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 43. “Hating the father” is also cited as a reason for Debord’s sentiments toward Breton by Luisa Passerini, “L’Exubérance, les Injures, se Laisser aller à la Dérive, dans la Critique de la Vie Quotidienne,” *Retour au Futur?*, 35. ; Christophe Bourseiller, *La Vie et Mort de Guy Debord*, 1278. [Amazon Kindle.]

<sup>386</sup> Guy Debord, *Le Marquis de Sade a des Yeux de Fille*, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004).

<sup>387</sup> Penelope Rosemont, *Dreams & Everyday Life* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2008): 106.

In 1968, Debord's critique of Surrealists expresses one fatal flaw: occultism.<sup>388</sup> In "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution," an encyclopedia entry on Surrealism written for *EMDA (Encyclopédie du Monde Actuel)*, Debord denounces Surrealism's "recourse to occult interpretations i.e. from the 'Great Initiates' to 'Gnosis.'" <sup>389</sup> Throughout this text, Debord places the Surrealists in the context of their historical "revolt." He admires for their relevance. He does not simply paint them as cold architects of the existing world, or as impactful merely in ways that would result in the dominance of the Spectacle. Surrealists are humanized as active agitators in search of "a perfect weapon for the liberation of human desire."<sup>390</sup> Debord admires how Surrealists sought to "reach beyond the artistic world;" to "change life."<sup>391</sup> While the title of the entry, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution," may sound derogatory at first glance, rationalism was not the Situationist program, so irrationalism was not the Situationist critique of Surrealism. While Surrealists may have aimed to rediscover the real world, the world outside of art, Situationists saw their apparent aim as unaccomplished. Debord argued that instead Surrealists remained "accepting [of] their self-imprisonment in the artistic representations they wanted to surpass."<sup>392</sup> If the Surrealists wanted to overcome art, it did not make sense for them to produce it. Khayati would respond that the Surrealist production of art was mere commodification and that "to make art was wrong,"<sup>393</sup> as recounted by Rosemont. The one area where Debord denounces Surrealist logic in "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution" is its "recourse to occult interpretations i.e. from the

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<sup>388</sup> Guy Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution," Trans. Anthony Hayes, *Cahiers de l'Encyclopédie du Monde Actuel* 35 (Lausanne: Éditions Rencontre, 1968). [thesinisterscience.com](http://thesinisterscience.com).

<sup>389</sup> Guy Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution," Trans. Anthony Hayes, *The Sinister Science* (Cambera, 2021).

<sup>390</sup> Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution."

<sup>391</sup> Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution."

<sup>392</sup> Guy Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution."

<sup>393</sup> Penelope Rosemont, *Dreams & Everyday Life*: 108.

‘Great Initiates’ to ‘Gnosis.’” Reaching beyond art was admirable for Debord, but he argued that Surrealists believed it was possible only by finding a “magical path.”<sup>394</sup>

Not only was magical and occultist logic flawed, but it was also boringly common. Lefebvre argued that contemporary art and philosophy – Surrealism and Idealism – searched for mystery and magic, promising a new world while merely reiterating the occultisms of the old world. “In their *nouveaux merveilleux*, there was nothing new — and nothing marvelous.”<sup>395</sup> In the search for common magical thinking, Surrealists rejected everyday life. The discrediting of everyday life was an action “against life” and against the real which had similar conclusions to anti-democratic “right-wing” thought. Metaphysics tends to find itself in the mystical through abstraction:

Mystical or metaphysical criticism of everyday life, be it poets or philosophers, ends up in a reactionary position, even if and above all when its arguments have formal similarities to those of the ‘left.’<sup>396</sup>

In “Captive Words,” Khayati denounced the Surrealist artistic project as “reactionary.”<sup>397</sup>

Similarly, Debord wrote to Mariën, “All that is notoriously reactionary supports Breton.”<sup>398</sup>

Debord concludes with disappointment:

It is such an art wrapped in magic [...] that Surrealism placed its last hope. It is permissible to think that the results of such a great human project are a little paltry, and that so many of its novelties have fallen to well-worn conformism.<sup>399</sup>

Surrealist occultism is framed as tending toward the materialist in Jules Monnerot’s 1945 *La Poésie Moderne et le Sacré* which is referenced in Vaneigem’s reading notes. Monnerot considers how Surrealists aligned themselves with a history of sorcery and alchemy insofar as

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<sup>394</sup> Guy Debord, “Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution.”

<sup>395</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 134.

<sup>396</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 150.

<sup>397</sup> Mustapha Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology*, Trans. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006): 225.

<sup>398</sup> Debord, *Lettres à Marcel Mariën*: 29.

<sup>399</sup> Debord, “Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution.”

they decided that medieval sorcerers “are always types of Manichean heretics” who do not aim for submission to God. They turn away from heaven and instead look “toward the earth (hell is in the bosom of the earth.)” Sorcerers tend toward affiliations with chthonic deities.<sup>400</sup> However, Breton’s *l’Art Magique* seems to veer away from the worldly and toward the heavenly. He divides heaven and earth through associations with colors that he uses to generalize about primordial human inclinations toward synesthesia as well as historical European magic. Yellow is the ground, the earth, witchcraft, while blue represents heaven, the sky, and the holy. The word “blonde,” Breton states, etymologically derives from *blao*, because it was associated with blue eyes and, therefore, the heavenly.<sup>401</sup> This likely extends from Wassily Kandinsky’s *Concerning The Spiritual in Art* as well as medieval traditions. Breton does not denounce the heavenly, but instead seems to revere it. The association between the heavenly and bloneness recalls similar occultisms that informed Nazi Aryanism, despite the fact that Breton was explicitly opposed to Hitler, and opposed the Hitlerian thought that he found in the work of Salvador Dali.<sup>402</sup> The association between heavenly blue and blonde is present in his book of poems, *Earthlight*. For example, he writes for “In the Eyes of the Gods”:

It's the azure. You don't have to be afraid of the azure./ There'll be a large blond vase in a tree./ The bell tower of the town with blended colors/ will be your reference point. Take your time./ Remember. The brown geyser hurling fern shoots into the sky/ Salutes you. (...) The beautiful woman, the victim, the one known in the neighborhood as the little reseda pyramid/ Unstitched just her herself a cloud like/ A sachet of pity.<sup>403</sup>

Breton imagines heaven through the eyes of Gods, referring to the azure sky, blonde, and clouds.

The title of the book, *Earthlight (Clair de Terre)*, refers to the astronomical phenomenon of sunlight reflected off the earth onto the moon, allowing the dark side of the moon to be visible.

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<sup>400</sup> Jules Monnerot, *La Poésie Moderne et le Sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945): 27.

<sup>401</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique*: 109.

<sup>402</sup> Robert Adèle Greely, “Dali’s Fascism; Lacan’s Paranoia,” *Art History* 24.4 (Wiley, 2001): 465-492.

<sup>403</sup> André Breton, “Fifteen Poems from Earthlight,” Trans. Bill Zavatsky and Zack Rogow, *The American Poetry Review* 14.1 (Philadelphia: Old City Publishing, 1985): 3.

The concept of “earthlight” unites the heavens (the sun and the moon) with the earth. Breton may have been suggesting that his poems, themselves, reflected “the eyes of” the heavens to the reader on earth.

While Surrealists present arguments for materialism, their Inner Worlds tend toward idealist notions particularly through Gnostic influence. Surrealists, like Gnostics, argue that Inner Worlds allow for “connection to the origin of human interiority”<sup>404</sup> which is separate from and superior to the material world. For Breton, this connection can be accomplished to an extent through art and language, both of which can poetry. The Inner World, wherein the imagination creates a universe, is separate from nature. Art is anti-nature, or so declared a proposition that defined 19<sup>th</sup> Century worldviews exemplified by Charles Baudelaire and Paul Valéry.<sup>405</sup> Surrealists depict such worlds with references to the air, the sky, the heavens, the vertical, rather than the earthly or worldly. The artist’s supposedly unconscious mind lifts ephemeral objects into the air. Vertical movement marks a distinction from a post-Copernican shift toward horizontality. In the Copernican concept of the world, there is a sense of horizontal expanse, of cartographical charting. Surrealists represent a concept of the world that refers to pre-Copernican models, like Gnostic concepts, where there is a sense of heaven and earth, and thus a sense of hierarchy relative to physically higher and lower strata.<sup>406</sup> Verticality relates to concepts of heaven, anti-nature, and thus the ephemerality of the physical world. Horizontality relates to the earth and its physical expanse. Verticality associates with lightness, but it also relates to hierarchical

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<sup>404</sup> Blumenberg, “Dritte Sitzung: Surrealismus und Gnosis,” *Immanente Ästhetik, Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1966): 438. “Wiederherstellung des Bezuges zur Herkunft der menschlichen Innerlichkeit.“

<sup>405</sup>“Dritte Sitzung: Surrealismus und Gnosis”. “H. Blumenberg unterstreicht die eine Tendenz: Kunst als Anti-Natur, die von Baudelaire zu Valéry führt.”

<sup>406</sup> Taubes, “Noten zum Surrealismus,” 140. “Frage bleibt nur, wie das vertikale Schema der Gnosis fundamental sich verändern muß, wenn es im Umkreis nachkopernikanischer Immanenz sichtbar werden soll. Diese Wende vom vertikalen zum horizontalen Schema galt und gilt es zu interpretieren.”

metaphors, particularly insofar as it derives from Christian symbolism e.g. the hierarchical structures in Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

Max Ernst's *Pleiades* presents an example of heavenly verticality in Surrealist painting. A woman's body dissipates, decapitated, into a transformative azure sky. The dimensions are vertically aligned at 24.5 x 16.5. The body is centered but takes less than a quarter of the entire space of the composition. Blue sky dominates with layers of abstracted texture. A hint at a landscape lies at the bottom, several centimeters below her floating feet. Pleiades were companions of Artemis, the seven daughters of the titan Atlas, who carried the weight of the world. However, this Pleiades defies the weight of the world. At the bottom of the painting lies a caption: "the gravitation of the undulations does not yet exist." [FIGURE 3.1] Undulations, or the actions of moving up and down, are free from gravity and free from the world.

However, Breton does not accept Christian concepts of heaven in "Political Position of Surrealism," where he presents nuance in lightness and vertical imagery to describe the unconscious. He draws attention to how the dreams that float upward from the human unconscious in ways that can be dangerously bigoted:

It must be pointed out that a whole world of unavowable prejudices gravitates around the other world, the world which can be dealt justice only with a red-hot iron from the moment that we observe a minute of suffering under high magnification. It is made up of cloudy, distorting bubbles which keep coming up from the marshy bottom, from the unconscious of the individual.<sup>407</sup>

The floating otherworld of the unconscious is not innocent and pure as heaven is described, but it nevertheless takes on symbolic connections to heaven through its association with the sky and floating. Situationists do not adopt Breton's interpretation of art as bubbles from the unconscious at face value. Kotányi acknowledges how paintings, while appearing to float from the

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<sup>407</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969): 225.

unconscious like bubbles from a marsh, are not actually produced as such. There is a barrier between inner imaginings and the world, and that barrier is the material production of painting, which is, in fact, the predominantly definitive aspect of artistic creation: “Pictorial creation occurs not by dreaming of images in an armchair...but at the level of the painter’s professional gestures,” Kotányi transcribes in his notes from Van Lien. Kotányi describes such productions as “quasi-thought.”<sup>408</sup> Even for Surrealists, art is not merely a product of the artist, but a conversation between the Inner World and other worlds, which are not necessarily distinctly externalized, like the collective unconscious. Vaneigem considers Surrealist Inner Worlds through Michel Carrouges, who argues that, at their core, Breton’s ideas “link[ed]” “the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious, and even the cosmic unconscious.”<sup>409</sup> Through Inner Worlds, Surrealism attempts to find a “lost unity of one with the world,”<sup>410</sup> but that world is not the real; it is *sur-*, or above, the real, the Surreal, lie a heightened otherworld, a concept which they derive in part from Gnosticism.

The revival of Gnosticism through Surrealists was not a Catholic or Protestant revival but rather it was intended as a revival of a heretical movement. In the 1970s, Jacques Lacarrière characterized Gnostics as heretics, political rebels and outsiders devoted to negation and anti-institutionalism, similar to the avant-garde groups of the 1950s-70s, who were opposed to the superficiality of culture and society, including the pressure to live in a nuclear family. While Lacarrière is not typically accepted among academics of Gnosticism, he exemplifies how Gnostics were perceived by the French avant-garde in the postwar period. Lacarrière writes:

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<sup>408</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

<sup>409</sup> Michel Carrouges, *Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, trans. Maura Pendergast (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974): 17.

<sup>410</sup> Michel Carrouges, *Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, trans. Maura Pendergast (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974): 40.

The rejection of all systems, and of a world governed not by men but by shadows or semblances of men—whom I will call pseudoanthropes—forced them to live on the fringes of all established society, and to preach a refusal to compromise with false institutions, a refusal to procreate, to marry, to live in families, or to obey temporal powers, whether pagan or Christian.<sup>411</sup>

Despite Debord's clear opposition to all forms of religiosity, he nevertheless pursues "grains of truth"<sup>412</sup> in religious thought, especially that of certain medieval figures who are often characterized as heavily influenced by Gnosticism including Meister Eckhart and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord uses these figures to describe the ephemeral world of the Spectacle, which is not the same as reality. Nevertheless, it does not make sense to separate the Spectacle from Debord's own view of the world in all instances. For example, one theme in Debord's film, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* that appears seems to extend from Gnostic concepts is that humanity is an absurd mistake.<sup>413</sup> *In Girum* portrays alchemists from Marcel Carné's 1942 film *Les Visiteurs du Soir* who see themselves not as powerful magicians capable of changing the world, but are portrayed as "pawns in a game of heaven" who amuse themselves until they return to "the box of Nothing."<sup>414</sup> Eckhart argued, according to a 1329 Papal Bill: "All creatures are mere nothings. I do not mean that they are insignificant or anything at all, but they are mere nothings."<sup>415</sup> In *Aion, Research into the Phenomenology of Self*, Karl Jung describes Eckhart as "world-embracing" in a way that was informed by Gnosticism:

The world-embracing spirit of Meister Eckhart knew, without discursive knowledge, the primordial mystical experience of India as well as of the Gnostics,

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<sup>411</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *The Gnostics* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991): 10.

<sup>412</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970): thesis 208.

<sup>413</sup> Jules Monnerot, *La Poésie Moderne et le Sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945): 79. "Un monde raté par un démiurge de seconde zone, mauvaise copie d'élève peu doué."

<sup>414</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Cinématographiques Compètes* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). "Pour parler clairement sans paroles—nous sommes les pies d'une joue du ciel — on s'amuse avec nous sur l'échiquier de l'Être — et puis nous retournons un par un dans la boîte du Néant."

<sup>415</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, "Minden teremtmény pusztá semmi: nem azt mondom, hogy jelentéktelenek vagy egyáltalán valamik, hanem hogy pusztá semmik."

and was itself the finest flower on the tree of the 'Free Spirit' that flourished at the beginning of the eleventh century. Well might the writings of this Master be buried for six hundred years, for 'his time was not yet come.'<sup>416</sup>

Jung finds Eckhart is both world-embracing and influenced by Gnosticism, which aimed to reject the world. Eckhart found the spiritual in the material. Jung argued that the psyche – the Inner World of the Self – was empirically real. Thus both Jung and Eckhart present means of subverting traditional dichotomies between materialism and idealism. In terms of the Free Spirit, this movement based itself on liberating the Spirit of the Inner World, and this liberation was accomplished through the individual Spirit's engagement with the worldly, including sexuality.

Vaneigem's *Movement of the Free Spirit* addressed an irony wherein Eckhart saw his interpretations of God taken in ways that could define a new, freer life for the Cult of the Free Spirit, a life where the worldly could be accepted.<sup>417</sup> Hermeticism appears in the writings of Raoul Vaneigem and Jacqueline De Jong, not nevertheless as a testimonial of a belief system, but nevertheless an interest in how ontological questions relate to past discussions of hermeticism and Gnosticism transhistorically. Understanding Gnosticism, according to Vaneigem's methodology for analyzing the history of religion, served as a means of unraveling historical contradictions.<sup>418</sup>

For Gnostics, the body and the world are mere mirrors. An all-consuming experience, humanity is inclined to believe that the body and world are reality, but they are deprived of spirit. Humans are asleep in the material world where materiality is an immaterial mirage and true reality is invisible.<sup>419</sup> Debord characterizes the Spectacle similarly: it alienates us from material

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<sup>416</sup> Carl Jung, *Aion: Research into the Phenomenology of Self* (Routledge, 1991): 194.

<sup>417</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit* (New York: Zone Books, 1991): 91.

<sup>418</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Rien n'est Fini, Tout Commence* (Paris: Allia, 2014): 103.

<sup>419</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *The Gnostics* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991): 16-22.

reality and plunges us into a false world.<sup>420</sup> If humans are “mere nothings” and existence is a mistake then there would be no purpose to revolt. So marks a key division between Gnostics and the neo-gnostic currents of Surrealism which appears in Kotányi’s notes on a panel discussion on Surrealism between Jacob Taubes, Hans Blumenberg, and others. Unlike Gnosticism, revolution is central to Debord’s concept for the change and transmutation of the world, as it was for Surrealists. Contrarily, according to Blumenberg, the “premise of Gnosis can provide an approach to destroying the world but cannot provide a program for changing it.”<sup>421</sup> He argues:

The crucial structural difference between Gnosis and Surrealism [...] is that Gnosis did not know the forms of reaction of protest and revolt. The call of salvation to transcendence is not a call to any behavior towards the world or even action toward the world. Rather, the call is exhausted in [...] the restoration of the connection to the origin of human interiority.<sup>422</sup>

*In Girum* incorporates several quotations and influences from Eckhart. Traditional dichotomizing of Heaven and Earth was inverted by Eckhart who described the “ground” (*Grund*) as God, spirituality, and heaven. *Grund* also translates to “reason,” but Eckhart related this linguistic metaphor to literal ground and earth. Eckhart subverted the divide between the abstract and material; the Platonic and the Aristotelean. As a result, parts of his works were redacted and dubbed heretical after his death. “Heaven can only work on the ground of the earth,”<sup>423</sup> he writes. “What is mixed with earth, such as leaves, grass, and trees: this bears

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<sup>420</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967).

<sup>421</sup> “Surrealismus und Gnosis,” Panel Chaired by Dieter Henrich, *Immanente Ästhetik, Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1966): 432. “Die akosmistische Voraussetzung der Gnosis kann einen Ansatz zur Vernichtung der Welt geben, nicht aber ein Programm zu ihrer Veränderung liefern.“

<sup>422</sup> “Surrealismus und Gnosis,” Panel Chaired by Dieter Henrich, *Immanente Ästhetik, Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1966): 439. “Der entscheidende, von J. Taubes übersehene strukturelle Unterschied zwischen Gnosis und Surrealismus besteht aber darin, daß die Gnosis die Reaktionsformen des Protestes und der Revolte nicht gekannt hat. Jener Ruf des Heilbringers aus der Transzendenz ist kein Appell zu irgendeiner Verhaltensweise gegenüber der Welt oder gar zu einer Aktion gegen die Welt; der Ruf erschöpft sich vielmehr in der Aktualisierung der Anamnese, in der Wiederherstellung des Bezuges zur Herkunft der menschlichen Innerlichkeit.

<sup>423</sup> Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, Trans. Maurice O’C Walshe (New York: The Crossroad, 2009): 204.

likeness to heaven.”<sup>424</sup> Raoul Vaneigem discusses how he first became acquainted with the works of Meister Eckhart:

What is valid in mysticism? It was Kotányi who introduced me to Meister Eckhart. He had me read his writings. In it I found phrases like this: ‘I pray that God will rid me of God himself.’<sup>425</sup>

For Eckhart, God and the human soul were fused into one entity that inhabited a placeless, silent, empty ground, the ground that has no ground. This was the origin of reality. Eckhart envisioned God as similar to the void, but also part of all things on earth and in the human soul. Thus, the internal experience, the heavenly experience, and the earthly experience were in unison.

In Debord’s notes for *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, he attributes the following line in his script to Eckhart from *Le Livre de la Consolation Divine*:

But neither wood nor fire finds peace, satisfaction or ease in any warmth, great or small, or in any kinship, until the moment when the fire becomes one with the wood and they impart to each other their real nature.<sup>426</sup>

Debord is presumably referring to the following passage from Eckhart:

When the Father begets the Son, He gives him all that He has of essence and nature. In this way it is God’s intention to give Himself entirely to us. It is like when fire seeks to draw the wood into itself, and to penetrate the wood, finding the wood unlike itself. Therefore it takes time. First it makes it warm, then hot, then it smokes and crackles on account of its unlikeness: and the hotter the wood gets, the more still and quiet it becomes, and the more like the fire, the more peaceful it is, until it becomes all fire. If the fire is to press the wood into itself, all unlikeness must be cast out.<sup>427</sup>

The Voice-Over of *In Girum* is paired with images of a burning barricade in 1968.<sup>428</sup> For Eckhart, the relationship between wood and fire is symbiotic in the sense that wood and fire benefit from one another. Throughout his texts, Eckhart sees fire as a metaphor for God, and

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<sup>424</sup> Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*: 252.

<sup>425</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International*, trans. Bill Brown, (Not Bored: 2015): 52.

<sup>426</sup> Guy Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, trans. Ken Knabb, (Oakland: AK Press, 2003).

[bopsecrets.org](http://bopsecrets.org).

<sup>427</sup> Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*: 348.

<sup>428</sup> Guy Debord, *Œuvres Complètes Cinématographiques*, (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005.)

encourages humans, like wood, to allow God to consume them. Peace and satisfaction come through the connection between wood and fire, because they both express their essence; their “real nature.” When paired with 1968, the fire is literal; it is revolution. Fire representing revolution could transitively be compared to God for Eckhart or Spirit for Hegel. Fire is also destructive. Debord is thus arguing that the “real nature” of the 1968 participants became one, consumed, with revolution as a means of discovering their own “peace” and “satisfaction.”

Just as Eckhart inverts the concept of the world as worldly and the sky as heavenly, he inverts the concept of hellfire by representing fire as God. Debord describes his past experiences (like 1968) saying that “We enlisted irrevocably in the Devil’s party — the ‘historical evil’ that leads existing conditions to their destruction, the ‘bad side’ that makes history by undermining all established satisfaction.” He then cuts to a Mephistopheles-like devilish character from *Les Visiteurs du Soir* who proclaims before a blazing fire, “Oh, I love fire!” The title of the film, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, means “We go dancing in the night and are consumed by fire,” a medieval palindrome that was said to be spoken by the devil, himself.<sup>429</sup>

Eckhart’s metaphor for God intentionally inverts imagery that were previously prescribed as hellish, and, simultaneously, represents the ultimate destruction of the wood. It is as though the disintegration of the wood, by submitting to fire, allows it to return to Eckhart’s vision of a silent groundless ground. Debord says that he is opposed to “established satisfaction,” while Eckhart says that disintegration creates satisfaction in the wood by allowing it to find its true essence. Consider the word “established.” Debord is certainly not opposed to satisfaction, but he believes, like Eckhart, that satisfaction can be reached through the disintegration – or negation – of what exists. The metaphor of wood and fire represent a divide between the material and abstract. Wood is present while fire has a fleeting, ephemeral quality. For both Debord and

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<sup>429</sup> Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*.

Eckhart, this abstraction relates to nothingness, silence, and the void. Eckhart interprets the void as God. Debord interprets Eckhart's depiction of God as a useful act of negation. Similar to how the slang of "bad" taken as "good" presents a dialectical rebellion, a historical symbol of the devil, "fire," taken as a good and heavenly form of destruction inverts traditional morality in such a way that it challenges the very core of historical Christian iconography which, prior to Hegel's "death of art," was historically not taken as ideological but rather as material Truth.<sup>430</sup> Furthermore, quite literally, fire is a depiction of movement, change, and the destruction of objects. It can change the world in a way that does not define a new world, making it a negation rather than a creation. Debord, who does not see an image of a better future but knows that the present cannot continue as it currently exists, aims for negation of the Spectacle in favor of the ability of allowing others to create who are not himself.<sup>431</sup> Bachelard analyzes motifs wherein fire and water are depicted as forces of movement and change in *L'Eau et les Rêves* as well as *La Psychanalyse du Feu*.

Debord refuses to see his own significance in the cosmos in the film *Howls for Sade*:

He knew quite well that nothing of his exploits remained in a town that rotated the Earth, as Earth rotated the Galaxy, which is itself only a tiny part of a little island which recedes away from us to infinity.<sup>432</sup>

In 1999, Breton argued that Eckhart, along with Kant, was the origin of "the whole process of modern thought" who were followed by Hegel and Marx. Breton thus acknowledged a materialist approach to spirituality in Eckhart's *Grund* that he saw as distinctly modernist rather

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<sup>430</sup> François Coadou, "Le Politique de Marcel Mariën," *Il Créait des Choses Désagréables* (Édition Art Book Magazine/Les Presses du Réel, 2022): 89-90. "Avec la mort de l'art, dont Hegel pense, au début du XIXe siècle, être le témoin, l'œuvre d'art, pour le dire autrement, quitte l'histoire, elle quitte la vie réelle, concrète, pour entrer dans un lieu abstrait supposément éternel: lieu dont le symbole est le musée."

<sup>431</sup> Guy Debord, "Hurlements en Faveur de Sade," *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005.)

<sup>432</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 13.

than medieval.<sup>433</sup> Breton's influence on Situationist readings cannot be overlooked for its profound influence, but Situationists approached philosophical texts like Eckhart from multiple historical trajectories, including the influence of the Hungarian Dialogic School, which was the first intellectual circle of Kotányi. Lajos Szabó was of Jewish descent and had survived Auschwitz. He travelled through various circles on the left, with influences from Neo-Gnosticism and religious thought. Many of the references who appear in Debord's reading notes were primary considerations of Szabó and Hamvás: including Károly Kerényi and Heraclitus who influenced Hamvás and Karl Korsch, who was one of Szabó's interlocutors. The neo-Gnosticism of the Hungarian dialogic school was especially influenced by Henrik Jenő Schmitt. Kotányi sees a distinction between the Platonic-inspired, Kantian-inspired subjectivism cum nihilism of his contemporaries and Gnosticism as Gnosticism was in fact less limited; it was more participatory. Ancient Gnostics wanted to be part of the "work" of the otherworld, and they were not completely detached from it. As a result, there was ironically something materialist and worldly about Gnosticism:

The main danger is that ancient Gnostics will be 'left out' or not fully included in the work [...] In this sense, the self-falsifying spirit is also [...] the enemy of spirituality — we participate in it more than in Platonic ideas.<sup>434</sup>

Jung's suggestion that there was something worldly and material about both Eckhart and Gnosticism could be corroborated through this argument. There is something material that they want to connect with, despite how that materiality is distant from them. They believe that the otherworld is real and tangible. In a way, this is a form of materialism,

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<sup>433</sup> Lauren Walden, "Surrealism: A Global Cultural Movement with Local Political Agency," *International Conference on Global Studies*, 2016. Cf. André Breton 1999. "Toute la démarche de la pensée moderne, cette pensée qui est venue normalement à Marx par Hegel comme est venue normalement à Hegel par Maître Eckhart et par Kant."

<sup>434</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library "(Az a főveszély, hogy „kimarad” a gnosztikus regéiktől, nem az, hogy bekerül a műbe, mert oda úgyis bekerül kizárólagosan vagy sem, ha jó a mű) Ilyen értelemben az önmagát hamisító szellem is aletesete a szellemellenség – jobban részt veszünk benne mint a platóni ideákban, és ezt, nem a platónit fontos elismerni ebbe a furesza Q-képletbe."

just a materialism that suggests materiality in an alternate dimension, to use a rather anachronistic term. According to Lacarrière's Gnosticism, the otherworld of the Spirit is not simply words, as in Platonism or the Gospel of John, and it is not illusory images. The world of everyday life is the world of illusions. Liberation, just as in materialist concepts, is through a connection to something tangible, but that tangibility is impossible, it is nowhere to be found, perhaps strangely again suggesting Kant's conundrum regarding the limitations of perception.

### 3.3. Mirror of the World (*miroir du monde*)

In 1980, Guy Debord addressed a translation of *Society of the Spectacle* that translated "Spectacle" as "show":

I do not understand the nuance in [...] the word "show" in the title. In French, spectacle has the merit of being linked to the Latin *speculum*, and therefore to the mirror, the inverted image, the concept of speculation, etc.<sup>435</sup>

The Latin, *speculum* also appears in Debord's notes for the film *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* when he quotes Paul's first letters to the Corinthians (13:12)<sup>436</sup>:

We now see as though through a mirror and mysteries, but we will one day see God face-to-face. I now only know God imperfectly but I am able to understand him the way that I understand myself.

*Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte: tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum.*<sup>437</sup>

In his reading notes, Debord transcribes Latin and French translations of the bible side-by-side to compare meanings.<sup>438</sup> "Mirror" in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is translated from Greek to

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<sup>435</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondances* 6 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006): 36. "Je ne saisis pas la nuance sur les deux traductions du mot 'spectacle' dans le titre. En français, spectacle a le mérite d'être lié au latine *speculum*, et donc au miroir, à l'image inversée, au concept de spéculation, etc."

<sup>436</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>437</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603. "Nous ne voyons maintenant que comme un miroir et en des énigmes; mais alors nous verrons Dieu face à face. Je ne connais maintenant dieu qu'imparfaitement; mais alors je le connaîtrai comme je suis moi-même connu de lui."

<sup>438</sup> Guy Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésies*.

Latin as *speculaire*, which has led to translations of multiple meanings of this word, including “lens” and “mirror.” Paul is characterized as a Gnostic by scholar Elaine Pagels in her 1992 book, *The Gnostic Paul*.<sup>439</sup> The Spectacle was like a mirror the way the Gnostics saw the world as false and humanity as a mere mirror of the world of heaven:

Humanity is a mirror in which one can discover the reduced and condensed image of the sky, a living universe carrying within, in body and psyche, fires and dark shores, zones of shadow and of light.<sup>440</sup>

While humanity, for Gnostics, is a mirror of the universe and the sky, the “world in which we lie is not only opaque, heavy, and given over to death, but it is above all a world born of monumental machination.”<sup>441</sup> Debord argues that contrarily the Spectacle is a monumental machination that mirrors the world. In its mirroring, it misses important aspects of the physical world, including materiality as well as anything that falls outside of the scope of the mirror’s curated gaze. In mirroring the world, the Spectacle also acts as a mirror wherein individuals identify themselves. Situationists argued against the curated and argumentative mirroring of the Spectacle, and, in that same argument, they argued against the individual to construct versions of Self that emulate the social arguments that the Spectacle proposes.

Comparisons between the world and various looking devices appear in Gnostic apocrypha as well. Attila Kotányi writes in his notes that the “Gnostic equation” is “a shape of a prism” that hides the “beautiful.” He “indicts” “Christology” as a “window” through which humanity sees their “golem,” like a mirror visualized through the “shadows” on the “TV.” “The mediation of Platonists [...] has become a nightmare of mescaline, a Heideggerian promise

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<sup>439</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul* (Norcross: Trinity Press International, 1992).

<sup>440</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *The Gnostics*, trans. Nina Rootes (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991): 16.

<sup>441</sup> Lacarrière, *The Gnostics*: 20.

without fulfillment.” “The self-reflecting spirit [of Gnosticism] is the same as Platonic ideals.”<sup>442</sup> The shadows on the walls of Plato’s cave have mirror-like attributes that find limitations in sense perception and the experience of living. If Kant is in some ways a counterargument to Platonism, perhaps his concept of taste, the beautiful, and aestheticism could be considered as the type of beauty that Kotányi describes as hidden. Kotányi did, albeit with self-deprecation, declare himself a Kantian. Kant describes Plato’s conception of beauty as harmony and principles that tend toward objectivity, which were contrary to “subjective” “aesthetical purposiveness.”<sup>443</sup>

According to Lacarrière, Gnostics are alien to the world as spirits trapped inside bodies. They are alien to physicality, including their own.<sup>444</sup> Kotányi relates to this phenomenon: “It is difficult to recognize oneself, [...] this simulacrum homunculus.”<sup>445</sup> The appearance of oneself has a “strange familiarity” where, if a given person were to pass a doppelgänger of themselves on the street, they might look without even processing “that it was [their] own features of [their] own face”<sup>446</sup> that they had just seen. Looking at oneself in the mirror is a punishment for Karl

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<sup>442</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. “A végesített gnosztikus egyenlet... Egy alakja a prizmának. [...] Ilyen értelemben az önmagát hamisító részt veszünk benne, mint a platóni ideálokban.” “Esquisse pour une réquisitoire (Christologie qui ne peut être disqualifié ou critiqué et qui n'était pas atteint, en effet, (?) les prévisions): L'ouverture sur la poésie, sur la signe et la mathématique des ou plutôt sur ce qui nous est donné par elle, par ce fenêtre dans laquelle nous soumise ou par laquelle nous rêves et ces techniques biens remis nous rejoignent, ce fenêtre de chacun des tributs avec toutes leur golem et états (même qu'ils soit des abstractions des ombres ou le progrès en ces pancartes en couleurs [...] sinon in motion, en TV-odeur) se communiquent avec nous par ce trou positif (par notre constitution, [...] - sacré qui veut dire omnipuissant comme ici en Europe toutes les responsable ont un peu compris par la médiation des platoniciennes et ces adversaires, eu deux mille ans, cet ouverture (...) est devenu un cauchemar du mescaline, heideggérien, promesse, sans y arrivé, parce que sans le clé qui est la croix, et là, ou il y a du croix, chez Bentham, pas de fenêtre.”

<sup>443</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

<sup>444</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *The Gnostics*, Trans. Nina Rootes, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991).

<sup>445</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. “À tel point que tout défendre de nouveau ‘corps’ ou ‘personne’ ayant son propre système de la communication, ses distances à lui, ses retarde à lui, ses décalages des mouvement à lui, tout semble dépendre de ce nouveau corps ou assemblage, plutôt grande - intégrale par les petites pas de la danse de cette étrangeté cultivée de ce pratiquement la même personne, mais difficile de se reconnaître même par sa voie plus soi-même, de ce simulacre, homunkulus [sic] que je commence à admettre la triste vérité de l'alkohol [sic] et des autres aliénant vue ce qu'il y en a dans leur corps-cœur actuelles.”

<sup>446</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. “Selbstverständlich, erklärt Heine in seiner typologischen Studie zu den Frauengestalten Shakespeares, kennen wir unser Gesicht, das wir so oft im Spiegel erblicken.”

Georg Büchner (1813-1837), a German revolutionary who studied medicine and literature in Strasbourg. Büchner appears in Kotányi's papers in an 1834 letter to Luise Wilhelmine Jaeglé. Büchner is "afraid of [his] voice ... and [himself] in the mirror."<sup>447</sup> There is a "painful feeling of alienation that the mirror image produces."<sup>448</sup> Part of this sense of horror and alienation comes from attempts to understand the world which, through doing so, humans simply come to understand themselves says Hegel whose "mind inhabits a palace of mirrors."<sup>449</sup> He sees reflection on the self as a "mirror" to the "Other Self."<sup>450</sup>

In *Les Lèvres Nues*, Paul Nougé writes a poem titled "Mirror" wherein he sees, in the mirror, a reductive mirage of himself that does not amount to his sense of his immensity. The mirror triggers an existential crisis making him question his existence in the world which is reducible to a face.<sup>451</sup> Elsewhere in *Les Lèvres Nues*, Nougé writes: "The mirror that reflects your real face never responds to the questions in your eyes."<sup>452</sup> While a doppelgänger and while self-identification are disconcerting, it could be also be seen as disconcerting to go without. Mariën answers a questionnaire as to what scares him more than anything else: to look into a mirror and not see himself.<sup>453</sup>

The image of the physical Self and one's face is a form of self-identification. Inner Self and personal philosophy can likewise metaphorically relate to self-identification and self-

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<sup>447</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "Ich fürchte mich vor meiner Stimme und – vor meinem Spiegel."

<sup>448</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "Büchners Zeitgenosse Heine formuliert es nüchterner aber mit ebensolchem Gespür für das schmerzliche Gefühl der Fremdheit, das das Spiegelbild nach dem Umbruch vermittelt."

<sup>449</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, GEN MSS 1499, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "Hegels Geist bewohnt einen Spiegelpalast."

<sup>450</sup> Frances Berenson, "Hegel on Others and the Self," *Philosophy* 57.219 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 77-90.

<sup>451</sup> Paul Nougé, "Miroirs," *Les Lèvres Nues* 4 (Paris: Allia, 1955): 24. "Open to the game of mirages/ Equivocating pure immensity here, to exist only at the mercy of a face," "Ouvrte au jeu des mirages équivoques immensité pure ici de n'exister qu'à la merci d'un visage."

<sup>452</sup> Paul Nougé, "Reconnaissance d'Angèle Laval," *Les Lèvres Nues* 2 (Paris: Allia, 1954): "Le miroir qui refléterait votre visage véridique ne répond jamais aux questions de nos yeux."

<sup>453</sup> Mariën, *l'Activité Surréaliste en Belgique*: 377.

portraiture. Constructing a *Weltanschauung* is, in the end, simply constructing a self-portrait, says Pierre Fougeyrollas of *Arguments*.<sup>454</sup> If the Inner Self or *Weltanschauung* bases itself on dialectics, negation, and becoming, it becomes ephemeral and could be seen as similar to a palace of mirrors like the metaphor for Hegel's mind that appears in *Les Lèvres Nues*.<sup>455</sup>

Vaneigem outlines Gnostic-influenced Meister Eckhart's conflicts with Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* in *The Movement of the Free Spirit*.<sup>456</sup> Margaret Porete, a 14<sup>th</sup> Century mystic and foundational member of the Movement of the Free Spirit, referenced Eckhart's ideas. She sees mirrors as representative of the ontological questions of image production. Eckhart contested her:

An image is not of itself, nor is it for itself. It rather springs from the thing whose reflection it is and belongs to it with all its being. It owes nothing to a thing other than that whose image it is; nothing else is at its origin. An image takes its being immediately from that of which it is the image and has one sole being with it, and it is that same being.<sup>457</sup>

Humans are the image of God for Porete, but they are autonomous from God because they are images. The 14<sup>th</sup> Century heretical Movement of the Free Spirit saw such logic as liberating because the alienation between the creator and the image meant that as images individuals had freedom and power that they did not owe their creator. If this logic were followed in the creation of the Spectacle, if the autonomy of an image from its creator is empowering, then power is given to reproduced images, and real humans are detached from their productions as well as from the images that they see. Porete took human autonomy as permission to pursue sexual desires.

She decides that "absolute sovereignty" is "realized in love," "around which the life of this

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<sup>454</sup> Pierre Fougeyrollas, "De Marx à Nous," *Arguments* 12-13 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959): 64. "La philosophie en tant que conscience de soi de la *Weltanschauung* est donc à la fois poésie et critique. Marx, comme les autres, a allié la critique à la poésie."

<sup>455</sup> "Un Serpent Coupé en Deux qui se Mord la Queue," *Les Lèvres Nues* 2 (Paris: Allia, 1954): 15. "Hegel, palais de lumière et de miroir, sans fenêtre et sans porte."

<sup>456</sup> Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*: 131.

<sup>457</sup> Matthew Fox, *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart* (Inner Traditions, 1980): 107.

person and the whole universe are meant to be ordered.”<sup>458</sup> It seems that Situationists found some alignment with Gnostics, not in the belief in the “divine afterworld,” but in protesting the existing world and its Spectacles. *Internationale Situationniste* 9 (1964) conveys some sympathy for historical “non-orthodox Christians” who represented a time “when protest against the world had to be posed first and foremost in religious terms.” “The church” had, for a long period of time, “fought against ‘spectacles’ while defending its monopoly on the social spectacle based on the divine afterworld.”<sup>459</sup>

Like Gnostics, Situationists do not believe that the mirror of the world (which for Gnostics is reality but for Situationists is the Spectacle) can lead to the fulfillment of desire. Contrarily, Breton illustrates the mirror to other worlds as a manifestation of desire as well as a fulfillment of desire. Breton finds this in the work of Hieronymous Bosch who “reduces the magic of the universe to some simulacrum” in *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*<sup>460</sup> [FIGURE 3.2]. In the voice-over to *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, Debord states: “Spectators do not find what they desire; they desire what they find.”<sup>461</sup> This use of axiomatic language has a mirrorlike quality that extensively appears in Situationist writing. Debord appropriates a quote from Daniel Boorstin that is framed similarly: “All that is good appears; all that appears is

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<sup>458</sup> Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*: 123.

<sup>459</sup> “Le Monde Dont Nous Parlons,” *Internationale Situationniste* 9: 370. “L’église, qui a si longtemps combattu “les spectacles” alors qu’elle défendait son monopole du spectacle social fondé sur l’arrière-monde divin, se taille aujourd’hui sa place — limitée mais importante — dans le spectacle du siècle. Elle fait les concessions utiles, met en scène ses papes-vedettes, récupère les architectes perdus des expériences abandonnées du primitivisme concentrationnaire. L’internationale des curés est en mesure d’élever la voix partout, et sur tous les tons : rescapés de l’Inquisition aussi bien que parachutés dans la jeunesse sauvage. Ils fournissent en plus ces effarants penseurs-thalidomide du “christianisme rouge,” ces mutants teilhardiens qui ne peuvent vivre qu’en couveuse : sous cloche dans l’ultra-vide de la pensée de la gauche actuelle (voir les exemples ici même, aux chapitres Les mots et leurs employeurs et La contestation en miettes). Il est pourtant clair qu’il ne saurait exister de chrétiens non-orthodoxes depuis la fin des siècles où la contestation du monde devait se poser d’abord en termes religieux. Tout christianisme est déjà unifié théoriquement, avant de l’être œcuméniquement. L’abandon de la critique de la religion est forcément le sommet ultime de l’abandon de toute critique.”

<sup>460</sup> André Breton, *L’Art Magique* (Paris: Phébus, 1991): 180. “[Cette toile] réduit la présence de la magie dans l’univers a quelques simulacres.”

<sup>461</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 121.

good.”<sup>462</sup> Bosch’s *Temptation of Saint Anthony* depicts Saint Anthony, a hermetic monk, looking into a river like a magic mirror wherein tempestuous demons appear. The subject became a favorite for Surrealists, including Salvador Dali [FIGURE 3.3] and Ernst [FIGURE 3.4]. For Debord, humans are wasting away in front of screens, looking at mirrors of the world rather than the world, itself. Such an obsession with mirrors and temptation that traps in unfulfilled desire certainly recalls the myth of Narcissus, whose myth is reiterated in Boorstin’s *The Image*, an influence on *The Society of the Spectacle*. At the end of the myth:

[The Gods] doomed [Narcissus] to fall in love with his own image. A soothsayer predicted that Narcissus would live only until the moment when he saw himself. This was, of course, in the days before photography or television. And the only way they could make him see himself was to have him see his own reflection in the limpid waters of a spring one day as he was leaning over it. When he saw his reflection his passion for this phantom so obsessed him that he could not leave the waterside. [...] On that very spot he died of languor [...] Though the Greek word which means numbness or stupor (*narke*: whence ‘narcotic,’ of a self-image is closely connected with languor, sleepiness, and inactivity.”<sup>463</sup>

In the film *Réfutation de Tous les Jugements*, Debord repurposes a cigarette advertisement wherein a man shops for a cigarette. To decide if the cigarette is right for him, he is presented with a mirror wherein he sees himself smoking [FIGURE 3.5]. The feeling of smoking a cigarette, while not a narcotic, does have a languor that perhaps feels similar to hypnotically gazing at a mirror. However, it is not the act of smoking so much as the appearance of smoking that is important. The physicality of the cigarette and its effects are hardly referenced, and, instead, appearance triumphs. Despite the lack of a reference to physicality in the advertisement, there are physical consequences to smoking that manifest in the real world. Whether Debord was at all concerned about health consequences in 1972 is dubious, especially given the Situationist propensity for heavy drinking, which likely was primarily promoted by Debord more than others

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<sup>462</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 65.

<sup>463</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 257.

as a means of creating a useful sense of disorientation.<sup>464</sup> Instead, the advertisement for smoking in *Society of the Spectacle* is concerned primarily with the lack of a reason to smoke outside of the visual appeal or at least a lack of a reason provided by advertisements.

Realists were preoccupied with the mirror image. Heidegger suggests that realism was driven by a human desire to trap the world as a means of understanding it through a form of conquest (*per-capio*).<sup>465</sup> It is never enough to simply look at reality. Realists like Da Vinci felt an obsessive need to capture their sight on canvas. This inclination is not so different from obsessing over one's own appearance, says André Breton. After all, artists identify themselves with their work, despite how Debord argues that they are removed from their final product. Breton considers the obsession of realists with representing Narcissus-like. Representing reality drove Leonardo Di Vinci to "delirium" (*délire*), he argues.<sup>466</sup> Mariën discusses how realism as a form of mirroring was addressed by the ready-made in Surrealism, which "ruined the artificial prestige of representation." He imagines how much simpler it would have been for DaVinci to simply sit Mona Lisa in front of a mirror rather than painting her.<sup>467</sup> Debord admires a similar ready-made Surrealist mirror in an exhibit wherein, below a mirror, gallery visitors read the title, *Portrait of an Imbecile*.<sup>468</sup> In this instance, looking in the mirror means literal self-reflection. There is a level of reality in this portrayal that does not relate simply to representation, but to an examination of the existing world through (self-)perception. The metaphor of looking in a mirror to see truth also appears in a letter wherein Debord writes: "The most advanced country in this

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<sup>464</sup> Raoul Vaneigem and Gérard Berréby, *Rien n'est Fini*: 131-132.

<sup>465</sup> William Richardson, *Heidegger, Through Phenomenology to Thought*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003): 419.

<sup>466</sup> André Breton, *l'Art Magique*: 209.

<sup>467</sup> Marcel Mariën, "Les Marches de l'Été," *La Conquête du Monde par l'Image*: 30. "Que Léonard de Vinci se fût contenté, au lieu de la peindre, de placer devant un miroir *la Joconde*, et le problème moral transféré de la peinture contemplative à la peinture d'action, bien avant les moustaches, était résolu."

<sup>468</sup> Guy Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution," trans. Anthony Hayes (Canberra: The Sinister Science, 2021).

dissolution of the world holds up to us the mirror in which our common future can be read,”<sup>469</sup> where he references Annie Le Brun’s *The Assassins and their Mirrors (Les Assassins et leurs Miroirs.)* Similarly, Khayati says that *On the Poverty of Student Life* was intended to be a mirror wherein students could reflect on their own misery.<sup>470</sup> Thus, Situationists, who embraced *dépaysement* and the unexpected, nevertheless aimed to produce a type of realism that aimed to deductively induce truths about society and the world. Bertrand Cochard sees the Spectacle not as a true mirror, but as an illusion-generator. If the Spectacle were truly to reflect the world, typical individuals would see their own boredom or exploitation. Instead, they see glamorous images.<sup>471</sup> So, too, Debord turns the mirror on the audience, showing how an audience appears from the perspective of the screen in *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* [FIGURE 1.3]. The mirror of a true reflection rather than an illusion can be used to break the spell and reveal the world as it truly is.

Film maintains aspects of realism through photography. The preoccupation of Isou’s *Treatise on Venom and Eternity* was to destroy the image, the photograph, of film by literally cutting it. *Howls for Sade (Hurlements en Faveur de Sade)*, Debord’s first film from 1952, created through Isou’s Letterist movement, removed images altogether and only played a soundtrack to rotating white and black screens. *Society of the Spectacle* uses stills more often than moving images in order to emphasize the deadness of photographs, as well as the relationship between film and photography. Realism is inclined to reproduce; it is mimetic. Whether Debord’s films are realistic is up for debate. In some ways, he intentionally distances the viewer and reveals the mechanism of the film to demystify the process. For example, when

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<sup>469</sup> Guy Debord to Dario Markovic, March 13, 1993, *Correspondance 7*. “Le pays le plus avancé dans cette dissolution du monde nous tend le miroir où se lit notre avenir à tous.”

<sup>470</sup> Mustapha Khayati interview with Mehdi El Hajoui, *On the Poverty of Student Life* (New York: Common Notions, 2022): 45.

<sup>471</sup> Cochard, “Le Monde du Spectacle,” *Guy Debord et la Philosophie*: 249.

he shows the audience themselves or chooses grainy photographs. On the other hand, Debord argues that he aims to “reinstale reality in the world” and displays his everyday life, factories, and other images that could be argued to be realistic. He compares *In Girum* to a mirror, specifically a “mirror of the world (*miroir du monde*) from poetry”<sup>472</sup> which could be interpreted as realism that extends encyclopedically. In a letter, Debord uses the Latin, *mundi speculum*, which emphasizes the connection between “spectacle” and “mirror.”<sup>473</sup> In the Renaissance, the *speculum mundi* was thought to represent the origins, creation, and end of the world, as well as all of the memories and images of the world throughout history. It was a representative world history.<sup>474</sup> Debord describes the Spectacle as a *miroir du monde* in *The Considerations on the Assassination of Gérard Lebovici*. This mirror, which intends to represent everything, does, in fact, curate, meaning that there are people, like Debord and the entire proletariat, who are not meant to be seen:

Like the proletariat, I am not supposed to be in the world. Gérard Lebovici thus dangerously made deals with ghosts. The decline of rational thought, obvious and deliberately sought in the spectacle, constitutes black magic [...] officially organized by the State through the omnipresent *miroir du monde* where everything appears in reverse. Saying that two and two makes four is becoming a revolutionary act.<sup>475</sup>

Debord’s characterization of the *miroir du monde* as a magic mirror harkens to Surrealist and Romantic themes of magic mirrors. In *l’Art Magique*, Breton references various magic mirrors,

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<sup>472</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>473</sup> Guy Debord to Gianfranco Sanguinetti, August 10, 1970, *Correspondance* 4.

<sup>474</sup> John Swan, *Speculum mundi or a glasse representing the face of the world shewing both that it did begin, and must also end: the manner how, and time when, being largely examined*. University of Michigan, 1671. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A13217.0001.001>.

<sup>475</sup> Guy Debord, *Considerations on the Assassination of Gérard Lebovici* trans. Robert Greene (Los Angeles: TamTam Books, 2001.) “Comme le prolétariat, je suis censé ne pas être au monde. Alors Gérard Lebovici est aussitôt réputé entretenir un dangereux commerce avec les fantômes. Le recul de la pensée rationnelle, si évident et si délibérément recherché dans le spectacle, fait taxe de magie noire, de ralliement aux forces obscures des gourous, du vaudou, et j’en passe, toute pratique qui se tient en dehors de la magie officielle organisée par l’État de l’omniprésent miroir du monde où tout se présente à l’envers. Dire que deux et deux font quatre est en passe de devenir un acte révolutionnaire.”

including an Etruscan mirror intended to protect from Gorgons [FIGURE 3.6], a *miroir du temps* (mirror of time)<sup>476</sup> and a *miroir de merveilleux* (mirror of marvels).<sup>477</sup> Breton summarizes the title choice of Pierre Mabille's *Miroir de Merveilleux*, both regarding the “marvelous” and “mirrors”:

No doubt, the two words in the title, Pierre Mabille weighed in gold. No one has ever so clearly differentiated the marvelous from the fantastic [...] because the fantastic is almost always characterized as fiction without consequence, but the marvelous shines in its entirety. The mirror warns us that it is similar to our spirit (*esprit*), so we have to admit that the silvering consists of the red flow of desire.<sup>478</sup>

For Mabille, marvels, unlike fantastical fictions, have consequences because they have realities. There is a merger between the real and illusion in a mirror that is not fantasy, because it reflects reality. So, too, does the marvelous reflect the human interior, be it mind or spirit (*esprit*). Marvels and mirrors are not removed from reality – in a way, they show it; they show the reality of desires, the “grain of truth”<sup>479</sup> that Debord finds in the Spectacle.

Through the Spectacle, humanity has ventured beyond the looking glass. Debord, through Breton, takes interest in the children's book author, mathematician, and Anglican pastor, Lewis Carroll (né Charles Dodgson). Carroll, author of *Through the Looking Glass*, also wrote *Alice in Wonderland* which translates, in French, to *Alice au Pays des Merveilles*, or “Alice in the land of marvels.” In his notes, Debord cites Breton's *Anthologie de l'Humour Noir*: “All with any sense

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<sup>476</sup> Breton, *l'Art Magique*: 231.

<sup>477</sup> Breton, *l'Art Magique*: 117.

<sup>478</sup> Pierre Mabille, *Le Miroir du Merveilleux* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962). “Ne doutons pas que Pierre Mabille ait pesé--en poudre d'or--les deux termes qui entrent dans ce titre. Le merveilleux, nul n'est mieux parvenu à le définir par opposition au “fantastique” qui tend, hélas, de plus en plus à le supplanter auprès de nos contemporains. C'est que le fantastique est presque toujours de l'ordre de la fiction sans conséquence, alors que le merveilleux luit entier. Quant au miroir, il nous prévient que, s'il est possiblecro d'y comparer notre esprit, il faut admettre que le tain en est constitué par la rouge coulée du désir.”

