

## “HISTORY IS THE SPECTRE HAUNTING MODERN SOCIETY”: TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD’S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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Within fields associated with the conjunction of Western Marxism and philosophy, the work of Guy Debord and the Situationist International (S.I.) often tends to receive rather less attention than it deserves. Whilst focussing on their famous concept of ‘spectacle’, this essay will try to show that Debord’s work may offer a richer resource to contemporary political philosophy than might otherwise be imagined. We will begin with a brief discussion of some of the problems and trends that have coloured the academic reception of this material, before presenting an initial interpretation of Debord’s account. This will serve to relate the concept of spectacle to the S.I.’s broader aims and ambitions.<sup>2</sup> Our principal aim, however, is not simply to develop a reading of Debord and the S.I.’s critique of spectacular society *per se*, but rather to show that spectacle should also be seen to function as a much broader historical and ethical problematic. Addressing it in this manner can serve to highlight the theory of communism *qua* collective historical praxis that it contains. The approach attempted here is thus intended to augment more explicitly Marxian readings of Debord’s treatment of capital and commodities, by indicating the broader, more existential and Hegelian conceptions of temporality, subjectivity and agency that support his analyses, and which inform the wider conceptual framework that underlies his mature oeuvre.

Developing this reading will thus require a discussion of some of the philosophical positions that support Debord’s claims. To that end, and in order to make good on the proposition above—i.e. that this material may afford a more complex and nuanced resource than is often supposed—we will advance this interpretation of spectacle whilst demonstrating that Debord’s work contains the following, still largely overlooked elements: 1) a philosophical anthropology; 2) a speculative philosophy of history; 3) the rudiments of an epistemology; 4) an implicit ethics; 5) a dialectical conception of strategy. As these topics constitute facets of the interpretation of Hegelian Marxism that underlies Debord’s work, addressing the concept of spectacle in connection to them can provide a means towards reconstructing and discussing that interpretation. Such a reconstruction is necessary, as whilst the influence of Hegel’s philosophy is evident throughout Debord’s work, substantial statements concerning his use thereof are sparse; we will therefore need to make use of textual evidence, archive material and reference to the writers that he drew upon. It should however become apparent from what follows below

that the version of Hegelian Marxism that can be inferred from Debord's account amounts to what might be termed (admittedly problematically)<sup>3</sup> a philosophy of praxis, and that spectacle should be understood primarily in terms of the deprivation of the relation to history that that mode of praxis entails. We will also see that these ideas actively point beyond Debord's extant formulations, and towards the production of new, more contemporary theoretical positions.

As the claims advanced here will jar somewhat with Anglophone academia's tendency to treat Debord as a media theorist, and to view the S.I. as an art movement,<sup>4</sup> we will begin with a short discussion of the manner in which this material is typically handled. The second part of the essay will then provide a brief overview of Debord's claims; the third will then attempt to advance the argument outlined above, and the fourth will conclude with an overview of Debord's Hegelianism.

## I. APPROACHES TO DEBORD'S THEORY

### *Interpreting the theory of spectacle*

According to Debord, 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".<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the "mass media" is said to be only its "most stultifyingly superficial manifestation".<sup>6</sup> However, statements such as these tend to jar markedly with the manner in which Debord's work is often addressed, as his predominantly visual terminology is often treated in a predominantly literal sense. According to one symptomatic example of such commentary, "spectacle" is thus said to refer to "the system of the mass media", to "the social force of television", and to "the form taken by the gaze within a consumer-capitalist society".<sup>7</sup> Yet despite their disparity with Debord's own remarks, claims such as these are far from uncommon; and even when reference is made to the crucial Marxian elements of his theory, this emphasis on the visual and the media still tends to predominate. The spectacle thus becomes the maintenance of a unifying ideology through media forms;<sup>8</sup> a literally visual reformulation of Lukács' account of contemplative detachment;<sup>9</sup> or simply the fads, fashions, communication and entertainment that articulate contemporary desire and opinion.<sup>10</sup>

All of these readings are certainly partly correct: Debord does indeed address phenomena such as this. Furthermore, "news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment" were said to be "particular forms"<sup>11</sup> of spectacle, and the very fact that such phenomena constitute the spectacle's most "superficial" appearances necessarily entails their connection to its inner dynamic. Yet, by that same token, interpretations that treat spectacle by focussing on its superficial manifestations lend themselves to addressing symptoms as though they were a cause. At root, Debord's spectacle denotes a condition of fetishistic separation from bodies of individual and collective power: a separation that ultimately amounts, as we will see below, to a condition in which human subjects become detached from their capacities to shape their own lived time. As this entails a relation between a passive, spellbound subject and an active, seemingly independent object, it certainly relates to the role played by imagery and entertainment within modern society: their profusion was in fact held to reflect the sense in which modern capitalism had brought that dynamic of contemplative separation to such an extreme that it had become expressed in full, self-evident view across the surface of a society that it had moulded to the very core.<sup>12</sup> Yet it remains the case that that inner dynamic constitutes the real heart of the concept, and that it by no means pertains solely to the media and the visual. Ultimately, *The Society of the Spectacle* describes a society that has come to be characterised by its separation from its own history, as a result of abdicating its capacity to shape its future to a sovereign economy.

The question that might then arise is as follows: if this is indeed the case, then how could the tendency to treat spectacle in literally visual and media-centric terms ever have become so widespread?

An initial response might be to point out that Debord's texts are often dense and frequently rather more complex than they appear. For example, much of the difficulty of *The Society of the Spectacle* derives from its

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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attempt to combine elegant concision with the broadest of scopes: to bring “together and explain a wide range of apparently disparate phenomena”<sup>13</sup> by gathering them under the rubric of a concept capable of grasping the essential characteristics, and indeed the potential negation, of the “historical moment in which we are caught”.<sup>14</sup> This ambition requires the concept to operate on several registers at the same time. It refers not only to the central dynamic of that “moment”, but also to specific phenomena within it (hence the prevalence of the error, referred to above, of confusing symptom with cause). The difficulty of Debord’s texts is also amplified by his attempts to adequate their form to their content, and to thereby ward off the danger of merely *representing* the refusal of spectacle. Hence *The Society of the Spectacle*’s extensive use of *détournement*,<sup>15</sup> which allows it to actualise the negation of modern culture that it advocates; hence also its Adornian refusal to stoop, through easy exposition, to the level of its targets (an early statement of 1952, in which he declared “I will never give explanations”,<sup>16</sup> can thus be seen to have set the tone for much of what would follow). This peculiarly strategic approach to writing<sup>17</sup> becomes all the more complicated in some of Debord’s later, and seemingly more straightforward works, as a result of their attempts to respond to the spectacle’s purported infiltration of its own negation. *Panegyric* is thus deliberately “crammed with traps”,<sup>18</sup> and 1988’s *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* begins by warning its readers to beware “certain lures” within its pages, “like the very hallmark of the era”<sup>19</sup> (Many have admitted their perplexity in regard to this odd warning,<sup>20</sup> but its meaning can be discerned from evidence in Debord’s correspondence and broader work).<sup>21</sup> Suffice it to say that these texts are often much more complex than they may first appear,<sup>22</sup> and it would seem that their consequent difficulty has, at times, fostered the adoption of a crudely literal approach to terms such as ‘image’, ‘representation’ and ‘spectacle’ (as one particularly frustrated writer once put it: “when Debord pompously writes ‘everything that was directly lived has withdrawn into a representation’, the prick is simply saying that we see posters of naked women pushing brands of cigarettes”).<sup>23</sup>

However, beyond the difficulties posed by Debord’s occasionally baroque mode of presentation, a more serious obstacle to the comprehension of his work was set up by the intellectual ambience that coloured its initial academic appropriation. In a letter of 1971, in which he responded to questions from a reader of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord remarked that “one cannot fully comprehend [the book] without Marx, and especially Hegel”;<sup>24</sup> yet during the 1980s and 1990s, and thus when his own and the S.I.’s works first began to be enthusiastically adopted by academia, both writers had fallen from fashion. Debord himself complained of the degree to which the “German origin” of “nearly all”<sup>25</sup> of his theory’s key elements had been overlooked; for, as Hegel and Marx had been rendered, respectively, the unacceptable and obsolete epitomes of a dead modernism, the primarily Hegelian ideas upon which his theory relies slipped from view. As unfamiliarity with the theory’s conceptual mechanics can render its terminology opaque, this perhaps fostered the temptation of a primarily visual interpretation, which in turn eased the theory’s Anglophone adoption by disciplines such as visual culture, art history, cultural studies and media studies (the latter no doubt facilitated the erroneous, but still widespread tendency to conflate spectacle with Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra).<sup>26</sup> It therefore seems pertinent to stress that Debord is not a “postmodern” writer, but rather a recalcitrant modernist: not a post-structuralist, but rather a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Young Hegelian, whose work owes far more to figures such as Cieszkowski, Feuerbach, Stirner and the young Marx than to any of his despised contemporaries who had “taken refuge at Vincennes”.<sup>27</sup> Yet before we begin to develop that Young Hegelian lineage, and thereby outline the reading of Debord’s work that it affords, we should first take note some of the more successful, Marxian analyses of his claims.

It was indicated earlier that the concept of spectacle operates on several levels at the same time. Debord indicates as much at the very outset of *The Society of the Spectacle*,<sup>28</sup> but a useful clarification of its operation in this regard can be found in a letter of 1973. Debord writes there that the concrete reality of the spectacle, as opposed to its relatively superficial existence as a set of mediatic and ideological practices, “can only be justified by reference to these three degrees: simple technico-ideological appearances / the reality of the social organization of appearances / historical reality”.<sup>29</sup> On the first of these three “degrees”, or levels, the spectacle is simply an ideological and mediatic “part of society”: the sector thereof “where all attention, all consciousness, converges”.<sup>30</sup> Evidently, this is the level of Debord’s analysis upon which much of the academic work referred to above has tended to focus. However, on the second level of this schema, and thus “behind the phenomenal

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appearances of the spectacle”, such as “television, advertising, the discourse of the State, etc.,” we find what Debord refers to as “the general *reality* of the spectacle itself”, as “a moment in the mode of production.”<sup>31</sup> This second, deeper level thus pertains to the connections between the concept of spectacle and the social operation of capitalist value. This is the dimension of Debord’s theory that has been addressed by some of the best available studies of his work. Anselm Jappe’s seminal *Guy Debord* (1993, in Italian; 1999 in English) is of particular significance here,<sup>32</sup> as it deals with these themes in detail. It is by no means insignificant, given its Hegelian-Marxian focus, that Debord himself referred to it in his correspondence as “the best-informed book about me”.<sup>33</sup> However, the subordination of lived reality to capital’s dictates, which takes place on that second level, also requires the concept of spectacle to operate on the third level of this schema, i.e. that of “historical reality”. The articulation of lived reality via the social relations of capital involves the separation of human subjects from their own lived activity. The result is a historical moment characterised by a loss of historical agency, insofar as the latter has been abdicated to an effectively autonomous economic system; and it is this level of the concept that we will attempt to address below.

