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Jean-Pierre Voyer
It’s Crazy How Many Things Don’t Exist
Selected Writings of Jean-Pierre Voyer
2015

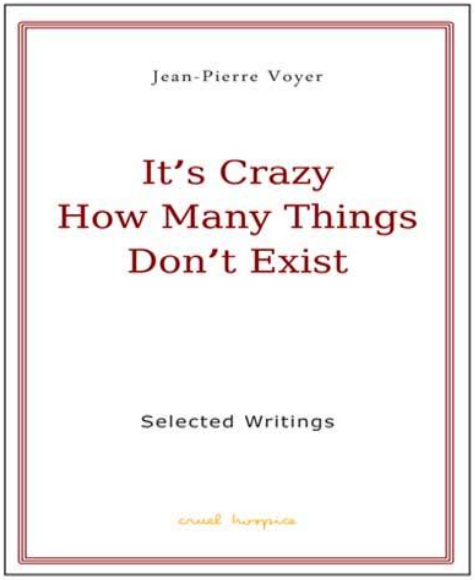
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# It’s Crazy How Many Things Don’t Exist

## Selected Writings of Jean-Pierre Voyer

Jean-Pierre Voyer




2015

# Contents

**Introduction** **5**
Who is Jean-Pierre Voyer? . . . . . 5
Selected Excerpts from Voyer's Writings . . . . . 6
*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Misery of the People*, Editions Champ Libre 1975 . . 6
Review of Contemporary Prehistory, 1982 . . . . . 7
*Hecatombe*, Editions de la Nuit, 1991 . . . . . 8
4. "Negation of the Economy," (Voyer's website), 2001 . . . . . 9
Bibliography . . . . . 9

**Reich: How to Use** **11**
1. The Notion of Character According to Reich . . . . . 11
2. Its Application to the Spectacle Effect . . . . . 13

**Non-Well-Founded Set Theory: Putting an End to Marx's Reductionism** **21**

**The Economy is Only an Ideology in Marx's Sense** **25**

**My Goal in Life** **44**

**What I am Satisfied With (1997)** **47**

**There Is No Society of the Spectacle** **50**
The World of Silence . . . . . 58
It's Crazy How Many Things Don't Exist . . . . . 61
The Disgusting Sluggishness of Souls . . . . . 64

tyred by English bourgeois prejudice. Let it be known too that I am for the legalization of marijuana and of bestiality, but also for the formal prohibition, upon penalty of death, of roller-skating by anyone older than twelve. Why such a draconian punishment? Because public safety is at stake. Everyone knows how prickly the Arabs are, so we must avoid doing anything that may irritate them. They might bomb *Paris Plage* (I don't mean Le Touquet, that charming village that, in addition to charm, possesses an airport where one can land a plane normally if one has learned how to land). Furthermore, it would be counterproductive to lead them to believe that they're dealing with children, though it's too late now, they already know. Bush Junior never grew up. He wants to play with and break his tactical nuclear toys no matter what. Why didn't his daddy finish the job ten years ago and deliver the Iraqis from their terrible, jocular dictator? Because he feared an alliance between the Shiites of Iraq and the Shiites of Iran. Frustrated by all that, the CIA (always up to no good) laid a trap for the poor Iraqi Shiites, as we all know. I hope the Shiites will make their so-called liberators pay dearly for that. Ten years ago the Sunnis were rich, moderate, respectable, bourgeois, westernized. But nobody was paying attention to the Wahabites (who are behind the Saudi fortune) and particularly to the Salafists. In those ten years the Sunnis thoroughly earned their bad reputation, equaling that of their Shiite enemy brothers. Praise them. Bad reputations are the consequence of having displeased the CIA and the president of the United States. The American leaders are trying to use in Iraq the same methods (myth and lies) that they've used so successfully with their own human resources "at home." Iraq has no human resources, but it still has men. The United States is a desert—not Iraq, at least not yet.

*I swear by the time, most surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.*



# Introduction

## Who is Jean-Pierre Voyer?

French social thinkers don't have the best reputation in America. Typically they are seen as humorless, self-important, elitist intellectuals whose purpose is to tell the world not only what to believe, but what to do with those beliefs. We know Jean-Pierre Voyer, and he is none of those things. He has worked as a cab driver, a plumber and software programmer/entrepreneur. He never attended a university, and he is completely self-taught. He has a wicked sense of humor and all of his writings develop and make a critical analysis of his initial ideas. He has gone on record as saying that one of the goals of theory is to say what *does not* exist, in particular, the "economy".

His provocative assertions made him many enemies, most of the time because the latter would rather maintain the status quo on essential questions rather than enter into a critical debate. In his search for an answer to the question: "Why don't people revolt?" he leaves no stone unturned. He is destructively funny and provocative when addressing trendy thinkers, politicians and politics. He puts his life where his mouth is. He is unique not only among French social thinkers, but among radical thinkers everywhere.

Voyer is the most original thinker to come out of the post-1968 movement in Europe, so original in fact that he developed a profound critique of the failures and inadequacies of Marx and of the Situationists, which led to his estrangement from Debord. What is crucial is not that Voyer and Debord stopped talking, but that

Voyer continues to think and write about the modern world as no one else does.

Voyer is the author of six books and numerous articles published in France by Editions Champ-Libre, by Editions de la Nuit and by Editions Anonymes. His site contains all his writings: thousands of pages of research, correspondence, and theoretical and polemical work. His work is ferociously Hegelian in its method. He writes—about modern slavery, the tyranny of the commodity, communication, the movement of thought in society, the naivete of the materialist conception of this world—with a clarity and wit that would be reassuring except that they are also extremely demanding of the reader.

## Selected Excerpts from Voyer's Writings

The following excerpts from Voyer's writings beckon to translators who can help bring more of his work to an English-language audience. Fortunately *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Misery of the People* will appear next year in a LBC Books edition.

### *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Misery of the People,* Editions Champ Libre 1975

"The scandal of Marxism and of Situationism consists simply in claiming that the thought of Marx and the thought of the Situationists are true while the enemies of Marx and the enemies of the Situationists are still standing, as if the truth of a thought were not a practical question, a question of its power and of the annihilation of its enemies. In fact, Marxism is the victory of Stalin's 'thought,' that is, the victory of his police."



dards and a single motto: "If I catch you, I'll screw you" (*stricto sensu* in Iraq). I, too, shit upon it. That, by the way, is the only thing I share with the Arabs, other than faith, obviously. Simply put, our religions differ but our faith is the same. There are many religions but only one faith, because there is only one object of faith, whatever name you give it. That object has many names and, in fact, the only thing we know about it is its names. They all have the same meaning. They are synonyms. On the other hand, as the insightful Tocqueville pointed out, how can you ask a religion that interferes in politics to be open and tolerant? One might as well have asked the Christian State of the King of Prussia in the time of Marx—a state that meddled in religion, in religious politics, and gave a religious character to political matters—to be open and tolerant. We know what followed: Bismarck, a fist of iron in an iron glove, German unity, coal, steel, war (then, the encore, a new fist of iron in a new iron glove, mixed with madness and Keynesian ministers). The spirit of conquest, right? It's fortunate that a world based on mass prostitution should fare so poorly. There would be no morality if it were to fare well.

Because people often leave school these days unable to read (they were taught to "sight read"), to preclude any misunderstanding I want to make clear that when I attack married gays it's not the gays I'm attacking but bourgeois marriage, the most ridiculous institution there is, paired in this case with aggressive militancy and presented as the pearl of the Occident. Gay marriage: what a huge step forward for freedom and humanity. In demanding the right to bourgeois marriage gays repudiate themselves (supposedly "proud" but evidently ashamed of not being like everyone else, they make their shame official. That's really the last straw: militant conformism, have your cake and eat it too. "Mommy, help!"[13]), and they offend the memory of Alan Turing, who was atrociously mar-

[13] "Allo maman, bobo," song by Alain Souchon about a sad young man with very low self-esteem

*deniers in battle formation, do not turn your backs to them.*" And … it will grow (the world or the punishment, we don't know yet), it will grow and grow … because it's Spanish.[9]

So it is precisely because of the strength and perfection of US weapons that only civilians can do what those Arab civilians are doing. A state that would do likewise would be immediately annihilated, something Kadhafi clearly understands. A *world* has begun to resist and, what is remarkable, has done so for purely human, i.e., spiritual, reasons. Spirit is with them. I suppose that the "Muslims of France" and elsewhere will agree to begin "a radical critique of their view of the world" when the herds of human resources begin their own radical critique of their view of the world, which in their case is not their view at all but their masters', one they get from *Le Monde* and the *New York Times*. All that human resources know how to do is obey, complain, moan, vote (for Charybdis or Scylla),[10] moralize, and rant and rave against Le Pen—that convenient scarecrow. As during the time of the Turkish occupation and the Haidouks,[11] when the master is at his balcony and lets his *chechia*[12] fall into the courtyard, startling the human resources, the rollerbladers fall on their faces and the married queers go limp. Long live the Haidouks, those terrible bandits! Gentlemen Human Resources, you, who feel complete solidarity with one another because you are totally separate from one another (cf. Marx and Durkheim), shoot first! Criticize yourselves first! Visibly, the Muslims—and not just the Arabs—shit on "your" democracy, which is only your masters' democracy, the buddy democracy, the democracy of rogues and rollerbladers, a democracy of lofty moral stan-

[9] *La Perichole* by Jacques Offenbach: "*Il grandira car il est Espagnol.*"

[10] Sailors navigating the narrow Strait of Messina between Sicily and Italy fell victim to either of the two sea monsters: Charybdis on one side and Scylla on the other.

[11] Courageous resistance fighters in the Bulgarian people's struggle for freedom from their Ottoman oppressors, $15^{th} - 18^{th}$ centuries

[12] A distant cousin of the European beret, from Andalusian times



## Review of Contemporary Prehistory, 1982

"According to realism, it is correct and sensible to affirm that a reality exists and that it is independent of the human spirit. Moreover, according to this current of thought, the human spirit can progress in the direction of ever-increasing knowledge of this reality." (Bernard d'Espagnat, *In Search of The Real, A Physicist's Perspective*. Gauthier-Villars, 1979.)

Obviously, we are in complete disagreement with materialist realism, first on the nature of knowledge and then on all of the questions stemming from it, beginning with the question of reality. For materialist realism, knowledge is reduced to individual consciousness. For us, on the contrary, knowledge is not the knowledge or thought of an individual, it is a world, it is the movement of thought in the world. Understood in this way, knowledge constitutes reality itself. It follows quite clearly that knowledge does not refer to an external and independent reality but to itself. So knowledge understood in the materialist realist sense as thought or consciousness of an individual necessarily refers to knowledge as a world. Thought, therefore, necessarily refers to the movement of thought in the world.

However, it might seem that we agree with materialist realism on two points since (1) we are of the opinion, along with Hegel, that a reality exists and that it is exterior to the consciousness and the thought of the impoverished individual and, (2) we are of the opinion, against Kant, that reality is knowable. But this agreement is a simple appearance because we are totally opposed to materialist realism as to the meaning it gives to words, just as we are totally opposed to materialist realism as to the meaning it gives to the words 'communism' and 'revolution.' A reality exists but not as conceived of by materialist realism. The reality of this realism is not real. It is one of the merits of the arguments put forth by the physicist d'Espagnat, no matter what his conclusions, to reveal the naivete of the materialist conception and especially to show

that the questions which dogmatic materialism always assumes to have been resolved are not."

### *Hecatombe*, Editions de la Nuit, 1991

"I will summarize in a few words my vision of the world. Slaves are dogs. Their masters are pigs. But the world is beautiful. At least it is on workdays, for nothing is more repugnant than the swarming of idle slaves, on foot or on wheels. It's as if Stanley Kubrick and Francis Coppola were directing! As swinish as the masters are when taken individually, the divinity to which they sacrifice is beautiful, and they're not about to torch the world for utilitarian peanuts but only for a fatal beauty. Marx understood and stated that money doesn't develop any quality within the individual and, likewise, doesn't require any. The bourgeois is a man without qualities. Money has them all. Balzac illustrated this fact at length. What a businessman can accomplish, anybody can. Marx also noticed that it is only with money that the zeal invested in work becomes limitless, because money is exhilarating, as opposed to the dreary utilitarian sermons from the on-the-lefts. If the world is to be changed, it should only be to experience something more beautiful and more exhilarating than money. The great revolutionaries Hitler and Goebbels understood this very well. They promised the German slaves that they would be like gods. I am delighted to watch as the pitiful succession of aborted attempts, hypocritically grounded in utilitarian precepts, always end up in bald submission to the demands of commerce. Finally we can see what our celebrated socialists have accomplished in the last ten years: fortunately, nothing—absolutely nothing—if not farting in silk pajamas and oozing sugary words of comfort and virtuous patriotic indignations. That's all their imbecilic electorate will get and that's the least of all evils. Since the bourgeois is already two-faced, his pink version is twice two-faced. Why would these particular citizens be less enslaving than the citizens of Rome? Not only they are, they're



conditions of life are for the herds of human resources, who will? In this self-celebratory world, a world where praise is an industry, who will say it? What are the Muslims' five daily prayers in comparison to the permanent autocelebration—day in and day out, over the air and in the press—of this perfect world, so democratic, so free, so beautiful? Muslims submit to their god out of love or respect. In the free world, human resources are bribed into submission. In the free world, it is not the faithful who pray to their god but God himself who hustles them for cash. An entire caste is assigned to that task. In the free world, God is an industry. Die, bastards. If the Arabs hold the free world in contempt, it's because it's contemptible. At last some men have the means to say so, loud and clear, at the risk of their lives.

