

# Why the customer is always right

## Debord's spectacle as the rationalisation of mimesis

Eric-John Russell

I once knew a monster who said she could not read Proust because there were no figures in Proust with whom she could identify.

Theodor W. Adorno

With this seemingly off-the-cuff anecdote, Adorno, lecturing on the topic of aesthetics in 1958, gave illustration to a critique of a certain kind of aesthetic reception, or against the idea that art must be commensurate or conform to the experiential familiarity of the viewing subject. Throughout his writings, one finds recurrent concern with the problem of aesthetic relativism: that the criterion of evaluating works of art ought to defer to judgments of taste, and therewith to an insatiable subjectivity that demands art 'give' them something. It is the insistence that works of art blend completely into the closed surface of immediate experience, consonant with meagre perceptions of an easily recognisable reality and preformation mechanisms of subjective reaction, allowing people to 'cheaply unburden themselves' through identification.<sup>1</sup> For Adorno, aesthetic experience limited to such a subjective reflex, a provision expected in return for given attention, elicits, at base, that loathsome idea of exchange, an ethos that *the customer is always right*.

For Adorno, when the mimetic component of aesthetic experience is reduced to mere duplication or replication of empirical reality and *a priori* categories of perception, to the exercise of just recognising the always already familiar, we have entered the arena of the 'culture industry', where art fails to demarcate itself adequately from the schematism of an administered world of commodity relations, liquidating the boundary between itself and reality, most enticingly, for example, when 'based on a true story'.

A social world economically structured around an omnipresent compulsion for identification with the immediate appearances of everyday reality has perhaps, alongside the work of Adorno, one of its most incisive diagnoses in the work of Guy Debord and his concept of the society of the spectacle. In two hundred and twenty-one short theses, Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) outlines a peculiar form of domination developed through the autonomy of the commodity economy within the capitalist mode of production, in which people come to *identify* with the appearances of social life, under compulsion to recognise themselves and their needs within the dominant images, representations and appearances produced by commodity society – including today the avatars, emojis, gifs, memes, hashtags and, what Hegel might have called, other picture-thinking units of digital communication. Just as Narcissus fell victim to his own reflection, helpless to tear himself away from the grip of identification, so too are human beings within the spectacle captivated by their own mirror image. Against the need for social reassurance and recognition, nothing is worse than failing to be noticed.

As will be explored in the following essay, Debord's concept of the spectacle incorporates what Joseph Gabel termed *Identitätszwang* – that is, the compulsion for identification. Yet the literature on Debord that has taken more seriously his debt to Hegelian and Marxist thinking has tended to emphasise not the significance of *identification* within the logic of the spectacle, but rather the importance of *separation*.<sup>2</sup> And for good reason: the social cohesion of the society of the spectacle is produced through separation. It is a social separation of human beings from their own activity, falsified into appearances operating outside of their control. For Debord,

the 'triumph of an economic system founded on separation leads to the *proletarianization of the world*'.<sup>3</sup> Characteristic here is, of course, a relation of dispossession, a detachment, dislocation or bifurcation of the proletariat from its own conditions of existence, subject to forces experienced as coercively imposed upon it. Yet the phenomena of separation and alienation, conceived here as an antimonic distancing, is only part of Debord's critical diagnosis. There is also comfort to be drawn in the recognitive relations to the immediacies of the world, however inverted and torn asunder they may be by the heteronomy of the capitalist mode of production. For Debord, the society of the spectacle, as the form capitalism took over the twentieth century, has inaugurated *universal* modes of pathological identification, mechanisms of recognition not easily dismissed under the rubric of a hostile schism. Single recourse to the framework of division risks failing to grasp the spectacle as the 'the social *organization* of appearances' and the ways in which human beings are entangled in its reproduction.<sup>4</sup>

The spectacle refers to the nature of capitalist society as a structural totality, the total result of social objectification including both processes of human activity and the immediate appearance of that externalised social reality. With the increasing fragmentation of human experience through the capitalist division of labour and the structuring of social relations through the form of the commodity, the spectacle for Debord reconstitutes a *unitary* social life from its separated and disjointed moments, albeit at the level of appearance. In a word, while separation remains 'the alpha and omega of the spectacle',<sup>5</sup> and is its basis insofar as it is the development of the commodity-capitalist economy and its requisite class division, the spectacle nevertheless obtains a certain unity-in-separation, a complex logic beyond the scope of the present essay yet concomitant with both Marx's critique of political economy and Hegel's notion of speculative identity.<sup>6</sup>

This is where Debord's analysis makes considerable strides beyond the young Marx and Georg Lukács' concept of reification. That is, the spectacle comprises an integrative socialisation, cohering through a principle of identity, soliciting not only *passive* contemplation from the standpoint of spectators, but also *active* and participatory identification, with individuals 'recognizing [themselves] in the dominant images of need'.<sup>7</sup>

*The Society of the Spectacle* expounds not simply a social situation in which fragmentation abounds without any reconciliation between subject and object, but rather, as a 1966 article from issue 10 of *Internationale Situationniste* makes explicit, a reconstructed 'lost paradise of unitary societies ... a reality entirely reduced to the quantitative, thoroughly dominated by the principle of identity'. As the article continues, the logical principle of *identity* has found its 'appropriate realisation in the commodity-spectacle'. The 'flat and disincarnated positivity' installed by the commodity-spectacle thereby realises identity not simply as an illusory fantasy but actual through the formalisation of social relations by exchange.<sup>8</sup> There is a principle of identity between spectacle and spectators whereby the former furnishes the latter with an entire purview of social possibility and satisfaction, and, at its most nefarious, compels the latter to collapse into the former without remainder.

It will be the argument of the following essay that the mode of identification constitutive of the society of the spectacle is best illustrated through the concept of *mimesis*, that is, we will give greater focus to the overwhelming social mandate for pathological identification, equivalence and mimetic adaptation to the dominant appearance-forms of capitalist society. We will proceed through discursive variations on the critical usage of the concept of *mimesis*, particularly through the work of Adorno, but also with regard to the writings of Roger Caillois and Joseph Gabel, all of whom can provide insight into the role of mimetic behaviour within Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle.

The aim is to advance the concept of *mimesis* as a critical framework for understanding spectacular domination. More broadly however, the essay also seeks to establish a firm continuity between Debord's diagnosis and the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theory, specifically the work of Adorno. It is not sufficiently recognised that Debord ought to reside in that same tradition of working out a critical theory of society based on the dynamics of commodity exchange. It will be demonstrated that it is not simply the case that what binds the work of Debord to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School is a common concern over generic issues of alienation and reification, or that both merely scrutinise more closely how human beings subordinate themselves to things. It is more specifically in the spectacular lo-

gic of identification, of rendering commensurable *like with like* as the rationalisation of mimesis, so central to Max Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that Debord's critical theory finds accord with the early Frankfurt School.