Clearly, studies that have engaged with that second, Marxian level necessarily bear upon the third, but they can ultimately seem somewhat limited in this regard. This is in part due to the fact that spectacle cannot be reductively identified with capitalist society, and instead denotes a far older and broader historical problematic (as we’ll see below, Debord in fact traced its roots all the way back to antiquity). The separation from historical time to which the third level of the concept refers certainly stems, at present, from the social operation of capitalist value; yet that same dynamic of separation was viewed as having preceded modern society (granted, a more exclusively Marxian reading of Debord’s work could accommodate this by casting him as inadvertently echoing Sohn-Rethel’s notions of ‘real abstraction’; however, the more Feuerbachian notion of separated power that will be outlined here seems more in keeping with the textual evidence). Debord describes this problematic of separation as having developed towards the present, via a succession of different social and economic formations, and as having reached a full, identifiable and purportedly resolvable extreme within the consumer capitalism of his own day. It thus underscores and antecedes the concept of spectacle’s bearing upon the capitalist social relations and culture industry proper to the first and second levels of Debord’s schema; and if it is to be addressed fully, recourse needs to be made not only to Debord’s use of Marx, Lukács, et al, but also to the existential, Hegelian and Young Hegelian themes that structured his conceptions of history, subjectivity and temporality.<sup>34</sup>

This entails a rather different approach to Debord’s theoretical work than that which has been undertaken in recent debate and discussion. Within the context of contemporary theory, attention now tends to gravitate towards the homologies that can be discerned between Debord’s work and the new readings of Marx (particularly those connected to *Wertkritik*,<sup>35</sup> the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* of figures such as Heinrich and Postone,<sup>36</sup> and the various currents of so-called communisation theory;<sup>37</sup> again, Jappe’s book was seminal in this respect).<sup>38</sup> Yet whilst those homologies are important and useful, reading Debord under this rubric can lend itself to locating his work’s relevance within its contributions to questions of structure and social form.<sup>39</sup> As the relation between the image and the commodity thus comes to take centre-stage, the themes of agency, strategy and praxis that underscore Debord’s views on that relation can thus slide into the background. Furthermore: the aspects of Hegelian Marxism prevalent within these new readings of Marx tend to centre around Marx’s mature use of Hegel as a means of theorising the operation of capital. This is certainly relevant to Debord’s account; one need only look to the opening theses of *The Society of the Spectacle*’s second chapter to find evidence for its pertinence. However, Debord’s debts to Hegel are primarily inflected by Marx’s early writings, in which the self-determinate movement of Hegelian thought is not associated with capital, but rather with the historical actions and alienation of the human subject. This more “historicist” approach to Hegelian Marxism, to borrow Chris Arthur’s useful shorthand,<sup>40</sup> underlies the “systematic” Hegelian Marxism at work in Debord’s discussions of capitalist value, and an investigation of the former should precede studies of the latter.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore hoped that the approach attempted here can serve to augment such readings: for if they can be said to focus on Debord’s account of the *society* of the spectacle—i.e. on his description of a specific, socio-historical and economic moment that fully expresses and instantiates the dynamic of separation referred to above—then our

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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own concern will be to address and explore that dynamic *per se*: to thus focus on the broader problematic posed by Debord's concept, and to thereby show how his account might be understood and reinterpreted in that light.

Having sketched out some of the themes that have inflected the handling of this material we can now move towards addressing it directly. Our first step towards doing so will be to provide a broad overview of its central themes. To that end, what follows will emphasise the sense in which Debord and the S.I.'s work constitutes a 20<sup>th</sup> Century re-figuration of Marx's early call for the "realisation [*Verwirklichung*] of philosophy"<sup>42</sup> in praxis.

## II. THE REALISATION OF PHILOSOPHY

### *Vorstellungen*

We will return to Debord's critique of Hegel in greater detail below, but it can be sketched, in essence, as follows. Hegel, for Debord, correctly identified history with self-determinacy and self-consciousness; yet he located the full, complete expression of their unity not in the concrete process of freely and self-consciously shaping an open future, but rather in a purportedly contemplative philosophy that merely admired a seemingly completed world. In his view, the consequent task addressed by the Young Hegelian and radical critics that followed was thus that of reversing Hegel's retrospective and detached perspective: to "invert" it not by simply bringing the ideal back down to earth, but rather by actualising the freedom and self-determinacy that it sought to describe in the conscious creation of an open future.<sup>43</sup>

On this view, therefore, Hegel's philosophy, *qua* philosophy, comes to be seen as an alienated representation (or rather as a *Vorstellung*: a word that was translated, significantly, as *représentation* in the version of Hegel's *Phenomenology* that Debord used)<sup>44</sup> of the pro-active praxis that should supersede it. The identification of self-conscious thought with historical movement and freedom advanced by Hegel's philosophy needed to be translated into concrete praxis: thought would no longer contemplate the past, remaining at one remove from the world's transformation, but would become actively engaged in shaping the future. Because the core of this issue is the supersession of a state of separation from historical process, and thus that of all other modes of separated power and thought that prevent direct engagement with the active construction of historical change, Debord credits various Young Hegelians with having taken steps towards such an advance (e.g. the critiques of alienated, representational power advanced by Feuerbach and Stirner, and Cieszkowski's call for a philosophy of praxis, to which we will return).<sup>45</sup> Principal credit is however given to Marx, who is cast as having advocated just such a future-oriented stance (tremendous weight is thus placed on Marx's famous final thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it").<sup>46</sup> For Debord, this orientation—i.e. this move towards the actualisation of freedom through the self-determinate transformation of the world—is in fact the key theme that runs throughout the entire radical tradition, or at least throughout what he took to be its genuinely radical elements, as it was seen to amount to an incipient call for the total self-determinacy that he and the S.I. advocated. Thus, "all the theoretical strands of the *revolutionary workers' movement*", according to *The Society of the Spectacle*, "stem from critical confrontation with Hegelian thought".<sup>47</sup>

This emphasis on the realisation of philosophy can be placed in useful contrast to Adorno, who once famously remarked that the moment for philosophy's actualisation had been "missed":<sup>48</sup> its unification with the revolutionary proletariat and consequent contribution to the latter's self-abolition, as advocated by Marx, had failed to transpire. In complete contrast, Debord's entire political and philosophical perspective hinges on the view that that challenge and exigency remains in place, albeit having taken on a new, more demanding form. In the latter half of the Twentieth Century, it could no longer be confined solely to the self-determinate use of thought in a project of shaping the future. Instead, the key exigency posed by that final theses on Feuerbach had been radically expanded, as a result of the evolution of culture, technology, and the consequent possibilities of shaping lived experience within the modern world. Those new, expanded possibilities were currently divorced from their producers, as a result of their integument within the social relations of capital. Thus, the familiar task

of wresting control of history from the economy had been expanded and enriched, and had been given even greater impetus by the total poverty of self-determinacy engendered by capital's penetration into every aspect of lived experience. The task at hand, therefore, was now that of reclaiming and employing *all* such capacities in lived praxis, and of abolishing all such separated power, with a view towards affording a new era within which lived experience could become the conscious creation of the experiencing subject. This ambition was directly connected both to the basic dynamics of Debord's spectacle and to the S.I.'s broader political project.

### *The spectacle and the Situationists*

To treat the former connection first: Debord and the S.I. characterised the modern societies of their day as subordinate to their own economic systems. Capitalism, for Debord, essentially means the regulation and domination of lived practice by the abstraction of value, and was thus viewed in a manner that encompasses its state-bureaucratic and consumer-based variants alike. Crucially, the articulation of lived activity through the social relations proper to those economic systems was viewed in terms of the separation of social power from its producers. All social activity, creative capacity and technological potential had become bound within that same all-encompassing general framework, which was held to amount, cumulatively, and despite its internal divisions, to a generalised "*Weltanschauung*"<sup>49</sup> capable of operating as a concrete, independent and objective force. The intimate penetration of that power throughout the lives of the individuals concerned was framed as co-extensive with their alienation from it. Their lived activity and the latter's objective results had thus become a detached object of contemplation: a "spectacle", in other words (or a "show", to use an alternative translation of the French *spectacle*), in which those same individuals performed.<sup>50</sup>

The S.I.'s aim, during their more theoretical and revolutionary Marxian period in the 1960s, was to herald and foster a response to this state of affairs. This response was not a call for a more equitable mode of distribution, or for better working conditions, but rather a demand for all that modern technological capitalism had rendered possible and yet simultaneously denied. It was thus a call for the supersession of all forms of separated capacity and hierarchical power, and for the consequent instantiation of a mode of social collectivity that would foster the actualisation of the possibilities that the previous social order had merely *represented* (as Vaneigem put it in 1963: "What do we demand in backing the power of everyday life against hierarchical power? We demand *everything*").<sup>51</sup> The drive towards such an extreme, all-encompassing mode of revolt was held to have been fostered and generalised throughout society by the same capitalist formations that had generated the separation described above. Society's newfound wealth of consumer goods had seemingly alleviated the 19<sup>th</sup> Century poverty that had exercised Marx, thereby dismissing, for some contemporary commentators, the need and desire for social change altogether.<sup>52</sup> Yet for Debord and the S.I., the proletariat had not been buried "beneath an avalanche of sound systems, T.V.'s, small cars and planned communities",<sup>53</sup> but had instead been radically expanded. As all life had become shaped and structured by capital, disaffection and alienation had become similarly universal, thus engendering a 'new' proletariat: a vast, effectively classless social 'class', composed simply of "all people who have no possibility of altering the social space-time that society allots to them".<sup>54</sup> The separation of Marx's proletariat from the means of independently maintaining his or her own existence had thus given way to a 'higher', more existential form of poverty, marked by a separation from the means of consciously shaping and directing that existence<sup>55</sup> (this reformulation should be borne in mind in connection to contemporary criticisms of the S.I.'s alleged 'workerism').<sup>56</sup>

Initially, and particularly in the years that followed the S.I.'s emergence from the avant-garde milieu, the radical self-determinacy that would rectify that state of affairs was to be researched and fostered through the construction of 'situations': moments of time that would unify art and life, through being shaped and lived according to the experiencing subjects' own wishes. The realisation of art that this entailed was explicitly cast as a new, modern manifestation of the realisation of philosophy, insofar as it involved actualising representations of lived experience in the attempt to consciously transform and shape the latter.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, however, this condition was to be attained within a communism that amounted to a condition of collective, and self-determinate praxis: a communism within which no instantiation of social power would be permitted to perpetuate itself indepen-

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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dently from those who generate it, and which, insofar as all forms of hierarchy and representative leadership would therefore be abolished, would thus come close to collectivist anarchism in some respects.<sup>58</sup>

To sum up this short overview: as will become apparent below, Debord can seem almost Bergsonian or Heraclitian at times, as he views the world in terms of temporal process.<sup>59</sup> Yet, nonetheless, he is best viewed as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Young Hegelian, as his primary claim is that human beings had developed to a point where they could now consciously *direct* that process, through laying claim to their own alienated powers and capacities (he in fact once remarked, whilst indicating the historical task addressed by the theory of spectacle, that “we have still not resolved the principle problems” raised by the “old comrades” of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century).<sup>60</sup> Where Feuerbach, in his critique of religion, talked of the projection of human capacity onto the clouds, and of a consequent mode of subordination to alienated depictions of humanity’s own abilities, Debord—whilst drawing on the implications of Marx’s early critique of Feuerbach<sup>61</sup>—casts these powers as a capacity to make history and addresses their transposition onto forms and structures that serve to maintain and consolidate an extant social order. The Situationists’ drive towards the reclamation of all such alienated thought, art, culture and technological potential was thus understood in terms of the supersession of a state of detachment from a potential engagement in the world’s conscious transformation.

Having now set out the basic characteristics of Debord’s claims, we can turn to the five aspects of his Hegelian Marxism that we listed in the introduction above: philosophical anthropology; philosophy of history; epistemology; ethics; strategy. Discussing them should serve to advance the following, broader argument. 1) Debord’s views on the human subject imply viewing subject-object unity as a condition of self-determinate temporal process; 2) the actualisation of that unity was placed at the apex of a narrative of historical development; 3) this entails treating spectacle as a broad historical problematic; 4) the latter implies a communist ethics, rooted in the operation and perpetuity of a condition of self-determinate praxis; 5) the operation of that condition must be an essentially strategic affair. The discussions that follow should therefore serve to demonstrate that the problematic of spectacle implies a conception of communism *qua* historical praxis.