The problem is not with the Arabs, it is with the free world. The problem with this world is precisely that, being peopled by prisoners, it alone is free. Engels observed the same thing about England in 1840. The ineptitude, cynicism, vulgarity, money-grubbing, pettiness and brutality of this world is a permanent insult to humankind before being an insult to Allah. That is why the Arabs gave this world a lesson in generosity ("altruistic suicide" according to Emile Durkheim), as well as a lesson *about* the world. Today any American hayseed knows where Mecca and Madrid are, which was not the case a little while ago. The United States: a big island. A New York friend of mine describes his country in two words: myth and lies, which means that, for Americans, history no longer exists nor will it ever again exist. *America forever.* Myth and lies: those two words also fit well with the free world. The crime is enormous because the free world is an enormous, permanent insult to the human race, with its big, fat socialists dining in the finest Parisian restaurants and its stern, impeccably dressed WASPs attending countless board meetings. This world will not rest until it turns every man into a boor (*kafir* in Arabic, translated by Berque as a "denier"): For God, the vilest of animals are the deniers, because they do not believe. *"You who believe, if you encounter the*

about its future. Bush is bent on being done with the Muslims; he wants to inculcate those obscurants with a little commercial civilization—call it commerce at gunpoint or the rip-off of Arabia. There's one hitch though: Arab or non-Arab, there are 1.5 billion of them. Will the hold-up of the century fail? *"God exhausts the schemes of the deniers;*[7] *they lavish their resources to cut off the path to God* (70 billion dollars already!). *Let them lavish, for afterwards they will feel only bitterness, and worse, will be defeated."*

Naipaul reproaches the Muslims for having only faith and no technology. But at least they have faith, and they know marvelously well how to hijack for their own ends the technology that they could not invent. (They still have some problems with SIMM chips; they won't make that mistake again.) One thing escapes Naipaul: Muslims constitute an international nation; they can strike whenever and wherever they want, which is something the Serbs cannot do no matter how strong their fervor. Under those conditions faith proves to be a formidable weapon. The Muslims are hopeless at taking out patents but exceedingly strong at wreaking vengeance on a world scale. A century ago Arab ferociousness was a literary cliche in the works of Balzac *(Lost Illusions)* or Flaubert *(Madame Bovary).* If the herds of human resources were not scandalously innocent, i.e., strictly incapable of doing harm, innocent due not to virtue but to inability,—La Rochefoucauld addressed that issue: "One cannot call someone good who lacks the ability to do harm."—if they were not eternal minors, incompetent in the sense of Roman law; indeed if they were not like cattle (yet even cattle are capable of vengeance via the pranks of the prion[8]), then that spirit of re-conquest would not be necessary; it would not even be possible.

The Arabs have truly struck the guilty ones—guilty of servitude. If the Arabs do not say, in their brutal style, how contemptible the

[7] Those who deny, who do not believe ("*les denegateurs*")

[8] The infectious agent in mad cow disease



hypocrites to boot. However, the socialists have done much to enhance the freedom of trade (notably by reducing the tax on reinvested profits to 35%) and that's just fine. Those maniacs of the state had to water down their *Chateau Latour*

### 4. "Negation of the Economy," (Voyer's website), 2001

"The negation of the existence of God was the prerequisite of the critique of religion. The negation of the existence of the economy is the prerequisite of the critique of political economy.

The economy is to political economy what God is to religion. In the same way that, while God does not exist but religion does and has numerous priests and devotees, the economy does not exist while political economy does and has numerous priests and devotees. In the same way that religion is the lie that says *God exists*, political economy is the lie that says *the economy exists.* In the same way as one cannot criticize religion if one has not first negated the existence of God, one cannot criticize political economy if one has not first negated the existence of the economy. In the same way that others negated the existence of God, I negate the existence of the economy. Neither Marx nor Debord did so, though they claimed to criticize political economy."

Voyer's recent writings as well as all of his published works appear on his web site http:// leuven.pagesperso-orange.fr/.

—Isaac Cronin

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They are innocent of that crime, which is much worse than their own. The point is that they do not want to become human resources themselves. How can they say that to be finally understood? As the Situationists used to say, in a world where submission is universal and glorified, freedom is necessarily criminal. What do those Arabs want to do? The greatest harm to the greatest number. But that's exactly what the free world does to those who live in it, and the opposite of the official truth proclaimed by the English ideologues of the 18th century: the greatest good for the greatest number. The greatest harm for a human being is to be reduced to the state of a human resource.

Only a renewed "spirit of conquest"— the spirit that has always moved Islam (with a long dormancy period suited to its growing embitterment)—is today capable of standing up to the only worldwide revolutionary movement: commerce. Islam is therefore the only worldwide counter-revolutionary movement. It's the *re-reconquista*. Consequently, Islam's spirit of reconquest is the *only* spirit of resistance today— this is sad to say, but true. The Arab-Muslims are neither "Negroes" nor Serbs;[5] they have the means to defend themselves, or at least to take cruel revenge. *They* are not innocent. They can do almost as much harm as their adversaries. In short, the "good people"[6] reproach the Arabs for being able to defend themselves. What impertinence, don't you agree? The Arabs are the redskins of the world. Will they end up the same way? Will mediocrity triumph over genius again? Victor Hugo was pessimistic because Waterloo was not the *definitive* victory of mediocrity over genius. Napoleon is no more, but Bin Laden is. Once again mediocrity has to worry

[5] Meaning that the Arab-Muslim are *not* in a state of submission, contrary to the other two groups. (The original French term, *negres,* here translated as "Negroes", the term also used by Malcolm X and other black rebels to refer to blacks, and people of color in general, in a state of submission.)

[6] Bush's "good people of America" with a play on words: *gens bons* (good people) and *jambon* (ham)

of the United States is intent on being the defender of the civilians of the free world, which means that free-world civilians are no longer able to defend themselves on their own, that they are *not* free, while Arab civilians can attack them with or without the complicity of pro-Muslim states or even the CIA. Arab civilians still have what free-world civilians have lost. The latter are now nothing more than *human resources*—a well-suited, cynical, but not very Kantian expression—Stalin still had the politeness to say "the most precious capital."

Consequently they are dealt with "*en masse*" and, obviously, not solely by their assassins. Mass man is treated everywhere and always as mass man. So there he is, held hostage to suffer for the sinister pranks of the strategists. When strategists goof, human resources go "poof". Popu is forever being shit upon.[3] Every day the television heaps insults upon him—why not? Poor Anders, who died in despair, observed as early as 1956 that this world conforms to the images it produces (matrix theory not in the mathematical sense but as in die casting)[4]. This very world induces the desire to bomb it. Arabs, even strict Muslims, go to see disaster films too. I regret that Anders did not live to see this splendor, to see his theory confirmed on a global scale. Further, since President Bush is a Texan, it's more effective to waste his free (as in free-range) cattle than to attack his person.

A rancher's cattle is sacred! But most of all it makes him look bad before the world cartel of cattle ranchers. What kind of a cowboy lets his cattle get wasted by outlaws? Arabs attacking human resources: an abominable crime. But the Arabs are not the only ones attacking them and, above all, it is not they who created them.

[3] Popu: Celine's neologism in his pamphlet *Mea Culpa*, written on his return from Russia, to refer to "the people" (in French: population, populace, populo).

[4] Gunther Anders (1902–1992), philosopher and essayist, author of *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (*The Obsolescence of Mankind*). Cf. Le Site de Jean-Pierre Voyer: "Debord est un homme que je corrige toujours"; also the web page of Harold Marcuse http://www. history. ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/anders.htm.



# Reich: How to Use

*The thing contains in its second part, in a very condensed but relatively popular form, quite a few novelties that anticipate my book,*[1] *while at the same time necessarily barely touching on a number of other aspects. Do you think it's a good idea to preview such subjects in this way?*

—Marx to Engels,

24 June 1865

## 1. The Notion of Character According to Reich

*To find love in Paris, one has to descend to the classes where the struggle with real needs and the absence of education and vanity have left more energy. To reveal a great unsatisfied desire is to reveal one's* inferiority, *an impossibility in France, except for those beneath everything*

*Hence, the exaggerated praises of young women in the mouths of young men afraid of their hearts.*

—Stendhal, *On Love*

[1] The Institute of Contemporary Prehistory is presently preparing an *Encyclopedia of Appearances: A Phenomenology of the Absence of Spirit.*

As a result of his practical and theoretical struggle against resistances in analysis, Reich came to conceive of character (character neurosis) as the very form of those resistances.[2]

In contrast to a symptom—which must be considered as a production and concentration of character and which is felt as a foreign body, giving rise to an awareness of illness—a character trait is organically embedded in the personality. Unawareness of the illness is a fundamental symptom of character neurosis. An explanation of this degradation of individuality cannot appear except within an attempt to communicate, in this case within the analytic technique itself. However unilateral this technique may be, it rapidly revealed character for what it is: a defense against communication, a failure of the faculty of encounter. This is the price paid for the primary function of character, the defense against anxiety.[3] There's no need to dwell on the origin of anxiety, on its causes and their permanence. Let us simply note the obvious fact that the particular form of one's character is a pattern that takes shape before the tenth year.

The discretion of this arrangement explains why it is not recognized as a social plague, and thus why it is lastingly effective. This setup produces damaged individuals, as stripped as possible of intelligence, sociability and sexuality, and consequently truly isolated from one another; which is ideal for the optimum functioning of the automatic system of commodity circulation. The energy which the individual could use to recognize and be recognized is *harnessed* to his character, i.e. employed to neutralize itself.

In all societies in which modern conditions of production prevail the impossibility of living takes individually the form of death, madness or character. With the intrepid Dr. Reich, and against his

[2] *Character Analysis* 1933 (year first published in German) (Noonday, 1972)

[3] The critical situation in which the magnitude of this price is fully revealed is love. It remains Reich's merit to have shown that character defense against anxiety is paid for in this situation by an incapacity for tenderness, which he labels, unfortunately, "orgastic impotence." At this level character is itself a symptom.



since the official truth holds that Spain is a democracy, then, accordingly, aren't the people sovereign, *the* Sovereign, proper noun? The Arabs aren't fooled: unlike ordinary anarchists or Basque separatists, they don't assassinate mere figureheads or puppet ministers (which would only delight everyone—obviously not the aim of these Arabs. They aim to displease and they accept responsibility for their wickedness. So praise them in this world of good-thinking people, where even the bad dare present themselves as good and respectable.) No, they attack the real sovereign, or the one so proclaimed by all the newspapers, radios and televisions of the Western world. The critique these Arabs apply is *ad hominem* (and also, alas, *ad personam*), for they take literally the openly stated claims of the free world. Among the sovereign people are some who are innocent (in the sense of simpleminded) and who wonder why Arabs are attacking the civilians of a country where peace reigns. But that country is making war on Iraq. How stupid to find those attacks surprising, given the loyalty of the Arabs who, like Hitler, clearly announce way in advance what they are going to do, and when the moment comes, they do it. They take no one by surprise (not even President Bush, so they say), from a strategic viewpoint that is. But they reserve the right of tactical surprise. That is all that they have, and what the U.S. does not.

Today, the Arab-Muslim nation is *the* world nation. Petit Robert Dictionary: *"Nation: A human group, generally quite large* (indeed!), *characterized by the consciousness of its unity and a willingness to live together."* Precisely. According to V.S. Naipaul, non-Arab converts to Islam strive to be more Arab than the Arabs. They soon will be more Arab than Muslim.

What is the assassination of *one* archduke good for if not to trigger a world war among world powers? As for the archduke, there are plenty more fish in the sea. But to trigger a worldwide *civil* war, it's preferable to assassinate civilians *en masse.* The *State*

on. Things like offend our souls, and fill our minds with sinful thoughts."

# The Parthian Shot[1]

*But the essential of religion lies elsewhere. Religion belongs primarily to the realm of action. Beliefs are not fundamentally knowledge to enrich our minds; their principal function is to give rise to acts.*

Emile Durkheim, *The Religious Problem and the Duality of Human Nature* (1913)

Commerce is the only worldwide revolutionary movement—and proves it daily. President Bush summons the *free world.* He agrees completely with my view: truly *a world* is under attack and not just the USA, and in so doing he acknowledges the existence of another world. Cover up that world, which I can't endure to look on[2]—and if you can't cover it up, then destroy it. Let's invade Iraq. Why mess around with all the riff-raff, given our megatons and especially our tactical nuclear weapons, so-far unused… How tempting. The world has become a film by Stanley Kubrick, and Iraq one by Tarantino.

There is democracy in Spain, isn't there? So why aren't the Spanish people issuing death sentences against the strategists who got them into this mess? Were those strategists expecting to go on defying the Arab nation with impunity, a nation humiliated for the past four centuries? Now, after so many centuries, we are witnessing the first victories of this old conquering nation. Further,

[1] *La Fleche du Parthe,* first posted on Voyer's site: http://perso. wanadoo.fr/leuven/ under "Le Knock-blot de Mr Ripley," March 2004.

[2] Moliere's *Le Tartuffe*: "Cover up that bosom, which I can't endure to look



horrified recuperators and vilifiers, we postulate the pathological nature of *all* character traits, i.e. of all chronicity in human behavior. What is important to us is neither the individual structure of our character nor the explanation of its formation, but *the impossibility of applying it toward the creation of situations.* Character is thus not simply an unhealthy excrescence which could be treated separately, but at the same time an individual remedy in a globally ill society, a remedy that enables us to bear the illness while aggravating it. People are to a great extent accomplices in the reigning spectacle. *Character is the form of this complicity.*

We maintain that people can dissolve their character only by contesting the entire society (this is in opposition to Reich insofar as he envisages character analysis from a specialized point of view). On the other hand, since the function of character is to accommodate us to the state of things, its dissolution is a prerequisite to the total critique of society. We must destroy this vicious circle.