<sup>479</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, (Buchet-Chastel): 167 “Noyau de vérité.”

of revolt see Lewis Carroll as their first truant schoolmaster.”<sup>480</sup> As an insult, Debord would at times ask, “What other world beyond the looking glass brought you to think...?”<sup>481</sup> Michèle Bernstein references *Alice in Wonderland* multiple times, including in the title of her book, *All the King's Horses (Tous les Cheveux du Roi)*, an auto-fictional account of her life with Debord.<sup>482</sup>

In Khayati's papers, there is a short text by Egyptian Surrealist Georges Henein titled “Alice au Pays des Merveilles” (“Alice in Wonderland”). Henein argues that Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* “gives people the tools to build a better life.”<sup>483</sup> In this text, “At some point, reality loses its hold. When it finally loses hold, that's what Alice is. (...) She traverses with immaterial steps.” Alice is unsurprised by the supernatural and unexpected. Henein idealizes this vision of the world and this character who embodies it:

We hold out hope for one day, around the corner of an exceptionally boring street, we will be whisked away from a chain of sleepy events, robbed of the tyranny of common sense, abandoned with no return to the wonderland in the skin of Alice.<sup>484</sup>

In *La Fausse Conscience*, Joseph Gabel of *Arguments* has a very different take on the immaterial world of marvels as well as the world through the looking glass. Lewis Carroll writes *Through the Looking Glass* about a reversed world filled with aggression, anxiety, and frustration, says Gabel. He notes how Paul Schilder draws a connection between Carroll's mathematical

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<sup>480</sup> *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésie* (Paris: Éditions l'Échappée, 2019). “Tous ceux qui gardent magnifique champ d'expérience. Tous ceux qui gardent le sens de la révolte reconnaîtront en Lewis Carroll leur premier maître d'école buissonnière.”

<sup>481</sup> Guy Debord to Gianfranco Sanguinetti, January 15, 1976, *Correspondance* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2005). “Dans quel monde d'au-delà du miroir crois-tu que...?”

<sup>482</sup> Michèle Bernstein, *All the King's Horses* (Pasadena: Semiotexte, 2008.)

<sup>483</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480. “Ce sont là des lectures hautement recommandables que l'on doit s'habituer à pratiquer le plus tôt possible, car il est dans leur pouvoir de charpenter une vie mielleure.”

<sup>484</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, GEN MSS 1480. “Nous gardons l'espoir d'être un jour, au tournant d'une rue exceptionnellement banale, pris dans un engrenage d'événements réparateurs, enlevés à la dictature des bonnes raisons, abandonnés sans retour dans un merveilleux pays en peau d'Alice. Ainsi seraient regagnées d'un seul coup toutes les illusions que la vie se flatte de nous avoir fait perdre. Notre place est virtuellement retenue à la table du Loir, du Lièvre de Mars et du Chapelier.”

investigations of space and time with the frustrations involving space in these texts. Gabel calls the spatial disorientation of Alice in the looking glass *Daseinsanalyse*, which he sees as a correlation between “Gnosis and praxis”<sup>485</sup> that creates an “inauthentic universe of error as well as a universe of inauthentic error”<sup>486</sup> leading to depersonalization, the sense of a dream, and an impression of emptiness.<sup>487</sup> The fundamental relationship between “Humanity and the World” is “not representable,” says Gabel; it can only exist dialectically. Representation, as in a mirror, is a depersonalizing “*sous-existence*” that disorients our relationship with space, the world, and, as a result, ourselves.<sup>488</sup>

Gabel draws attention to body image in relation to the perception of space in *Alice and Wonderland*: she worries that she is too small, then too big. Overall, these texts represent worlds that are “strange, cruel, and full of anxiety.”<sup>489</sup> Debord was influenced by Gabel’s *La Conscience Fausse* in the production of *Society of the Spectacle*. He represents the ephemeral world of the

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<sup>485</sup> Joseph Gabel, *La Fausse Conscience* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962): 236.

<sup>486</sup> Gabel, *La Fausse Conscience*: 236. “Un univers inauthentique de la faute qui est aussi un univers de la faute inauthentique.”

<sup>487</sup> Gabel, *La Fausse Conscience*: 200. “Le monde d’Alice (et celui de son autre roman, *Through the Looking Glass*) est un monde étrange, cruel, rempli d’angoisse. Le récit commence par une longue chute (un thème de la *Daseinsanalyse*). Une atmosphère d’angoisse constante est liée aux variations de l’image du corps. Alice se sent soit trop grande, soit trop petite. Le temps parfois s’arrête ou fait marche arrière (le fantasme de *Jurg Zund!*) ; l’espace est sans profondeur (Roi et Reine des cartes!). Carroll lui-même aurait, un jour, écrit une lettre commençant par le dernier mot et finissant par le premier. Schilder dit que le mathématicien ne se caractérise peut-être par les libertés qu’il sait prendre avec l’espace et le temps. Carroll affectionnait également l’écriture en miroir ! Tout le récit est marqué par la frustration et l’agressivité orales et cette agressivité déforme la structure de l’espace vécu. Schilder s’étonne du succès de Carroll comme écrivain de l’enfance ; on partage son étonnement encore que les destinées de l’œuvre de Swift posent Presque le même problème. C’est une œuvre étonnante où s’entremêlent les thèmes analytiques (frustration et agressivité orales) et les thèmes de *Daseinsanalyse* (transformation de la structure spatio-temporelle.)”

<sup>488</sup> Gabel, *La Fausse Conscience*: 150. “La question des rapports existants entre cette relation fondamentale [du Moi et du Monde] non représentable et ses manifestations représentables, constitue un problème ontologique important. [...] Cette impression de sous-existence décolore le monde propre qui revêt dès lors un aspect artificiel et factice. Dépersonnalisation (impression de sous-existence par dégradation de la capacité de devenir) et déréalisation (impression de vide) sont par conséquent des phénomènes corrélatifs; deux aspects d’une même défaillance de la rencontre avec le monde. La déréalisation sensorielle est conséquence et non pas cause de cette altération fondamentale présensorielle des rapports de l’homme et du monde.”

<sup>489</sup> Gabel, *La Fausse Conscience*: 200. “On est tenté de ranger parmi les études expérimentales, sur le temps des schizophrènes l’article de Schilder sur ‘Alice in Wonderland.’ [...] Le monde d’Alice (et celui de son autre roman, *Through the Looking Glass*) est un monde étranger, cruel, rempli d’angoisse. Le récit commence par une longue chute (un thème de la *Daseinsanalyse*.) Une atmosphère d’angoisse constante est liée aux variations de l’image du corps. Alice se sent soit trop grande, soit trop petite.”

Spectacle as anxiety-inducing and cruel. The Situationist International embraced strange, dreamlike worlds where the unexpected was able to present itself. They sought such “beauty”<sup>490</sup> through the winding explorations of the *dérive*, or wanderings which explored distortions of space similar to how Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* applied mathematical concepts of spatial distortion. Asger Jorn<sup>491</sup> and Jacqueline de Jong<sup>492</sup> embraced movement in mathematics away from Euclidean concepts of space into the warped topographical charts. The difference between the unexpected space of wonderland and the mirror world of *Through the Looking Glass* is that the world of the looking glass is a visual reproduction of the existing world in reverse rather than an adventure into the unexpected. Alice tells her cat, “I’ll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass House. First, there’s the room you can see through the glass. That’s just the same as our drawing room, only the things go the other way.”<sup>493</sup> The looking glass is a reproduction of sight. Carroll hypothesizes how it might lend to possibilities for adventures, but not in reality, rather in the imagination.

Debord refers to an article by Paul Nougé in *Les Lèvres Nues* in his letters to Marcel Mariën.<sup>494</sup> In the article, Nougé references the “mirror of the eye”<sup>495</sup> to convey the limitations of perception particularly regarding spatial constructions and organization. Nougé writes:

It seems that we allow ourselves to be caught in the mirror of the eye and that we behave towards the mind like a house, a labyrinth, a stratified earth, a full, a landscape. We are so made that nothing is more painful to us than escaping the temptations of space. The mind has such a horror of emptiness that it cannot help but assume it every time in order to immediately fill it by organizing it in the

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<sup>490</sup> *Potlatch [1954 – 1957]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996): 25. “La beauté nouvelle sera DE SITUATION, c’est-à-dire provisoire et vécue.”

<sup>491</sup> Asger Jorn, “La Création Ouverte et ses Ennemis, *Internationale Situationniste* 5 (Paris: Situationist International, 1960): 38.

<sup>492</sup> Jacqueline de Jong, *The Situationist Times*.

<sup>493</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922): 9.

<sup>494</sup> Debord, *Lettres à Mariën*: 118.

<sup>495</sup> Paul Nougé, *Les Lèvres Nues* 8 (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1998): 29.

manner of the spectacles which inhabit its eye. As soon as we want to think about the mind, we are inclined to think in space.<sup>496</sup>

While Surrealism aimed to escape space through investigations into Inner Worlds, Inner Worlds in fact designated spaces. The imagination has its own sense of sight. It is with this logic that Surrealists and Annie Le Brun<sup>497</sup> refer to both Saint Theresa of Avila and the Marquis de Sade who explore their spirits and minds through spatial constructions of labyrinthine castles. Le Brun regularly corresponded with Debord after the dissolution of the Situationists.<sup>498</sup> In fact, she assisted him in securing publications with her publisher, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, who was especially interested in Sade, one of Le Brun's main research interests.<sup>499</sup> She was also in close correspondence with Surrealists. Avila, a deeply devotional medieval mystic, was likely intended as an ironic connection to Sade, but Surrealists saw both of their interior explorations and worlds as devoted to the creation of a mind-space that expresses the multitudes of the Self wherein they can confront and indulge in fantastical relationships with sin and ecstasy, which, for both, have overlapping moments. Avila's canonical *Interior Castle* was certainly an influence wherein she sees her soul not only as an interior castle, but also as a "polished mirror"<sup>500</sup> filled by a vision of Christ. She argued that those who are not able to understand themselves obstruct the light of the Divine so that they "do not behold [themselves] in the mirror wherein [their] image is engraved."<sup>501</sup> The Divine, too, is like a mirror that is "more vast than the whole world" because it

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<sup>496</sup> Paul Nougé, *Les Lèvres Nues* 8 (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1998): 29. "Il semble bien que nous nous laissions prendre au miroir de l'œil et que nous nous comportions vis-à-vis de l'esprit comme une maison, une labyrinthe, une terre stratifiée, une pleine, un paysage. Nous sommes ainsi faits que rien ne nous est plus pénible que l'échapper aux tentations de l'espace. L'esprit a une telle horreur du vide qu'il ne peut s'empêcher de le supposer à tout coup pour aussitôt le combler en l'organisant à la manière des spectacles qui habitent son œil. Dès que nous voulons penser l'esprit, nous sommes enclins à penser dans l'espace."

<sup>497</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Sade: A Sudden Abyss*, trans. Camille Naish (San Francisco: City Lights, 1990): 9.

<sup>498</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondance 7* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2008).

<sup>499</sup> Olivier Bessard-Banquy, *La Vie du Livre Contemporain*, Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2009): 156.

<sup>500</sup> Theresa of Avila, *The Book of My Life*, (Boston: New Seeds, 2007): 337.

<sup>501</sup> Theresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1912): 268.

is envisioned as light and clarity, and because understanding God is understanding the entirety of the world as well as oneself:

Let's say the Divine is like a clear diamond, vaster than the whole world — or else a mirror, so sublime that its purity cannot be exaggerated. We could say that everything we do is visible in this jewel since it was fashioned to contain all things within itself. Nothing transcends its greatness. It was frightening for me to see so many things joined together in such a short time within this gem, and it made me sad to have seen such ugly things as my mistakes reflected in that pure brilliance.<sup>502</sup>

Avila's voyage through her interior castle is a quest for self-understanding. Through the interior journey, she arrives at self-understanding and therefore an understanding, also, of God, who reflects her highest, most polished version of herself. *Les Lèvres Nues* lists Avila and Sade side-by-side, Avila for her "imagination" and Sade for his "heart": "Theresa of Avila [is an] annoying shit and great example of the powers of the imagination. The Marquis de Sade is an Alain Fournier without a heart of stone."<sup>503</sup> While the anti-occultist Belgian Surrealists of *Les Lèvres Nues* and the literary theorist Annie Le Brun, were able to read Avila poetically rather than mystically, it was the distortion of the eye and the spaces that it envisions that led Nougé to cynically argue that "lies stop being lies when they succeed."<sup>504</sup> The "mirror of the eye" is easy to manipulate. Nougé instead aimed to transcend the lies through a path of "reason." In 1967, Nougé commented on Breton's occultism: "How sad, indeed, to see [Breton] going astray far too often on the paths of unreason, the sinks of 'magic.'"<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Theresa of Avila, *The Book of My Life*: 337.

<sup>503</sup> *Les Lèvres Nues* 10 (Paris: Allia, 1958): v. "Maître Eckhardt et Thérèse d'Avila sont deux emmerdeurs et de beaux exemples des pouvoirs de l'imagination. Le Marquis de Sade, un Alain Fournier qui n'aurait pas eu le Cœur de pierre."

<sup>504</sup> Paul Nougé, *Les Lèvres Nues* 8 (Paris : Éditions Allia, 1998): 29. "Il semble bien que nous nous laissions prendre au miroir de l'œil et que nous nous comportions vis-à-vis de l'esprit comme une maison une labyrinthe, une terre stratifiée, une plaine, un paysage. Nous sommes ainsi faits que rien ne nous est plus pénible que d'échapper aux tentations de l'espace. L'esprit a une telle horreur du vide qu'il ne peut s'empêcher de le supposer à tout coup pour aussitôt le combler en l'organisant à la manière des spectacles qui habitent son œil. Dès que nous voulons penser l'esprit, nous sommes enclins à penser dans l'espace."

<sup>505</sup> Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism*: 80.

Sade's castle is an interior space of the Self, with which Le Brun agrees, though she is more skeptical of the comparisons made to Avila:

I find it hard to believe in scientific objectivity when certain critics suddenly take it into their heads to compare the interior castle of Saint Teresa of Avila with the edifices built by Sade. Such comparisons owe more to coincidences of interpretation than of representation. 'The castle of the soul has many points in common with the castle of the flesh erected by Sade,' as Béatrice Didier is not afraid to write, even though her exposition of those common points is far from convincing. For even though she discovers a similar concentric structure in both Sade and Saint Theresa, sheltering the same imperious interiority and yearning for the absolute, her discovery does not amount to much.<sup>506</sup>

The irony of comparing Sade's interior castle to Avila's was likely part of a Surrealist heretical humor, given Avila's pious exploration and Sade's profanity. Even if Avila is not a "scientifically objective" comparison to Sade, as Le Brun argues, she is a recurring comparison to Sade made by Surrealists. Vaneigem called Avila's *Interior Castle* a "weapon against life."<sup>507</sup> Perhaps Vaneigem's critique was not only a critique of Avila's religiosity and self-censorship, but also her willful disconnection with the material world through her retreat into imaginary spaces.

Surrealists Hans Richter and Man Ray reflect on the "mirror of the eye" in *Dreams that Money Can Buy* when a man gazes into a mirror where he finds, in the reflection of his eye, a woman [FIGURE 3.7]. A voice-over narrates his internal monologue in the third person:

Here's something on which you can really pride yourself. You've discovered that you can look inside yourself. You know what that means? You're promoted! You're no longer a bum; you're an artist! Remember a poet you once read? The eye is a camera he said. Suppose like a film it could retain the images that glide so secretly through your brain. Have you ever tried to see the shadow world inside photographs of the retina held suspended in its memory? This is one of the more unusual talents and it's yours it seems. Maybe this will revive your bank balance. Remember, everybody dreams. If you can look inside yourself you can look inside anyone [...] a potential of two billion customers all with a dream.<sup>508</sup>

<sup>506</sup> Annie LeBrun, *Sade: A Sudden Abyss*, trans. Camille Naish (San Francisco: City Lights, 1990): 9.

<sup>507</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Resistance to Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023): 209.

<sup>508</sup> Hans Richter and Man Ray, *Dreams that Money Can Buy* (Films International of America Inc: 1947).

Vaneigem argued that, of all Surrealist films, few were worth discussing, but *Dreams that Money Can Buy* “is a film that deserves to be better known in France.”<sup>509</sup>

*Society of the Spectacle* cites Gabel, particularly with reference to his concept of the “mirror sign:” “The spectacle as a whole is [Gabel’s] ‘Mirror sign’ presenting illusory escapes from a universal autism.”<sup>510</sup> When *The Society of the Spectacle* was written in 1967, the DSM-I defined autism as childhood schizophrenia, only characterized as separate from adult schizophrenia due to lack of maturity, and thus can be interpreted here as infantilizing schizophrenia.<sup>511</sup> The relationship to immaturity could be related to the *mirror stage* in childhood psychoanalysis, which is characterized as a stage of development when concepts of Self-World relationships evolve.<sup>512</sup> Prior to the mirror sign, there is no sense of self, sense of reflection, or sense of object permanence in relation to the materiality of the *world of things*. For Gabel, the *mirror sign* specifically refers to distortions of the sense of space in relation to hallucination and illusion:

The famous ‘mirror sign’ can be interpreted as a manifestation of a tendency to identify (and therefore spatialize), or as a false *Selbstigung* [selfishness], or even as an attempt to surpass the illusory sense of existence without perspective.<sup>513</sup>

The relationship between identification and spatialization signals a self-world dynamic that Gabel finds within *Alice in Wonderland*. In his notes on Surrealism, Vaneigem calls the inner world the “wasteland of subjectivity,” a laboratory where the Self navigates its relationship with the world.<sup>514</sup> The unconscious mind does not in fact “belong” to the individual, and thus it is not

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<sup>509</sup> Vaneigem, *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*: 101.

<sup>510</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967.)

<sup>511</sup> Ellen Herman, *The Autism History Project* (Eugene: University of Oregon, 2019.)

<sup>512</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2005).

<sup>513</sup> Gabel, *La Conscience Fausse* : 197. "Le fameux ‘signe du miroir’ peut être interprété comme une manifestation de la tendance identificative (donc spatialisante), soit comme une fausse ‘*Selbstigung*,’ soit encore comme une tentative de dépassement illusoire de l’existence sans perspective, soit comme une ‘illusion de rencontre.’ "

<sup>514</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 1955. “L’intermonde est le terrain vague de la subjectivité. L’espace-temps du rêveur se façonne plastiquement sur les normes de la volonté

truly a representation of themselves, though they would see it as a mirroring with which they identify. Vaneigem cites Artaud: Inner Worlds are “reigned” by something outside of the individual, something that desires nothing more than to “take my place, for me, in my body and myself.”<sup>515</sup> Thus, artists and the producers of visual content are not puppet masters of the audience, but rather all participating in the illusion are controlled by its immersive and enveloping power. In terms of the conflation between individual Self and world, Debord’s reading notes make a direct connection here between Lewis Carroll and *Society of the Spectacle* in the sense that the naming or designation of individuals and lands reifies them until they “disappear into fiction.”<sup>516</sup>

Vincent Kaufmann argues that Debord’s concept of revolution is not merely the end of “exploitation” but also the end of “the mirror stage and all of the symbols that trap our wants.”<sup>517</sup> The mirror stage, or the stage when humans (and some animals) begin to recognize themselves in a mirror, describes a stage of consciousness wherein personal identity is connected to the material body. However, Debord’s concept of mirrors and, likely, a mirror stage of consciousness emphasizes how the mirror is not a literal version of the person who is looking into it. *Howls for*

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individuelle tout en prenant la mesure selon la perspective du pouvoir. Ce super-espace-temps est aussi un laboratoire où il importe de voir clair, c’est-à-dire de distinguer la construction du vécu et la destruction du réel; ce qui se définit par rapport à soi et ce qui est défini par rapport aux autres et aux choses. C’est seulement par un traitement correct des composantes subjectives et en particulier des éléments de l’intermonde que sera évitée une fois pour toutes la solution psychanalytique et réformiste de la sublimation et du transfert, la récupération, pour tout dire.”

<sup>515</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 1955. “En explorateur de l’esprit, Artaud rend bien compte de la lutte et de ses fulgurances lucides: ‘L’inconscient de n’appartient pas, sauf en rêve, et puis, tout ce que je vois en lui: et qui traîne, est-ce une forme marquée pour naître ou de malpropre que j’ai rejeté? Le subconscient est ce qui transpire des prémisses de ma volonté intérieure, mais je ne sais pas très bien qui y règne, et je crois bien que ce n’est pas moi, mais le flot des volontés adverses qui, je ne sais pourquoi, pense en moi et n’a jamais eu d’autres préoccupations au monde et d’autre idée que de prendre ma place, à moi, dans mon corps et dans mon moi.”

<sup>516</sup> Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésie*: 142. “cf. Lewis Carroll et Société du Spectacle: Le nom, c’est le numéro d’enregistrement à l’aide duquel l’autorité retrouve toujours ses aimés et féaux esclaves. Le nom remplace l’homme son Cœur et sa vie, comme le capital remplace la chose, la terre, le travail et la Valeur réelle. L’Homme et la nature ont disparu devant la fiction.”

<sup>517</sup> Sylvano Santini, “À Toi de Jouer,” *D’Une Révolution à l’Autre* (Montreal: Université de Montréal, 2023): 62. “La révolution selon Debord nous débarrasse non seulement de l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme, mais aussi du stade du miroir et de toutes les barres du symbolique qu’on voudra.”

*Sade* as a disembodied voice rejects identification with a face, a rejection that seems to empower the speaker by granting dislocated immateriality. The world that humans think that they see in a mirror is not the real world, but rather an “inverse world” like the Spectacle. In 1955, *Les Lèvres Nues* “parachuted” a text across London that made a declaration against utopias, which it argued were like Alice’s wonderland – utopias are mere representations that exist only in drawings.<sup>518</sup> Self-identification with land, philosophies and things presents, for René Viénet, an underlying issue with writing history and philosophy. Individual *Weltanschauungen* render written theories about the world mere subjective reflections of the individuals who write them. What is read, in the end, is a mere distortion. This issue is deeply present in radical theory, says Viénet, which, like all philosophy, displays a bureaucratic hall of mirrors, mirroring individuals as well as mirroring the writing and ideas of others. For example, the very term, “Marxism,” suggests mirroring the ideas of Karl Marx and identifying with Marx as an individual. The prevalence of specific jargon becomes a definitive aspect of leftist discourse. In academia, as well, there is a necessity to emulate others, often without a building or drawing new conclusions. Academic emulation is a form of mirroring, argues Viénet.<sup>519</sup>

Debord writes a poetic reflection in a letter to Hervé Falcou on how the relationship between life and dreams are similar to the sense of entrapment and emptiness associated with looking in a mirror. Written prior to the foundation of the Situationist International, he seems to reject the real world for the world of dreams in a way that is reminiscent of Surrealism as well as Gnosticism:

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<sup>518</sup> *Les Lèvres Nues* 7 (Paris: Allia, 1998): 30. Supporterez-vous plus longtemps que le pays d'Alice n'existe que sur les épures, que celui d'Utopie en soit une pour jamais?

<sup>519</sup> René Viénet, *Enragés et Situationnistes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968): 146. "Cette façon de saisir les choses à la racine était vraiment la théorie réalisée, le refus pratique de l'idéologie. De sorte que ceux qui agissaient ainsi radicalement se trouvaient doublement habilités à dénoncer la distorsion du réel qu'opèrent, dans leur palais des miroirs, les appareils bureaucratiques en lutte pour imposer partout leur propre reflet: ils se battaient pour les objectifs les plus avancés du projet révolutionnaire, et donc pouvaient parler au nom de tous et en connaissance de cause."

Life and dreams meet, the two face each other in the mirror. I am inside of the mirror, and I can't get out, or return to the real world from which I am always curiously absent. Dreams, by chance, can be measured.<sup>520</sup>

Mirrors become a metaphor for the disconnect between the real identity of authors and artists with their byproducts, their work. In *Les Lèvres Nues*, Mariën says that they present a “satellite of their existence, a mirror [...] a shadow of who they were.”<sup>521</sup> Isidore Isou and Letterist Gil J. Wolman contrast that sentiment, asserting that they have somehow found a way to enter their book and film, respectively. Wolman asserts in the voiceover of *l'Anticoncept*, “I am immortal and living.”<sup>522</sup> *L'Anticoncept* was a key inspiration for Debord's first Letterist film, *Howls for Sade*, produced in 1952. Isou asserts that the difference between other books about heroes and *l'Agrégation d'un Nom et d'un Messie* is that other books write *about* heroes, but Isou's book *embodies*—he *is* within the book, not as identical to an original Isou, but as a *real* Messiah, incarnated through words like incantations. Here, there is perhaps a sense of identity, but it is ephemeral, ghostly, and removed from the original artist. Nevertheless, for Isou and Wolman, the presence of the author or voiceover is powerful and real, emanating as though it is coming from a being in another world through the looking glass. Debord portrays a similar God-like voiceover in *Howls for Sade*, while later Situationist films emphasize the inhumanity and mechanical nature of the artist's byproduct. The person speaking, Debord says in the voice-over, is not Debord.<sup>523</sup> This lack of association to the Self gives the voice-over a ghostlike quality that in fact gives it a sense of power. An inhuman being speaks in monotone over the representation of the

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<sup>520</sup> Guy Debord, *Le Marquis de Sade a les Yeux de Fille*: 52.

<sup>521</sup> Marcel Mariën, *Les Lèvres Nues*, 7 (Paris: Allia, 1995): 17.

<sup>522</sup> Frederic Acquaviva, *I am Immortal and Alive*. (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2010.)

<sup>523</sup> Debord, “Howls for Sade,” (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

entire world of images in *Society of the Spectacle*. If he is not human, then is he like a God?

Debord advertises *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* with an icon of God the Father.<sup>524</sup>

Gnostics considered the eye to be a center of the world as well as a microcosm of the universe. While a differentiation can be made in thought before and after Copernicus, Copernicus, himself, was a product of a history of cosmological thinking related to Gnosticism. Gaston Bachelard notes how Copernicus recalled the Gnostic cosmological model in relation to eyes and light:

A very curious text by Copernicus can, by itself, help us to posit a cosmology of light, an astronomy of light. Of the Sun, Copernicus, that reformer of astronomy, wrote: 'Some have called him the pupil of the world, others the Spirit (of the World), others finally his Rector. Trismegistus calls him Visible God. The Electra of Sophocles calls it omnivoyant. The poet could not leave the word ray to geometric tranquility. It was necessary to restore to the word ray its solar reality. So a poet's eye is the center of the world, the sun of a world.'<sup>525</sup>

Jacques Lacarrière writes how the eye is a type of Gnostic model of the universe as well as an axis for how individual humans grasp their own inner universe:

Let us examine the eye. It is round, globular; it resembles the universe as described by the Gnostics. Within this orb are set three successive circles, the eyeball (in its strict sense), the iris, and the pupil. The exterior circle is that of the white, where the small arteries and veins ramify like filamentous nebulae. The intermediary circle is the iris, speckled with contorted pigments which show configurations, blots, and patterns. Finally, there is the central circle of the pupil, the abyss of shadows wherein one may glimpse the depths of the soul and the reflection of that luminous emulsion which is the (...) trace of the divine light. Thus the eye very naturally reproduces the pattern of the universe: the sublunar circle of the pupil, the median circle of the galactic world, the exterior circle of the extra-galactic world. To look at the human eye is to grasp the patten of the entire universe. To contemplate the eye, and lose oneself in this dark well, as if in the heart of the great ocean depths shot through with

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<sup>524</sup> Debord, "Trailer to *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*" (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

<sup>525</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de la Rêverie*, Montréal : Université de Québec, 1968 : 191. "Un texte très curieux de Copernic peut, à lui seul, nous aider à poser une cosmologie de la lumière, une astronomie de la lumière. Du Soleil, Copernic, ce réformateur de l'astronomie, écrit: "Certains l'ont appelé la prunelle du monde, d'autres l'Esprit (du Monde), d'autres enfin son Recteur. Trismégiste l'appelle Dieu visible. L'Électre de Sophocle l'appelle omnivoyant. Le poète ne pouvait laisser le mot rayon à la tranquillité géométrique. Il fallait rendre au mot rayon sa réalité solaire. Alors un œil de poète est le centre d'un monde, le soleil d'un monde."

phosphorescent flashes, is to seize the ultimate nature of our existence in this world, the magical point at which man and God meet and are united.<sup>526</sup>

Gnostics found the eye to be a looking device that reproduced the pattern of the universe—a series of concentric orbs, in the center of which lies “the pupil, the abyss of shadows wherein one may glimpse the depths of the soul and the reflection of that luminance light which is the material trace of the divine light.” The eye is a “microcosm” of the “immensities of the infinite hyperworld.”<sup>527</sup> The microcosm was often described as the individual, or otherwise as a symbol for a whole. André Breton considered the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm as, traditionally, the relationship between nature and an individual human as well as relationships between symbols and broader realities like the symbolism of astrology as an historical understanding of the cosmos.<sup>528</sup> In *l'Art Magique*, nuclear physicist Pierre Auger argues that animate beings are all necessarily caught between their interior microcosmic cosmos and the “macrocosm in which they find themselves immersed.”<sup>529</sup>

While interior worlds are not reflective of the essential identity of individuals, they do nevertheless have certain reflective properties. Just as dreams originate in perception of surroundings, so, too, does the basis of Inner Worlds. Often, these unconscious renditions of the world are not simply from the material world, but also from representations, like films. Mariën writes, “As much as we try to resist them, cinematic images, studded with words and sounds, insidiously intertwine with the images that populate our minds, which govern our lives.”<sup>530</sup>

Perhaps individuals see themselves in films, but also films engrave themselves within the minds of individuals and therefore films contribute to the formation of selfhood and individual identity.

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<sup>526</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *The Gnostics*, Trans. Nina Rootes, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991): 38-39.

<sup>527</sup> Lacarrière, *The Gnostics*: 38.

<sup>528</sup> André Breton, *L'Art Magique*: 165.

<sup>529</sup> Pierre Auger in André Breton, *L'Art Magique*: 288-289.

<sup>530</sup> Marcel Mariën “Un Autre Cinéma,” *Les Lèvres Nues* 7: 17. “Quoi que l'on tente pour leur résister, les images du cinéma, constellées de paroles et de sons, s'entrelacent insidieusement aux images qui peuplent notre esprit, qui gouvernent notre vie.”

Filmic mirroring does not merely constitute a relationship between individual minds and images, but also the physical process of producing films. Film functions through mirrors, both in terms of filming and, at times, screening. It works through reverse images. *Ion*<sup>531</sup> reiterated this fact many times, and even included a diagram demonstrating how a theater in the Latin Quarter reflected images on the screen through a mirror [FIGURE 3.8]. The back cover of *Ion* depicts an eye, which, like a mirror, uses reflections to portray images of the world [FIGURE 3.9]. Breton builds on historical mythologies to consider how the act of looking in a mirror is a reflection-machine (an eye) looking into another reflection, which lends itself to seeing “infinity,” “darkness,” and “sorcer[y].”<sup>532</sup> In a 1963 report from the Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism, shortly after his exclusion from the Situationist International, Asger Jorn compares the eye to a magic mirror in a metaphor for artistic obsession. When an artist becomes bewitched by a “new possibility invisible to others” they become blind to “the world of realities.” They have a “piece of the magic mirror in [their] eye, so that everything others find good and natural [to be] a grotesque sham.”<sup>533</sup> Similarly, in Kotányi’s notes, he writes that philosophers who are “opposed to life” have eyes that do not see the same light and instead they claim to know “some value other than this life.”<sup>534</sup> For Jorn and Kotányi, Second sight of an invisible beyond causes a form of blindness to material reality in the case of artistic and philosophical vision. Debord connects the metaphor of light from religious and philosophical enlightenment to a form of blindness that renders “the world” “paradoxically invisible.”<sup>535</sup> For Gnostics, there is a light within each being according to Oswald Wirth’s *Le Symbolisme Hermétique*, which appears in Vaneigem’s reading notes. The decentralization comes from the fact that the light is in everyone,

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<sup>531</sup> *Ion* (Paris: Jean-Paul Rocher, 1999): 257.

<sup>532</sup> André Breton, *l’Art Magique* (Paris: Phébus, 1957): 209.

<sup>533</sup> Asger Jorn, *The Natural Order and Other Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 350.

<sup>534</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1499.

<sup>535</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

and therefore there are many lights. Wirth sees this tradition as an extension from Kabbalistic *Ensoph*, or the “bottomless abyss,” “endless,” “infinite,” and “unknown” that is the true inner light.<sup>536</sup> In Kabbalah, light is the source of all existence, all thought, and all life — light is an all-encompassing hidden truth and it is the requirement of each being to find their internal light. For Debord, the reign of light extends from religious tradition, and continues to encompass the visually driven culture of the Spectacle. The defining center to how the world of illusions operates is light, Debord agrees. In *Howls for Sade*, Debord cuts lights and the sound for over twenty minutes, leaving the audience literally and metaphorically in the dark. In *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, Debord defines himself as contrary to the “upside-down world” and, in a world driven by vision and light, that means that he is like an “invisible and malevolent ghost” and a “Prince of Darkness” or “Prince of Division,” thus solidifying the comparison between the devil and dialectical negation, but also drawing a connection to alienation. He embraces the description as counter to the world and the history of the concept of “enlightenment”:

In order to avoid the deceptive clarity of this upside-down world, you are seen, at least by those who believe in that world, as a controversial legend, an invisible and malevolent ghost, a perverse Prince of Darkness. Which is in fact a fine title—more honorable than any the present system of floodlit enlightenment is capable of bestowing. We became the emissaries of the Prince of Division, - ‘he who has been wronged’ – and undertook to drive to despair those who identified with humanity.”<sup>537</sup>

Artistic reproduction is a form of mirroring — mirroring the physical world, at times, but also mirroring existing works, literature, films, etc. Daniel Boorstin argues in *The Image* that the modern world is defined by a “mirror-effect” through “pseudo-events” that “tend to become

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<sup>536</sup> Oswald Wirth, *The Magician's Tarot* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1990): 41, 166.

<sup>537</sup> Guy Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, trans. Ken Knabb (Oakland: AK Press, 2003).

bland and unsurprising reproductions.”<sup>538</sup> Media mirrors itself as well as the public, particularly through the tool of opinion polls.<sup>539</sup> The outcome of the mirror effect is a world of vivid and surface-level exciting dreams that ultimately are predictable and contrived. Representations of adventure – through the Spectacle as well as through contrived tourism – are created to appeal to an audience and thus they mirror the nature of the audience rather than truly venturing into the adventurous or unexpected:

One of the deepest and least remarked features of the Age of Contrivance is what I would like to call the mirror effect. Nearly everything we do to enlarge our world, to make life more interesting, more vivid, more varied, more exciting, more fabulous, more promising, in the long run has the opposite effect. In the extravagance of our expectations and in our ever-increasing power, we transform elusive dreams into graspable images within which each of us can fit. By doing so we mark the boundaries of our world with a wall of mirrors.<sup>540</sup>

The method for demystifying an inverse world is to put it back in another mirror to see it as it would be in reality. Alice Becker-Ho identifies how this logic leads to jaded Machiavellian criminality and scams, which is capitalistic and cruel, but, internally, embraces its reality as an exploitative entity. The “dangerous classes” see the “inverse world” through “a two-way mirror” where “people and things are seen for what they are: mere fools to be used with every illusion-generating device.”<sup>541</sup> In the criminal underworld, the “liar has” *not* “lied to themselves”<sup>542</sup> but rather to others, she argues. If illusions create the possibility for manipulation, they do not simply create that possibility in the criminal underworld but also in social organization more generally.

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<sup>538</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961): 108.

<sup>539</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 238.

<sup>540</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 255.

<sup>541</sup> Alice Becker-Ho, *The Essence of Jargon*, Trans. John McHale (New York: Autonomedia, 2015): 75.

<sup>542</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman: 2. Note that the Donald Nicholson-Smith translation is significantly different: “deceit deceives itself”: 12. Debord writes “le mensonger s’est menti à lui-même”: 9. The depersonalization and dehumanization of “deceit” is an interesting choice. People are not liars in this instance, but, rather, the noun “deceit” has no clear origin, which does seem consistent with how Debord describes the proletarianization of power structures of the spectacle. However, given the directness of Perlman’s translation with the original French, this is the primary choice given that this dissertation intends to write a history and not a theoretical treatise.

The Spectacle exploits. It creates illusions that argue things about the world that are not true. If, simply, the Spectacle says that the world is a heavenly utopia, and the mirror of the world that it emulates does not display the trials and tribulations of the proletariat, then the Spectacle is essentially scamming the public. It could be described as unrealistic, but the photographic mimetic of film could be nevertheless claimed as a form of realism. The news, which Debord appropriates, could be considered realistic but it operates on contrived pseudo-events in order to produce news rather than report on pertinent events according to Boorstin. Marcel Mariën references the Soviet film by Dziga Vertov, *The Sixth Part of the World* (1926), in “Theory of Immediate World Revolution.”<sup>543</sup> This film, like *Society of the Spectacle*, intercuts between dancing on media, dancing in everyday life that emulates media, and the reality of capitalist exploitation in factories. This juxtaposition of the dreamlike portrayal and the portrayal of reality that feels real emulates a Baroque tactic described by Richard Alewyn which, in fact, adds a greater depth of layering to the dream of the Spectacle:

The destruction of the illusion only serves to strengthen it. When the theater within the theater seems to throw off the mask [...] it does not place itself on the true side of reality. What is proposed as a revelation of reality, even if it looks like it, is only theater learned by heart and therefore a subtle deception. The viewer has the impression of dreaming, then waking up, even though they are only moving from one dream to another. They only sink deeper into the game of illusion from which they appeared to be freed.<sup>544</sup>

In 1942, Mariën wrote a parallel argument in “Les Marches de l’Été,” which appeared in *The Conquest of the World by the Image (La Conquête du Monde par l’Image)*:

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<sup>543</sup> Marcel Mariën, *Theory of Immediate World Revolution* ed. Anna O’Meara, trans. Ian Thompson, Nadège Lejeune, and Anna O’Meara (London: Verso, forthcoming.)

<sup>544</sup> Alewyn, *l’Univers du Baroque*: 94-95. “Cette destruction de l’illusion ne sert en vérité qu’à la fortifier. Car, lorsque le théâtre sur le théâtre semble jeter le masque, lorsque le pitre sort de son rôle, il ne se place pas, pour autant, sur le pan de la réalité vraie. Ce qu’on propose comme révélation de la réalité, même si cela lui ressemble à s’y méprendre, n’est jamais que du théâtre appris par cœur et donc une subtile duperie. Le spectateur a l’impression de rêver, puis de se réveiller, alors qu’il ne fait que passer d’un rêve à un autre. Il s’enfonce seulement plus avant dans le jeu de l’illusion dont il semblait libéré.”

The astonishing, the fanciful, the bizarre, the never-before-seen, can we decently believe them to be impervious to boredom, irresistible to the wear and tear of repeated use? The spirit of popularization pursues them, banality stalks them.<sup>545</sup>

The fanciful images in the screen are boring largely because they are not living. The audience sees, Mariën says, “only an [...] image, a shadow without warmth which lacks the breath of reality.”<sup>546</sup> In *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, his *miroir du monde*, Debord says in the voice-over he wants to show the audience something that would not be considered respectable “in the mirror of the screen” because “nothing important was ever communicated by sparing the audience of Pericles’ contemporaries.”<sup>547</sup> While Debord was referring to Pericles’ “Funeral Oration” by Thucydides and likely would have been familiar with the famous line in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*: “Death should be remembered like a mirror/ who tells us life’s but breath, to trust it to error.”<sup>548</sup> The association between deadness and the mirror of the screen reminds the audience that what they are seeing is not alive, not breathing, despite their organic trust in its constructed reality. Pericles’ funeral oration likewise invokes a reference to death, but he challenges his audience because he does not mourn death, but rather sees life as brief moments of happiness. Meanwhile, “The whole earth is the tomb of famous men.” Surrounded by death, humanity can learn from the past, but must find the “freedom to be happy.”<sup>549</sup> The comparison of death to a mirror could be considered in relation to the pastness or deadness of photography. Debord’s slow melancholic pans over pin-up photos in *Society of the Spectacle* feel like an autopsy. There is something that could be considered masturbatory and erotic about the slow evaluation of bodies, but the grainy black-and-white photos and sad monotone voiceover

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<sup>545</sup> *La Conquête du Monde par l’Image* (Paris: La Main à Plume, 1942.)

<sup>546</sup> Marcel Mariën, “Les Marches de l’Été,” *La Conquête du Monde par l’Image*: 30. “Ce n’est là encore qu’une image inerte, une ombre sans chaleur à laquelle manque le souffle de la réalité.”

<sup>547</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Complètes Cinématographiques*: 189. “Rien d’important ne s’est communiqué en ménageant un public, fût-il composé des contemporains de Périclès; et dans le miroir glacé de l’écran, les spectateurs ne voient présentement rien qui évoque les citoyens respectables d’une démocratie.”

<sup>548</sup> William Shakespeare, *Pericles* (Folger Shakespeare Library, [folger.edu](http://folger.edu)): 15.

<sup>549</sup> Thucydides, *Pericles’ Funeral Oration* trans. Richard Hooker (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1996.)

thwart desire, compelling desire to fall into an alienating sense of unrealized. Furthermore, when Debord brings a funeral oration into *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, along with quotations by Bossuet that are typically read at funerals, he gives a sense that these still photographs are of the dead. Many of the people who he pictures are dead: portraits of Marx and Machiavelli. A notion seems to arise: what does it mean to feel attraction to an image of someone who has died? This deadness can be literal or a deadness of reification. The Spectacle depicts the movement of life while a spectator is nonparticipatory, giving more power to the nonliving Spectacle than to the viewer. However, desire and emotion are felt within the living spectator while the spectacular image is unable to reciprocate.

Philosophy is a form of mirroring. Khayati's course notes on Georges Gusdorf suggest:

Philosophy is a reflection of truth for anyone who consents to reality and agrees to the movement of the world without questioning it. It satisfies the need for elucidation. It gives meaning to the world as a world and to humanity as humanity. A truth of thought comes to inhabit the universe and the human community, to define orientations in value and to formulate the intellectual status of all beings, promoted to the dignity of beings of reason.<sup>550</sup>

Philosophy persists because of the hall of mirrors that perpetuate it throughout history. This hall of mirrors is reminiscent of the contemporary concept of the "echo chamber," a metaphor that Gusdorf uses as well:

History corresponds to the phenomenon of the echo. [...] Just as the world of perception, the place of all particular perceptions, refuses to perceive it as a whole, so the reality of the past transcends all efforts to reduce it; for it is not a relation of existence within a certain spiritual horizon.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480. "Chaque philosophie est manifestation et attestation de la vérité. A la vérité reréfléchie de l'homme quelconque, consentement au réel, accord avec le mouvement du monde sans que le monde soit mis en question, la philosophie substitue une présence réfléchie, un besoin d'éclaircissement. Elle donne sens au monde comme monde et à l'homme en tant qu'homme. Une vérité de pensée vient habiter l'univers et la communauté humaine, définir des orientations en valeur et formuler le statut intellectuel de tous les êtres, promus à la dignité d'êtres de raison."

<sup>551</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480. "L'histoire correspond à un phénomène d'écho. Le retentissement du présent qualifie ou disqualifie certains des aspects inépuisables de la réalité passée. Mais elle ne peut matériellement pas lui rendre justice en totalité, parce que le passé ne peut matériellement pas lui rendre justice en totalité, parce que le passé n'existe pas comme un donné en soi dont une

Individual humans see ephemeral vestiges of the past that do not resonate as they might have at other points in time or in other minds, but they nevertheless resonate in such a way that they create a perceived “world” wherein contradictions and expansive ideas exist rather than cohesive frameworks.

Situationists critiqued the citational mirroring of philosophy in general, but they also found a particular tendency toward tautology in ontological principles. *Arguments* translates an article by Heidegger titled “The Principle of Identity” (“*La Principe d’Identité.*”) Heidegger sees the mirroring tautological concept of identity, that “ $A = A$ ,”<sup>552</sup> as the driving force of Being, existence, and philosophy. Identity is constructed as a sense of unity within subjectivity. He connects this unity to German philosophies of *Weltanschauung* from Kant and Hegel:

To grasp the synthetic essence in itself, of identity, we must consider the philosophy of speculative idealism, that of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, prepared by Leibniz and Kant [...] the unity of identity as simple uniformity.<sup>553</sup>

Individuals are not one unified entity. While Hegel and Marx considered the contradictions inherent in *Weltanschauung*, Heidegger seems to aim to find principles of identity that with clear essential Truths, or  $A = A$ , or  $A$  mirroring itself. However, understanding the Spectacle means understanding certain tautologies that are not True, but that are presented as true.

The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are at the same time its goal. It is the sun which never sets over the

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analyse pourrait fournir un inventaire exhaustif. De même que le monde de la perception, lieu de toutes les perceptions particulières, se refuse à toute perception d’ensemble, de même la réalité du passé transcende tous les efforts pour la réduire ; car elle n’est une relation d’existence à l’intérieur d’un certain horizon spirituel.’ L’histoire correspond à un phénomène d’écho. Le retentissement du présent qualifie ou disqualifie certains des aspects inépuisables de la réalité passée. Mais elle ne peut matériellement pas lui rendre justice en totalité, parce que le passé ne peut matériellement pas lui rendre justice en totalité, parce que le passé n’existe pas comme un donné en soi dont une analyse pourrait fournir un inventaire exhaustif. De même que le monde de la perception, lieu de toutes les perceptions particulières, se refuse à toute perception d’ensemble, de même la réalité du passé transcende tous les efforts pour la réduire; car elle n’est une relation d’existence à l’intérieur d’un certain horizon spirituel."

<sup>552</sup> Martin Heidegger, “La Principe d’Identité,” *Arguments* 7 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959): 2.

<sup>553</sup> Martin Heidegger, “La Principe d’Identité,”: 2. “Pour domicilier l’essence synthétique en soi, de l’identité, il faut l’attendre la philosophie de l’idéalisme spéculatif, celle de Fichte, Schelling et Hegel, préparée par Leibniz et Kant [...] l’unité de l’identité comme simple uniformité."

empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.<sup>554</sup>

Identity can potentially be treated as tautological. Something or someone is *x* because *x* is something or someone. While identity can be an attribute alongside many other attributes, in the cases of stereotyping or racial profiling, it is treated as the primary or only characteristic of a person to the point that they become more like an iconographic symbol than someone who changes and someone who contains multitudes. The connotation of the term “identity” in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century France was often connected with the police, a subject that appears when Isidore Isou is asked for an identity card after leaving Romania for Paris during World War II: “In the morning, it’s the soldier – very friendly this time [...] who searches me with big to-do for my identity papers.” He finds irony in the fact that his identity is in a card, but rarely asked in casual sexual encounters.<sup>555</sup> Vaneigem relates concepts of identity to nationalism and language, specifically connecting to the fraught history of identity cards:

For me, language has never marked a national belonging. I never had the feeling of being a Picard. I refuse to consider myself a Walloon or a Belgian, and I think humanity will make great progress with identity papers are burned! I refuse to be ‘carded.’ But language matters.<sup>556</sup>

In Michèle Bernstein’s *The Night*, asking for someone’s identity implied suspicion, and it was done by someone in a government position, though this sort of inquiry was made common and banal to the extent of being a thoughtless formality:

They’ll meet a postman they won’t have seen before, who will ask Gilles’ identity: a real early bird, this postman [...] The fact of asking Gilles’ name will strike him as a trivial formality and he’ll have accomplished it in a perfunctory manner, given that Gilles was headed toward the same house the postman was

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<sup>554</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* trans. Fredy Perlman: 13.

<sup>555</sup> Isidore Isou, *Isou ou la Mécanique des Femmes* (Paris: Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, 1949): 20.

<sup>556</sup> *Rien n’est Fini, Tout Commence* : 20. “Pour moi, la langue n’a jamais marqué une appartenance nationale. Je n’ai jamais eu le sentiment d’être un Picard. Je me refuse à me considérer comme un Wallon, ou comme un Belge, et je pense que l’humanité fera un grand progrès lorsque les papiers d’identité seront brûlés! Je refuse d’être “encarté.” Mais la langue a de l’importance.”

heading towards. Without heeding his reply, he will extend a sealed letter which Gilles will pocket after observing that it is addressed not to him, but to Geneviève.<sup>557</sup>

Annie Le Brun discusses how police “identity” profiles were initially inspired by detailed biographical studies by Balzac.<sup>558</sup> Situationists tended to prefer a dissolution of identity, which was exemplified by the concept of being lost. While one might think at first that lostness would lend itself to emptiness or a lack of content, Situationists argue that possibilities expand in the dissolution of identity because predictable and tautological definition is relinquished.

### 3.4. Spirals and Labyrinths

Ancient Greek mythology tells the tale of a labyrinth on the isle of Crete. A hero, Theseus, must survive a labyrinth that houses a minotaur — a creature that is part man and part bull according to Ovid.<sup>559</sup> A princess of Crete, Ariadne, provides Theseus a bracelet that, in his moment of need, reveals a thread which allows him to navigate his way out of a labyrinth toward his freedom. Labyrinths appeared in cathedrals and churches in Europe and North Africa throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages which interests Jacqueline de Jong in *Situationist Times* 4. In Paris, the labyrinth in the Jardin des Plantes was of interest to the Situationists though they noted it was “a purely symbolic labyrinth, no chance of getting lost there.”<sup>560</sup>

Labyrinths and spirals have a common result: they create vertigo. For Roger Caillois, certain qualities appear as overarching themes in games that also appear in mythology, one of which is the intentional creation of vertigo. The theme of vertigo, both in games and in mythologies, is explored through broad connections throughout *Situationist Times* 4 in a way that is reminiscent of the following consideration from Caillois:

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<sup>557</sup> Michèle Bernstein, *The Night*, trans. Clodagh Kinsella (London: Book Works, 2020): 40.

<sup>558</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Les Châteaux de la Subversion* (Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1982): 22.

<sup>559</sup> *The Love Books of Ovid*, trans. J. Lewis May (New York: Rarity Press, 1930.)

<sup>560</sup> Bernstein, *The Night*: 80.

The study of how semi-circular canals function can imperfectly explain the popularity of the swing, the slide, the ski, and the vertigo machines of the amusement parks, without counting exercises (...) these games all have the same power of panic, as in the whirling of the dervishes of the Middle East or the spiral descent of Mexican *voladores*. This does not take into account the sociology of lotteries, casinos, or racecourses.<sup>561</sup>

In *Society of the Spectacle*, circular motion and spirals recur, emphasizing disorientation and a disconnection from linearity. The stock exchange spirals around a circular space where a crowd moves toward a central point [FIGURE 4.1]. The montage compares scenes of *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941), the stock exchange of La Bourse, and the roulette wheel of *Johnny Guitar* (1954) [FIGURE 4.2]. A clip from an advertisement or game show similarly shows an erotic scene of a topless woman being spun on a wheel framed by a large candelabra [FIGURE 4.3]. She spins on a structure like a lazy Susan, which is juxtaposed with many brands of cars spinning on similar pedestals. For Debord, closed circularity represents movement that is predictable in its directionality. The game of roulette, for Caillois, represents deterministic chance. There is no creative or autonomy of the payer, only “the decision of fate.”<sup>562</sup> Labyrinths, as opposed to repetitive circular motions, often represent choice. Deciding which path to take presents opportunities for choice, as does the winding path of life and the driving force of human beings who follow their desires. The walls of labyrinths create an interiority and personal seclusion that allows for metaphors related to the interiority of the self as well as the search for the outside world, from which the individual intellectual journey is necessarily removed. Interiors in the writing of the Marquis de Sade similarly extend inward and outward in disorienting labyrinthine

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<sup>561</sup> Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et Les Hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958): 268. “L’étude du fonctionnement des canaux semi-circulaires explique imparfaitement la vogue de la balançoire, du toboggan, du ski, et des machines à vertige des parcs d’attractions, sans compter des exercices d’un autre ordre, mais qui supposent le même jeu avec les mêmes puissances de panique, comme le tournoiement des derviches du Moyen-Orient ou la descente en spirale des *voladores* mexicains. D’autre part, le développement du calcul des probabilités ne remplace nullement une sociologie des loteries, des casinos ou des hippodromes.”

<sup>562</sup> Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et Les Hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958): 26. “[Le joueur] ne fait rien, il attend la décision du sort.”

ways. In an architectural drawing by Sade in the collection of the State Historical Museum in Moscow, the labyrinth in fact is shaped more like a wandering spiral with a central opening. A “central, oval room” is placed “at the center of a labyrinth-like form,” describes Alyce Mahon [FIGURE 4.4]. *Shanghai Gesture* does not represent closed circularity, but rather, the film can be mapped through a labyrinthine spiral. Similarly, despite the closed roulette wheel displayed from *Johnny Guitar*, Debord argued that he admired the labyrinthine “psychogeography” of the film, which reminds him that “Ariadne is [his] sister.”<sup>563</sup> *Shanghai Gesture* centers on a main room of a casino whose architecture forms a spiral ramp descending into a central point. As the story of *Shanghai Gesture* progresses, secret smaller rooms within this same building unveil themselves. Both the den of horrors in *The Shanghai Gesture* and Sade’s castles act like labyrinths of vague circular constructions wherein doors open to new rooms with no clear floorplan; rooms are based on the desire for certain interactions to unfold.<sup>564</sup>

*In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* takes the viewer down a long, winding rocking boat ride through Venice as Debord speaks. The long black-and-white shot is coupled with a monotone voice-over that uses what Debord would call a “cold and emotionless style,” similar to the writing style of *Society of the Spectacle*, and the stylistic approach he recommended for *On the Poverty of Student Life*. However, consider how a Venetian boat ride could be like in real life: people clamor to spend time on a boat in the sunshine, time that feels trapped and wasted on film, at least in the way it was shot for *In Girum*. The dream of a long boat ride becomes sickeningly buoyant and empty through representation particularly in Debord’s continuously

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<sup>563</sup> Debord to Straram, *D’une Révolution à l’Autre*: 138. “Ariane ma sœur, de quel amour blessée... Je mêlai je ne sais comment à cette tristesse, et la renforçant encore, le souvenir de l’étonnant début du film de Nicholas Ray, *Johnny Guitar*, d’une si remarquable ambiguïté, à la fois “psychogéographique” et sur le terrain des rencontres, avant que des explications ne soient données, qui ramènent le film à un très honorable western. Film dont j’ai essayé l’an dernier d’acheter les droits de reproduction de quelques plans, pour les mêler (avec leur bande-son) à mon documentaire détourné (*Sur le Passage*).