### III. A COMMUNISM OF TIME

#### *Philosophical anthropology*

Time and temporality are central to Debord’s thought and to his conception of the Situationist project. The “Situationist attitude” was in fact said to entail “going with the flow of time [*miser sur la fuite du temps*; “wagering on the fleeting passage of time”]”.<sup>62</sup> Conversely, the concept of spectacle describes the denial of such an autonomous temporality, as spectacular society “separates the subject...from his own time”<sup>63</sup> by replacing a potentially free, self-determinate and thus “directly lived” existence with the latter’s mere “representation”.<sup>64</sup> Hence, Debord’s description of the spectacle as a “paralysed history”, and as an “abandonment of any history founded in historical time”.<sup>65</sup> for time—and thus history, *qua* the self-consciousness and application of human action within time—is the milieu within which the human subject might shape and determine its self and its world.

Debord’s understanding of time undermines the crude, humanistic essentialism that is often attributed to his work. He seems to have viewed the human subject as an inherently mutable, processual being: as an entity that shapes itself through shaping its world. In this regard, his work displays a peculiarly French, mid-Century confluence of Hegelian Marxism with the legacy and ambience of Sartrean existentialism<sup>66</sup> (inflected, arguably, with residual traces of Bergsonism),<sup>67</sup> as it is marked by a preoccupation with self-actualisation in time, framed via positions that seem informed by French Hegelianism’s characteristic focus on Hegel’s links between consciousness, time and negativity.<sup>68</sup> For example, Debord states, by way of an unattributed<sup>69</sup> quotation from Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, that, “Man—that “negative being who *is* to the extent that he abolishes being”—is one [*identique*] with time”.<sup>70</sup> It seems clear that any such identification of the human subject with time and negativity must preclude a politics based upon a naïve humanism, or indeed upon the actualisation of a fixed,

“natural” human essence; so too must it rule out any appeal to a lost, original realm of authenticity (*contra* the claims of some commentators, Debord by no means “postulates a golden age, a humanity originally transparent to itself”).<sup>71</sup> If the human subject is indeed “one with time”, then there can be no fixed human essence at all: human subjects are simply held to possess an intrinsic capacity to create and undergo historical change, and any notion of authenticity can only pertain to the full, free actualisation of that open capacity. Consequently, spectacle should thus be seen to derive not from the occlusion of an original, essential and fixed identity, but rather from the alienation and consequent impoverishment of that capacity.

That alienation was seen to involve human subjects becoming subordinate to social forms in which that capacity is expressed, concentrated and reified (religion, dogma, social hierarchy, the commodity, etc.). When this occurs, they become alienated from their own actions within time, insofar as those actions come to be dictated by their own misrecognised and externalised power. Debord’s debts to the young Marx of the *Manuscripts* are of course apparent here, and this informs the manner in which the theory of spectacle essentially re-casts the classical separation of subject from object as that between a passive observer and a contemplated image (a re-formulation that also owes much to the evolution of these ideas from Debord’s initial concerns with the detachment of art from lived activity).<sup>72</sup> Like the alienated object of consciousness in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Debord’s spectacle is an unrecognised and seemingly independent expression of the subject that contemplates it; like the products of labour described by the young Marx, it is composed of the alienated social power and activity of those who have created it. Such an estranged object is cast as an ‘image’ not solely because it is the focus of a passive, and thus ‘contemplative’ consciousness (as in Lukács’ influential work),<sup>73</sup> but also because it presents fallacious depictions of its own independence, validity and necessity: for, insofar as those depictions constitute and engender alienated instances of the subject’s direct self-actualisation, they can also be understood as paltry representations of the genuine unity of subject and object that would be achieved within a fully self-determinate condition of praxis.

Time is important here once again, for as the goal is to reclaim and actualise a capacity to shape history, it follows that the mode of subject-object unity that would resolve this condition of separation could not take the form of a fixed, static state of affairs. Instead, it seems far closer to a mode of continual, collective, self-determinate movement. What we thus find here, therefore, is something very close to the condition implied by the *German Ideology*’s famous description of communism as “the real movement that abolishes [*aufhebt*] the present state of things”;<sup>74</sup> a line that *The Society of the Spectacle* links, notably, to the movement of a self-conscious history, and indeed to the dissolution of “all separation”.<sup>75</sup>

To sum up these points, as regards our overall argument: the actualisation of the self-determinacy advocated by the S.I. should be seen as a condition of continual, temporal movement, associated with the attainment of a condition of subject-object unity. Given that Hegel himself presented the resolution supposedly attained within his philosophy as a condition of unity characterised by continual process, rupture, and constant, restless movement—and given also that Debord, as we saw in an earlier section of this essay, advocated the actualisation of Hegel’s identification of history and self-consciousness in concrete praxis—it would seem that Debord’s account re-casts Hegelian resolution as the conditions of existence of the ‘real movement’ referred to above. The remainder of this essay will attempt to develop the broader dimensions of that model, with a view towards highlighting the conception of communism that it entails. We will then return to it at the end of the essay, where we will show that it derives, in part, from Debord’s contact with the influential French Hegelian Jean Hyppolite.

#### *Philosophy of history*

We can start to flesh out this notion of communism by looking at the narrative of historical development within which it was situated. *The Society of the Spectacle* contains no less than two, seldom-discussed chapters on time, which describe a historical narrative of development and separation. Humanity’s capacity to shape its existence is presented as having developed through a succession of technical developments and social and economic forms, but as having done so in tandem with its increasing detachment from its producers. This narrative

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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begins with the “cyclical time” of early agrarian societies, which were shaped by the pattern of the seasons; it then goes on to discuss societies within which a more linear, “historical time” emerged as the preserve of the nobility, by virtue of their wars, feuds and lineages, albeit whilst remaining “separate from common reality”,<sup>76</sup> insofar as this history’s events unfolded over and above the lives of those whose socio-economic activity enabled its existence. This separation between history and the lives of workers and common people was eventually overcome with the advent of the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, which diffused a linear, irreversible sense of time throughout society; yet as this was time as measure, and thus a mode of domination,<sup>77</sup> its penetration into lived experience entailed a further removal from the possibility of shaping that experience, and thus a further state of separation from history. Debord presents this detachment as having reached an extreme within his own and the S.I.’s present: for where historical agency had once been transposed onto the heavens, and employed within a history peopled by kings, popes and princes that played out over the heads of their subjects, society’s growing articulation via the social relations of capital had resulted in a context in which history was at once both closer and further away than ever before. Debord’s narrative thus presents his society as affording a grand, world-historical crux, insofar as its contradictory extremes had forcibly imposed a demand for the reclamation and actualisation of this power. It had thus engendered a ‘higher’ communist project that would make explicit the implicit drive towards self-determinacy of all previous struggles,<sup>78</sup> and which would thereby go beyond any of the merely statist or economic demands of the past.<sup>79</sup>

This reading of history can also be mapped onto Debord’s views concerning the legacy and lineage of Hegelian thought, which we outlined earlier. Following Korsch<sup>80</sup> and Lukács<sup>81</sup> he seems to hold that Hegel’s flawed identification of an association between freedom, self-consciousness and history was itself predicated upon the ascendancy of capitalist society: Debord describes the temporality introduced by the bourgeois revolutions as “*profoundly historical*”,<sup>82</sup> but maintains that the conscious direction of such history remained detached from those that conducted it. Hegel’s presentation of a world that made itself corresponds to this temporality, and subsequent Young Hegelian and Marxian calls for history’s reclamation respond to its deepening contradiction. Debord himself is situated within this implicit narrative, as his own account is positioned at a point at which that contradiction could be clearly identified, theorised and (through revolution) resolved: for by the middle of the century, “man”, according to Debord, though “separated from his product,” had become “more and more, and ever more powerfully, the producer of every detail of his world”; and yet at the same time, “the closer his life comes to being his own creation, the more drastically he is cut off from that life.”<sup>83</sup>

The unification that Debord posited at the apex of this narrative was thus a condition within which the totality of subjectively lived experience could indeed become a conscious creation; and insofar as this would necessarily take the form of an on-going process, that unification must be seen not as the *end* of history, but rather as something far closer to Marx’s allusions (which were referenced several times by Debord and the S.I.)<sup>84</sup> to the end of *pre*-history.<sup>85</sup> Communism, therefore, emerges as the social form within which human beings would take charge of their own destiny; and insofar as it was to be a condition of perpetual, self-determinate process, it ceases to be identified with a specific political doctrine or economic plan, or indeed with any hierarchical social structure. Thus, “History itself”, according to *The Society of the Spectacle*, “is the spectre haunting modern society”.<sup>86</sup>

### *Epistemology*

It’s important to note that the narrative described here cannot be seen as a teleological account of history, insofar as ‘teleological’ is taken to denote an inevitable movement towards a pre-ordained outcome. The state of separation that was held to define modern society, and indeed the revolutionary resolution that it invited, was viewed as having forcibly imposed the awareness that human history is made by no other agency than that of human beings themselves. It thus obliged them (and Debord alludes here to the *Communist Manifesto*) to “view their relationships in a clear-eyed manner”.<sup>87</sup> From such a perspective it could thus be identified that the direction of history could not be the preserve of the economy, however much the latter may have monopolised it in the past (or indeed in the projected future of some orthodox Marxisms), and that nor could it be said to fall

under the purview of the Party, *Geist*, or indeed any other over-arching force. By extension, there can be no “cunning of reason” at work within Debord’s account of history, or indeed any other invisible hand pulling the strings of the actors concerned. As Marx and Engels put it in *The Holy Family*: “‘history’ is not a person apart, using man as a means for *its own* particular aims, history is *nothing but* the history of man pursuing his aims.”<sup>88</sup>

However, this is not to say that this account of history is devoid of a sense of *telos* altogether, insofar as those “aims”, when viewed cumulatively, display an inherent orientation and tendency. The following has to be imputed from Debord’s work, as he remains silent on this matter, but the philosophical anthropology described above—which views the human subject as possessed of a capacity to shape itself and its world within time—appears to have informed the identification of an inherent tendency within history towards the self-conscious identification and actualisation of that capacity. Thus, whilst there can be no pre-ordained inevitability to historical events, or to their final outcome, there is, nonetheless, an impetus at work within them. History, in short, is viewed as moving contingently towards a point at which it might be directed intentionally;<sup>89</sup> and that point, of course, is the historical moment at which Debord’s own analysis locates itself.

This invites analogy to Hegel’s own account of history. To put it rather glibly: Hegel writes himself into his own story, in effect, as his philosophy of history presents the latter as necessarily tending towards the emergence of a philosophy such as his own. Although Debord cannot claim any such grand metaphysical basis for his own account, he too situates himself within his own narrative: human history is characterised by a tendency towards self-consciousness and self-determinacy, and his work is placed at the point where this becomes fully identifiable and resolvable. Yet where Hegel can seal the self-validating legitimacy of his own account by casting it as the final realisation of the reason that it holds to be at work within history, Debord can make no such claim to truth. The historical instantiation of the condition of self-determinacy that it advocates possesses no inevitability, and has no innate metaphysical and idealist connection to the theory that would announce its inception. Consequently, his work can be no more than an analysis of his moment and of that moment’s potential future, developed in the light of a reading of its past. This then means that the only claim to truth that he can lay claim to is the degree to which his work’s analyses might be validated by subsequent historical events: or more accurately, by the actions undertaken by human beings in the course of creating (however unconsciously) their own history. Thus, “Nothing is ever proved except by the real movement that dissolves existing relations”<sup>90</sup> Clearly aware that his work could thus claim no more than a provisional validity, Debord made the following, rather disarming remarks in a letter of 1971:

If this concept [of spectacle] is *radically false* (since it could indeed just be relatively “false”, and thus currently “true” for historical thought, in the sense that it is merely the “maximum of possible consciousness” presently to be had concerning the society we are in and for which a far better explanation will be forthcoming once this society is consigned to the past and the process embarked upon in order to consign it is more fully underway) then in the course of this book [*The Society of the Spectacle*] I may well have said a host of *other* things that are correct (the vast majority of which come from comrades down the ages), but because I have understood and assembled them solely on the basis of this concept, they would all be *in some way flawed* ... But if the very concept of spectacle is mistaken, then the whole bloody book is scuppered. As far as I am aware there is, however, *no better one* on the subject that concerns us here - a point that takes us back to the crucial role of consciousness and its role in history.<sup>91</sup>