## The rationalisation of mimesis

Walter Benjamin famously inquired into the historical development of the mimetic faculty, and whether or not there might be a decay or transformation of this natural comportment. As he writes, 'neither mimetic powers nor mimetic objects have remained unchanged over time [and that] on the whole, a unified direction is perceptible in the historical development of the mimetic faculty'.<sup>9</sup> It is within Benjamin's broader proposition – that the mimetic faculties have anthropologically undergone a kind of decomposition – that mimesis can begin to emerge as a critical heuristic, to discover how mimetic behaviour becomes entangled with modern forms of domination and corresponding forms of anxiety and psychological disorder.

Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* traverses the history of the mimetic faculty in and through a critique of rationality, specifically situated within a subject's relationship to the objective world, one for which the movement of imitation, going back to Aristotle, is based on an instinct expressed in the relation of a subject towards an object.<sup>10</sup> This subject is the consciousness of an ego that rests its identity on reason, while the object amounts to that which is different, incommensurable and nonidentical. Imitation becomes the disposition for experiencing an object, one for which the subject seeks likeness in order to rationally grasp the object.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the history of the mimetic faculty is inextricably tied to the history of rationality itself, a development which witnesses the scientifically rationalised bourgeois subject of the late eighteenth century emerge from an incipient self that is characterised by magical practices of the myth-oriented subject of primeval societies. This admittedly speculative history of rationality consists in a development of man's relation to, and domination of, nature, whose objectification is grounded in myth. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* traces the manner in which the rationality of enlightenment

thinking is not simply opposed to myth but already located within the phenomenon of myth as the first effort at grasping one's object in order to dominate it out of the compulsion for self-preservation. In a word, it is fear that initiates imitation. The self wants to become *like* the objective power it fears. Mimetic behaviour becomes the protective self-defence mechanism for a self adapting to its environment. This process consists in the mastering of nature, whereby an emerging self gradually establishes itself in opposition to nature and, in this objectification, the self projects personifications upon nature as possessing 'powers', thereby grounding myth as an object of knowledge. The constitution of myth thereby emerges as the rationalisation of man's fear of nature and efforts at self-preservation.<sup>11</sup> Myth seeks to report, narrate and explain the phenomena of nature as an external force.

The phase of mythology proceeds in accordance with this development of human beings adapting to the power of gods through the medium of sacrifice in order to ensure self-preservation.<sup>12</sup> The consciousness of myth as such consists in the compulsion of owing something to the gods, a ritualistic mode of communication with the deity that, for Adorno, prefigures exchange relations. The self-preservation of mythic society comes to depend on a form of exchange with the mythic forces in the form of sacrifice, executing a communication with the projected deities. Sacrifice is thereby the result of human beings mimetically adapting themselves to nature in order to escape its hostility, developing the logic of self-preservation into the realm of commensurability.

Yet for Adorno and Horkheimer, enlightenment thinking does not abolish the practice of mythic sacrifice but facilitates its transformation into formalised exchange relations. Whereas what Adorno and Horkheimer call the 'magical phase' of mimesis witnesses sacrifices made in order to influence natural or transcendental powers, the exchange relation constitutive of its 'historical phase' refers to the rational self seeking its own preservation. For Adorno, the regimentation of mimesis is myth undergoing increased rationalisation. The models of myth become replicated within instrumental reason as the perfection of man's domination of nature. This 'historical phase' consists in the ascendancy of an instrumental rationality whereby bodily adaptation to nature characterising the magical phase is replaced by conceptual identification. The natural must be absorbed into

utility through the sanitising channels of a conceptual order. The mimetic replication of a thoroughly administered society becomes adaptation to a petrified objective world. Here, the structure of self-preservation becomes the barbaric content of empirical life.

Through this philosophical anthropology, mimetic adaptation is no longer focused on communicating with natural or transcendental powers, but towards the omnipotent power of the social whole, still nevertheless carrying forward the centrality of sacrificial exchange. Here, sacrifice progressively requires an accurate calculation of quantities and proportions, a rationalised magnitude of exchange, thereby anticipating the use of money. As such, sacrifice can be described as the defining experience in which the first practical roots and ideological precursors of economic practice appear, one for which self-preservation and survival came to depend on pacts, contracts and more formalised modes of exchange with both mythical forces and other clans. Myth, it can be said, facilitating the development of the exchange relation,

functions to conceal the cunning of exchange, that is, a pervasive form of social mediation increasingly dominated by the principle of equivalence and identity.<sup>15</sup> Within the exchange relation, sacrifice comes to be quantified, calculated, rationalised and standardised under the logic of universal commensurability. Through this process, the objective forces of natural powers are supplanted by society itself as the external force over and against the individual. Here, the dynamic of myth is reproduced through its deification. In a word, modernity becomes mythic. Instead of a subordination to magical or mythical forces, there is now a subordination to a rationality which attains mythic proportion as it imposes a 'civilizing process'.

### **Mimicry as a renunciation of the self**

Motivated by the fear of death, society perpetuates the threat from nature as a permanent, organised compulsion, a systematic self-preservation repetitively carried



out with regularity and preserved under mythic proportions. Here, as a central theme in the process of the rationalisation of mimesis, equality commands a mode of adaptation that witnesses an identity of the world with the subject. Thought comes to subsume difference under identity, equalising particulars under a universal. This process subsumes diversity within a unity, then into commensurable equivalence, finally engendering concretely applied notions of calculability and exchange. Controlled or regimented mimesis therefore induces the subsumption of difference under sameness, an adaptation and identification with forces of domination. The transformation of the faculty for establishing sameness consists in the transition from an adaptation of likeness to a subsumption of equivalence. 'Judgment is no longer based on a real act of synthesis but on blind subsumption.'<sup>14</sup>

Yet Adorno and Horkheimer also describe the rationalisation of mimesis as patterned after biological mimicry, that is, as the mere replication or copying of the external environment in order to better equip oneself in the face of objective forces. This process of adaptation internalises a dominant rational order that, through its increasing estrangement from nature, itself reverts to a frigidly objectified and lifeless nature. The subject comes to mimic its own rationalised contortion of nature. The mimesis of an increasingly objectified, cold and inorganic nature – that is, the mimesis of death – functions as a defence mechanism against the dissolution of the newly acquired rational and self-sustained self. 'They reproduce within themselves the insatiability of the power of which they are afraid.'<sup>15</sup> Mimicry thereby consists of an estrangement of the self, a movement of complete subordination of human beings to a dominated objectivity.