<sup>564</sup> Alyce Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

bouncing black-and-white shot. Imagining a winding boat ride, the viewers perhaps long for the experience as they acknowledge that they are alienated from it. The Situationist *dérive*, or wandering through the city was documented in for example the pre-Situationist texts of *Potlatch*. Debord's film created the sea-sickening vertigo that had visceral effects in ways that a text could not communicate as effectively be it *Potlatch* or other texts of wanderings that influenced the Situationists like Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.

The wide variety of associations along with the form of the spiral are attributed to labyrinthine logic by the Situationists, particularly in Jacqueline de Jong's *Situationist Times 4*, an edition created based on the theme of labyrinths. A spiral is a "labyrinth with a single path," says De Jong.<sup>565</sup> Both labyrinths and spirals are stationary forms that imply and can create movement, thus relating them effectively to a world in flux. An article in *The Situationist Times 4* by Hans Ludwig Cohn Jaffé introduces studies of labyrinths by Karl Kerényi, a student of Carl Jung. For Kerényi, labyrinths are "a form of human consciousness that are able to signify the reality of the exterior and interior world."<sup>566</sup> Kerényi links the meaning of the oldest Babylonian labyrinthine forms to drawings of animal intestines:

This palace of the intestines is nothing other than Hades, this underworld inhabited by the dead, which finds its image, its concretization in the spiral of the intestines, in the same way as the heavens shimmer in the shape of the liver and its changes and formations.<sup>567</sup>

For Kerényi, labyrinths signify a world of the dead. Birds over labyrinths give some indication of transcendence, but mortals are trapped, unable to take flight. Jaffé references Arthur Evans, who interprets labyrinths as a "model of the world and of life" wherein "the mythical passage of man

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<sup>565</sup> *The Situationist Times 4*, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris: Situationist International, 1963): 12.

<sup>566</sup> H.L.C. Jaffé, "Les Labyrinthes," *The Situationist Times 4* (Copenhagen: Art Print A/S, 1963): 23.

<sup>567</sup> Jaffé, *The Situationist Times*: 23.

leads from life to death to renewed life, depending on choices and memory.”<sup>568</sup> When compared to a labyrinth, worldly life promises a possible escape through death. The free and open sky is visible but inaccessible above.

Spirals appear as a recurring motif for many who doodle or scribble, launching the scribbler into a dreamlike trance where their actions are driven by mechanical rather than intentional drawing, according to Jean Vinchon in *La Magie du Dessin*, which appears in Vaneigem’s reading notes. The serpentine form compares to labyrinths in its winding rhythm. Vinchon influenced hypnotherapy, writing on the history of Franz-Anton Mesmer, the namesake of “mesmerize.” There is something like an internal vibration in this depiction of the spiral — it represents a psychological inner movement. Vaneigem sees labyrinths as representative of the world, and at the same time representative of the Self, which contains a personal world that is planned with metaphorically “scribbled sketches” that presumably take the form of a labyrinth:

The labyrinth of the self and the labyrinth of the world are one and the same place. It is there that at every moment my destiny is planned with scribbled sketches and renewed [...] The meanders of destiny like a labyrinth where the self and world are created and recreated lend to a subjective foundation for the construction of situations that protect it from the abstractions that define Situationism as it is continually reused in the cultural spectacle.<sup>569</sup>

Situationist ideas are not “isms” as they are not intended to be fixed. The Self, likewise, is not fixed. The world is not fixed. It is constantly in the process of recreating itself as individuals are constantly in the process of recreating themselves.

In *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*, Vaneigem writes a reflective, meditative chapter based entirely on the theme of labyrinths wherein he investigates the limitations of perception and the relationship between Self and World over the course of the moving path of life. It reads something like Theresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*, but he deprives it of moralizing.

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<sup>568</sup> Jaffé, *The Situationist Times*, 4: 23.

<sup>569</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 151.

While Avila's goal was to cleanse the interior Self of sin and evil, Vaneigem wants to explore the interior Self without shame:

The real investigations are exciting and emotional. They are driven by the passion to explore our parallel universes. These investigations are made without guilt, aimed at unraveling the tangled facts that I have created and that define me.<sup>570</sup>

In the labyrinth of the Self, only the "bias of unconsciousness and ignorance imprisons us."<sup>571</sup>

The propensity to think cohesively within a consistent framework limits movement at "the crossroads where the possible and impossible lose their meaning"<sup>572</sup> because "there is no continuity in the universe of sensations."<sup>573</sup> This labyrinth has a "different arrangement of space and time."<sup>574</sup> It is both guided and defined by the self and it guides and defines the Self. "The world has no meaning other than what I ascribe to it. But this meaning has also been leant to me by the world, where my birth, my existence, and my story have been inscribed."<sup>575</sup> This labyrinth of the Self gravitates around a central aspect: the Self. Desire acts as Ariadne's thread for Vaneigem, personally. He allows himself to be guided by his wants.<sup>576</sup>

Baroque art also used labyrinths as metaphors for the world, which had some degree of organization—they were organized around a center which, if found, could lead to the exit but they also were constructed with the goal of disorienting and confusing. In *The Situationist Times*, a passage from Hocke's *Die Welt als Labyrinth* (The World as a Labyrinth) explains how

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<sup>570</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 142. "Les vraies enquêtes, passionnantes et phéniques, sont animées par la passion d'explorer nos univers parallèles. Ce sont des enquêtes sans coupables, visant à dénouer l'enchevêtrement des faits dont je suis la cause et qui me déterminent."

<sup>571</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*: 136-137. "Seul le parti pris d'inconscience et d'ignorance nous emprisonne et nous désespère dans les enchevêtrements où nous sommes engagés et que nous bêtisons selon les filières arachnéennes de notre destinée."

<sup>572</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*: 137. "Nous sommes la croisée où le possible et l'impossible perdent la signification qu'a implantée dans notre esprit..."

<sup>573</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*: 141. "Mais la continuité n'existe pas dans l'univers des sensations."

<sup>574</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*: 142. "...autre de l'espace et du temps."

<sup>575</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*: 153. "Le monde n'a pas d'autre signification que celle que je lui prête."

<sup>576</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*: 160.

ancient labyrinths were “a ‘unifying’ metaphor for the predictable and unpredictable element in the world. The detour leads to the center. Only the detour leads to perfection.” In contrast, Baroque labyrinths tended to focus more on winding expanse. “The English call Baroque prose ‘labyrinthine prose.’”

A universe in motion based on vibration of matter recalls Bachelard’s critique of materialism in *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique* wherein all material is essentially in movement, ionizing and atomizing and filled with not only Being but also empty spaces. *SPUR*, a German extension of the Situationists, depicts the history of Situationist events as radiating in the form of a spiral with many connecting points in the form of straight lines.<sup>577</sup> [FIGURE 4.5] This spiral represents transhistorical time and the expansive growth of the movement. Similarly, in 2003, Raoul Vaneigem reconsidered the concept of life cycles in *Le Chevalier, La Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*:

Life is without age. [...] It is not a cycle but a spiral. We are tricked by time. In other words, the version of time that we know is only a representation.<sup>578</sup>

Vaneigem’s reading notes include Vinchon’s archetypal associations with spirals and labyrinths.<sup>579</sup> He begins with a prediction about the first spirals drawn: scribbles from the whirling of the wrist with a utensil or finger. From there, it came to represent birth, rebirth, the development of knowledge, the Milky Way, light, waves, and rhythm. In terms of spirals as expansiveness, the spiral on the stomach of Alfred Jarry’s *Père Ubu* represents insatiability.<sup>580</sup> The spiraled Ubu is pictured without explanation in *Le Scandale de Strasbourg* by André Bertrand and André Schneider, two collaborators with the SI’s Strasbourg Scandal, or the scandal

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<sup>577</sup> Jacqueline de Jong and Asger Jorn, *Spur* (Munich: Spur, 1960).

<sup>578</sup> Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*, 93.

<sup>579</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, “Reading Notes,” Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>580</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library.

surrounding the publication of *On the Poverty of Student Life* in 1967.<sup>581</sup> Ubu's spiral is also referenced in Vaneigem's reading notes on Jacques Vinchon. [FIGURE 4.6] Insatiability relates to movement. For the Béla Hamvas of the Hungarian Dialogic School, the issue with living is that it is constantly driven by desire — desire moves humans to act. Desire is constantly vibrating in human bodies, making them restless and without peace. For Hamvás, this is a curse; for Situationists, it gives reason to live.

A timeline as a spiral differs from a consistent timeline that is circular because they are natural seasons or the pseudo-seasons imposed by corporate interests. In *Society of the Spectacle*, cyclical time involves seasons and pseudo-cyclical time, seasonal vacations on ski resorts and beaches. Long shots of the Grande-Motte show a combination of the vacation life and the architecture built to facilitate it, including roads filled with traffic (*circulation*), particularly traffic around round-a-bouts [FIGURE 4.7] If *Society of the Spectacle* is in part a reflection on the aftermath of 1968, Debord is likely proposing the new system set into place to repress revolt. Instead of simply pounding young people with police batons, they can be strategically and systematically seduced into a placated and distant vacation where they will be driven by sexual fantasies on beaches, where they will shop for second houses and for products, and where they will support the automobile and aviation industries.

The entire city of the Grande-Motte was constructed by one architect, Jean Balladur, who divided the city into a masculine side and a feminine side. The architecture of the feminine district employed themes of curvature and shapes similar to bikinis. The masculine district was angular and showed themes of intentionally phallic architecture.<sup>582</sup> Alongside these buildings, Debord shows topless women on beaches. The entire construction of the Grande-Motte was

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<sup>581</sup> André Bertrand and André Schneider, *Le Scandale de Strasbourg: Mis à Nu par ses Célibataires, Même*, (Clermont-Ferrand: l'Insomniaque, 2018): 175.

<sup>582</sup> Claude Prelorenzo and Antoine Picon, *l'Aventure du Balnéaire* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 1999): 125.

sexualized. Balladur studied philosophy under Jean-Paul Sartre before turning to architecture. In 1967, he was published alongside Lefebvre in *l'Urbanisme Aujourd'hui: Mythes et Réalités*.<sup>583</sup> The Grande-Motte was intended to reach the middle class, unlike other vacation destinations. Balladur aimed to embrace a democratic vision for architecture. Influenced by the Marxist theory of the “right to be lazy” by Paul Lafarge,<sup>584</sup> Balladur argued that vacations were for everyone. Encouraging middle class people to spend time outside of the city — even to buy vacation homes — was a democratic idea, as was decentralization from a city center.<sup>585</sup> Bringing democratic citizens outside of the city meant a new structure for France and the world that would be facilitated by auto and plane transit.<sup>586</sup> De Gaulle supported this system.<sup>587</sup> Transit outside of city centers certainly and decentralization would also mitigate risks for riots like 1968. Seasonal vacations seem like a natural extension of existing seasons, and the democratic right to a vacation thus seduces groups of young people into a perpetual lull through the year wherein they do not create changes to the world. Where are young people after 1968, Debord seems to ask. He shows dense traffic in long clips including round-a-bouts wherein cars seem to circle around the same space in an endless and unchanging loop. The traffic does not show movement, it shows obstruction as well as repetition.

The French word for traffic, *circulation*, encapsulates the spiral-like repetition of redundant circles that Debord depicts in *Society of the Spectacle*. The time, energy, and motivation of individuals are caught in an entrapping loop after 1968 where they believe they can go to get away from it all, to find some glimpse of liberation. However, they are entranced in socially constructed seasonal vacation traffic that is intended to keep them docile. When they

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<sup>583</sup> *L'Urbanisme Aujourd'hui: Mythes et Réalités* (Paris: Centre d'Études Socialistes, 1967).

<sup>584</sup> Prelorenzo, *l'Aventure du Balnéaire*: 11.

<sup>585</sup> Prelorenzo, *l'Aventure du Balnéaire*: 16.

<sup>586</sup> Prelorenzo, *l'Aventure du Balnéaire*: 15.

<sup>587</sup> Prelorenzo, *l'Aventure du Balnéaire*: 13.

reach the beach, they spend their time appearing and looking. In a letter to Hervé Falcou, Debord depicts the map of Paris as itself a spiral. He shows how it winds almost like a spiderweb [FIGURE 4.8]. Contrarily, the circular *circulation* in *Society of the Spectacle* does not move inward or outward but rather around. Debord's map of Paris suggests an organicism and an appreciation for the beauty of movement in the city. *Society of the Spectacle* suggests pollution, lack of movement, and the banal everyday realities of technology like car ownership in 20<sup>th</sup> Century life.

Round and round, predictably preoccupied, individuals live and die according to a will that is not their own. Situationists hoped for something less expected, which could be tangibly reached through a feeling of lostness (*dépaysement*) by wandering in labyrinths or creating changes in direction that break redundant cycles that mirror themselves. The world of the Spectacle gains power for itself as it places individuals in pseudo-cyclical repetition. Breaking these cycles disempowers the Spectacle and creates new possibilities for new worlds of the future.

## Chapter 4. Dreamworlds

The Spectacle is not a dream, but it is like a dream. Similarities between moving images and dreams are explored in relation to pacing, individual agency, and the disconnect between materiality and illusion. Debord calls the Spectacle the “bad dream of a modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep.”<sup>588</sup> This chapter considers how Debord references Freud in the phrase “the guardian of [...] sleep.” Freudian psychoanalysis influenced Situationist discussions that related dreams to desire, to concepts of materialism and idealism, and to the concept of Self. While Surrealists saw dreams and dreamlike images as spaces for liberation, Situationists separated dreams from representations. Situationists agreed with Surrealists that liberating aspects characterize dreams of everyday life but they found restriction in the dreamlike qualities of the Spectacle, which locked humanity “in chains,” monitored by a “guardian of [...] sleep.”

Guy Debord was especially interested in the concept of the dream in Johann Wolfgang von Göthe’s *Faust*. His reading notes refer to Göthe extensively, particularly in relation to the concept of the Spectacle. This chapter considers Debord’s interpretation of Göthe’s *Faust* in depth, as well as other literary influences related to dreams that appear in Situationist discourse including: *Aurélia* by Gérard de Nerval; *Metamorphosis (Verwandlung)* by Franz Kafka; *Maldoror* by the Conte de Lautréamont; the writings of the Marquis de Sade; and the concept of dreams according to Surrealists, especially André Breton.

### 4.1. Spectacle and Psychoanalysis

*Internationale Situationniste* 10 criticized mid-century psychoanalytic thinkers of recuperation: Freud once had revolutionary potential, but his ideas had been institutionalized into

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<sup>588</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 17.

oppression. While Freudian ideas were previously been explosive to social order, contemporaries like Jacques Lacan “carr[ied] out the obscure dispersal of language that they discovered in the final phase of modern poetic writing.” Poetic slant on psychoanalysis became a “gratuitous game.” While psychoanalysis was once a critique of society, psychoanalysts from “the salons of Paris” came to represent a “return to obscurity” that was “truly hollow and pompous.”<sup>589</sup> Debord recalled that Freud, himself, did not glorify the revolutionary potential in his own work but rather he feared the revolutionary and “always scientifically pursued an enlargement of the rational.”<sup>590</sup> Freud’s ideas nevertheless upset religious sensibilities, particularly, says Debord, “in France, as in countries more generally submitted to the influence of Catholicism.”<sup>591</sup> It was André Breton and the Surrealists who found Freud’s ideas to be “a perfect weapon for the liberation of human desire,” as did “Wilhelm Reich” and “Herbert Marcuse.”<sup>592</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10 disputes Freud’s theory that repression is necessary for “civilization” and Freud’s support of the exploitation of labor. “His handling of a partial critical truth inside a total non-critical system led psychoanalysis to be officially ‘recognized.’”<sup>593</sup>

While Situationists criticized Freud, they nevertheless used his ideas and strategies. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France contains notebooks of Debord’s dream journals wherein he carried out such personal explorations of his dreamworlds. At the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, dream journals are kept in the papers of Jacqueline De Jong<sup>594</sup> and Raoul Vaneigem.<sup>595</sup> De Jong argues that materiality to dreams can be analyzed as separate from mysticism or self-involvement through the observations in dream journals. She writes on the first

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<sup>589</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997): 475.

<sup>590</sup> Debord, “Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution,” *EMDA*.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>593</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997): 475.

<sup>594</sup> Jacqueline de Jong Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 832.

<sup>595</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, Finding Aid, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, [archives.yale.edu](http://archives.yale.edu).

page of her dream journal that she is interested in “the imaginary value which has any dream of any person” [sic]. There is something “egocentric” about dream journals, she writes, but she is “directed by the material, which are the dreams” as an observational path that she might develop “later in a more theoretical writing”<sup>596</sup> [FIGURE 5.1]. Vaneigem, unlike De Jong, resists dream interpretation. Reconciliation between dreamworlds and the Self create a detachment that he sees as a “profound pleasure” that psychoanalysis has attempted to recuperate and control. Joy, for Debord, Vaneigem, and Reich, should be the goal of the interior journey, unlike the psychoanalytic shame theorized by Freud or the moralizing conquest over inner sin ventured by Theresa of Avila. Dreams existed before psychoanalysis, Jung, and occultism says Vaneigem.<sup>597</sup> Perhaps in some distant past prior to Freud and Avila alike, dreams maintained a greater degree of joy, unencumbered by shame.

Freudian dream interpretation was applied as a methodology to aesthetic representations in literature, art, and film. Mid-century psychoanalytic thinkers who influenced Situationists like Gaston Bachelard expanded Freudian and Jungian dream analysis to include a wide variety of meanings through associations to, for example, water, fire, earth, and labyrinths. While Freud allowed some variability of meaning, a dream about losing teeth always translated to anxiety, and blunt objects were nearly always phallic. Mid-century psychoanalytic thinkers like Bachelard would often instead treat dream interpretation similarly to literary interpretation where context played a major role and multiple possible meanings were explored regarding a single archetype.

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<sup>596</sup> Jacqueline de Jong Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 832.

<sup>597</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 1455. “Je pense au rêve et à la rêverie, à la profonde volupté de l’*onirisme*. Je pense à la plongée dans l’inconscient, au décryptage des gestes et des conduites. À tout ce qui s’exhale de moi comme d’un abîme et n’atteint pas le ciel qui ne m’appartient pas. A la création avant la récupération culturelle, à la drogue avant sa fixation dans l’idéologie, au rêve avant son interprétation occultiste ou mystique, à l’inconscient avant le syncrétisme de Jung.”

Following longstanding psychoanalytic tradition, Bachelard included examples from patients who they consulted as evidence in their texts.

Certain research interests run through both Gaston Bachelard's philosophies of science and explorations of literary symbols notably a worldview wherein movement and flux reign over solid forms and stagnation. Asger Jorn defines Bachelard's methodology as one which separates the realm of the rational from the imagination, and the real from the dream. The "materialist world," for Bachelard, should not be "objectified' by an idealist reduction,"<sup>598</sup> just as the "dreamworld" should be "freed from the control of rationalism."<sup>599</sup> Bachelard found this division essential. Jorn especially appreciates Bachelard's critique of *imago mundi*, or attempts to reduce the entire cosmos into abstractions of the world:

From the moment the entire universe was depicted in the image of man through abstract analogies, a new representation of man takes place in the background of this image of the world which now has an 'objectivized' value.<sup>600</sup>

In the 1950s, Asger Jorn met with Bachelard regularly. In 1960, Bachelard wrote a piece in Jorn's exhibition catalog, *Le Long Voyage* wherein he described Jorn's collaborations with tapestry artist, Pierre Wemaëre. It was through collaboration, said Bachelard, that Jorn and Wemaëre were able to open themselves into a continuous, dreamlike process that renewed themselves as individuals by creating a new universe, a new world, that is born and grows

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<sup>598</sup> Jorn, *Discours aux Pingouins*: 368. "Le monde matérialiste a été 'objectivé' par une réduction idéaliste."

<sup>599</sup> Jorn, *Discours aux Pingouins*: 365. "Dans son domaine, Bachelard ne se distingue pas de ses plus éminents confrères. Mais contrairement à tous les autres, sa méthodologie n'implique pas une attitude hostile envers l'image, bien au contraire. Une distinction totale entre rationalisme et imagination devait, selon lui, libérer non seulement le premier mais aussi la seconde, notamment le monde onirique de l'homme qui, dégagé du contrôle du rationalisme, pouvait alors se développer avec bonheur et bonne conscience comme contrepoids créatif à la pensée moderne et scientifique."

<sup>600</sup> Jorn, *Discours aux Pingouins* : 368. "À partir du moment où l'univers entier a été dépeint à l'image de l'homme par le biais d'analogies abstraites, une nouvelle représentation de l'homme se met en place à l'arrière-plan de cette image du monde qui a maintenant une valeur "objectivée."

through its collectivity. Such conversational creation allows for liberation.<sup>601</sup> Jorn painted multiple portraits of Bachelard in the 1960s [FIGURE 5.2] [FIGURE 5.3]. Vaneigem cited Bachelard's *Lautréamont* in his master's thesis on Isidore Ducasse's (Lautréamont) *Maldoror*. The driving thesis of Lautréamont's worldview according to Bachelard is a universe of motion that prioritizes pacing over space. It is fast-paced and far from stagnant. Bachelard's *Le Théorie de la Durée* and *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique* demonstrate that Bachelard himself holds a similar view of the world and portrays it with a similar velocity and movement. Jorn's portraits seem to capture this sense of movement, as though Bachelard's entire body were composed of oscillating or vibrating molecules. Bachelard writes on Lautréamont:

Some poets devour or assimilate space; one might say that they always have some universe to digest. Others, far fewer in number, devour time. Lautréamont is one of the greatest devourers of time.<sup>602</sup>

A universe that is constantly in motion is a universe that can transform, Bachelard says.

Lautréamont does not attempt to create or understand an inner world, but rather to create a building propulsion wherein the inner landscape mutates rapidly.

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<sup>601</sup> Gaston Bachelard, "La Création Ouverte," *Le Long Voyage: Tapisseries Asger Jorn et Pierre Wemaëre* (Paris: Arhaus Statsgymnasium, 2000): 7-8. "Deux peintres conscients de la prodigalité d'inventions de la peinture moderne se sont unis pour trouver le germe d'une œuvre, pour en provoquer une croissance qui invente, pour convaincre d'autres travailleurs qui les ont aidés d'achever leur exploit. Ils étaient peintres, les voici tapisseries. Chacun était seul comme un peintre devant sa toile, les voici chefs d'équipe d'une technique qui réclame patience et lenteur. Souvent, le maître tapisserie met tout son génie à dessiner un "carton." Il administre d'avance la multiplicité des écheveaux. D'habiles artisans viennent ensuite donner, de la belle épure, une traduction dans le langage de la laine. Il y a donc rupture entre les valeurs de création et les valeurs d'exécution: en devenant tapisseries complets, tapisseries créateurs et tapisseries exécutants, Asger Jorn et Pierre Wemaëre ont réuni à tous les instants de la croissance de l'œuvre leur vertu de création. Pour eux la tapisserie est, comme dit le philosophe, "une création continue." Le carton n'était qu'un monde tout fait. Il emprisonnait l'exécutant. A petits pas, sa fusette s'en allait de cellule en cellule, n'ayant un peu de joie lorsqu'il trouvait la belle [...] Déjà en s'unissant, les deux artistes se libéraient l'un l'autre. Mais à deux, la tapisserie aurait été trop lente. Les créations lentes finissent par s'endormir. Asger Jorn et Pierre Wemaëre ont étendu leur fraternité. Leur métier à tisser est devenu un chantier ouvert où sont venus rêver, l'aiguille en main, de nouveaux travailleurs. Grand exemple de la création ouverte. Quand un exécutant succède à un autre, le premier peut dire au second: "Je te copie un peu, mais en même temps, je te renouvelle." De fil en aiguille, se tisse un monde. Il faut beaucoup de créateurs pour faire un bel univers. Parfois, Jorn et Wemaëre, ces deux divinités premières, revenaient pour exciter la création. Ils relançaient dans l'arbre une nouvelle sève. La fantaisie reprenait alors son élan. Ainsi, le tableau de laine triomphe-t-il de la raideur des ébauches. Il échappe à la tyrannie des maîtres du carton. Voilà comment les tapisseries de Jorn et Wemaëre sont nées et ont sans cesse continué de naître. Leur vie de création continue le fait maintenant, sous nos yeux, sous notre main, toutes vivantes."

<sup>602</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Lautréamont*, trans. Robert Dupree (Dallas: The Dallas Institute, 1939): 1.

Bachelard primarily brings two other authors into his discussion of Lautréamont for comparison: Franz Kafka and the Marquis de Sade. Kafka, known for *Metamorphosis* (*Verwandlung*), writes worlds driven by motion, often employing labyrinthine journeys that heavily employ strategies for pacing, but, unlike Lautréamont, this world in motion is slow and arduous, and metamorphoses are nearly always devolutions into horror: Gregor Samsa devolves into an insect. Bachelard argues that this transformation into an insect is not written with quick pacing, despite the metamorphosis that occurs in the very first sentence.

What a profound diagnostic integrity Kafka's work reveals, what penetration this intimate book into progressive catatonia! If we read *The Metamorphosis* psychologically, we realize that the strange book of this work begins to recede; the author gives us a deep biological experience in which the soul's substance becomes coagulated and uncoordinated, in which movement is sluggish and disorganized.<sup>603</sup>

The distinction between the quickness of Lautréamont and the sluggishness of Kafka can be psychoanalyzed, Bachelard says, as indicative of Lautréamont's vicious and vigorous will to live, which is contrary to Kafka's "barren" will to live. "Forms are barren in Kafka because the will to live is exhausted; they are multiplied in Lautréamont because the will to live is excited."<sup>604</sup> Lautréamont finds this will to live through writing. Writing is an "exorcism" driven by desire. Sade, similarly, uses writing to exorcise his desires and to invigorate his will to live, which is accomplished, like Lautréamont, through movement, a "discontinuity of acts,"<sup>605</sup> and through the idea that things do not simply have to be as they are but rather "you can be something else."<sup>606</sup> In Vaneigem's master's thesis, Bachelard seems to be indirectly attacked for his propensity to negatively psychoanalyze Lautréamont:

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<sup>603</sup> Bachelard, *Lautréamont*: 8.

<sup>604</sup> Bachelard, *Lautréamont*: 9.

<sup>605</sup> Bachelard, *Lautréamont*: 10.

<sup>606</sup> Bachelard, *Lautréamont*: 55.

What crime does reality commit in developing its fibers and its reflections in parallel, that each time we come to amputate Lautréamont sometimes of his reason, of his discursive faculties, of his aesthetic control—the psychoanalyzed animal, the Enlightened One of the mouths of the Dream—sometimes of his psychology, of its social nature, of his century—the eunuch *a priori*, the *révolté-in-themselves* (Kantian category dear to Caillois), the carcass conforming to school textbooks, the anatomo-philosophical pittance dedicated philosophers...Enough!<sup>607</sup>

Bachelard, who formulates his text around the development of a Lautréamont complex, diagnoses Lautréamont as a psychological study that could be replicated, reduced, and characterized as violent. Just as Bachelard uses Lautréamont to exemplify a “complex,” Freud drew his “complexes” from literature, especially Greco-Roman theater, as well as mythology. Within mythologies and literatures, Freud believed that he could find constants that could serve as symbols for wider trends within humanity, trends that revealed aspects of human character that he assumed to have highly negative attributes, thus the negative connotation of “complex.” Rather than considering human psychology to attempt objective understanding as his empirical positivism proposed, Freud projected moralizing condemnation onto human desire. Likewise, Bachelard takes a character who Lautréamont intended as the epitome of evil, a symbol of pure transgression, and he projects that symbol as a complex that could serve as a scientific stand-in for others in the world. Such propensity is the subject of Vaneigem’s criticism. Freudian dream interpretation could be assessed similarly. Freud’s project is to use dreams to make broad generalizations about humanity. Experiences become reduced to symbols.

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<sup>607</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. “Le cerveau métaphysique brûle les cheveux. Se méfier des philosophes chauves, ils ne se sont pas souciés de soigner leur système’ pileux! Ce qui ne suffit nullement à transformer un coiffeur chevelu du philosophe. Pourquoi écarteler idéologie et psychosociologie? Quel crime commet donc le réel à développer parallèlement ses fibres et ses reflets, qu'on en vienne chaque fois à amputer Lautréamont tantôt de sa raison, de ses facultés discursives, de son contrôle esthétique-- l'animal psychanalysé, l'Illuminé des bouches du Rêve--tantôt de sa psychologie, de sa nature sociale, de son siècle-- l'eunuque a priori, le révolté en soi (catégorie kantienne chère à Caillois), la carcasse conforme aux manuels scolaires, la pitance anatomo-philosophique des philosophes consacrés...Il suffit!”

Roger Caillois, who significantly influenced Situationist theories of games, is referenced several times in Vaneigem's thesis due to his introduction to *Lautréamont (Œuvres Complètes)* because he argued that Lautréamont was delusional and lost in a dream.<sup>608</sup> Contrary to Caillois' conclusions on Lautréamont, Vaneigem says that Lautréamont was not simply lost in a dream. He was not delusional. He did not write only as an escape from life like an instinctual "eunuch"<sup>609</sup> deprived of a sense of reality. Similarly, Situationists argued that movement, change, and strangeness exist in life not as delusions but as realities often as horrors but sometimes as empowering moments for possible change. These realities are in fact masked by the banalities of the Spectacle. Vaneigem's thesis argues that there is an "inseparable dialectical continuity between the real and the dream, and between the dream and the real. A universe close to that of Kafka, yet different. [...] Joseph K, Franz K carry themselves with difficulty, filled with anxiety and guilt; they walk through a world that ignores them." Unlike Kafka's penitent ardor, Lautréamont contests God, the creator, and reaches toward an "alpha and omega" that allows him to create real change; transformation; movement.<sup>610</sup> Vaneigem completed this thesis circa 1956,<sup>611</sup> before his time in the Situationist International. Nevertheless, this thesis can be seen as a precursor to concepts of the Spectacle, art, and representation that would characterize thought within the SI.

This word that Vaneigem continually uses, "eunuch," criticizes the sexlessness or rejection of sex in two areas: "psychoanaly[sis]" and "Kantian" philosophies. Freud's theories on deviance and repression were intended to attack desire and sexuality. Vaneigem seems to portray Kant as anti-sexual in this description as a "eunuch." It can be assumed that the "eunuch" is

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<sup>608</sup> Roger Callois, "Introduction," *Lautréamont (Œuvres Complètes)* (Paris: Corti, 1946.)

<sup>609</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455. See footnote 529 for details.

<sup>610</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

<sup>611</sup> Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

intentionally cut off (literally and metaphorically) from sexuality. There is an intentionality to Kant's *a priori* worldview that does not simply view the world as limiting and internalizing but rather forces "carcass"-like philosophers inside of themselves, making them incapable of manifesting their internal desires outside of themselves, and even repressing those desires to the point that the desires themselves die.

In terms of Caillois' relationship to Kant, Jean Duvignaud considers Kant's influence on the *pathetic fallacy* of Romanticism: if what can be known is only what can be perceived, then the beauty of nature is a reflection of our own internal perception. It is here that Kant's concept of the sublime connects to Romanticism, while in so many other ways it is distinct. Artistic perceptions of nature are thus personal perceptions, making individual views of nature individual and artistic. Caillois calls the artistic limitations to perception "hallucinatory comas"<sup>612</sup> more similar to a hall of mirrors (mimicry) than autonomous and free decision making. Inner Worlds, for Caillois, are not positive and they are not individually empowering. By considering all perception personal falsity and by rejecting individual autonomy, Caillois deprives individual desire of validity as well as the potential to operate in the world. It becomes difficult to imagine revolutionary potential in such a limited framework.

In his reading notes, Debord references a psychoanalytic interpretation by Marcel Jean and Árpád Mezei of Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*. Maldoror, argue Jean and Mezei, represents the opposite of Freud's "moral unity of man": instead of repressing the unconscious in favor of the conscious, he represses the conscious in favor of the unconscious. Unlike Freud's idea that dreams can open a door to the unconscious, Maldoror's dreams open a door to consciousness. Jean and Mezei argue that this inversion is a response to a historical situation

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<sup>612</sup> Jean Duvignaud, "Roger Caillois et l'Imaginaire," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 66. (Presses Universitaires de France, 1979): 91-96.

wherein “the decadence of the Church became the sole representative of the concrete.”<sup>613</sup> In a world dominated by illusions, dreamlike realities compel spectators to act like dreamers and repress conscious thinking. The question becomes whether dreams then reveal realities that might otherwise be repressed.

For Debord<sup>614</sup> and Vaneigem,<sup>615</sup> dreams show desires, and thus, mark the labyrinthine path for the possible fulfillment of personal desire and happiness. The Spectacle shows desires, but they are not organic to the everyday lives of individuals; they are rather connected to a culture driven by consumerism and a desire to accumulate capital. The Spectacle, like a dream, can be analyzed as a means of mapping the desires of social control as well as a dialectic with human consciousness just as dreams can clarify aspects of individual desires.<sup>616</sup> While dreams have benefits, they are also illusory, showing what in the unconscious feels that it cannot venture beyond the Ego according to Freud. Like the repressive ego, the Spectacle acts like a warden, entrapping individuals in falsity. *Society of Spectacle* makes a pastiche of the citation “the Spectacle is the guardian of sleep,” a *détournement*, from Freud’s “the dream is the guardian of

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<sup>613</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, NAF 28603, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Marcel Jean and Árpád Mezei, *Genèse de la Pensée Moderne*, 59. “La dualité psychologique du héros des *Chants*, Maldoror, est inverse de celle que, plus tard, étudiera la psychanalyse. L’unité de l’homme moral, dit Freud, s’établit par un refoulement de l’inconscient au bénéfice du conscient, tandis que dans les *Chants de Maldoror*, l’individu s’identifie avec son inconscient : c’est alors le conscient qui est refoulé. Dans la troisième strophe du Chant V, le rêve, qui permet selon Freud la surgie des éléments inconscients, est au contraire une porte ouverte à la conscience, à un étranger, au ‘Grand Objet Extérieur,’ - à la curiosité farouche du Céleste Bandit ! » C’est-à-dire au Surmoi naissant d’une identification avec le père. Cette primauté de l’inconscient est fonction du moment historique, de l’époque où l’inconscient, refusé par une Église en décadence, devient le représentant unique du concret. Il s’agit donc dans les *Chants* du renversement d’une situation dans laquelle le Surmoi s’arrogeait tout le ciel et reléguait l’inconscient dans l’enfer le plus profond.”

<sup>614</sup> Guy Debord to Patrick Straram, October 14, 1960, *D’une Révolution à l’Autre*: 131. “Je me méfie un peu de ton terme (lefebvien) de ‘réhabilitation de la v[ie] q[ue] quotidienne’, car si c’est la réhabiliter que de plonger en elle, contre le rêve pur et les jeux de l’écriture, c’est ce que nous avons voulu faire, ce que nous avons déjà réussi parfois (étant donné que la v[ie] q[ue] quotidienne contient aussi le rêve, l’aventure, etc.)”

<sup>615</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003)

<sup>616</sup> Guy Debord to Patrick Straram, October 14, 1960, *D’une Révolution à l’Autre*: 131. “Je me méfie un peu de ton terme (lefebvien) de ‘réhabilitation de la v[ie] q[ue] quotidienne’, car si c’est la réhabiliter que de plonger en elle, contre le rêve pur et les jeux de l’écriture, c’est ce que nous avons voulu faire, ce que nous avons déjà réussi parfois (étant donné que la v[ie] q[ue] quotidienne contient aussi le rêve, l’aventure, etc.)”

sleep.”<sup>617</sup> As a result, the Spectacle does contain visions of “worldly gratification” that are considered unacceptable in everyday life:

The vestiges of religion and of the family [...] along with the vestiges of moral repression [...] can be blended with ostentatious pretensions of worldly gratification precisely because life in this particular world remains repressive and offers nothing but pseudo-gratifications.<sup>618</sup>

Societies and eras can be defined by how they interpret dreams according to Swiss academic Albert Béguin. Vaneigem includes *L'Âme Romantique et le Rêve* by Béguin in his reading notes.<sup>619</sup> There is a sense of individualism in the way dreams are interpreted by Béguin's contemporaries, he observes a sense that their dreams are *theirs*. Béguin questions who he is in dreams, if anyone. He has no control over the images he sees while sleeping. However, trends could be gathered in the dreams, daydreams, and dreamlike imaginings in writing from different eras that would show commonalities between people, not only as humans, but as people within a social context. “The collective imagination, in its spontaneous creations, and the imagination released in the individual by exceptional moments, seems to refer to the same universe.”<sup>620</sup> If individuals see emulations of their worlds in dreams, then aspects of their world can be understood through how these presentations and memories, however distorted. From Béguin's perspective, Sade's incarceration is a product of how his social context has compelled him to dream, not an essential drive that defines his humanity. However, Vaneigem notes on Béguin that dreams speak to social contexts in a way that waking life does not: they reveal needs and desires through an expansion of possibilities and “dimensions.” Dreams pose “the problems of human destiny” in “a kind of floating space with multiple dimensions” that are typically “refused to us

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<sup>617</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* trans. A. Brill (New York: MacMillan Company, 1913). [gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

<sup>618</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb: 23.

<sup>619</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Reading Notes, Box 1, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>620</sup> Albert Béguin, *L'Âme Romantique et le Rêve* 1 (Marseilles: Éditions Cahiers du Sud, 1937): xiii.

by our ontological situation.”<sup>621</sup> By envisioning incarceration in ways that create new paths for travelling to and within seclusive labyrinthine chateaux and by envisioning recurring possibilities for sexual fulfillment, it becomes clear that Sade’s incarceration at once defines his understanding and experience of the world — as trapped within a confined space — and his desires for change within that world, a display of what he does not have. In this way, “the alchemy of our dreams can erase...the nightmare,” says Vaneigem in *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*.<sup>622</sup> Distinction is drawn between dreams and reveries. Vaneigem notes on Béguin that dreams at night are “without a dreamer,” but poetic reveries like Sade’s writing have just enough awareness for the dreamer to decide that they are “happy in the leisure where [they] no longer have to think.”<sup>623</sup> While dreams are not a decision and reveries typically are, the two hold more similarities than differences so the comparisons can be easily drawn.

#### 4.2. Faust’s Dream

In Göthe’s *Faust*, the demon Mephistopheles responds to the beckoning of a bookish alchemist, Faust. Immersed in his books, Faust continually aims to garner the attention of beings of the beyond, including God, to create through magic. Mephistopheles presents a contract wherein Faust will have everything he wishes for (and Faust wishes for love), but it will necessitate that his soul will belong to the demon. The common phrase in English to describe this transaction has become *a deal with the devil*. Like many stories involving wishes and djinn, there is a catch. Faust’s wishes are granted, but only through dreams. Meanwhile, in physical reality, Faust rots in prison. In *Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* features a Mephistopheles-like character from the 1942 film, *Les Visiteurs du Soir* (Marcel Carné.) [FIGURE 5.4] Just before

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<sup>621</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Reading Notes, Box 1, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>622</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 165.

<sup>623</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Reading Notes, Box 1, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

picturing *Les Visiteurs du Soir*; Debord says that he and the Situationists “enlisted definitively in the Devil’s party, that is, the historical ‘evil’ that leads existing conditions to their destruction; the ‘bad side’ that makes history by undermining all established satisfaction.” The Mephistopheles character or *confidence man* sits by the fire where he is asked his name. His name does not matter, he says, he is but a traveler from far away. Debord’s reading notes on *Faust* choose quotations characterizing Mephistopheles as negation: “Spirit of contradiction!” “I am the spirit that always lives, and with justice: because everything that exists is worthy of being destroyed; it would be better if nothing existed.”<sup>624</sup> If everything that exists has been reduced to images, and if the images have destroyed human connection, then, Debord feels, it is as though he is against the entire world. In *In Girum* he says describes Situationists as “lightheartedly at war with the entire world.”<sup>625</sup>

Written in 1808, Göthe’s *Faust* is considered an example of Baroque Theater. The Baroque, Debord argued, was a world that had “lost its center,” and instead gave way to superficial excess and confusion.<sup>626</sup> In *l’Univers Baroque*, Richard Alewyn, a professor of German literature who taught at the University of Paris, classifies Baroque elements of the play including the quintessentially Baroque theme that humanity loses agency and significance in the mêlée of grand cosmic conflicts between heaven and hell.<sup>627</sup> Similar to Platonic interpretations of the world, the physical world loses significance and heaven reigns. Reality becomes ethereal. *L’Univers Baroque* appears in Debord’s reading notes where he expresses special interest the Shakespearean idea that the world is a stage.<sup>628</sup> Alewyn classifies *Faust* as typical of Baroque

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<sup>624</sup> Guy Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésie, etc.* (Paris: Éditions l’Échappée, 2019): 181.

<sup>625</sup> Guy Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1978.)

<sup>626</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 133-134.

<sup>627</sup> Richard Alewyn, *L’Univers du Baroque*, (Hambourg: Éditions Gonthier, 1959).

<sup>628</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

*grand théâtre du monde*, a great theater of the world.<sup>629</sup> Baroque theatrical effects overflowed with *trompe l'œil* that intended to show the world itself as an illusion. Heaven and Earth were depicted as interacting, allowing objects to take flight into the representative celestial space above the ground. A sense of the real world and immersion was created through lighting indicating night and day. Optical illusions made use of perspective and mirrors lulling the audience into a dream-like state wherein their sense of reality would dissolve into an ethereal other-reality. At times, it would abruptly remind the audience of their dream state, jolting them back to a less ephemeral representation intended to represent reality. This style could be compared to Vertov's *The Sixth Part of the World* as well as Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* which both attempt to reveal jarring distinctions between popular consumption of media and alienating factory life. The realistic juxtaposed with the unrealistic aims to augment the sense of realism through comparison, heightening the impression of realism in, for example, depictions of factories. Debord acknowledges this problematic portrayal of the realistic in *Society of the Spectacle*, and considers the historical representation of the proletariat, as well. The spectacular "image of the working class" produced by the Soviet Union was as much an argumentative dream aimed toward self-identification with a visual as capitalist productions.<sup>630</sup> The question as to whether any representation of reality is possible arises for Debord, seemingly in response to the layered realities of Baroque theater discussed by Alweyn. While Situationists theorize and discuss the real, Debord worries that "the world runs the risk of becoming paradoxically invisible."<sup>631</sup> His films nevertheless may resist the authoritarian dominion of the Spectacle through subversion, but they still reify, argue, and theatrically present as all films do. If the world is a stage for the Baroque, this does not simply mean that a stage can represent a microcosm of

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<sup>629</sup> Alweyn, *L'Univers du Baroque*: 31.

<sup>630</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 69.

<sup>631</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

the world, but also that there is a metaphysical worldview that everything outside of the theater is theater as well. For Oswald Wirth, who appears in Vaneigem's reading notes, Gnostics also see the world as a theater wherein people are actors who have become so committed to their roles that they cannot remember when the curtains will close.<sup>632</sup>

For Göthe, heaven and earth blend together. The blue tint of the sky blends with the night, the vapors in the air, the sun, and the water on the surface of the earth. According to Bachelard in *La Poétique de la Réverie*, this blending speaks to Göthe's Hegelian dialectical worldview, which tends toward intermingling of elements rather than dichotomous or Manichean thinking. Bachelard argues that Göthe constructs an imaginary ecosystem based on the breathing in and out of life as creation and negation.<sup>633</sup> This ecosystem rings strongly of alchemical world views, which have been explored by Ronald Gray and others. Given the historical subject matter of *Faust* - the story of an alchemist - this connection is unsurprising. In Wirth's *Le Symbolisme Hermétique*, he discusses the interactions between the elements as definitive of alchemy and hermeticism. If the goal for alchemists is transmutation, perhaps dialectics can be seen as a form of transmutation. Göthe presents a dialectical-alchemical view of an interactive world:

I imagine the earth with its circle of vapors as a great living being which aspires and breathes eternally. If the earth aspires, it attracts to itself the circle of vapors which approaches its surface and thickens into clouds and rain. I call this state the aqueous affirmation; if it lasted beyond the set time, it would drown the earth. But the earth does not allow it; it breathes new things and sends above the vapors of water which spread throughout all the spaces of the upper atmosphere and become so thin that not only the brilliance of the sun passes through them, but that the eternal night of infinite space, seen through them, is colored with a brilliant blue tint. I call this second state of the atmosphere aqueous negation. In the state of aqueous negation, not the humidity of the earth ... disappears in the air, so that if

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<sup>632</sup> Oswald Wirth, *Le Symbolisme Hermétique* (Troutdale: Éditions de la Nouvelle Atlantide, 2023): 31. "Il ne voit dans le monde qu'un théâtre où les personnalités se donnent en spectacle. Les acteurs paraissent sur scène affublés d'accoutrements d'emprunt, et ils jouent leur rôle avec conviction, oubliant qu'à la chute du rideau, ils dépouilleront leurs oripeaux pour redevenir eux-mêmes."

<sup>633</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de la Réverie*, Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales (Chicoutimi: Université du Québec, 1968) <http://classiques.uqac.ca/>: 187.

this state were prolonged beyond the set time, even without the sun, the earth would run the risk of drying out and completely hardening.<sup>634</sup>

Göthe sees dreams as a “sphere” in *Faust*; an entrance to another world – sometimes a world above and sometimes a world below: “In the spheres we dream of yonder/ A High and Low our souls await.”<sup>635</sup> “It seems we have entered newly/ In the sphere of dreams enchanted.”<sup>636</sup> Dreams are a space where the real meets the ethereal Beyond. High and Low spheres are atmospheric and, as Bachelard describes, represented through water-like characteristics. Similarly, *Faust*’s journey to the world of dreams traverse water: “Out on the open ocean speeds my dreaming;/ the glassy flood before my feet is gleaming/ a new day beckons to a newer shore!”<sup>637</sup> Mephistopheles creates images that “plunge [Faust] in the seas of sweet untruth.”<sup>638</sup> Illusory falsity adopts a thick atmosphere like watery vapors or like swimming underwater. The impression of another world is emphasized by the change in atmosphere to a world that is underwater. Perhaps the darkness of the marine world is reminiscent of night. Göthe finds the waters relaxing calling their untruth “sweet” and “beckon[ing].” Reflective qualities of water are referenced as appearing “glassy” like a mirror. Submarine movement becomes slower, as in dreams. There is some sense of entrapment unlike depictions of flying or air which is often associated with freedom and speed. In the sea of illusion, *Faust* recognizes that the dream is *not* airy as he would imagine heaven or other spiritual realms. “Am I again so foully cheated?/ Remains there naught of lofty spirit-sway/ But that a dream the Devil counterfeited.”<sup>639</sup> Imprisoned by his books in the real world, Göthe’s *Faust* leaves the sphere of Nature for the

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<sup>634</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de la Rêverie*, Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales (Chicoutimi: Université du Québec, 1968) <http://classiques.uqac.ca/>: 187.

<sup>635</sup> Johann Wolfgang Von Göthe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 2005). [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

“world of spirits.” However, this is not one of the Higher realms of the world of spirits like heaven, but a lower realm that is both literally and metaphorically darker. Mephistopheles is not a spirit of heaven, but a “Spirit of the Earth.”<sup>640</sup> Mephistopheles grants him dreams based on desire that disintegrate into violent visions, similar to the impulses of nightmares. At first, Faust believes that he has, in fact, made Mephistopheles his prisoner, but the inverse is true. A “deal with the devil” is its own form of ultimate incarceration — his soul ultimately comes under the ownership of another.

The motif of water appears prominently in Debord’s *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*. “The entire film (also with the help of images as well as in the commentary) is built on the theme of water.”<sup>641</sup> History is like a journey through “cold waters.” Ships wreck along the way, and “the names of ship wreckers are only writ in water.” Thus water is fleeting and ephemeral but constant. For Lautréamont, humanity is not eternal but the ocean is eternal. The ocean is like a great and powerful God to which humanity cannot pretend to associate itself. Water is seductive, like the passing of time. Debord states, “the sensation of the passing of time has always been vivid for me, and I have been attracted by it just as others are allured by dizzying heights or by water.”<sup>642</sup> Individuals can never seismically visualize the length and breadth of history, similar to the power of the ocean. If compared to the sea of Göthe’s dream, water creates a sense of being lost, being too small and powerless to control or understand surroundings, and potentially drowning, the way “dizzying heights” relate to fear of falling.

Water, fire, air, and earth are elemental motifs in alchemy that depict the possibilities for change and creation. Water, fire, and air, in particular, appear in Bachelard’s literary criticism for

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603. “Tout le film (aussi à l’aide des images, mais [...] dans le texte de ‘commentaires,’) est bâti sur le thème de l’eau.”

<sup>642</sup> Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*.

aspects of movement and changeability. Such movement often appears in dreams, argues Bachelard, because it resonates with an internal rhythm of a dreamer, a rhythm that moves and thus becomes represented by elements in the world that move as well. He theorizes an alchemy of the dream. Göthe's Faust was an alchemist, as was the historical Faust. Alchemy can be seen as a process not to abstract or make ephemeral theories and ideas, but rather to materialize and create physical realities on earth. Alchemy is worldly. In the Surrealist single-edition journal, *The Conquest of the World by the Image (La Conquête du Monde Par l'Image)*, Marcel Mariën wrote an article titled "Les Marchés de l'Été," that proclaimed that Surrealism and Dadaism had the capacity to transcend traditional art, including realism, which merely aimed to create mirrors of the world rather than dreaming new possibilities. On the cover of the volume appeared a quote from Göthe that is reminiscent of the alchemical principles of the historical Faust:

The creative force of the artist must bring forth images, idols from inside of the organism, memory, and imagination [...] They must unfold, grow, expand and contract in order to no longer be fleeting, but true and concrete objects.<sup>643</sup>

Faust does not simply want to understand the world; he wants to create. Contrary to the historical Faust, Göthe's Faust serves as a cautionary tale about the nature of creation and creativity. The alchemist, seeking to conquer nature, reap its benefits, and materialize a creation, is, instead, himself, conquered by a demonic inhuman being. Like the dominion of art, artists project themselves onto their creation, but, according to Situationists, their creations are inhuman beings that are not manifestations of the artists, and, in fact, conquer aspects of the artist's and the public's psyche. Faust is transported to an ethereal world beyond the physical. Göthe creates distinctions between spheres, including multiple spirit worlds: the lofty and the watery. Göthe's

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<sup>643</sup> *La Conquête du Monde par l'Image*. "Il faut que la force créatrice de l'artiste fasse surgir ces images, ces idoles demeurées dans l'organisme, dans le souvenir, dans l'imagination; qu'elle le fasse librement sans y mettre d'intention ni de vouloir; il faut qu'elles se déploient, croissent, se dilatent et se contractent, afin de devenir non plus des schèmes fugitifs, mais des objets véritables et concrets."

own spiritualism in part can explain these distinctions. Rudolf Steiner's *Göthes Weltanschauung* (*Göthe's Conception of the World*) analyzes Göthe's interpretations of German Idealism. Göthe rejects both "Christian" versions of Platonism like the sense of a "world Beyond," as well as Kant's proposition that nothing can truly be known of the physical world. He sees a difference between materiality and ideas wherein a "spiritual eye perceived the idea of reality."<sup>644</sup> Reality was formed by ideas; "the object can only exist as the idea has made it."<sup>645</sup> For Göthe, there is no real difference between the Platonic abstract ideal of an object and that object, itself. Objects of nature were microcosms of their ideals, each representing a "little world."<sup>646</sup> Steiner appears in the writings of Jean-Louis Brau,<sup>647</sup> partly due to his writings on Göthe, but also for Steiner's significant influence on occultism and Theosophy. Brau recalls how Steiner criticized materialism for "ravaging" the world. The spiritual world was "much stronger than that of the physical world."<sup>648</sup> Steiner, an Anthroposophist, wrote on Göthe, and he was also an architect and a spiritual leader. Attila Kotányi found Steiner's anthroposophist architecture particularly despicable. Steiner's approach to integrate his architecture into the landscape was "fake."<sup>649</sup> Kotányi compared Steiner's ideas to "syphilis,"<sup>650</sup> in other words, attractive yet disease-ridden and potentially lethal. A designer of houses as well as temples, Steiner's most noted construction was two Götheanumen, *Gesamtkunstwerken*, that aimed to cohesively integrate all aspects of art into one – essentially, an artistic take on the concept of *Weltanschauung*. Atop the first Götheanum was a "garish multi-colored" dome that appeared "as if the heavens were awash in a

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<sup>644</sup> Steiner, *Göthe's Conception of the World*: 14.

<sup>645</sup> Steiner, *Göthe's Conception of the World*: 2-3.

<sup>646</sup> Steiner, *Göthe's Conception of the World*: 122.

<sup>647</sup> Brau, *Les Initiés d'Occident*: 135-147.

<sup>648</sup> Brau, *Les Initiés d'Occident*: 2,3, 14.

<sup>649</sup> Christophe Kotányi and Anna O'Meara, April 16, 2024, Interview (New York: Common Notions, forthcoming.)