The very notion that human history might be characterised by a move towards progressively more conscious and explicit attempts at self-determinacy implies that any single body of theory that would contribute towards that process might well be superseded by its successors. Clearly, therefore, these epistemological issues do not apply solely to Debord’s work alone, but rather to the production of radical theory in general; and the position that they ultimately entail is that the validity of a body of theory can only derive from the degree to which it serves to articulate and further a historical struggle. This bears direct relation to the theme of separation. We saw earlier that Debord’s attempt to unite the form and content of his work reflected a desire to avoid merely

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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representing and thus remaining at one remove from the negation that it evokes; here we can add that his work also displays a markedly anti-Leninist<sup>92</sup> desire for a condition of unity between the theory that would articulate the movement of history and the actors that would actually conduct that movement (hence the S.I.'s readiness to make such seemingly presumptuous claim as "Our ideas are in everybody's heads",<sup>93</sup> or that "Situationist theory is in the people like fish are in the sea").<sup>94</sup> Theory, in other words, was to function as an immanent, recognisable diagnosis of a shared exigency—i.e. as a means of clarifying and rendering explicit the inherent contradictions and conflicts of a given moment—and was to be employed as a demonstrably practical tool towards resolving the situation that provoked its emergence. It was, in other words, to function in a manner akin to *strategy*, albeit a mode of strategic thought that emerged immanently from the movement that it purported to articulate. We thus find an interpretation of the "judgement of history" here that identifies the latter's truth with nothing other than history's progress towards freedom and self-determinacy (thus, the "revolutionary movement" knows "that the practice of truth is its own milieu of existence, and at the same time, its own historical goal").<sup>95</sup>

Debord's Hegelian Marxism, we have proposed, re-casts the movement, process and unity of Hegelian resolution as the condition of perpetual historical praxis afforded by the S.I.'s communism. Insofar as this movement must entail the continual negotiation of changing circumstances, the mode of thought associated with it must be inherently strategic. The *dialectical* thought of the Hegelian system thus becomes the *strategic* thought of philosophy's realisation, as that system's static *Vorstellung* of historical self-consciousness becomes a mode of active engagement in history's creation. We will develop this point at length below, but we should first note its implications.

In a film of 1979, titled *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, Debord remarked that "Theories are only made to die in the war of time. Like military units, they must be sent into battle at the right moment", and they must be continually "replaced because they are constantly being rendered obsolete".<sup>96</sup> Theory, in other words, if it is to avoid degenerating into spectacle, cannot claim any perpetuity beyond its relevance and utility to the moment from which it arose; and once that moment passes, so too must that body of theory. If it were to remain in place beyond that moment, it would become a hypostatized, reified representation of the praxis that it once facilitated.

It takes little imagination to connect that observation to the contemporary celebration and acceptance of this once oppositional material (not only is it now a common feature of academic and cultural discourse: to much alarm in some quarters<sup>97</sup>—albeit to the great assistance of studies such as our own—an archive of Debord's work and personal notes has been installed in the Bibliothèque Nationale). Nor is it difficult to note the disparity between this view and that of the many commentators who would make claims as to *The Society of the Spectacle*'s continuing validity (a claim that Debord, admittedly, upheld as well: in 1979, he declared that he had "no doubt that the confirmation all my theses encounter" would "last right until the end of the century and even beyond").<sup>98</sup> For if theories are made to die in the war of time, then Debord's own theory must be subject to that fate too; and if the themes of time and history that underlie that theory therefore imply the production of new, subsequent theoretical interventions, then the foundations of Debord's work can be seen to contain a model of praxis that points beyond the formulations that he himself built upon them.

Furthermore: if we retain the distinction that we introduced above, between Debord's account of the *society* of the spectacle—i.e. of a discrete historical moment—and our attempt to highlight the broader *problematic* of spectacle, then it becomes apparent that superseding Debord's account of that society would not entail jettisoning the concept of spectacle that defined it. As noted earlier, that concept, and the problematic to which it refers, is rooted within the same philosophical anthropology of human temporality that necessitates such continual movement in time. Spectacle, when seen in this broader sense, thus stands as the primary antagonist within that "war of time", as it designates the continual possibility of degeneration into conditions of separation, hierarchy and arrest. Seen in this light, spectacle thus functions as something akin to an *ethical* category.

*Ethics*

This extension of the purview of spectacle beyond Debord's account can be substantiated by noting his indications that it also preceded modern society. As indicated earlier, his theory frames modern society as having brought an older and broader dynamic of separation to an identifiable and resolvable extreme. Granted, Debord consistently dated the spectacle's emergence to the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet when doing so, Debord was referring to the full, complete expression of that older historical tendency; and thus although he certainly claims that the spectacle "corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonisation of social life",<sup>99</sup> such remarks should be understood as referring to the inception of that full expression. Support for this view can be found in his correspondence, where he writes as follows:

[The spectacle] has its basis in Greek thought; it increased towards the Renaissance (with capitalist thought); and still more in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when one opened museum collections to the public; it appeared under its completed form around 1914-1920 (with the brain washing [*bouillage de crâne*] of the war and the collapse of the workers' movement).<sup>100</sup>

All of the phenomena referred to within that quotation relate to the dynamic of separated power. The reference to Greek thought can be understood as pertaining to the importance of citizenship within the state, and to the ideal forms of Platonic philosophy; the rise of capitalism refers to the ascendancy of its rule over lived reality, the museums to the detachment and management of historical thought,<sup>101</sup> and the collapse of the workers' movement to the latter's subordination to representational and Statist politics. Yet one need not bury oneself in the details of Debord's private letters in order to find evidence for this view. Within *The Society of the Spectacle* itself he states explicitly that "power draped itself in the outward garb of a mythical order from the beginning"; that "all separate power has been spectacular",<sup>102</sup> and that "at the root of the spectacle lies the oldest of all social specialisations, the specialisation of power".<sup>103</sup>

Clearly, this notion of separated power has brought us a long way from the media-centric readings of spectacle referred to at the beginning of this essay. Yet it also encompasses Debord's Marxian claims, which describe society as a whole as having become subordinated to its own alienated activity. This broader reading is also able to accommodate the many instances in Debord and the S.I.'s work where the term "spectacle" was used to refer to phenomena that bear little obvious relation to capital or to the commodity *per se* (e.g. Debord's objections to Leninism and its apologists,<sup>104</sup> his numerous critical descriptions of leaders and figureheads,<sup>105</sup> or indeed his concern in the late 1960s that the S.I. itself was growing dangerously spectacular<sup>106</sup>). And if the basic dynamic of spectacle is not reducible to the socio-economic modes that brought it to its full manifestation, then presumably spectacle, in some form, is likely to arise in *any* instance where historical agency and collective power became alienated and transposed onto an "external" body: for as Debord himself put it, "wherever there is independent *representation*", the spectacle "reconstitutes itself".<sup>107</sup>

This means that it would not be enough to simply abolish capitalism in order to end spectacle, for the simple reason that spectacle simply cannot be reductively identified with capitalist society. In order to *truly* abolish spectacle, far more is required: for in addition to ending the economy's sovereignty over lived existence, *all* hierarchies, independent proxies for constitutive agency, and fixed, dogmatic forms must also be superseded. The concept of spectacle, therefore, implies a collectivist-anarchist ethics: an ethics that is wedded to the notion of historical process and praxis developed above.

The identification of an ethics within this material invites the obvious objection that it could be seen to contradict the S.I.'s inherently anti-dogmatic stance. It should also be acknowledged that the S.I. consistently described morality in terms of ideology, and that Debord can be seen to have (indirectly) associated the rejection of moral norms with the communist project *per se*.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, his concerns with subjective autonomy owe a debt to Stirner, for whom "the dominion of morality" is also that of "the sacred",<sup>109</sup> and thus an imagined authority that must be rejected. Yet evidence as to the presence of ethical themes can certainly be found in

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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Debord's writings on a subjective<sup>110</sup> and anecdotal level,<sup>111</sup> and indeed on a theoretical level too. This is because his work ultimately describes a drive towards a mode of collective "association"—to use a phrase that he borrowed from the *Communist Manifesto*<sup>112</sup>—"in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all".<sup>113</sup> This must be a form of association in which the ability to shape one's own time is predicated on the ability of all others, insofar as it entails the absence of hierarchy and coercion, and the abolition of independent bodies of social power. Identifying such an ethics in Debord's work does not, therefore, require the invocation of a fixed and universal notion of reason, a metaphysics or an essentialised humanism, but instead refers to the conditions of existence of the form of collective, self-determinate praxis that he advocated.

These themes can therefore help us to develop that notion of praxis, and to thereby ward off the charges of relativism that might be engendered by the epistemological issues touched on above. As stressed above, the goal of Debord's revolution is an on-going, open-ended condition of historical praxis. Yet that goal must also be reached through praxis, given that it will not transpire automatically. The goal, therefore, cannot be separated from the path taken towards it, but rather brings the self-determinacy inherent within it to fuller, more complete fruition. There is therefore a unity of means and ends here that entails a prefigurative politics, and acknowledging this can help us to make sense of the S.I.'s view that an anti-spectacular project must embody its rejection of dogma, ideology and hierarchy within its own practical mode of organization.

Any such organisation, according to Debord, cannot "allow the conditions of division and hierarchy that obtain in the dominant society to be reproduced within itself";<sup>114</sup> to do otherwise would be to "combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle".<sup>115</sup> Or as the S.I. put it: "self-management", according to the S.I., "must be both the means and the end of ... struggle"; it was thus "not only what is at stake in the struggle, but also its adequate form".<sup>116</sup> This unity of means and ends should be connected to Debord's views on time: for as he put it in his correspondence, and in keeping with the identification of process and goal indicated above, "historical time", was said to be both the "milieu and goal of the proletarian revolution".<sup>117</sup> If that is the case—and if the instantiation of that goal entails the perpetuity of such "historical time"—then any collectivity that might actualise it must be oriented towards the further instantiation of its own conditions of existence. The views developed here do not, therefore, imply a relativist drive towards "making history" in the abstract, but entail an orientation towards continued manifestations (or indeed towards the further enrichment) of that condition. We therefore have a model of a process that shapes and determines itself through continually recreating its own foundations.

Situating these ideas in relation to the reading of Debord's Hegelian Marxism inferred above can also help to make sense of the notion of collectivity that can be found in Debord's work. If the 'inversion' of Hegel essentially means transposing his philosophy into a condition of praxis, then his emphasis on mutual recognition and on the organic interrelation of universality and particularity would seem to pertain directly to these themes. After all, Debord's descriptions of the bourgeois atomisation of spectacular society (e.g. the spectacle is a "unity ... of generalised separation")<sup>118</sup> were directly informed by Marx's claim that Hegel's political philosophy had imposed an abstracted, philosophical idea of unity upon a fragmented reality, and indeed by his implications that communism would afford a more adequate mode of interrelating the universal with the particular (one might also think of Marx's later claims in *Capital* that capital is a "social relation"<sup>119</sup> in which "men are ... related in a purely atomistic way").<sup>120</sup>

To sum up: Debord's work can be seen to imply a theory of communism that casts the latter as a condition of collective praxis within "historical time". This however requires acknowledging that the concept of spectacle cannot be reductively identified with capitalist society *per se*, and that its broader dimensions ultimately pertain to the denigration or denial of the forms of association that would allow the institution and perpetuity of that mode of temporality. On this basis, we can now return to the connection between dialectical and strategic thought that we highlighted above. For if Debord's Hegelian Marxism can be seen to frame the operation of this mode of association as the actualisation of Hegelian resolution in praxis, then the dialectical thought of the Hegelian system, when actualised in such praxis, becomes the strategic thought of that mode of association's operation.

