

RE-EVALUATING SPECTACULAR SOCIETY

By Alan Rutherford

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
BA(Hons) Fine Art
Glasgow School of Art
1998/1999
total amount of words: 11,773
(excluding quotations)

CONTENTS

Introduction

One: **What is Spectacular society?**

Two: **Theory and practice of the SI**

Three: **Jean Baudrillard - The theory of a postmodern society of technology and information.**

Four: **Postmodern art practices**

Five: **Further comments and conclusion**

LIST OF FIGURES

Description related Page no

- Fig 1. Guy Debord 8
2. Raoul Vaneigem 9
3. 'Society of the Spectacle' 10
4. ' Heroin chic ' 16
5. Détourned image 29
6. 'Psychogéographique de Paris: discours sur les passions de l'amour', 1956, Guy Debord with Asger Jorn. 29
7. Marcel Duchamp , 'Fountain', 1917 30
8. Paris, May 1968 31
9. Maslow's pyramid 32
10. The 'Nintendo' War of Simulation 47

11. Richard Hamilton, 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?', 1956, collage 53

13. Jeff Koons, 'New Shelton wet / dry double decker', 1981 56

14. Sterlac, 'Involuntary body / third hand', 1997 60

Introduction

With the sacrificed students in Beijing and the racial riots in Los Angeles, the murderous war in the Persian Gulf and the ethnic bloodbath in Bosnia, the bombing in Oklahoma City and the trial of O.J. Simpson, we have become wired to spectacular events. (Hal Foster, Return of the Real)

Several perspectives - such as art, poststructuralism, postindustrialism and postmodernism can be used to guide and direct the meaning of today's society towards any number of desired locations. It is intended to therefore provide the reader with a debate that is both equally balanced with theoretical content and hypothetical analysis. The task of this essay will therefore be to discuss the major shift that has quickly taken place from a society of industrial production during the situationists era of the 1960s, to the information based networks of the 1990s. This shift has been described by Fredric Jameson, as the replacement of symbols which represent modernity, such as the automobile and the freeway - for more technologically cultural icons, such as the computer and the Internet.

It is therefore possible that the dominant symbols created by late capital during the 1990s have replaced the more natural and real symbols that represent mass society. The natural symbols often associated with freedom such as happiness, love, creativity and play - are now replaced by signs organized and arranged according to capital relations. These symbols then indicate slavery and servitude within society to this particular system. According to postmodern thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, these artificial signs of capital exist only as referents to capital power, surveillance and state control. This has resulted in the creation of new forms which are simulacral representations of the 'real', created by combining cybernetics, media, commodity exchange and advertising. Guy Debord wrote that 'In a world which really is topsy-turvy, the true is a moment of the false'. The cultural balance required to maintain a sense of equilibrium in society may therefore be in danger of collapsing. Baudrillard later suggested in Simulations and Simulacra , that the proliferation of cybernetics may have altered society's perception of the real world, to such a degree that true reality is no longer experienced. Instead what is experienced is the pure illusion of unity and freedom that has been induced by global capitalism.

It will therefore be attempted to explore today's information and media-based systems in relation to previous models of production and manual dexterity. This will involve analyzing the perspectives of Marx, the Situationist International (SI) and the work of Baudrillard. The primary source will be taken from material written by the leading members of the SI, Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem. The SI were the main post war avant garde group. In their journal, 'Le' International Situationniste' they argued that capitalism glossed over the actual reality of society, such as its capacity for brutal wars, widespread poverty and the maintenance of class divisions. Society was therefore termed to be Spectacular. This view will be tested on today's information society for appropriation as a suitable paradigm.

The second primary source will be Jean Baudrillard, who argued that because of capitalism's exploitation of all systems, Marxism was no longer an acceptable paradigm for assessing the information society. Baudrillard is recognized as an important theorist of the realization of postmodern space, time, speed, cybernetics and the relationship of the mass media. Baudrillard's work however has been challenged by critics such as Douglas Kellner, who have noted that his postmodern theory can lack social awareness and can also be seen as sexist and discriminating .

The essay shall first begin to consider in the broadest possible sense, what the Spectacular society actually was and how it will be possible to relate a specific line of inheritance to possible areas within contemporary society. This will look at Karl Marx and discuss how objects have become commodities over time. A need exists if the information society is to be successfully evaluated to recognize the work of Marx, as he suggested that objects incurred a more discredited value through exchange, rather than through use value. In the present global society of 'systematic commodities and images', it would appear that this symptom has worsened with the emergence of cyberspace and issues regarding ownership and copyright as subject of great debate.