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

dancing spectrum.”<sup>651</sup> Temples like the Götheanumen, said Steiner, were microcosms of the earth, just as humans were. The evolution of the human soul was reflected through religious architecture over time, and Steiner believed that his architecture marked the next evolutionary development of the human soul.<sup>652</sup> Using the works of Göthe and Hegel to guide his architecture and spirituality, Steiner theorized on “the Other Self,”<sup>653</sup> or the idea that the Self changes once it is aware of Selfness. Steiner considered dreams to hypothesize what death and heaven would be like, essentially envisioning journeys to ethereal realms wherein the invisible of the world becomes visualized like a revelation or the meaning of “occult” as revealing the “hidden.”<sup>654</sup>

Göthe’s resistance to both idealism and materialism is revealed in his Hegelian rewriting of the biblical phrase, “in the beginning was the word” to “in the beginning was the action,”<sup>655</sup> a passage that appears in Debord’s notes and that comes from a passage in *Second Faust* that is also cited in Jean-Louis Brau’s *Le Sorcellerie*:

Just before meeting Mephistopheles, Faust ponders the meaning of life. ‘In the beginning was the Word,’ he wrote. ‘No, here I stop. It is impossible to grant the Word so much value...I must translate reality differently, if the Spirit gives me its light, and I write: in the beginning was the force. But something stops me. The Spirit of Inspiration helps me and I write this time with certainty: in the beginning was the Action.’”<sup>656</sup>

Göthe sees the force of action and flux as a form of spiritual inspiration. Heaven dictates the Earth through the Word in the story of creation, as is reflected in the reign of heaven over earth in

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<sup>651</sup> Edwin Heathcote, “The Other-Worldly Architecture of Rudolph Steiner,” *Apollo*, 2022. [Apollo-magazine.com](https://www.apollo-magazine.com).

<sup>652</sup> Rudolph Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, trans. Johanna Collis et al, (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999).

<sup>653</sup> Christiane Haid, “Rudolf Steiner et la Théorie des Sens,” *Goetheanum*, 2024, [goetheanum.ch](https://www.goetheanum.ch).

<sup>654</sup> Rudolph Steiner, *An Outline of Occult Science* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1922.) [archive.org](https://www.archive.org), 2009: 56-57.

<sup>655</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>656</sup> Brau, *La Sorcellerie* (Paris: MA Editions, 1986): 135. “Goethe devait revenir sur ce mythe dans son *Second Faust*, terminé peu avant sa mort. Juste avant sa rencontre avec Méphistophélès, Faust s'interroge sur le sens de la vie: "Au commencement était le Verbe, a-t-il écrit. Non, ici je m'arrête. Il est impossible d'accorder au Verbe une telle valeur...Il faut que je traduise autrement le réel, si l'Esprit me dispense bien sa lumière, et j'écris: au commencement était la Force? Mais tandis que j'écris ceci quelque chose m'avertit déjà. L'Esprit inspirateur vient à mon aide et j'écris cette fois avec certitude: au commencement était l'Action.”

Baroque theater. *Society of the Spectacle* argues that there was a historical necessity that could be analyzed in the ephemeral quality of Baroque art, which sees the physical world as immaterial:

The baroque was the art of a world that had lost its center with the demise of the last mythic order recognized by the Middle Ages, an order founded, both cosmically and from the point of view of the earthly government, on the unity between Christianity and the ghost of an Empire. An art of change was obliged to embody the principal of the ephemeral that it recognized in the world.<sup>657</sup>

While Debord would not see flux and the ephemeral as spiritual, he does see the importance in the Baroque aesthetic of the ephemeral as a vehicle for decentering and for creating change, contrary to medieval cosmology. The decentering and ephemeral aesthetic of the Baroque is also present in the Spectacle. In his reading notes, Debord responds to Richard Alewyn:

Life is a dream, the world is a theater [...] The theater is the world in the melancholy eyes of the Baroque: felt but not real [...] It is real illusion in an illusory reality.<sup>658</sup>

György Lukács' *Göthe and his Age* argues that, by the time Göthe wrote *Faust*, he had developed a cohesive *Weltanschauung* derived from Hegel; a dialectical worldview. Debord notes this passage in his reading notes. Despite critiques of *Weltanschauungen*, Debord, too, takes a dialectical worldview, arguing in *Society of the Spectacle*, "Conflict is the origin of all things in this world."<sup>659</sup> Lukács describes how discussions of *Weltanschauung* in German Idealism aimed to define core truths about the function of the world, which necessarily led to theories of a world defined by contradiction, or "the discovery that contradiction constitutes the center of life and thought."<sup>660</sup>

This renewal results from the spirit of the German Enlightenment, from the tendencies [...] of this epoch of transition in the direction of dialectical thinking.

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<sup>657</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 133-134.

<sup>658</sup> Guy Debord, "Fiches de Lecture," NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>659</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 138.

<sup>660</sup> Lukács, *Göthe and his Age*: 166.

The conscious formation of this new *Weltanschauung* is the basis of Göthe's life-long work on *Faust*.<sup>661</sup>

Jean-Louis Brau reveals a dialectical Hegelian bent in *Faust* when he discusses how Mephistopheles asks God permission to tempt Faust, to which God replies: "If you can take him, drag him with you toward the abyss... I gladly give the man the Evil One, source of negation which will spur him on."<sup>662</sup> The Hegelian concept of negation is implied when Göthe presents a situation where negation is necessary to benefit the world. Göthe associates evil and negation, blurring the concept of evil as villainous and instead depicting it as a necessary balance to dialectical progression, as does Hegel: "Nor is there such a thing as the false any more than there is such a thing as evil. [...] The false [...] [is] the negative of the substance."<sup>663</sup> While relatable to Hegel, and while subjectivity and entrapment in the Self are themes in *Faust*, "it is altogether false," argues Lukács, "to read into *Faust*, as many commentators do, any essential relationship between Göthe and Kant."<sup>664</sup> Instead, Lukács suggests similarities to "Lutheran revisions."<sup>665</sup> While, as Lukács says, Kant should not be read into Göthe as an "essential connection," Kant can be seen as an essential connection to Lukács' own literary interpretations of Göthe as well as his writing in general and therefore Debord's interpretations of Kant. As a result, even if Kant were removed from readings of Göthe, he should not be removed from readings of Debord's uses of Göthe's ideas.

### 4.3. Dreams as a Key to Heaven or a Gate to Hell?

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<sup>661</sup> Lukács, *Göthe and his Age*: 167.

<sup>662</sup> Jean-Louis Brau, *Les Initiés d'Occident*, (Paris: MA Editions, 1986): 131. "Aussi longtemps qu'il vivra sur terre, rien ne t'interdit d'essayer, ajoute Dieu. Si tu peux le saisir, entraîne-le avec toi vers l'abîme...J'adjoins volontiers à l'homme le Malin, source de négation qui l'aiguillonne et le stimule. Mais demeure confondu s'il te faut confesser qu'un homme bon, en son obscure inspiration, demeure conscient du vrai chemin."

<sup>663</sup> Georg Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 22.

<sup>664</sup> Lukács, *Göthe and his Age*: 201.

<sup>665</sup> Lukács, *Göthe and his Age*: 167.

Debord specifically chooses the translation of Göthe's *Faust* by Gérard de Nerval, which represents a trend wherein he picks translators based on their other works. For example, Debord specifically picks Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's translation of the bible. Elsewhere, he is also interested in Bossuet's other writings wherein he finds a detached and fleeting world in flux.<sup>666</sup> Similarly, Debord read Kostas Axelos' translations of Lukács which included Axelos' introductions to Lukács' texts on which Debord kept notes.<sup>667</sup> As for the translator of *Faust*, Gérard de Nerval, Debord likely first became first interested due to how Nerval's 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic texts that Debord classified as "dreamwork"<sup>668</sup> influenced Surrealists. Debord highlights interest in Nerval's dreamworlds as well as approaches to night and death. For Nerval, the world is a dream and night is a negation of material reality. However, material reality still exists, says Debord, whether he or Nerval see it or not. Debord's references a passage from Nerval's *Aurélia* in his notes: "Everyone knows that in dreams we never see the sun, although we often perceive a much brighter light." Debord responds: "Whatever happens in the dark and at night, I exist – and I have to overcome it as long as long as I still live on earth."<sup>669</sup>

Nerval's *Aurélia or Life and the Dream* opens with the premise that dreams are gates to the underworld like the ivory gates in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

A dream is a second life. I could not pierce without shuddering these doors of ivory or horn which separate us from the invisible world.<sup>670</sup>

He wonders if dreams produce their own real locations. Dream locations, as portals to the "world of the spirits," could present common meeting spaces for multiple real people who there could communicate. In *Aurélia*, there is an "overflowing of the dream into real life," which includes

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<sup>666</sup> Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésies*: 42.

<sup>667</sup> Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Marx, Hegel*: 193.

<sup>668</sup> Debord, "Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution," *EMDA*.

<sup>669</sup> Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésies*: 303. "Chacun sait que dans les rêves on ne voit jamais le soleil, bien qu'on ait souvent la perception d'une clarté beaucoup plus vive. Quoi qu'il fasse dans l'ombre et la nuit, j'existe—et j'ai pour le vaincre tout le temps qu'il m'est donné encore de vivre sur la terre."

<sup>670</sup> Guy Debord, "Fiches de Lecture," NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

sometimes jarring juxtapositions between the dreamed and the real. For the narrator, who enters into dreams through psychotic episodes in a hospital, the real world is doubled by a spirit world. Ultimately, as in the cosmic conflicts of Baroque theater, the spirit world is in control and the real world mirrors it as though it were acting in a play:

I saw correspondences between the real world and the spirit world. The earth, its inhabitants and their history, were the theater in which we carried out the physical actions which prepared the existence and position of the immortal beings attached to its destiny.<sup>671</sup>

Surrealist “dreamwork,” to use Debord’s term, codifies dreams into a series of symbols to understand a world beyond reality. Informed by Freud and Jung, they drew from Nerval’s concept of a common dream, a theme they also found in Georges du Maurier’s *Peter Ibbetson*, who classifies dreams in ways that are seen as common to every human. Breton called du Maurier’s rejection of the world in favor of a new shared landscape of dreams a “philosopher’s stone” that allowed Surrealists to “dismiss the mean and miserable world that is inflicted on us.”<sup>672</sup> In other words, dreams were a key to heaven. In *Peter Ibbetson*, dreams erode the Self as two lovers (one of whom is dead) explore dream landscapes together where they are able to communicate. Over time, their perception melds into one before it becomes replaced by visions of their ancestors. *Peter Ibbetson* is a story about “outer and inner life” where the inner life is not singular to the Self, and where the Self does not have agency. “The whole cosmos goes mad and has its will of us.” Nevertheless, the expanse of the dreamed cosmos imply individual power: “the whole cosmos is in a man’s brains.”<sup>673</sup>

Surrealists and Situationists considered the connections between dreams and everyday life through the ethnographic studies of Mircea Eliade. The connection between dreams and the

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<sup>671</sup> Gérard de Nerval, *Aurelia or Life and the Dream* trans. Geoffrey Wagner (Boston: Exact Change, 1996): 37.

<sup>672</sup> Georges Bataille. *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (London: Verso, 2006): 69.

<sup>673</sup> George Du Maurier, *Peter Ibbetson* (Project Gutenberg/ Amazon Kindle): 801.

world parallels the connection between the ephemeral realm of the heavens and the materiality of earth. For Eliade, the classic key to heaven in Jacob's dream, wherein a ladder propels Jacob to heaven, is at once a portal to a heavenly realm and something "dreadful." Jacob undergoes an initiation dream, entering into a mystical realm, another world. According to Eliade, in initiation dreams of indigenous Siberians, celestial journeys to heaven entail dreams wherein the initiate is killed and sees their body dismembered and their head severed, which Vaneigem transcribes in his reading notes.<sup>674</sup> For initiates, the space of the initiation dream is shared. These dreams, classifiable as trances or waking dreams, include rituals. For indigenous Siberians, initiation entails a waking dream on a "celestial journey to the World Tree."<sup>675</sup> For Altic tribes, dreams take the Shaman "to the center of the world."<sup>676</sup> For the Kunapipi, initiates undertake a collective ritual through a "dreaming period" wherein they "reactualize the primordial time (...) The cosmos and society emerge regenerated."<sup>677</sup> In this case, dreams are not an escape from waking life but rather a tool for restructuring waking life, allowing it to become more like a dream, and for the dream to integrate into the real.

For De Quincey, on whose *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* Debord kept reading notes, opium produces "the anarchy of dreaming sleep" provides "the keys to Paradise," but, like Midas, at a cost. Midas' wish to turn anything to gold is "defrauded by his human desires."<sup>678</sup> Once the opium was taken, the dream no longer was an option; representations would come without the opium-eater's choice in the matter. If this metaphor were extrapolated to a broad social level, as Debord says, "dreaming will remain a social necessity."<sup>679</sup> De Quincey's paradise

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<sup>674</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>675</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1958): 89.

<sup>676</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*: 70.

<sup>677</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*: 48.

<sup>678</sup> Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; (Project Gutenberg, 2000). [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).

<sup>679</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 18.

was “defrauded” by a “deep-seated anxiety and utter melancholy” that “plunged” him into “chasms and sunless abysses” nearly every night. While majestic mountains of “storm[y]” dreams are “solemnized” in the dream state, there is nevertheless a persistent “agitation.” The paradise of dreams is a paradise lost. De Quincey references Milton:

My dreams are not yet perfectly calm, the dread swell and agitation of the storm have not wholly subsided [...] like the gates of Paradise to our first parents when looking back from afar, it is still (in the tremendous line of Milton.)<sup>680</sup>

Debord presents a clip from *Shanghai Gesture* in *The Society of the Spectacle* where Poppy reflects on the “witches sabbath” of the Shanghai casino: “I never believed such a place possible except in dreams. I feel like I’m in a waking dream. Anything could happen, at any moment...” [FIGURE 5.5] The dream not only changes time through increased speed, but also increased possibilities and increased permissibility. The world, itself, is less predictable, but also more open to, in Poppy’s words, “evil.” The shocking element for Poppy, like Maldoror, is that such a place can be real. She is not dreaming. What if the advantages to the dream or the film – the fulfillment of desire, unpredictability, excitement – could be realized in the real world?

Former Situationist T.J. Clark, an art historian, analyzes the fresco, *Joachim’s Dream*, by Giotto di Bondone in the 2018 *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come* [FIGURE 5.6]. The legacy of Situationist ideas remains palpable in his analysis. In New Testament apocrypha, Joachim is informed that his wife Anna is pregnant with Mary. Joachim sleeps mid-day in front of the entrance to a small hut indicated by an abstracted black square which frames the sleeping Joachim. The mountainous grey landscape portrayed with a thin paint contrasts the dense and textured overpowering blue of the sky. This blue, says Clark, creates a sense of “despair and isolation,”<sup>681</sup> unlike Breton’s analysis as the blue of heaven as calming and beautiful compared to

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<sup>680</sup> Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; (Project Gutenberg, 2000). [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).

<sup>681</sup> T.J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018): 32.

the yellow of earth, which he derives from Kandinsky.<sup>682</sup> Clark is interested in the difference between heaven and earth in the painting, wherein the “precipitous” “shape of the world against the sky” contrasts “any other in the chapel.”<sup>683</sup> Heaven and earth begin to merge in dream states – they are no longer divided. Dreams “open onto a dimension that puts, as it must, the very idea of ‘world’ in doubt.”<sup>684</sup> Dreams are the “co-presence – the disconnection and tying together – of earth and heaven.”<sup>685</sup> *Joachim’s Dream* is intended to portray a type of dream that is extraordinary, but dreams, says Clark, are very ordinary and everyday.

[Dreams are a] moment of suspension in everyday life, entirely commonplace and recurrent, when something half-enters the world as we understand it and puts our world-picture to the test.<sup>686</sup>

Dreams “happen every night” and “deprived of this dreamworld we go mad.”<sup>687</sup> Our everyday experience is characterized and informed by our own dreams. Therefore, they are part of reality while they also transfigure reality. Dreams “materialize” something that “half-enters the world.”<sup>688</sup> Transfigured images through dreams are a necessary part of human existence, consciousness, and understanding of the *world of things*, argues Clark. When the material world outside of the dream begins to adopt characteristics of dreams, illusions enter not only our physical existence but also a deeper part of our being, a part of our being connected to what was once characterized as the spirit world.

“One moves ‘toward the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality.’” So defines Breton in *Manifesto of Surrealism*, which Debord cites in *Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution*. The real

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<sup>682</sup> André Breton, *l’Art Magique*: 109.

<sup>683</sup> Clark, *Heaven on Earth*: 35.

<sup>684</sup> Clark, *Heaven on Earth*: 43.

<sup>685</sup> Clark, *Heaven on Earth*: 65.

<sup>686</sup> Clark, *Heaven on Earth*: 70.

<sup>687</sup> Clark, *Heaven on Earth*: 65.

<sup>688</sup> Clark, *Heaven on Earth*: 70.

blends with the imaginary in an area whose “boundaries” could not be precisely defined.<sup>689</sup>

Lefebvre calls Breton’s “resolution” of “dream and reality” “simple-minded Hegelianism.”<sup>690</sup>

For Lefebvre, this logic justified an attack on reason and, in fact, all areas of reality and everyday life. Jules Monnerot agrees that Surrealists are at war with everyday life, and, unlike the Surrealists, he sees it as a fight that cannot be won. Unlike Lefebvre, Monnerot does not aim to refocus on everyday life, but simply to mourn the fact that the fight against the world only enters the realm of alienation, and that everyday life continues to exist:

The lost world is indeed lost. We only try to win it back in a desperate fight, lost in advance, in a war to the death against this world. Freshness and imagination gild the impossible within reach that cannot be touched.<sup>691</sup>

For Breton, the dream *is* life, but its relationship to life has been pushed away by modernity.

Dreams need to be reintegrated into life, because they are, themselves, part of life.<sup>692</sup> Dreams are real, on a “continuum” between the material world and the *surreal*.<sup>693</sup>

Vaneigem sees Breton’s theory on the relationship between dreams and reality as a “meeting point” of the “real and the virtual;” a cosmos where the laws of the era blend with desires. He provides the example of the Marquis de Sade whose cosmos converse with non-transparent 18<sup>th</sup> Century law that extended from monarchism and Catholicism as an institution and confinement as well as defined by Sade’s own detached, blasé attitude toward fictional pornographic murder. Vaneigem argues that *Maldoror* is confined to a world of moralizing laws wherein Catholicism that punishes sexuality and deviance defines the real and tangible as opposed to abstraction which for Lautréamont is characterized by sexual desire and fantasy. Unlike Sade, murder is

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<sup>689</sup> Guy Debord, “Surrealism: An Irrational Revolution,” Trans. Anthony Hayes, *Cahiers de l’Encyclopédie du Monde Actuel* 35 (Lausanne: Éditions Rencontre, 1968). [thesinisterscience.com](http://thesinisterscience.com).

<sup>690</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, (New York: Verso, 2014): 133.

<sup>691</sup> Monnerot, *La Poésie Moderne et le Sacré*: 119.

<sup>692</sup> Monnerot, *La Poésie Moderne et le Sacré*: 109. “André Breton réclame pathétiquement la réintégration et le retour du rêve dans la vie, la reconnaissance de cette réalité: le rêve lui aussi est la vie.”

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

certainly not blasé in Lautréamont's writing; it is rather an act born from longing and fascination.<sup>694</sup> In Vaneigem's master's thesis, the world Lautréamont creates is a "dialectic" between "the real and dreams" like "Kafka," where "a bank is still a bank, and an omnibus is not a butterfly."<sup>695</sup> Lukács writes a strikingly similar analysis of Kafka, from which Vaneigem's argument is likely derived. "[In] Kafka, [...] the most improbable, fantastic statements appear real through force of descriptive detail." Leaps from "documentary" scope to "timeless" "ambience" present a "dialectic" that is "not straight-forward anti-realism." In fact, it is realistic insofar as it is based on real sentiments and perceived experiences by the writer. Kafka's interior world converses with his exterior world, a "sadistic" bureaucratic hell that predicted the coming realities of fascism.<sup>696</sup> Kafka is example of a writer who finds interior worlds horrific and lacking agency of an individual willpower. His connection to the history of authoritarian rule, which appear particularly strongly in the example of "In the Penal Colony" wherein executioners coldly contemplate the mechanical aspects of guns in great detail as they shoot prisoners against a wall. Apathy is examples of a dreamlike sentiment wherein horror and the unexpected begin to feel light and natural. Strange and horrific normalcy is likewise an issue with the world of the Spectacle. Individuals take military violence, colonialism, and exploitation as givens, as though these are the only possible aspects for reality, but these horrors are in fact based on dreamlike illusory unreality. It is a "world that is really on its head," which should not be accepted as normal or ethical. Breaking this cycle could present, instead, a world where happiness could

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<sup>694</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Reading Notes, Box 1, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>695</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem's Master's Thesis on Lautréamont, Box 2, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>696</sup> György Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press): 47.

exist. “Happiness is a new idea in Europe.”<sup>697</sup> In the Spectacle, there is a “banality of evil” but it is a contrived and sensationalized banality that does not need to manifest readily into the banality of the everyday. Perhaps Hannah Arendt’s banality of evil of concentration camps could be distinguished from human nature and everyday evils, and instead be attributed to a repercussion of Spectacular evil that has materialized into the everyday.

Kafka expresses his Inner World, but also his context. It seems that he sees the world and reality as dreamlike, lacking empathy, and horrific. Whether it would be possible for Kafka to even imagine a fictional world without these aspects likely would present a serious challenge for him as an author. Like a recurring dream that one cannot help but have, Kafka returns continually to worlds that operate based on bureaucratic sadism and devolutions into catastrophe. Bachelard says, “The dreamer of a world does not know the division between [their world and] their being.”<sup>698</sup> For Lefebvre, Kafka simply aspires to depict everyday life:

Kafka’s ‘universe’ does not strive to be extraordinary, nor does it aspire to be a universe; it is everyday life — or Kafka’s view of it — meticulously described and captured in its essence.<sup>699</sup>

In accounts from concentration camp survivors and journalists, Lefebvre demonstrates how concentration camps created “another world, a monstrous universe where human thought falters and ends up lost; a nightmarish Kafkaesque world where everything seems organized according to some implacable, rigid, rational mind, but which one?”<sup>700</sup> For Lefebvre, the defining characteristic of both Kafka’s writing and concentration camps is the unity of absurdity and reason, which “tragically control” human victims. Both absurdity and reason are inhuman, and it

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<sup>697</sup> Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Cornell University Press, 2010): 1.

<sup>698</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de la Rêverie* (Chicoutimi: Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales, 2014): 181.

<sup>699</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 264.

<sup>700</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 262.

becomes impossible to differentiate one from the other.<sup>701</sup> Kafka's dreamworld and concentration camps similarly mark themes of killing, dying, and namelessness, but there is no longer any sense of satisfaction. However, Kafka nevertheless does write a dreamworld, as Kotányi notes: "Kafka finds no other Space [...] than the nightmare [...] The nightmare is also a dream, which connects to Novalis-Breton and afterwards. Perhaps there will be a redemption."<sup>702</sup> Unlike Kafka, Situationists view neither dreams nor the world as inherently bad or evil. Kotányi connects Kafka's universe to the Gnostic concept of the world as evil. Kafka describes, says Kotányi, a "deeply religious world" that instead of being "sacred" is "inverted" (*fordított*) because it is "unholy, cursed" (*szentségtelen-átkozott van*).<sup>703</sup> Gabriel Moked similarly sees Kafka's universe as representing "Gnostic existentialism." Moked argues:

I prefer to define this brand of existentialism, which focuses on and gives expression to the struggle of the subject against an incomprehensible and unjust reality, as a gnostic *and* agnostic existentialism and *not* as either a religious or secular one.<sup>704</sup>

Unlike Lukács, Moked decides that Kafka "cannot be defined as 'realist' in the customary mimetic usage of the term," but he nevertheless agrees that Kafka "convey[s] important facts about the human condition."<sup>705</sup> Kotányi sees Kafka's world as a "magically divided world, a pseudo-world" (*mágikusan megosztott világ, álnemvilág*) that has a "Gnostic separation from the

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<sup>701</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 264.

<sup>702</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1499. "C'est comme ça, que Kafka n'ayant pas d'autre moyenne, lui, pour trouver un Espace, le lien, le Joint que dans le cauchemar - allure plutôt de cauchemar que de rien, du joint, parce que le cauchemar est tout de même du rêve, qui relie à ce Novalis-Breton et après, peut-être il aura de rédemtion, disait déjà Dostoïevski, les romantiques, sans y arriver."

<sup>703</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1499. "A Kafka-féle egzisztencialista, valamely fordított Mircea Eliade - világ mélységes vallásossága: bár annyi a különbség, hogy a szakrális világ helyett szentségtelen-átkozott van. Még az is nyitva van hagyva, hogy magát átkozta el vagy elátkozták."

<sup>704</sup> Gabriel Moked, "Kafka's Gnostic Existentialism and Modern Jewish Revival," *Kafka, Zionism, and Beyond*, ed. Mark Gelber (de Gruyter, 2004): 147.

<sup>705</sup> Moked, "Kafka's Gnostic Existentialism and Modern Jewish Revival," 149.

rational” which due to its falseness does not evolve or “transition.”<sup>706</sup> Kotányi like Lefebvre questions how rationality and Kafka’s dreamworld might not be mutually exclusive but ultimately Kotányi sees deductive positivism as at odds with the unpredictability of Kafka’s

*Weltanschauung:*

It is not quite possible to maintain the impression that the decisions and experiences in your current life stem entirely from deductive considerations [...] [Is] there any way to establish this in a behaviorist-Kafka universe[?] [...] Their character is also obviously different. ‘Psychological-biological,’ ‘instinctive-emotional,’ these terms fit very strangely into the deductive world [...] Can the intention of deductive processing of the behaviorist adventure (life?) be maintained?<sup>707</sup>

Kotányi questions whether deduction and rationality have any place in a universe that operates on unpredictable situations. Unlike Kafka’s nightmare world, he calls the behaviorist universe an “adventure” that he aims to maintain. Unpredictability for Situationists was both a possible reality and an asset that could be killed by rationalist world-building. Unpredictability was a world to fight for. “The new beauty will be SITUATIONAL. That is temporary and lived.”<sup>708</sup> Nevertheless, the nightmare of the Spectacle did exist like a dream, as socially dreamed. In the

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<sup>706</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1499. “Ő, Kaffka pontosan azt a fajta világból szobára és a szobáról magára – visszavonást, imploziót tanácsolja mind ars poetikát és biztos receptet, hogy a világ striptízt játszon, mint amit Hommes leír. Itt csak ennyi a különbség, ebben a racionálisan, kz-kiválásban a gnosztikustól, hogy ez a világ se Marx módján nem egy átmenet és egy tag a képletben, ha a leg elembevágótt, érévágóbb is, se nem beékelt kvalitással termelt gnosztikus kép gualitás (dualitás?), mágikusan megosztott világ, álnemvilág. Nemcsak szükségyszerűségvilág, álnemvilág.”

<sup>707</sup> Attila Kotányi Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1499. “Nem egészen tartható az a látszat, hogy csupa deduktív megfontolásból eredtek a jelen életmódban foglalt deciziók és tapasztalatok. Nem csak a felsorolás ad félreértésre okot, amit a “sárga kritika” se tudott teljessé tenni, hanem magában az írásbeli reflexióban rejlő intenció. A megisméltésre és általánosításra felszólító motívumok - ha egyáltalán mód van egy behaviorista-Kafka-mindenségben ennek megállapítására - sokkal “kisebkek” kellettek legyenek, mint a protokollból következtetni lehet. Karakterük is nyilván más. “Pszichologikus-biológikus”, “instinktív-emocionális”; ezek a kifejezések igen idegenül ékelődnek bele abba a deduktív világba, amit a teória jelent. E szavak inkább gesztikulálnak a többi, szalonképes “*Be riff*” között, mint az egyszerű ember a jó társaságban, ha arra a naiv gondolatra jut, hogy az ő tapasztalatáról akár beszámolni, nem ismervén deduktívék és barátaik társaságának szabályait: a saját nyelvükön formulázható, variációval előállítható “tapasztalatokon” túl ők nem mennek, s így elkerülik, hogy nevéssé váljanak. Európa ma a deduktív spekuláció mellett való kitartást jelenti? A deduktivitás az élet gyakorlatát tekintve mire korlátozódik? Kant és Nietzsche az angolokról. No most az én szempontomból: fenntartható-e a behaviorista kaland (élet?) deduktív feldolgozásának szándéka.”

<sup>708</sup> *Potlatch [1954 – 1957]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996): 25. “La beauté nouvelle sera DE SITUATION, c'est-à-dire provisoire et vécue.”

film *Le Passage de Quelques Personnes à Travers une Assez Courte Unite de Temps*, Debord sees rationality as, itself, a social dream: “Our epoch accumulates powers and dreams of itself being rational.”<sup>709</sup> Life under the Spectacle is dreamlike and irrational despite its fiction of rationality. Small moments of liberation are dreamlike as well. “When freedom is practiced in a closed circle, it fades into a dream, becomes a mere representation of itself. The ambiance of play is by nature unstable. At any moment, ‘ordinary life’ can prevail once again.”<sup>710</sup> Desire drives the instability of dreams, and social desire for false rationality drives the false stability of society.

Lefebvre sees dreams as representative of “the transition from need to desire.” Needs are biological but desires are driven by qualitative individual extensions of needs. Desires in waking life take on dreamlike qualities just as dreams “re-enact the tremulous birth of desire.” Dreams and desires both make objects and lived experiences into symbols. For example a dream about a birthplace could represent nostalgia, an idyllic past without problems, or a desire to change what has already happened. Because desires relate to needs, these symbols also represent the unattained. Therefore, they each represent a type of failure.<sup>711</sup>

Breton does not provide a dichotomously clear answer as to whether dreams are conclusively nightmare worlds or spaces for liberation. He argues that dreams are liberating in “Manifesto of Surrealism,” but often portrays them as potentially deadly and lacking individual autonomy. In “Manifesto of Surrealism,” Breton sees the ephemeral nature of dreams as liberating and “fully satisfy[ing]”:

The mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him. The agonizing question of possibility of no longer pertinent. Kill, fly faster, love to your heart’s content. And if you should die, are you not certain of reawaking

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<sup>709</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films* (London: Rebel Press, 1992): 45.

<sup>710</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 29.

<sup>711</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 303.

among the dead? Let yourself be carried along, events will not tolerate your interference. You are nameless. The ease of everything is priceless.<sup>712</sup>

Jean Markale describes Breton's dreamlike epics differently, identifying nightmare qualities:

[In the Breton epic,] there is [...] what is called the Quest in the Other World, the search for the treasures hidden in that world, which cannot be very far away, since it is everywhere present — every twist in the road, in a valley dominated by a castle, in a forest clearing, or in a mound blasted betimes by storms whose lightning flashes transform the landscape. This is a permanent descent into hell, into humanity's deepest core, into the shadowiest lands of consciousness, imaginings and dreams. But we always return, for mind triumphs over matter.<sup>713</sup>

Breton reflects on nightmares when he “psychoanalyzes” the Marquis de Sade through a comparison to Francisco Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Nightmares* (1799). Asleep at his drafting desk, a man is tormented by vicious owls, ominous silhouettes of bats, and a wild cat. While the title might suggest that evil prevails without reason, Goya's caption points to a different interpretation: “Imagination abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders.”<sup>714</sup> [FIGURE 5.7] The nightmares of the unconscious lend themselves to the violent and sadistic — the sublime and uncanny — “wonders.” Sade's reality is the Bastille even in his dreams of escape. His entity becomes one with his oppression. Man Ray pictures Sade as an enormous bust crafted from a stone wall. Man Ray's Sade embodies the characteristics of the walls of the Bastille, gaining inhuman longevity, fully representing his environment. Annie Le Brun describes the portrait: “For eternity, the man of stone, a gaze of stone, a fate of stone.” The Bastille is distant from him, in this image, “where he is supposed to be locked up.”<sup>715</sup> Even the best dream as an “incarceration” that, through the pathetic fallacy, freezes the world in “universal silence,” a

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<sup>712</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969): 13.

<sup>713</sup> Vaneigem, *Cavalier History of Surrealism*: 114.

<sup>714</sup> André Breton, *L'Art Magique*, (Paris: Phébus, 1991): 206.

<sup>715</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Les Chateaux de la Subversion* (Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1982): 57.

“cadenced concert of suspended worlds.”<sup>716</sup> So, too, is modern society “in chains,” and the “Spectacle” is the resulting nightmare.<sup>717</sup> When observed by a waking person, dreamers are unresponsive and immobile, or, Debord says, “catatonic.”<sup>718</sup>

While Breton and many others see Sade’s writing as representative of a dream-state, Sade does not describe his own writing that way. Responding to his contemporary Christian denunciations of the world of the senses opposing the abstract world of spirituality, Sade sees writing about sex as a preoccupation with physicality and materiality rather than the illusory (translated as “chimeric”)<sup>719</sup> phantom<sup>720</sup> of God. He “sees no reason in your religions than the foulest mess of contradictions.”<sup>721</sup> Sex is “palpable” contrary to mysticism:

What do you experience after two or three hours of mysticism? A cold void, an abominable void, which, having provided nothing for your senses, necessarily leaves them in the same state as if you had been worshiping dreams and shadows.<sup>722</sup>

God is the product of “delirious imaginings” and “you must free yourself as rapidly as possible of the terrors inspired by this phantom.”<sup>723</sup> Instead of viewing Sade’s writing as a regression into delirium, it could be seen as catharsis to free himself from delirium. He seeks liberation from the monsters in his imagination; he seeks physicality rather than abstraction. *Society of the Spectacle* quotes Freud: “All that is conscious wears out. What is unconscious remains unalterable. But once freed, does it not fall to ruins in turn?”<sup>724</sup> Waking up from a dream, like the waking dream induced by the Spectacle, means experiencing life and fulfilling desire rather than merely representing it. Desire ceases to be the chaos of bats, owls, and wild cats in the mind. Sade

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<sup>716</sup> Le Conte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 74-75.

<sup>717</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 18.

<sup>718</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 153.

<sup>719</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Sade: A Sudden Abyss*, Trans. Camille Naish (San Francisco: City Lights, 1990): 31, 136.

<sup>720</sup> Le Brun, *Sade*: 135, 137.

<sup>721</sup> Le Brun, *Sade*: 135.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

<sup>724</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 36.

argues if he had not been imprisoned (or, rather, if he had been imprisoned with “girls,”) he would have simply fulfilled his desires, and likely would not have felt the need to write.<sup>725</sup> Breaking from the spectacular dream and, instead, living — this is the Situationist idea of revolution of everyday life.

Sade is depicted as more of a materialist than a delirious dreamer in Debord’s reading notes on Marcel Jean’s *Genèse de la Pensée Moderne*: Sade wanted to “overtur[n] the Christian notion of the irrational, alogical, and evil concrete.”<sup>726</sup> Opposing dogma did not mean opposing reality but rather not giving into normalized delusions. “One man, [Sade], did not allow himself to be convinced by age-old reasoning, and refused to sacrifice concrete reality to dogmatic conceptions.”<sup>727</sup> The reality that Sade *did* see, however, was a universe in motion, like Bachelard’s world, and it was capable of creation and reconstruction. He did not see this view as complicated or irrational at all, as Jean describes in Debord’s notes:

This man [Sade] saw, more clearly than any other, that the tumultuous and swirling reality was, deep down, absolutely not chaotic. This is Sade’s discovery, from which he undertook to reconstruct the world.<sup>728</sup>

Sade and Lautréamont, for Khayati, decided to “say everything,”<sup>729</sup> but saying anything does not mean the freedom to “do everything.” Words are “captive,” used to conceal, and never truly one’s own. Even when produced by revolutionaries, they are then taken “like prisoners of war” by “counterrevolutionaries.” Like Faust, the writer remains imprisoned in the world of books. Like Goya’s *Sleep of Reason*, the writer sleeps at their desk. Sade and Surrealists showed how the excesses of language could take power away from specialization, strict definitions, and

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<sup>725</sup> Le Brun, *Sade*: 20.

<sup>726</sup> Jean, *Genèse de la Pensée Moderne*: 32.

<sup>727</sup> Jean, *Genèse de la Pensée Moderne*: 31.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>729</sup> Mustapha Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology* trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006): 225.

semantical language. However, communication is intended to be between people, not between an author and their “work.” Confined to the Bastille, to a desk, to a dream, to the abstraction of authority, they remain asleep.

For Khayati, semantical writers have even less agency than those who “say everything.” Thus, Dadaists, Surrealists, and Sade did accomplish at least “saying everything,” at least for a moment, despite the insufficiency of language. The insufficiency of language is manipulated by power; “the dictionary is the guardian of present meaning.”<sup>730</sup> This sentence structure mirrors *Society of the Spectacle*: “The Spectacle is the guardian of [...] sleep,”<sup>731</sup> which is a *détournement* of Freud: “The dream is the guardian of sleep.”<sup>732</sup> *Captive Words* was written in the same year as *Society of the Spectacle*: 1966. Taking Freud’s meaning, that dreamlike illusions keep individuals asleep, and applying it to Khayati, the argument becomes that dictionaries structure the illusory world of the present. They not only restrict meaning but more importantly define and prioritize particular meanings. Thus a cultural *Weltanschauung* can be understood through the curated decisions of the dictionary. Language insofar as it connects to culture is regulated and a system of mirroring in and of itself. The dictionary creates a “world of meanings.”<sup>733</sup> Khayati proposes the creation of new meanings and new words as a type of *détournement* that could shift the world of present meanings to a new world determined by revolutionary language. Sade and Lautréamont “saying anything” do not really venture into this territory. They continue to use the words formed by their own cultural and historical context, propagating words in excess like a dream, and thus they mirror context. Herein lies the dreamlike quality of language: it is written and spoken as though it were natural. It not only is illusory, but

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<sup>730</sup> Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology*: 223.

<sup>731</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 18.

<sup>732</sup> Guy Debord, “Fiches de Lecture,” NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010): 253.

<sup>733</sup> Khayati, “Captive Words,” *Situationist International Anthology*: 222.

it is also part of a system that is exterior to the Self. Unless new meanings are willfully created, authors simply express the dream of their culturally defined world taking it as their own.

The Spectacle guards sleep but waking “sleep” meanwhile expressing “nothing more than its wish to sleep,”<sup>734</sup> says *Society of the Spectacle*. Maldoror is an insomniac who desperately wishes to sleep. Constantly, he reminds himself that he is not sleeping — his waking mind “wearies itself with bizarre meditations while [his] eyes stray at random through space.”<sup>735</sup> Insomnia is killing his body — he turns pale and feverish while his muscles give off the smell of graveyard trees (cypress). He prays for dreamless sleep, which he sees as only attainable through death. Dreamt nightmares and waking nightmares blend together. Differentiation between memories and dreams cease to be possible for him. He wanders late at night, finding grave diggers who tell him that he should be in bed where he would be safe. When Maldoror does dream, he screams in his sleep as though “condemned to death” but when he wakes, he “discovers that reality is thrice worse than a dream.”<sup>736</sup> Reality blends with dreams through Maldoror’s insomnia and failing memory. The dreams, however, have their basis in reality — even dreaming forces Maldoror into existence. Would death or nonexistence count as unreal or real? Death, Maldoror ultimately decides, is the most real reality:

Let that fatal day come when I shall fall asleep! On waking, my razor, working its way into this neck, will prove that as a matter of fact nothing was more real.<sup>737</sup>

Vaneigem describes, “Out of space, out of time, silhouettes overcome their circumstantial erasure on the level of the real. But is eternal nothing different from the idealized, falsified reflection of the real? Nothing escapes the real.” Reality is “three times worse than dreams” for

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<sup>734</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*: 18.

<sup>735</sup> Le Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 91.

<sup>736</sup> Le Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 50.

<sup>737</sup> Le Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 170.

Lautréamont.<sup>738</sup> He describes an “angelic” hermaphrodite asleep in the forest dreams of happiness, “that he is has flown off upon a purple cloud to another sphere peopled by beings of the same kind as himself.” Maldoror wishes for the hermaphrodite to “sleep...sleep forever.”<sup>739</sup>

Perhaps reality is worse than dreams because dreams are painless and forgettable. Bachelard’s descriptions of movement in *Maldoror* indicate liberation in speedy pacing and changeability, and part of that liberation extends from the forgettability of horror and fleeting pains that do not linger. However, says Bachelard, reality can seem like a dream given that perception and memory are limited. Imagination draws from an intangible “myth of memory” that it has the liberating ability to “smash” (*fracasser*) in order to move forward into the future.<sup>740</sup> (87) Faulty memory is depicted in juxtaposition to bad dreams in a clip from *Johnny Guitar*: Vienna (Joan Crawford) asks Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden), “What’s keeping you awake?”

- Dreams. Bad dreams.
- I get them, too. Take this. (*She hands him a tumbler of whiskey.*) It’ll help.
- How many men have you forgotten?
- As many women as you’ve remembered.

In the voiceover, Debord declares art a fading twilight of life, recalling a past memory that is now removed from reality. *Society of the Spectacle* shows a man and a woman sitting beside one another on a couch watching a small television by their hearth.<sup>741</sup> Debord alludes to the forgettability of moments watching television together. They likely will not remember the time spent or what was on television at a particular moment, while an uncountable number of days

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<sup>738</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Reading Notes, Box 1, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, GENMSS1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>739</sup> Le Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 75.

<sup>740</sup> Bachelard, *Lautréamont*: 87.

<sup>741</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

pass watching television in a similar manner. Time lulls into a dreamlike continuum, arrested by the dream of the television, and, just as dreams are typically not remembered in the morning, the couple will forget their time together watching television nearly as quickly as they started. In *Le Passage de Quelques Personnes à Travers une Assez Courte Unité de Temps*, Debord sees waking from a dream and returning to reality as an acknowledgement of unfulfilled needs. Dreams present “flashes of an unresolved past.”<sup>742</sup> “Confusion and doubt”<sup>743</sup> bubble to the surface and desires typically remain unresolved in the daylight. The past, the dream, and the needs are indecipherable and “incommunicable.”<sup>744</sup>

In *Critique of Separation*, a voice-over is heard over a montage showing a girl’s face shifting to an airplane, moving into the distance, then a panoramic view of the Quai d’Orléans.

What cannot be forgotten reappears in dreams. At the end of this type of dream, half asleep, the events are still for a brief moment taken as real. And the reactions they give rise to become clearer, more distinct, more reasonable; like so many mornings, the memory of what one drank the night before. Then comes the awareness that it’s all false, that ‘it was only a dream,’ that there are no new realities and no going back to it. Nothing you can hold on to. These dreams are flashes from the unresolved past. They unilaterally illuminate moments previously lived in confusion and doubt. They strikingly publicize those of our needs that have not been answered. Here is daylight, and here are perspectives that no longer mean anything. The sectors of a city are, at a certain level, decipherable. But the personal meaning they have had for us is incommunicable, like all that clandestinity of private life regarding which we possess nothing but pitiful documents.<sup>745</sup>

*On Collective Memory* by Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs connects dreams to faulty memory and the concept of memory. This text appears as a source for Situationists influences including sociologist Chombart de Lauwe,<sup>746</sup> Bachelard,<sup>747</sup> Gabel,<sup>748</sup> and Mannheim.<sup>749</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films* (London: Rebel Press, 1992): 47-48.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

<sup>745</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 48.

<sup>746</sup> Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, “Excerpts from *Paris and the Parisian Region*,” *The Situationists and the City* (London: Verso, 2009): 55. Chombart de Lauwe appears in *Internationale Situationniste* 1: 28; *Internationale Situationniste* 2: 19; and *Internationale Situationniste* 6: 33-34; and *Internationale Situationniste* 10: 34-59.

Halbwachs worked closely on a team of researchers with Henri Lefebvre at the University of Strasbourg.<sup>750</sup> Dreams, says Halbwachs, represent a form of isolation similar to a world without society making dreams difficult to remember.<sup>751</sup> In a dream state, socially constructed collective memory is relinquished. Dreams never fully recall memories; they are always blended with something “alien” and they develop their own timeline. The “alien” appears due to emotional reasoning which juxtaposes interior sensations with the outside world. Interior worlds of individuals blend with their exterior. The inability to relive memories creates a sense of detachment from the world outside of the dream and from the past. Still, there is a freeness because many of the limitations of waking life are shed. Halbwachs questions how much dreams relate to an autonomous Self given that dreamers lack autonomy within dreams. He suggests that dreams are connected to memory and both shape memory but concludes “the dream is only based upon itself.”<sup>752</sup> Memories operate similarly in the sense that memories are never fully remembered. They are preserved like “intact vertebra of fossil animals which would in themselves permit reconstruction of the entities of which they were a part.”<sup>753</sup>

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had.<sup>754</sup>

*Society of the Spectacle* and *In Girum* persistently attempt to connect to memories of friends and experiences which lead Debord to loneliness and a sense of alienation because memories are

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<sup>747</sup> Bachelard, *La Dialectique de la Durée* (Montreal: University of Montreal, 1950): 53.

<sup>748</sup> Gabel, *La Fausse Conscience*: 38.

<sup>749</sup> Mannheim, *Idéologie et Utopie*: 10.

<sup>750</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: xii.

<sup>751</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 39.

<sup>752</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*: 42.

<sup>753</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*: 41.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

reduced to “nothing but pitiful documents.”<sup>755</sup> *Howls of Sade* which does not show a single image, discusses longing and memory as often penetrating in its immediacy rather than consistent in its “continual” reproduction: a woman appears in his memory as “in a flash, as if burnished by fireworks on contact with water.”<sup>756</sup> Nevertheless, the preservation of memory does have a recurring continuity in the portraits of friends that Debord displays in *Society of the Spectacle* and *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*. Still-frames of photographs indicate a persistence of personal memory that has a parallel persistence to certain other images from spectacular culture, particularly of women.

Instead of directly using *Faust* in his films, Debord takes clips from a *Faust*-inspired film, *Les Visiteurs du Soir* in *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*. Jean Pucelle, a professor from the University of Strasbourg, directly discusses *Les Visiteurs du Soir* for its effect that he calls devil-like power: it stops time. This text appears in Khayati’s course notes. In a dance controlled by the devil-like character, dancers freeze in the air. Slow motion would create a different effect that would launch them into a “languid grace,” but freeze-frames create the cold implication of “death.” The rhythm, pacing, and immersion of the dream-like state halt. The actors and the film itself are shown to be ephemeral falsities easily controlled by a director like toys. “The freezing of time evokes a diabolical magic.”<sup>757</sup> In the context of the film, just like Baroque theater, cosmic beings (devils) truly have power, and reality, itself, is a malleable game, like a play.

Some dreams have different timing and rhythm than others. In *The Situationist Times 4*, a passage from Gaston Bachelard discusses dreams about labyrinths and “underground rivers.”

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<sup>755</sup> Guy Debord, “Critique de la Séparation,” *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*, (Paris: Champ libre, 1978): 45. “Le sens qu’ils ont eu pour nous, personnellement, est intransmissible, comme toute cette clandestinité de la vie privée, sur laquelle on ne possède jamais que des documents dérisoires.”

<sup>756</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 13.

<sup>757</sup> Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 12, GEN MSS 1480.

Winding paths with a sense of entrapment are, by their nature, slow. “There is no quick maze dream.”<sup>758</sup> The difference between a labyrinth and a stream is that a stream does not require physical effort. Labyrinths, in the process of walking and decision making, are anxiety inducing. *The Situationist Times* integrates Bachelard’s description of underground streams into cross between a portrait and an abstract painting filled with movement as though Bachelard’s face itself becomes the labyrinthine stream. The stream thus represents life: movement; internal mental windings; and a sense that matter is not stationary or stagnant [FIGURE 5.3]. He argues that both labyrinths and underground streams represent contradictions. The flow and timing make it hard to remember specifics.<sup>759</sup> Bachelard describes the artistic process as similar to a winding, entrapping labyrinth. He argues that Jorn, in particular, exemplifies “a continuous creation” where along with collaborator Pierre Wemaëre, a weaver, they “are born and continue to be born.” The two artists throw themselves into creating “a beautiful universe” where they weave and wind in attempts to escape tyranny.<sup>760</sup> It is an escape from the cyclical into *dépaysement*. Speedy rhythm in writing creates a sense of freedom and unpredictability. Slow evolutions create a sense of arduousness and entrapment. Labyrinths, in general, entrap. If Situationists compare life to a labyrinth, it seems that they in fact see life as somewhat challenging, arduous, and entrapping. Even within a world where individuals can make their own decisions, and where they are not repetitively redundant, running in circles, life is challenging. Vaneigem seems to find Lautréamont’s dreamlike pacing to be a liberating investigation of the Inner Self that is free from shame. However, for Vaneigem and other Situationists, the speed of an underground stream does not really match how they describe the path of life and the path to

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<sup>758</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “La Terre et les Rêveries du Repos,” *The Situationist Times* 4 (Paris: Jacqueline de Jong, 1963): 155.

<sup>759</sup> Bachelard, “La Terre et les Rêveries du Repos,” *The Situationist Times*: 156.

<sup>760</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “La Création Ouverte,” *Le Long Voyage*, (Paris: Aarhus Statsgymnasium, 2000): 7.

revolution. Perhaps they envision a revolution as “game-like” and “fun” but it is also like a “game of the world” that will inevitably end in death. Situationists often attempt to present possibilities for lightness and agility in their descriptions of the world but rather a Kafka-esque arduousness often presents itself. They were after all children of war.

Movement and speed are important for Bachelard’s understanding of “material” in dreams. By “material,” he means tangible entities that evade reification into stagnant images. By evading reification, dream materials easily adapt to movement and rhythm. He discusses the elemental: water; fire; earth. The imagination is “graffitied” with images, says Bachelard, and images tend to have stagnant qualities, but elements that evade images, like water and fire, adapt to themes of movement and the ephemeral which recur in dreams because ephemeral movement is characteristic of the subconscious. Dreams can be analyzed as a “material imagination” and a “core function of the unreal.”<sup>761</sup> Such analysis takes poetry out of stagnant images and art instead finding poetry in everyday life wherein “everyone dreams.”<sup>762</sup> Debord describes the central themes of water and fire for *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, which encapsulates Bachelard’s view of water and fire as moving, and as representative of a world in flux:

The entire film (also with the help of images as well as in the commentary) is built on the theme of water. Thus, we quote the poets who write on the collapse of everything (Li Po, Omar Khayyam, Heraclitus, Bossuet, Shelly?). They all spoke of water: it's time. There is, secondarily, the theme of fire; of brilliance of the moment: it is the revolution, Saint-Germain-des-Près, youth, love, negation in the night, the Devil, the battle and the ‘unfinished enterprises’ [...] (‘nocte consumimur igni.’) However, the water of time remains which carries away the fire and extinguishes it. Thus the bright young people of Saint-Germain-des-Près, [...] drowned in the rushing water of the century.<sup>763</sup>

Rushing water has a power that “drown[s]” and “extinguishes” with speed. Fire has brilliance and speed, but only for a moment, and it is not pervasive. Debord does not

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<sup>761</sup> Jean-Pierre Faye, “L’Apport de Gaston Bachelard,” *Arguments* 12-13 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959): 41-42.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>763</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

discuss the redundancy of power in this passage, but rather the “collapse of everything” as a collapse of life and revolution. Time is more powerful than momentary revolution and it is also more powerful than the Spectacle. Despite all efforts, everyone will die while time continues. Living for such a “rather brief” fleeting “moment” has an ephemeral quality that itself is like a dream.

## Chapter 5. The End of the World

Despite the aim to appear as an eternal and an extension of nature, the Spectacle and ideology can be historicized and therefore changed, argues Debord. “What the spectacle offers as eternal is based on change and must change with its base.”<sup>764</sup> *Society of the Spectacle* and Situationists explored how endings can create new beginnings. In an era characterized by fears of nuclear annihilation, many nihilistically came to perceive the future as an absence, while Situationists contrarily continued to invent new future possibilities. Endings as new beginnings are symbolized through the Tower of Babel and the ouroboros. New beginnings are not necessarily positive or optimistic. The alchemical ouroboros meets its demise through autophagy. The apocalypse etymologically connects to vision and revelation, and Situationists oppose the spectacular dominion of vision. Situationists then ask how not simply different futures but better futures can be constructed. Apocalypse and the Tower of Babel could be contextualized not only through their historical reference points, but also through the postwar context of the Situationists among the “ruins” of wars.<sup>765</sup> If society eats itself or falls, they question what will generate atop the ruins of the past. They see the construction of that world not as a fixed set of principles or a utopia, but rather as a game wherein multiple players present various motivations. Situationist motivations include liberation of desire and workers’ councilism.

### 5.1. Apocalypse

Guy Debord has trouble imagining the end of the Spectacle and predicts that *Society of the Spectacle* will be a relevant critique for as long as he can foresee. However, it is only when *Society of the Spectacle* becomes irrelevant, when the Spectacle ends, that his aspirations will

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<sup>764</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman ; Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*: 53. “Ce que le spectacle donne comme perpétuel est fondé sur le changement, et doit changer avec sa base.”

<sup>765</sup> Sergio Ghirardi, *Nous n'avons pas Peur des Ruines* (Paris: Insomniaque, 2004.)

finally succeed.<sup>766</sup> Envisioning the end of the Spectacle according to mythologies of the end of the world led to imperfect comparisons with historical ideas of apocalypse. The historical search for religious revelation was a search for knowledge, change, and something beyond what exists. The definition of “apocalypse” as beyond what exists was useful in the sense that the Situationists, while areligious, sought something beyond what existed in their society.

The terms “Revelations” and “apocalypse” etymologically have the same double meaning: they both relate to sight and enlightenment (e.g. “to reveal”) as well as endings and the end of the world (e.g. the book of the bible, “Revelations.”) “In Greek, *apocalypsos* means ‘revelation,’” as in enlightenment explains Raoul Vaneigem.<sup>767</sup> The term apocalypse “much later assumed the meaning ‘universal catastrophe.’”<sup>768</sup> Vaneigem’s *Revolution of Everyday Life (Traité de Savoir-Vivre)* (1967) aimed to capture the apocalyptic sense of revelation in *Poésies* by the Conte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse).<sup>769</sup> *Revolution of Everyday Life* was written with the explicit intent of complementing *Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>770</sup> Revelation, for Lautréamont, is truth through poetry, and poetry is an exorcism. Exorcisms are considered necessary when something otherworldly and typically evil possesses the interior of a writer, and it can only be remedied by its expulsion into the material world. Evil must be called forth to end its reign of the consciousness and begin a new life in reality. However, it is not simply a spirit that is released through poetry or fiction, but an entire world. “The *Poésies* are an opening to another world,”<sup>771</sup> says Vaneigem. Once released, inner truth can be seen and understood – revealed.