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*Strategy*

Debord's interest in strategy is often noted within the literature, but it has rarely been analysed in theoretical detail.<sup>121</sup> This is hardly surprising, for as is also the case with his Hegelianism, at no point in Debord's public work, correspondence or unpublished archive material does he provide us with a clear, distinct summary of his views. Yet, like his Hegelianism, the primary aspects of his views on strategy can be reconstructed from textual evidence; and whilst a discussion of its particular applications in his political analyses falls beyond the remit of this essay, we can at least map out its central features. At the very least, what follows should serve to establish that it cannot be understood in the absence of an engagement with his Hegelianism.

In one of his few substantial statements on Hegel's work, Debord writes as follows:

For Hegel it was no longer a matter of *interpreting* the world, but rather of interpreting the world's *transformation*. Inasmuch as he did *no more* than interpret that transformation, however, Hegel was merely the *philosophical* culmination of philosophy. He sought to understand a world that *made itself*. This historical thought was still part of that consciousness that always arrives too late, and which pronounces a justification *post festum*. It thus superseded separation—but *in thought only*.<sup>122</sup>

Hegel's philosophy is thus viewed as a mode of thought that announces its claims *after* the advent of historical events, as opposed to applying itself within their creation (an idea that would seem to be informed by Debord's reading of Korsch).<sup>123</sup> Despite his identification of self-consciousness and freedom with history, Hegel is viewed as remaining at one remove from the actual movement of history, insofar as the unification that he posits takes place solely in philosophy. Debord is not, therefore, criticising Hegel in an Adornian vein for attempting to establish a condition of unity, as have many others within the French tradition;<sup>124</sup> instead, he criticises him for making that attempt within the detachment of philosophical thought, and for thereby *failing to achieve* that unity, *qua* lived, pro-active praxis. Consequently, and as he puts it in his correspondence, the task posed by the critique of Hegel's work is that of moving beyond Hegel's contemplation of a world that had completed its own "auto-transformation", in order to "take an active part in history".<sup>125</sup> This then returns us to Debord's interpretation of Marx's famous 'inversion' of Hegel, which does not involve the "trivial substitution"<sup>126</sup> of unfolding categories for a history of developing social relations, but rather a change in perspective: a view according to which Marx corrects Hegel's description of the present as the conclusion of the past by rendering the present the basis of an open future.<sup>127</sup> This is particularly apparent in Debord's remarks on the work of August Cieszkowski, a Polish young Hegelian whom he credits as having pre-figured this manoeuvre. Cieszkowski's work, he claimed, stands before both Marx and Feuerbach, and thus at the very outset of a long line of theoretical and political development, along which "the dialectical method" edged ever closer to unification with "the reality that seeks it".<sup>128</sup> Debord identifies that "dialectical method" with "the thought of history,"<sup>129</sup> and implicitly locates himself and the S.I. at the point upon this line where that unification might be achieved: at the point, in other words, where all such modes of reflecting upon a historical world might be actualised in the process of consciously shaping the latter. Cieszkowski is presented as having implicitly grasped this exigency, as can be seen from Debord's short summary of his critique of Hegel:

Cieszkowski surpasses Hegel in purely Hegelian terms: he negates the central aporia of the system by simply acknowledging that time has not ended. Hegel had concluded history, in the form of thought, because he ultimately accepted glorifying his present. In a single manoeuvre, Cieszkowski reverses the system, by bringing it into contact with the "moment" of the future. This is because he recognised, in the thought of history—the supersession of philosophy—the power to transform the world.<sup>130</sup>

Debord's reading of Cieszkowski, therefore, essentially runs as follows. Time's negativity, and thereby the meaning and sum truth of the human history through which the lived experience of time becomes self-conscious,<sup>131</sup> cannot be captured and bound within the hypostatised form of a system; certainly not within one that

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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identified such 'truth' with a single, glorified, concluding moment.<sup>132</sup> Thus, although Hegel was right in presenting dialectical thought as affording historical self-consciousness—Debord explicitly associates it with “the thought of history”—he was nonetheless wrong in hypostatizing its movement within the detached abstractions of a philosophical system. Debord is clearly influenced by Marx's famous remarks in his postface to the second German edition of *Capital*, where he claimed that dialectical thought, once extracted from its “mystical shell”, is inherently critical, historical and revolutionary, because it “includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation”, and thus “regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state”.<sup>133</sup> It seems that for Debord, this meant that dialectical thought afforded a means of achieving a self-conscious engagement with the flow of time; and if that self-consciousness was to become actualised in historical praxis, following Marx's call for the realisation of philosophy, then dialectical thought was to become one with *strategic* thought.

This interpretation of Debord's use of Hegel, therefore, can help us to clarify his otherwise enigmatic identification of dialectics and strategy. Both Machiavelli and Clausewitz, for example, were described as proponents of “dialectical, strategic thought”,<sup>134</sup> and a study of both writers was said to be required, “in the current era”, in order to “complete readings of Hegel and of other old friends of the International”.<sup>135</sup> The connection between strategy and dialectics is phrased even more explicitly in the following remarks, made on one of the personal reading notes that are now housed in the Debord archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale:

It is the same thing to think dialectically and to think strategically. When one *separates* one's terrains and terms, one specialises this genre of operations, and one draws an ideological mantle over their methods and all their practical applications. For these terrains are evidently one single terrain, *since both denote the totality*. It is the thought of praxis, which must act; practical theory, in the course of its combat in time. They are the same mode of thought, and they are judged by the same result [*C'est la même pensée qui est jugée par le même résultat*].<sup>136</sup>

Strategy, therefore, corresponds directly to Debord's concerns with the need for consciousness to move in step with time and history, and in this regard it can be seen to operate on several levels within his work. Firstly, it pertains to its existential dimensions, as it connects to his Sartrean view that human subjects exist within momentary situations that they are obliged to traverse (and which, following the Situationist project, they might deliberately shape). If the human subject is indeed an inherently 'negative' being, located in perpetual opposition to its present moment—and if it is also finite, and characterised by limited, contextual knowledge, as Debord also stresses—then that subject must continually operate and negotiate its circumstances on the basis of limited knowledge. The very conduct of life itself is thus strategic in this sense, and its constant contingencies relate to Debord's interest in turning life into a game:<sup>137</sup> for play, like strategy, requires knowing how to act at the right time. In fact, the import of such knowledge seems to be the real core of Debord's understanding of strategy.

It would also seem that dialectical thought was held to afford an awareness of conflict, flux and change within the totality of a given moment: to thus provide a means of recognising where and when one might strike and act effectively within such a moment. This can be illustrated by way of reference to the set of notes on Poker that Debord produced for his wife in 1990 (and which are clearly not *just* notes on the game of Poker). They advise that a good player should keep his or her own use of bluff to an absolute minimum, and that when others are presenting illusions and assuming all others to be doing the same, acting opportunely on the basis of known facts confers an advantage. To play well, he writes, “One must know how to employ the *kairos*<sup>138</sup> of one's forces at the right moment”.<sup>139</sup> Such knowledge was clearly associated with a capacity to negotiate the tangle of bluff, feints, illusions and representations that Debord held to characterise the spectacular society of his later years. An increased emphasis on the importance of “strategic theory” can in fact be discerned in Debord's thought from the mid 1970s onwards.<sup>140</sup> Its increased importance at that time reflected his response to the subsidence of the events of May 1968, and his growing preoccupation with the intrigue and confusion of the Italian *anni di piombo*. The latter would in fact greatly inform the analyses presented in 1988's *Comments on the Society of*

*the Spectacle*, which contend that because modern society had rejected history, it could “no longer be led strategically”,<sup>141</sup> and had consequently degenerated into a muddle of conflicting, fragmentary interests. Coupled to the increased existential impoverishment engendered by the spectacle’s continued advances, this meant, according to Debord in 1988, that “conditions have never been so seriously revolutionary”; yet at the same time, the general denigration of critical, historical thought entailed that “it is only governments who think so”.<sup>142</sup> This contradiction should however be seen as the deepening of an exigency that had already been identified in 1967s *The Society of the Spectacle*. The modern “proletarian revolution”, Debord claimed there, “is predicated entirely on the requirement that, for the first time, theory as the understanding of human practice be recognised and directly lived by the masses”, so as to avoid its Leninist, spectacular imposition upon the latter. This meant, he claimed, that “workers” must “become dialecticians”.<sup>143</sup> As we have just seen, that statement is tantamount to the contention that they must become *strategists*; and difficult though that may be, he remarked in a letter from that same year that “there is absolutely no other way to leave our sad prehistoric period”.<sup>144</sup>

#### IV. THE ABSOLUTE

##### *Debord and Hyppolite*

There is no space here to offer a critical evaluation of the political positions that these remarks imply, but we should at least be able to summarise and characterise the claims that have been made here regarding the nature of the ideas that underlie and support Debord’s claims. Our aim has been to demonstrate that the latter contain a theory of communism *qua* historical agency. We’ve seen that this has its roots within Debord’s views on time and history, and that it seems to point beyond his own extant work, thereby implying a model of on-going intervention and praxis. We’ve also seen that the theory of spectacle carries ethical implications as regards the perpetuity and orientation of that praxis, and that Debord’s concerns with strategy pertain to the conceptual operation of its conduct. The result, it would seem, is a model of praxis that could be drawn out of Debord’s work and developed independently of the corpus within which it currently resides. An attempt to do so, however, would necessarily entail a fuller engagement with the Hegelian Marxian ideas that structure it, and we will therefore close by schematising them by way of the following.

All of the discussions above were shown to pertain to Debord’s views on the relation between Marx and Hegel. This is due, quite simply, to the fact that he saw his own work as a direct continuation of the latter writer’s contributions towards human historical emancipation. Hegel was seen to have grasped the relation between history, freedom, self-consciousness and self-determinacy; Marx was seen to have called for the actualisation of that set of relations in concrete historical action. Debord’s reading of the connection between these two figures, when viewed in terms of his own theoretical claims, appears to take Marx’s call for Hegel’s actualisation relatively literally, as it could be schematised as a Feuerbachian reclamation of qualities associated with the Hegelian Absolute. The latter’s interrelation of universality and particularity, and its consequent retention of perpetual unrest and self-determinate process within a condition of unity, appear to have been re-framed not as the end of history, but rather as the grounds of a fully self-conscious collective praxis.

These claims may seem rather speculative—as noted, this position has been inferred from Debord’s claims, and is not explicitly stated within them—but in addition to according with the textual evidence, they also bear interesting relation to Debord’s links to Jean Hyppolite.<sup>145</sup> The Hegel that Debord criticises in his texts often seems to be that of Alexandre Kojève, i.e. a Hegel who had rashly declared history to have ended with Napoleon and the Prussian State. The Hegelianism that Debord developed when articulating his own positions, however, was in fact far closer to Hyppolite’s reading of Hegel, according to which the Hegelian Absolute is not a static condition of arrest, but rather an endless, restless, self-determinate process of continual rupture and re-unification. Hyppolite stresses themes such as these in his excellent *Introduction to Hegel’s Philosophy of History* of 1948 (Debord owned this book, and his notes on it are now stored in the Paris Archive), and he relates them to Marx in his exceptional *Studies on Marx and Hegel* of 1955 (Debord owned and made detailed notes on this book too). Significantly, Hyppolite presents Marx as having dismissed religion and speculative philosophy as alien-

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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ated appearances of the unity that would be actualised through revolutionary praxis, describes him as having been “incapable of adopting a position outside of a history that *is to be made at the same time as it is to be thought*”,<sup>146</sup> and as advocating a communism that amounts to an on-going, self-constitutive process: a process engaged in “forever re-creating its own foundations”.<sup>147</sup> These remarks bear obvious connection to the Hegelian model of communism *qua* praxis that we have attempted to reconstruct above. Consequently, although Lukács was evidently a major figure in the development of Debord’s Marxian analyses, Hyppolite may have played a similarly formative role in the evolution of the Hegelianism that supports them.