Total contestation begins with the critique in acts of wage labor,[4] in accordance with a first principle beyond discussion: "Never work." The qualities of adventure absolutely essential for such an enterprise lie exclusively outside character. Character destroys those qualities. The problem of opposing the entire society is thus also the problem of dissolving character.

## 2. Its Application to the Spectacle Effect

*The truest and most important concepts of the era… are precisely marked by the organization around them of the greatest confusions and the worst misrepresentations. Vital concepts are simultaneously subject to the truest and the most false uses… because the struggle between critical reality and the apologetic spectacle leads to a struggle over words… The truth of a concept is not revealed by an authoritarian purge, but by the coherence of its use in theory and in practical life.*

[4] While Reich concluded in a very ambiguous manner that character is an

—*Internationale Situationniste* #10

**Public:** *pertaining to all the people.*
**Publicite:** *public notoriety; that which is done in the presence of the public; that which belongs to the public.*[5]

—*Dictionnaire Larousse*

The publicity of misery is inseparable from the *idea* of its suppression.[6] This is how *spirit* comes to men and women. Misery is always misery of publicity. It is thus necessary to seek the reason for the persistence of misery in that which causes the misery of publicity.

Fetishism is the misery of publicity. It is the very form of social separation. Wherever there is opposition between individuals and the totality of their interrelations, this opposition takes the form of fetishism of the totality. Opposition between the whole and individuals takes place by *means* of parts of the whole which appear to be isolated, or which maintain illusory relations with the whole and with each other.[7] Deceived consciousness is the fundamental moment of fetishism. With it, things become what they seem. The absence of consciousness takes the form of consciousness.

The fetishism of the commodity is concentrated in its value. It took Marx thousands of pages of *Capital* to get to the bottom of this fetish. It is the yoke of value that weighs down human brows,

obstacle to work, we contend that character is an obstacle to the *critique* of work.

[5] Note that this last meaning, which makes for some fundamental plays on words in the original French text, is not present in the English word "publicity." See the addendum, Discretion Is the Better Part of Value, in which the author elucidates this and some other aspects of his text. (Translator's note.)

[6] The reader will have recognized class consciousness here, and will therefore not confuse it with the spectacle of misery, which is the *advertising* version of the publicity of misery.

[7] Alas! the opposition of the whole to individuals takes place only by *means* of parts of the whole. When the opposition of individuals to the totality becomes



tors, nobody is more serious than the businessman Levy posing as one among the literati. This is why his colleagues resent him so.

*Non-World of Ephemerality*:[31] Modern slavery has lasted for two centuries and promises to go on. There is only a spectacle of ephemerality. Only the slave's satisfaction is ephemeral, and that word is too strong: it is furtive, like an American stealth bomber.

[31] Reference to the cretin Gilles Lipovetsky (the French equivalent of the cretin Alvin Toffler) author of *La nature a horreur de Lipovetsky (L'Ere du vide).*

this revolt with a profusion of false protests: the dykes, the fags, the oil crisis, unemployment, AIDS, the students and their future, the immigrants, and the film-makers.

The fact that someone like me will not ignore the existence of Bernard-Henri Levy[26] is a scandal. Levy will just have to suffer the consequences, which is the least you could expect.

M-E Nabe reproached Debord for not appearing on television. But what did Debord have to say, what did he ever have to say when he had all the time in the world to express himself? I understand why Debord didn't dare go on television, since he had nothing to say. But when one has something to say, one doesn't have to say it on television. And what did M-E Nabe have to say when he went on television: "Leon Bloy, Leon Bloy."[27] I still prefer the voice of Claudel calling out through the fog, "Verlaine."[28]

Novels always describe the impossibility of the idyllic (*In Arcadia ego*: death existed in Arcadia.)[29]

Communication has deserted life that thus becomes the everyday.

Slavery leads to mutism. A slave is someone who has no voice.

*Non-World of Frivolity*:[30] Only intellectual sluts are frivolous. There is only a spectacle of frivolity. There is nothing more serious than commerce, alas. Contrary to his despicable coconspira-

[26] From 1992 to 1997, Jean-Pierre Voyer addressed over 30 letters to Bernard-Henri Levy. All have been published in *Limites de conversation* (ibid.).

[27] Leon Bloy, 19th century maverick French author who wrote, among other works, *Histoires desobligdeantes* and a famous journal.

[28] *"Nothing but the sharp thwack of the mainsail filling with wind and the sound of a mighty bow in the foam. Nothing but a voice, almost the voice of a woman or a child, or that of an angel calling through the fog—Verlaine!"* Paul Claudel, *Le Faible Verlaine* from *Feuilles de Saints.* This calls to mind Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* or James Mason and Ava Gardner in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman.* http://www.britishpictures.com/ photos2/photo146.htm

[29] In a painting by Nicholas Poussin, Arcadian shepherds contemplate a gravestone inscribed with the words, *In Arcadia ego*—"Even in Arcadia, there am I." This is death talking.

[30] Reference to *Rideau* by M-E Nabe.



be they bourgeois, bureaucratic or proletarian. Value is the relation between two quantities. What is more bizarre than the fact that $x$ pounds of carrots are worth $y$ quarts of wine or even $z$ minutes of hairdressing? Value is the exorbitant autonomy of the commodity. It is dangerous to steal, loot or burn. It's even more dangerous to never work! Value exerts itself implacably,[8] while the deceived gaze only meets things and their prices.

In the nineteenth century, with the complete opposition between individual life and species life (everyday life versus automatic commodity circulation), all hopes were allowed (those of Hegel, those of Marx). At that stage things were clear: everyday life was *nothing,* circulation was *everything.* The nothingness of everyday life was a *visible* moment of the all-encompassing circulation. Fetishism scarcely deceived anyone but the ruling class and its toadies. Several times the proletariat launched an assault on the totality, and the publicity of misery came very close to triumphing over the misery of publicity.

Today things have changed considerably. The modernization of the struggles of the oppressed, and above all their incompletion, have brought about the rapid modernization of fetishism by the ruling class and its state since 1930. The rise of *scientific fetishism* was striking: Bolshevism, National Socialism and the New Deal appeared almost simultaneously. This modernization consisted essentially of *depriving* everyday life of what was left to it: its negativity, i.e. the publicity of its misery, the publicity of its nullity. The secret of the misery of everyday life is the real state secret. It is the keystone completing the edifice of separation, which is also the edifice of the state.

The spectacle—the scientific development of fetishism—is simply the private property of the means of publicity, the state

"total," things become totally clear.

[8] The worker has the same advantage over the rich as the slave over the master. The slave knows fear; the worker, a living commodity, knows value.

monopoly of appearances. With it, only the circulation of commodities remains public. The spectacle is nothing but commodity circulation absorbing all available means of publicity, thus condemning misery to invisibility. The spectacle is the secret form of public misery, where value operates implacably while the deceived gaze only meets things and their use.

In the imperialist publicity of commodity circulation, value never appears. This is the spectacle of the invisibility of value. This "natural" invisibility constitutes the fundamentally spectaclist tendency of circulation which the bourgeoisie has exploited in the scientific development of fetishism. As long as value does not become public in a different way, circulation is able to appear as a carnival of use (principally the use of money, needless to say). It is thus easy to understand the entrancement of the spectator confronted daily by value. This is the spectacle effect. It forestalls all ideas; everything seems accomplished. It forbids all recognition; the miserable being sees himself as alone in his misery. Money itself appears as the instrument of the abolition of value—the peak of inversion. As a result of all this, spirit does not come to men nor (what is even more regrettable) to women.

From his front row seat, Wilhelm Reich couldn't help being struck by the role played by character as anti-individual structure in the magnificent Nazi spectacle.[9] He leaves the farcical question "Why do workers revolt?" to the psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, sociologists, and other servants of the spectacle, in order to pose the fundamental question: "Why don't they revolt?"[10] He attributes

[9] See *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* 1933 (year first published in German) (Noonday, 1971) and *What Is Class Consciousness?* 1934 (in *Sex-Pol*, Vintage, 1972). In this latter small work Reich attains the height of Leninist naivete. Despite his denials, he extols specialized historical know-ledge to the extreme. There is even a curious foreshadowing of the Maoist conception of education as a spectacle of misery.

[10] "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," 1929 (in *Sex-Pol*). Mass Psychology and Dialectical Materialism are both indelibly marred by a mechanistic conception of instincts.



wanting. Each person is unique, except that they don't know it or don't want to know it. On the other hand, people know very well how the guardians of the wall live and what they want. And if they don't, then they have to find out. If the word "spectacle" has any sense that is not trivial, that is not the trivial sense spectacle = television, spectacle = media, it is really that this so-called disgusting sluggishness is a pure spectacle. But "spectacle" is too big a word where "propaganda" suffices completely. That fat man up there on the stage, who suffers from corns and whose stomach is hideously distended by the painful digestion of a copious plate of duck confit accompanied by potatoes sauteed in goose fat and chased down by a bottle and a half of Madiran, is evidently not Hamlet, but everyone sees Hamlet. That is a spectacle. One can easily perceive when watching "The Price Is Right" or "The Wheel of Fortune" an underlying tragedy no different from that of Eschylus' *Persus*: tragedy in the losers' camp.

According to M-E Nabe, an anarchist in 1900 could easily explain why a priest was a son of a bitch. A wretched of the earth in 1936 could easily explain how capitalism exploited him. Big deal. What good did it do them? On the contrary, I think their reasoning was fallacious. How can a true thought be defeated? How could you prevent the atomic bomb from existing, and above all from being detonated, after the Schrodinger equation was not only posed but solved? The world is eager for thought; the propagation of thought has not posed and will never pose any difficulty. The only difficulty is that of its existence. Should it take the trouble to exist, the rest will take care of itself. Today a slave does not know that he is a slave, or he tries not to know it, or he knows it and says nothing. Today those who suffer do not know why they suffer. Excellent, this is real progress. At least they don't put forth a series of false reasons that have clearly proved to be inane and imbecilic. The great multinational revolt of 1968 exploded in a perfect silence of false reasons. Finally, everything happens for the best in the best of worlds. The counter-offensive has precisely consisted in opposing

## The Disgusting Sluggishness of Souls[21]

If there is a spectacle, it is only a spectacle of disgusting sluggishness with runny Camembert,[22] shriveled Vacherin[23] and foreskin thought.[24] Just as one swallow doesn't bring on spring, an intellectual slut doesn't bring on misery. The spectacle is only the spectacle of the idiots who talk about it. All this is just blah-blah but, even so, this society is not the society of blah-blah. Likewise, the great number of intellectual sluts doesn't mean that this society is the society of intellectual sluts. There were as many intellectual sluts in Balzac's time, I presume. Stendhal, attending a meeting of the *Institut*,[25] stated that the illustrious mathematician Cauchy was a major idiot! True, he said it in English. He didn't dare be so direct in French.

Since the middle of the 70s, no disgusting sluggishness has descended on us. The whole world wants to move, and those who approach the super wall that blocks the road to real life are filled with enthusiasm by its thickness and the hilarious vileness of the sentinels who guard it.

The wall's thickness guarantees the exalting grandeur of what is at stake. When Parmentier wanted the Parisians to stop slighting his potatoes, he put guards around the plot on the Monceau plain where he grew them, but only during the day. The Parisians then promptly went out and stole them at night. Another reason I became so enthusiastic about the Situationists was their assertion that nobody knew how people live, beginning with the police, and that one could not prejudge what people were capable of doing or

the term "anti-matter" and his ocean is an ocean of anti-matter. Today we call it a quantum vacuum.

[21] Ironic allusion to Milan Kundera's "The Unbearable Lightness of Being."

[22] Pascal Bruckner, a so-called "new philosopher."

[23] Andre Glucksmann, a so-called "new philosopher."

[24] Pensee prepuce = a so-called thought of a so-called "new philosopher." Allusion to a work by Derrida.

[25] Science Academy founded by Louis XIV.



their submission to the crushing of the individual by character. This is hardly contestable. Necessary but insufficient. To say that this society hasn't got an intrinsically spectaclist tendency would amount to saying that the spectacle is the creation of the ruling class alone. That would be giving them too much credit! We know that the ruling class is the chief victim of its own illusions. It follows the trend.

We have already demonstrated the rationale of this tendency. Character is nevertheless undeniably real. It can be clinically detected. We now have to determine exactly what is analyzed in character analysis, once its insufficiency as a separate notion is recognized. As a separate notion it is nothing but one more fetish.

Our thesis is as follows. The quantitative reigns. All human relations are governed by the relation of quantity to quantity, though they appear as purely human relations—the deceived gaze only meets things and their prices. We have briefly reviewed the spontaneously spectaclist effect of the "natural" invisibility of value. For all that, value never ceases to be lived by each person as the inescapable necessity of his daily life. We have seen that this *lived secret* fulfilled the spectaclist tendency of commodity circulation. What is it that Reich clinically detects which he labels "character"? We contend that it is *value,* as inhuman necessity and otherwise invisible, that is grasped by this approach. It is even, up till now, the only concrete way of approaching value as secret misery of individuality. Under this form Reich tracked down *the unconscious,* its misery and its miserable repressive maneuvers, which only draw their force and their magical pomp from the dominion of value over everyday life. Because human relations have been globally socialized *exclusively* in terms of value, which is their *negation,* authentic human relations, validated by pleasure, are preserved[11] within this socialization as *natural relations* (and thus illicit and clandestine ones), since all sociality, all humanity, is occupied (in the colonial-

[11] According to the principle: "That which is not superseded rots; that which rots incites to supersession" (Vaneigem).

ist sense) by value, the only officially validated socialization. Whatever tends to escape the law of value thus takes the form of the *natural*, i.e. that which *by definition* escapes the mastery of humanity.