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<sup>766</sup> Guy Debord, “Preface to the Third French Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*,” Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Situationist International Online, <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/posts/preface.html>.

<sup>767</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International*, trans. Bill Brown (New York: Not Bored, 2015): 163.

<sup>768</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Resistance to Christianity* (New York: Not Bored, 1993): 29.

<sup>769</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International*, trans. Bill Brown (New York: Not Bored, 2015): 163.

<sup>770</sup> Vaneigem, *Rien n’est Fini, Tout Commence* (Paris: Allia, 2014): 145.

<sup>771</sup> Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures*: 42.

In Greek, *apocalypsos* means ‘revelation.’ In the notion of ‘apocalypse,’ we lose the sense of ‘revelation’ and keep that of ‘general catastrophe.’ Thus we can say that *Maldoror* assumes an apocalyptic aspect, while the revelation in Lautréamont’s world would be the *Poésies*. We see the same schema in Joachim de Flore: there will be three ages; we are in the third, the one of the destruction of the world and the new beginning, which is called ‘the Age of the Saints and Universal Salvation’ under the aegis of God.<sup>772</sup>

In an introduction to *Maldoror*, André Breton writes that Lautréamont basks “in the same light as the Apocalypse.”<sup>773</sup> Envisioning the Apocalypse as a light rather than a darkness associates it with sight and revelation rather than simply a dark ending. Breton elaborates that *Maldoror* is “the expression of a revelation so complete it seems to exceed human potential.”<sup>774</sup> Attributed to characteristics of a monster-like vampire, he says that his parents were sharks. He has existed long enough to “witness the revolutions of our globe”<sup>775</sup> through which he has seen “several generations of humans.”<sup>776</sup> Perhaps he is a prophet, simply observing the universe and God then channeling it like gospel writer given the word of God then exorcizes it onto paper. Like a prophet, Maldoror has seen the Almighty, which has provided the “brilliant revelation of eternal axioms and hieroglyphics pre-existent to the universe, and which will outlast it.”<sup>777</sup> Living a horrible half-awake nightmare of an insomniac, Maldoror propels himself into violence and destruction. His living existence becomes like a lucid dream without inhibitions or sense. The birth of Maldoror, his beginning or creation, was a result of something like an ending or an apocalypse; a “horrible, universal night”<sup>778</sup> wherein the Almighty seems to show a similar sadistic propensity through the act of creation. Thus, Maldoror curses his Creator. Alexis Lykiard explains how Lautréamont’s *Maldoror* intended to reflect on the nature of evil in a way that

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<sup>772</sup> Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures*: 65.

<sup>773</sup> Claude-Pierre Perez, “Dans la Lumière Même de l’Apocalypse,” *Littérature* 117 (Armand Colin, 2000).

<sup>774</sup> Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, trans. Guy Wernham (New York: New Directions, 1965).

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>777</sup> Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 84.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*

would contrast with a supplementary book on the nature of goodness and God that Lautréamont was not able to write before he died. Associations with “visions of the Apocalypse”<sup>779</sup> depict Maldoror as a sort of Antichrist whose birth marks the end. Lautréamont describes the end of the world:

The end of time will see — still erect on the ruins of the ages — your cabalistic numbers, laconic equations, and sculptural lines enthroned on the avenging right hand of the Almighty, while the stars plunge desperately like waterspouts into the eternity of a horrible, universal night, and humanity, grimacing, dreams of settling accounts with the last judgement.<sup>780</sup>

Unlike Maldoror’s apocalyptic frenzy, which is a product of his creation or birth, Vaneigem interprets the apocalypse as a dark end wherein the world freezes because creation and transformation stop. In fact, *Revolution of Everyday Life* admonishes revelation arguing that once poetry in-itself is characterized as revelation, particularly as connected to hard truths, eternal god, and occultist ideas, it becomes static. Artistic representations of worlds while “beautiful” are each the end of worlds because they are frozen and dead.

Aesthetics is a carnival paralyzed, as cut off from life as a Jibaro head, the carnival of death. The aesthetic element, the element of prose, corresponds to the element of death secreted by everyday life. Every apocalypse is beautiful but this beauty is a dead one.<sup>781</sup>

Spectacle alienates spectators from reality depriving them of life and compelling them as a result to dream of death as better than the situation of non-life which they non-live. The world feels empty in its deadness, leading to a destructive nihilism that wants to deprive the world of itself.

In the twentieth century, death terrifies humans less than the absence of real life. (...) This is what leads to a dangerous charm to dreams of apocalypses, gigantic destructions, complete annihilations, cruel, clean, and total deaths. Auschwitz and Hiroshima are indeed the ‘comfort of nihilism.’<sup>782</sup>

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<sup>779</sup> Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 13.

<sup>780</sup> Lautréamont, *Maldoror*: 85.

<sup>781</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

Vaneigem locates nihilism as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century response to mass killings. *Maldoror* displays tendencies toward violence without rationale and, Lautréamont argues, he is a personification of “evil,” suggesting something potentially genocidal about the character, though perhaps not about the text itself.

Vaneigem notes a significant difference between religious notions of Revelation and how vision manifests in the contemporary Spectacle. God “decomposed” into “the stage of the Spectacle” where he was “shattered by the forces of social atomization.”<sup>783</sup> At one point Revelation meant a moment of inspiration wherein individuals connected to an unknown. This often appeared in travel in the form of religious pilgrimages. There was some degree of benefit to this idea because it was adventurous but in the stage of the Spectacle, people replace “the revelation of the immutable” with new visions of “the shifting economic world, the insatiable hunger for profit, and the necessity for constant innovation.”<sup>784</sup> While pilgrimages once were mystical encounters with the unknown or quests for understanding, global expansion is now a conquest rather than a quest, and it is economically rather than spiritually motivated. Revelations in pilgrimages were contrarily “within each individual”:

The seeker would travel the world seeking it in himself, seeking it in far lands, until it would suddenly surge forth, a magical spring released by the purity of a gesture at the same place where the ill-favored seeker would have found nothing.<sup>785</sup>

A pilgrimage is a journey wherein individuals attempt to go beyond their own subjectivity and context to find something in the physical and spiritual world that can move them beyond themselves thereby expanding their spirits. This is ultimately accomplished *through* themselves; through their own inner magic.

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<sup>783</sup> Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

The Situationist International can be contextualized in an era driven by the fear of nuclear annihilation. Regarding the physical end of the planet, like revolution, they doubted that it would occur in one fell swoop. Rather the material world was already physically experiencing its end times. In *A Sick Planet*, Debord draws a divide between “Planet” and “World.” The world has been created by alienated labor and the planet is made sick by this manufactured world. Degradation of the conditions of survival by pollution and even nuclear energy are outcomes of a longstanding process: capitalism. Society has “recreated the world — everywhere and in concrete form — as the environment and backdrop of its sickness: it has created a sick planet.”<sup>786</sup> The creation of the human world results in the creation of death like the birth of the Antichrist. The ocean, Debord says, does not care about pollution. However, humanity is threatened by the monster of production that they themselves have created. Ultimately nature will again “establish domination over itself”<sup>787</sup> because the human time to save themselves “has run out.”<sup>788</sup> The manufactured deadly world of industry was not halted or slowed by Marxism or Marx’s contemporary allies, but rather perpetuated and encouraged by them. Fatal flaws were made in the logic of the nineteenth century:

Nineteenth-century scientific optimism founded over three main issues. The first was the claim that revolution was certain and that it would ensure the happy resolution of existing conflicts; this was the left-Hegelian and Marxist illusion. [...] The second issue was the view of the universe, or even simply of matter, as harmonious.<sup>789</sup>

Not only is the Hegelian-Marxist belief in the possibility of a harmonious future incorrect according to Debord, but its focus on the future rather than the present, along with similar thinking from other 19<sup>th</sup> Century materialists, has been detrimental to how humanity treated

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<sup>786</sup> Debord, *A Sick Planet*: 81-82.

<sup>787</sup> Debord, *A Sick Planet*: 81-82.

<sup>788</sup> Debord, *A Sick Planet*: 84.

<sup>789</sup> Debord, *A Sick Planet*: 91.

nature and other people. Rationalism defined the *Weltanschauungen* of the nineteenth century, which resulted in cruel ordering through systematized labor according to Lefebvre,<sup>790</sup> who clarifies that reason and rationalism are not the same: rationalism is an ideology. Rationalism defined exploitative factories and the scientism of the past, which alienated people, made everyday life miserable, and killed the planet.<sup>791</sup>

## 5.2. The Atomic Bomb

According to Annie Le Brun, fears of nuclear annihilation shifted the sense of space and the human relationship with the world:

From the moment when the possibility of annihilation became real, first with Hiroshima and the nuclear disasters that followed it, imagination was suddenly deprived of the unsettling feeling of [...] distorted perspective, just as reflection was then prevented from venturing into the vertigo of an unlimited negation.<sup>792</sup>

The unfathomably small, the atom, threatened the human sense of totality, the entire world. The atom, whose name was derived from a branch of philosophy that conceived of the smallest possible essence of materiality, could, because of deadly human creation, destroy everything. In art and philosophy, a revival of historical philosophies of the microcosmic, macrocosmic and atomism exploded in the 1950s.<sup>793</sup>

While atomism has more than one origin, in the example of Ancient Greece, it related to idealism and Plato. A uniform, indivisible, and imperceptibly small essence of being appears in Plato's *Timaeus*. Aristotelian materialism questioned this Platonic entity that paralleled what Leucippus and Democritus called *atomos*. Each Greek philosopher aimed to theorize *minima naturalia* as a means of understanding the nature of being particularly insofar as it relates to materiality versus abstraction. The atomic bomb, when related to the historical philosophy of

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<sup>790</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir* (Paris: Bureau d'Éditions, 1938.)

<sup>791</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 262.

<sup>792</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Heart of the Void*.

<sup>793</sup> "Cosm" in "microcosm" and "macrocosm" means "cosmos," or, etymologically, "world."

atomism, proved, for Attila Kotányi, that abstraction and idealism, which felt detached from reality, had astronomical real-world (material) applications.<sup>794</sup> These applications were not merely for the advancement of science or philosophy, but rather horrifying “astropolitics” that brought the cosmic powers of heaven to earth. Scientists and politicians became fickle punishing Gods. The cosmic potential of the heavens could be harnessed by science created real atrocities as though stars could detonate into black holes right on the earth’s surface. The grandiosity and the associations with the heavens made such possibilities read like darkly poetical abstractions the basis of these possibilities in “abstract” mathematics and “theoretical” physics which were thought to have no real-world application before the development of the atomic bomb.<sup>795</sup> “The most abstract theory leads to the most practical applications” leading to the “total capitulation” of Japan.<sup>796</sup> Abstract theory — dialectics, idealism — were thus rendered materially dangerous. Repercussions not only fell on the structure of society but on the future of the planet. “The philosophical dialectic is at the service of no one, no one,” writes Kotányi. Likely referencing the association between Shiva and the atomic bomb displayed at CERN, “Shiva — the incarnated scourge of the heavens — will take care of the retribution.”<sup>797</sup> At CERN, Shiva holds a position in a Natraj dance, or the dance of the end of the world. He is encircled by a circle of flames that represents the world of illusion. He holds a drum that represents the rhythm of his dance that brings both the creation and the end of the world. [FIGURE 5.8] Lefebvre considers the “simple-minded Hegelianism”<sup>798</sup> of tearing apart arguments for the sake of contrarianism to result in emptiness. The tool of dialectical contradiction, along with the realization that life and the world

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<sup>794</sup> Attila Kotányi, *L'Architecture du Silence* (Paris: Exils Éditeur, 2022): 254.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

<sup>796</sup> Kotányi, *L'Architecture du Silence*: 203.

<sup>797</sup> Kotányi, *L'Architecture du Silence*: 84.

<sup>798</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, (New York: Verso, 2014): 133.

or at least certain worlds will end, do not in themselves provide sufficient reason for discounting the significance of a given argument, or the significance of life and the world.

Bachelard considers atomism when he argues that materialism is in fact based on a core abstraction: that matter can be localized in a precise space. Solids lack fluidity and movement; they are stagnant and can be measured precisely as such. This “substantialism” was based in “a materialist ontology from ancient atomists.”<sup>799</sup> A world in flux is in fact a worldview which sees everything, down to the atom, in movement; a world wherein time dominated material, transforming it, dissolving it through entropy, and recreating it. This scientific concept of a world in flux, for Surrealists and for Raoul Vaneigem, rang of alchemical history, a history that birthed modern chemistry (thus the etymology of chemistry from *al-khīmya*, from Arabic); a history that saw materials in the world as elements that reformed and shifted, where matter was rendered immaterial through its recreation. A world where movement reigns — not material or idealist abstraction — is a world where space and time have a necessary dependency. In a new world of “space-time,” Bachelard responds to Albert Einstein’s theories: “What poet will give us metaphors for this new language? How will we begin to imagine the association of the temporal and the spatial?”<sup>800</sup>

Jean-Louis Brau connects mysticism to the history of atomism in *Les Initiés d’Occident* wherein he considers how Emanuel Swedenborg explored models of the universe that would inform the theories of Pierre Laplace.<sup>801</sup> In *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, Laplace

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<sup>799</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique* (Quebec: Université de Québec, 1934): 52. cf. Brunchvicg: “Le substantialisme chimique, orienté vers l’ontologie matérialiste de l’atomisme antique, dit-il, semble appeler un substantialisme physique qui, derrière la diversité des apparences qualitatives, pose, comme faisaient jadis les Stoïciens, l’unité d’une réalité causatrice.”

<sup>800</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique*: 61.

<sup>801</sup> Brau, *Les Initiés d’Occident*: 93.

describes the atom as a microcosm of the universe and thus the key to developing a theory of everything as well as evidence that everything in the world can be explained:

We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be the present to it.<sup>802</sup>

For Georges Gusdorf, new confusions introduced in nuclear physics undermined positivism. Previous scientific claims that everything could be explained by Laplace came into question, and Einstein proved to Gusdorf that the world had not lost its mystery.<sup>803</sup> For Isidore Isou and Marcel Mariën, atomic weapons brought aspects of Marxist theory into question. The tangible scientific process of Marx's materialism became less verifiable for Isou in the face of theories like relativity or the sense of immateriality of the atom. Isou argued:

I was a Marxist too but given the rules and conventions of everyday life (Einsteinian, atomic energy, etc.) [...] we indifferently accept the lack of possible verification.<sup>804</sup>

Contrarily, for Mariën, because the atomic bomb made immediate worldwide revolution necessary for the survival of the planet, Marxist "dogma" had become an obstacle in the way of a necessary revolution that should not follow any specific "ism," and should be adaptable and distant from the sense of purity in some Marxist circles. The atomic bomb, created necessity for those who already had power to "socialize the means of production and liquidate national borders."<sup>805</sup>

Debord began his journey as a filmmaker by responding to atomic concerns in his 1952 film *Howls for Sade* wherein he presented nuclear anxieties without providing possible resolutions

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<sup>802</sup> Pierre Laplace, *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities* (New York: J. Wiley, 1902): 4.

<sup>803</sup> Georges Gusdorf, *Mythe et Métaphysique* (Chicoutimi: Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales, 2013): 210.

<sup>804</sup> Isidore Isou, *Traité d'Économie Nucléaire* (Paris: Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, 1949): 341.

<sup>805</sup> Marcel Mariën, "Théorie de la Révolution Mondiale Immédiate," *Les Lèvres Nues* 10: 5.

other than suggesting that silencing film, including his own film, could allow spectators to “move to a conversation.”<sup>806</sup> *Howls for Sade* was produced as part of Isou’s Letterist program under the category of “Nuclear Cinema.” The film had no images: only black and white screens. Several voices emerged while the screen was lit, intoning an accumulation of poetic stories, quotations, and legalese. The brilliant white light and darkness were reminiscent of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, associating atomic light with sudden death. Scattered love stories give the impression of fleeting memories of the dead or memories that flash before the eyes of the dying. However, it was not merely literal, but a metaphorical death of cinema; an attack on art and image production.<sup>807</sup> Debord alludes to temporality of artistic worlds in the voiceover: “Poetic worlds close in on themselves and are forgotten.”<sup>808</sup> The voiceover references specifics of daily life postwar – police are equipped with clubs, and antisemitic attacks – before this spoken collage zooms outward to “the cold of interstellar space, thousands of degrees below freezing (...): the incipient imitations of proximate dawn.”<sup>809</sup> Poetic worlds are forgotten, but the planet is not. Perhaps *Howls for Sade* is an elegy for the planet as well as for forgotten poetic worlds,

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<sup>806</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*.

<sup>807</sup> Debord to Wolman, September 1953, *Correspondence* 0. “Tous comptes faits et malgré les réserves que je peux faire sur l’intérêt de tout ce que j’ai connu, je suis satisfait d’avoir été dans l’affaire Chaplin (quoique refoulé dans les ténèbres extérieures) ou d’avoir fait ‘Hurllements.’ À ce propos je sais tout ce que je te dois. Je n’aime vraiment pas beaucoup les arts — même comme sensations ‘esthétiques’ maintenant — mais je crois que ces domaines d’intelligence sont ceux où quelques types subversifs et isolés ont des pouvoirs, et tirent plus de conséquences que, par exemple dans le crime ou la politique — ceci en dépit de l’opinion commune. Isou a certainement eu sa place dans cette aventure, car il y a introduit des vues de rupture, et nous a donné des armes. (Nous faisons l’Histoire, donc l’Histoire n’est que ça...) Cependant je trouve fausse dès l’origine sa notion d’‘artiste’ (*Œuvres, Éternité, etc.*) cf. La poésie n’a représenté pour moi qu’un des multiples MOYENS D’ÊTRE IMMORTEL... Une durée au-delà de l’être. Dans Ur. [...] l’on peut rire de ces phrases comme des religieux, et de leur Dieu. C’est aussi ‘beau’ si l’on veut, et dérisoire. J’en finis donc avec les prêtres d’Isou. Leur ton à la Bossuet ‘m’a toujours beaucoup [?]’ parce qu’il nie le monde donné, et le méprise. Mais c’est au [?] d’une transcendance presque aussi minable que Bossuet. Notre voie est à définir. En ce moment nous ne savons pas bien où nous allons. C’est ce qui permettra des cas troubles par essence » (Serge) des croyances esthétiques périmées (Brau) ou le nihilisme intégral qui est lamentable (En fonction de leur temp des hommes qui me plaisent également s’appellent St. Just ou Arthur Cravan. Mais nous sommes dans une époque de sous-Cravan. Il faut être profondément autres.) Mais tant que nous n’amour pas une ligne nettement définie (Isou en a une) nous savons dans ce flou, qui est pénible. Mais il faut y rester plutôt que de soudainement une ligne restrictive (genre Art — Brau) qui éliminerait l’avenir.”

<sup>808</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films* (London: Rebel Press, 1992): 19.

<sup>809</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle and Other Films*: 15.

speaking as though it is already missed; it has already died. The voice-over references the neighborhoods of the Saint-Germain-des-Près, giving Debord's atomic whiteout a sense of nostalgia. The white screen is like the flash of a world of the past or a world of the mind that could evaporate in an atomic instant.

Nuclear Cinema, argued Isou, was explosive; it blew the "fat pig" of cinema to pieces:

I believe the cinema is too rich, it is obese. It has reached its limit, its maximum. The instant it attempts to broaden itself, it will burst. Congestion will rupture this fat pig into a thousand pieces. I herald its destruction. The first apocalyptic sign of disjunction of this bloated organism known as film.<sup>810</sup>

Isou's manifesto-like voice-over in *Treatise on Venom and Eternity* (1952) was delivered predominately through shouting. A precursor to *Howls for Sade*, *Treatise on Venom and Eternity* began as a film for the first two reels, but, because the third reel was unfinished, it was only a voiceover, and so the final third was delivered in darkness.<sup>811</sup> Unlike Isou's voiceover, the monotone voice-over in *Howls for Sade* does not howl, implying, based on the title, that silences carry fearsome primal horror that would otherwise be exhibited in a howl. In the early 1950s, Debord writes that he finds silence "terrifying."<sup>812</sup> The silence of death in *Howls for Sade* is described as a "steak tartare" on a "scalding beach:" "Death would be a steak tartare and wet hair on such a hot beach of our silence."<sup>813</sup> Wet hair recalls collections of hair from concentration camps and the remains of Hiroshima and Nagasaki cataloged and displayed in Holocaust museums and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

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<sup>810</sup> Isidore Isou, *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (Paris: Re:Voir, 2008).

<sup>811</sup> Isidore Isou, "Documents on the Film," *Treatise on Venom and Eternity*, trans. Ian Thompson, Anna O'Meara and Nadège Lejeune (Ann Arbor: Annex Press, 2019).

<sup>812</sup> Guy Debord, *Le Marquis de Sade a des Yeux de Fille*, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004), 63. "Ce silence terrifiant."

<sup>813</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*. Translation by the author. "La mort serait un steak tartare, et les cheveux mouillés sur la plage trop chaude qui est notre silence."

Jorn hypothesized that, without *Howls for Sade*, Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon Amour* may never have been created.<sup>814</sup> *Hiroshima mon Amour* fixates on the horror of displaying the hair of the dead in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and questions whether love is possible in the uncertain anxious malaise of the international trauma following World War II.<sup>815</sup> [FIGURE 6.1] Letterist Patrick Straram proclaimed great affection for Resnais' cinema, particularly *Hiroshima mon Amour*; which came into conflict with Debord's challenge to Surrealism and modern art. Resnais dissolved typical narrative structure, warped time, and imposed collages on the film that Debord and Straram agreed represented the "fundamental" "dissolution of modern art."<sup>816</sup> Cinema became more *like* art, observing unmoving objects and allowing for portrait-like silences wherein characters exchange emotive rather than conversational connections between one another. Straram called this a *dépassement* with "emotive" and "primordial" aspects.<sup>817</sup> Debord contrarily saw it as a collapsing of art, in the way that everyday life could also "invade the domain of art" through "Surrealist poetry." Debord, unlike Straram, did not see Resnais' film as a *dépassement* because it was film, it was art, and considering it a *dépassement* would confuse and nullify Situationist positions on art.<sup>818</sup>

In the late 1960s, Situationist political opposition to nuclear war became more overtly political and less aesthetically influenced by the atomic bomb, when the group corresponded with a Japanese student union, Zengakuren. Zengakuren conducted decades of protests from

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<sup>814</sup> Asger Jorn, "Le Probleme de Maudit," *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

<sup>815</sup> Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon Amour*, (France/Japan: Zenith International Films, 1959).

<sup>816</sup> Debord to Straram, *D'Une Révolution à l'Autre*: 132. "Dans H[iroshima,] je reconnais, pas seulement, mais fondamentalement, et mouve[ment] de dissolution de l'art moderne."

<sup>817</sup> *D'Une Révolution à l'Autre*: 70.

<sup>818</sup> Debord to Straram, *D'Une Révolution à l'Autre*: 141. "Si Resnais a déjà réalisé le dépassement de l'expression, etc.; alors comment pourrait-on évoquer nos propres positions et recherches?" "On renforce ainsi l'inflation et la confusion totale du vocabulaire critique de l'art moderne. Si au niveau d'un Truffaut on est au moins un classique; si Resnais a déjà réalisé le dépassement de l'expression, etc; alors, comment pourrait-on évoquer nos propres positions et recherches? Comme nullité absolue; ou au contraire comme triomphe assuré, encore plus grandiose. Deux jugements qui seraient faux."

1945 into the 1970s, beginning with protests against the atomic bomb, then protesting the US occupation of Japan. Situationists and students from Strasbourg wrote *On the Poverty of Student Life* in 1967 where they called Zengakuren “the most important group in the world.”<sup>819</sup> Debord suggested that the SI display photos of protests by Zengakuren in high-end Parisian galleries, promoted by cocktail hour events.<sup>820</sup> Zengakuren’s protests defined what Debord believed to be the sole value and role of art and cinema: to create situations that would confront oppressive global power dynamics.

Jean-Louis Brau described the reason for 1968 protests in Europe and the United States as a response to nuclear armament. This response was not motivated by fears of nuclear annihilation, but rather a response to how those fears were manipulated to solidify the control of exploitative imperialist, capitalist, fascist, and generally authoritarian entities:

In Europe, it was the virulent opposition to the warmongering nature of imperialism, particularly atomic armament at the beginning of the anti-imperialist struggle. The American-Vietnam conflict that provoked, for youth everywhere, a serious crisis of conscious: how the most powerful state in the world can become oppressive like the worst fascism.<sup>821</sup>

The nuclear threat was present not only in armament but also in the proliferation of nuclear power. While the atom itself is unfathomably small, physical repercussions on the environment and the sheer space taken by nuclear power are potentially expansive. Lefebvre wrote:

The environmental disadvantages of nuclear energy have been stressed time and again; its political implications have been less forcefully emphasized: that is, the control — indeed the repressive partition — of space.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>819</sup> *On the Poverty of Student Life* ed. Mehdi El Hajoui and Anna O’Meara (New York: Common Notions, 2022): 15.

<sup>820</sup> *On the Poverty of Student Life*: 21.

<sup>821</sup> Jean-Louis Brau, *Cours, Camarade, le Vieux Monde est Derrière Toi* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1968): 37. “En Europe, c’est par une opposition virulente au caractère belliciste de l’impérialisme, en particulier à l’armement atomique que débute la lutte anti-impérialiste. Éclate alors le conflit américano-vietnamien qui provoque, dans la jeunesse surtout, une grave crise de conscience: ainsi l’État le plus puissant du monde pouvait devenir oppressif comme le pire des fascismes.”

<sup>822</sup> Lefebvre, *State/Space/World*: 130.

Debord argued that nuclear destruction did not end with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It already made its mark on the physical planet, and, through nuclear power developed for peacetime would continue to propel the planet toward inevitable destruction.

Admirably accurate measurements and projections are continually being made concerning the rapid increase in the chemical pollution of the breathable atmosphere, as of rivers, streams and, already, oceans; the irreversible accumulation of radioactive waste attending the development of nuclear power for so-called peaceful purposes; the effects of noise; the pervasion of space by plastic junk that threatens to turn it into an everlasting refuse dump.<sup>823</sup>

*The Real Split in the Situationist International* of 1974 proclaimed the official dissolution of the group (although it had essentially dissolved in 1972). In this text, Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti ended the group with a view of the future direction of the world, which was moving toward a destruction of the planet through pollution, radioactivity, the deterioration of water, etc. The modern world was a “portrait of general degradation” where “territory” was “constructed” around “scientific solutions” that in fact were catastrophic, rendering a “woeful summary of the map of the territory of alienation.”<sup>824</sup>

While the Situationist program against nuclear war reflected widespread fears, contemporaries reveled in the power and scientific knowledge associated with the atomic bomb. Situationists actively contested such currents, particularly in the case of the journal, *Planète*. The editors of *Planète*, Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, found awe in the possibility for Nietzschean Supermen to emerge in their contemporary world as a result of advancements in science that extend from occultism and alchemy. Hitler would be small and weak compared to nuclear physicists, the coming alchemists capable of controlling the world or destroying it through nuclear weapons. Pauwels and Bergier predicted a new age of mutants who would

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<sup>823</sup> Debord, *A Sick Planet*: 80.

<sup>824</sup> *The Real Split in the International* trans. John McHale (London: Pluto Press, 2003): 22.

evolve through the nuclear apocalypse.<sup>825</sup> This new age was not horrific, but rather “advancement,” an “enriched” period, particularly because of its surrealistic strangeness. *Planète* proposed that Oppenheimer specifically discovered a strangeness that would enrich the world:

‘In the field of science,’ said Oppenheimer, ‘we learn how vastly strange the world is. It is our conviction that history will be enriched by this strangeness.’<sup>826</sup>

Jorn and Debord planned a journal in response to *Planète* titled *Mutant* where they argued contrary points to Pauwels and Bergier’s optimistic post-apocalyptic vision. For Jorn and Debord, fall-out shelters were an excuse to control people by entrapping them underground, afraid for their survival, while the shelter would not even succeed in protecting the public. There would be no Pauwelian “Renaissance” through mutation.<sup>827</sup> In *Internationale Situationniste* 8, Situationists argued that *Planète* “play[ed] on the truism that science and technology are advancing faster and faster without anyone knowing where they are going [...] The drugs of ideology will end their history in an apotheosis of vulgarity that even Pauwels, for all his efforts, cannot yet imagine.”<sup>828</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 7 saw Pauwels as the biproduct of Surrealist occultism. While Surrealism made some strides in revolutionary theory, once Surrealists attempted rationalism, they were faced with the political ramifications of occultism: totalitarian thinking.<sup>829</sup>

In *Internationale Situationniste* 5, Jorn argues that the possible end of the world drove people like Pauwels to traditional religious visions of heaven or post-apocalyptic dreams of the

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<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid.

<sup>828</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 8 (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997): 303.

<sup>829</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 7, trans. Ken Knabb. “The journalists who praised Jean-Louis Bédouin’s *Twenty Years of Surrealism* either didn’t read it, or were unaware that surrealism effectively continued to exist for the twenty years following Maurice Nadeau’s work. [...] It’s a shame the surrealists didn’t stick to automatic writing, foreseeing that such and such a department store would burn down, or finding out what lay ahead for them in 1939. By choosing to attempt rational discourse instead, they made a wildly inaccurate prediction about a few people joining the NKVD (which even at stage was, of course, no longer), and are now completely incapable of seeing the future, let alone the present, of this year’s models: Hantai and Pauwels.”

chosen few. However, Jorn admitted to being from innocent of this tendency, himself. Debord urged Jorn to veer from thinking like *Planète*: “[Debord] then told me that it was necessary to leave such methods to people like Pauwels or Bergier, and the mystical old maids (*vieilles filles mystiques*) enraptured by little occult insights.”<sup>830</sup> After leaving the Situationist International, Jorn and Jacqueline de Jong engaged with occultism as part of their artistic practice which emerged in post-Situationist editions of *The Situationist Times*.

*Internationale Situationniste* 10 criticizes Pauwels and *Planète* for their influence from a Catholic priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who reconsidered topics in Catholicism for the atomic age.<sup>831</sup> In “Cosmic Life,” Teilhard proposed a framework for a spiritual cosmos that addresses scientific and political concerns of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, especially the atomic bomb. “Communion with Earth”<sup>832</sup> and “communion with God through Earth”<sup>833</sup> reconsidered contemporary Catholic neo-Platonisms by embracing both idealism and worldliness. Teilhard’s ideas influenced some psychoanalytic thinkers not only toward abstraction and symbolism, but also inclinations toward the spiritualization of those symbols which were often corroborated by spiritually inclined psychoanalysts like Carl Jung, who universalized symbols to the point of archetypes, emphasizing their recurrence as essential and eternal. Jung did read Teilhard’s work, especially toward the end of this life.<sup>834</sup> Teilhard’s work was also embraced in Theosophical circles.

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<sup>830</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 5: 183-184.

<sup>831</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, “Reading Notes,” Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>832</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Cosmic Life,” *Writings in a Time of War*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harper & Row, 1968): 28.

<sup>833</sup> Chardin, “Cosmic Life,” *Writings in a Time of War*: 57.

<sup>834</sup> Wehr Gerhard, *Jung* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987): 392.

Regarding *Planète*, Attila Kotányi disclosed to Vaneigem that they needed to be addressed because they were “encroaching on similar territory as Situationists.”<sup>835</sup> Teilhard, who was a primary influence on *Planète*, could be seen similarly. Like Eckhart, Teilhard’s “first principle in his spirituality” was “to love the world.”<sup>836</sup> Louis Savary explains:

Traditionally, spiritual writers saw a conflict between loving and serving God and loving and serving the world. We were told to love God and hate the world. So was Teilhard. But when he looked at this conflict more deeply, he began to realize there only appeared to be a conflict. Rather, the two apparently contrary loves were more like two sides of the same love. He experienced an integration of the two loves – God and the world – in his heart.<sup>837</sup>

The origin story of sin that creates the Earth, which could be placed in Eden or the Tower of Babel but either way in Genesis, should not be seen as the sin of a single human. Furthermore, the story should be rethought in a way that could allow for love of the world rather than a perspective that the world was created through sin and human transgression. Teilhard’s assertion was deemed heretical. For Teilhard, the world is “evolving”; it moves as it develops toward progress. This progress relates to science. Teilhard’s concerns converse with Situationist concepts of World. However, if the Spectacle is a World and if God is the ephemeral *Weltanschauung* of moral judgment, Situationists found themselves “against the entire world” as near-Luciferian negations of God, or, as Debord calls himself, “a Prince of Darkness” in “the Devil’s Party.”<sup>838</sup> Albeit these negations, there is a world that the *Revolution of Everyday Life* aims to revive and love. However, it is at the expense of the entire concept of God and at the expense of concepts like “evolution” and positivism.

In the 1960s, Situationists corresponded with an anti-Teilhardian Belgian anarchist group, particularly with Robert Dehoux and Claire Schock, co-authors of *Teilhard est un Con (Teilhard*

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<sup>835</sup> Vaneigem, *Rien n’est Fini*: 106.

<sup>836</sup> Louis Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained* (Paulist, 2007):

<sup>837</sup> Ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*.

*is an Idiot.*) Debord collaborated on a short text with Dehoux and Schock titled “Alternative” for a short journal published in response to strikes in Belgium. Dehoux was an engineer in the Miner’s Union who had, according to Vaneigem, been forced out of the Congo due to his anti-imperialist views. He and Schock worked together at l’Estro Armonico, a bar in Belgium where Debord, Vaneigem, and Bernstein frequented.<sup>839</sup> *Teilhard est un Con* critiques Teilhard’s concepts of “noology,” “reflection,” and “peace,” peace that they critique as placating conquest that benefit a select few. The text begins with an assertion similar to Orwell’s “War is Peace”: peace is a Spectacle that stagnates life and creates predictability under the control of an Omnipotence defined by a submission to a sense of the “supernatural.” Life becomes an “antechamber and a prerequisite for eternal life” defined by “sacrifice.” This Omnipotent Spectacle of Peace is governed by the “priest and the gendarme — the Master-Couple — allied with the State” who have “seized all of the tools and means of controlling alienation (the tools and means of controlling knowledge” under the auspices of “maintaining peace.” What results is a “social alienation” that is obsessed with placated “comfort.” No life remains.<sup>840</sup> The

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<sup>839</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Caricatures*, (Not Bored, 2015): 58-59.

<sup>840</sup> Robert Dehoux and Claire Schock, *Teilhard est un Con* (Franz Jacob a Chatelet, 1962). “La paix sociale, limitée au règlement de certaines discordes, doit s’interpréter comme perpétuation d’un état de choses en l’absence duquel ni ce règlement, ni ce genre de paix n’aurait de sens : elle apparaît comme spectacle de paix à ceux qui n’ont pu l’approuver : elle débouche sur une crise de participation de l’immense majorité à la ressentir comme telle : elle s’impose durement à ceux qui la vivent comme menace de fixation des violences qui leur sont quotidiennement faites est le respect des accords ne peut en définitive se concevoir sans respect de l’ordre, sans respecter des ordres. Sous contrôle de la paix, l’immense majorité tente pratiquement de pousser l’expérience de sa propre exclusion jusqu’à son point de confort maximum, jusqu’à son point d’installation sans le spectacle quotidien des événements qui résultent de sa non-participation à les décider et à les vivre : tenter de fuir la réalité en faveur du simple spectacle de la réalité devient l’objet d’un effort généralisé de cette tentative et sur la vogue du spectacle : l’homme ne peut sortir des événements sans créer du fait même l’événement.” “Ainsi se fixent des conditions ‘révélées’ d’emploi de la vie au niveau de la simple survie, c’est-à-dire, au niveau du ‘naturel’ dans le plan de sa contestation par ‘l’autre.’ L’espoir de vivre, reporté dans le ‘surnaturel’ est entièrement conditionné par le respect d’un ordre de survie qui fut imposé sur terre.” “Ainsi, la vision idéaliste du monde, évidemment obligée de considérer avec sérieux la contestation fondamentale et matérielle de l’homme par l’aliénation naturelle, se ménage-t-elle une retraite dans la mort, créant ainsi un climat dramatique, un suspense traversant toute l’existence, faisant accepter la survie terrestre comme anti-chambre et condition préalable à une Vie Éternelle. C’est par elle que se paiera sans équivoque le sacrifice de tous les jours.” “Le prêtre et le gendarme—le Maître-Couple—alliés dans l’État, se substituent à l’aliénation naturelle, s’emparent de tous les instruments et de toutes les commandes de l’aliénation (moyens et instruments de connaissance) en vue du maintien d’une certaine paix : ensemble, ils inventent l’aliénation sociale.”

designation of the “Cold” War as “cold” likewise demonstrates the contradiction central to an era of proxy wars.

Teilhard saw humanity as a “mutation” from the animal kingdom, and thus considered animal characteristics in humanity to be “zoological” and the “reflective” possibilities that developed in the brain to be a “noosphere,” or a thinking sphere. The “noosphere” can be differentiated from a “biosphere,” from nature, because humanity creates a new “kingdom” on earth. It is in the evolution of humans to “expand,” creating “civilization.” Implicit imperialistic tendencies toward conquest and racism justified by anthropology are identified by Schock and Dehoux.<sup>841</sup> Teilhard takes the reign of peace even further: toward a death principle. He sees peace as an Omega that Dehoux and Schock compared to the logic of concentration camps. A world where ultimate power could neutralize revolutions and human desire would mean a world where all humans are forced into a state of reflection rather than action; they are interiorized and necessarily alienated to the point of being non-living. Like the stagnation of heaven, world peace does not change and it is governed by an all-powerful god or superstructure. Dehoux and Schock write:

Embarrassingly influenced by ‘noogenic forces’ that add to the conflict of the alienation within him and make his language confusing, Teilhard nevertheless arrives at a critical point of reflection: all basic reflections — fragmentary reflections by specialists — obey the forces of attraction to a point. This is the criticism of Reflection, beyond which involution would neutralize revolution, where interiorization would block repression, where the proletariat would be definitively silenced and warmed by the hearth of an ‘Omega,’ considered as the concentration camp principle and collector of forces of its own alienation.<sup>842</sup>

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<sup>841</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Man’s Place in Nature*, trans. René Hague, (Fontana Books, 1949): 80-85.

<sup>842</sup> Robert Dehoux and Claire Schock, *Teilhard est un Con* (Chatelet: Franz Jacob 1962): 36. “Embarrassé par l’influence de divers champs de “forces noogéniques” qui se disputent en lui sa propre aliénation et embrouillent son langage, Teilhard en arrive cependant à un point critique de réflexion: toutes les réflexions élémentaires—comprises comme réflexions fragmentaires des spécialistes—obéissent aux forces d’attraction d’un point critique de Réflexion, point au-delà duquel l’involution neutraliserait la révolution, où l’intériorisation bloquerait le refoulement, où le prolétariat définitivement réduit au silence, se chauffera au foyer “Oméga” considéré comme principe concentrationnaire et collecteur des forces et instruments de sa propre aliénation.”

Despite intent to champion everyday life and life in general, the cosmic power of the nuclear threat did weigh on Debord. *In Girum Imus Igni* rotates a montage of nuclear power plants and popular culture; *Sur le Passage* juxtaposes a soap commercial featuring prominent actress Anna Karina and a 1945 filming of a solar flare during a solar eclipse from the High Altitude Observatory as though Karina's sexuality were creating the cosmic reaction [FIGURE 6.2] [FIGURE 6.3]. Debord's eclipse recalls his interest in themes of night and day and the conflation of white nights and black suns by Gérard de Nerval. Eclipses could perhaps be seen as a dialectical meeting of contrary cosmic forces. They also recall the mysterious and the occult, but they are real and material phenomena in astronomical reality. There is a sense that there are parts of reality that are out of Debord's control — the expanse of the universe and his response to Anna Karina, regardless of whether she appears as a mere image in a soap commercial.

### 5.3. Ouroboros and Creation as Reproduction

*Society of the Spectacle* depicts the circulation of traffic (*circulation*) around roundabouts, the circular structure of the stock exchange, and roulette. Debord expands outward to show the view of the circular earth from space. Rotations of planets connect these circular movements to the planetary [FIGURE 6.4]. Earth's seasonal rotation is depicted. It repeats. It does not change its path, its revolution, unless it is disrupted. The world of the Spectacle emulates organic circular rhythm of seasons through "pseudo-cyclical time." It also emulates other aspects of the organic earth or, as Henri Lefebvre discusses it, "Mother Earth." One of these aspects is reproduction. Debord connects the repetitive reproduction of spectacular images to mothering and sexuality. He portrays several mothers with children throughout *Society of the Spectacle*. A related theme occurs in several other productions by Situationists: the symbol of the alchemical ouroboros, a snake eating its tail, which represents the cyclical repetition of the world; it

represents reproduction including sexual but also creation through alchemical manifestation. An understanding of Situationist and Surrealist interpretations of the ouroboros clarify Debord's approach to the revolutions of the earth and its seasons as well as the metaphorical rotations of pseudo-cyclical seasons.

A poster advertising Debord's film, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, displays the title in a circle, emphasizing both that the title is a palindrome and that the Latin meaning indicates circling. The translation, "we circle in the night and are consumed by fire," uses the Latin *girum*, which can mean "turn" or the noun, "circle," as in "go into a circle." Turning, which relates to the etymology of *détournement*, and cyclical circles represent revolution. The etymology of revolution relates to turning but it can also mean repetition which is contrary to revolutionary change at least insofar as it describes a linear Hegelian evolution of progress. The form of the palindrome can be read circularly, or backward and forward, like a mirror. Greek palindromes ( $\iota\alpha\epsilon\omega$ ) were often portrayed circularly and often paired with the symbol of the Ouroboros and they were thought to have magical properties. Palindromes were often uttered as magical incantations, e.g. *abracadabra* is a palindrome. Incantations are words that manifest physical realities, a concept in magic and alchemy. The magical properties of palindromes may have been alluded to in a biblical passage in the book of *Acts* that condemns language that is not "straightforward." Joachim Sliwa suggested that this passage could be interpreted literally (e.g. read "straight" in one direction) as a denouncement divination through palindromes as the language of the devil.<sup>843</sup> The translation of *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* includes motifs of night, fire, and consumption — all of which can be associated with endings. Fire, like life, consumes material until it extinguishes. Water in the film, as Debord summarizes,

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<sup>843</sup> Joachim Sliwa, "Magical Amulet from Paphos with the  $\iota\alpha\epsilon\omega$  Palindrome," *Studies in Ancient Art & Civilization* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013): 293-300.

extinguishes fire and drowns revolutionaries: “The water of time remains which carries away the fire and extinguishes it. The bright young people of Saint-Germain-des-Près [...] [are] drowned in the rushing water of the century (*et consumumur igni.*)”<sup>844</sup> The film is at once about revolutionary theory intended to bring about new beginnings just as it is about endings: ends to friendships; ends to movements; ends to life. For Debord, revolution was in a way the realization of a better world but it is also a non-stagnant process of attempting to realize a new world that also is in a constant state of becoming and therefore also ending.

The ouroboros represents an alchemical alpha and an omega. Oswald Wirth defines the etymology of Ouroboros as “One as all,” a representation of a unified and totalizing world. For Wirth, the ouroboros represents “the ethereal and immaterial base of all things. The tangible being of the ouroboros, or its body, becomes exterior to its body when it consumes itself, and thereby enters another state of existence.” The ethereal and immaterial base of all things recalls ancient Greek atomism. The ouroboros associates with death and endings, but also to a birth characterized by cosmic becoming. Its shape, a circle, for Wirth, forms a Zero, connecting it with a “bottomless chasm” and “an unending vacuum of cosmic space” where “everywhere is identical to itself.”<sup>845</sup>

Vaneigem defines the ouroboros:

The ouroboros, a snake biting its tail, is a spiral which, by becoming a circle, has gone wrong. I now try not to let myself be overwhelmed by exuberance, not to fall into excess but rather to balance it, to order it so that it does not devour itself by turning on itself.<sup>846</sup>

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<sup>844</sup> Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28603.

<sup>845</sup> Oswald Wirth, *The Magician's Tarot* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1990): 48.

<sup>846</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable, et la Mort*, 60. “L'ouroboros, serpent se mordant la queue, est une spirale qui, en devenant cercle, a mal tourné. J'essaie maintenant de ne pas me laisser submerger par l'exubérance, de ne pas verser dans l'outrance mais plutôt de l'équilibrer, de l'ordonner en sorte qu'elle ne se dévore pas en se retournant sur elle-même.”

He notes how snakes are meant to move in spirals, not to eat themselves and thus the ouroboros serves as a metaphor for how individuals should not be so self-involved and introspective to the point that they close in on themselves and cease to move within the world. Vaneigem defines “apocalypse”:

A cyclical thought that curls around in the vivid foreshortening of birth and death, the origin and end of time, the alpha and omega of a world created so as if to annihilate itself in its terrestrial form and be reborn in a cosmic beyond, the apocalypse drains in a sudden rage the multiple reasons for finishing existence that is condemned to unhappiness.<sup>847</sup>

In terms of this definition, the ouroboros is a symbol of apocalypse: a curling circle signifying birth and death, the cosmic beyond, and autophagy.

In *Les Lèvres Nues*, Louis Scutenaire uses the ouroboros as a metaphor for the limits of perception. He begins the poem, “Un Serpent Coupé en Deux qui se Mord la Queue” (“A Serpent Cut in Two who Eats its Tail”): “Hegel, palace of light and mirrors, without windows or doors. Yes, there are great signs in the sky: the clouds [...] Nietzsche was nothing more than an artist [...] I will tell you of another world: your own.”<sup>848</sup> Scutenaire’s reference to Nietzsche could be drawing from an occurrence when Nietzsche references Kant when he discusses logic as “colliding through its own limits,” calling it a “suffering shipwreck” where “logic coils up at these boundaries and bites its own tail.”<sup>849</sup> When the snake devours itself, it enters a loop as though it can transport itself beyond space and time. At times in history this is connected to the

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<sup>847</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Resistance to Christianity*: 29.

<sup>848</sup> Louis Scutenaire, “Un Serpent Coupé en Deux qui se Mord la Queue,” *Les Lèvres Nues*, 2 (Paris: Allia), 15. “Hegel, palais de lumière et de miroir, sans fenêtre et sans porte. Bien sûr qu’il est parfois de grands signes dans le ciel: les nuages. (...) ‘Prenez et mangez, dit le Christ, prenez et buvez, ceci est mon pain, ceci est mon vin.’ Et les Apôtres entendirent mal. Le réel n’a pas de contraire (...) Frédéric Nietzsche n’était rien d’autre qu’un artiste. (...) Je vous parle d’un autre monde, le vôtre.”

<sup>849</sup> Babette Babich, “Kant Between Chemistry and Alchemy: Cinnabar, ‘Now Red, Now Black,’” *Berichte und Diskussionen, Kant-Studien*, (Berlin: De Gruyter): 797.

Eucharist due to auto-cannibalism and representations of the cosmic.<sup>850</sup> Scutenaire makes that connection as well in the poem “A Snake Cut in Two that Eats its Tail”: “Take and eat, said Christ, take and eat, this is my bread and this is my wine. And the Apostles misunderstood.”<sup>851</sup> Throughout the poem, Scutenaire references sexuality, ending the poem with fixation on women’s body parts. Scutenaire implies that connection between the body and oral consumption could relate to fellatio, imposing sexual meaning on the ouroboros. In alchemy, snakes are given phallic associations, but also associations with femininity. Alchemically, the ouroboros, specifically, relates to the circle of life, i.e. reproduction. Scutenaire — typical of Surrealists, especially those surrounding Marcel Mariën — takes religious themes and sexualizes them as intended blasphemy. Nevertheless, historically, the connection between the ouroboros and sexual reproduction is indeed relevant. Consider the origin stories of Babel and Eden. In terms of considering birth and the origin of life, sex is missing. Gustave Courbet’s *Origin of the World* makes this clear, which visually locates the beginning of the world of the individual within the chasm of the vagina. Whether the origin of the world as a snake is associated with women or men, the question of sexuality seems to be both implicitly present and questionably missing from mythical origin stories. When considering origin to life, it seems illogical to exclude subjects like pregnancy and conception. The oxymoron of a virgin birth is at times challenged by the avant-garde, but nevertheless recurs thematically, for example, in *Fille née sans mère* (*Girl Born without a Mother*), wherein Francis Picabia depicts a machine, as well as in *Maldoror* wherein the main character is godlike and thus has trouble locating origin or parenthood in time but suggests that his parents are sharks. Both *Girl without a Mother* and *Maldoror* draw connections to how motherhood and birth have a human quality that machines and Gods are missing.

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<sup>850</sup> Tertullian, “On the resurrection of the flesh,” *Latin Christianity: Its founder, Tertullian* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans): 549–596.

<sup>851</sup> Scutenaire, “Un Serpent Coupé en Deux qui se Mord la Queue”: 15.

However, it is precisely the inhuman quality of transcending birth that creates the sense of the godly and powerful in Picabia's machine and Lautréamont's Maldoror. Medieval alchemical texts persistently discuss motherhood and sexuality, sometimes which are represented through sexual exploitation of mothers and birthing, and which at other times prescribe power in motherhood and birthing. Alchemical texts are in conversation with biblical origin stories like Genesis that involve serpents and the creation of the world, as well as occultist symbols like the ouroboros. These texts will be discussed through Situationist and Surrealist readings in this section, particularly in terms of the subject of motherhood as an origin of the world. Situationist *détournements* and interpretations of these themes reveal trends within the group's approach to mothering, sexuality, and individual subjectivity insofar as it relates to the world of the individual after and as a result of birth.

*The Story of O* (1954) by Anne Desclos was published in the same year as *Les Lèvres Nues 2* wherein Scutenaire's thoughts on the ouroboros appear. Bertrand Westphal describes the motif of "O" in this novel, finding similarities to the "O" in Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969). "O" "refer[s] to the female menstrual cycle and to the cosmic revolution and political revolution (or circle); to that new beginning, the starting point of zero (0) after the flood waters (the French *eaux*, a homonym of *O*.) [...] The feminine circle combats the male line: feminist 'guerilla' writing moves by dislocation and relocation as opposed to the linear continuity that represents [...] phallogocentric thought."<sup>852</sup>

Three images of the ouroboros appear in Jacqueline de Jong's *Situationist Times 5*, "Wheels," beside a descriptive caption that reads:

ALCHEMY AND ALCHEMISTS: Known to the Chinese, alchemy appeared in Europe at the fall of the Roman Empire, but it was especially developed after the year 1000 when Arabs influenced the countries that they conquered with hermetic

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<sup>852</sup> Westphal, *Geocriticism*: 21.

arts. On the surface, alchemy was about the transmutation of metals into gold. However, certain symbols were cautiously related to a “gnosis of matter” but sought to avoid the wrath of the Church toward heretics. Medieval alchemists adopted and transformed the theme of the Ouroboros serpent which had already appeared in Egypt and which is represented here by Greek alchemists of antiquity, then in a medieval drawing where the serpent changes into a salamander, then in a representation from Benin, and, finally, an image representing the creation of the world.<sup>853</sup>

These images of the ouroboros demonstrate the geographic and historical dispersion of the symbol from China to Egypt, then Arab world, then to Greece, Benin and finally to Germany, from the ancient world to the year 1000 to the Medieval period. The final image that De Jong chooses “represent[s] the creation of the world,” does not explicitly seem to be an ouroboros at all. It depicts the cover of *Signaturum Rerum* or *The Signature of all Things Shewing the Sign and Signification of the several Forms and Shapes in the Creation and what the Beginning, Ruin, and Cure of Everything is. It Proceeds out of Eternity into Time and Again out of Time into Eternity and Comprises all Mysteries* by Jacob Böhme.<sup>854</sup> It is a circular movement that trails a dove, above which are the letters FIAT. Böhme, sometimes considered a Kabbalist,<sup>855</sup> significantly influenced Georg Friedrich Hegel.<sup>856</sup> This particular text presents a sort of theory of everything. It likely appears in *Situationist Times 5*, “Wheels,” largely because it depicts the way of the world through “The Wheel of Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt.” It is an alchemical text

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<sup>853</sup> Jacqueline de Jong, *The Situationist Times*, 5, (Paris: International Edition): 143. “Connue des Chinois, l’alchimie se manifesta en Europe dès la chute de l’Empire romain, mais c’est surtout après l’an mille qu’elle se développa, lorsque les Arabes initièrent des pays conquis par eux aux arts hermétiques. Apparemment, l’alchimie se proposait la transmutation des métaux en or. Cependant, certains symboles qu’elle employa l’apparentent davantage à une ‘gnose de matière’ teintée de prudence: il lui fallait éviter les foudres réservées par l’Église aux hérétiques. Les alchimistes médiévaux repriront, en le transformant, le thème du serpent Ouroboros, déjà vu en Égypte, et que nous retrouvons ici tel que le représentèrent les alchimistes grecs de l’Antiquité, puis dans un dessin médiéval où le serpent se mue en salamandre, ensuite dans une représentation du Bénin, et, enfin, sur une image figurant la création du monde.

<sup>854</sup> Jacob Böhme, “Signaturum Rerum: the Signature of all Things Shewing the Sign and Signification of the Several Forms and Shapes in the Creation and what the Beginning, Ruin, and Cure of Everything Is. It Proceeds out of Eternity into Time, and Again out of Time into Eternity and Comprises all Mysteries.” *The Works of Jacob Behmen Volume IV*, Trans. John Ellistone, (Jacob Boehme Online, 2010). [Jacobboehmeonline.com](http://Jacobboehmeonline.com).