In his 1935 essay 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', Roger Caillois transposes the phenomena of mimicry from the world of zoology to a set of pathological disorders characterised by phobias, obsessions, compulsions or excessive anxiety, an analysis thematically consistent with Adorno and Horkheimer's account of mimicry but with a different emphasis. Caillois begins with various forms of mimicry employed in the animal kingdom either to surprise prey, to escape the sight of a predator or to frighten it away by deceptive appearance, as well as the employment of disguises and the resemblance of different species.<sup>16</sup> Instances of homomorphic adaptation of form between an organism and its

surroundings are subsequently brought within the realm of human experience, conceived as pathological, specifically with what Caillois describes as 'a real *temptation by space*'.<sup>17</sup>

For Caillois, within represented space, the organism is not the origin of coordinates, but merely one point among others on a horizontal and vertical plane. '[I]t is dispossessed of its privilege and literally *no longer knows where to place itself*.'<sup>18</sup> In this dispossession, space becomes a devouring force, pursuing, swallowing and digesting individuals. The result is a certain depersonalisation through the mimetic assimilation to space, a point sociologically registered by David Riesman in his 1950 study *The Lonely Crowd*, a work that was important for Debord.<sup>19</sup> Similar to Caillois, Debord also identifies the encroachment of spatialisation as significant for the theory of the spectacle, an important lineage connecting his own writings to the work of Lukács. Both conceive reification as entailing the degradation of time's fluidity to an abstract spatial dimension for which its 'qualitative, variable, flowing nature ... freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things" ... in short, it becomes space'.<sup>20</sup> Debord explicitly describes the reduction of space and time to an abstract common denominator, a '*spatial alienation*, whereby a society which radically severs the subject from the activity that it steals from him separates him in the first place from his own time'.<sup>21</sup>

But for Caillois, this form of adaptation is concomitant with a decline in the feeling of personality and life of the individual, or a generalisation of abstract space at the expense of the individual. The instinct for self-preservation thus leads to an instinct for self-renunciation. The individual 'tries to look at *himself from* any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, not to something, but just *similar*'.<sup>22</sup>

Once nature is rendered into an object of mechanical rationality, to mimetically adapt to it – in Caillois' case, to space in the abstract – is to internalise its inanimate significance. Mimicry, again, becomes the adaptation to a lifelessness in the interest of self-preservation. It is the synchronisation of the self with an estranged world. Like a moth to a flame, it becomes *Identitätszwang*. Yet the faculty of mimesis remains in the interest of self-preservation, such that 'the tribute life pays for its con-

tinued existence is adaptation to death'.<sup>23</sup>

## Schizophrenic mimesis

Within what Caillois calls legendary psychasthenia, the individual, through its mimetic faculty, seems to lose ground and is diminished, caught in a blurred boundary between itself and its surroundings. This form of adaptation cultivates and arouses within the individual *equivalent behaviour*, a pathological phenomenon Caillois borrows from the phenomenological psychiatry of Eugène Minkowski, who heavily influenced one of the Debord's inspirations for *The Society of the Spectacle*, namely the work of Joseph Gabel.<sup>24</sup> Debord's reliance on Gabel's *False Consciousness: An Essay on Reification* (1962) for the concept of the society of the spectacle is, however, remarkably absent from the literature. Gabel draws a parallel between ideology and schizophrenia, an association that Debord relates directly to the concept of the spectacle and its development of the exchange process, which elevates to the level of the whole the axiom of identification. It is therefore crucial to examine Gabel's thesis since Debord adopts a number of its insights.<sup>25</sup>

Through a synthesis of Lukács' theory of reification, Karl Mannheim's concept of total ideology and the interwar existential and phenomenological psychiatry of Minkowski and Ludwig Binswanger, Gabel provides a psycho-sociological theory of consciousness, specifically through a parallel between a reified relation to the world and a clinical psychiatric condition of schizophrenia, both sharing a rationality which, similar to Caillois, subordinates temporal experience to excessive spatialisation. Here, reification is said to be analogous to schizophrenic symptoms and, as a result, the aporetic gap between subject and object is filled with pathological identification. Gabel's term for this process, adopted from Minkowski, is *morbid rationalism*.

This 'loss of vital contact with reality' is for Gabel a tenet of reification as a condition of schizophrenia.<sup>26</sup> As Gabel summarises in his preface: 'Defined as an *individual form of false consciousness*, schizophrenia finds a new nosological unity centred on the concept of morbid rationalism within the framework of a unitary conception ("total concept") of alienation, capable of embracing both its social forms and its clinical aspects.'<sup>27</sup> Such phenomena occur for Gabel through processes of repetition,

imitation, utopian fixation and temporal irreversibility, all of which can be derived from formal axiological structures as structures of social reality.

Gabel's 'Marxian theory of mental derangement' concerns a deterioration of the dialectic between subject and object, or more specifically, an identification between a subject and its world<sup>28</sup> – an insight taken up by Debord. It is an integrative process that renders the world into a spatialised and axiological experiential structure. Reification, as schizophrenic in nature, tends towards the spatialisation of duration, and 'concludes with the principle of axio-dialectical equivalence'.<sup>29</sup> Gabel's nosological account of reification unfolds a morbid rationalism that pivots upon a preponderant function of identification. Invoking an idea of 'false identification', which in turn produces 'false differentiation', this mechanism, dependent on the degree of accumulated aggression, can assume the form of either an absolute or relative identity. In either case, the 'human spirit's appetite for identity' transitions into an uncompromising rationalism whose logical structure, often expressed in forms of analogy, symbolism, caricature and stereotypy, sanctions non-differentiation while proliferating dichotomies.<sup>30</sup>

It is Gabel's concept of *Identitätszwang* – again, the compulsion or obsession for identification – that is important for our investigation. The identificatory and egocentric logic of the schizophrenic orientation to the world unifies subject and predicate under its morbid rationalism. This 'great leveling' procures a 'universe without frontiers',<sup>31</sup> a flat earth with neither mountains nor oceans and which has eradicated any central point of reference.<sup>32</sup> In the concluding chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord employs Gabel's concept of *Identitätszwang* as a 'virtual identification',<sup>33</sup> an injunction set in motion by the spectacle:

The spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence/absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the *real presence* of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances.<sup>34</sup>