In his third Philosophical Manuscript, Marx measures the humanity of man, his socialization, by the degree of socialization of that "immediate, natural, and necessary" human relationship: the relationship between man and woman. Value as universal socialization, as sole and inverted form of humanity, is also in fact the impossibility of socializing this relationship; which relationship *remains,* therefore, the "most natural," that is to say the most frustrated by the reigning social organization. Within a world of universal socialization by value, this naturalness becomes increasingly equivalent to its degree of decay,[12] just as the degree of naturalness of the Nambikwara Indians within our civilization tends to equal the degree of their extermination. This degree of decay—psychosis, neurosis, character—as index of the nonsocialization and nonhumanity of man, is the *real* object of psychoanalysis. That old swine Freud went so far as to identify naturalness with "savagery," and value-inverted socialization with "civilization." Psychoanalysis was and will remain the paleontology of this prehistory.

We support our thesis, still purely theoretical, with the following clinical observation: If, for one reason or another, an individual's character is dissolved, the phenomenal spectacular form of the totality is dissolved in its pretension to pass for the absence of value. Thus we have established, negatively for the moment, an identity between character and the spectacle effect. Whether the subject sinks into madness, practices theory, or participates in an uprising, we have ascertained that the two poles of daily life—contact with a narrow and separate reality on one hand and spectacular contact with the totality on the other—are simultaneously abolished, opening the way for that unity of individual life that Reich unfortunately labels "genitality." (We prefer *individuality.*)

[12] 1968 has provided us with abundant and most diverse data.



ingly reintroduces the need for the observer. In a way, experience is opposed to "the final solution" for the observer. OBserver: an observer with a large ZOB.[18] Many people would like to put an end to the observer. (Isn't the literary ideal that of the observer?) Wasn't Proust the prince of observers? Godel's theorem, and also quantum mechanics, prohibits trying to do without the observer. Godel showed that in arithmetic one could at any moment ask and even demand that the observer introduce a new axiom so that an otherwise undecideable proposition can be decided. Arithmetic is not complete, it needs an observer. So arithmetic is an experimental science! Neils Bohr commanded: "Thou shalt not speak of the atomic world in-itself, in classical terms thou shalt describe reality." There is no such thing as a quantum concept, there is no such thing as a quantum object. In classical terms? These are pretty much the same as those used in television shows such as "The Price Is Right" or "The Wheel of Fortune," everyday terms used by everybody, the terms of the representable. Each time I watch these television game shows, I hear people use words such as waves and particles, which are classical terms.[19]

One of the reasons that I was enthusiastic about discovering the Situationists in 1966 was that they seemed to favor the point of view of the observer. Alas, as their history unfolded, it became clear that that was only an illusion, that like nature in the 18th century, they abhorred a void. Thought is indeed the activity of that which does not exist within that which exists. Nature in the 20th century has truly changed since Dirac's[20] ocean (Oh, old ocean!); it is a century that loves quantum fluctuations.

[18] *Observateur : un observateur avec un gros OB…* By emphasizing the liaison you produce the word "zob," is colloquial French for a man's cock.

[19] An allusion to Niels Bohr's interpretation of quantum mechanics. He insisted that one had to speak of the results of quantum mechanics in classical terms, which necessitated paying strict attention to the meaning of these terms. For Bohr there is no such thing as a quantum *object.*

[20] P.A.M. Dirac, famous author of *Quantum Mechanics, PUF.* Dirac coined

effect just because it is only an idea. When Hitler or Himmler stated "All the Jews must be gassed," though "all the Jews" doesn't exist, "Jews" were gassed nonetheless. This example gives us a sense of the fearsome power of ideas. In contrast, the Alps exist, Hegel himself was forced to admit it, or so they say. But apart from burying a few ski bums under an avalanche or two, they never harm anyone. In general, the power of ideas is bad; it's probably the famous "negative" that Hegel constantly discusses. Socrates' fellow citizens got it right. This is why thought worthy of its name is bad (negative), and it is almost a pleonasm to say a "bad thought" and an oxymoron to say a "good thought."

In this orgy of things that don't exist, it seems to me that it would be comforting if I could cite something that does exist and that can be named. Even if the population doesn't exist, the nation does. It manifests itself in each of us at every moment whether we are thinking of it or not. And it crops up as well in those *reality shows* where some specimen of Frenchman, usually the "hunting and fishing" type, acts out for the television cameras a modestly heroic episode of his life. Certainly, it is not Valmy,[17] yet the nation is tangible. It is equally tangible—and tragic— in those American sitcoms like "The Joe Blow Family." On this point Marx lost out to Hegel: the spirit of a people is the immediate actuality; even in an American sitcom the Volksgeist manifests itself.

Thanks to the history of mathematics, we know what troubles the sets approach led to. For instance, it drove Cantor mad but it also led to the facetious theorem of Godel, who died mad as well. (Godel, like Howard Hughes, refused to eat, fearing food poisoning. As for Turing, you can choose: either he was assassinated by the English secret service, or he committed suicide, or he accidentally poisoned himself with cyanide). All classical thought strives to eliminate the observer. But experience constantly and unceas-

[17] Crucial 1793 French Revolutionary battle where France defeated the rest of Europe.



The works of Reich are the first since Marx to concretely shed light on alienation. The theory of the spectacle is the first theory since Marx that aims explicitly at being a theory of alienation. The synthesis of these two methods leads to some immediate consequences that we will develop in our forthcoming work.

First of all, we maintain that the practice of theory is inseparable from what Reich referred to as "genitality." Theory becomes continuous knowledge of secret misery, of the secret of misery. It is thus also in itself the end of the spectacle effect. Since the spectacle is the secret form of public misery, its effect ceases when the secrecy ceases. Its effect lies in its secrecy. Thus theory becomes increasingly identical to lived possibility (as opposed to probability, which is lived as doubt or indifference). Theory is *life* when everything is possible. It ceases to exist the moment it makes a mistake, and finds itself thrown back into boredom, into the spectacle effect. Real theory thus can't go wrong. It is a subject devoid of error. Nothing deceives it. The totality is its sole object. Theory knows misery as secretly public. It knows the secret publicity of misery. All hopes are permitted to it. Class struggle exists.

The spectacle is the absence of spirit. Character is the absence of theory.

The proletariat will be visible or it will be nothing. The proletariat *lives* in its own visibility. The organization of the proletariat is the organization of its visibility. The global practice of the proletariat will be its *permanent publicity* or nothing. Hitler, the Leninists and the Maoists understood this so well that they organized the visibility of the proletariat *by force.* A more ambitious capitalism wishes to realize the visibility of the *abolished* proletariat.

By itself, the visibility of misery is not the proletariat. Necessary but insufficient. The proletariat requires that the visibility of misery be public. The critique must be at once theory of publicity (of visibility) and publicity (visibility) of theory. Its aim must be *to ensure its own publicity.* It is when it's public that it doesn't go wrong. It is *not* the theory of publicity if it doesn't ensure its

own publicity. Indeed, it is the height of absurdity for a theorist of publicity not to be able to ensure the publicity of his theory.

The proletariat is the finally realized unity of the theory of publicity and the publicity of theory.

We think these insights are superior to everything that a Lukacs was able to say about class consciousness. They certainly have the advantage of brevity. As the ad men know, brevity is essential in publicity. ("Are you man enough for Granny Goose Potato Chips?"—one could not be briefer in contempt.) What they cannot imagine is that publicity will be even briefer at the moment of a Strasbourg of the factories. Visibility will flash like lightning, fire like a gun and rise like the sun, or it will not be.

For the moment our formulas may have only brevity in their favor. It may perhaps be necessary to introduce into them the concepts "Granny Goose" or "Potato Chips" in order for them to know their total clarity. A day will soon come when all the potato chips of the earth will no longer be able to smother the meeting of the theory of publicity and the publicity of theory.

Jean-Pierre Voyer's *Reich, mode d'emploi* was published as a pamphlet and a poster by Editions Champ Libre (Paris, 1971) and was translated by Ken Knabb in 1973.



## It's Crazy How Many Things Don't Exist

Elsewhere I wrote that the role of thought was not to say what *should* be, but more modestly to say what *is*. I now realize that even that was enormously presumptuous. The role of thought is not to say what is, but what *is not*. And this task is immense, so numerous are the things that do not exist but which nevertheless are talked about, in total mutism, day in and day out. Thus "the population," "all the inhabitants," "all the animals," "the economy." The population and all the animals are mathematical entities. The economy isn't even that, it's just a word devoid of meaning. Debord explicitly claimed to make a critique of the economy. But given that his aim was to make a critique of something that does not exist, it is hardly surprising that his critique did not exist either. That's the very least one could expect. The society of the spectacle doesn't exist any more than does the economy. And it is just as impossible to make a critique of the society of the spectacle as it is of the economy. I already wrote elsewhere that the critique of phlogistics is the discovery of oxygen and napalm. As Engels was fond of saying, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

In a famous passage of the *Grundrisse,* Marx says that at first sight it seems that the study of reality should start with the population. The population seems to be the immediate actuality that one encounters at first. But he shows that it is nothing like that. The population does not exist, or when it does, it is only as a mathematical entity. One is tempted to say that it is very simple, that "the population" is a set of all the inhabitants of a city, region or country. But a set of inhabitants is a mathematical entity that only exists in thought. It is only an idea, and if such a set exists, it exists only as an idea. Something exists, however, notably the city, but not the population or all the inhabitants.

Similarly, "all the animals" doesn't exist. It exists only as an idea. One can legitimately say that "animals exist," but not "all the animals." This does not mean that the idea "all the animals" is without

which is to say stay-at-home traffic jams. ATM[15] and fiber optics won't change a thing. Despite ever longer and wider freeways, traffic jams continue unabated. Telecommunication can never hope to replace communication.

More generally, I think that this world has been completely immobile for the last two centuries. In his amusing dictionary of literature, Edern Hallier[16] says that this world was created by Balzac, who thus is God. Indeed, nothing has changed since Balzac's time, except for the fact that in France the struggle for political power has become pointless since the fall of Napoleon III, given that this power is definitively under the control of business if not directly in its hands (so business has hands, invisible ones at that!). It was not Baudrillard who said that nowadays we no longer have craftsmanship, just products. It was Balzac in 1840.

For the last two centuries slaves have gone more or less docilely to their factories and offices, and it isn't the media or television that has pushed them there. The difference today is that slaves are motorized. And the journalists that Balzac depicted are the same as can be seen today. He even noted their passion for making puns. Today all they have left are puns. The brilliant Parisian life of 1840 is gone. Mutism has spread ever since.

Just as the circus occupied the idle plebian, automobiles and television occupy the needy slave during the six hours per day fallaciously known as free time. It is entirely possible that the effect of television on slaves is not exclusively harmful. Marx said that "city air" was liberating. I would be tempted to say that television is liberating: it replaces the local form of degradation with a universal one, so that modern slaves are as degraded in Charente as they are in Texas. Clearly, that's progress. Even the universal must progress through its bad side, as must everything, if Hegel is right.

[15] Asynchronous Transfer Mode http://www.cid.alcatel.com/ doctypes/techprimer/keywords/popup.html

[16] Edern Hallier, controversial French writer and owner of the magazine *l'Idiot international.*



# Non-Well-Founded Set Theory: Putting an End to Marx's Reductionism

Jon Barwise and Lawrence Moss, professors of Computer Science and Mathematics at Indiana University: *Vicious Circles: On the Mathematics of Non-Well-Founded Phenomena*, CSLI, 1996, Stanford University. Written as a book to learn from, in very basic English… The text is suitable for use in a classroom, seminar, or for individual study.

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Provides all you need in order to prove that

1) Brigitte Bardot is an institution whose Barwisean formulation is: *It is well known that Brigitte Bardot is well known;*[(1)]

2) money is an institution: *It is well known that the power of money is well known*;

3) Brigitte Bardot and money are institutions of the same type. What is admirable in the "money" institution and the "Brigitte" institution is the universal become effective—the universal that acts and constrains, the universal endowed with effectiveness.

It seems that there is a mathematic of concrete totalities known as Non-Well-Founded Set Theory. Such sets, which therefore are no longer sets (they are hypersets), allow forms of circularity such

[(1)] This formulation was originated by Boorstin in 1961. A joker whose name I've forgot even said, "He was known above all for his notoriety."

as: the fact that a situation is of public notoriety is part of the situation itself. (Jacques Dubucs, *Pour la Science*, dossier No. 49, Oct.-Dec. 2005). This is simply the negation of Marx's reductionism. The public notoriety of situation is the reflection of the situation into itself. The situation is endowed with an interior. This interior is infinite. Heil Hegel! Such a situation is infinite in the Hegelian sense because it posited itself. Concrete totalities are concrete because they contain the negative as appearance. The totality suppresses itself as appearance in the direction of the immediateness of its elements—immediateness that *ipso facto* is suppressed (the immediateness, not the individual, do not confuse Hegel with Goebbels). X is famous because everybody knows that everybody knows X's name, as opposed to knowing X personally, as Marcel would say (*Proust*, Descombes, 1987). X would not be famous if everybody knew X without knowing that each of them, that is to say all of them, knows his name, in other words without knowing that everyone knows the situation: The universality of knowledge must itself be universally known in order to be effectively universal (that is to say, to act and constrain, to be a subject). Heil Hegel! This is no more and no less than the negation of Marx's reductionism. It is the reflection of universality into itself: the universality of an item of knowledge must itself be universally known to become effectively—as Hegel would say—universal, that is to say to become substance. Beautiful, isn't it? The universal does not become effectively universal until it knows that it is. Heil Hegel! Famous people are famous because they are famous. (Already in 1961 Boorstin pointed out in *The Image* that a famous man is famous because he "is known for his well-knownness." Boorstin already sensed what Barwise would later develop. The power of money rests on such circularity: Everybody knows that everybody knows that everybody puts their trust in money and only in money. Who institutionalized this powerful institution? Nobody. It institutionalized itself. Such a situation is therefore infinite in the Hegelian sense because it posited itself. And then the instituted became the "institution-



who is using this term to understand. Since when does intellectual submission speak the truth? Or if you prefer, if intellectual submission says so, it's a lie. By using the term spectacle as if it were common knowledge and an accepted fact, M-E Nabe participates in this process of deceit. In spite of his denials and insults, he is a sycophant and a victim of Debord. He authenticates Debord's deception by affirming the existence of a society of the spectacle.