There is of course much more to say about the issues addressed here. We have focussed primarily on Debord’s theoretical work from the 1960s, and have paid relatively little attention to that from the 1950s, or indeed the decades that followed the S.I.’s demise in 1972. Yet having at least introduced some of the key components of the conceptual framework that supports Debord’s work, and having also indicated the sense in which it would seem to point beyond his oeuvre, we can perhaps conclude with some brief comments on the possible merits of pursuing these aspects of his thought further.

### CONCLUSION

The apparent defeat of the May 1968 uprisings not only pertains to the evaluation of Situationist theory, but also to that of much of the continental political philosophy that was produced over the subsequent decades. The seemingly spontaneous nature of those events not only undermined economic determinism and the structuralism that had dismissed humanism and Sartrean existentialism (“structures”, to quote a slogan chalked on a Sorbonne blackboard, “do not march in the street”),<sup>148</sup> but also revealed the limits of traditional modes of organisation, as the PCF, together with the major unions, sought to translate the movement’s demands into familiar and more manageable calls for higher wages. Yet the uprisings were ultimately subdued, and the traditional Left suffered further defeats throughout the following decades. Obligated to acknowledge both the lessons of the May events and those imposed by capital’s continued impositions, the stances that replaced those discredited models adopted alternative figures of social change, capable of articulating resistance within the networks and discursive regimes of technologically mediated capitalism.<sup>149</sup> Today, by contrast, radical theory seems characterised by more retrospective concerns: we are not only invited to rethink the ‘idea’ of communism, but also the concepts and organisational forms called into question by May 1968. Žižek delights in alluding to the dictatorship of the proletariat, even to the point of calling, alarmingly, for a “Thatcher of the Left”,<sup>150</sup> Badiou, memorably described by Debord as “Maoist carrion”,<sup>151</sup> continues to pursue elements of that doctrine; Althusser, whose “sombre dementia” was also explicitly rejected,<sup>152</sup> seems to be receiving renewed attention; Sartre has yet to receive a revival, but Hegel’s return to favour perhaps places him next in line. Within such a context of return to pre-68 models, there is perhaps a virtue in addressing material putatively associated with “the most extreme position taken up during the confrontations of 1968”:<sup>153</sup> for if it is approached in the manner proposed here, one can draw from it a set of ideas pertaining to political agency that stand opposed to structuralism’s dismissal of the human subject, that avoid any fixed, essentialist naturalisation of the latter, and which also reject the organisational frameworks that were called into question by those “confrontations”. As this agency was also conceived by its own author as a force able to operate strategically upon the terrain of a seemingly triumphant modern capitalism, it may merit further enquiry in the vein outlined above.

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

## NOTES

1. This article has been through a number of different drafts and incarnations, and I am very grateful to Bob Brecher, Matt Charles, M. Beatrice Fazi, Phil Homburg, John McHale, Ben Noys and Alberto Toscano for their helpful comments on earlier versions. Thanks are also due to my anonymous reviewers. Some elements of this essay revisit and develop material that was first presented in Bunyard, Tom, *A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of Spectacle*, PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2011. All translations from the French are my own. I am however very grateful to John McHale for his advice and assistance with the translation of some passages, and I have also found it useful to consult, where available, the translations of selected letters from Debord's correspondence that Bill Brown has made available at his *Not Bored!* website.
2. This article will concentrate primarily on Debord's mature and late formulations, and on the S.I.'s theoretical output during the early to late 1960s: the period within which the concept of spectacle came to the fore as a means of unifying and focussing the group's concerns. It should however be noted that this approach to the S.I. can be deemed questionable. In recent years there has been a reaction against the dominant tendency to read the S.I. through Debord's vision thereof, and to thus neglect the elements of the group's early years that existed prior to, or indeed jarred with, its subsequent consolidation around his concept of spectacle. The approach conducted here is however motivated by the view that whilst Debord has indeed received a good degree of attention, the technical and philosophical details of his work have remained largely neglected. Thus whilst there may well be virtue to extracting a more radical and 'authentic' S.I. from beneath the academic and Debord-centric recuperation that has accrued around the group, a similar task remains to be performed *vis a vis* the actual details and substance of Debord's work. See Jakobsen, Jakob, and Rasmussen, Mikkel Bolt (eds.), *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, Copenhagen: Nebula, 2011, for a collection of essays focussing on these aspects of the early S.I. and on the latter's artistic offshoots. For further commentary in this vein, and for work detailing the early S.I., see Home, Stewart, 'The Palingenesis of the Avant-Garde', available at <http://www.stewarthisociety.org/sp/palin.htm>, 1999; McDonnough, Tom, *The Situationists and the City*, London: Verso, 2009; Sadler, Simon, *The Situationist City*, London: MIT Press, 1998; and Wark, McKenzie, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, London: Verso, 2011.
3. As we will see below, Debord's work is fundamentally concerned with the realisation of philosophy in praxis. The importance of this aspect of Debord's work can be illustrated with an anecdote. Giorgio Agamben, who had the rare honour of being one of the few modern intellectuals whom Debord did not despise, recalls in an essay that he once told Debord that he considered him to be a philosopher. Debord responded by saying "I'm not a philosopher, I'm a strategist" (Agamben, Giorgio, 'Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films', translated by Brian Holmes, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, Ed. McDonnough, Tom, London: October, 2004, 313). Agamben does not make this point, but his response to that question was no doubt due to his view that strategy is the form to be taken by philosophy when it comes to be actualized, following Marx's critique of Hegel, in historical praxis.
4. See Clark, T.J., and Nicholson-Smith, Donald, 'Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International', in McDonnough, Tom, (ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, London: October, 2004, for a useful critique of this reading.
5. Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York: Zone Books, 1995, 12-3; Debord, Guy, *Oeuvres*, Malesherbes: Gallimard, 2006a, 767
6. Debord, *The Society*, 19; *Oeuvres*, 772
7. Frow, John, *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 5
8. See for example Hussey, Andrew, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, London: Pimlico, 2002, 217
9. See for example Beller, Jonathan, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Hannover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006, p.241
10. See Gilles Dauvé (a "Bordigist-revisionist", according to Debord (Debord, Guy, *Correspondance Volume 4: Janvier 1969—Décembre 1972*, Ligué: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004, 603)), albeit one whose broader critical remarks on the latter's work are otherwise pertinent) for an example of this view: "as capital tends to ... parcelize everything so as to recompose it with the help of market relations," he writes, "it also makes of representation a specialised sector of production"; as a result, "wage-workers are ... stripped of the means of producing their ideas, which are produced by a specialised sector" (Dauvé, Gilles, 'Critique of the Situationist International', first published in *Red-eye #1*, 1979) The spectacle, for Dauvé, would thus seem to be primarily associated with the marketing and ideology that supports the current economic system
11. Debord, *The Society*, 13, translation altered; *Oeuvres* 767
12. Hence Debord's contention in *The Society of the Spectacle* that the spectacle must be understood as "the visible negation of life; as a negation of life that has become visible" (Debord, *The Society*, 14; *Oeuvres*, 768). Hence also his early claim that the cinema offered "the best representation of an epoch" (Situationist International, *Internationale Situationiste*, Mayenne: Librairie Arthème Fayard Mayenne, 1997, 8); a point that was perhaps influenced by Lefebvre's even earlier contention in the first volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life* that "someone sitting in front of a cinema screen offers an example and a

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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common model of [modern] passivity" (Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique of Everyday Life* (Volume 1), translated by John Moore, London: Verso, 2008, 32).

13. Debord *The Society*, 14; *Oeuvres*, 768

14. Debord *The Society*, 15 translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 768

15. In brief, *détournement* was a technique that involved subverting existing cultural forms into new configurations by actualising the potential that they were seen to harbour *vis a vis* the supersession of the reigning society and culture. It was thus not solely associated with the subversion of adverts and films, which constituted its most famous expressions, and should instead be understood in more general terms as a kind of strategic *Aufhebung* of an opponent's force.

16. Debord, *Oeuvres*, 70

17. See Kaufmann, Vincent, 2006, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, translated by Robert Bononno, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, for a discussion that places Debord's interest in strategy in relation to writing.

18. Debord, Guy, *Correspondance Volume 7: Janvier 1988—Novembre 1994*, Vottem: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 2008, 218

19. Debord, Guy, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Malcolm Imrie, London: Verso, 1998, 2, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 1594

20. See for example Plant, Sadie, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern age*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 152-3; Brown, Bill, 'Guy Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*', available at <http://www.notbored.org/comments.html>, 1991; Kaufmann, *Guy Debord*, 264.

21. In a letter of 1989, Debord can be found indicating to a correspondent that "one can call 'lure' anything that misleads rapid reading or computers", that "for a reader capable of understanding dialectical, strategic thought" there are in fact "no lures" within the *Comments* at all, and that the only decoy to be found in the entire book is therefore the "very evocation of the possibility of there being lures" (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 7*, 78). A similar point is made in his as-yet un-translated *Cette Mauvaise Réputation*, ("Perhaps [the suggestion of lures] is a lure? Perhaps the only one?" (Debord, Guy, *Cette Mauvaise Réputation*, Paris: Gallimard, 1993, 33)), and again in a letter to a Spanish translator of the *Comments* ("I do not believe that one must translate "lures", originally a term used by hunters and that evokes a lost trail, by the brutal *trampa* [trap] (there is no false information, which might make the reader "fall into error", in my book)" (Debord, Guy, *Correspondance Volume 7: Janvier 1988—Novembre 1994*, Vottem: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 2008, 93).

22. One need only look at Debord's notes to any future translator of *Panegyric* to recognise this point (Debord, Guy, *Panegyric Volumes 1 and 2*, translated by James Brook and John McHale, London: Verso, 2004, 171-8; *Oeuvres*, 1686-9). Martin Jay was thus quite wrong when he claimed that whilst "other Western Marxists ... championed modernism ... Adorno was the only one who could legitimately lay claim to have been a modernist himself" (Jay, Martin, *Adorno*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, 17).

23. Voyer, Jean-Pierre, 'There is no Society of the Spectacle', in *Limites de conversation*, Strasbourg: Éditions Anonymes, available in translation at [http://pagesperso-orange.fr/leuven/arideau.htm#\\_ftn1](http://pagesperso-orange.fr/leuven/arideau.htm#_ftn1), 1998

24. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 454

25. Debord, Debord, Guy, 2005, *Correspondance Volume 5: Janvier 1973—Décembre 1978*, Ligugé: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 61

26. See for example Best, Steven, and Kellner, Douglas, 2000, 'Debord and the Postmodern Turn: New Stages of the Spectacle', available at: [www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell17.htm](http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell17.htm), 2000. For an early and seminal study that acknowledges the important differences between Debord and Baudrillard, see Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*.

27. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 5*, 349

28. See in particular its third thesis; the letter discussed in this paragraph is however primarily concerned with the explication of theses #7-10.

29. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 5*, 61

30. Debord, *The Society*, 12; *Oeuvres*, 766

31. Debord *Correspondance Volume 5*, p.61

32. Jappe, Anselm, *Guy Debord*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: University of California Press, 1999

33. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 7*, 453

34. There are some significant texts, besides Jappe's, that have treated Debord's Hegelian Marxism. Moinet (Moinet, Jean-Louis, *Genèse et Unification du Spectacle*, Paris: Champs Libre

1977), for example, explicitly connects the spectacle to Hegelian philosophy; Turner (Turner, Steve, 1996, 'Guy Debord and the Metaphysics of Marxism: An Obituary of Guy Debord', in *Common Sense*, #20, 1996) provides an extremely useful and admirably concise overview of Debord's links to Korsch, Lukács and the young Marx; Grass (Grass, Dominique, 'Dialectique Historiciste et Théorie du Proletariat: Histoire et Historicité de la Théorie Pratique', in *Philosophique*, Paris: Editions Kimé, 2000)

2000) also comments on Debord's connection to Korsch, identifies a further correspondence with Clausewitz, and presents positions on Debord's use of Hegel that are close to my own in some respects.