The second part will look more closely at Guy Debord and the SI, and the 'theory or practical activity of constructing situations' . The SI appropriated art as an overall tool for radical social change. The SI framework may thread an overall continuum between the consumer/productive society of the 1960s, through to the media society of the 1980s and then perhaps beyond to reveal the core identity of the information society of the 1990s. In the third section postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard who was greatly influenced by the Situationist International and the 68 movement, will be discussed. Baudrillard's framework can provide clues to understanding elements of the present information society. He has introduced many different theories since the 1960s, mainly on the consumer society, objects and their systems of organization and more recently on the 'total' eclipse of reality by its postmodern simulacrum. Signs of the restructuring of society because of technology, automata and information will be discussed, such as the virtuality of cybernetics which have spread into everyday life in the form of simulation and information processing. The real world and everyday life, as Baudrillard claims, are rendered through paradigms of models and simulations. This removes important references to real life, as seen in the Gulf War when US Lamps helicopter pilots wore Night Vision Systems that replaced real objects with computer generated images. The effect of this can be de-humanization and distancing from the subject and the actual social reality.

The fourth section will look at postmodern art in relation to the emergence of capital and the information society. Visual artists such as Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach deal with the process of commodification. Artists interested in the intersection between aesthetics, politics and cultural theory such as Critical Art Ensemble will also be discussed.

Performance artist Sterlac who incorporates technology for exploring endurance and body limits will also be studied. A transaesthetic approach can also be seen in these works because they look both inward towards the self and outwards towards social reality. Lastly a final analysis of the various perspectives studied throughout the essay will form a

conclusion and final synopsis. It is hoped that an evaluated opinion, that has been accurately informed can present a true reflection of society and provide a genuine analysis of the information society and the world which it inhabits.

One

What is 'Spectacular society'?

The oldest social specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. The spectacle is thus a specialized activity which speaks for all others. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself, where all other expression is banned. Here the most modern is also the most archaic. (Debord, Society of the Spectacle)

Several cultural aspects within the society of the 1960s were appropriated by members of the Situationist International (SI) to formulate a theory against what became known as Spectacular Society. These definitions appear in the work of Guy Debord (1931-94) and Raoul Vaneigem (figs 1 & 2) who were two of the SI's leading figures and played important parts in developing ideas towards an integration between art and life. The SI was formed in 1957 from various post-war Marxist avant-garde art groups and functioned throughout the 1960s before disbanding in 1972. The groups that formed together were the Lettriste International (LI), COBRA, International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB) and the London Psychogeographical Association. Together they became known as 'L'Internationale Situationniste' and averaged a core membership of around 40 - 50 artists. They collectively published twelve editions of the same journal titled 'Le' International Situationniste' between 1957 and 1972. The work that appears in these journals is written by various members and deals with a wide range of interests including urban town planning, the Algerian and Vietnam wars, cinema, art, industrial production, politics and many other interests.

The hypothesis of the 'Spectacular society'

The SI's theory on society reasoned that capitalism had created a Spectacular society. This can be divided into three main areas for appreciation, which are the spectacle of capitalism; the spectacle of social control and the spectacle of science and technology. The first area for consideration was the advancing spectacle of capitalism, which seemed to progressively turn everything into a series of banal statements and commodities. These offered the worker various systems of never ending consumer credit, while encouraging

mass consumption. Debord's main work titled 'La Societe du spectacle' or 'The Society of the spectacle' (fig 3) was written in 1967 and deals with the problem of capital. Raoul Vaneigem wrote a similar treatise in 1967, called 'Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations' which translated reads as 'the Revolution of Everyday Life'. It was argued in these texts that the process of commodification had conditioned the masses into accepting that an integrated state of unity existed between the bourgeois and the proletariat. The symbols offered by Capitalism advocated to an unsuspecting generation that all products offered by capitalism were vital and necessary to fulfill every day life . They often appeared deliberately seductive and desirable. Debord and Vaneigem argued that this process thwarted creativity, citing that every statement against this apparent fallacy was subject to recuperation as capital exchange. These were often then re-packaged to the masses for consumption as the latest new 'revolutionary chic' statement, in the form of fashion, accessories, commodities and ultimately - identities. Everything was therefore susceptible to commodification.

The influence of Karl Marx

The SI's theories on society generally agreed with Marx, mainly that the world we see is the world that we've been conditioned to see, and that conditioning, whether capitalist or communist has brain washed us into accepting material objects as a substitute for real experience. They argued that this inturn made us lose the ability to relate to each other as human beings. To understand this more clearly it is pertinent to examine the work of Karl Marx on production and surplus value. Marx's influence can be found within the core content of the SI's treatise on commodity exchange and in Jean Baudrillard's proposals that deal with the subjects of exchange, simulations, hyper reality, genetic cloning, gender and discourses in modern art, which shall be discussed later. Historically, Marx theory would appear to have failed with the collapse of the former Soviet Union, which has led to debates as to the exact prognosis why it failed. Signs of Marxism as a discourse that was faltering can be found in the ideas of many leading French intellectuals as early as post World War II. Thinkers such as Baudrillard, Foucault and Lyotard felt that they could no longer apply a Marxist discourse on society, mainly because its framework was too rigid for analyzing the new social reality that was in the process of creation through technology, cybernetics, consumerism and capital. The SI approached the issue with similar attitudes.