Actually, the spectacle in its ordinary sense doesn't bother me at all. Who does it bother, really? I don't watch television or read the newspapers. I don't read inept books published by imbeciles. It is a pleasure for me to insult Mr. Levy. Meanwhile, nobody can escape the stubborn mutism of this world, not even the rich and powerful.

I knew this world well in 1958, a time when television was barely around and only a few years before the Situationists put forth the term "commodity spectacle" (1962), and I see no change since then, except for the development of television, which is a phenomenon of no particular importance. Actually, Debord liked referring to film as "this little industry." What is new today is that the blue-collar slaves are less numerous while the office worker slaves (a particularly despicable species, Dr. Freud's clients) have become more numerous. And this world's stubborn mutism keeps growing. Already before 1930 Musil and Broch meticulously documented the relationship between commerce and mutism. Mutism weighs down more heavily in a society filled mainly with office workers than when it was populated mostly by blue-collar workers, who were more "outspoken" as they used to say. Office workers are a particularly disgusting species of slaves. At night, as we all know, they metamorphose into beetles, and their first thought in the morning is to figure out how to get back to the office. It appears that the problem will soon be solved and that the beetles will be able to stay home all day. The Internet is truly an information highway,

## The World of Silence

This world is no more an immense accumulation of spectacles than Rome was an immense accumulation of circuses or an immense accumulation of dead gladiators. This world is teeming with slaves. Our society is one of mutism. Herman Broch[14] understood this mutism to be one of values. There's no need to go so deep: just plain mutism—fiercely stubborn mutism—despite the constant jabber on radio and television. Actually, Broch spoke of a deafening mutism. All the radio and television jabber is to drown out this deafening mutism. Silence is dangerous. This world requires noise for selfpreservation. Intellectual submission is paid to produce this noise.

It is an error to believe, as M-E Nabe does, that mutism is caused by radio and television blah-blah. It's just the opposite. Television and the mass media result from mutism. As do all parasites, the media require favorable conditions in which to develop. Mutism is their turf; it has existed for two centuries. (Broch wrote in 1930). Media blabbermouths can ply their trade only because mutism has reigned for two centuries. But let mutism cease for a while, as it did in 1968, and all the jabberers are reduced to complete silence. What causes mutism? In this world, "money is the true community" (Marx, 1857).

Just as the circus in Rome testified to the degradation of the plebs (the vile multitudes) and of their masters as well, television testifies to the degradation of modern slaves and of their masters. A study of television can provide useful information regarding the degradation of modern slaves, but nothing more. One cannot base a general critique of society on it. And the simple fact of pretending that you can characterize society through the concept of the spectacle, understood as television, is to promote a lie aimed at obscuring the true nature of this society. You only have to consider

[14] Herman Broch, Austrian author who was a contemporary of Musil.



alizer", what the savages refer to by saying, "Thus it has always been". The situation of public notoriety has become subject. Heil Hegel! That is what I called, for lack of a better word, "publicity" in my *Reich, How to Use* in 1971. Publicity is none other than the universal notoriety of a situation, that is to say the reflection of a situation into itself. It is the situation itself that is public, universal knowledge. To extrapolate: the world is knowledge; the world is of public notoriety. All ends up happening. I suppose that this is what Durkheim called "to examine, someday in the future, things from within." These concrete totalities possess considerable power—"the pure negativity of the reflection of the essence into itself, or the power of substance". This is the reason why people passively obey. The knowledge of this reason can allow them, not to cease obeying, but to cease obeying passively in order to obey freely and at last to build their towns in the country, as did the ancient Greeks. The power of substance consists in the totality of this negativity (Encyclopedie, § 109, 1917). There was a time when I thought that Debord was dealing with this question in his famous book. I thought that what Debord was dealing with under the name of "spectacle" was perhaps this "showing within itself" of the situation. It was nothing of the sort; Debord was only a pretentious imbecile who believed for a time that he could intimidate me. When I was talking with him about those subjects (the reflection of the situation into itself) in 1976, just after the publication of my *"Inquiry"*[1], he asked me after 10 minutes: "Are you taking me for an imbecile?" I should have. And so, it is computer science that first brought me fortune—Oh! The binary language of computers! Haven't we heard enough of that, poor idiot?—and then *American* professors of theoretical computer science that brought me the knowledge that I need. There you have the state of debate in the Situationist International, those

[1] *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Misery of the People*, yet to be published in English. Original title: *Une Enquete sur la nature et les causes de la misere des gens*, Paris 1976.

people who claimed to debate everything debatable, a claim that, precisely, had attracted me to them but turned out to be pure bragging, as the future would show.

Already in 1999, "the philosopher David Lewis uncovered a deep source or circularity in human affairs [I would say "Humean affairs"] described in his famous study of convention": *Convention, A Philosophical Study*. What a waste of time. In 1969 I was reading Debord's baloney. Nevertheless, in 1971, in my *Reich, How to Use*, it was indeed *public knowledge*[2] that I had my sights on. Contrary to Marx, Hegel also addresses the notion of *public knowledge*. With Marx the notion of *knowledge, public or not,* completely disappeared; *knowledge* has become an insignificant superstructure. Althusser! Ha, ha!

[2] In English in the original French text.



when she detects a society of the spectacle? Does she wet her LICRA[13] pants?)

The media occupy a void, the void left by the estrangement of communication. The more this void grows, the more the media expand. Just as the Scholastic nature abhors a void, so too does modern society. In a void one could hear oneself think. There's no doubt then that the media stupefies. Unable to hear themselves think, people believe that they're stupid. But this is not what makes them obedient. It is not the media that subjugates slaves. They are delivered to the media, bound hand and foot. It is not because slaves watch television that they are slaves; it is because they are slaves that they watch television. And television is what it is because it is made for slaves, just as everything else in this world. What is shameful is not watching television, but being a slave.

The only illusion in capitalist society is the apparent freedom of its slaves. The only spectacle is that of the freedom of its slaves, an illusion owing to the endless wandering of *the lonely crowd*. This freedom to come and go is necessary to elicit submission from the whip of the paycheck. This submission is impossible without this freedom. It's what the merchants wanted and what they got through their various revolutions *(habeas corpus)*. The freedom to come and go is the only freedom that modern slaves have: they are free to submit any place they choose. And yet even this is an illusion, for no matter where they are, what they do or where they go, they are subjugated—*already*. But no longer seeing what oppresses them, they believe that they're free. This is the opposite of a spectacle: when one looks at history too close-up, one sees precisely nothing. (Musil)

[13] LICRA: acronym of the French anti-defamation group *Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisemitisme* (International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism).

December 3, 1994 issue of *Le Monde,* Roger-Pol Droit[11] chimes in with his "consumption of images," "the sweet tyranny of images." He would so love to obey only images, he who obeys everything else. Slaves do not consume images. Like all slaves and all the Roger-Pol Droits, they obey. This world is not under the control of sweet images, it is not dominated by the media. This can be easily seen when an employee of a national television network earning $15,000 per month gets kicked out on his butt. Television networks don't dominate the world; money dominates television networks. If the media spectacle contains all the evil in this world, it is therefore intellectual submission that creates all this evil. It naively brags about what it has done, like Nietzsche in Venice— "It is I who have created all this evil, do you like it?" It also presents itself logically as the only one qualified to solve the problem, like the super-moron medialogue Regis Debray. The society of the spectacle is nothing but a rattle that all the radio and television blabbermouths shake about. This rattle has been custom-crafted for a clear purpose by a gifted artisan. The society of the spectacle is the cliche of all cliches, the cream tart of all cream tarts. Intellectual submission doesn't think, that is what characterizes it. But not content with not thinking, intellectual submission considers it appropriate to broadcast that fact. Even Madame Levy[12] gives us her take on the subject in the April 19, 1995 issue of *Le Monde.* "*We have become the super sensitive detectors of the society of the spectacle taken to its extreme.*" (She is careful not to address the questions that really interest us: Can light be seen between her thighs—yes or no? What color are her panties? What happens

[11] Roger-Pol Droit, heavyweight journalo-whore writing for *Le Monde.*

[12] Arielle Dombasle, French film star whose picture graces Jean-Pierre Voyer's website. She is also the wife of Bernard-Henri Levy, who was a founding member of the "new philosophers" movement in the 80s and who continues to be a celebrated *poseur* and distinguished beneficiary of many thoughtful letters written to him by Voyer.



# The Economy is Only an Ideology in Marx's Sense

First Published in France in 1979 as chapter 4 of the *Report on the State of Illusions in Our Party Followed by Revelations Concerning the Principle of the World*

The most crudely false aspect of Marx's theory resides in his so-called critique of economics where, in the guise of a critic, he incessantly upholds the viewpoint of economics itself. And one hundred years after his death, this enormous as well as his most fundamental error has still not been exposed.

To be sure, Marx's bourgeois and bureaucratic enemies were not about to expose his error. They were not going to divulge the fact that their own theory of the world was present in Marx's writings! Quite the contrary, after offering purely perfunctory resistance to his ideas, they came out enthusiastically in favor of his «critique» of economics. Support from those people should have sufficed to alert the real enemies of this world and of its dominant theories that something was amiss. It is this element of Marx's theory that has attracted approving responses from conformist pundits, social-democrat professors and Stalinist torturers. It is this aspect of his theory that has been praised by all such scumbags as being a permanent and inalienable asset of the social sciences—and so on and so forth. What bullshit did Marx come up with that a pack of bourgeois, social-democratic, Stalinist and technocratic scumbags should lavish such praise on his «critique» of economics? What kind of bullshit does this «critique» harbor when on this point, and on this point only, a Guy Debord takes the same position and

says the same thing, though in the service of a different goal, as the living fossils Mandel, Mendel, Fossaert, Fourastie, etc.?

Economics is only a theory of the world. It is the dominant theory of the world today and today only, in the modern world, since it is this world that created it expressly for that purpose. The economy (the so-called object of economics) is only a thought and exists in no other form in this world, plays no other role in this world than as a simple thought. It is a pure Weltanschauung, a pure vision of the world, precisely one of those celebrated objects of contempt for «materialists.» And when it acts in the world, when it produces effects in the world, it only acts in the way thoughts and visions act, nothing more. It produces the effects that thoughts and visions produce, nothing more. The economy is only an ideology in Marx's sense.

Now, Marx, but also the Situationists after him, considered the economy to be a moment of the world—something other than a pure thought (a thought, however pure, is nonetheless a moment of the world). And Marx, as well as the Situationists, adopted all of the assumptions of the economy, beginning with the one concerning the very nature of the economy. One could even say that Marx was the fatal inventor of this assumption.

According to Marx and the Situationists, the *economy*, on one hand, is a real moment of the world, different from pure thought, while *economics*, on the other, is the theory, the thought of this real moment. According to them, the «economy» designates a moment of the world and economics the theory of this moment (this theory in any case being—we will never stop repeating—also a practical moment of the world as theory). According to them, economics is the dominant theory of the «economy» taken as a real moment of the world different from a pure thought. According to them, economics is the dominant theory of the economy. This is all pure nonsense because in reality the economy is not a real moment of the world, except as pure thought, while economics is only the dominant theory, the dominant lie about the true nature of the world,



changed, but society. And—why not—let's dissolve this society and elect another one!

Debord didn't like talking about these things. We met frequently over several years. The one and only time I tried discussing these issues with him, after ten minutes he interrupted me brusquely saying, "Do you think I'm an imbecile?" I should have thought so. Despite all of his pretensions, because of them in fact, he was incapable of conceiving of a meaning for the term spectacle that was not trivial.

So it is not surprising that intellectual submission stampedes in lock step (though warily) toward a thought that is a non-thought (and, as such, was intended for it), since thought worthy of the name has the same effect on intellectual submission as garlic or a crucifix has on a vampire. This trivial meaning of the spectacle is very pleasing to the intellectually submissive, because their submission is—without exception— employed in the aforementioned spectacle, thereby lending unwarranted importance to their work. They dream of being more harmful than they are. M-E Nabe doesn't understand this when he scolds them for spitting in the soup. He doesn't see that when the intellectually submissive appear to be attacking the spectacle, all that they're really doing is shining the spotlight on their own dreary lives and making themselves the center of attention—which is all they care about anyway. Thus in the December 6, 1994 issue of *Liberation,* the Italian Freccero, Berlusconi's ex-advisor and an advisor to Elkabbash,[10] maintains that the world is dominated by the media. This is his fondest dream. All cobblers would like to see the world dominated by leather, the ironmongers by iron, the electronic engineers by electronics—it goes without saying, everyone thinks it's noon according to their own watch. *Up yours! Italian asshole with your "spectacularization of commodities"!* In the

[10] Jean-Pierre Elkabbash, conducted a well-known interview with Mitterand. Currently president of a major French television network.

of *Actuel*[7] in the company of the statesman Mitterrand)— *"This is the opposite of the kind of disease one could contract through a single, regrettably imprudent act. On the contrary, the loyal intransigence of a lifetime is required."* Did you see me in my beautiful disease? How hip. This is not like the homos who get AIDS because they screwed without condoms. How vulgar. Is there no place left untouched by vanity? A footstool here, polyneuritis there. By his own admission Debord spent his life trying to be hip. But the extreme thinker (the bungee thinker) must share the obituary pages of *Liberation* with Loulou Gaste,[8] the unforgettable author of *My Cottage in Champot*. That's hipness for you. The extreme thinker who was very much into his deviant lifestyle and friends is now the prey of a herd of high school readers of *Liberation-Chargeurs.*[9] Shame comes not from being recognized or, as M-E Nabe incorrectly thinks, from desiring recognition (doesn't M-E Nabe just itch to be recognized?), but rather from being recognized by these particular people and only these people, after having pretended to disdain them as well as three generations of Gallimards, statesmen, and the whole political scene. The great drinker put water in his wine.