For the omnipresence of the spectacle, identifications between self and world, subject and object, appearance and essence and, ultimately, truth and falsehood reign. Furthermore, as '[t]he role of the look in para-

noid madness is notorious',<sup>35</sup> the spectacle assimilates and reflects back objectivity in and through its deranged gaze.<sup>36</sup> What it sees is the triumphant procession of a world that it itself has created. However, despite the fact that Debord occasionally makes reference to alienated individuals, the schizophrenic agent, in this correlation with Gabel, is not the spectator but the spectacle itself in its totality. As Debord writes in his archival notes on Gabel, 'thus the whole spectacle, being organized collectively, is a socially hallucinating fact'.<sup>37</sup> Writing further in a May 1969 letter to the Italian section of the Situationist International, Debord claims the ninth chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle*, 'considers all of spectacular society as a psychopathological formation'.<sup>38</sup> Thus it can be said that Debord utilises Gabel's analysis as a macro condition for society at large, not for a particular pathological agent. It is a schizophrenic structure beyond individual psychology and subsisting at the level of the social whole.<sup>39</sup> It is for this reason that any obsolescence of Gabel's psychoanalytic theory is secondary to Debord's adoption of the latter's ideas for a diagnosis of larger social tendencies.<sup>40</sup> As a structure subsisting at the level of the whole, Debord, within his notes on Gabel, makes the distinction between production and consumption along the respective lines of the spatialised time of schizophrenia and the destructured time of maniacal hysteria: 'In short, the SduS would be schizophrenic in production – including the production of the spectacle to the partial recipient; the visible [apparent] spectacle – and hysterical in all of its consumption'. And yet not completely adopting such a schematic, Debord also reverses the relation further on in his notes: 'Or it can be said that the spectacle (consumption) is schizo, but that its production is maniacal'.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear that, for Debord, the society of the spectacle adopts a schizophrenic structure. It is, as he himself says when quoting Gabel, 'quite another level of pathology', in which 'the abnormal need for representation here compensates for a torturing feeling of being at the margin of existence'.<sup>42</sup> Further, with regard to the distinction between truth and falsehood, Gabel examines the erasure of definitive limits on the true and the false characteristic of fantasy pseudology, itself a variation on hysteria whose 'theatrical consciousness ... destroys the subject-object dialectic by causing the subject to disappear (whilst the lie destroys it by reifying the object)

[and] ends in the same psychological and moral result as the lie, despite the possible congruence of its assertions with reality'.<sup>43</sup> The schizophrenic structure of the spectacle thereby collapses the distinctive boundaries between the true and the false through the hysterical pattern of pseudology, a perversion of the mimetic faculty where individuals are rendered commensurate with the appearances that surround them. Pathological identification through the rationalisation of mimesis characterises the logic of the society of the spectacle, itself part, as Debord derives from Gabel, of a schizophrenic structure whose morbid rationality perpetuates 'generalized autism',<sup>44</sup> in and through its maleficent organisation of appearances, which exude overwhelming radiance. As Debord writes of the spectator, '[t]he need to imitate ... is indeed a truly infantile need, one determined by every aspect of his fundamental dispossession'.<sup>45</sup>

## Pathic projection

A month after *The Society of the Spectacle* was published, Debord wrote to the American section of the Situationist International, claiming that the primary task of their organisation 'is to produce the most adequate critical theory'.<sup>46</sup> It would not be the only time Debord would characterise the critique of the society of the spectacle as a critical theory: 'In 1967 I wanted the Situationist International to have a book of theory ... impos[ing] its victory on the terrain of critical theory'.<sup>47</sup> Despite these references, his own direct relation to the critical theory coming out of Frankfurt via the Institut für Sozialforschung are few and far between. Yet it is known that Debord's personal library contained copies of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and *Eros and Civilisation*. Additionally, Debord's archive notes include comments on Adorno's 'Music and Technique', whose French translation appeared in the 1960 issue of *Arguments* no. 19.

Even if it would be too much to say that the work of Debord and Adorno were like two ships quietly passing in the night, Debord's concept of the spectacle shares a number of important continuities with Adorno's work. For example, Adorno begins *Minima Moralia* with formulations that strongly accord with ideas found in *The Society of the Spectacle*, most notably with an observation that the relation between the economy and life proceeds

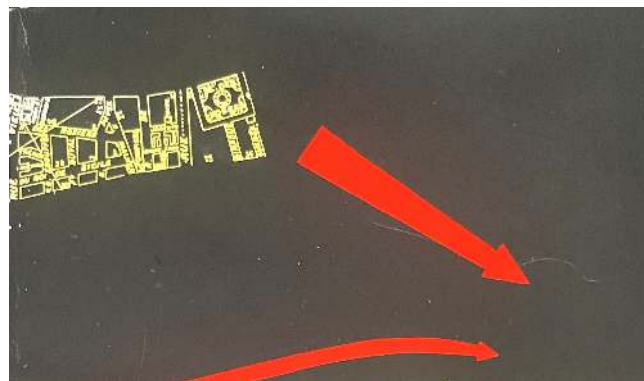
by debasing the latter to a form of appearance of the former. It is a development for Adorno in which 'life has become appearance'. Further on, 'people cling to what mocks them confirming the mutilation of their essence by the smoothness of its own appearance.'<sup>48</sup> For both Adorno and Debord, we discover again *Identitätszwang* – the social compulsion to identify with the surrounding world and its concurrent injuries to subjectivity.

One of the most potent convergence points observed by commentators between Adorno and Debord is the critique of industrial culture.<sup>49</sup> Here, in the case of cultural phenomena within capitalist society, products of leisure become pre-digested and standardised, whose various media elicit mass psychological behaviour for which base survival and integration assume the form of satisfaction. Yet it is often ignored how such a diagnosis does not rest on a simple one-way framework in which a juggernaut of commodified culture merely imposes its contours upon otherwise *tabula rasa* spectators. On the contrary, we find a form of pathological projection in which *people strive to adapt* to a schematism accompanied by a set of ready-made reactions to the cultural products on display, with their empty promissory notes designed to indefinitely prolong an unsublimated anticipation of pleasure, depleting the already scarce psychological resources of weak egos.

Accommodating various layers of behavioural response patterns, the cultural products of the spectacle refine their ability to directly identify reality *with* its representation. The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the verifiable conviction that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which, for example, has been revealed in the cinema. Herein lies the spectacle as geared to mimetic regression, to the manipulation of repressed impulses to copy. Its orientation is to anticipate the spectator's imitative practice by giving the appearance of agreement. Yet the entire system is justified on the basis of an infantile public, which the system itself has created. Again, it is a customer-demand ethos that *appearances be made relatable*.

This physiognomy of reification consists in a mixture of, on the one hand, streamlining photographic hardness and precision and, on the other, an individual's pathological identification with standardised formulas and clichés. Here, the revelation of barbaric existence

and the objective legitimation of its meaning are given direct exposition, that is, *spectacularised*. Recall that the spectacle is a structure of reification in which human beings 'recognize', as Debord writes, their 'own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system.'<sup>50</sup> For both Debord and Adorno, reification thereby comprises a mechanism of identification through the continuous presentation of what exists as the sole possible horizon and as objects of pathological projection. Everything is reduced to recognition, to 'whatever the camera reproduces',<sup>51</sup> therefore stunting the power of discernment in an emaciation of human perception through its *Identitätszwang*. Human comprehension comes to require only a quick and observant mind, while at the same time it debars thinking so that fleeting facts aren't missed. In a word, a primacy of alertness is necessary, even if in a state of perpetual distraction.