<sup>855</sup> Gerold Necker, *Jacob Böhme and his World* (Brill, 2018.)

<sup>856</sup> Elizabeth Haldane, “Jacob Böhme and his Relation to Hegel, *The Philosophical Review* 6.2 (Charlotte: Duke University Press): 146-161.

concerned with the philosophy of matter and being. Sulphur typically associates in alchemy with the salamander, a later manifestation of the ouroboros, but no ouroboros or salamander is mentioned throughout the text. Serpents, however, are discussed.

Before unravelling the theme of serpents in Böhme, consider his explanation of the wheel, which the image in *The Situationist Times* is most likely to represent given that the entire edition of *The Situationist Times 5* centers on the motif of wheels. The wheel, like the ouroboros, begins with “Nothing” for Böhme until it is “mothered” into creation. Everything in the world is generated by the “seven Forms of the Mother.” She represents creation through a “Wrestling into Properties.” The wheel of the mother of the world births matter. At the beginning and the end of this circle, there is a darkness speckled with darting flashes of “the Original Fire.” Nothingness creates a platform or driver for being, and being eventually returns to nothingness.<sup>857</sup> As for the Serpent, Böhme writes an alchemical interpretation of the Genesis story wherein the serpent, for Böhme, is not equivalent to the Devil and, unlike human souls, the Devil, and God, the serpent does not relate to eternity. “Whatever is eternal proceeds originally from the same ground, but the Serpent is not out of the eternal Ground, but out of the Beginning.” “The Serpent was created out of the Beginning of Time. Therefore [the Devil] insinuated his desire into the Serpent.” However, the Serpent does not represent evil. “The Serpent was good in its creation before the curse.” Böhme associates the Serpent with a representation of the beginning and the end, with a version of life that is not eternal, but rather has a timeline. He also associates the Serpent with desire, continually relating it to phallic themes and masculinity. As for the Fall, it was not the fault of the Devil, the Serpent, Eve, or Adam, but rather their dangerous combination that was “corrupted by Imagination and Pride.” Imagination led to the temptation for humanity to become

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<sup>857</sup> Jacob Böhme, “Signaturum Rerum,” *The Works of Jacob Behmen*. trans. John Ellistone, (Jacob Boehme Online, 2010.) [jacobboehmeonline.com](http://jacobboehmeonline.com).

knowledgeable like God. The imaginative search for understanding in fact did render humanity more like God, because humanity knew good and evil.<sup>858</sup> The story parallels Babel insofar as it is the ambitious and creative will to be like God that lends itself to human destruction. However, alchemy, a search for knowledge and creation, would pursue this path. In the end of the Genesis creation story, Eve is cursed with pregnancy. Böhme frames pregnancy quite differently than a curse. “In the Woman’s seed is God-love,” he says. Pregnancy is a form of creation that could be affiliated with women as well as creative men, or aspect of creation, masculine, feminine, or material. The notion that the product of creation is separate from the creator appears as well in Böhme’s description of pregnancy through a description of material. He describes the alienated product of art as the child, the artist as a mercurial producer who bears the child through pregnancy but ultimately cannot connect to the child, and a mother, who is like a mysterious material entity that is at once blended with the symbol of the pregnant father-creator and placed as superior to the father-creator:

*Mercurius* is the Master-Workman of this child (...) He labors in the *materia* of the Child (...) He grows exceedingly pregnant with the Child (...) and the Child is born and afterwards becomes its own, and as a Child of Liberty, and cares no more for its Work-Master: it is better than its Father, but not better than its Mother, in whose seed it lay.<sup>859</sup>

There is a sort of circle of life in this alchemical or artistic production. For Böhme, the material world, or mother and child, always has something pure about them that transcend the knowledge, process, and ability of the creator. Humanity is not superior to Mother Earth or the objects that humanity is able to create. This concept of materiality is quite different from biblical arguments, wherein the earth and worldly are bad, and wherein human production creates Babels that are sinful attempts to emulate Godliness. Böhme’s arguments differ from typical Situationist

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<sup>858</sup> Ibid.

<sup>859</sup> Ibid.

arguments that humanity should prioritize mercurial flow over stagnant materiality or the outcomes of artistic production. However, like Debord's idea that the water of time continues to march on, despite the fire of a revolutionary moment, the material world remains regardless of the fleeting movement of individual human lives. Debord's *Howls for Sade* begins by describing a small Parisian neighborhood, then expands to stars. Worlds close in on themselves.<sup>860</sup>

Situationists, like Böhme, do not see humanity's movement or flux through time as powerful compared to the wide expanse of time and the material world.

While Böhme's serpent is not explicitly an ouroboros, its association with time, beginnings and endings, and alchemy allows the inference for De Jong (which seems to be a strong inference) that it counts as an ouroboros. The image depicted seems to be a circle of light, nearly closed, surrounded by darkness. Above is the Middle English word, *Fiat*, or "Let it be done." At the head of the circle is a bird, which Böhme associates with Venus. [FIGURE 6.5] Böhme continually refers to the *Verbum Fiat*, which essentially means incantation, or the word that creates flesh. *Verbum Fiat*, or "in the beginning was the word," argues that the word of God brought everything into being in the beginning of the world. One might infer that this notion could apply to human capabilities for change and transmutation, but that is not what Böhme concludes. Rather, he argues that the *Verbum Fiat* creates a "fixity" of all things. Everything has an imprint of creation and eternity that does not change. The "motion of time," contrarily, allows for a contrary "unfixt being." However, even "Motion of Time [...] does enter again into the first Motion from whence it has taken its Original, and is a Map of its Form which it had here, like a Picture, or as an Image in a Glass without Life." Böhme sees a Mirror World, similar to the Gnostics, that represents a greater eternal being.<sup>861</sup> While, for Böhme, the serpent represents a

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<sup>860</sup> Debord, "Hurlements en Faveur de Sade," *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*.

<sup>861</sup> Böhme, "Signaturum Rerum," *The Works of Jacob Behmen*.

beginning and an end, De Jong, in “A Vicious Circle,” points to a serpentine reference that is somewhat contrary to the clear “vicious circle” of an alpha and an omega as a direct path or a perfectly circular snake eating its tail. *The Saga of Gunnlaugur Serpent-Tongue*, an Icelandic saga, considers how, “when starting a concept or idea, one does not know where the end will be and how many ending points will be appearing.” She connects this saga to the concept of labyrinths.<sup>862</sup>

*The Situationist Times 5* pictures an early depiction of an ouroboros that appears in a Byzantine manuscript circa 10<sup>th</sup> Century, *Codex Venice Marcianus*, which apparently derives from a preexisting Alexandrian text<sup>863</sup> [FIGURE 6.6]. Marcellin Berthelot considered this particular ouroboros in *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs* (1888) as representative of a three-part alchemical process: coming to power; the fixed masculine sun overcoming the volatile feminine sun; and repeated alchemical experiments.<sup>864</sup> This association with the number three is important in alchemy, where three is often considered to be a magic number related to movement, change, and transmutation rather than fixity. De Jong draws from this theme of transmutation and the number three when she presents an 18<sup>th</sup> Century depiction of a three-headed serpent in the form of a circle, like an ouroboros, from the 1622 *Philosophia Reformata* by J.D. Mylius.<sup>865</sup> [FIGURE 6.7]. The three-headed serpent represents the material world, above which are the Sun and Moon, depicted anthropomorphically, as well as four orbs that contain representations of the “four phases of the Work”: the raven; the peacock; the swan; and the Red King. The Red King, a final phase, represents fixity. Fixity is intended to triumph as order over

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<sup>862</sup> Jacqueline de Jong Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 832.

<sup>863</sup> Jacqueline de Jong, *The Situationist Times*, 5, (Paris: International Edition): 143.; Dana Michael Reemes, “The Egyptian Ouroboros: An Iconological and Theological Study,” (Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles, 2015).

<sup>864</sup> Dana Michael Reemes, “The Egyptian Ouroboros: An Iconological and Theological Study,” (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2015): 415.

<sup>865</sup> J.D. Mylius, *Philosophia Reformata*, (Frankfurt, 1622).

the chaos of the three-headed serpent, which divides the Great Work into three moving, transforming parts. Thus, De Jong prioritizes movement and change, or process, rather than a final product or fixity. If a final product could be considered a work of art for Surrealists, Situationists resist fixity and instead encourage ongoing process. Fixity results in alienation and reification.

Elsewhere in *Philosophia Reformata*, a pregnant anthropomorphized moon with a masculine body holds a baby who anthropomorphizes the sun. The man's mid-section is ensconced in a transparent globe. The baby, an anthropomorphized sun, represents philosophy and the man is a Sage who nourishes it with the mercury milk of the Earth.<sup>866</sup> [FIGURE 6.8] This plate from *Philosophia Reformata* references the second emblem from *Atlantia Fugiens*, wherein the world is depicted as within the womb of a pregnant woman<sup>867</sup> [FIGURE 6.9]. Breton, without explanation other than a citation, pictures this woman from *Atlantia Fugiens*, pregnant with the world, in *l'Art Magique*.<sup>868</sup> The womb is like a cave under the earth in Wirth's interpretation of alchemy. Wirth's *Le Symbolisme Hermétique*, which appears in Vaneigem's reading notes, describes the embryo of a child that develops in the Earth's maternal womb. Earth's "impregnation" from the air turns the grass green, the color of Venus.<sup>869</sup> Despite the Earth having a "womb," Wirth describes the ouroboros as creator that could be attributed to either male or female genders. The ouroboros is the "father/mother of all things."<sup>870</sup> Vaneigem defines alchemy as the androgynous creation of human life, which is sometimes defined through transmutation of materials into gold. Such definitions miss the true meaning, which, Vaneigem argues, is birthing:

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<sup>866</sup> J.D. Mylius, *Philosophia Reformata*, (Frankfurt, 1622).

<sup>867</sup> De Jong, H. M. *Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969).

<sup>868</sup> Breton, *L'Art Magique*: 54-55.

<sup>869</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, "Reading Notes," Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University; Oswald Wirth, *Le Symbolisme Hermétique*: 22.

<sup>870</sup> Oswald Wirth, *The Tarot of the Magicians*, (Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1985): 48-49.

True alchemy is the transmutation of elementary forms of life into human life [...] There is no better indication of this than the amount of fervent attention surrounding birth and babies.<sup>871</sup>

Alchemy is, fundamentally, a process that hastens the purification that nature itself supposedly carries out, turning base metals into noble metals, symbolized by gold. That it originated in the sacred knowledge of priests suggests that it derives from older practices. Telling in this regard is the concern for unity, as exemplified in the androgyny of alchemical marriage or in the inseparability of the transmutation of metal and that of the alchemist themselves.<sup>872</sup>

Böhme sees power to give birth to be the source of Godliness and life, and he reveres this power.

Contrarily, *Atlanta Fugiens* defines the role of the male alchemist-philosopher comparably to how the Enlightenment would define the role of scientists, and how Heidegger would define the role of Being: to conquer; create; and impose oneself on the world in order to control.

The whole of philosophers agree in this: [...] The man's part is to generate and govern the wife, and her part is to conceive, impregnate, bring forth, suckle, and educate the offspring, and be subject to the commands of her husband.<sup>873</sup>

Lefebvre recounts the gendered history of “Mother Earth” and how it relates to themes of male conquest:

The Earth is represented humanly and sexually: Mother Earth, wounded and harrowed by the plough, and fertilized — like a woman — by man. Moreover, at once frightening and fruitful, the Earth receives the dead and grows fat with their corpses.<sup>874</sup>

“Man” makes the world, says Lefebvre, but the world is not the Earth. While “men” might plough the ground, in the end, they return to it.<sup>875</sup> He cites how Greek chthonic traditions discusses the dead, beneath the earth, as continuing participants in daily life as “strange phantoms” preparing to be born from Mother Earth (and an actual mother) again.<sup>876</sup>

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<sup>871</sup> Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*: 236.

<sup>872</sup> Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*: 235.

<sup>873</sup> H. M. De Jong, *Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969): 14.

<sup>874</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (New York: Verso, 2014): 225.

<sup>875</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 225.

<sup>876</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*: 226.

Vaneigem addresses the misogynistic elements of alchemy, while also finding elements that thwart those existing paradigms.

Woman — except as mother or as pure object — is lascivious, useless, and harmful, and arouses a horror of the feminine affecting even that part of femininity which male worshippers of the patriarchal and celestial menhir repress so thoroughly. The anchor of misogyny plunges deep into waters of the origins, into the primal and sexual dampness so essential to the alchemical project. Floods, swamps, and sap stirred by the moon are natural settings in which the body is formed, the cosmic womb wherein it is nourished before some natural ebbing of life drains it dry.<sup>877</sup>

Lefebvre, like Gustav Courbet and Louis Scutenaire, argues that the womb is a microcosm of the world, and it is here that the origin of life, the “true alchemy,” is created. Mothers hold a special role in alchemy that is seen as pure, and women who are not controlled and impregnated by men are “useless” and “harmful.” Still, symbols of two-headed hermaphrodites represent alchemical marriage in a way that leads to gender-confusion and androgyny in alchemical literature. Situationists recognize these trends and highlight them as a way of thwarting the prevalent patriarchal conclusions. Vaneigem and De Jong ultimately argue that alchemy could be reframed to interpret women’s wombs as their own power rather than the coveted object of control for a male artist-creator-philosopher-chemist.

Surrealists, influenced by alchemy, contemplate the origin of the world through pregnancy and mothering. In *A History of Surrealist Painting*, Marcel Jean discusses how Tanguy’s paintings depict earth as a breastfeeding mother by “plac[ing] us inside a globe swelling with milk at the center of a huge maternal breast.”<sup>878</sup> He generalizes “paintings” but provides examples in the margins: *The Glance of Amber* (1929); *Ennui and Tranquility* (1938); *The Ribbon of Extremes* (1932); *Gouache* (1936). These paintings bring Jean to reflect on how “the

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<sup>877</sup> Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*: 239.

<sup>878</sup> Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1967): 169-172.

Mother is one with the Earth and the Earth becomes a nebulous spiral where the organic is ultimately inorganic and dawn resembles high noon or the midnight sun.” Motherhood for Jean follows cycles like the “Hindu” “spiral” “time-concept” but also like a “powerful goddess not subject to time or space.” Jean compares these cycles and abstractions to capitalism: “commerce is founded on the belief that one can truly live by this abstract activity.”<sup>879</sup> Mother Earth and its cycles are not contrary to abstraction, modernism, and capitalism, and they are not ultimately nurturing. Forced into survivalism, workers depend on capitalism the way children depend on their mothers. “Grown-ups are rather frightened to identify the idea of the Earth with that of the Mother since this mother can be extremely cruel toward her sons.”<sup>880</sup> This cruel cycle of life reminds Jean of the cycles of dung beetles. Comparing Earth to a Mother is reminiscent of a scarab as a God who deposits eggs in a dung ball that is round like a globe. Tanguy’s metaphor for the cycles of nature, capitalism, and women suggest not only fears of nature and capitalism but also of women. It also recalls 19<sup>th</sup> Century tendencies to see Mothers as primal, thereby associating them with animalistic and organic qualities. Mothers were “primordial” beings that represented nature “not subject to time or place.”<sup>881</sup> These organic qualities could be related to the dichotomy in philosophy between materialism and idealism. Subjectivity is “Man” while World becomes the generalized Other of “Woman.” Jacques Derrida discussed the “phallogentrism” of metaphysics in terms where femininity equated to difference, and the hymen served as a meeting point between difference and subjectivity. “The end of man locates the possibility of the affirmation of woman.”<sup>882</sup> Kant’s *world of things*, for Tanguy, is a space to inhabit like a womb. Women are a space to inhabit. Given Kant’s conundrum that the space

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<sup>879</sup> Ibid.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid.

<sup>882</sup> Lue Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, trans. Mary Cattani (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990): 139.

subjectivity inhabits is ultimately unknowable, women become a mystery – a non-thinking or at least non-subjective mystery; a mystery related to primordial *a priori* space of abstraction as represented by Tanguy’s spaces inside the maternal breast as well as related to objects and matter. Emil Cioran woefully refers to the “trouble with being born.”<sup>883</sup> If Eve is to blame regarding the creation of the world and descent from Eden, a variety of writers in European history seem to blame women and mothers for their existential woes.

Unlike Böhme’s Eve, Tanguy’s primordial mother does not search for knowledge, and she is not separate from nature. She is more like the Serpent than Eve; like an ouroboros that represents the beginning and the end, non-eternal being, as well as chthonic associations with dirt and earth. The relationship to the chthonic resonates with Meister Eckhart’s concept of God in the earth, which inverts the heaven-earth dichotomy of traditional Catholicism wherein heaven is godly and abstract while earth is material, dirty, worldly, and where the Devil or Satan live. Thus, chthonic associations with dirt and earth for the ouroboros suggest a materiality and worldliness to the symbol. Despite being a symbol that abstracts an alchemical idea, the ouroboros, like alchemy, itself, was interested in the physical world and the possibilities of early chemistry that humans could be empowered to create within it.

Insofar as the alchemical concept of creation was related to biological reproduction, it is necessary to consider how Debord was opposed to having children and the structure of the nuclear family; an opposition that appears strongly in *Society of the Spectacle* and *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*. Some Situationists did have children, and this perceived shortcoming was overlooked for example in the case of Kotányi,<sup>884</sup> but the desire to have children and a

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<sup>883</sup> Emil Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard (The Arcade, 2013.)

<sup>884</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Self-Portraits and Caricatures*: 49.

family was one factor leading to the break with Henri Lefebvre.<sup>885</sup> Parents were seen as figures of control and authority, while the anarchic chaos of childhood logic was glorified. Debord references Daniel Lagache on the concept of childhood as a note for *Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>886</sup> As a member of a group that was very critical of Lacan's psychoanalysis as well as the structure of the family, it might be assumed that critiques of "the French Freud," Lagache would follow.<sup>887</sup> However, Lagache was invested in analyzing reification. He aimed to avoid "the naïve idealism which makes the personal world derive from subjectivity."<sup>888</sup> Lagache discusses the relationship of a child to a mother as an "object-relation" between the child and a breast, but the child does not differentiate between subject and object. Following Jean Piaget, the child then begins to objectivize the entire world around them in order to identify themselves as apart from it, similar to the development of the identification of the Self through the mirror stage, but with more emphasis on the relationship to the material world. The process of human development, which led to self-identification and reifying the world, meant that some connection with the world as lost. In *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, a couple sits happily, composed and collected, on their clean white sectional. Children jump wildly in the air.

Debord's *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* uses images of the mother to represent a horrifying concept of reproduction, or how the Spectacle procreates; it breeds itself in its own image. Children leap from sectional couches in an advertisement taken from Roche Bobois.<sup>889</sup> Purchasing a behemoth of a couch indeed seems like an anti-climactic symbol of supposed success but, given Situationist resistance to the nuclear family structure, Debord likely also refers

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<sup>885</sup> Kirsten Ross and Henri Lefebvre, "Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview."

<sup>886</sup> Guy Debord, "Fiches de Lecture," NAF 28603, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

<sup>887</sup> Kermit Hummel, "The French Freud," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 4.2 (Toronto: York University, 1980).

<sup>888</sup> Hariklia Pepeli, *From Freud's Unconscious to Lacan's Subject* (London: Middlesex University, 2010): 205.

<sup>889</sup> Guy Debord, "In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni," *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

to what the couch represents: children and a family. The couch, itself, covers the majority of the room. It represents a crafted enclosure that defines the nuclear family. The original advertisement read:

Surround yourself...with the soft life. BOBOIS: (...) Come experience the Roche Bobois mystique... It's sheer enlightenment. Unique, high-spirited and free. It could change your whole approach to the way you live. (...) Surround yourself with deep, soft, comfortable velvet. Even cabinets, platforms, and bookcases and upholstered in full velvet. [FIGURE 6.10]

Designed by Hans Hopfer, this early rendition of the *Mah Jong* sofa was intended to allow multiple room arrangements as part of “a new way of organizing space.” Originally called *La Famillia*, the *Mah Jong* remains a centerpiece at Roche Bobois showrooms to this day. It features changeable fabrics, size, and shape, which has allowed the piece to serve as a platform for experimentation by various designers. The fabrics have been treated almost like a billboard, sometimes plastered with brand names like Jean Paul Gaultier and at other times sporting iconic design markers of Kenzo. Proud of its “vanguard” origins, the *Mah Jong*'s changability has allowed Roche Bobois to partner with a litany of designers and contemporary artists, encouraging difference and the unexpected.<sup>890</sup> One hint as to the “vanguard origins” of Roche Bobois lies in the background of this early Roche Bobois advertisement, which dons a *Spider* wall lamp (wall version 1152) by Joe Colombo [FIGURE 6.11] and a table lamp by Gae Aulenti, *Pipstrello* for Marinelli Luce. Colombo was a member of the Movimento Nucleare, an avant-garde art movement founded in 1951 by Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo. Enrico Brenna explained the impetus for founding the movement:

A group of contemporary painters has set out to break down [...] static enchantment. It has tried to destroy it with a frenetic whirl of spots, as exasperating as hallucinations or madness itself. To emphasize the highly topical nature of their anxiety, they have called themselves ‘nuclear.’ They have attempted to destroy painting and have found themselves in a world of nightmare.

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<sup>890</sup> *50 Years: Mah Jong Sofa* (Paris: Roche Bobois, 2021).

So that, once disintegrated, they have tried to put painting back together, seeking its symbols and the reasons for its existence.<sup>891</sup>

Baj first introduced Asger Jorn to the Letterist International's *Potlach*, which influenced Jorn to meet Debord.<sup>892</sup> The members of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus included both Jorn and Baj.<sup>893</sup> Like Debord's reference to Godard's spectacular commercial engagements through Anna Karina's soap commercial in *Critique de la Séparation*, Debord's use of this Roche Bobois advertisement mocks Hopfer and Colombo, who used avant-garde ideas for capital gain, and, by association, he also mocks Baj and Jorn. "It is very normal that a film about private life will be entirely made up of 'private jokes,'" Debord says to describe his intention for *Critique of Separation*. By the time Debord releases *Society of the Spectacle* and *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, those friends have all gone, yet he still has things to say. Some of those things are regrets, some nostalgic, but given the fixation on the Roche Bobois advertisement, it is clear that not all of his private messages are intended to be positive or sentimental. In terms of Colombo, Jorn met and worked with the Milanese neo-conservative on many occasions, including to consider the construction of nuclear cities, which are precisely the constructions that Situationists would oppose on many occasions in publications like *Internationale Situationniste* and *Mutant* [FIGURE 6.12]. Colombo was known for his *Television Shrines* that "attest to the admiration Colombo had for the medium. Even in his designs for furniture and interiors he emphasized the screen: he was the first designer to integrate it directly into many objects"<sup>894</sup> [FIGURE 6.13]. Several minutes of *In Girum* present the still of the Roche Bobois advertisement, including close-ups on the faces of the family members. The shot is from the point-of-view of the television, looking out onto the family. Nearly all the advertisements in *In*

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<sup>891</sup> *Joe Colombo* (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 19.

<sup>892</sup> François Coadou, "Introduction," *Lettres à Marcel Mariën*: 23.

<sup>893</sup> *Joe Colombo*: 30.

<sup>894</sup> *Joe Colombo*: 84.

*Girum* and *Society of the Spectacle* portray interior designs centered around televisions, often which are present by hearths, often which are incorporated into the form and function of the furniture design [FIGURE 7.14].

Colombo designed many Nuclear Cities with Jorn and the Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus in 1952. Situationist images of fallout shelters in *Internationale Situationniste* depict similar scenes of families around contained spaces centered on televisions. Families would be living underground to avoid nuclear annihilation, including traffic on underground highways. In bomb shelters, they would be separated from the world, in their own contained underground space, like the enclosed womb of the earth. The “nuclear” quality of the “nuclear family” is in its isolation and containment, though it debatably also does have some ring of association to the atom bomb as well. Given the Situationist criticisms of such fallout shelters in *Internationale Situaitionniste*, *Mutant*, and other publications, it is surprising that Jorn had previously been a primary member of movements that planned Nuclear Cities in the past. Nuclear armament was motivated by a quest for monopolized global control — for State control over expansive territory — argues Henri Lefebvre. Burrowing families under the earth creates new space, new territory, as well as a separation from space. For fallout shelters, chthonic associations with the earth and ground do not connect to materiality, worldliness, or reality, but rather alienation, detachment, and a complete reliance on the portrayal of the world through the television. Everyday life in the world of the fallout shelter is limited to the nuclear family, and the nuclear family is structured around the hearth of the television. In such a removed situation, one might hypothesize that a strong bond could be formed between family members, but, in the portrayals in *In Girum*, *Society of the Spectacle*, and Colombo advertisements, family members are in fact disconnected from one another as they watch television. Everyday life in a fallout shelter lacks community,

even among the nuclear family, itself. Lefebvre writes that the nuclear threat was marked by a connection to objects that marketed itself as a need that had not existed previously:

The reprivitization of everyday life [...] started from the 1950s onwards. It consisted of an escape from the nuclear threat and from the setbacks of history [...] Needs were being aroused, some new, some existing potentially as mass phenomena and only crystallized by advertising, by the mediation of which they were connected to their objects.<sup>895</sup>

Colombo took avant-garde ideas and made them commercial. He claimed to resist objectness and objectification by depriving design of symbolic meanings and instead envisioning his furniture as part of an architecture defined not by its confinements, but rather by the “dynamicism” of its “space-time.” Like the anti-art Situationists, Colombo proposed an “anti-design.” This anti-design, however, was intended to be commercial. It was, Colombo said:

An anti-design that resists the glorification of the object — that is, a design of anonymous elements that are well-suited to mass production, that can be personalized at the moment of their installation and distributed at affordable prices.<sup>896</sup>

Mass (re)production exploits materiality but also disdains its material qualities — it aims for the abstract and customizable, creating an anonymity of objectness. This anonymity allows for a transformative mutability. Similarly, the objectness of the Spectacle is veiled. The television, for example, is not seen as a box of tubes or, today, microchips and wires, but rather for the illusions it projects upon it. It gives the semblance of changeability. However, its changeability is predictable and planned according to simple goals, particularly fueling mass consumption. Presumably, Debord lost faith in the reception of avant-garde ideas about space, time, and anti-art with the commercialization of avant-garde ideas.

Debord associates the question of (re)production of art as products with the nuclear family, which, according to the 1950s model as well as Abrahamic traditions that call to “go forth and

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<sup>895</sup> Lefebvre, *State/Space/World*: 88.

<sup>896</sup> *Joe Colombo*: 93-94.

multiply,” aimed for the reproduction of children within a morally structured environment. The Roche Bobois advertisement does not show children who are quiet, demure, alienated, and hypnotized by a television like many of the other images of couples who appear in *In Girum*. Rather, the children jump and play. Play and wildness in childhood are likewise values of the avant-garde that are presented in this Roche Bobois advertisement in a way that relates to the ideas of the furniture designers, Hopfer and Colombo; ideas that were also connected to the Situationist International.

Two collages by the leader of the Mouvemento Nucleare, Enrico Baj, are exhibited in *Situationist Times 4* to illustrate the chaotic joy of children’s games [FIGURE 7.15]. The chaotic joy of children playing similarly appears in the Roche Bobois advertisement, wherein play is both encouraged and spatially controlled within a playpen-like structure of a couch and within the nuclear family. Baj’s own home, purchased in 1967, contained his own artistic series, titled *Furniture*, beside pieces by André Breton and Joe Colombo.<sup>897</sup> Puppet-like collages of upholstery have the expressions and body language of jumping children, juxtaposed with matching pieces that simply picture wooden cabinets. The puppet-like faces and fabrics reinforce the lifelessness of the characters, and their juxtaposition with abstracted furniture as well as the title of the series, *Furniture*, gives a sense that the children, themselves, were becoming one with the furniture. In fact, some of the children in the *Furniture* series are depicted on chair pillows, coming off the walls and integrating with the furniture itself [FIGURE 7.16]. Surrealism and the avant-garde, like the Roche Bobois advertisement, wanted to “change your whole approach to the way you live,” or, in Rimbaud’s words, “Change life.” However, the similarity of the Roche Bobois commercial with Baj’s *Furniture* series suggests commercialized, reified lifelessness; it

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<sup>897</sup> Aaron Peasley, “Inside the Enchanting Villa that Inspired Enrico Baj’s Work,” *Architectural Digest*, 2017.

suggests children who want to play but are trapped in velvet. Velvet covers the couch, the room, the walls. Next, perhaps the children will become velvet couches as well.

The children in the advertisement have a certain sense of naturalness, humanity, and worldliness depicted in their play. *Society of the Spectacle* depict stills of mothers and women as sex symbols connected to nature: the nature of desire (pornography); biological reproduction (mothers); etc. However, spectacular renditions flatten woman's nature. Unlike playing, jumping, or moving children, the image intends to capitate, hold, and freeze the movement of the viewer. The recurrence of women creates an internal consistency to *Society of the Spectacle* suggesting a consistency within the Spectacle itself. Through the recurrence of images of women, the Spectacle, like historical depictions of Mother Earth, is rendered, at least in part, effeminate. Juxtaposed with clips of men haphazardly warring in a chaotic and depersonalized mess, the pervasive faces of women (and girls) with penetrating glances amalgamate into a sort of faceless, archetypal female character. At the end of *Society of the Spectacle*, a sexualized image of a woman in a bikini cuts incessantly into scenes of bombings, blurring the divide between representations of the masculine and the feminine.<sup>898</sup> Freudian undertones could be hypothesized: drives for *eros* and *thanatos* are connected. Like Mother Earth, the feminized Spectacle smiles and nurtures, but she is also cruel because humanity has no power over her Spectacular dominion, and because she is inhuman. She is the *alpha and omega*, reproducing and cutting into powerful scenes of destruction, like bombings. However, instead of giving life and connecting humanity to nature, her image and reproduction separates humanity from the real. "Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle."<sup>899</sup> She births something that also kills.

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<sup>898</sup> Debord, "La Société du Spectacle," *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*.

<sup>899</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995): 20.

Within feminist discourse, Julia Kristeva draws from Debord, referencing the “spectacle” and the “society of the spectacle” as a “flooding of images over language” which she hypothesizes could limit the ability for discernment and criticism of “cultural products.” In other words, culture, which communicates images through symbols as though they were language, perhaps becomes experienced not as though it were language but as though it were reality, particularly due to the sheer quantity of images that are present and consumed postwar. She then connects this concept to “the role of women, and more particularly, that of motherhood. Mothers play a significant role in the development of a child’s language, and thus mothers can be seen as part of a perpetuation of “the future of culture,” more so than television, says Kristeva.<sup>900</sup>

#### **5.4. The Fall Upward, or The Tower of Babel**

An end is also a beginning in the biblical story of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis: a society collapses, by the will of God resulting in a new version of the world. The end or the fall is at once a beginning; the *alpha* is an *omega*. *Tower of Babel* (1563) by Pieter Brueghel<sup>901</sup> depicts a tower crafted of a soft stone and tiered like an eight-layer cake with a spiral ramp along the exterior. About as wide as it is tall, it shows no signs of precarity except the scaffolds that it is still under construction: dense internal layers of steeply inclined pathways peek through wooden scaffolds. Open arches repeat rhythmically. Nestled into external arches, dwellings extend to the edges of unprotected plateaus. The structure is crafted in such a way that light would enter through the arches in the exterior, but layer upon layer of internal arches suggest darkness in internal habitations. Swaths of unsculpted stone suggest that it may have been built using a preexisting foundation, perhaps from a mountain. In the foreground, ships

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<sup>900</sup> Julia Kristeva, “The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue,” trans. Anne Marsella, [kristeva.fr](http://kristeva.fr).

<sup>901</sup> André Breton, *L'Art Magique* (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 1991): 18-19.

gather at a port. In the background, surrounding dwellings extend up until a distant surrounding wall, behind which, a bucolic countryside is speckled with small communities.

Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* painting makes an appearance in *Society of the Spectacle*. Throughout *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord continually displays the construction of modern towers. He shows the construction of a corporate campus that includes E.S.S.O., Europe, E.D.F-G.D.F, and Aurore in La Défense, in the business district of Paris. "As their alienated products accumulate, all time and space become foreign to [producers,]" says Debord as the camera arcs, enclosed and surrounded by repetitive corporate buildings.<sup>902</sup> Debord seems to draw a parallel to contemporary towers when he focuses later in the film for several seconds on a still of one of Bruegel's multiple *Tower[s] of Babel*, a version often known as "the little tower of Babel," as he describes revolution as "critique of human geography through which individuals and communities could create places and events." [FIGURE 6.17] He then immediately cuts from Babel to details from *Thebaid* by Fra Angelico attributed to Gherardo Di Jacopo Starnina (1410) [FIGURE 6.18] as he explains in the voiceover: "the ever-changing playing field of this new world and the freely chosen variations in the rules of the game will regenerate a diversity of local scenes." *Thebaid* depicts the area surrounding Thebes where hermits (including Saint Anthony) prayed, often tempted and tormented by evil spirits [FIGURE 6.19]. Next, Debord cuts to scenes of the Wild West from *Johnny Guitar*. Presumably, a cowboy traversing a sandstorm in the desert appears freeing for Debord. He calls *Johnny Guitar* "psychogeographic." Psychogeography can be divided into two roots, "psycho," related to the psyche or inner self, and "geographic," the terrain of the physical world.<sup>903</sup> Psychogeography seeks inspiration to liberate the inner self from

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<sup>902</sup> Guy Debord, "The Society of the Spectacle," *Œuvres Cinématographiques de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

<sup>903</sup> Debord to Straram, *D'une Révolution à l'Autre*: 138. "Ariane ma sœur, de quel amour blessée...Je mêlai je ne sais comment à cette tristesse, et la renforçant encore, le souvenir de l'étonnant début du film de Nicholas Ray,

its isolated subjectivity, and it does so by physically traversing space. While Babel is contained, both ideologically and spatially, psychogeography ideologically and spatially wanders.

Psychogeography perhaps is one method to “change the rules of the game.” Roger Caillois argues that the sin of Babel was abstraction and dogmatism that could be redirected through gamification. Caillois also authored a book titled *Babel* wherein he argued that the true sin of Babel was not excess or ambition, but merely in the fallacy of connecting to a tangible concept of heaven through a journey into the sky. The sky, after all, is not a vault above us, he says, and, as a result, the builders sought the heavens but found nothing. Contrarily, Raoul Vaneigem tends to see Babel as a materialist assault on an abstract heaven. As an attempt to bridge the divide between heaven and earth, or even to flip it, bringing heaven to earth, Babel could be interpreted as a materialist assault on abstractions and religiosity, which separated people from their bodies and the worldly. Vaneigem sees Babel as valiant and God’s response as cruel, “cynical,” and “hypocritical.” Vaneigem says, “It was this god who had shifted the blame for all disintegration, divergences of interests and antagonisms onto human beings, as in the story of the Tower of Babel. For trying to recapture heaven and bring the gods back to earth, the builders of the tower were struck by a divine malediction that forced them into mutual incomprehension and individual and collective self-destruction.”<sup>904</sup> Situationist T.J. Clark characterizes Bruegel as a materialist because of Bruegel’s interest in human folly, downfall, and material connection to the physical world:

Bruegel seemed to me a materialist, perhaps the deepest and most thoroughgoing to have left us a picture of the world; and in this he connected across history with certain other painters [...] who had a similar interest in the human world’s overall

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*Johnny Guitar*, d’une si remarquable ambiguïté, à la fois “psychogéographique” et sur le terrain des rencontres, avant que des explications ne soient données, qui ramènent le film à un très honorable Western. Film dont j’ai essayé l’an dernier d’acheter les droits de reproduction de quelques plans, pour les mêler (avec leur bande-son) à mon documentaire détourné (*Sur le Passage*).”

<sup>904</sup> Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*: 29.

orientation, in particular the way the upright (or downfallen) body connected with the ground.<sup>905</sup>

The appearance of *The Tower of Babel* in *Society of the Spectacle* suggests that Debord associated Babel with the Spectacle, which had both materialist and abstract qualities. The story of Babel discusses humanity's attempt to unify all aspects of the world through language and contain it in a building that would aim to reach heaven, both physically by building toward the sky, and intellectually by emulating the powers of God. The containment of a world within language and a manmade space that is at once abstract and material indeed seems to be a good metaphor for the Spectacle, as well as a good metaphor for a *Weltanschauung*.

*The Society of the Spectacle* intercuts *The Tower of Babel* with *Thebaid*, drawing associations with Saint Anthony and monks with visions. This theme appears in Surrealist and *fin de siècle* French art in the *Société Libre des Beaux-Arts*, which included Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Paul Verlaine, and Félicien Rops, Saint Anthony's hermitage represents sexualized temptation by illusions [FIGURE 6.20]. The Spectacle haunts and tempts through illusions, but temptation, itself, is not a bad thing for Debord. Rather than watching the tempestuous ghosts in the water like Saint Anthony, he, like an outlaw, wants to make those dreams into a reality, which is the revolution of everyday life and the slogan of the 1968 general strike. Debord's choice details from Fra Angelico's *Thebaid* does not have the strangeness of the Surrealists or the sexualized darkness of *fin de siècle* interpretations of Saint Anthony's temptation outside of Thebes. A boat blows in the wind. A woman catches a fish. Hermits in robes wander mountains with serious and at times crazed faces, but the viewer does not see what they see. Fra Angelico's depiction reminds the viewer that Saint Anthony's visions were visions. Perhaps this was a materialist interpretation of temptation, allowing viewers to feel that if they could wake up from

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<sup>905</sup> T.J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018): 74-75.

a tormented dream, they could enjoy simple fishing or sailing. Creatures like dragons are visible, and women appear, but they are simply small pieces of a bigger tableau, that is at once teaming with life and it displays a rhythm that is at ease, that is everyday — it is not chaotic or overwhelming. He juxtaposes these scenes with Babel. Paris, when characterized as a Babylon in the *fin de siècle*, used the term to mean debauchery.<sup>906</sup> The association between Babel and debauchery perhaps relates to the spectacular notions of excess and the baroque. While Debord in many ways supported and even represented the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s, he nevertheless criticized the excess of sexualized vision in the Spectacle for its superficiality and lack of fulfillment. *Thebaid* depicts visions. Everyday life and an expansive landscape surrounds monks, but they are preoccupied with the abstract spiritual world. *Thebaid* does not depict a revolution of everyday life so much as it depicts unique individuals who have become preoccupied with the unreal. Nevertheless, the everyday scenes that proliferate throughout *Thebaid* and the lack of consistency in the visions suggest that adventure and uniqueness are possible if the monkish deign to give into temptation and engage.

Given that Babel represents a biblical story, Debord's understanding should be grounded, at least in part, in the biblical passage, itself.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. [...] And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. [...] Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' [...] And the Lord said, 'Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused (*balal*) the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:1-9).<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>906</sup> Rupert Christiansen, *Paris Babylon: The Story of the Paris Commune* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>907</sup> *ESV Student Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016): Genesis 11.

The Tower of Babel ceased its construction, but Genesis does not mention anything about its fall, as with the Walls of Jericho. Kabbalistic interpretations of Babel were referenced by Debord's interlocutors. In Maimonides' Kabbalistic commentary, the ascent and descent of the Almighty between realms creates a type of Fall of humanity that births a new world, a world of confusion and chaos, like the beginning of the profane world after the Fall from Grace of Eden. This Fall or Descent of humanity is metaphorical because "of course, God's existence does not exist in a spatial sense but only in relation to absolute reality, greatness, and power." God divides humanity and human potential as a metaphorical descent wherein construction, language, and understanding cease, but despite being metaphorical, there is nevertheless an impression of the vertically higher existence of Heaven and the lower existence of Earth. In art and literature, the Tower of Babel came to represent difference in language, the immateriality of language, ambition, and crisis — even a fall, metaphorically or not.

Sami Sjöberg's *The Vanguard Messiah* considers how Isidore Isou's concepts of Letterism responded to the concept of language as related to the origin of the world in Kabbalah. He contests that Isou's familiarity with the Kabbalah implies a relation to such stories, particularly due to the emphasis on letters in Letterism, but Sjöberg hypothesizes that Isou embodies a philosophy more reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's "lore" than the Babel of Maimonides.<sup>908</sup>

Isou sees a fall as a liberation and depicts himself as a messiah who liberates through destruction. His name, Isou, is a pseudonym that means "Jesus" in Latin. In *Agrégation d'un*

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<sup>908</sup> Sami Sjöberg, *The Vanguard Messiah* (Amsterdam: De Gruyter Oldenbourg): 138. "In Benjaminian lore, the expulsion from Eden — and not the Tower of Babel — accounts for the separation of languages. [...] The banishment of languages becomes mediated, which means that words are nothing more than signs instead of the creative word of the divine language. [...] Benjamin ascribes to Kabbalistic sources as he describes how the human subject had no access to the *immanente eigene Magie* [own immanent Magic] of language after the Fall. By such magic, Benjamin seems to mean pansemiosis, but in a form influenced by romanticism and the aesthetic Kabbalah, and not in the sense promoted by the prophetic Kabbalah. Isou does not provide a similar detailed genealogy for language to Benjamin's, but this aspect was embedded into the historiography of Kabbalistic pansemiosis. For Isou, language—in a form broadened with hypergraphics—was the sole route to messianic unity, even through "hyman language," the language of communication, was inherently insufficient."

*Nom et d'un Messie*, he declares himself and his avant-garde writing to be messianic. Isou's attack on art wherein he intends to "explode" the "fat pig of cinema"<sup>909</sup> gives a sense of the God of the Torah and Old Testament taking down Babel. Situationists did not depict themselves as messianic, but there is some consistency with how Letterists saw the history of art, film, and various disciplines as Babels that should be deconstructed. Vaneigem similarly compares the accumulation of knowledge and its systematization through different ideologies to Babels.

Vaneigem describes doctrine as a Babel-esque "pyramidal and derisory gigantism" that:

represent[s] and shelter[s] prejudices, clichés, and cretinisms of theological systems, philosophical Babels, ideological tricks and slight[s] of hand [...] What arduous scabbles [...] in the kilometeric stretch of the volumes devoted to God, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Marxism, [...] and the mechanisms of the universe.<sup>910</sup>

These notions extend not simply from Isou's critiques, but from Surrealism as well. The first paragraphs of André Breton's *l'Art Magique* use the Tower of Babel as a metaphor for the pitfalls of abstraction and the overambitious creation of abstract worlds, or *Weltanschauung*. Breton associates Babel with expanse, confusion, and attempted unity that ends in overcomplicated falsity. Instead of creating a Tower of Babel, he is searching for a degree of truth contained within a scope that is not prescriptive toward the entire world with claims that are too broad. Breton proposes a retreat away from the art of "civilization" or "all poetic *Weltanschauung* [...] of the Christian West and the white race,"<sup>911</sup> and instead a revival of "primitive" art and the origins of art, which lay in magic. However, the creation of *Weltanschauung* themselves are "first of all a magical act," because a *Weltanschauung* "claims to account for [...] the totality of

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<sup>909</sup> Isidore Isou, *Treatise on Venom and Eternity*, trans. Ian Thompson, Nadège Lejeune, and Anna O'Meara (Ann Arbor: Annex Press, 2019).

<sup>910</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Chevalier, La Dame, le Diable et la Mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 154.

<sup>911</sup> Breton, *L'Art Magique*: 94. "Quant à l'art, il se recharge périodiquement de magie, et, à notre époque, semble être sur le point de périr, ou bien de se constituer en magie proprement dite, toute *Weltanschauung* poétique ayant disparu de la civilisation environnante (celle de l'Occident chrétien et de la race blanche.)

experience,” argues Gérard LeGrand.<sup>912</sup> Breton begins to consider how to define “magic,” but the reduction of a broad concept to a single word, “magic,” in itself creates a totalizing *Weltanschauung*.<sup>913</sup> “Magic,” can be used to mean many things according to so many people, that its apparent unity is, in fact, an oscillating expanse of a Tower of Babel, says Breton, referring to Novalis.<sup>914</sup> Novalis considered Babel in terms of a description of the inherent falsity of language. He questioned “language’s relation to reality,” and argued that “language is material illusion — sign — image.” Babel led Novalis to ask, “What is reality, anyway?” Language, he decided, was a tool. Signs and communication are used as “projections” to understand “the essence and qualities of a Whole.”<sup>915</sup>

At first glance, one might presume that Situationist references to Babel derived from Letterist and Surrealist interests in the subjects. However, as is often the issue with attempting to trace origins, there are other sources as well, especially the Hungarian Dialogic School, or the first intellectual sphere of Situationist Attila Kotányi, who also consider Babel in terms of language. For Szabó and Tábor, the confusion of perception is not simply a disconnect between the material world and the mind, but also within the mind, itself. In 1930, they wrote a book together titled *Vádirat a Szellem Ellen (Indictment of the Spirit)*, wherein they consider language as, itself, a type of material, that is the closest to physical reality that humans can attain. Nevertheless, language has its own limitations, and creates Babel-like linguistic confusion. They named this issue “language materialism.”<sup>916</sup>

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<sup>912</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique*: 307. “Toute *Weltanschauung*, même réduite à des théorèmes abstraits, est d’abord un acte magique, puisqu’elle prétend rendre compte non seulement de la totalité de l’expérience, mais d’une expérience (par définition illusoire aux yeux de la science) de la totalité. L’art qui restitue au concret cette expérience ne peut être à son tour qu’imprégné de magie.”

<sup>913</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique*: 23.

<sup>914</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique*: 23.

<sup>915</sup> William Arctander O’Brien, *Novalis: Signs of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995): 108.

<sup>916</sup> Lajos Szabó and Béla Tábor, *Vádirat a Szellem Ellen* (Budapest: Pannon, 1991).

Khayati, while he differs drastically from Szabó and Tábor in terms of his anti-mysticism, reflects notions of linguistic materialism in “Captive Words” where he called “Language” “the material support of its ideology” and declared that “language is the house of power,” creating a strong sense of material physicality in language that likewise seems to refer to language as related to an architectural space, like Babel. Gnosticism similarly worried that language has been contaminated and “completely dominated by the material structures of the world.” For Gnostics, this is a “poverty of worldly language that must destroy itself in the void.”<sup>917</sup> According to Khayati, “every critique of the old world has been made in the language of that world,” but critiques change language, making it dialectically new. Surrounding words are a “world of meanings.” Attacking the world of meanings of the old world means attacking that world, itself. Thus, there is a materiality to language. “It is impossible to get rid of a world without getting rid of the language that conceals and protects it.” However, unlike Gnostics and (the concept of) God, for Khayati, is not related to transcendence or a separation from the material world of language, but rather the mediator:

Just as the Christian God is the necessary mediation between two souls and between the soul and the self, the discourse of power de-establishes itself at the heart of all communication, becoming the necessary mediation between self and self. This is how it is able to coopt oppositional movements, diverting them onto its own terrain.<sup>918</sup>

Conceptual God, here, is essentially the embodiment of power, which is rendered not only physical, but as a world, having a “terrain,” much like Marx’s concept that God is, in fact, a world rather than an entity,<sup>919</sup> which appears in Debord’s reading notes.

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<sup>917</sup>Preisendanz, “Dritte Sitzung: Surrealismus und Gnosis,” *Immanente Ästhetik, Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1966): 436. “Schließlich ist sowohl für Solger wie für Hoffmann das Problem relevant, daß die Sprache als Organ solcher Transzendenz ganz durchwaltet bleibt von den Strukturen der Welt und daß sich also gerade deshalb der poetische Trieb, eingehend in diese Dürftigkeit der welthaften Sprache, stets im Nichtigen selbst vernichten muß.”

<sup>918</sup> Mustapha Khayati, “Captive Words,” 225-227.

<sup>919</sup> Guy Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Marx, Hegel*, (Paris: Éditions l’Échappée, 2021): 35.

The philosophical goal of *Vádirat a Szellem Ellen (Indictment of the Spirit)* is to reconnect “unity of experience and word.” Babel disconnected words from material meanings and reality, but Lajos and Tábor argue, there are inner contents, histories, and realities within words that can be reunited to experience through “existential etymology.” They are influenced by Marx’s materialism, but they also believe that the reunification of words with real experience is a spiritual experience. Nevertheless, they are aware that spiritual life is plagued by abstracted confusions, and that spirituality has come to represent “irresponsibility” through its removal from wordliness — it has “fallen upward.” Like Marx and Eckhart, Lajos Szabó want to bring heaven to earth, as does Marx. For Lajos Szabó, Babel represented a “conquest of the stratosphere,” moving upward into the sky, literally and metaphorically, which created the reification of language, removing it from experience. They compare this journey to the “boundless confidence of the scientific age,” which looks to the sky in space travel but disconnects from life.<sup>920</sup>

Situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys planned a “New Babylon,” so titled in 1960 [FIGURE 6.21]. Unlike the story of the Tower of Babel, however, Nieuwenhuys aimed to build a city that

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<sup>920</sup> Lajos Szabó and Béla Tábor, *Vádirat a Szellem Ellen*, (Budapest: Pannon Panteon, 1991): 13. “Így éljük át a bábéli torony meséjét. Égig érő tornyot akartak építeni az emberek és közben izolált darabokra bomlott az egységes ősnyelv - tekintse mesének, aki tudja. Aki visszaemlékszik csak egyetlen pillanatra is, melyben úgy érezte, hogy belső világában a tudat és tudatalatti, szó és történet, logika és intuíció egységbe oldódtak, nem fogja tudni mesének tekinteni. Ilyen pillanata mindenkinek volt; másrészt viszont igaz az is, hogy egyre nő azoknak a száma, akik ezekre a pillanatokra lehetőleg nem emlékeznek vissza. Tehát mese - de nem hozzánk, rólunk ebben a mesében? A motívumok nagyon is ismerősek. A ’tudományos korszak’ határtalan önbizalma - függetlenül attól, hogy ez az önbizalom indokolt-e vagy indokolatlan – mindnyájunk élménye. A föld meghódítása, a víz meghódítása, a levegő meghódítása, a sztratoszféra meghódítása. [...] Itt rejlik a mese másik motívuma, a bábéli torony gigantikus vállalkozása mellett a bábéli nyelvzavar, amely magánál a hódítás fogalmánál kezdődik. Úgy látszik, kifelé mást nevezünk hódításnak, mint befelé. Ez a kettősség a kiindulópont, a bábéli nyelvzavar alapmetszete. Az élő nyelvünk romlott meg; alapja csúszóvá lett: “lét” mállott, kevert, mérgezett, fertőzött. Ennek a szónak belső tartalma lehet csak a fix pont, amelyen állva bármilyen magatartást egyáltalában elhatározhatunk. Ha ezt az élményt nem fejezi ki, úgy ez azt jelenti, hogy éppen az elhatározásra nem vagyunk képesek, hogy lemondjunk minden állásfoglalásról, és amit még ezek után állásfoglalásnak nevezünk, nem egyéb, mint az izolált pillanatok véletlen helyzetképeinek tudomásulvétele. A tiszta - nem korrumpált - szó a belső történet egyik szerves mozzanata; nem a társadalmi érintkezés ’praktikus eszköze,’ nem valami ősi technikai vívmány, a gépkorszak korai előfutára, mint ahogy a mesterséges világnyelv hívei.”

allowed for variation, a city that was malleable by its residents. “New Babylon” is suspended above the ground, providing different levels and dimensions for experience. The suspended construction allows for movement like a mobile sculpture. The structure offered “a conceptual architecture for thinking about the world.”<sup>921</sup> Nieuwenhuys argues that New Babylon was “a realistic project” because the “present condition [...] has lost all contact with reality.”<sup>922</sup> The present world, the present reality, is removed from what was once reality, like what Szabó and Tábor call a “fall upward.”

In *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, Vaneigem categorizes two types of language: the language of power, which is abstract and Godly, and the material language of the earth. There is, he says, a materiality to language that can also be divided from it as meanings and archetypes are imposed onto words, and as words lose their sense of historicity, connotations, and flexibility. The language of Babel represents linguistic flexibility and broadness, dubbed as incoherence:

Language [...] is elevated above human beings, binding them together in a network of abstractions, woven together into a web of myth. [...] The legend of the Tower of Babel is a warning to priests. It reveals the incoherence that threatens to undermine the language of temporal power (the profane communication between master and slave.) From the moment that the materiality of worldly language challenges the language of the gods, the message of heavenly economy is confronted by the crude and earthly language that emanated from it.<sup>923</sup>

Asger Jorn relishes in the changeability of meanings, and the idea that there is not one world, but worlds; and, thus, there is not one end the world, but ends of the worlds. Contrary to Vaneigem’s interpretation, the issue with Babel was not its expansive incoherence, but rather its singularity of meanings and attempt at universality. He writes:

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<sup>921</sup> McKenzie Wark, “New Babylon ou le Monde des Communs,” *Multitudes* 41 (Paris: CAIRN, 2010).

<sup>922</sup> Ibid.

<sup>923</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Movement of the Free Spirit*, trans. Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson (New York: Zone Books, 1998): 42.

There is a tendency in matter that functions toward exclusivity, exclusion, and incomprehensibility, towards the attraction to border regions, towards dissolution, towards fog-formation, and that precisely this dissolving activity is necessary for the sake of unity, that in its time the Tower of Babel could not be completed because men knew each other all too well, with everyone doing and saying the exact same thing. Therefore they were separated so that each could learn something the other could not and pronounce words that the other could not say or understand, so that when they got together and build the Tower of Babel.<sup>924</sup>

While Jorn argues that “saying and doing the exact same thing” was detrimental, some sense of unitary theoretical approach could create solidarity. In “La Révolution Architecturale Accomplie,” Jorn argues that modern structures are, in fact, *not* like Babel because they are blocked by academic disagreements and efforts to embroil architecture with various traditions. He says that this disunity blocks progress and that Babels will indeed be built because a new revolutionary era of architecture is coming: “an era of solidarity.”<sup>925</sup> A true, functional Babel would mean unity.