While mathematicians still don't know exactly how to solve the problem of three bodies, Sir Guy Debord claims to have produced *the exact theory of society*. Unfortunately, this exact theory has no known effect other than to impassion intellectual submission. Here, then, is an example of exact thought with zero effect. It's enough to make one lose faith in exactitude. This kind of thing would have troubled the engineer Musil, he who was so wrapped up in literary exactitude. And—don't forget—it's not theory that has to be

*Son Temps* http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/reviews/ aug2000/ bk_DEBORD_cox.html

[7] *Actuel*—hip weekly. Stupid and trendy.

[8] Loulou Gaste, songwriter and husband of Line Renaud, a well-known cabaret singer who performed in Las Vegas for many years.

[9] *Liberation-Chargeurs: Liberation* was saved from bankruptcy by being acquired by the "Chargeurs Reunis" shipping company.



about the central part of the world, about what is real and active in the world.

However, economics is also—in a manner completely different from that conceived of by Marx and the Situationists—the dominant theory of the economy because economics**,** being a lie about the true nature of the world, like any self-respecting lie, it is first a lie about its own lying nature. And economics is *also* the dominant theory of *economics*, the dominant theory of the dominant theory, the dominant lie about the dominant lie. It is primarily with Marx that economics became *first of all* a theory that holds the «economy» to be the central part of the world and of society, the concrete basis of society and not just a pure thought, a pure theory of the world. Marx, who took ideas for something other than ideas, thought he was right in attacking Hegel for his frantic idealism, but Marx always forgot to criticize his own. Hegel saw ideas everywhere— and we will show that he was not all that wrong— while Marx did not see an idea where one needed to be seen.

Recently, Rafael Pallais in his *Incitation to Refute the Third World* wrote, *«the basis of history is not the economy, whatever Marxist ideologues say.»* But Pallais does not understand that if the economy is not the basis of history, it does not play any secondary role either. Pallais acknowledges that the economy does not play a central role in society, but allows that it plays a secondary role as «*a particular, determined, specific mode of alienation.*» However, the economy is not even that. It is purely a dominant idea about the world, about alienation. In this sense one can nonetheless say that it is a particular mode of alienation, but not in the sense that Pallais means. A false and deceitful thought like the dominant thought, like the economy, is indeed a particular mode of alienation, a particular mode of stupidity. Nothing more.

The economy is not, as Debord so unthinkingly wrote in *The Society of the Spectacle, «this central part of social life»* (thesis 123) or the *«material basis of social life»* (thesis 41), but only the illusory object of this world's dominant theory as regards this central

element. The central element of social life — and not only central but peripheral as well, everywhere and all the time—is *communication.* The present form of the central element of social life, the form of communication that dominates today, is the *commodity*. Economics is only the dominant theory of the mode of communication that dominates today. Economics is only the dominant theory of the commodity.

Marx and the Situationists always criticized economics as the dominant theory of the *economy*, never as the dominant theory of the *commodity*. They therefore never criticized economics for what it is. They therefore criticized it in appearance only. However, Marx and the Situationists were relentless critics of the commodity and they criticized it from a viewpoint radically opposed to economics**,** from the viewpoint of total communication, from the viewpoint of absolute wealth, and they did this by taking the commodity and the spectacle literally. But neither Marx nor the Situationists were, despite their claims on the subject, critics of the dominant theory of the commodity. They were critics of the dominant thing and not of the theory of the dominant thing. To be sure, both Marx and the Situationists criticized the commodity. Both Marx and the Situationists contributed to the destruction of its world and to the destruction of all that its world contains, hence to the destruction of—among other things—the dominant theory of the commodity. Both Marx and the Situationists relentlessly criticized the dominant thought as long as it took a form other than economics, other than the dominant theory of the commodity. But both Marx and the Situationists simply *forgot* to criticize the dominant theory of the commodity, simply forgot to criticize the dominant theory when it took the form of economics. And Marx did not limit himself to passively forgetting, he forgot *methodically* since he went to the trouble of *pretending* to make this critique. Both Marx and the Situationists integrated the dominant theory of the commodity as a totally irrational belief into their critical thought of the commodity in opposition to the rational thought that finally must destroy it.



express crude ideas. This society is no more the society of the spectacle than Rome was the society of the circus, even though when in a good mood the emperor could sacrifice 50,000 pairs of gladiators in three days. There again, the media is not the cause of slavery but one of its consequences. Just as Pontius Pilate representing the Roman state delivered Jesus to the Jews, the modern democratic state delivers *Popu*[3] over to commerce, bound hand and foot. The essence of Celine's anti-Semitism, which I had underestimated, is here revealed. Celine's anti-Semitism is more fundamental than I had imagined. It is a grand metaphor for the delivering of folks over to commerce by the bearded social-democrats. Celine is inspired by his anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic because he is inspired. Celine's anti-Semitism is an integral part of his genius. I stigmatize in passing the contorted explanations of Professor Godard in *Celine Scandal.*[4] Celine's epic is that of *Popu* being delivered over to commerce.

Debord is a fraud not because he tried and failed, but because he was self-satisfied. Selfsatisfied, moreover, is too weak a term in this case. Puffed-up would be more precise. Frauds never change. As are all slaves, Debord was moved by the spectacle of society. But he simply wanted a place in this society. He got one, *in extremis*, just as the great drinker's ashes drifted up the coast of Denmark, carried by the last remnants of the Gulf Stream. Water! Everywhere water![5] Even in death he was posing, as is demonstrated by the letter he sent to that super-bitch Cornand[6] (who I caught in the pages

[3] Popu: Celine's neologism in his pamphlet *Mea Culpa,* written on his return from Russia, to refer to "the people" (in French: population, populace, populo).

[4] Professor Henri Godard, author of *Celine Scandal,* published by Gallimard. Edited the complete works of Celine published by Gallimard, Bibliotheque La Pleiade.

[5] *Que d'eau! Que d'eau!* While visiting a flooded city along the Loire River, this was the only reply French president Mac-Mahon (1873) could think to make when journalists asked him to comment on the situation. http://vdaucourt.free.fr/Mothisto/Ma-hon2/Mahon2.htm

[6] Brigitte Cornand, the director of Debord's last film: *Son Art et*

Every society is about communication and communication only. So, *acting* in a society means *communicating*. It's because Debord did not understand this fact that he was unable to give anything but a trivial meaning to the word "spectacle." Due to his dimwitted, Marxist stupidity, he thought that humans had to enter into determined relationships in order to produce their means of existence. Fat chance, it's just the opposite: humans must produce their means of existence—they must communicate—in order to enter into determined relationships. The proof of this is that when they do not produce those means—when they do not communicate—they cannot enter into any relationship whatsoever. The Situationists never created a situation! Situationists who don't create any situations are like homosexuals who could never fuck each other. Actually, except for Vienet, who was a machinist, not one of these gentlemen could even pound a nail.

If society is about communication and communication only, the spectacle of society is a spectacle of communication. But this spectacle is not the *cause* of the estrangement of communication. Communication does not "withdraw into a representation" as Debord states in the first thesis of his book. On the contrary, it is because communication is estranged that it is a spectacle for the slave. The spectacle of society is not estrangement of communication but the spectacle of estranged communication. Here is a book that starts off on the wrong foot.

So either the so-called notion of the spectacle as it appears in Debord's book is meaningless and therefore a deception, or else it means spectacle in the sense of television, advertising, radio, newspapers, magazines, movies, theatre, the circus, or more generally what we today call the media, in which case it is totally without interest. 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, but he says it in a way that gives the impression that he is conveying a profound thought. He uses dignified language to



The same thing happened with economics as happened with religion: While bourgeois physicists were attacking in theory the world that makes religion necessary, their financial backers were attacking this world directly through their own actions, long before religion—that is to say long before the dominant theory of this world— was attacked *per se*. It was only when the world that required religion had totally disappeared that this dominant theory was indicted as pure thought by the erudite work of the philologist Strauss regarding the real Greek origins of Christianity, reputedly Jewish, and later by the works of Feuerbach and Marx regarding the earthly reasons, the practical causes of this thought, the practical conditions of its historical production, while economics—the new star of dominant thought—was already shining brightly in the theoretical firmament.

Although the commodity itself was immediately attacked in practice by the modern poor and in theory by Marx and the Situationists, the dominant theory of the commodity has not yet been indicted for being a pure thought, for its nature as a pure thought, a purely false idea, an appearance, an invention, an illusion. Nor have the practical conditions of its historical production been put in question. Just as the contradictions of the celestial family—commencing with its existence in thought—were to be explained by the contradictions of the terrestrial family, the fairy tales of the economy must be explained through the real dangers that must be confronted in the world by the backers of the economy. Both Marx and the Situationists always treated economics *as realistic thought*, thought that translates an economic reality of this world, certainly more or less accurately, more or less deceitfully. According to them, it is the economy, as a real thing in this world, not as a pure thought, that must be—sometimes mastered, sometimes overthrown—take your pick. It's as if atheists, instead of going after religion, after the real causes of religion, instead of studying those causes and struggling against them, continued to go after God, wanted to master God, wanted to overthrow God! This is

all the more surprising since Marx, as well as the Situationists, always held the commodity, in parallel with the economy, to be the substance of the modern world. This is in fact the central contribution of Marx, and the crucial investigations concerning this substance constitute the core of the Situationists' work. Either the reality, the substance of this world, is the commodity, or this reality, this substance, is the economy. A choice must be made. And neither Marx nor the Situationists were able choose.

With the goal of illustrating the above, we shall re-examine some of the 178 economic crudisms contained in *The Society of the Spectacle*. Reader, rest assured, we shall not employ the patient approach used by Marx in *The German Ideology* and shall not inflict upon you all 178 corrections in our *English Ideology*. In the succeeding chapter, we shall treat the same subject, focusing instead on Marx and proceeding in an even more expeditious manner. This case has been waiting one hundred years to be made, and cannot wait an instant more.

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If it is true that the economy, as pure thought, depends on the society that produces it (as do all ideas), it is perfectly false that it depends on it because *«society discovers that it depends on the economy»* (thesis 52). If society discovers this, here in the person of Debord, it is simply one more false discovery, one more pure appearance. Now, if it is true that society depends—though in a different sense than Debord understood—on the economy, it is only to the extent that all societies depend on the ideas that its members have of it. Now, the world is not false because men create false ideas about it. On the contrary, men create false ideas about the world because the world is false. But it is quite clear that the world will remain false as long as men create false ideas about it.

*«The production of commodities»* could not have *«seized the total domination of the economy»* wherever *«it encountered the social con-*



who are not, the ones sitting in the bleachers. The same goes for the society as a whole: its slaves are not players and so society is a spectacle for them. This is no reason to label such a society "the society of the spectacle" since the spectacle of this society is a simple side effect of the condition of being a slave. The spectacle of this society is a consequence of the slave's isolation, not the cause. An individual in this society is first a slave and then—and solely because of this fact—a spectator. The cause of the spectacle is known: it is slavery. What needs to be determined then is the cause of slavery. Modern society should be called the society of isolation, a particularly fitting label as it also alludes to the isolation to which the modern slave's political freedom is reduced, epitomized by the polling booth. The society of isolation: we would search Debord's book in vain for as simple an idea as this, it is not there. In the end, it may not even be an interesting idea, but it at least points out the ridiculousness of Debord's laborious lyric.

Our society is unified by commerce, not by any so-called spectacle. It is because of this unification that the spectacle of society can exist, not the other way around. But society was not a spectacle for the slaves of every era. In certain periods it was the slaves themselves who created the spectacle—in the arena! For modern society to be a spectacle for its slaves, the slaves must be politically emancipated, with the free use of their bodies, so that they can travel far and wide, even to the beaches of Greece. Indeed, a slave who cannot leave his master's domain cannot see much of society. We must therefore call modern society the society of emancipated slavery, which is what Marx insisted on calling it. However, there is a common trait shared with the slaves of antiquity who put on the spectacle in the arenas. Our society, which its slaves can only gaze at, is composed mainly of slaves. Therefore, slaves are practically all that they see, just as the ancient Romans saw only slaves performing in the arena—at least when the emperor was not performing there himself!

# There Is No Society of the Spectacle[1]

Reply to "Rideau" by Marc-Edouard Nabe[2]

For a long time I used to go to bed late, hoping to find an idea in Guy Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle*. I must bow to the obvious: there are none. For a long time I believed that Debord had given to the word "spectacle" a meaning that I did not understand and which would shed light on the mystery of the nature of our society. But he did nothing of the kind. Despite his circumlocutions, or rather because of them, he was incapable of doing so.