For Adorno, specifically in the case of photography and film, the resulting reification of the audience is a degradation of human perception. It does this, first and foremost, through a certain *domesticated naturalism* to which the photographic image is disposed, infusing empirical life with meaning: 'the duplicity of which viewers can scarcely see through because the nightclub looks exactly like the one they know.'<sup>52</sup> Again, here the spectacle need only display the reigning actuality through individualised cultural products under an 'ideal of naturalness'. 'Such a photological proof is of course not stringent, but it is overpowering.' Like the culture industry, the spectacle upholds the world in reverence as its own object, under the 'demand for pitiless clarity'. As Adorno continues: 'It exploits the cult of fact by describing bad existence with utmost exactitude in order to elevate it into the realm of facts.'<sup>53</sup> These comments are consistent with Debord, insofar as the spectacle employs 'a sort of flat, positivistic exactness',<sup>54</sup> in which 'everything is



reduced to a satisfying positivity [which in turn] justifies its own existence tautologically by the mere fact that it exists, which is to say that it is granted *recognition* within the spectacle'.<sup>55</sup>

The pathological projection constitutive of the society of the spectacle is inadvertently described throughout *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Yet if readers of the book remain content to draw similarities between Adorno and Debord from the chapter 'The Culture Industry' alone, the centrality of *Identitätszwang* for the diagnosis will never emerge. It is rather the case that the full significance of the critique of industrial culture – how pathic projection, as its fundamental theoretical core, is what most precisely establishes the continuity between Adorno and Debord's social diagnoses – only comes to fruition in the subsequent chapter, 'Elements of Anti-Semitism'. There Adorno and Horkheimer invoke a psychoanalytic theory of false-projection as the repression or reversal of mimesis, whereby 'if mimesis makes itself resemble its surroundings, false projection makes its surroundings resemble itself'.<sup>56</sup> Here, the rationalisation of mimesis is translated into a pathic character trait of the reified consciousness, a self which is mimetically structured by the society it inhabits, for which it then projects its psychosomatic damages back onto the world. This process of replication emerges as fundamental to the rationalised mimetic faculty, whereby volatile inwardness is displaced onto the world at large and reconstituted in its own degraded image. Within human history, as the faculty of projection of the self is increasingly controlled, its degeneration into a false projection emerges, such that the subject is unable to return to the object what it has received from it, and as such, can no longer reflect upon the object nor itself.

This process heralds the omnipotence of the rational subject, investing 'the outside world boundlessly with what is within itself; but what it invests is something utterly insignificant, ... a grim praxis unilluminated by thought'.<sup>57</sup> The subject renders the world the mere occasion for its delusion, calibrating social experience towards a primacy of the *inner*, essentially fragmenting objectivity itself. The modern subject positions himself at the centre of the world, dislocating gods, nature and all other metaphysical totalities and yet maintains the adaptation to myth insofar as its neuroses are the result of its drive for self-preservation. As Debord writes,

in the spectacle, 'the most modern is also the most archaic'.<sup>58</sup> Or as stated within issue eight of *Internationale situationniste*: 'The spectacle is nothing but secularized and fragmented myth.'<sup>59</sup> The world is perceived only insofar as it corresponds to the subject's blind purposes of self-interest, the cold means of their self-preservation, and to be touched by this world awakens in them only shame and rage, exemplified, for Adorno and Horkheimer, in the doctrine of the idiosyncratic image of the Jew that appears to refuse full assimilation, that is, as deficient adaptation.

The analysis of anti-Semitism pivots on the rationalisation of mimesis, driven by the urge of sameness and the sanctioned rage of the collective body. It is a 'situation in which blinded people, deprived of subjectivity, are let loose as subjects'.<sup>60</sup> It is here worth repeating that such a dynamic – in which damaged subjects are 'let loose' – cannot be captured within a framework that upholds 'passivity' as the sole criterion by which individuals take in the world.<sup>61</sup> There is nothing 'simply passive' about the march of Brownshirts, nor the (however meagre) agency allotted to composing a Spotify playlist. Mimetic adaptation, which, in the case of Adorno, is the diagnostic for grasping the continuity between industrial culture and fascism, requires active participation. The volatile interiority of such damaged subjects, under the mandate that the world ought to mimetically adhere to and resemble the blind sequencing of their own lifeless and rational omnipotence, correspondingly receives validation for their own pathologies, since their system of delusional neurosis is declared true to a reality that has, in truth, become thingified. The world becomes an extension of the subject's delusion, a paranoid fixation for creating everything in its own image, imbuing the outside world with stereotypical formulae. It is worth repeating: *the customer is always right*.<sup>62</sup>

## Against recognition

Lukács tells us that in the commodity, 'the worker *recognises* himself' in objectified form, that its consciousness is 'the *self-consciousness of the commodity*'.<sup>63</sup> Discovered here is the kernel of how recognitive relations can be pregnant with various pathological relations to both oneself and the outside world, not simply however as a phenomenon of 'inter-subjective relations' or moral

transgressions, but as an objective characteristic of capitalist commodity production, that is, in the way in which this society has transformed the mimetic faculty of human beings. If for Axel Honneth recognition precedes cognition, then mimesis is a precondition for recognition since to recognise is to identify familiarity within an environment of difference.<sup>64</sup> Not only for ethical bonding, but recognition can also be a proviso for hatred and indifference,<sup>65</sup> or, following Adorno and the spectacle's solicitations as described above, identification with the aggressor as a self-defence mechanism.

Relations of recognition adequate to the inverted world of the commodity and its spectacularisation are embedded within the rationalisation of mimesis, that is, 'imitation as absolute'.<sup>66</sup> Here a defensive anxiety retains the individual's propensity for fierce competition while seeking social acclaim and recognition. This is compounded by a dependence on vicarious warmth provided by others, yet alongside a fear of dependence. It is a tension not reducible to a personality structure but emboldened by a society that rewards pseudo self-insight, calculating seductiveness, nervously self-deprecating humour, a ravenous craving for notoriety while contemptuous of others and insatiably hungry for emotional experiences.

It is the difference between being an individual and being individuated that marks the regression into an empty yet grandiose self for which the world is only its mirror; in a word, the collapse of the boundary between the self and the world. These developments accelerate and intensify, in a dense interpersonal and interconnected society, with the proliferation of visual and audio images permeating everyday experience, wherein, it can be argued, the preoccupation of the self with the self has become total.

The identity of a subject that wishes to recognise itself everywhere links directly with the principle of equivalence paramount in a society dominated by the autonomy of exchange value. Accordingly, nowhere has the abolition of hierarchy been more successful than in the realm of taste. It is through the universality of equivalence that every cup of coffee risks being watered down for commercial interests. Equality becomes a principle of levelling mediocrity as the barometer of cultural advance.