Situationists were no stranger to “crude” and “earthly” language, and they used pornographic and taboo references as strategic challenges to authority on many occasions. *Détournement* could be compared to a type of heresy insofar as heresy uses and changes religious ideas in order to change aspects of the existing social order. Vaneigem investigates heresy and finds value in its inherent challenges to Christianity. His *Resistance to Christianity* considers heresies like in the *Book of Baruch* by Justin the Gnostic, who anthropomorphizes Babel into a woman parallel to Eve in *Genesis*:

Elohim, who found himself under the authority of the Good, did not descend toward Eden. Then the one [Eden] commanded Babel, who is Aphrodite, to provoke the adulterous and divorced men [...] Omphalos, who is none other than Babel, Aphrodite; the one who seduced Hercules and disrobed him of his power (...) dressed him in her robe, that is to say, in the power of Eden, the power of below.<sup>926</sup>

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<sup>924</sup> Asger Jorn, *The Natural Order*, (New York: Routledge, 2001): 290.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid.

<sup>926</sup> Vaneigem, *Resistance to Christianity*: 82.

Babel thus is not only a tower, but a representation of “below,” of Eden, and of Aphrodite. These conflations highlight how God is better understood as a world or a space rather than an individual. Debord writes in his notes on Marx:

This State, this society, produces religion, an erroneous consciousness of the false world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritual point of honor [...] because the human essence has no true reality. The fight against religion is therefore in turn the fight against this world, of which religion is the spiritual aroma. This religious misery is on the one hand the expression of real misery. Religion is the sigh of the creature overwhelmed by misfortune, the soul of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless era. It's the opium of the people.<sup>927</sup>

Debord facetiously connects his own creative work to the cosmic work of God creating the world. He revives the Gnostic problem: if the world is bad, why would God create it in the first place? The trailer for Debord's *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* presents an icon of God the Father giving a blessing that points to heaven with one hand, and he points to earth with the other. The caption reads, “At the moment when God was going to create the world, he was so revolted by this film that he decided to not create the world at all.”<sup>928</sup> He points downward toward the world, and considers creation, but stops himself. Debord fantasizes a film that would stop the creation of worlds through negation. At the same time, Debord states that *In Girum* is meant to reflect the entirety of the world through a “*miroir du monde*,” an omnipotent, God-like alpha and omega.

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<sup>927</sup> Guy Debord, *La Librairie de Guy Debord: Marx, Hegel* (Paris: Éditions d'Échappée, 2021): 35. Notes on Marx, *Contribution à la Critique de la Philosophie du Droit de Hegel*. “Cet État, cette société, produisent la religion, une conscience erronée du monde faux. La religion est la théorie générale de ce monde, son compendium encyclopédique, sa logique sous une forme populaire, son point d'honneur spirituel [...] parce que l'essence humaine n'a pas de réalité véritable. La lutte contre la religion est donc par ricochet la lutte contre ce monde, dont la religion est l'arôme spirituel. Cette misère religieuse est d'une part l'expression de la misère réelle. La religion est le supir de la créature accablée par le malheur, l'âme d'un monde sans cœur, de même qu'elle est l'esprit d'une époque sans esprit. C'est l'opium du peuple.”

<sup>928</sup> Debord, “Trailer to *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*” (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

The divide between heaven and earth, the immaterial or abstract and the material, has so far been described in terms of language and illusion, which have both abstract and material aspects. However, both Surrealists and Situationists do also consider the possibility of a literal, physical, historical Babel, particularly through confluences with the Babylonian ziggurat. This conflation is made direct in Yves Raynaud's *l'Organisation Révolutionnaire*, which is referenced in Guy Debord's reading notes. Raynaud stood alongside Situationists in May 1968 and kept a close and fond relationship with Debord. He closes *l'Organisation Révolutionnaire* with a broad history of Abrahamic religions and Western philosophy that pinnacles with the Spectacle. Raynaud argues that Abrahamic religions originate with the story of Babel and Babylon (one, listed after the other), and that these origins continue to exist, they "cannot be untangled."<sup>929</sup> Babel's relationship to heaven and God, rather than simply the theoretical discussions about how language developed, appear in Surrealist uses of Babel and the Babylonian ziggurat allude to their readings of Mircea Eliade, who discussed the ziggurat as an example of exoticized depictions of tribes wherein non-European religions were seen as past and primordial. Breton references Eliade in *l'Art Magique*, who calls the Babylonian ziggurat a link between heaven and earth. "The ziggurat was literally a cosmic mountain; the seven stories represented the seven planetary heavens; by ascending them, the priest reached the summit of the universe."<sup>930</sup> Letterist and Situationist-correspondent, Jean-Louis Brau, cites a Babylonian incantation in *La Sorcellerie*, stating that, like the seven tiers of the ziggurat, there were also seven demons on earth and seven demons in heaven:

There are seven, there are two times seven. There are seven in the heavens and seven on the earth. They are evil, they are evil. Among the wise gods, they aren't known. Their name does not exist, neither on heaven nor on earth.<sup>931</sup>

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<sup>929</sup> Yves Raynaud, *l'Organisation Révolutionnaire* (Paris: Yves Raynaud, 2014): 200.

<sup>930</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963): 40-41.

<sup>931</sup> Jean-Louis Brau, *La Sorcellerie* (Paris: MA Éditions, 1986): 56.

The demons mirror each other in number and in their relationship to heaven and earth. Babel, after all, is a story about the attempt to bridge heaven and earth. Pieter Bruegel represents Babel in multiple similar paintings circa 1563, each represented with seven tiered towers, likely a conflation with the Babylonian ziggurat. The seven-tiered ziggurat appears as a theme not only in ancient art, but in Renaissance art as well — for Bruegel, to depict Babel, but also for Dante to depict Purgatory. Dante’s Purgatory similarly stands as a seven-tiered tower that links heaven and earth. In *Les Initiés d’Occident* Brau presents an 1881 print of Dante in front of the seven-tiered tower of purgatory [FIGURE 6.22]. The journey upward depicts human toiling that eventually leads upward toward heaven. Movement toward heaven is challenging but difficult. Unlike heaven and hell, the path through purgatory is not eternal. It, like life and like the story of Babel, will end. Purgatory’s end is the beginning of a new and better existence. Like the story of the labyrinth as life, there is an escape. However, that escape is like death: an eternal, fixed existence in heaven. Purgatory, unlike heaven and hell, involves movement and change. It is in flux. Furthermore, while it traverses upward toward heaven, the tower of Purgatory, like Babel, is tied to the earth.

Vaneigem argues that structures like the ziggurat were not just representations of conquest, human ingenuity, or symbolic beliefs, but they were intended as fortification. In Vaneigem’s notes on Breton’s *l’Art Magique*, he notes that “consciousness does not find symbols useful unless they have cosmic fortification.”<sup>932</sup> The ziggurat was not a symbol, it was intended to be a real and functional receptacle for the power of Gods. For Eliade, the sacred is defined by its realness. In fact, its ritual repetition solidifies its reality. Vaneigem responds to this will for coherence between the world and individuals, but he says that it can only be partially realized. In

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<sup>932</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, Raoul Vaneigem Papers, “Reading Notes,” Box 1, GEN MSS 1455, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

other words, the search for a common language translates to individuals through an “inner rhythm,” but that language, like the Tower of Babel, is breakable.

André Breton describes the ziggurat as “a receptacle for bolts of lightning and meteors to secure the terrestrial acquisition of powers from above.”<sup>933</sup> While he references Swedenborg, who argues that Babel is “not a city,” but a symbol for “interior worship,” Breton is interested in the historical tower as a material space or “house” for consolidating heavenly powers and for creating realities on earth that are driven by abstract — or “magical” — principles like language and art (which is a form of communication.) He refers to Mircea Eliade on the physicality of the house in relation to portals and magical manifestation that connects to other worlds.<sup>934</sup> The ziggurat as a portal materializes the other worlds outside of the material world, e.g. abstract meanings, similar to how art materializes a vision of the interior world of an artist. Nevertheless, even once made physical, the tower maintains abstract meanings and thus remains archetypal and mythical. “The mythical Tower of Babel, whose name signifies a ‘Gate of God’ is a sort of poor archetype. This is where the sixteenth Major Arcana of the medieval Tarot derives its traditional name of Maison-Dieu.”<sup>935</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Marseille Tarot deck, it appears as though fire, lightning, and abstract cosmic light enter the tower, as though the tower has opened its lid, ready to contain a sublime destructive ray that falls from above. The sky is speckled in red, blue, and white dots. In some medieval decks, the ray extends from the sun, while, in others, it is represented as lightning or simply fire. In Oswald Wirth’s deck, the shape of the tower mirrors the Marseille tower, and a similar jagged ray of the sun penetrates the tower in the shape of an arrow. He does not title this card *The Tower* or *The House of God*, but rather *The Fire of Heaven* (*Le Feu du Ciel*) [FIGURE 6.23] In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rider-Waite deck, lightning dislodges

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<sup>933</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique*: 132.

<sup>934</sup> Ibid.

<sup>935</sup> Breton, *L’Art Magique*, 133.

inhabitants from the tower, and they plummet from the sky to the earth. The Tarot represents archetypal disaster, which can occur at points in life in ways that are reminiscent of the story of Babel. Annie Le Brun makes a similar comparison:

The notion of disaster is an inherent part of the human mind. It appears as soon as we wonder about ourselves. Thus, from chaos to Revelation, from the Flood to the end of time, from the Tower of Babel to the year 10000, to the total upheaval that engendered the revolutionary *Grand Soir*, countless are the imaginary constructions that led to catastrophe as a constant.<sup>936</sup>

Annie Le Brun saw the Tower of Babel as a form of Revelations that was emblematic of events so remarkably destructive that they change the world, destroying an old world and leading to a new one, like an apocalypse.

Asger Jorn similarly describes apocalypse as recurring to the point of being common. He writes a short story wherein a character pleads to his friend: “You must listen to me. I have written down a frightful message. Judgement Day will soon come for us all, and now it must be made known to every person on the Earth.” His friend responds, “Judgement Day, but that was on Wednesday.” The writer then feels as though it was not worthwhile to write at all and that he might as well burn his words, to which his friend responds, “No [...] You must not do that, for it is Judgement Day far more often than you suspect.”<sup>937</sup> It is up to writers to prophesize catastrophic events and untenable social constructions. They can do so through observing their present moment, which can provide insight for the future.

### **5.5 “Game of the World” (*Jeu du Monde*)**

A prevailing sense of cosmic destiny characterized the anxieties of Kostas Axelos of *Arguments* in his book, *Game of the World*, wherein the concepts of games are reflected in a global, cosmic force that is greater than humanity; a force filled with secret rules that humans

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<sup>936</sup> Annie Le Brun and Karl Pollin-Dubois, *The Heart of the Void*, trans. Nisrine Slitine El Mghari *World Literature Today* 93.4 (University of Oklahoma, 2019).

<sup>937</sup> Jorn, *The Natural Order*: 291.

could see in pieces through human games, but which was not reducible to human games. This concept of a world that is planetary, above history, universal, and reflected through mythology, art, and games aligned with the Planetism exemplified by Axelos during his time contributing to *Planète*. It was also precisely the concept of the world that Situationists opposed: one that would lead to mystification and totalitarian thought. Axelos' game of the world "exceeded everything" as the "only globally worldly game."<sup>938</sup> He saw this as a positive means of understanding reality. Seeing international affairs as a "game" was typical in the postwar period, particularly through the influence of Game Theory, or statistical and sociological tactics that informed how nations should respond to aggression, particularly nuclear aggression.<sup>939</sup> Lefebvre addresses Axelos' *Game of the World* with caution:

The human plays with their destiny seriously, and the universe plays with planet earth, with the seriousness and games of humans. Appearance and apparition play with reality, because reality is only the play of appearances. Being? Nature? The absolute? Let us not speak of these. When we play, we are there without speaking of it. 'It' is an eternal child, gathering dice to throw them into the infinite. Oh demon of the dialectic! Divine demon! Eternal childhood! He who would speak clearly becomes as obscure as Heraclitus — and Axelos. Reader, hypocritical reader, it is your turn to play – and to judge.<sup>940</sup>

It is as if Lefebvre is speaking diplomatically, making concessions, perhaps to Situationists, who see the world as dialectical and changeable, beauty as situational, people as encountering one another for brief moments in time, and the "absolute" as a dangerous concept that lends itself to mythological, mystical, and totalitarian thought. On the other hand, Lefebvre supports Axelos, or invites the reader to consider doing so. The invitation is quaintly noncommittal, as though to avoid confrontation: "Reader, hypocritical reader, it is your turn to play – and to judge."<sup>941</sup>

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<sup>938</sup> Kostas Axelos, *Game of the World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2023): 402.

<sup>939</sup> Paul Erickson, *The World the Game Theorists Made* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.)

<sup>940</sup> Lefebvre, *State/Space/World*: 257.

<sup>941</sup> *Ibid.*

Situationists also considered games in relation to the world, through a text that contrasted significantly from the ideas of Axelos: Roger Caillois' *Les Jeux et Les Hommes*. Khayati's course notes include Georges Gusdorf's class on Caillois' "Theory of the Game" wherein Gusdorf discusses how games are sacred. Gusdorf describes "the world [as] a fable," or *mundus est fabula*, referencing René Descartes.<sup>942</sup> Caillois' *Les Jeux et Les Hommes* argues that games become "perverted" when they are taken as reality. Both myths and games involve a commitment to a "closed universe," but the difference is that the game is temporary. After the game is over, applause, for example, can signal a return to reality. Myths, contrarily, necessitate ongoing commitment to the closed universe, its rules, and its prescriptive fiction that describes the world, and the character that it compels one to play.<sup>943</sup> Tarot is a great example of a game that is taken as real. It includes aspects of games, particularly risk. In fact, Tarot is the historical origin of suits in typical decks of playing cards.<sup>944</sup>

The tarot cards themselves were and remain used for both purposes. At every point, there is a natural shift between risk and superstition. [...] Through the knowledge and use of the chances that heaven offers, people try to obtain the reward that they can win through [...] relentless effort and patient application [...] Superstition thus appears as perversion, that is to say the application to reality of that of the principles of play.<sup>945</sup>

In *l'Art Magique*, André Breton discusses how Tarot was traditionally referred to as a "Jeu du Monde," a "Game of the World."<sup>946</sup> Tarot connects cards to stories intended to answer questions about the specific everyday lives of readers through association. Infinite permutations of possible narratives intend to represent manifestations of the real world each time different cards are drawn

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<sup>942</sup> Mustapha Khayati Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 1480

<sup>943</sup> Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et Les Hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958): 40.

<sup>944</sup> Tim Husband, "Before Fortune-Telling: The History and Structure of Tarot Cards" (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016) [metmuseum.org](http://metmuseum.org).

<sup>945</sup> Caillois, *Les Jeux et les Hommes*: 82. "Les tarots eux-mêmes furent et demeurent employés aux deux fins. En tout point, il existe un glissement comme naturel entre risque et superstition. [...] Par la connaissance et l'utilisation des chances que lui ménage le ciel, il tente d'obtenir la récompense qu'il doute de conquérir par ses qualités par un effort acharné et une application patiente [...] La superstition apparaît ainsi comme la perversion, c'est-à-dire l'application à la réalité de ce principe de jeu."

<sup>946</sup> Breton, *l'Art Magique*: 164.

(by chance or, traditionally, through premonition.) Situationists were interested in games of chance because they presented multiple possible outcomes rather than stagnation. *Les Jeux et les Hommes* suggested that games and mythology were linked. Tarot was of particular interest for Caillois and for Jacqueline De Jong, for example, because it invites mythology to describe specific aspects of the world through archetypes but, unlike philosophy, Tarot is based on changeability and the specifics of everyday life. Caillois, a materialist, argued that the difference between games and mythology was time, designated by a commitment to either playing for a short period of time as a fun experiment, or continuing to play with serious belief for life.

Jacqueline de Jong's *Situationist Times 4* includes an extract from an article on myths that Tarot derived from Egypt by H.C. Doets titled "Extract of Literature found on the Subject 'an Egyptian Tarot,' which argues that Tarot intends to have repercussions in three worlds: the "divine world;" the "intellectual world;" and "the physical world." Tarot readers are led by a double of themselves into the spirit world to see the future through cards, thereby dividing the body and spirit. Doet's article cites an occultist belief that Moses left secret Kabbalistic hieroglyphics preserved by Egyptians that would lead to Tarot. Egyptian hierophants kept these "metaphysical Truths" secret among themselves, according to Pyotr Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe*, cites Doets.<sup>947</sup> Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe* states that Tarot is "a combination of the Cabala, Alchemy, Magic, and Astrology."<sup>948</sup>

The four principles or the four letters of the Name of God, or the four alchemical elements, or the four classes or spirits, or the four divisions of man (the four Apocalyptic beasts) correspond to the four suits of the Tarot: wands, cups, swords, and pentacles.<sup>949</sup>

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<sup>947</sup> Jacqueline de Jong, *Situationist Times 4* (Paris: Situationist International, 1963): 117-120.

<sup>948</sup> Pyotr Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe* (London: Routledge, 1931): 237.

<sup>949</sup> Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*: 239.

Ouspensky divides the cards in the order of their numbering into alternating sets of seven, the first seven (numbered 1, 0, 6, 15, 7, 9, and 12) handling individual or human aspects, the second seven, the “the universe” (numbered 19, 18, 17, 16, 20, 10, 13), and the third seven, “God” (2, 3, 4, 5, 14, 11, 8). He does not categorize the 21<sup>st</sup> card, “the world,” in any of these sevens because it is a culminating card that represents every single card in Tarot. “The Tower” falls under “the universe.” Ouspensky distinguishes “universe” from “world” in a way that is uncommon. In common usage, the term “universe” is considered to be bigger than the world. Ouspensky, contrarily, describes the world as culminating, all-encompassing, and apocalyptic; it has universal attributes rather than particular. The universe as “Tower” and as a numbered category used to classify only about a third of cards, is characterized as particular rather than universal.

Ouspensky describes the world in Tarot:

When we placed card 0 in the center we had to use a certain figurative interpretation, saying that the world is contained in the mind of man. [...] [In another context,] The world is in the circle of time, among the four principles (or four elements) represented by the four beings of the Apocalypse.<sup>950</sup>

Thus, Tarot does not represent a consistent metaphysical framework, but shifts according to different situations. Ouspensky cites Eliphas Lévi's *Dogme et Rituel*:

The Tarot is a truly philosophical machine, which keeps the mind from wandering, while leaving it initiative and liberty; it is mathematics applied to the Absolute, the alliance of the positive and the ideal, a lottery of thoughts as exact as numbers, perhaps the simplest and grandest conception of human genius.<sup>951</sup>

Tarot, based on symbols, shifts the meaning of those symbols based on their order, similar to language. The world and everythingness can change their entire meaning based on pairings with the concept of everythingness. A perspective on the world describes every card in the Tarot and exists outside of categorization, but nevertheless remains changeable. The act of projection of the

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<sup>950</sup> Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*: 249.

<sup>951</sup> Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*: 236.

Self onto Tarot cards is an important part of the game. Archetypes are intended to recall and scramble aspects of an individual's actual life, inclining them to tell a personal story in a way that neither they nor the game had not envisioned prior, unlike filmic projections which are determined and carry a didactic or instructive quality, even if the didactic conclusion is simply that the viewer should buy cigarettes.

Ouspensky was of interest to Surrealists by the 1930s,<sup>952</sup> particularly for Roberto Matta and Gordon Onslow Ford, who were studying particle physics and the fourth dimension in relation to occultism.<sup>953</sup> In *Situationist Times* 4, Doets cites Ouspensky's reference to Oswald Wirth's *Le Tarot des Imagiers du Moyen Âge*, which was a collection of Tarot cards with a book of interpretations that was reprinted in 1927 with an introduction by Roger Caillois.<sup>954</sup> Wirth's Tarot deck and explanations were cited by Breton on many occasions.<sup>955</sup> Wirth and Ouspensky agree that the major arcana in Tarot (or the cards without the four suits: wands, cups, swords,

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<sup>952</sup> Ouspensky was influenced significantly by George Gurdjieff. Jean Louis-Brau cites Ouspensky on Gurdjieff, who distinguishes between waking states and dreaming. In a dream, a dreamer "cannot do anything." Gurdjieff describes a "subjective world" driven by "I like" and "I don't like" where reality is invisible. For both Debord and Gurdjieff, humans display similar lack of agency in their waking life.<sup>952</sup> The difference between them is that Gurdjieff sees the world as necessarily this way, whereas Debord sees such entrapment as a ramification of the Spectacle. The Spectacle renders individuals as spectators, "chaining" them in a bad dream. In 1956, Debord references Gurdjieff in a letter to Alexander Trocchi, calling him a "worldly guru" who believes in the intrinsic importance of individuals beyond their actions, with which Debord does not agree (see footnote 892.) The use of the word "worldly" is interesting, given Gurdjieff's explorations of dreams, but there is a reality to dreams that Gurdjieff considers - the reality of physical being as a dreamer, and the reality of physical responses to dreams. Gurdjieff already distances the importance of being and self as he explores dreams, but his continued belief in the value of self and individual marks his departure from Debord. Thus, we can imagine that the entrapment and dissolution of self in subjectivity and dreams is emphasized in Debord's worldview. Discussions of Gurdjieff were common among Surrealists, especially André Breton. Charles Duits argued that "Breton was much closer (for example) than to Gurdjieff than to the even greater writers with whom he's been compared." Louis Pauwels, editor of *Planète*, wrote a biographical history of the relationship between Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, using the text as a means of explaining their influence in Russia, New York, and France, their explorations in Asia, their philosophies, as well as a creating a platform to discuss philosophies related to reality, the self, and occultism. Louis Pauwels, *Monsieur Gurdjieff* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1954).

<sup>953</sup> Guy Debord to Alexander Trocchi, February 26, 1956, *Correspondence* 0 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2010). "Je ne crois pas à l'importance d'une personne en dehors de ses actes: ce sont Iris et Gurdjieff qui y croient [...] Gurdjieff, gourou mondain."

<sup>954</sup> Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*: 243.

<sup>955</sup> Nozomu Maenosono, *André Breton et les Grands Transparents: la Genèse d'un Mythe* (Lyon: Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2016).

pentacles) can be read in pairs of “antipodes” to one another,<sup>956</sup> thus portraying a world of opposites, or a dialectical world in conflict. Wirth, a Freemason, deviated from dogma in his approach to occultism. Rather, he saw occultism as for an approach to diverse possibilities for living. Wirth presented a mixture of rationalism and spiritualism that appealed to the rational mysticism of Le Corbusier and the mystical atheism of Breton.<sup>957</sup> Wirth had “an extreme aversion to all forms of deceptive doctrine and authoritarian dogma, as well as a mixture of intense logical rationalism and intense occult spiritualism.”<sup>958</sup>

Wirth, who appears in Vaneigem’s reading notes, developed a theory of image production and visualization that could easily be translated to theories of how symbols captivate the mind differently than texts, he argued. Words and discourse do not retain memory the way symbols can. Associations with them grasp the human mind through “mediation.” Wirth sees the submission to symbols as a liberation from “chatter” that allows for a deep presence in the consciousness:

Symbols do not act on the mind in the same way as texts: they generate thought and, as the field of thought is infinite, they have never suggested everything. If we advocate symbolism, it is because we have recognized it to be the most powerful stimulant of autonomous thought, derived from oneself. The philosophers who wear themselves out with words deafen us with their chatting, and far from making us think freely, they tend only to convert us to their system. Now, the superiority of symbols consists in the muteness that prevents them from preaching anything, while giving rise to reflection...But the person who is brought by symbolism to mediation no longer detaches himself from it, for the image makes the mind work untiringly. A first idea that has arisen spontaneously summons another, which gives rise to a third, and so on, in uninterrupted generation.<sup>959</sup>

What Wirth appreciates about Tarot is its openness to chance and flexibility with regards to symbols. Tarot may use the mediators of traditional symbols, but it still nevertheless presents

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<sup>956</sup> *The Situationist Times 4* ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris: 1963): 118.

<sup>957</sup> Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*.

<sup>958</sup> Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*: 147.

<sup>959</sup> Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*: 311.

infinite possibilities for interpretation and thus it is anti-authoritarian and anti-dogmatic. Caillois, in the introduction to Wirth's Tarot collection, *Le Tarot des Imagiers du Moyen Âge*, admires how Wirth sees Tarot and spirituality as games, inviting tarot readers to “play at divination.”<sup>960</sup> This approach is likely embraced by De Jong, whose *Situationist Times 4* explores the theory of the game and chance in relation to the many possible associations with symbols like labyrinths.

Wirth's Tarot deck revises archetypes, but largely mirrors the symbols from the medieval Marseille deck. Breton creates his own version of a deck, paralleling the style, content, and symbols of Marseille and Wirth, and he also titles it “the Marseille.” Instead of typical major arcana, he curates fictional characters, authors, and philosophers into archetypal symbols. “Alice” [in Wonderland], “Freud,” “Sade,” “Lautréamont,” “Hegel,” “Paracelse,” “Novalis,” and others are represented in stark primary colors,<sup>961</sup> similar to the color scheme of earlier Marseille decks. It is as though Breton has decided that these figures can be read into any situation, and one only needs to project the name of an author onto a given question to begin to derive answers and understanding. Playing with these names and images allows for juxtapositions that lead to internal conversations. Sade as a symbol in Breton's Tarot does not necessitate understanding of Sade's full biography, and instead can draw from any aspect of Sade, likely with consistent themes from Sade's character, including sexuality and imprisonment. The fiery red body and red eyes of Breton's Sade card could be said to symbolize passion and sexuality, while keyed doors unlocking a dark corridor above his mind represent both imprisonment and the winding corridors of his imaginative inner world [FIGURE 6.24].

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<sup>960</sup> Oswald Wirth, *Le Tarot des Imagiers du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Tchou, 2014.)

<sup>961</sup> André Breton and Roberto Matta Echaurren, *Marseille Tarot* (New York: Brentanos, 1945.)

An interesting trend occurred in divination between the medieval and modern periods. Divination came to be known as fortune telling.<sup>962</sup> The goals were less inclined toward creating futures or exploring possibilities (divining or transmuting), and rather questions that used the verb “to be” were posed with hopes for exact and stagnant finalities like, “At what age will I get married?” Raoul Vaneigem and Jacqueline De Jong, like Surrealists, are interested in alchemy and medieval magic due to its preoccupation with creativity, and not because they are interested in fortune telling or definable truths about the future, which not only would be mere occultism, but also it is a stagnant and in fact modernist worldview more like a definable *Weltanschauung* than a creative universe that is changeable and in motion.

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<sup>962</sup> Jesse Hathaway Diaz, “Diviner and Divined: The Mechanics, Manipulation, and Mutability of Fate,” *Psychoanalysis, Art and the Occult Conference* (London, 2016).

## Conclusion

It could be argued that this dissertation commits a major infraction to Situationist practice: it considers ontology. Despite how Situationists did consider ontology in their reading, they aimed to move from ontological questions into a practice that would change the world rather than merely understand it. Contemplating existence led to stagnation. A creative ontology of a world in motion was not really a philosophy or ontology at all. Marx, in this way, transcended philosophy and moved to politics, exemplified by his proposition:

Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to transform it.<sup>963</sup>

Despite the infraction, themes of creativity, a world in motion, and revolution connect to ontological subjects throughout this dissertation. If part of the Situationist program was to move from ontology, they did so dialectically, and thus ontology was retained in their discussion. One of the strange qualities to dialectics is that, when opposing any thesis, antithetical negation in some ways also embodies that thing. It retains an “umbilical link” to “what [it is] opposing,” argues Laura Mulvey.<sup>964</sup> So too are themes of Catholicism, for example, present throughout this dissertation. As Michel Foucault argues, within Catholic attempts to regulate and repress sexuality is an obsessive discussion of various types of sexualities.<sup>965</sup>

While a *détournement* marks a change or shift that can identify a “grain of truth” within the critique of an argument, it also carries historical ideas forward. However, it is not the goal of *détournement* to maintain the integrity of initial contexts and arguments.

The word *détournement* means a shift or distortion, and it contains etymology related to

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<sup>963</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

<sup>964</sup> Laura Mulvey and Roberta Sassatelli, “Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* (ResearchGate, 2011).

<sup>965</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Penguin, 1991.)

the word “turn” (*tourne*.) The word, “revolution,” relates etymologically to “revolve,” as in a circle. Historically, revolutions were depicted as wheels, as in the Wheel of Boethius, where time would shift like seasons that repeat, creating hierarchies that fall to be replaced by similar hierarchies. *Détournement* does not repeat. It does not follow a sense of “cyclical time,” but rather it’s *tourne* could be depicted as a winding path, like a labyrinth, or a shifting spiral. Part of the shift in *détournement* could come from intentionally forgetting aspects of the original. Situationists discuss life and history as necessarily changing, wherein memory necessarily distorts. They refer to Maurice Halbwachs who argues that all memories are creative distortions that are not recreations of the past.<sup>966</sup> Situationist references to Lautréamont, “plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it,”<sup>967</sup> call for the omission and therefore the intentional forgetting of original names and references to reuse ideas. This dissertation contrarily is a history. It does not use *détournement* as a strategic literary device; it makes citations; it documents; it aims to understand.

If the negative always remains within a dominant Hegelian thesis, that means that there are significant challenges and perhaps flaws with dialectical models for change. In *Hitler au Pouvoir*, Henri Lefebvre recalls how lack of political direction and call to action in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century led to conservative German critiques democratic thinking. Democracy did not “ask anything from them.” These concerns created some of the justification for indictments of democracy, laying groundwork for racism and fascism.<sup>968</sup>

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<sup>966</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 39.

<sup>967</sup> Khayati, “Captive Words.”

<sup>968</sup> Lefebvre, *Hitler au Pouvoir*: 55. “Beaucoup d’intellectuels allemands, formés par l’Empire ou par la guerre, méprisaient la démocratie parce qu’elle ne leur commandait rien. Et parce qu’elle ne leur commandait rien, ils n’avaient pas grand-chose à dire. Ils se sont rattrapés depuis. Ils ont retrouvé avec ivresse une doctrine d’État.”

War left conservatives, anarchists, leftists, anarchists, and Dadaists alike wrestling with questions of emptiness and purposelessness. Lefebvre critiqued of dialectical contrarianism in *The Critique of Everyday Life*, wherein he dubbed André Breton's Hegelianism as "simple-minded"<sup>969</sup> in its will to negate everything without constructing new consistent premises. While Debord triumphalized negation and even considered himself an embodiment of the negative, *Society of the Spectacle* nevertheless aimed to develop a cohesive and totalizing theory that was not contrarianism or nihilism, but rather a negation of a social reality that Debord did find existed and that he did consider to be detrimental to human life. However, he proposes strategies for change other than mere critique or negation: play, wherein moves are determined situationally, and a reference to Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*:

Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to transform it.<sup>970</sup>

This reference to Marx appears persistently in Situationist, Surrealist, and Letterist writing. Debord acknowledges that Marx wrote "more than a hundred years ago" when he proposed the revolutionary idea to change rather than interpret the world, an idea that transformed European philosophy, particularly in the tradition of *Weltanschauung*.<sup>971</sup> Debord calls for the will to transform, declaring in *Society of the Spectacle*, "The world has already been filmed. It is now necessary to transform it."<sup>972</sup> Isidore Isou remembers how Marx's publications were printed a century prior to his, and wonders why the economic conditions of the world have not yet transformed:

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<sup>969</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, (New York: Verso, 2014): 133.

<sup>970</sup> Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

<sup>971</sup> Guy Debord to Patrick Straram, August 1960, *D'une Révolution à l'Autre*: 118. "La compréhension philosophique a commencé à rejeter les illusions sur sa liberté il y a plus de cent ans, avec la constatation que l'on avait assez 'interprété le monde,' qui s'agissait désormais de transformer."

<sup>972</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Cinématographiques Complètes*: 74. "Le monde est déjà filmé. Il s'agit maintenant de le transformer."

Marx claims that we have thought about the world sufficiently and that it is a matter of transforming it. But for a century we have been transforming the universe every day and the disarray of the economy remains staggering.<sup>973</sup>

Marx's definition of transforming the world calls for the abolition of class, which Isou finds to be insufficient and vague.<sup>974</sup> Isou worries that "the economy can be transformed without changing anything other than the style of slavery."<sup>975</sup> Debord finds a median point between the transformative value of Marx's abolition of class and Isou's concern that a classless society does not necessarily mean a free society. He does address the vagueness in trying to measure the transformation of the world. Broadly, it cannot be effectively measured, defined, or evaluated by people within the context or world that they are trying to evaluate, just as individuals cannot evaluate themselves objectively. Only material contradictions and conflicts in social conditions can be analyzed with clarity.<sup>976</sup> *Society of the Spectacle* sees worker's councils as a means of transforming and redesigning the world in a way that mitigates class distinctions and lends to existing Marxist analyses. Situationists supported the exclamations from 1968 Council Communists, "All power to the worker's councils!"<sup>977</sup> and Debord argued in *Society of the Spectacle*:

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<sup>973</sup> Isou, *Traité d'Économie Nucléaire*: 25. "Marx prétend qu'on a suffisamment pensé le monde et qu'il s'agit de le transformer. Or depuis un siècle on transforme chaque jour l'univers et le désarroi de l'économie reste ahurissant."

<sup>974</sup> Isou, *Traité d'Économie Nucléaire*: 60. "On importe, maintenant, de transformer le monde," s'exclame Marx dans un aphorisme célèbre sur Feuerbach. Mais, c'est le transformer bien peu que de se contenter de l'abolition des classes, et en fait (car, on ne doit pas mesurer la largeur de la transformation) il ne s'agit que de le changer d'ici jusque-là. La, disrépance, faible-fort, inférieur-supérieur, canalisée et ramassée dans la formule saint-simonienne, oisif-travailleur, en perdant une de ses carapaces historiques, peut se transmettre sous d'autres visages que l'aspect de classe dans lequel elle s'est catalysée. On assiste à la parution d'un ferment social différent qui s'apprête à lutter pour son segment d'égalisation, entraînant à son tour dans sa route, sa partie de transformation du monde."

<sup>975</sup> Isou, *Traité d'Économie Nucléaire*: 136. "L'économie peut se transformer sans rien changer que le style de l'esclavage."

<sup>976</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Complètes Cinématographiques* : 18. "Tout comme on n'apprécie pas la valeur d'un homme selon la conception qu'il a de lui-même, on ne peut apprécier de telles époques de transformation selon la conscience qu'en à l'époque; bien au contraire, on doit expliquer la conscience à l'aide des contradictions de la vie matérielle, à l'aide du conflit qui existe entre les forces de production sociales et les conditions sociales."

<sup>977</sup> Viénet, *Enragés et Situationnistes*: 172.

The power of [worker's] councils will 'transform the totality of existing conditions' for it aspires to 'recognize itself in a world of its own design.'<sup>978</sup>

Worker's councils would be more tangible and direct than the Spectacle. The evolution of capitalism strategically detached from reality through the Spectacle, but if reality were visible, it would be more transformable because a direct relationship to reality would allow for facility of alteration and recreation. Worker's Councils, says Debord, would create more direct relationships with reality that become warped and intangible in other systems like the illusory Spectacle and religious systems wherein prayer for change is requested to a fictive God who does not and cannot listen or respond.<sup>979</sup>

In *Le Situationnisme*, Élane Brau argues that the "new proletariat" has the opportunity to inherit the worthless bourgeois world, and they will have a chance to rewrite what human nature means. Real desires could be expressed in a rewritten world. It would be truly revolutionary if desires were able to detach from the repressive Spectacle and its "fantastically [...] dreamlike delirium."<sup>980</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10 asserts, "We think, like Marx, that 'all of history is simply the total transformation of human nature.'<sup>981</sup>

Debord nevertheless seemed to resonate with Isou's concern that the abolition of classes did not mean the creation of freedom. *Society of the Spectacle* sees alienation as a possible

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<sup>978</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 127.

<sup>979</sup> Debord, *Librairie de Guy Debord: Hegel, Marx*: 250. "L'évolution capitaliste, à mesure qu'elle connaît mieux la réalité (et sait la modifier), s'en détache, crée un nouvel écran d'illusion (finalement: le spectacle.) Le réel est plus connaissable et transformable (parce que déjà en transformation) mais en même temps le rapport direct avec lui est dissous (c'est-à-dire seuls les Conseils ouvriers pourraient administrer au monde plus clairement que ne l'administrerait 'Dieu.'"

<sup>980</sup> Élane Brau, *Le Situationnisme*. (Paris: Roger Michel, 1968): 37. "La chance historique du nouveau prolétariat est d'être le seul héritier conséquent de la richesse sans valeur du monde bourgeois, à transformer et à dépasser dans le sens de l'homme total poursuivant l'appropriation totale de la nature et de sa propre nature. Cette réalisation de la nature de l'homme ne peut avoir de sens que par la satisfaction sans bornes et la multiplication infinie des désirs réels que le spectacle refoule dans les zones lointaines de l'inconscient révolutionnaire et qu'il n'est capable de réaliser que fantastiquement dans le délire onirique de sa publicité."

<sup>981</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10: 79. "Nous pensons, comme Marx, que 'l'histoire entière n'est que la transformation entière de la nature humaine.'"

means toward the “proletarianization of the world”<sup>982</sup> wherein power will be allotted to inhuman spectacular controls that progressively detach from a rule of the shadowy or unidentified few.

Alienation is a type of transformation in cases where people who were once united are separated, or relationships between individuals and the material world are mediated in such a way that did not exist previously. Certainly, not all transformations of the world have been positive. Debord defines history as “the transformation of reality,”<sup>983</sup> which he expresses as a series of world-changing and world-defining events over time. The development of the Spectacle was one such transformation. Anselm Jappe outlines Debord’s analysis in *Society of the Spectacle* of a progression of history from ancient times to the Middle Ages to the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution to the Spectacle, and how human relationships and labor changed over time.<sup>984</sup>

History is a struggle wherein theory and praxis allow for transformations. Action based on theory creates change, and Marx proposes a theory of action. As history transforms over time, everyday life and “human nature” transform as well. Debord writes in his notes on Marx: “History is really part of natural history, of the transformation of nature into humanity.”<sup>985</sup> Bertrand Cochard describes Debord’s politics as informed by the relationship to human beings to time. Like the labyrinth of life, time takes humans through a “permanent process of transformation.”<sup>986</sup> The only constant in life is continuous flux and movement. The sense of frozen time in images, spectacle, and the repetitions of the seasons (cyclical time) do not represent a reality that moves. However, in terms of the speed of historical struggle and transformation, certain moments move

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<sup>982</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 8.

<sup>983</sup> Tom Bunyard, “The Situationists, Hegel, and Hegelian Marxism in France,” *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook*: 56.

<sup>984</sup> Jappe, *Guy Debord*: 19.

<sup>985</sup> Cochard, “Guy Debord: La Politique et le Temps”: 70. “L’Histoire est elle-même une partie réelle de l’histoire naturelle, de la transformation de la nature en homme.”

<sup>986</sup> Cochard, “Guy Debord: La Politique et le Temps”: 79. “L’homme et le temps sont identiques car tous deux n’existent, peut-on dire, qu’à la condition de changer, de se transformer constamment: de même qu’un temps qui n’accueillerait aucun changement ne disposerait d’aucune épaisseur et à la limite ne serait même plus identifiable comme tel, l’être humain est engagé dans un processus permanent de transformation.”

more than others. Vaneigem expresses how ideology can freeze historical movement: “the revolutionary feels despair when confronted by the transformation of real historical movement into ideology.”<sup>987</sup> While ideology hinders real transformation, it is actually a type of transformation in itself, wherein inventions from human perception and worldviews are taken as universal nature, or “second nature.”<sup>988</sup> The apparent unchangability and truth of ideology, while a transformation from what existed before, appears untransformed, immutable, and stagnant. This stagnation is a lie wherein ideas have been “congealed into respectable truths — or, in other words, that have been transformed into lies.”<sup>989</sup>

György Lukács considers alienation as a process of transformation when he defines reification as “fetishism [that] transforms processes into things.”<sup>990</sup> The Spectacle’s reifying transition from world to pseudo-world and cyclical time to pseudo-cyclical time is an important historical transformation that irreversibly changed the world.<sup>991</sup> However, once this change happens, the sense of change and movement becomes false and frozen. The spectacular sense of time becomes false and frozen, because it is reliving the past through images of what once was. The pseudo-world, where we have lied to ourselves and accepted illusions as truth, cannot be revolutionary. Films cannot be revolutionary, based on the nature of the medium. Éleine Brau argues, “The alienated world produces lies, and these cannot reappear within what claims to carry social truth, without this organization itself being transformed into one more lie in a fundamentally lying world.”<sup>992</sup>

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<sup>987</sup> Vaneigem, *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*: 110.

<sup>988</sup> Lefebvre, *State/Space/World*: 278.

<sup>989</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith: 145.

<sup>990</sup> Jappe, *Guy Debord*: 22.

<sup>991</sup> Debord, *Œuvres Complètes Cinématographiques*: 106.

<sup>992</sup> Brau, *Le Situationnisme*: 33. “Le monde aliéné produit le mensonge, et celui-ci ne saurait réapparaître à l’intérieur de ce qui prétend porter la vérité sociale, sans que cette organisation ne se transforme elle-même en un mensonge de plus dans un monde fondamentalement mensonger.”

Surrealists, like Situationists, were interested in transforming the world. André Breton embraced Marx's call to action: "'Transform the world,' Marx said; 'change life,' Rimbaud said. These two watchwords are one for us."<sup>993</sup> Transforming the world, said Breton, was not just about transforming economic conditions but transforming the mind.<sup>994</sup> At moments, Surrealism was sincerely involved with calls to action, or *praxis*, as evidenced in their embrace of Marxist intent to transform rather than merely understand the world. Vaneigem argues that, somewhere along the way, Surrealism lost this sense of historical materialism and saw transformation instead as something occultist and connected to a Beyond. As a result, they "abandon[ed] all hope of changing life and, concomitantly, transforming the world," wherein Vaneigem references Dante's descent to hell — though is it better illustrated as a descent to heaven? Real transformation was lost in "the mists of the transcendent," much like the ideologies of Christianity. The transformation of this world, the material world or the "world of things," was replaced with "indulgence" in myths of other worlds.<sup>995</sup> Occultist inclinations in Surrealism thus may have involved a transformation, but not a material transformation, rather a transformation into alienation and abstraction. Such transformation recalls the reference to Balthasar Gracián in *The Situationist Times* 4, wherein a "miraculous mirror [...] transforms everything that seems natural into illusions."<sup>996</sup> The Spectacle is also illusory, but never just a "simple illusion."<sup>997</sup> It was precisely this transformation that Situationists wanted to break. Art, cinema, images, and ideology created pseudo-worlds that operated in pseudo-cyclical time and false senses of space. In *Internationale Situationniste* 10, Théo Frey proposed the Situationist project as "reuniting

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<sup>993</sup> Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*: 241.

<sup>994</sup> Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*: 288.

<sup>995</sup> Vaneigem, *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*: 121.

<sup>996</sup> *The Situationist Times* 4: 154.

<sup>997</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman: 212.

space and time in a free construction of individual and social space-time.”<sup>998</sup> The transformation of reification was part of a historical trajectory stemming from the transformation of labor into capital, or Marx’s concept of alienation.

According to Marx, money accumulated beyond a certain threshold is transformed into capital; according to Debord, capital accumulated beyond a certain threshold is transformed into images.<sup>999</sup>

Power relations and class conflicts were transformed into relations dictated by these new developments. Thus, while Situationists sought to transform the world, they did not seek just any sort of transformation. In fact, their project was in many ways a refusal of transformations, just as *Howls for Sade* refused to display images on the screen, rendering cinema material rather than transformative in the illusory sense. “We refuse to transform into power,” declared *Internationale Situationniste* 10.<sup>1000</sup> Instead of allowing themselves to transform into images, capital, and power structures, Situationists find value in tracking transformations over time including through historical changes and in changes in the meanings of words (etymology.) They also transform existing images and arguments into new ones thereby rewriting what exists into something new (*détournement*.) Jorn defines “situology” as the “transformative morphology of the unique.”<sup>1001</sup> Alice Becker-Ho documents the slang and regional dialect of Romani people in *Princes of Jargon*, comparing changes in linguistic meaning to *détournement*, while also finding and assessing historical changes and meanings thereby adding life and alterability to the history of words that gives them a type of materiality or worldliness beyond abstraction. Raoul Vaneigem similarly explores the changes in meanings of symbols and myths over time like the Gorgon and the serpent, distinctly searching for differences and contradictions to demystify ahistorical

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<sup>998</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10: 35. “Le tâche de réunifier l’espace et le temps dans une construction libre de l’espace-temps individuel et social.”

<sup>999</sup> Jappe, *Guy Debord*: 19.

<sup>1000</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10: 69. “Nous refusons même de nous transformer en pouvoir.”

<sup>1001</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 5: 40. “La situologie est la morphologie transformative de l’unique.”

understandings of mythology and archetypes. Jacqueline De Jong traces the historical transformations in meaning and productions of labyrinths to explain metaphors for human consciousness and how understandings of human experience changed over time in *The Situationist Times 4*.

Such morphologies are reminiscent of the “existential etymology” of the Hungarian Dialogic School, wherein words and meanings were material and their lives were on a changeable path that was deprived of its reality when reductively rendered abstract.<sup>1002</sup> The relationship between linguistic translation or morphology and material transformation appears when Debord argues that the spectacle is a “*Weltanschauung* translated materially,” to which Donald Nicholson-Smith adds the word “transformed” in the English translation. Situationist interest in linguistic and symbolic morphologies share qualities with the study of semiotics, though, given the academic nature of semioticians, Situationist René Viénet aimed to distinguish himself from such fields and thus only seem to consider academic fields like semiotics in spite, for example, in the film *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* wherein the leader of the bureaucrats sends his minions to stop revolution including his “sociologists, psychiatrists, urban planners, architects, [his] Foucaults, [his] Lacans.”<sup>1003</sup> Following Lefebvre, the argument against semioticians was that they, like philosophers, create abstractions in the meanings of words rather than demystifying abstractions. Alternatively, when semioticians act as historians, they become preoccupied with the past rather than developing strategies for the future. The academic context of semioticians was the primary concern of Situationist critiques. However, above all, Situationists likely found that semioticians did not intend to develop theories of action. Academics including philosophers, semioticians, and historians did not intend to create

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<sup>1002</sup> Lajos Szabó and Béla Tábor, *Vádirat a Szellem Ellen*, (Budapest: Pannon Panteon, 1991): 13.

<sup>1003</sup> René Viénet, *La Dialectique Peut-Elle Casser des Briques* (Paris: Télémondial and l’Oiseau de Minerve, 1972).

strategies. They did not intend to transform the world, but rather to merely to understand it. They track changes and history, but by focusing on what was, they do not in fact display a universe in motion or realize the potential of the changeability of meaning as does *détournement*. According to Gaston Bachelard, literary universes “in motion” are universes that can transform. Rhythm and time in writing and in worldviews lend to creativity and novelty while descriptions of universes or maps of what exists (fictively or really) do not lend themselves to transformation. Few writers encapsulate universes in motion that emphasize time and rhythm over stagnant physicality. Isidore Ducasse (Lautréamont) and Franz Kafka, according to Bachelard as well as Situationists, are exceptions. For Situationists, the transformative universe in motion is not simply literary but rather a possibility for the transformation of lived experience.

Lives are on a constant timeline of transformation. Thus, fixed sense of identity destroys people the same way it destroys the varied meanings of words. The Spectacle reduces identity, people, and the timeline of change over the course of people’s lives to images. Daniel Boorstin presents how, “in the extravagance of our expectations and in our ever-increasing power, we transform elusive dreams into graspable images within which each of us can fit.”<sup>1004</sup> Memories of “short passages of a few people through brief moments in time” remain.

Cinema visualizes memories. Writing records memories. Memory reflects the past. According to Debord, only everyday life presents possibilities for change, action, and revolution in the present and for the future. The transformation of the world does not happen in small shifts or fleeting victories, argues Lefebvre. True transformation, which Lefebvre defines as revolution, only applies if it marks an irreversible and worldwide transition.<sup>1005</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10 reinforces that “the transformation of a society is a completely different matter from political

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<sup>1004</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*: 255.

<sup>1005</sup> Lefebvre, “Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,” *State/Space/World*: 150. “[Autogestion] shows the practical way to *change life*, which remains the watchword, the goal, and the meaning of a revolution.”

struggles for the modification of a few specific points within an accepted society.”<sup>1006</sup>

Transformation of the world does not mean transformation of governments, but transformation that directly affects everyday life.<sup>1007</sup> Changing the world means rewriting what “world” means.

Revolution is not only the end of a world, but the writing of a new one.

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<sup>1006</sup> *Internationale Situationniste* 10: 62. “La transformation d'une société est une affaire toute différente des luttes politiques pour la modification de quelques points précis à l'intérieur d'une société admise.”

<sup>1007</sup> Lefebvre, *State/Space/World*: 283.

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Zimbarba, Michel and Jean-Louis Bédouin. *l'Invention du Monde*. Paris, 1952.

## Appendix I: Image List

### Chapter 1. *Weltanschauung*

[FIGURE 1.1] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. [Rifle sight.]

[FIGURE 1.2] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. [Aerial bombings]

[FIGURE 1.3] Debord, Guy. “In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

### Chapter 2. Pseudo-Worlds

[FIGURE 2.1] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 2.2] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 2.3] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 2.4] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 2.5] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

### Chapter 3. Inner Worlds

[FIGURE 3.1] Max Ernst, *Pleiades*, 1921, oil painting, private collection, [max-ernst.com](http://max-ernst.com). Public domain.

[FIGURE 3.2] Bosch, Hieronymous. (c. 1500). *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* [Painting]. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.

[FIGURE 3.3] Salvador Dalí, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Gala Salvador Dalí Foundation, 1946.

[FIGURE 3.4] Max Ernst, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, painting, 1945. [Maxernst.com](http://Maxernst.com).

[FIGURE 3.5] Guy Debord, “Réfutation de Tous les Jugements,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 3.6] André Breton, *l’Art Magique*, Etruscan Mirror with Gorgons, Bronze, c. 500, Musée Civique et Fondation Faina, Orvieto.

[FIGURE 3.7] Hans Richter and Man Ray, *Dreams that Money Can Buy* (Films International of America, Inc: 1947).

[FIGURE 3.8] *Ion* (Paris: Jean Paul Rocher, 1999): 257.

[FIGURE 3.9] *Ion* (Paris: Jean Paul Rocher, 1999): Verso.

### Chapter 3. Inner Worlds

[FIGURE 4.1] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). [La Corbeille de la Bourse]

[FIGURE 4.2] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Johnny Guitar*

[FIGURE 4.3] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 4.4] Alyce Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020): 59.

[FIGURE 4.5] *Retour au Futur? Des Situationnistes*. trans. Claude Galli (Marseille: Éditions Via Valeriano, 1990): recto.

[FIGURE 4.6] Alfred Jarry, *Véritable Portrait de Monsieur Ubu*, 1896, public domain.

[FIGURE 4.7] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). [Grande-Motte]

[FIGURE 4.8] Debord, Guy. *Le Marquis de Sade à les Yeux de Fille*. (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2004.)

### Chapter 4. Dreamworlds

[FIGURE 5.1] Jacqueline de Jong Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 832

[FIGURE 5.2] Asger Jorn, *Bachelard*, 1960, *Situationist Times* 4, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1963): 156.

[FIGURE 5.3] Asger Jorn, *Gaston Bachelard*, 1960. Private collection. © 2024 Donation Jorn, Silkeborg / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VISDA.

[FIGURE 5.4] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. [Devil].

[FIGURE 5.5] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Shanghai Gesture*.

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[FIGURE 6.2] Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon Amour* (France and Japan: Argos/Como/Daiei, 1959.)

[FIGURE 6.3] Guy Debord, “Sur le Passage...,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. Anna Karina Soap Commercial, Palmolive.

[FIGURE 6.4] Guy Debord, “Sur le Passage...,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. Sun flare, 1945 eclipse mission 1945, High Altitude Observatory.

[FIGURE 6.5] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).

[FIGURE 6.6] *Situationist Times 5*, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1964):143. Cf. Jacob Böhme, *The Signature of All Things*.

[FIGURE 6.7] *Situationist Times 5*, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1964): 143. Cf. *Codex Venice Marcianus*.

[FIGURE 6.8] J.D. Mylius, *Philosophia Reformata*, (Grancofvrti apud Lucam Iennis, 1612): 3.

[FIGURE 6.9] Michaele Majero, *Atlantia Fugiens*, (Hieronymi Galleri, 1608): 4.

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[FIGURE 6.11] *50 Years: Mah Jong Sofa*. Paris: Roche Bobois, 2024.

[FIGURE 6.12] Joe Colombo, “Spider (Wall Version No. 1152),” *Joe Colombo: Inventing the Future*. (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 175.