There is, indeed, a spectacle of society, but there is no society of the spectacle. Our society is a spectacle for each and every slave that inhabits it, precisely because he or she is a slave, because he or she is isolated and separated from the other slaves and from society as a whole, because slaves do not govern, slaves do not communicate and, therefore, *slaves do not act*. Their miserable lives are summed up in their miserable jobs, miserable homes, miserable nuclear families, miserable vacations and miserable purchases. In such conditions, how could society be anything but a spectacle for them? A football game is not a spectacle for those who are acting—the ones participating in the game, *the players*—but only for those

[1] This reply to Marc-Edouard Nabe appears in the book *Limites de conversation* by Jean-Pierre Voyer, published by Editions Anonymes, 67000 Strasbourg, Karl.von.Nichts@wanadoo.fr, 1998 (pp. 167 -185).

[2] Urbane man of letters known in France for his ongoing literary memoirs, such as his *Journal Intime: I. Nabe's Dream, II. Tohu-Bohu, III. Inch'Allah, IV. Kamikaze*, Editions du Rocher.



*ditions of large-scale trade and capital accumulation»* (thesis 40), because in no society, in no era, in no location has something like «the economy» existed that could be dominated by the commodity—except in our own society as a pure illusion. Only modes of communication can be seized and destroyed by the commodity. Similarly, *«the domination of the commodity»* cannot manifest itself *«in an occult manner over the economy»* (thesis 41) but only over means of communication different from and predating the commodity, because nowhere and at no time did an «economy» ever exist over which the commodity could hold sway, in an occult manner or otherwise, except in our society as the dominant illusion.

The spectacle cannot be *«the victory of the autonomous economy»* (thesis 51) any more than it can be *«the economy developing for itself»* (thesis 16) or *«the economy moving for itself»* (thesis 32), because the economy being a pure idea—do we have to remind ourselves after Marx?—it has no independent history. Marx, who first pointed out this characteristic of ideas in general and of ideologies in particular, simply forgot to point it out regarding the ideology referred to as the economy. Likewise, this *«victory of the autonomous economy»* stands no chance of becoming *«at the same time its defeat»* or the defeat of the world that requires the economic lie, because this so-called victory of the so-called autonomous economy is a pure appearance of dominant thought that we see here dominating the thinking of Debord.

The bourgeoisie is not the *«class of the developing economy»* (thesis 88) but the class of the developing commodity; it was not *«the development of the economy»* that was *«the cause and the consequence of its capture of society»* (thesis 87) but the development of the commodity; nor was it within the economy that the bourgeoisie *«was already in power»* when it built its *«partial ideological consciousness»* (thesis 123) but within the commodity.

The spectacle cannot subjugate living people *«to the extent that the economy has already subjugated them totally»* (thesis 16). Being a purely false idea, the economy can only subjugate the minds

of people, and even then people must be practically subjugated already by the commodity and the State, by the reigning forms of alienated communication. The spectacle is not *«the image of the reigning economy»* (thesis 14). The economy is already itself an image and only an image: it is the dominant image of the reigning form of communication, or more precisely, the reigning form of alienated communication. Social life is not totally occupied by *«the accumulated results of the economy»* (thesis 17) but by those of the universal alienation of communication. Finally, there can be no *«subordination of the economy to historical consciousness»* (thesis 176) since the economy is purely a lie about the true nature of the world and—far from wanting to subordinate this lie—historical consciousness can only want to destroy it and destroy the world that makes it necessary.

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Fortunately, what «*closely links Marx's theory to scientific thought»* is not any so-called *«rational understanding of the forces actually at work in society»* (thesis 81). Luckily, the science of history, history as science, did not have to be *«itself historically founded with the economy»* (thesis 82). If indeed, like everything else, the science of history had to be historically founded (although that which exists can very well exist without being founded, but if it is founded, it can only be historically founded—Heil Hegel!), it was so founded with the development of a certain mode of alienated communication. And — thanks be to Hegel — economics is not the *«historical science par excellence»* (thesis 84) but rather the ideology par excellence of the era that saw the birth of history as a science. Happily, it is not *«history that discovered its basis in political economy,»* (thesis 141) but only the illusions about history and about the true nature of the economy that have their intellectual basis in political economy.

Special attention must be given to thesis 84 as it is an example of a *false critique of Marx. «The scientific-determinist side of Marx's*



no meaning, one has to find a meaning by oneself. Hegel was a sophist; he proves everything and its opposite, which is proper to speculative demonstrations—very superior on this point to deductive demonstrations. I'm simply unsatisfied for having written only two propositions of this kind. I would gladly write a hundred if I could.

the effort to tell me for what reason, rather than boldly declare my writings very good and quite enough. One would not do differently if the intention was, again, to silence me. For those who haven't noticed, I draw attention to the fact that there are not just make-shift thoughts in what I have published. There are at least two statements with which I'm totally satisfied: "Value is exchange carried out in thought" (I solve in seven words a problem that was already bothering Aristotle.) and, "A phenomenon as a phenomenon is not a phenomenon" (I solve in nine words the phenomenological question posed by Husserl: Since a phenomenon as a phenomenon is not a phenomenon, the phenomenon as a phenomenon is not observable, so it is vain to want to observe it. To speak of phenomena as W.[4] speaks of facts, phenomena constitute all that is observable— no phenomena, no observation. Therefore it is vain to want to observe what is not a phenomenon— even more so a phenomenon as a phenomenon. Because it cannot be observed, nothing can be said of it besides the fact that it is not observable. Reduction, that is to say abstraction, can be used at will; nevertheless, it will not be possible to observe the phenomenon as a phenomenon. The ego is observable (and hateful too, so they say), but it is not the phenomenon as a phenomenon, it is just an object as any other…; that is why it is observable (Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 1936). In solving this question, I solve also that of the torrential literature in foreskinology[5] that followed. Foreskinology is to Husserl what Marxism is to Marx. What the proposition, "the phenomenon as a phenomenon is not a phenomenon," says I've known for forty years, but it was only a few years ago that Hegel graciously and fortuitously provided me the words to formulate it. A friend brought to my attention that Hegel incites to thinking by oneself. With wicked wit, I immediately replied, "Of course, since what Hegel writes has

[4] Wittgenstein

[5] Foreskinology: Cf. the writings of Jacques Derrida and like philosophers on the social meaning of the foreskin.



*thought»* is not *«the gap through which the process of ideologization penetrated»* into Marx's thought during his lifetime. This gap was Marx's belief in the postulates of economics—perfectly determinist, positivist, utilitarian assumptions after all—and this as early as the *Manuscripts of 1844*. That gap consists in the recycling—without real testing, without real testing followed by real results—of economic thought. All in all, Hegelian assumptions are better than those of Marx. Just as, according to Hegel, Kant regressed in relation to Spinoza, Marx regressed in relation to Hegel in his choice of assumptions, because he admitted the very ones that Hegel was combating.

It's easy for Debord to scold Marx for having been *too concerned* about the economy. But if, like Marx *and* Debord, one believes in the economy—if one believes that the economy is something real and active in the world, not only as a thought but as a thing—one can hardly go on thinking and acting without paying it any attention at all. And this leads to that sterile and century-old discussion about how much or how little attention one should pay to «this thing.» Should one *«patiently study economic development and, with Hegelian tranquility, accept the suffering it imposed,»* or should one leave this accursed development sulking in a corner and devote oneself to more attractive pursuits? Believers in werewolves who are as cowardly as socialdemocrats avoid going out at night, while those with Situationist courage go forth armed with a rifle. But in either case such precautions are quite useless—though not useless for everyone, if you consider who profits from the error—and appropriate to a time supposedly more superstitious than our own.

This thesis of Debord's, which contains all the aspects of a critique of «economism,» is nonetheless completely orthodox as regards the economist creed; it is itself perfectly economist. It directs our attention to that pinch of determinism that taints Marx's thought, all the more easily to avoid any reference to the strong box of the economy that encumbers his theory. And there is no

crude form of economism that can be opposed to a more refined one: economism is nothing other than the belief in the economy. Contrary to what is asserted in thesis 89, which is another example of a false critique of Marx, *«the intellectual basis for the illusions of economism»* does not consist in expecting too much from scientific predictions but in expecting anything at all from the predictions of a false science. This sort of expectation is itself the basis for the majority of possible illusions. And contrary, again, to what is asserted in this thesis, it is not Marx who created the intellectual basis for the illusions of economism. This basis is economics itself and is therefore a creation of the ruling class. Marx only failed in his attempt to overthrow it. Perhaps he contributed to reinforcing this basis by proclaiming its overthrow a done deal. And, be it said in passing, the basis of economism is and could be nothing other than intellectual, since economics is nothing other than an intellectual thing, a pure thought. Frankly, economics is not only the basis of economism, it is economism itself to the extent that economics is above all propaganda on behalf of the economy, to the extent that economics is a lie about its own nature as a lie. And contrary, again, to what is asserted in this thesis, if Marx did not create the basis for the illusions of economism, he succumbed to those illusions just as Debord did, because they both believed in the reality of the economy. If our correspondent has in mind critiques of Marx and of economics that, according to him, we would be wrong to ignore, I hope they are more serious.

The denunciation of economism, the denunciation of the *excessive* claims of economic science—as opposed to a denunciation of all of the claims of economic science—is economics' best and last defense. The notion that only the excessive claims of economic theory are criticizable implies that economics also makes claims that are *not* excessive and, therefore, justified. This implies that economics is a science with a real object in the world. Now, *all* the claims of economics are unjustified, beginning with its claim to existence as a simple thought. Like religion, economics is a total



# What I am Satisfied With (1997)

*In 1997, one of Jean-Pierre Voyer's correspondents wrote to him as follows:*

*I do not see why you are trying to redefine what you defined so well more than twenty years ago… Your explicitly anti-economist concepts are in no need of it.*

*In his reply, Jean-Pierre Voyer evaluated his own work and shed light on his purpose.*

What differentiates phlogiston from oxygen is Napalm®.[1] It is now time to invent Napalm®.[2]

I know firsthand that what I wrote in the "Report"—and not only there—is insufficient. I see no holocaust yet, no smoke on the horizon, just Homais[3] standing in his doorway… [Our correspondent] is satisfied with little. It's astonishing how much energy [is] deployed to prevent me from being unsatisfied with what I've written. Up until then I had only published makeshifts of my thoughts. If one finds what I've published satisfying one should at least make

[1] An obsolete scientific theory postulated a fire-like element called phlogiston, contained within combustible bodies and released during combustion. The name comes from the Ancient Greek ipAoYiffTov phlogiston (burning up), from tpAoi; phlox (flame). It was first stated in 1667 by Johann Joachim Becher. The theory attempted to explain burning processes such as combustion and rusting, which are now collectively known as oxidation. Thus, Becher described phlogiston as a process that explained combustion through a process that was opposite to that of oxygen. (Wikipedia 2015)

[2] Original title in French: *Rapport sur l'etat des illusions dans notre parti suivi de revelations sur le principe du monde*, Jean-Pierre Voyer, Institut de Prehistoire Contemporaine, 1979

[3] Homais, the pharmacist in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

shoemaking. This is reductionism-scientism. Everything reduced to shoemaking. The world contains physics, physics doesn't contain the world.

Sincerely, JPV

Note: Reductionism failed in metamathematics. Hilbert's project was to guarantee the consistency of arithmetic by the supposedly simple-to-establish consistency of a simplified "little arithmetic," that is to say to guarantee the complicated through the simple. It is this project that Godel's 1931 demonstration annihilated. God is not simple. J.Y Girard in *Le theoreme de Godel*, Seuil.

Reductionism: Tendency that consists in deriving the higher (the conscious, the vital) from the lower (physio-chemical) by attributing reality only to the simplest constituents and in considering them as more fundamental. *Encyclopedie Hachette.*



phantasmagoria, but—as we shall soon see— without any of religion's revelatory aspects. It is purely a damper. The denunciation of the excesses of economic theory as economism, as an abuse of the purported science of economics, is the ultimate economic illusion, dominant thought's ultimate ruse, *its last line of defense.* And since we are led to discuss the so-called «critique of economism,» this spectacle of the critique of «economics» as theory, let's not forget the spectacular critique of the purported economic «thing.» Let's not forget in passing to lift our legs on the current crowd of «anti-economist» sluts like Rosanwhore, Vivashit, Gorzette, and Illitch[1] who, in guise of combating the noxious «effects» of the economy, have as their only goal to reinforce the dominant illusions about the existence of the economy. In attributing to the economy, this chimera, the calamities that engulf the world, these hermetic saints accredit the supposed existence of this chimera and thereby give credence to the supposed necessity of its «self-management,» which is their specialty—some as writers in *Le Nouvel Obervateur,* others as members of the absurd Socialist Party or the Cidoc,[2] etc.—thus also accrediting the necessity of their respective jobs. But above all they distract attention—they think they do—from the *real causes* of the world's misery and even from the real nature of this misery. In a way, they do the same thing that Marx and Debord also did, but their goal is obviously altogether different and, above all, that's all they do. They therefore have none of the excuses that Marx and Debord have.

And if it is indeed because «the *exposition* of Marx's theory was put forth on the *terrain* of dominant thought» that Marx's thought became ideological, this happened not because Marx developed his thought further there *«in the form of critiques of partic-*

[1] Pierre Rosanvallon, Patrick Viveret, Andre Gorz, Ivan Illich

[2] Centro Intercultural de Documentacion (CIDOC), founded by Ivan Illich at Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1966: "a broad-based research centre which offered courses and briefings for missionaries arriving from North America." [http://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/dec/09/guardianobituaries.highereducation]

*ular disciplines,»* but rather because, having been drawn onto such a terrain, Marx was incapable of *really* and successfully criticizing these particular disciplines, incapable of refuting them or of overthrowing them. The real project of surmounting the economy is none other than that of overthrowing a chimera. And this requires nothing other than to overthrow it in thought, because that is where chimeras live. But then the chosen terrain must not be that of the chimera itself. Both Marx and the Situationist International achieved theoretical success only when they chose their own terrain: the terrain of total communication, the terrain of history. Unlike Marx, the Situationists never took on dominant thought on the latter's terrain. But they confirmed the sovereignty of this thought over its territory by taking Marx's theoretical defeat for a victory. In theory as in war, some victories are worse than a defeat.