35. Jappe's work on Debord was seminal in the establishment of this connection, not least because of his own connections

to the Krisis group and the work of Robert Kurz. See Jappe, Anselm, 'Towards a Critique of Value', in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, April 2014, for a useful introduction to this school of theory; see also Larsen, Neil; Nilges, Mathias; Robinson, Josh; and Brown, Nicholas (eds.), *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, Chicago: MCM Publishing, 2014, for a set of essays on the topic. See also the series of essays by Kurz and other members of Krisis that have been made available in English in pamphlet form by Chronos Publications, such as 'Contributions to the Critique of Commodity Society', London 2002, 'Marx 2000', London 2002, and 'No Revolution Anywhere', London 2012.

36. This connection stems largely from the sense in which Debord's critique of spectacular society describes capital as an overarching social form that shapes and determines its own content: a view that accords with aspects of the differing views presented by the writers associated with 'value-form theory' and the new readings of Marx. The work of figures such as Arthur, Backhaus, Bonefeld, Heinrich, Postone and Reichelt are relevant here. Postone in particular has been connected to Debord (albeit questionably, and no doubt largely due to his relative theoretical proximity to Kurz) by the now defunct Principia Dialectica group; the most notable point of reference here would be Postone's discussion of temporality in Postone, Moishe, *Time, Labour and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. The opening chapters of Heinrich's excellent *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012) include a very short overview of the new approach to Marx; see also Elbe, Ingo, 2013, 'Between Marx, Marxism and Marxisms: Ways of Reading Marx's Theory', in *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 2013 (available online at <http://viewpointmag.com/2013/10/21/between-marx-marxism-and-marxisms-ways-of-reading-marx-theory/>) for another overview. However, perhaps the best illustration of the connections between this approach to Marx and the Situationists can be found in the excellent work of the Endnotes group. See Endnotes, 'Bring out Your Dead', in *Endnotes #1*, 2008, and Endnotes, 'Communitisation and Value-Form Theory', in *Endnotes # 2*, 2010.

37. The term 'communitisation' refers to a set of often conflicting concerns within the French ultra-left that broadly share the view that communism should be viewed as a historical process oriented towards the eradication, as opposed to the affirmation, of labour and a working-class identity. Communism, on this view, thus ceases to be viewed as a discrete state of affairs, or as a specific social modality that might be attained at the end of a programmatic struggle against capitalist society, but rather as the very process of that struggle itself. As will become apparent below, the interpretation of Debord's Hegelianism developed in this present article is by no means dissimilar to that perspective. Again, see the Endnotes group's 'Bring out Your Dead' and 'Communitisation and Value-Form Theory' for useful introductions to this school of thought *vis a vis* the S.I.. The work produced by the French Théorie Communiste group is also relevant in that respect (see Simon, Roland, *Histoire Critique de l'Ultragauche: Trajectoire d'une Balle dans le Pied*, Marseille: Senonevero, 2009), as are the Vaneigem-esque claims presented by Tiqqun (see in particular The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009). Ben Noys' *Communitisation and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique and Contemporary Struggles*, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2011, provides a good critical introduction to this field of thought.

38. One might think here of Jappe's indication in his *Guy Debord* that "the relevance of Debord's thought lies in his having been among the first to interpret the present [socio-political and cultural] situation in the light of the Marxian theory of value"—i.e. in a manner that displays unintentional homologies with the readings of Marx referred to here—but that "his shakier contentions are made at points where his thinking is still under the influence of the Marxism of the workers' movement", i.e. which echo the failings within traditional, classical Marxism that these new approaches have endeavoured to resolve (Jappe, *Guy Debord*, 18).

39. Despite the claims made by those who would link Debord's work to groups and figures such as Krisis, Kurz, Postone and indeed Jappe's interest in *Wertkritik*, the fact remains that the real core of Debord's theory is its preoccupation with history and agency. Much contemporary Marxian work seems comparatively sceptical towards young Marxian and Hegelian notions of history and subjectivity; one might think here of the absence of a subject in Kurz's work, or indeed the difference between Debord and Postone. Although Debord's work has certainly been linked to the latter (e.g. Prigent, Michel, 'The Difference between Moishe Postone's and Guy Debord's Critique of Capitalism, or: The Limits of Guy Debord', available at <http://www.principiadialectica.co.uk/blog/?p=575>, 2009), the difference between their work is great: for where Postone attributes the self-determinate movement of Hegelian thought to capital, and criticises the young Marx for linking it to the human subject (e.g. Postone, *Time, Labour*, 75), Debord presents the attribution of that self-movement to capital as a symptom of humanity's separation from its own historical agency (Cf. thesis #80 of *The Society of the Spectacle*, and see also the further discussions in this article). If Debord is to be associated with writers linked to the new readings of Marx, then perhaps the closest point of reference may be the more humanistic approach advanced by Werner Bonefeld (see for example Bonefeld, Werner, 'Abstract Labour: Against its Nature and on its Time' in *Capital and Class* vol.34, #2, and his 'Social Form, Critique and Human Dignity' in *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, Vol. 13, 2001, available online at <https://libcom.org/library/social-form-critique-and-human-dignity>).

40. Arthur, Christopher, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Boston: Brill, 2004, 7

41. Further support for such an approach can be derived from the fact that the themes of separation and temporality articulated by Debord's Hegelianism can be found, in nascent form, within his early artistic and avant-garde concerns. They thus precede his turn to both Marx and Hegel in the late 1950s.

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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42. Marx, Karl, 1975, *Early Writings*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, Middlesex: Penguin, 1975, 257, translation altered; Marx, Karl, 'Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie: Einleitung', available at [http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01\\_378.htm](http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01_378.htm), 1999
43. As an aside, it might be noted that Marx's original term for that 'inversion' was *umstülpen*, which also means to reverse, to turn inside out.
44. Debord indicates in his correspondence that he used Hyppolite's two-volume translation of the *Phenomenology*, which appeared in 1939 and 1941 (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 65).
45. See in particular Cieszkowski, August, 'Prolegomena to Historiosophy', in *Selected Writings of August Cieszkowski*, edited and translated by André Liebich, London: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Feuerbach, Ludwig, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989; and Stirner, Max, *The Ego and his Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*, translated by Steven T. Byington, New York: Dover Publications, 1963
46. Marx, Karl, *Early Writings*, 423
47. Debord, *The Society*, 50; *Oeuvres*, 794, italics in the original
48. Adorno, Theodor, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge, 1973, 3
49. Debord, *The Society*, 13, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 767
50. Debord: 'The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him' (Debord, *The Society*, 23; *Oeuvres*, 774).
51. Situationist International, *Situationist International Anthology*, translated and edited by Ken Knabb, Berkeley: Bureau of Public, 2006, 159; *Internationale Situationniste*, 334
52. See Vaneigem, Raoul, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Rebel Press, 1994, p.68; See Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*, 14-6 for a discussion of this issue.
53. Vaneigem, *The Revolution*, 68
54. S.I., *Anthology*, 141; *Internationale Situationniste*, 309
55. The S.I. can thus be seen to echo some of Marx's contentions in the *Grundrisse* prior to its French translation (Marx: "For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time" (Marx, Karl, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973, 708)).
56. See for example Dauvé, Gilles, 'Back to the Situationist International', available at <http://troploin0.free.fr/biblio/backto/>, 2000, and Endnotes 'Bring out Your Dead' for examples of this line of critique. The objection is essentially that there is a contradiction between Debord's slogan "Never work!" and the S.I.'s call for "All power to the workers" councils!". There is however very little contradiction here: the problematic that the S.I. sought to address was the absence of self-determinacy, and the councils were not viewed as a permanent solution, but rather a means of maintaining a fledgling post-revolutionary society without compromising the principle of autonomy that was to define it. After all, the S.I.'s 'proletariat' was by no means economically defined. As Debord put it in his 1961 film *Critique of Separation*: "The point is not to recognise that some people live more or less poorly than others, but that we all live in ways that are out of our control" (Debord, Guy, *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills and Documents*, translated and edited by Ken Knabb, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2003, 31; *Oeuvres*, 543).
57. Insofar as the constructed situation anticipated the new social modality that would replace that of the present, the conclusion was ultimately reached that to continue producing traditional art works within the current context would be reactionary. Given that such a condition of creative self-determinacy could only be achieved through revolution, the group's emphasis, following a split with its primarily Scandinavian and German artistic 'right wing' in 1962, fell on the production of theory that would facilitate such change. According to Debord in 1989, the conclusion reached following that split was simple: "The S.I. must now realise philosophy" (*Internationale Situationniste*, 703). Cf. Marx's 'Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' for a host of remarks that pertain to this identification of the need to unite radical theory with the practical agency that would actualise it (Marx, *Early Writings*, 1975, pp. 243-57).
58. Although Debord and the S.I. distanced themselves from anarchism, largely due to the abstract immediacy of its demands (see in particular thesis #92 of *The Society of the Spectacle*), they nonetheless acknowledged their proximity to its aims (e.g. Debord, in correspondence with an anarchist group: "we have a great sympathy for the principal anarchist manifestations in history"; "the goals of anarchism are those of all imaginable revolutionary movements in modern society" (Debord, Guy, *Correspondance Volume 3: Janvier 1965—Décembre 1968*, Ligugé: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003, 140-1)).
59. Cf. Debord *Correspondance Volume 4*, 94
60. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 5*, 79
61. Principally Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach'. The latter argue that although Feuerbach had grasped humanity's need to supersede the separation of the alienated abstractions that it had posited over and above itself, his work still lacked the process and movement proper to the Hegelian philosophy that it had criticised. That movement thus needed to be brought down to

material praxis.

62. S.I., *Anthology*, 42; Debord, *Oeuvres*, 327

63. Debord, *The Society*, 116; *Oeuvres*, 835

64. Debord, *The Society*, 12; *Oeuvres*, 766

65. Debord, *The Society*, 114; *Oeuvres*, 834

66. Debord's antipathy to Sartre, despite his apparent debts to his work, was however formidable: Sartre was variously described as a "buffoon" (Debord, Guy, *Correspondance Volume '0': Septembre 1951—Juillet 1957*, Libraire Arthème Fayard, 2010, 128); a "nullity" (S.I., *Anthology*, 235; S.I., *Internationale Situationniste*, 488), one of the "celebrities of unintelligence" (S.I., *Anthology*, 413), a consumer and purveyor of "Stalinist illusions" (S.I., *Anthology*, p.289; S.I., *Internationale Situationniste*, 572), and as less of a leftist than Khrushchev (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 3*, 105).

67. See Noys, Benjamin, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, 100, for comments in this regard.

68. For useful commentaries, see: Baugh, Bruce, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 2003; Kelly, Michael, *Hegel in France*, Birmingham: Birmingham Modern Languages Publications, 1992; Butler, Judith, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*, New York: Columbia Press, 1999.

69. The quoted phrase is taken from Hyppolite's translation of the *Phenomenology*. Thanks are due to John McHale for this reference.

70. Debord, *The Society*, 92; *Oeuvres*, 820

71. Kaufmann, Guy *Debord*, 222

72. See Bunyard, *A Genealogy and Critique* for further discussions in this vein

73. See Jappe, Guy *Debord*, for a reading that places particular emphasis on Lukács' influence on Debord.

74. Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich, *The German Ideology*, edited by Arthur, Chris, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, 56-7

75. Debord, *The Society*, 48; *Oeuvres*, 792; Cf. *Oeuvres*, 866

76. Debord, *The Society*, 96; *Oeuvres*, 823

77. Debord's work draws on Marx's occasionally explicit indications that capitalism can be understood as a mode of temporal domination, and in consequence echoes, as noted earlier, elements of Postone's work. See for example Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*: "time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most time's carcass. ...the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives" (quoted in Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone, London: Merlin, 1971, 89; Debord quotes the same passage: *The Society*, 110; *Oeuvres*, 831).