Against vertically organised traditional broadcasting and informational services, the spectacular hori-

zontalism of digital communication and its lateral organisation, its direct and instantaneous communication throughout the globe, is infused with economic imperatives of commensurable uniformity and transparency. Here the right to self-definition comes to trump all other rights: a struggle over attentive constituencies and self-identification. The result is an overwhelming, however subtle, demand for branding, a staple not just of the market, but of politics as well: it is crucial to stay on message and to prize that communication over content. Both a voting drive and an iPhone advertising campaign compete in the field of expeditious ideas, brand consistency and repetitive jingles.

Two desiderata of its stimuli are to provoke the recipient's attention while doing so in 'recognisable' language. To simply recognise the melody of a pop song is enough to afford it grandeur. Thinking becomes the mechanism of identification taking place under the appeal and veneration for unlimited transparency and communication. Yet to stand out is only to accord with the repetitive mechanisms of distributing standardised material, or what Adorno refers to as 'plugging' as 'the literal repetition and inexorable representation of endless sameness'.<sup>67</sup> Here, the success and popularity of a particular product derives directly from the phenomenon of repetition and '[i]ts fame is only the sum-total of these very announcements'.<sup>68</sup> Youtube, Instagram and TikTok personalities are a case in point in which the developing technological standards democratise chances of success simply as a result of the proliferation and extension of the cultural schematism. The success of any 'influencer' does not derive from any cultural 'pioneering' but is predominantly the result of pre-existing standardisation and algorithmic strategising. The velocity of ever-nuanced variations on standardised and administrated experience emerges as more crucial than any of its individual products. The unending stream of social media feeds, with one entry deserving far less than the perpetual current of the whole, remains exemplary of this dynamic. In this way, the inattentive attention of retention today is only 'the *recognition* of a sequence of identical pattern'.<sup>69</sup>

A criterion of cultural success requires flat objectivity, a structure of recognition that habituates the viewer with content already known. 'Recognition becomes an end instead of a means',<sup>70</sup> which finds of course various ex-

pressions. We can hum a catchy toothpaste melody and solidify a vague remembrance. We can straightforwardly identify with a film's protagonist with earnest awareness. We can find belonging through labelling staples such as associated references, allusions, affinities, milieus and hashtags. We can find reassurance in that which we've already internalised. In all cases, leisure today has never been more devoid of laziness. It takes strenuous efforts to harmonise with our surroundings.

The result mocks the precarious self-sufficiency of the spectator who is trained in recognising the already familiar conditions of its base existence. Total technological replication of empirical reality, through an infinite abundance of information, is its aim. Within photography and film especially, the eye cannot compete with this situation and the spectator resolves to find only verification of itself in all of its contortions such as the lack of spatial depth, of scale or an inhuman tempo. Like the lives we live, a relation between foreground and background becomes increasingly difficult to discern. There can be no suspense, only anxiety, when our engagement with detail amounts only to the apprehension of a nasty residue of photochemical processes and pixel saturation, an absolute emaciation of perception. Everything is reduced to recognition, a substitute for contemplation and patient reflection.

Within both the culture industry and the spectacle, the resemblance of art and life has become rationalised mimesis, the mere replication of empirical reality. Its 'technicolour heroes do not allow us to forget for a second that they are normal people'.<sup>71</sup> When they don't furnish models of the good life, they will at least extend solidarity and 'relatable' hardship, often reaffirming doctrines of empowerment and exonerating our own situation. Through entertainment, 'art abandons the attempt to weave illusions around the audience and to present a heightened version of reality, it tries [instead] to close the gap between audience and actors.'<sup>72</sup>

A waning belief in the objectivity and reality of the external world corresponds to an identification with a reality furnished by materials of advertising and mass industrial culture, with themes and dramatic tropes of popular film and television, fragments torn and assembled from a vast range of cultural traditions. On the whole, 'the affirmation and intellectual duplication of what exists anyway become pseudo-culture's own content, proof

of its legitimacy'.<sup>73</sup> We rally in the form of pop music, mimic the intonations of comedians, dream in the style of a video game. The mechanical reproduction of culture, with its proliferation of images and the rapid sequence of their incessant generation, brings the rationalisation of mimesis to prominence as a damaged form of relations of recognition.

## A faithful portrait

For Adorno, mimesis, 'which reaches back into the biological dimension',<sup>74</sup> consists of a thoroughly participatory attitude toward reality for which the subject-object relation is abandoned to the disposition and comportment of self-likeness. However, in its rationalisation, mimesis transforms into the defensive mode of mimicry, a vicious cycle by which the fear of objective forces foment the principle of identification. This *real subsumption* of humanity's mimetic impulse as such clarifies a form of domination characterised by a process of commensurable identification of the nonidentical, a depreciated ability to differentiate characteristic of the projective identification of reducing particulars to abstract equivalents, that is, of the commodity form's qualitative incentive for the quantitative.

As likeness is contorted into equivalence, mimesis becomes the synchronisation of subjects to an alienated world, an identity between spectators and spectacle. As Debord argues in an April 1963 letter:

The only point I dispute is the inevitability of the undifferentiation of human beings 'by their lack of originality and their sharp resemblance.' I think it's quite the opposite: a *system* makes people look alike by manufacturing the obligatory sameness of their gestures (from the small range of choices allowed) and the ways of feeling and reporting such gestures.<sup>75</sup>

For Debord, the spectacle is riddled with constant isomorphic solicitation, 'at once a faithful mirror held up to the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers'. Making 'no secret of what it is',<sup>76</sup> the spectacle assumes a mirror structure which, rather than misrepresenting reality, accurately reflects a reality already mangled and perverted by the fetish-forms of the autonomous economy developing for itself. In short, the spectacle has advanced the rationalisation of mimesis as a development of the commodity economy.

The capitalist mode of production contorts the mimetic faculty into the form of mimicry. The rationalisation of mimesis can be described as a schema for both the labour process – as an adaptation to external mechanisations or dead labour – and the exchange process – as an adaptation to sacrifice for self-preservation. Just as money was for Marx the *becoming visible* of commodity relations in their totality, the spectacle is for Debord the *becoming visible* of capital as a totality. In other words, the spectacle is the *becoming visible* of the unity of appearances, that is, the mode of appearance of society unified under capital. Here, '[s]ociety in its length and breadth becomes capital's faithful portrait'.<sup>77</sup> The social form of the commodity is 'shown for *what it is*'. 'Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world.'<sup>78</sup>

Within the spectacle, social activity is made to appear, and in doing so, is embedded with mimetic import. This entails the organisation of human perception, defining *what* is to be seen with *how* it is apprehended, that is, through pathic identification. As a 'monopoly of appearance', the spectacle 'naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs'. The spectacle thereby 'says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears"',<sup>79</sup> an optimal environment for mimetic identification.