- [FIGURE 6.13] Joe Colombo, “Nuclear City,” Drawing, 1952, *Joe Colombo: Inventing the Future*. (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 31.
- [FIGURE 6.14] Joe Colombo, “Television Shrine,” 10<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale, drawing, 1954. *Joe Colombo: Inventing the Future*. (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 29.
- [FIGURE 6.15] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).
- [FIGURE 6.16] Enrico Baj, “Game,” 1963, *The Situationist Times* 4, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1964): 124.
- [FIGURE 6.17] Aaron Peasley, “Inside the Enchanting Villa that Inspired Enrico Baj’s Work,” *Architectural Digest*. (California, 2017.)
- [FIGURE 6.18] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Tower of Babel*
- [FIGURE 6.19] Rops, Félicien. (1878). *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. [Pastel]. Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. Public Domain.
- [FIGURE 6.20] Nieuwenhuys, Constant. *New Babylon*. © Fondation Constant, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2024.
- [FIGURE 6.21] Jean-Louis Brau, *Les Initiés d’Occident* (Paris: MA Editions, 1986): 47. Cf. 1881 print.
- [FIGURE 6.22] Oswald Wirth, “Jeu de Tarot Kabbalistic dit les Imagiers du Moyen Age,” (Paris: Bibliothèque National de France). [Gallica.bnf.fr](https://gallica.bnf.fr).
- [FIGURE 6.23] Daniele Giraudy, *Le Jeu de Marseille* (Marseille: Éditions Hors du Temps), 2003.

**Appendix II: Images**

[FIGURE 1.1] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 1.2] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 1.3] Debord, Guy. "In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



2.1 Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 2.2] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 2.3] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 2.4] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 2.5] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



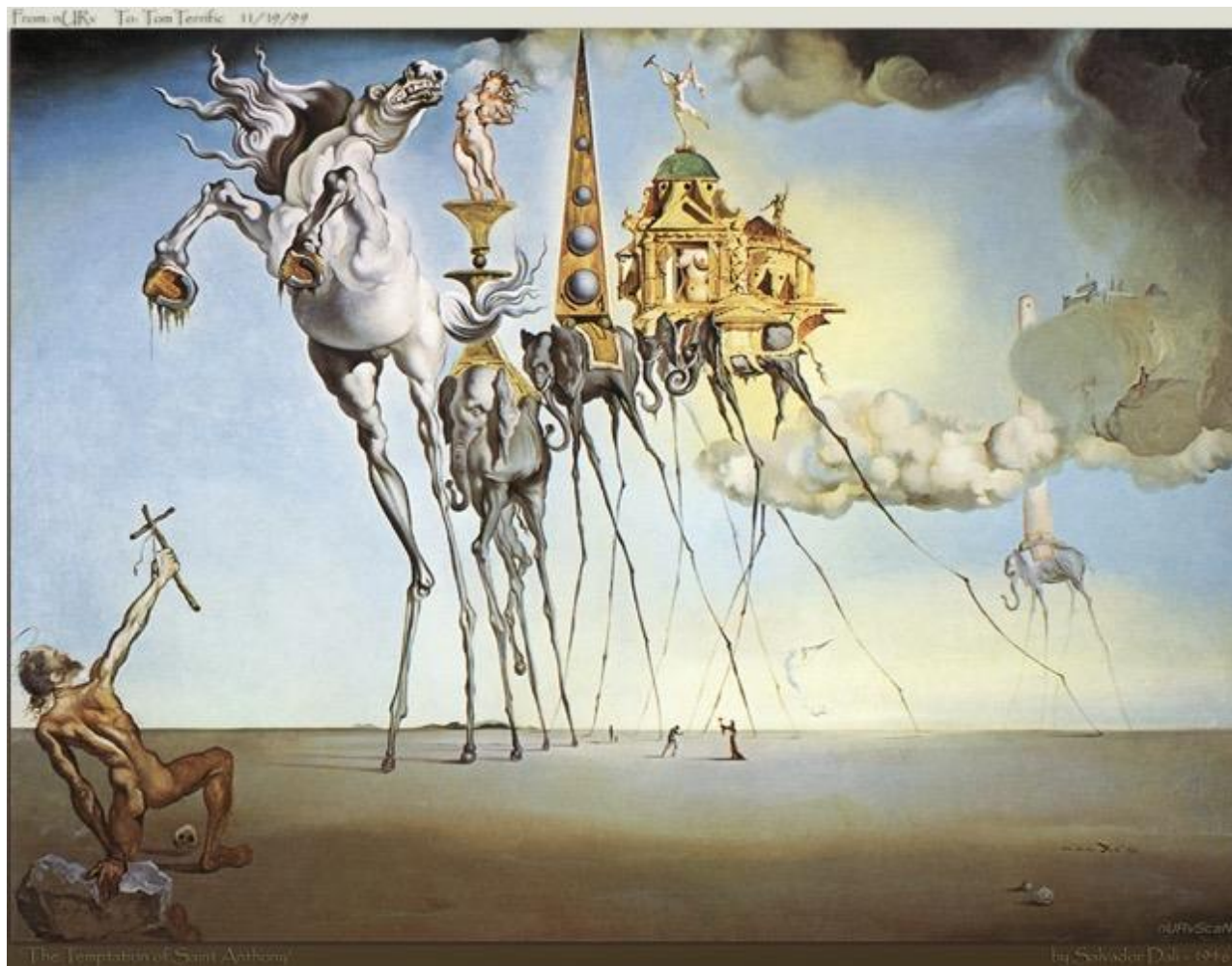
[FIGURE 3.1] Max Ernst, *Pleiades*, 1921, oil painting, private collection, [max-ernst.com](http://max-ernst.com). Public domain.



[FIGURE 3.2] Bosch, Hieronymous. (c. 1500). *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* [Painting].  
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.



[FIGURE 3.3] Salvador Dalí, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Gala Salvador Dalí Foundation, 1946.



[FIGURE 3.4] Max Ernst, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, painting, 1945. [Maxernst.com](http://Maxernst.com).



[FIGURE 3.5] Guy Debord, “Réfutation de Tous les Jugements,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 3.6] Etruscan Mirror with Gorgons, *l'Art Magique*, Bronze, c. 500, Musée Civique et Fondation Faina, Orvieto.



[FIGURE 3.7] Hans Richter and Man Ray, *Dreams that Money Can Buy*, (Films International of America Inc.): 1947.



[FIGURE 3.8] *Ion* (Paris: Jean Paul Rocher, 1999): 257.

## 2° Le cinéma aquarium (écran)

### a) Le cinéma aquarium écran indirect.

Un aquarium de la forme d'un parallépipède carré (d'une petite épaisseur (20 centimètres) par rapport à la longueur du côté du carré, est placé au fond de la salle. La cabine de projection se trouve au-dessus de l'écran.

La face postérieure (contre le mur), les faces des côtés supérieurs, inférieurs et latéraux sont des miroirs. La face antérieure est une vitre.

L'appareil projette sur l'aquarium. Les faisceaux projecteurs doivent traverser l'aquarium avant d'atteindre le miroir (1) qui reflète une image transformée (image du film + les nouveaux principes pris à l'aquarium) sur l'écran.

Dans leur traversée de l'aquarium, les faisceaux lumineux subissent la loi des fantaisies (introduction savante et fortuite de poissons, jeu de lumière, poudre colorante, etc.) du préposé au fonctionnement de l'aquarium. Le metteur en scène du spectacle.

L'élément surprise sera donc surajouté à l'image immuable du film.

Le metteur en scène de l'aquarium pourra donc improviser suivant l'inspiration du moment. On peut voir là une analogie avec le jazz. Le thème (film) immuable et les improvisations (fantaisies qui deviendront bientôt un art de la mise en scène de l'aquarium).

Une variante.

### b) Le cinéma aquarium direct.

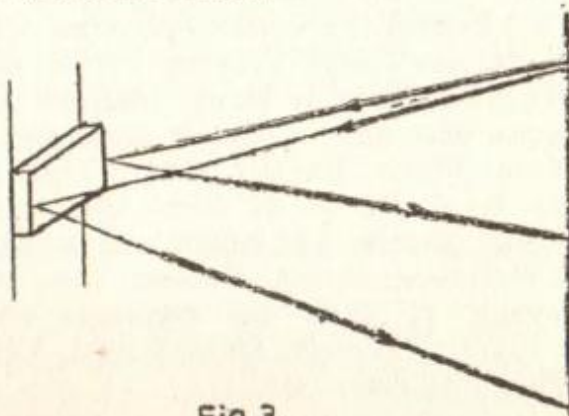
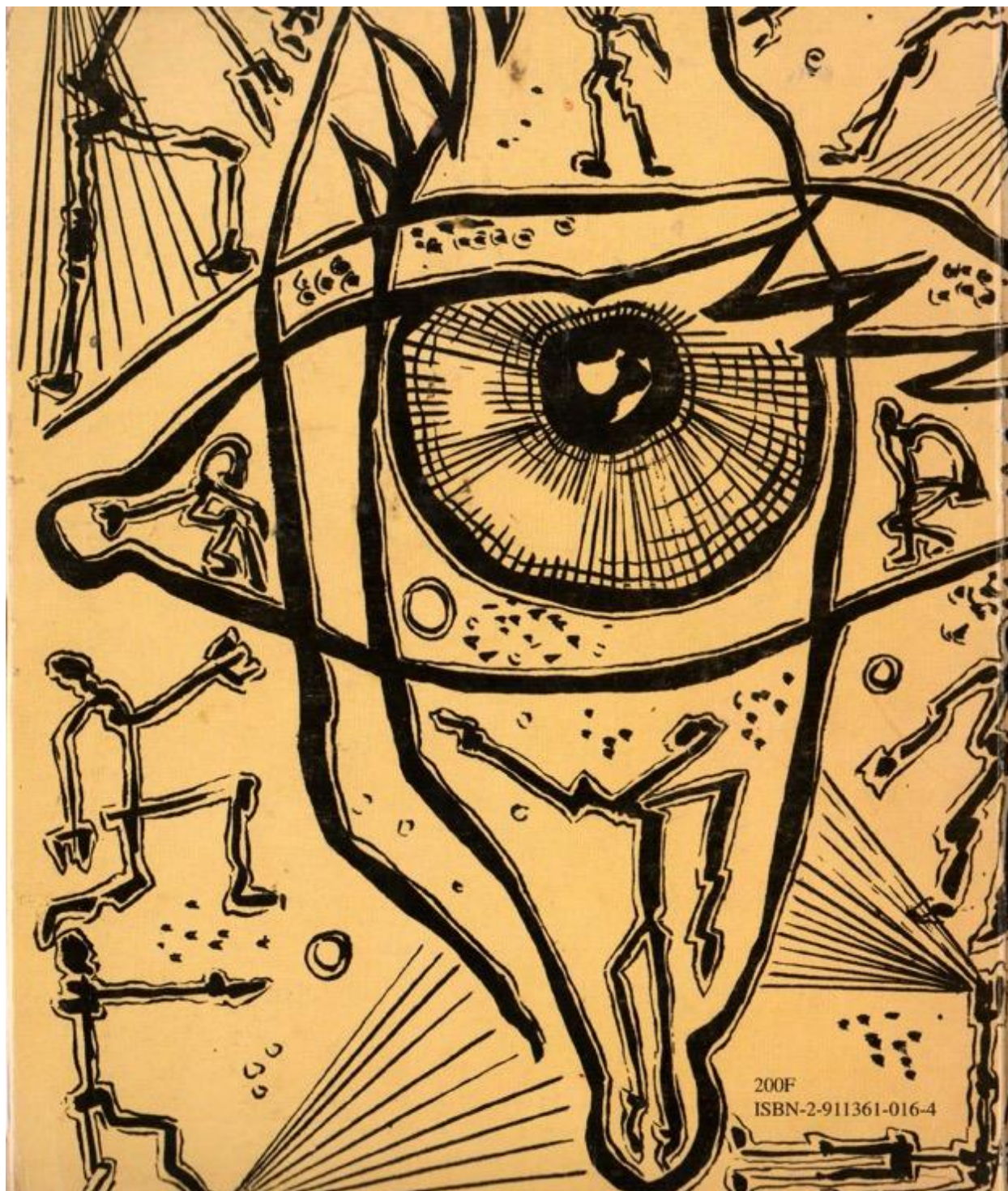


Fig 3

(1) Il existe déjà des salles qui projettent par l'intermédiaire d'un miroir. Au Quartier Latin, le Champollion, par exemple, projette d'une cabine située au-dessus de l'écran sur un miroir au fond de la salle, lequel reflète l'image sur l'écran.

[FIGURE 3.9] *Ion* (Paris: Jean Paul Rocher, 1999): Verso.



[FIGURE 4.1] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). [La Corbeille de la Bourse]



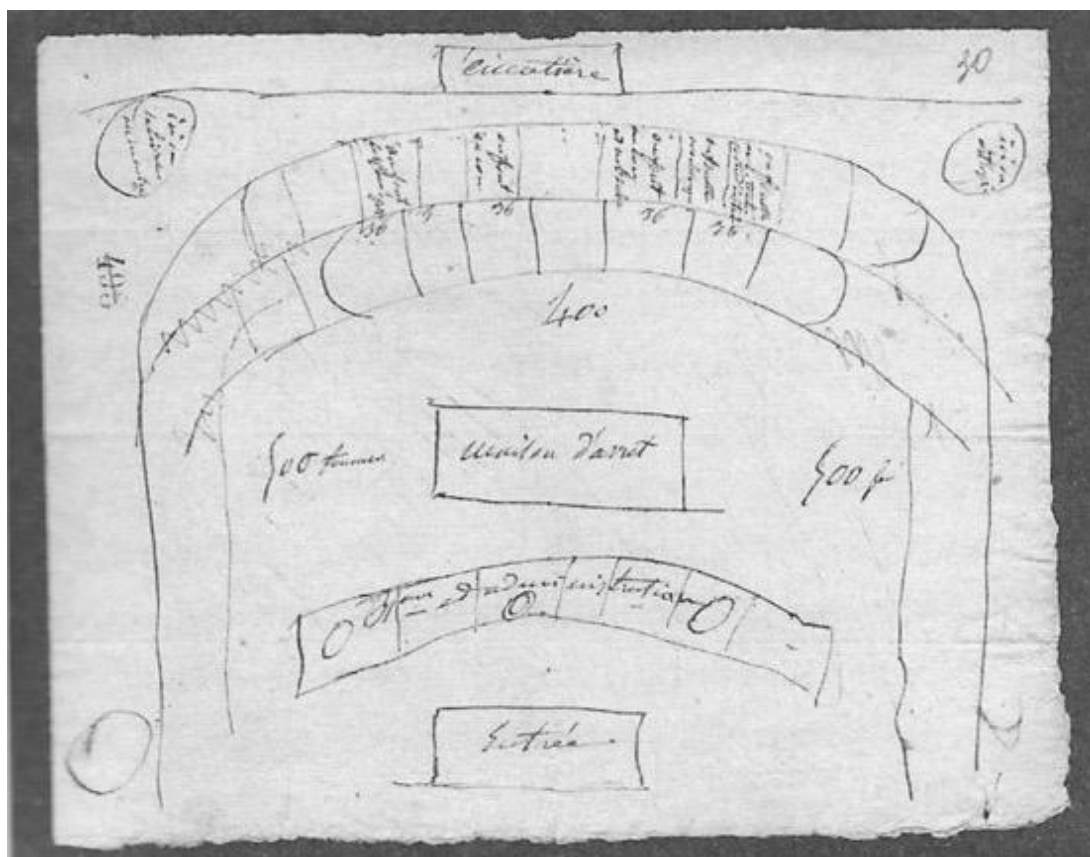
[FIGURE 4.2] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Johnny Guitar*



[FIGURE 4.3] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



[FIGURE 4.4] Mahon, Alyce. *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020: 59.





[FIGURE 4.6] Jarry, Alfred. (1896). *Véritable Portrait de Monsieur Ubu* [Etching], Morgan Library, New York City, public domain.



[FIGURE 4.7] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. Grande-Motte.



[FIGURE 4.8] Debord, Guy. *Le Marquis de Sade a des Yeux de Fille*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004.



[FIGURE 5.1] Jacqueline de Jong Papers, Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale, GEN MSS 832



[FIGURE 5.2] Asger Jorn, *Bachelard*, 1960, *Situationist Times 4*, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1963): 156.



[FIGURE 5.3] Asger Jorn, *Gaston Bachelard*, 1960. Private collection. © 2024 Donation Jorn, Silkeborg / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VISDA



[FIGURE 5.4] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Les Visiteurs du Soir*.



[FIGURE 5.5] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005. Cf. *Shanghai Gesture*.



[FIGURE 5.6] Bondone, Giotto di. (1305) *Joachim's Dream*. [Fresco] Civic Museums of Padua.



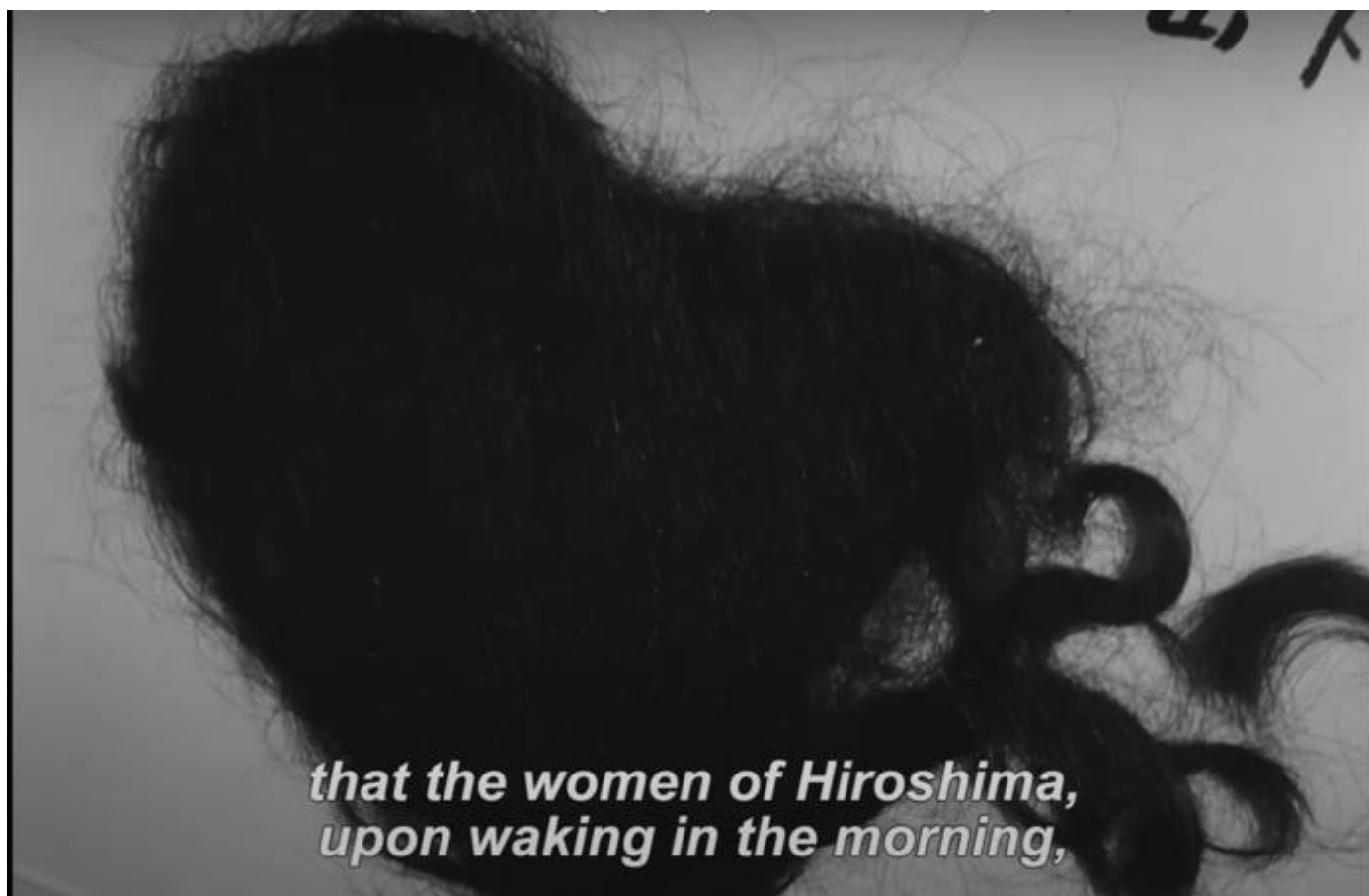
[FIGURE 5.7] Goya, Francisco. *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1799) Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. [Etching].



[FIGURE 5.8] Kenneth Lu, “Natraja at CERN,” (CC 2.0., 2014.)



[FIGURE 6.1] Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon Amour* (France and Japan: Argos/Como/Daiei, 1959.)



[FIGURE 6.2] Guy Debord, “Sur le Passage...,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. Sun flare, 1945 eclipse mission 1945, High Altitude Observatory.

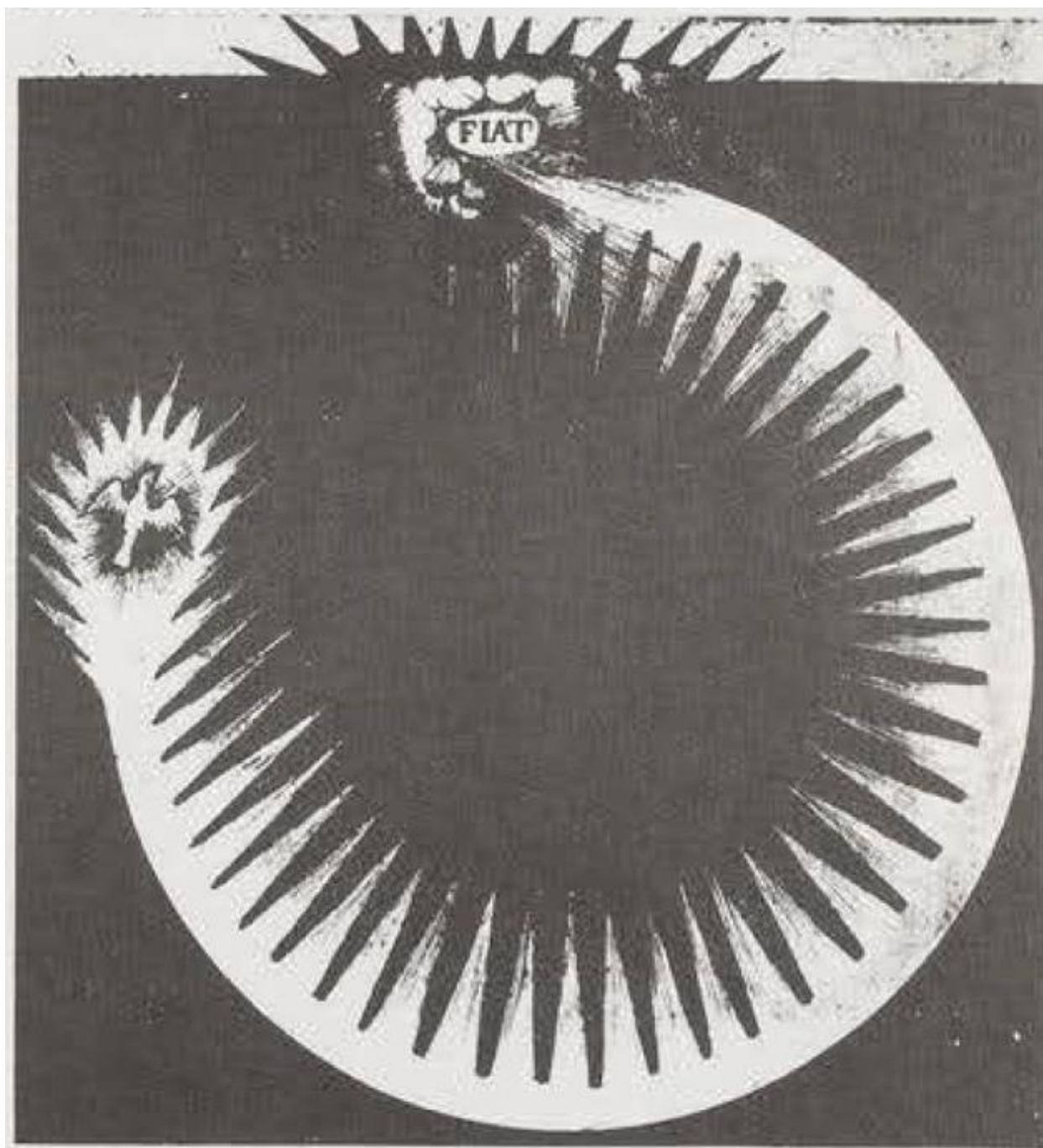


[FIGURE 6.3] Guy Debord, “Sur le Passage...,” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord* (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. [Anna Karina Soap Commercial, Palmolive.]





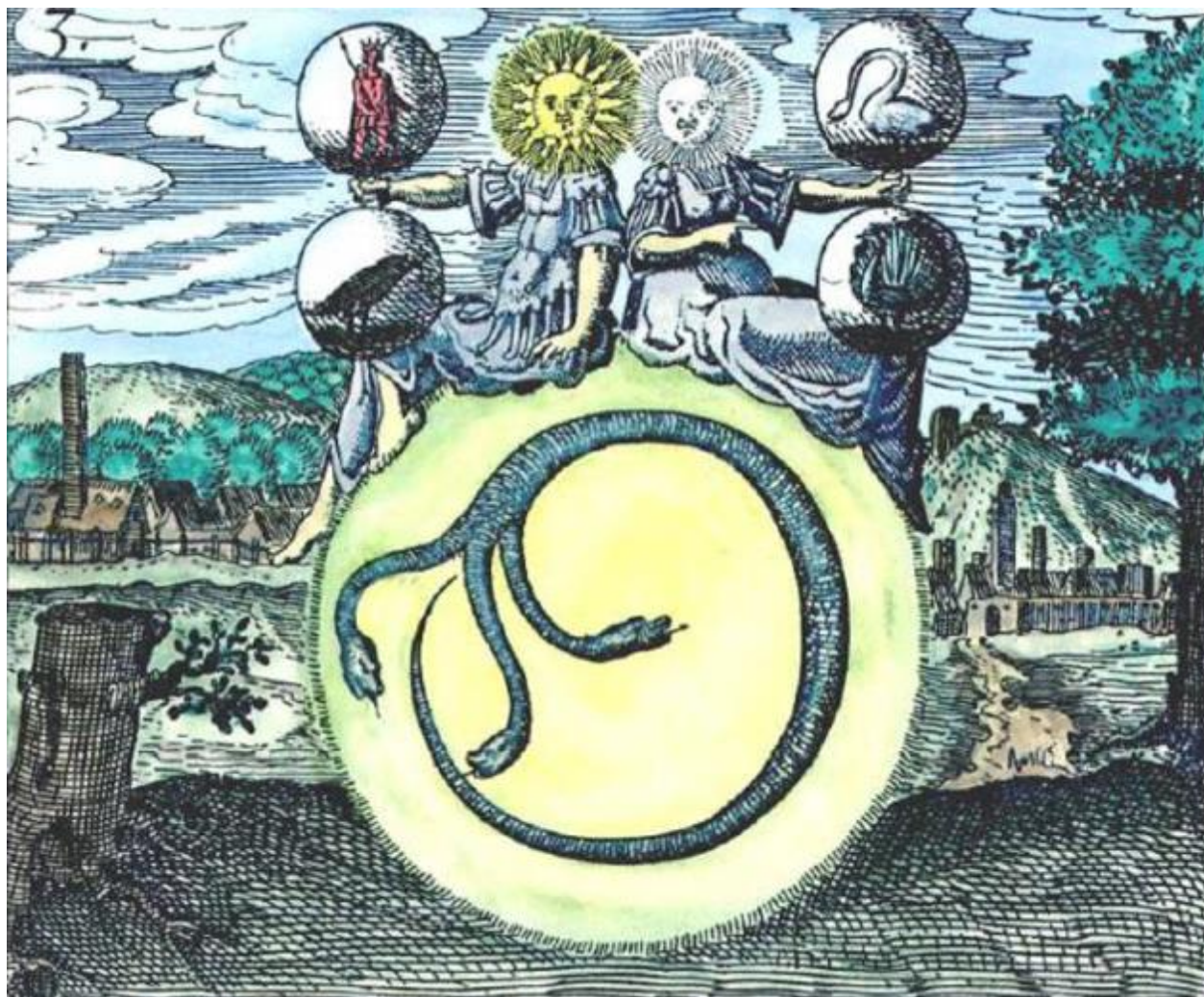
[FIGURE 6.5] *Situationist Times 5*, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1964):143. Cf. Jacob Böhme, *The Signature of All Things*.



[FIGURE 6.6] *Situationist Times* 5, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1964): 143. Cf. *Codex Venice Marcianus*.



[FIGURE 6.7] J.D. Mylius, *Philosophia Reformata*, (Grancofvrti apud Lucam Iennis, 1612): 3.



[FIGURE 6.8] J.D. Mylius, *Philosophia Reformata*, (Grancofvrti apud Lucam Iennis, 1612): 2.



[FIGURE 6.9] Michaele Majero, *Atlantia Fugiens*, (Hieronymi Galleri, 1608): 4.



[FIGURE 6.10] 50 Years: Mah Jong Sofa Paris: Roche Bobois, 2024.



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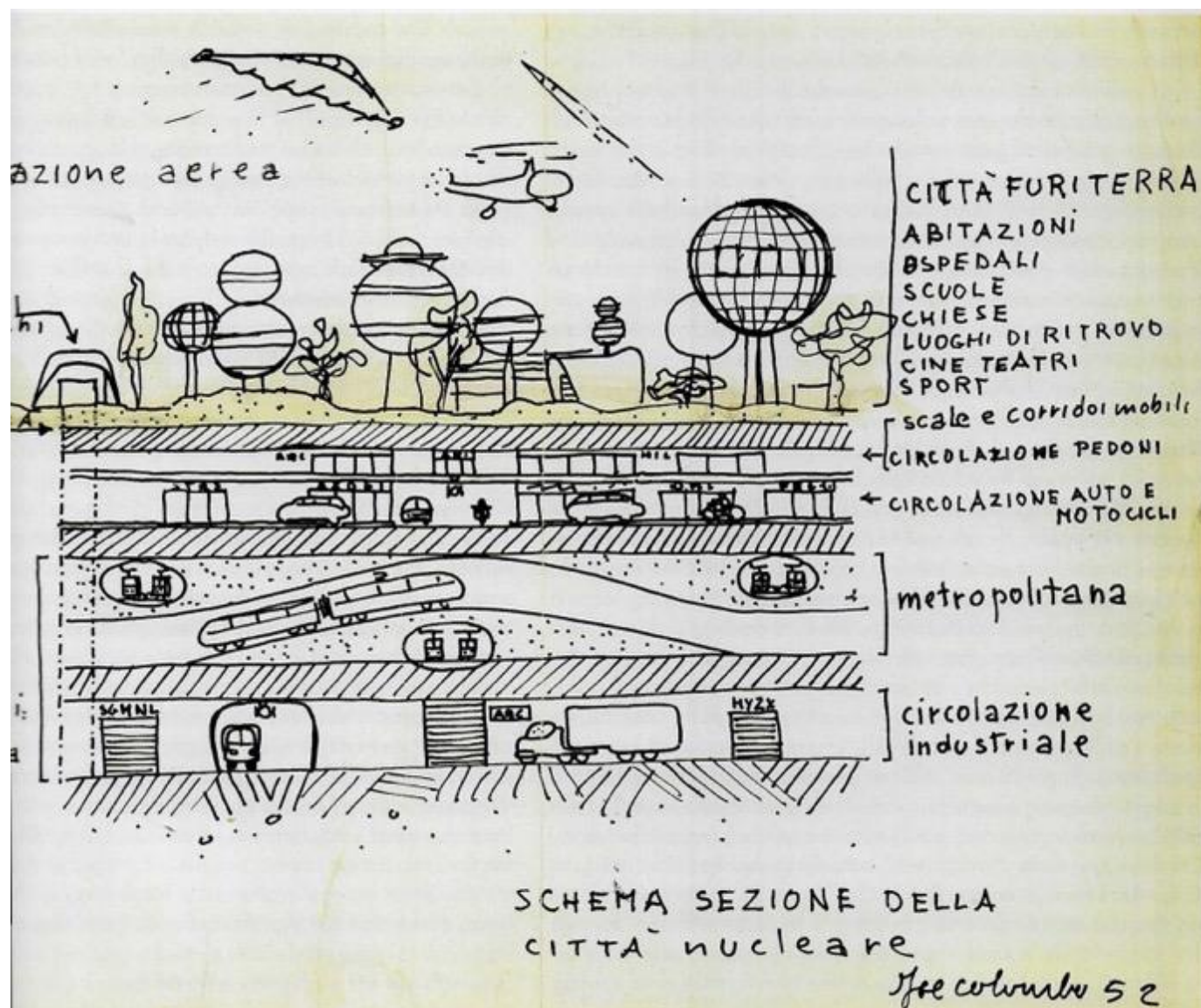
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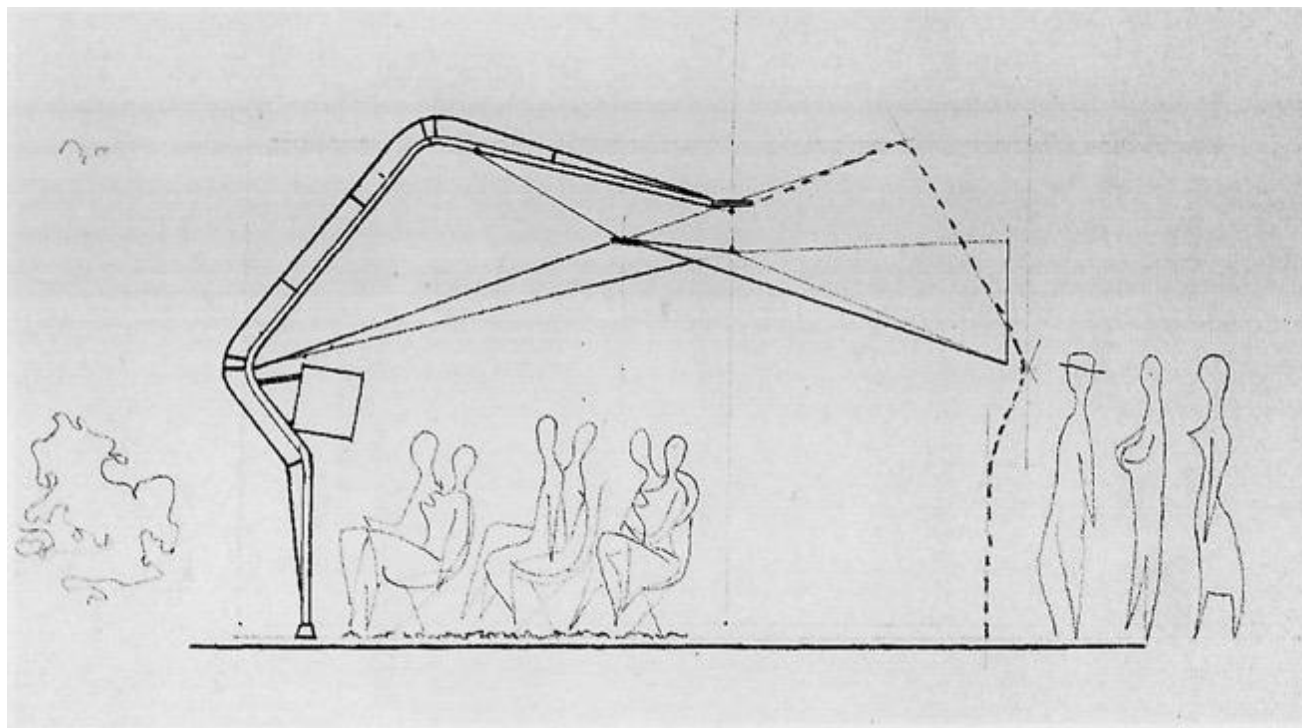
[FIGURE 6.11] Joe Colombo, "Spider (Wall Version No. 1152)," *Joe Colombo: Inventing the Future*. (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 175.



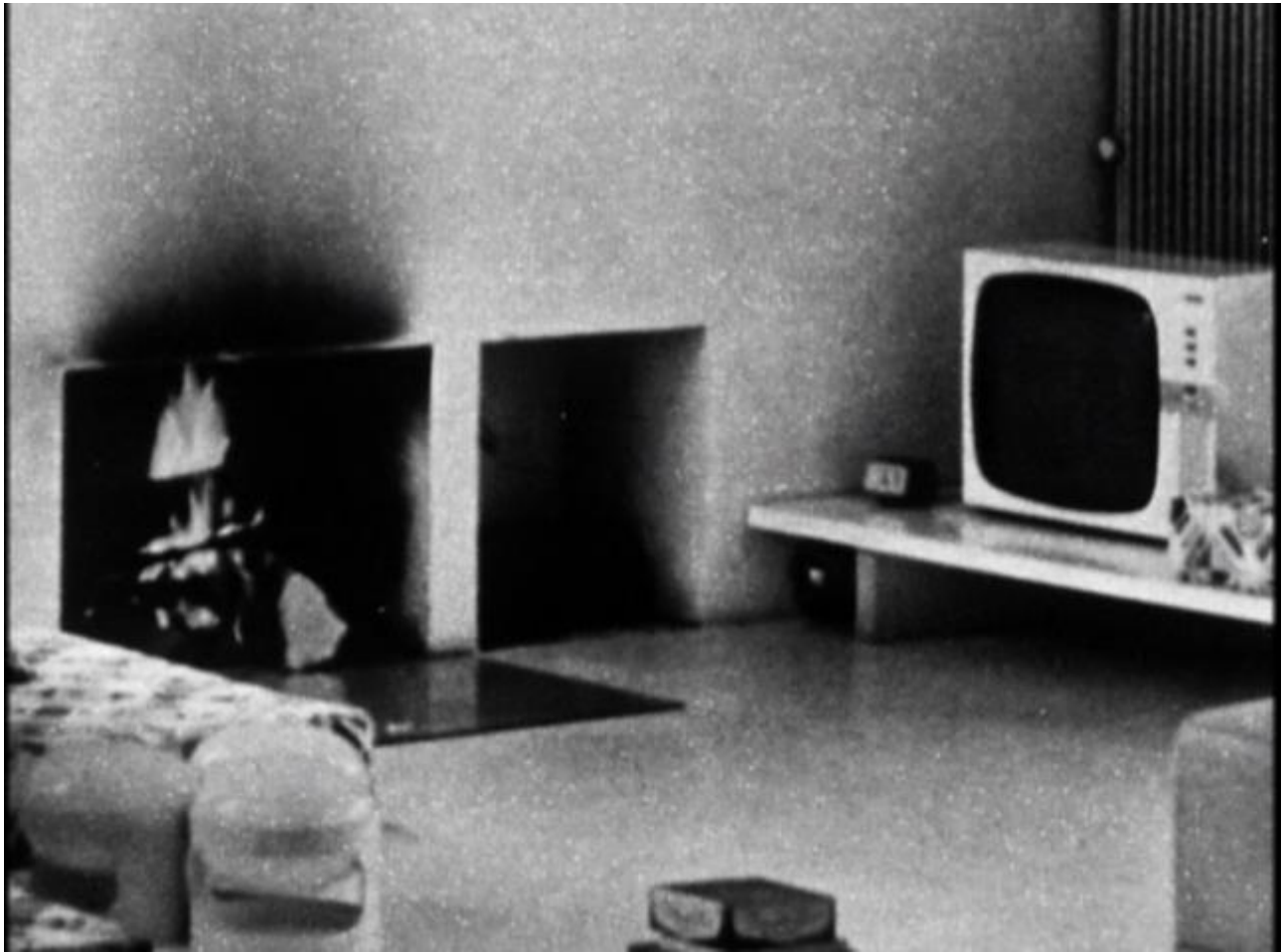
[FIGURE 6.12] Joe Colombo, "Nuclear City," Drawing, 1952, *Joe Colombo: Inventing the Future*. (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 31.



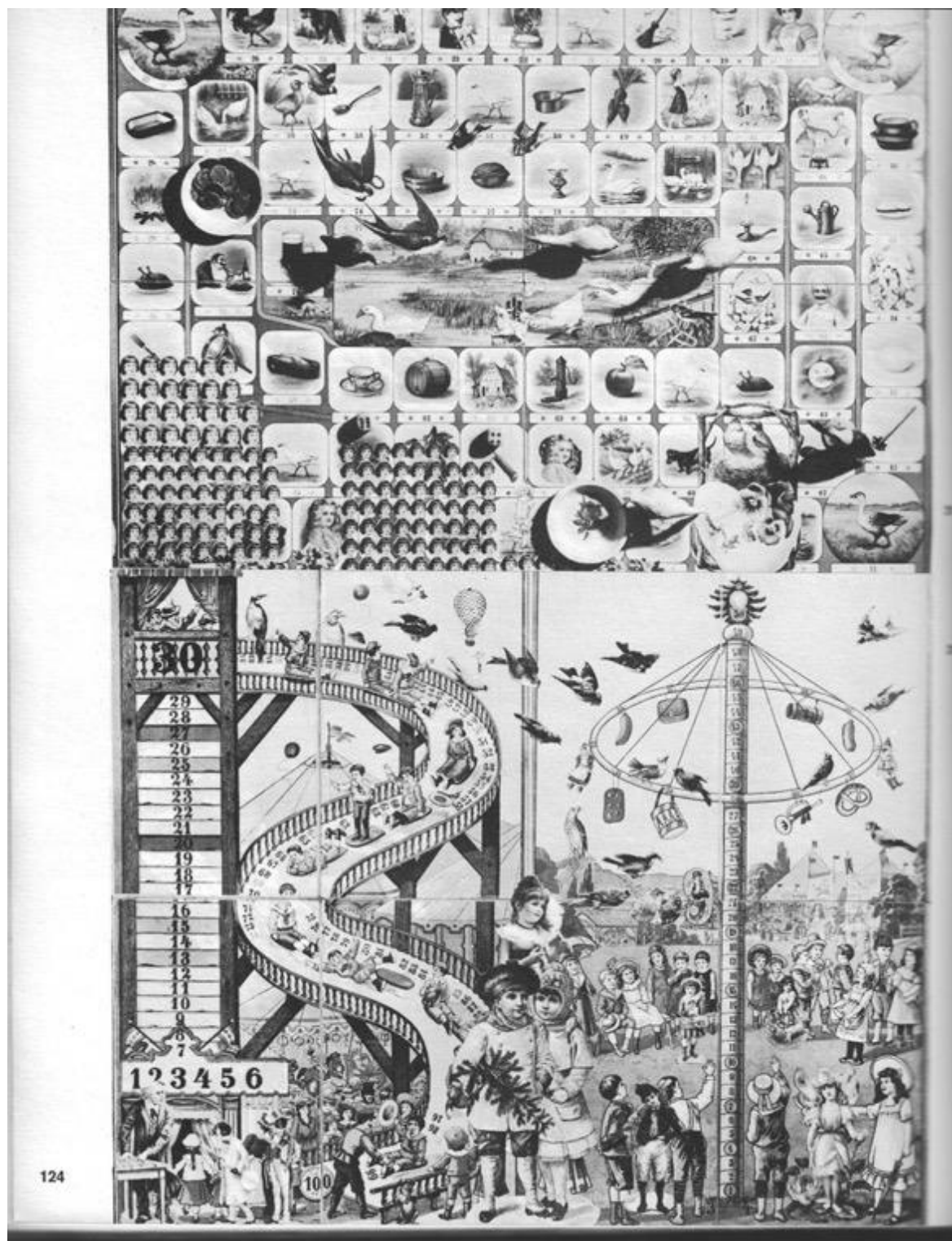
[FIGURE 6.13] Joe Colombo, "Television Shrine," 10<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale, drawing, 1954. *Joe Colombo: Inventing the Future*. (Milan: Vitra Design Museum, 2005): 29.



[FIGURE 6.14] Debord, Guy. "In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005).



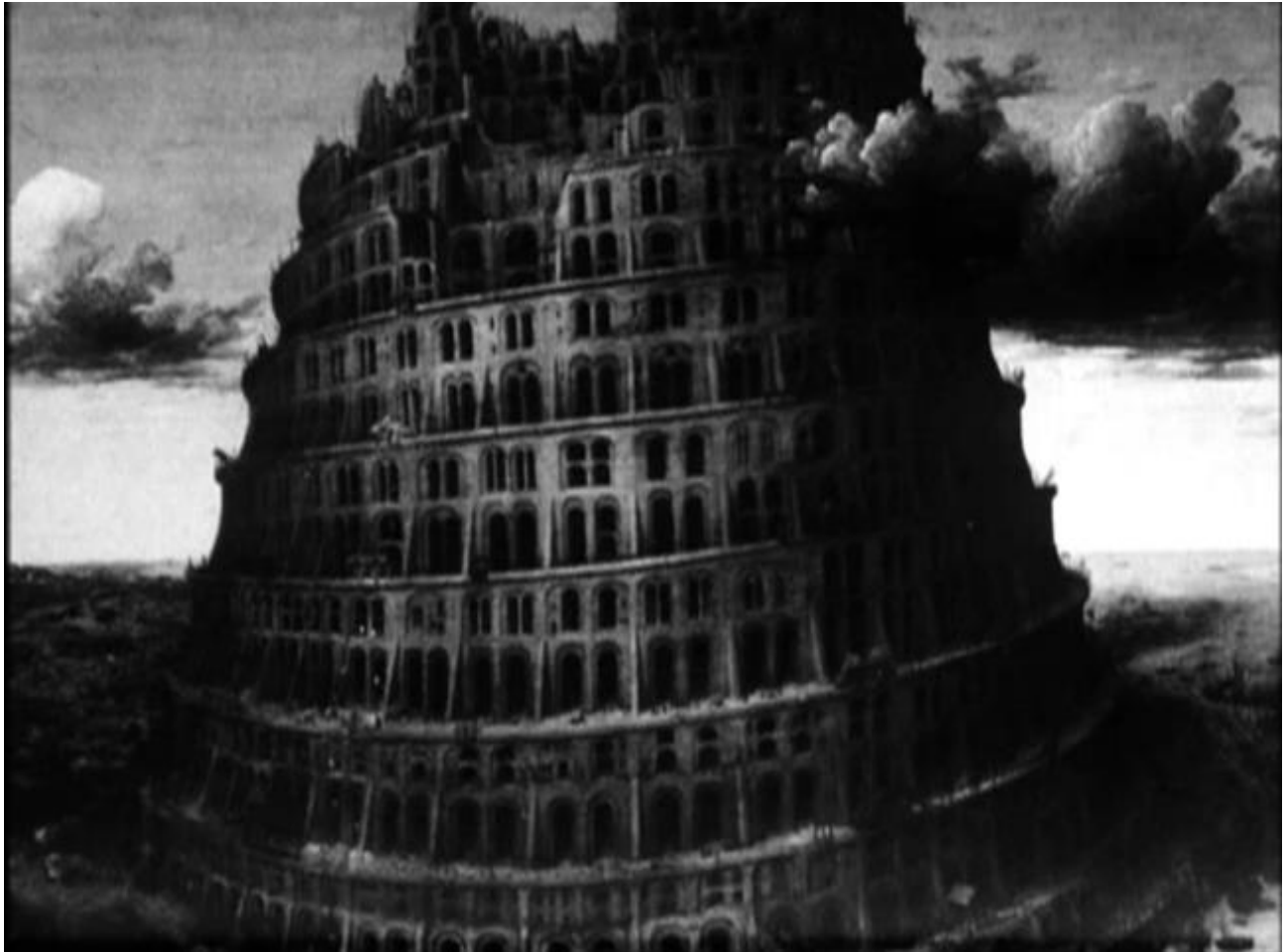
[FIGURE 6.15] Enrico Baj, "Game," 1963, *The Situationist Times* 4, ed. Jacqueline de Jong (Paris, 1964): 124.



[FIGURE 6.16] Aaron Peasley, “Inside the Enchanting Villa that Inspired Enrico Baj’s Work,”  
*Architectural Digest*, (California, 2017.)



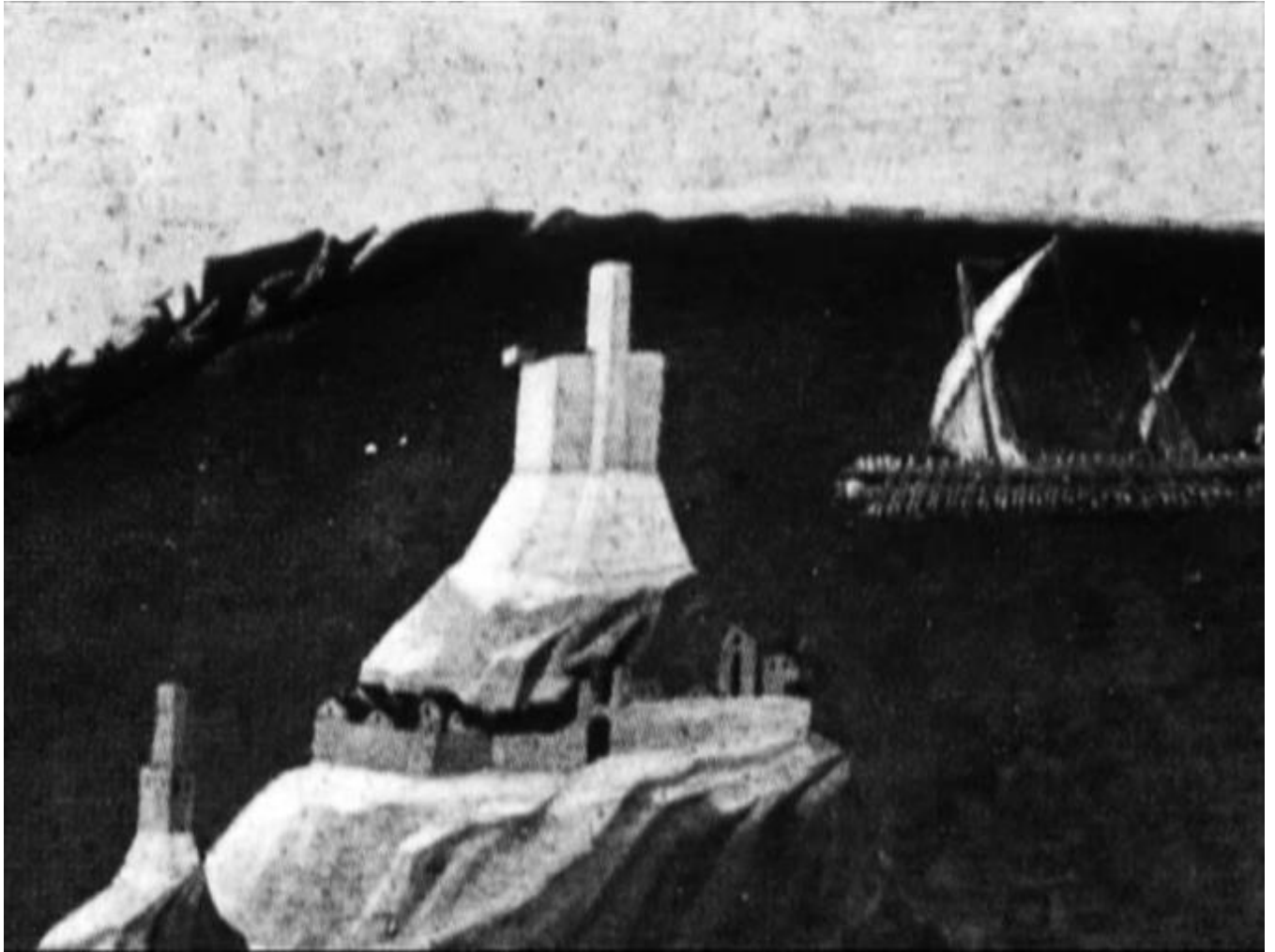
[FIGURE 6.17] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005. Cf. *Tower of Babel*.



[FIGURE 6.18.1] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Thebaid* [Details]



[FIGURE 6.18.2] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Thebaid* [Details]



[FIGURE 6.18.3] Debord, Guy. "La Société du Spectacle." *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Thebaid* [Details]



[FIGURE 6.18.4] Debord, Guy. “La Société du Spectacle.” *Œuvres Complètes de Guy Debord*. (Paris: Gaumont Video, 2005). Cf. *Thebaid* [Details]



[FIGURE 6.19.1] Fra Angelico, attrib. Gharardo Straina. *Thebaid*. (1420). Musée des Offices, Florence. [Tempera painting]. in Guido Cornini, *Beato Angelico*, Giunti, 2000.



[FIGURE 6.19.2] Fra Angelico, attrib. Gharardo Straina. *Thebaid*. (1420). Musée des Offices. Florence. [Tempera painting]. in Guido Cornini, *Beato Angelico*, Giunti, 2000. [Detail]



[FIGURE 6.19.3] Fra Angelico, attrib. Gharardo Straina. *Thebaid*. (1420). Musée des Offices. Florence. [Tempera painting]. in Guido Cornini, *Beato Angelico*, Giunti, 2000. [Detail]



[FIGURE 6.19.4] Fra Angelico, attrib. Gharardo Straina. *Thebaid*. (1420). Musée des Offices. Florence. [Tempera painting]. in Guido Cornini, *Beato Angelico*, Giunti, 2000. [Detail]



[FIGURE 6.19.5] Fra Angelico, attrib. Gharardo Straina. *Thebaid*. (1420). Musée des Offices. Florence. [Tempera painting]. in Guido Cornini, *Beato Angelico*, Giunti, 2000. [Detail]



[FIGURE 6.20] Rops, Félicien. (1878). *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. [Pastel]. Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. Public Domain.



[FIGURE 6.21] Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon*, © 2024 Constant / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / PICTORIGHT, Amsterdam



[FIGURE 6.22] Jean-Louis Brau, *Les Initiés d'Occident*. Paris: MA Editions, 1986: 47. Cf. 1881 print.



[FIGURE 6.23] Oswald Wirth, "Jeu de Tarot Kabbalistic dit les Imagiers du Moyen Age," (Paris: Bibliothèque National de France). [Gallica.bnf.fr](http://Gallica.bnf.fr).



[FIGURE 6.23] Daniele Giraudy, *Le Jeu de Marseille* (Marseille: Éditions Hors du Temps), 2003.