78. For example: "Underlying the events [of the Paris Commune] ...one can see the insurgents' feeling that they had become the masters of their own history..." (S.I., *Anthology*, 398; Debord, *Oeuvres*, 628); for according to Debord, "the very development of class society to the stage of the spectacular organisation of non-life leads the revolutionary project to become visibly what it always was essentially" (Debord *The Society*, 89-90; *Oeuvres*, 819).

79. Cf. Debord, *The Society*, 85; *Oeuvres*, 816

80. Korsch, Karl, 'A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Marxism', in *Politics*, May 1946, available at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/bps/CF/korsch.htm>, 1946; Cf. Thesis #76 of *The Society of the Spectacle*.

81. As discussed by Hyppolite in a text that Debord drew on directly: see Hyppolite, Jean, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, translated by John O'Neill, London: Heineman Educational Books, 1969, 73

82. Debord *The Society*, 104; *Oeuvres*, 828, Debord's italics

83. Debord *The Society*, 24; *Oeuvres*, 775

84. Debord and the S.I. draw explicitly on this concept (See for example Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 54; S.I., *Anthology*, 111; *Internationale Situationniste*, 253; and Jorn, Asger, 1964, 'Guy Debord and the Problem of the Accursed' (preface to Guy Debord's *Contre le Cinema*), available at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/postsi/accursed.html>, 1964. See also *Correspondance Volume 4*, p.52.

85. For example: "The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation [i.e. capitalism]" Marx, *Early Writings*, 426); see also the third volume of *Capital*, where Marx describes capitalism as "that epoch of human history that directly precedes the conscious reconstruction of human society" (Marx, Karl, *Capital Volume 3*, translated by David Fernbach, London: Penguin, 1981, 182).

86. Debord, *The Society*, 141; *Oeuvres*, 851

87. Debord *The Society*, 48; *Oeuvres*, 792; Cf. Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich, 1985, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated by Samuel Moore, London: Penguin, 1985, 83.

88. Engels, Friedrich, and Marx, Karl, *The Holy Family*, translated by R. Dixon, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1936, 126, italics in the original.

89. I am indebted here to Sean Sayers, who also brought the previous quotation from *The Holy Family* to my attention.

90. Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 144-5; *Oeuvres*, 1347

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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91. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 456. I am very grateful to John McHale for his assistance with this translation.
92. Debord: “we fundamentally approve” of refusing “any organization that has the pretension to *lead* the revolutionary project”, but reject the “refusal of precise theory”, and indeed the view that “the revolutionary project” must be “entirely dependent upon the momentary appearances of a spontaneity that lacks memory and language” (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 3*, 204).
93. S.I., *Anthology*, 275; S.I., *Internationale Situationniste*, 529
94. S.I. *Internationale Situationniste*, 257; also quoted in McDonough *The Situationists and the City*, 164
95. S.I. *Internationale Situationniste*, p.656
96. Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 150-1; *Oeuvres*, 1354
97. See for example Prigent, Michel, ‘Guy Debord and the French State Mausoleum’, 2009, available at <http://www.principi-adiialectica.co.uk/blog/?p=299>. Even *Le Monde* felt moved to comment on the irony of displaying, “in a temple of the state”, the work of a figure who was opposed to “all institutions and society in general” (Rérolle, Raphaëlle, ‘A Chacun son Debord’, in *Le Monde*, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013). For a more sober and considered view, see Jappe’s comments in Antonucci, Ricardo, ‘Che Cosa Rimane de Guy Debord: Intervista ad Anselm Jappe’, in *Il Rasoio di Occam*, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.
98. Debord, Guy, 1979, ‘Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*’, available at <http://www.not-bored.org/debord-preface.html>, 1970; *Oeuvres*, 1465
99. Debord, *The Society*, 29; *Oeuvres*, 778
100. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 455-6
101. See Nicola Clewer’s forthcoming PhD thesis ‘Memorialisation in the Neoliberal Age’ for further remarks on this theme.
102. Debord, *The Society*, 20; *Oeuvres*, 772
103. Debord, *The Society*, 18, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 771
104. Lukács, Debord writes, “was an ideologist speaking for a power that was in the crudest way external to the proletarian movement, believing and giving his audience to believe that he himself, his entire personal being, partook of this power as if it were truly *his own*” (Debord, *The Society*, 81; *Oeuvres*, 814).
105. See for example his description of the hierarchical structure within the *Pouvoir Ouvrier* group: “In the P.O. spectacle there are stars [*vedettes*]” and “spectators...” (Debord, Guy, *Correspondance Volume 2 : Janvier 1960—Décembre 1964*, Ligugé: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001, 83).
106. Hence Debord’s scathing remarks about “pro-situs”—“enthusiastic spectators of the S.I.” (Situationist International, *The Real Split in the International*, translated by John McHale, London: Pluto Press, 2003, 32; Debord, *Oeuvres*, 1107)—and hence also his concern that the “‘pro-Situ’ mind-set” could be detected within the group itself (S.I., *The Real Split*, 87; Debord, *Oeuvres*, 1138).
107. Debord, *The Society*, 17, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 770, emphasis in the original
108. The epigraph to the celebrated fourth chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* is the following passage from a parliamentary inquest into the Paris commune of 1871: “Equal right to all the goods and pleasures of this world, the destruction of all authority, the negation of all moral restraints; if one goes to the heart of the matter, this is the *raison d’être of the March 18th insurrection and the charter of the fearsome organization that furnished it with an army*” (Debord, *The Society*, 47, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 792).
109. Stirner, Max, *The Ego and his Own*, 49
110. On a subjective level, Debord clearly possessed a strong sense of personal honour, albeit one that was clearly connected to the “duty of *revolutionary distrust* towards all the values, habits and persons bound to the world that we want to change” (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 2*, 30, Debord’s italics). See Stone-Richards, Michael, ‘Néo-Stoïcisme et Ethique de la Gloire: la Baroque chez Debord’, in *Pleine Marge*, December 2001, for an interpretation that attributes a noble, almost aristocratic form of stoicism to Debord. This could be usefully connected to the stoic virtue-ethics of political resistance developed by Howard Caygill, who also discusses Debord and Vaneigem in his recent *On Resistance* (Caygill, Howard, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013). It might also be added that as early as 1952, Debord called for the development of a “science of situations”, which would include, alongside other elements, an “ethics” (Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 4; *Oeuvres*, 63).
111. One might think here, for example, of Debord’s early description of the ‘Declaration on the Right to Insubordination in the Algerian War’ as “perfectly honourable ethically” (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 2*, 23).
112. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 105
113. S.I., *The Real Split*, 83; Debord, *Oeuvres*, 1135
114. Debord, *The Society*, 88-9, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 818-9.
115. Debord, *The Society*, 89; *Oeuvres*, p.819
116. S.I., *Anthology*, 210; *Internationale Situationniste*, 432
117. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 79
118. Debord *The Society*, 12; *Oeuvres*, 767
119. Marx, Karl, *Capital Volume 1*, translated by Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin, 1976, 932

120. Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 187
121. Debord's potentially enigmatic and idiosyncratic interest in strategy has, sadly, been largely addressed via media-centric readings and by approaches that do not engage with Debord's key philosophical and theoretical influences. Contemporary attention towards this aspect of his work was however given Anglophone impetus in recent years by the English publication of Debord's *Kriegspiel* (Becker-Ho, Alice, and Debord, Guy, *A Game of War*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Atlas Press, 2007): a military board game of Debord's own invention, intended to simulate the central dynamics of Clausewitzian combat. Some writers have however come close to addressing its connection to Debord's concerns with temporality. Wark, for example, has claimed, interestingly, that Debord's *Kriegspiel* is "really a diagram of the strategic possibilities of spectacular time", but unfortunately does not take this observation further (Wark, McKenzie, *50 years of Recuperation of the Situationist International*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008, 28). Jappe presents Debord's interest in strategy as nostalgia for a pre-spectacular past (Jappe, *Guy Debord*, 114). I would argue against this: strategy is an attempt to think and act with chance and uncertainty, not against it. Kaufmann (*Guy Debord*, passim) picks up on the sense of pathos and occasional touches of sublimity attributed to the experience of time in Debord's later works, but reads Debord's interest in time in terms of poetic melancholy, and therefore misses the importance of creating the future, as opposed to reflecting on the past. Bracken acknowledges that "for Debord [the] apprehension of time was coloured with the Hegelian preoccupation with the self-conscious creation of history with acts of negation" (Bracken, Len, *Guy Debord: Revolutionary*, Venice, California: Feral House, 1997, 105), but leaves these assertions undeveloped, and ultimately seems to view Debord's interest in strategy in terms of Machiavellian (in the crudest sense of the term) manoeuvring: as a means of achieving ends on "the battlefield of everyday life" (Bracken, *Guy Debord*, 217).
122. Debord, *The Society*, 49, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 793
123. Korsch, 'A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Marxism,'; Cf. Thesis #76 of *The Society of the Spectacle*.
124. See Baugh, *French Hegel* for a useful overview.
125. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4*, 94-5
126. Debord *The Society*, 51; *Oeuvres*, 794
127. Coincidentally, Arendt seems to have shared the same view: see Arendt, Hannah, *On Violence*, Harcourt Brace and Company, Florida, 1969, 27.
128. *Oeuvres* p.1536
129. *Oeuvres* p.1536
130. *Oeuvres* p.1536
131. See thesis #125 of *The Society of the Spectacle*.
132. Cf. Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 103
133. Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 103
134. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 7*, 78
135. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 5*, 42
136. Debord, Guy, Fonds Guy Debord, Bibliothèque Nationale, NAF28603, Notes de Lecture, Stratégie, Histoire Militaire, Box 2, dossier 5, folder labelled 'strat', card 4. Thanks are due to John McHale for his advice regarding the translation of this passage.
137. Cf. Debord, *The Society* 1995, p.116; *Oeuvres*, p.836
138. *Kairos* is a classical Greek term referring to the opportune moment: the right time to act, but a time that cannot be measured. *Kairos* is inherently qualitative, as opposed to the quantitative sequence of *kronos*, or 'clock-time', and not only does transcend the latter but also impinges upon it with its demands for apposite action.
139. *Oeuvres*, 1790
140. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 5*, 127
141. Debord, *Comments*, 20, translation altered; *Oeuvres*, 1605
142. Debord, *Comments*, 84; *Oeuvres*, 1643
143. Debord, *The Society*, 89; *Oeuvres*, 819
144. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 3*, 231
145. Debord was actually in contact with Hyppolite for a time. Merrifield claims that just prior to the publication of *The Society of the Spectacle* Debord "was all set to help out with a lecture...until Hyppolite had a change of heart and asked someone else." (Merrifield, Andy, *Guy Debord*, London: Reaktion Books, 2005, 50). Clark and Nicholson-Smith ( 'Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International', 479) also recount visiting one of Hyppolite's lectures with Debord. Hussey (*The Game of War*, 115) however goes so far as to claim that "Debord first encountered Hegel via the work of Jean Hyppolite, then a professor at the Collège de France". This is incorrect: Hyppolite took up that position in 1963, and Debord was clearly reading Hegel from a much earlier date.
146. Hyppolite, *Studies*, 135, italics in the original
147. Hyppolite, *Studies*, p.135
148. Quoted in Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*; see also Ross, Kristin, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, London: University

## TEMPORALITY AND PRAXIS IN GUY DEBORD'S HEGELIAN MARXISM

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of Chicago Press, 2002, 193

149. Noys presents an excellent discussion of this problematic in the introduction to his *The Persistence of the Negative*.

150. Žižek, Slavoj, 2013, 'The Simple Courage of Decision: A Leftist Tribute to Thatcher', in *New Statesman*, April 2013, available at <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2013/04/simple-courage-decision-leftist-tribute-thatcher>, 2013

151. Debord, *Correspondance Volume 6*, 227

152. Debord: "I was happy to have attempted—in 1967 and completely contrary to the sombre dementia of Althusser—a kind of "salvage by transfer" of the Marxist method by adding to it a large dose of Hegel" (Debord, *Correspondance Volume 7*, 212).

153. Debord, *The Society*, 7-8; *Oeuvres*, 1792