We find a similar diagnostic within the work of Adorno, that is, a social whole that need only disclose itself to justify itself. Here, consistent with the society of the spectacle, the exposition of social conditions becomes a mystification of those very same social conditions, insofar as it cultivates and stimulates mimetic regression towards recognising the already familiar, authoritarian intolerance towards ambiguity and as the confirmation of a damaged subject's pathological projections. It is for this reason that Adorno can say: 'the surface of life, the immediacy it makes available to people, has become ideology.'<sup>80</sup> The critique of mimetic identification and its allurements remains part of Adorno's critical theory of society no less than the spectacle's organisation of appearances theorised by Debord. For both, the aggressive demand that the world bend to our barbarically diminished expectations is indexical of a barbarically diminished horizon of experience itself.

Eric-John Russell is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institut für Philosophie, Universität Potsdam and the author of *Spectacular Logic in Hegel and Debord: Why Everything is as it Seems* (2021).

## Notes

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics 1958/59*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 185. As Adorno summarises elsewhere: 'Prior to total administration, the subject who viewed, heard, or read a work was to lose himself, forget himself, extinguish himself in the work. The identification carried out by the subject was ideally not that of making the artwork like himself, but rather that of making himself like the artwork. This identification constituted aesthetic sublimation; Hegel named this comportment freedom to the object. He thus paid homage to the subject that becomes subject in spiritual experience through self-relinquishment, the opposite of the philistine demand that the artwork give him something.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 17.

2. For example, as Tom Bunyard makes commendably clear, *The Society of the Spectacle* is 'best understood as ... a book that describes a society that has become detached from its capacity to consciously shape and determine its own future'. Tom Bunyard, *Debord, Time and Spectacle: Hegelian Marxism and Situationist Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 4; emphasis added.

3. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1995), §26. Both Nicholson-Smith's and the early 1970 Black & Red translation of *The Society of the Spectacle* will be referenced in this essay. Each have their own respective merits depending on the context.

4. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman and John Supak (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970), §10; emphasis added.

5. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), §25.

6. See Eric-John Russell, *Spectacular Logic in Hegel and Debord: Why Everything is as it Seems* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). There it is argued that both Marx's critique of political economy and Hegel's speculative logic emerges within Debord's critical theory as a really existing rationality that gives structural coherence to the actuality of the society of the spectacle.

7. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), §30.

8. Internationale Situationniste, 'Les structures élémentaires de la réification', in *Internationale situationniste: Édition augmentée* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997), 451, 450, 452.

9. Walter Benjamin, 'Doctrine of the Similar' in *Selected*

*Writings Volume 2, Part 2, 1931–34*, trans. R. Livingstone et al., eds. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland and G. Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 695.

**10.** For further examination into the significance of mimesis within the work of Adorno, see Karla L. Schultz, *Mimesis on the Move: Theodor W. Adorno's Concept of Imitation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, 'Vital Experience (Adorno)', in *Mimesis: Culture – Art – Society*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 281–293; Pierre-François Noppen, 'Adorno on Mimetic Rationality: Three Puzzles', *Adorno Studies* 1:1 (2017).

**11.** Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 146.

**12.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 5.

**13.** A nearly identical analysis can be found in the work of Debord's fellow Situationist International member Raoul Vaneigem. See Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 60–64, 91 and 118–119.

**14.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 166.

**15.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 150.

**16.** Caillois' examples, among others, include the Trochilium butterfly, which assumes the appearance of a wasp, the Choerocampa Elpenor caterpillar that contorts its body in the form of a snake when alarmed, as well as the Caligo butterfly, which spreads its wings to resemble the plumage of an owl.

**17.** Roger Caillois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (Winter 1984), 28.

**18.** Caillois, 'Mimicry', 28.

**19.** See Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §28 and §192.

**20.** Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 90.

**21.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §161, §170.

**22.** Caillois, 'Mimicry', 30.

**23.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 148.

**24.** Within the Guy Debord archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, all of Debord's notes on Gabel's book are marked with either 'SduS très important' or 'import. pour SduS'. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAF 28603. Fonds Guy Debord. Fiches rassemblées sous l'intitulé: 'Philosophie,

sociologie' 156 f. Gabel, Joseph 5 f.210 x 135, 155 x 70 et 20 x 90 mm and Gabel, Joseph 8 f.125 x 75 et 75 x 125 mm.

**25.** There are a number of specific themes within Gabel's work that Debord utilises for *The Society of the Spectacle*, most glaringly with the latter's description of the spectacle as the organisation of abstract, irreversible and essentially spatialised temporality under a 'perpetual present' (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §108, §126). As Gabel echoes Debord's comments, specifically within chapter six of *The Society of the Spectacle*, 'the maniac lives in an eternal present. His personal time is a succession of present time without memory of the past and without plans for the future. ... Therefore, the eternal – and eternally renewed – present of the maniac corresponds to a sort of spatialization of duration.' See Joseph Gabel, *False Consciousness: An Essay on Reification*, trans. Margaret A. Thompson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 185.

**26.** Eugène Minkowski, *La schizophrénie. Psychopathologie des schizoïdes et des schizophrènes* (Paris: Payot, 1927), 198.

**27.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, xxi.

**28.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 4.

**29.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 21.

**30.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 93.

**31.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 294–295.

**32.** Here, both 'stifling proximity and hopeless distance' oscillate within a world of paranoia that knows 'neither real distance nor real proximity'. Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 259, 272.

**33.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §212.

**34.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §219.

**35.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 124.

**36.** Notably, 'as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), [the spectacle] naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs' (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), §18), which corresponds to Gabel's observation that while paranoid hallucinations are mainly acoustic, deranged perceptions are predominantly visual (Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 280).

**37.** Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAF 28603. Fonds Guy Debord. Fiches rassemblées sous l'intitulé : "Philosophie, sociologie" 156 f. Gabel, Joseph 5 f.210 x 135, 155 x 70 et 20 x 90 mm and Gabel, Joseph 8 f.125 x 75 et 75 x 125 mm.

**38.** Guy Debord, *Correspondance Volume 4: Janvier 1969 – Décembre 1972* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004), 80.