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There is no *economic reality* for which *economic theory* provides a more or less precise, more or less true, more or less complete understanding, and which theory must consequently be criticized before we can finally understand, master or overthrow *the economic thing* of which this theory is the imperfect and partial understanding. The world does not have an economic reality any more than it had a religious reality in the era of religion or than there is a socialist reality in Moscow. The only religious reality in the world consisted in religion and in its guarantor, the King of Prussia. The only economic reality in the world consists in the reality of the dominant thought called economics and in this thought's practical power of illusion at the hands of its guarantors: States, ruling classes and their leftist intellectual valets. There is only a fundamental, reigning lie about the reality of this world, and this lie is the only thing that is really economic in the world. If the economy is the central part of anything, it is only the central part of dominant thought, the central part of the dominant lie. It is this



ties. Perhaps there were horses but not the horse genre. Multiplicities didn't exist until thought existed. They are only thoughts. The only multiplicity that is not only a thought is precisely humanity itself, and that because it contains thought. This collective being is the only one that doesn't depend on external thought **to exist** precisely because it contains thought. One shouldn't confuse the existence of horses with the existence of multiplicities. We might as well say that numbers existed before they were invented. One shouldn't confuse the existence of horses with their number, unless horses can count. Swift pretended that they could in his celebrated travels. The Platonists pretend that numbers existed before they were invented, but according to them, numbers exist in the sky of ideas, in which case we have no direct contact with them.

I don't have the **impression** that thought is the foundation of everything. I have only the **certitude** that one cannot study humanity by making an abstraction of the role of thought as Marx meant to do.

Likewise, my goal does not consist in conceiving things as they are before thought existed, but only in not considering humanity through reductionism. My program is much more limited than the one you propose at the end of your letter. Before asking myself if logic exists before thought exists, I ask myself what logic is at work within humanity if you don't dismiss thought as Marx did. For the moment this logic is totally unknown. In humanity, one so rarely encounters thought and the movement of thought that everyone is completely oblivious to it, the entire world thinks like Locke. And Marx didn't improve things. He is more an heir of Locke than of Hegel. One could think that he *overdosed* on thought with Hegel, and, in a violent reaction, he took the opposite position. More seriously, Marx lived in an era of furious reductionism, which is generally known as scientism. Reductionism in physics is beneficial, it doesn't become scientism until the point that one tries to draw conclusions outside of physics. Everyone thinks it's noon according to their own watch, the cobblers want to explain the world through

# My Goal in Life

Even though in a way I always knew it, I have only now become fully aware that my only goal in life, as soon as I read *Capita*l in 1962, was to disqualify the reductionism of Marx. The term reductionism did not awake a response in me until now. I understood it, but didn't suspect its importance. Your letter revealed it to me.

Clearly justified in the sciences of nature, reductionism has no justification when it is a question of studying humanity itself. Without reductionism, these sciences wouldn't exist, there would be none of the applications of these sciences, no electricity, no atomic bomb, no genetically modified organisms, etc. One could say that reductionism is the principle of these sciences. The reply of Laplace to Napoleon (God is a useless hypothesis) effectively proves it. But one cannot dismiss God when one pretends to study humanity itself, and not only celestial mechanics. Marx's error is to dismiss thought in order to study humanity. Marx wanted to reduce the study of humanity to a kind of celestial mechanics despite all his claims to dialecticism. Sartre said, "Materialism is a reductionism." He said it in his heroic (whisky and amphetamines) anti-reductionist attempt *Critique of Dialectical Reason.*

The set of men being, of all the possible sets, *the only one that is a thing and not only a thought, cannot be dealt with by reductionism,* while if it is a thing—unlike other sets—it is because it contains thought. *The set of animals is only a thought* and cannot exist before the existence of thought. Unlike the genre of animals, the human genre is a thing. Animality or equinity are thoughts and only thoughts, humanity is a thing. Before the existence of thought, there were animals, perhaps, but certainly not multiplici-



fundamental, reigning lie that must be overthrown, among other things, which must be refuted and annihilated in order to attain an understanding of the reality of this world—or more precisely to attain an understanding of how little reality it has—and above all to attain the practice of reality.

The real *«project of surmounting the economy»* (thesis 82) is a purely theoretical one—having nothing to do with the senseless practical project discussed by Debord—because it consists in overthrowing, in refuting, a false theory. But, fatally, Debord's understanding of *«the project of surmounting the economy»* espouses the very essence of the economic lie referring to itself. *Economics does nothing else than endlessly propose to surmount the economy,* thereby postulating that the economy is a practical moment of the world. It thus does nothing other than to lie indefinitely about its true nature as a lie, while at the same time lying about the true nature of the world.

There is no such thing as a *«class of the owners of the economy»* (thesis 143) in the sense that Debord understands it, though the class that owns alienated communication also owns the illusions about communication and its alienation, and thus owns «the economy,» which constitutes the central part of these illusions. Nothing more. *«The root of the spectacle»* cannot be *«within the terrain of the abundant economy»* (thesis 58), because the abundant economy can be nothing other than an abundance of economic rehash produced by such dried up academic laggards as Fourastie, Mendel, Fabra, Marek, or an abundance of

economic crudisms in the text of Debord, the abundance of an illusion. *«The contemplation of the movement of the economy in the dominant thought of present-day society»* (thesis 80) can occur, but then this would only be the contemplation of dominant thought by dominant thought, the contemplation by all the above-mentioned hacks of their own economic turds and their mutually congratulatory scribblings. Now, it is quite true that the belief in the practical domination of the world by *the idea* «economy» is *«the* non-

inverted *legacy of the* non-dialectical *part of the Hegelian attempt to create a circular system».*

Everything dominant thought considers to be real is, in fact, as Hegel affirmed, the ultimate of unreality, of nothingness, or else it is pure phantoms, pure appearances, pure illusions, pure nightmarish dreams within this dominant thought, or else manifestations, moments, inessential aspects of reality, manifestations of unreal moments because arbitrarily isolated not only in thought but also in the world by the world and, therefore, devoid of any kind of reality, not only in thought but in the world. In saying this I call to witness my fellow wage slaves, as I shall frequently do in this book. Everyday we experience the bitter proof of the dearth of reality in what we're supposed to call life, of the dearth of reality in what is considered real by dominant thought, of the dearth of reality—not in the thought of Hegel but in the world—in the moments of this reality with which we are confronted. Generally speaking, the reality of this world, the only reality in this world, the only «thing-in-itself» in this world is communication, and everything that claims to be a *thing*, reality, in this world of alienation is only an inessential moment, an inessential and unreal manifestation of this reality, tainted with the nothingness specific to all that pretends to be finite. And it is not only dominant thought that «presents / posits» these moments as finite, as sufficient and real, it is these moments themselves that present themselves as such, they themselves refuse to obey [comply with reality]. The reality of this sad world has always been right up to today the reality of alienated communication, because this alienation is the only «thing» that blithely lays claim to its infinity. And the history of the world until now has been nothing but the history of the concrete forms of this alienation: hierarchy and money, the commodity and the State.

The reality of this sad world, the dominant mode of communication in this sad world, is the commodity. And the commodity is not economic. On the contrary, it is anti-economic. It is the commodity that renders all economy—in the etymological sense of the word,



like the intellectually submissive, they have practical and certain knowledge, as testified by their lives and revolutionary positions—and what the dominant theory says is happening in the world.

modity, what must be overthrown in the world is the commodity itself. Of course, as dominant thought, economics is a thing of the world and must be overthrown *in* the world because it is in the world that thoughts exist. But it is in the world only as a thought and as action of a thought, while the commodity is the world itself, the world that contains the dominant theory of the world. And if to overthrow in thought the dominant theory, which is economics, a general theory of communication will suffice, to overthrow the world of alienated communication, which required among other things this dominant theory, total communication itself is necessary. And what must be mastered in the world is not the economy, as Marx and the Situationists thought. The economy as a false thought is only to be destroyed. What must be dominated and mastered in the world is the world's substance, *communication*, of which the commodity is only an alienated form.

To refute economics, to refute the dominant theory of the world, to refute the utilitarian and positivist theory of the world, is nothing other than to reveal what is real in the world, what acts in the world, what is world in the world. It is to reveal what economics aims to conceal and what, nevertheless, has always been in action and what—unlike economics—the theory of Hegel aimed to uncover. Refuting a lie is to reveal what the lie aims to conceal and what, in a certain way, the lie itself reveals through the very care it takes to conceal it.

Marx's merit and advantage over Hegel, who spoke endlessly about the world of the commodity, about its logic and the logic it *revealed,* without ever being able for a single instant to identify his object, is to have been the first to identify the true object of Hegel's theory. But Marx's merit stops there. Unlike Hegel, Marx as well as the Situationists—and until now, who hasn't done the same thing?—have continually confused the thing and the dominant theory of the thing. They have continually confused the commodity with the dominant theory of the commodity. They have continually confused what is really happening in the world—of which, un-



i.e. all management of the household—impossible. It creates the necessity for all those grotesque and laughable economic treatises at the very time when all economic power, all power of sovereign management of the household, all absolute power of the State has disappeared or sees its days threatened by that which tolerates no limits: the commodity.

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In the confrontation between the two rival modes of communication, the State and the commodity, economics has a fitting name as «political economy.» *Economics is the theory of the commodity from the point of view of the State.* Economics is the State's theoretical response—a collection of recipes about communication—as it faces the danger presented by its rival mode of communication, the commodity. Remember: *delenda Carthago.* Yet never to this day has this theory succeeded in properly resolving, from the State's viewpoint, the threat the commodity has continually posed. Today, the new Carthage, the most recent problem posed by the commodity to the State, is the creation of the modern proletariat in the form of salaried workers. And if Carthage did not, strictly speaking, have a permanent army— unlike pillaging Rome—this new Carthage is, itself, a permanent army. The State and its eco-valets will no doubt succeed in creating green commodities. And if we give it enough time, the State will no doubt even be successful, with the help of its vanguard consumer valets, in replacing the automobile as star commodity with another—the commodity «culture» for example—even going so far as to produce an edible commodity «meat.» But it will never be able to create a commodity without the modern poor.

The *«industrialization of the Stalinist era»* (thesis 104) does not reveal *«the bureaucracy's true nature»* but that of economics. We have seen that economics is the State's insane attempt to dominate the commodity without realizing it, and that this project hides within an even crazier one, that of «surmounting the economy.» In

attempting to realize this project *totally* (the survival of this project elsewhere is ensured only by dint of guesswork and owing to its incoherence), the Stalinist bureaucracy reveals in fact the reality of the project of State management it contains. Rather than the economy producing the need for money, as Marx incorrectly proposed, rather than the economy producing the spectacle, as Debord incorrectly proposed, when the economy produces something, when this thought produces something, this something is the Stalinist State. And this is not *«the proof of the independent economy that dominates society to the point of recreating for its own goals the class domination it requires»* but the proof of the independence of two modes of alienated communication, the South of the State against the North of the commodity, that fight to maintain and to reinforce their independence vis-a-vis society through an impossible *modus vivendi,* as well as the proof of their complicity, of their need for each other. When things do not take a radical turn as they did with Stalin or Hitler, an incessant, pragmatic debate goes on among the dominant shysters and their servants as to whether more State and less commodities, or less State and more commodities, are required for the world to function well. And we see a succession of periods characterized by the alternation of these two parties, a succession that results in fact with more State and more commodities.

There can be no *«totalitarian management of the economy by a State bureaucracy»* (thesis 56) if not in the form of totalitarian management of dominant economic thought by Stalin, the author of instruction manuals on the economy and dialectical materialism. In contrast, it is possible for Stalin and Louvois to attempt the totalitarian management of the commodity, that is to say to attempt the total realization of the project of State management of the commodity, which is what economics is really all about. In thesis 87 we see Debord approaching the theoretical solution to this problem while at the same time reintroducing, of course, the same fundamental error about the true nature of the economy and, therefore, about the true nature of the world. It is here that he correctly uses the



term «economy» in the etymological sense. *«The economic role of the State»* (which Marx neglected, and for good reason) in managing the commodity corresponds to both the reality and the content of the economic project: the theory of the domination of the commodity by the State and the corresponding practice by the State.

If economics is indeed *«the fundamental science of bourgeois society»* (thesis 84), neither Marx nor Debord were able to grasp the real object of this science (the domination of the commodity) and its real backer (the State). The dominant reality of this sad world is the commodity, and economics is only the dominant theory of that reality from the viewpoint of the State. It must finally be criticized, then, for what it is: a thought and only a thought. And furthermore, a thought of the State. As for the viewpoint of the commodity, the economy is the spectacle itself, this «materialized ideology.»

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Finally, if the critique of economics is indeed both departure point and prerequisite for all critique of this world (as in other times religion was, another dominant theory of another dominant mode of communication), it is not, as Marx and Debord thought, because the economy is the central part of social life, but because economics is the dominant theory of this central part, the dominant lie about this central part. And it is not the economy that must be overthrown, this so-called central part of the present world—leave that windmill to the sorry-faced knights of the left—but only economics, the dominant lie about this central part, and already a tall order judging from the duration of this lie's unchallenged reign. If economics is indeed the departure point for the critique of the commodity—as in other eras the critique of religion was the departure point for the critique of the State—it is because economics is the dominant theory of the commodity, the dominant lie about the commodity. And if what must be overthrown in thought—among other things—is only economics, the dominant theory of the com-