- 39.** For the Situationist International's position on psychoanalysis generally, see 'Les aventures du résultat parcellaire' in the tenth 1966 issue of *Internationale situationniste* wherein it is said that, '[t]he discoveries of psychoanalysis, like the thought of Freud, are at the end of the day unacceptable to the dominant social order.' *Internationale Situationniste*, 'Les aventures du résultat parcellaire', in *Internationale situationniste: Édition augmentée* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997), 475.
- 40.** Of course it can be said that neither Adorno nor Debord successfully resolve the larger question of how one relates problems of individual psychoanalysis to broader social tendencies, that is to the theoretical difficulties of sociologising psychoanalysis. See Alexandra Ivanova, 'Psychologizing Sociology?' in *Cured Quail Vol. 2* (2020), 217–228 and Frank Grohmann, 'Le nouveau parochialisme et la vieille critique des exigences tronquées de la pratique', *Palim Psao* (Feb. 2022), available at <http://www.palimpsao.fr/2022/02/le-nouveau-parochialisme-et-la-vieille-critique-des-exigences-tronquees-de-la-pratique-par-frank-grohmann.html>. Yet it remains the case that Adorno at least was aware of the challenges. (See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Revisionist Psychoanalysis', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 40:3 (2014), 326–338.) Debord's diagnostic target is of course not clinical in nature nor an individual pathological agent, but society at large. In this way, his usage of psychoanalytic characterisation wields pronouncedly less commitment to the discourse of psychoanalysis itself, and ought to be grasped as part of his stylistic *détournements*, appropriations of language utilised without fidelity to their original context for altogether different purposes. Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle by no means requires psychoanalytic categories for its own internal coherence, even if they add to that concept's vivacity.
- 41.** Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAF 28603. Fonds Guy Debord. Fiches rassemblées sous l'intitulé : "Philosophie, sociologie" 156 f. Gabel, Joseph 5 f. 210 x 135, 155 x 70 et 20 x 90 mm and Gabel, Joseph 8 f. 125 x 75 et 75 x 125 mm.
- 42.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §219. For Gabel, 'an increased need for compensatory representation' and 'for imitation' characterises the pathology of hysterical pantomime. 'The abnormal need for representation here makes up for a torturing feeling of being on the edge of existence ... hysterical imitation, like the *Identitätszwang* of schizophrenics, is a structural element of this inauthenticity which occurs on this side of the voluntary-involuntary alternative.' Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 199–200.
- 43.** Gabel, *False Consciousness*, 200, 201.
- 44.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §218. Debord derives the category of autism from Gabel's reference to Ignace Meyerson and Marinette Dambuyant's article 'Un type de raisonnement de justification', *Journal de Psychologie* (Oct. 1946), 387–404. Although beyond the scope of this essay, further investigation into the relation between the spectacle and autism would do well to consider Thomas Ogden's 'autistic-contiguous' position, which is constitutive of the experience of bounded surfaces. See Thomas H. Ogden, *The Primitive Edge of Experience* (London: Karnac, 1989).
- 45.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1995, §219
- 46.** Guy Debord, *Correspondance Volume 0: Septembre 1951 – Juillet 1957* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2010), 329.
- 47.** Guy Debord, 'Préface à la 4<sup>e</sup> édition italienne de *La Société du spectacle*', in *Œuvres* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006), 1463.
- 48.** Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 15, 147.
- 49.** See Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press 1999), 103; Anselm Jappe, 'The Spectacle and the Culture Industry, the Transcendence of Art and the Autonomy of Art: Some Parallels between Theodor Adorno's and Guy Debord's Critical Concepts', in *The Sage Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Volume 1*, eds. Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Sage, 2018), 1285–1301.
- 50.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §30.
- 51.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 119.
- 52.** Theodor W. Adorno, 'Television as Ideology', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 62.
- 53.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 101, 118, 133, 119.
- 54.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §213.
- 55.** Internationale Situationniste, 'L'absence et ses habilleurs', in *Internationale situationniste: Édition augmentée* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997), 374; emphasis added.
- 56.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 154.
- 57.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 156.
- 58.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), §23.
- 59.** Raoul Vaneigem, 'Basic Banalities (Part 2)', in *Situationist International Anthology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public

Secrets, 2006), 158.

**60.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 140.

**61.** There is a common albeit erroneous tendency within the literature to characterise both Adorno's critique of the culture industry and Debord's critique of the spectacle as inculcating a standpoint of 'passivity', as if the objectivity of forces of abstract domination were not themselves ultimately the result of subjective activity. Here it should be recalled that Adorno's critique of *Aktionismus*, that is, 'action that overdoes and aggravates itself for the sake of its own publicity, without admitting to itself to what extent it serves as a substitute satisfaction, elevating itself into an end itself', is hardly reducible to passivity, even if one wanted to allot a certain 'pseudo' prefix to its practice. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Resignation', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 291; see also Theodor W. Adorno and Gerhard Richter, 'Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower? A Conversation with Theodor W. Adorno', *Monatshefte* 94:1 (2002), 10–23. Additionally reductive would be to qualify Debord's spectators as simply 'passive'. While 'contemplation' as a register of reification is a term frequently employed by Debord, much as it is by Lukács, within the theory of the spectacle it is not tantamount to a passive disposition of an alienated subjectivity. As Debord writes in his notes comparing the work of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* to the theory of the spectacle, '[i]t is too simple to say that capitalism both requires and prevents participation .... Capitalism organises 'participation' as spectacle – in the spectacle.... It is wrong to say that <capitalism> prevents participation where in fact it is at the same time dependent on participation.' Laurence Le Bras and Emmanuel Guy, eds., *Lire Debord: Avec des notes inédites de Guy Debord* (Paris: Éditions L'Échappée, 2016), 29. The essential point here is that varied phenomenological oscillation between 'passive' and 'active' poles can be found within a critical diagnostic of mimetic behaviour, not the absolutisation of one pole over another.

**62.** As Adorno makes clear in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'Philistines are those whose relation to artworks is ruled by whether and to what degree they can, for example, put themselves in the place of the actors as they come forth; this is what

all parts of the culture industry are based on and they foster it insistently in their customers.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 346.

**63.** Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 168.

**64.** Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40f.

**65.** See Raymond Geuss, 'Philosophical Anthropology and Social Criticism', in Honneth, *Reification*, 127. For an analysis of the ways in which ignorance and recognition work *in concert*, not with any form of misrecognition or non-recognition, see Mari Mikkola, 'Ideal Theory, Epistemologies of Ignorance, and (Mis)Recognition', in *Epistemic Injustice and the Philosophy of Recognition*, eds. Paul Giladi and Nicola McMillan (New York: Routledge, 2022).

**66.** Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 103.

**67.** Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music', in *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 299.

**68.** Adorno, 'On Popular Music', 307.

**69.** Adorno, 'On Popular Music', 311.

**70.** Adorno, 'On Popular Music', 300.

**71.** Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 202.

**72.** Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 88–89.

**73.** Theodor W. Adorno, 'Theory of Pseudo-Culture', *Telos* 95 (1993), 33.

**74.** Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 329.

**75.** Guy Debord, *Correspondance, Volume 2: Septembre 1960 – Décembre 1964* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001), 221.

**76.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §16, §25.

**77.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), §50. '[D]o not let the term "visibility" suggest that the spectacle is a concept, again, primarily concerned with literal visual imagery or is reducible to an environment oversaturated with advertisements or consumerism. Visibility here refers back to the riddle of the money-fetish – to the inverted world become, in Marx's words, "dazzling to our eyes"' (Russell, *Spectacular Logic*, 104).

**78.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), §37, §42

**79.** Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), §12, §18.

**80.** Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 336.