Marx and the theory of commodities and their values

Marx lived between 1818 and 1883 and is widely known for his theories towards the construction of a utopian society. His studies looked at object and commodity exchange and proposed that commodification was a political science. He studied Hegel's theory of movement and fusion between the thesis and the antithesis and appropriated this idea as an instrument for social change. He reasoned that society consisted of two classes, the bourgeois (who owned the means of production) and the proletariat (who owned nothing expect their children). In early feudal society, there was little surplus produce and if there was, then it was taken to the local market and exchanged or sold for a little profit. According to Baudrillard, feudal society was a time when 'nothing was produced, and everything was deduced, from the grace (of God), or beneficence (of nature) of an agency that offered or refused its wealth'. Economic activity began to steadily increase and instead of swapping goods or selling for a small profit, industrial operations started to produce large amounts of commodities. Capital was introduced to purchase larger amounts of tobacco, textiles, alcohol and grain. The exchange of objects and commodities therefore served for the purpose of accumulating personal wealth. People at the top of society wished to be free of want and valued wealth for its comforts, security, power and

enjoyment that could be bought. Marx therefore noticed that the social and economic conditions in which people lived, of the kind of labouring activities they (the working class) perform and the practical relationships in which they stand to one another were in fact controlled by modern capital and its drive for power and profit. This in turn created

a scene of 'alienation' for human beings from themselves, their lives, and others, and also as holding out promise of the conquest or overcoming of alienation' .

He therefore reasoned that all human beings have a basic set of needs and principles which have to be satisfied.

Desire or alienation could be suppressed with the production of goods and objects - but only for a short period. The process where objects are made and exchanged to symbolize and satisfy our desires was termed by Marx as Use Value. The Situationists believed in the power of Use value and the exchange of gifts as in the north west American Indian system of Potlatch - where a genuine feeling of life was experienced through receiving a gift; denoting a special occasion or moment in time. The servicing of desire became more complex and diversified as societies began to expand through production and the development of new technology. This led to objects being marketed on a global, rather than local, scale. The individual, unable to fulfil his or her own personal desires, has to therefore enter a larger system of exchange to obtain the required objects. This aspect of an object is termed as its Exchange Value. Marx, the SI and Baudrillard argued that objects had lost their use value as societies developed. The two main types of societies that have evolved are the Symbolic (which the SI favoured) and the Productive. Symbolic societies rely on systems of exchanging gifts, celebrations and festivals and the bartering and trading of objects. Conversely the productive society is controlled by the seemingly omnipresent faceless centralized mechanism of capitalism, where trade is conducted in excessive commodities. The relationship between the buyer and the object was therefore altered - the object now became endowed with overt aestheticism in order to gain the buyer's attention. Objects therefore developed a set of abstract rules and values to match the expanding doctrine of capital exchange.

Marx outlined the plight of the workers who produced these objects as problematic because the workers;

Do not experience the products of their labour as their expression, or indeed as theirs in any sense. For these products belong to a non-worker, the capitalist, to whom they (the workers) must sell their activity for a wage which suffices only to keep them alive so that they may sustain the whole absurd cycle of their lives.

This 'absurd cycle' of alienation, which it is argued perpetually separates workers from their real lives, became the core argument of Marx and also the SI. In theory the SI agreed with Marx and proposed that society should not use the exchange system of capitalism for the following reasons. The process was controlled and regulated by the dominant ideology of capital and the amount of actual lived freedom which the under classes could actually experience was reduced to that of 'spectacular consumption'. The system of exchange meant that any mass produced objects functioned merely as banal commodities used to amuse the interests of the proletariat while the bourgeoisie accumulated the surplus capital. In this process all spiritual and symbolic meanings of the gift were rationalized and

removed by capital.

In order to subvert this principle where an object symbolized the power of capital, the SI's theory of gift exchange tended to concentrate on the relationship between the subject, the object and real world events. For example, each moment and event was a singularly special time, and should therefore be met with an equally special gift to symbolize that moment and its strength. Marx's system was therefore supported by the SI, in order to refute the surplus value created by commodification. According to capitalist exchange, material harmony is therefore produced through the process of production and purchased through consumption. This trend continues today, as we see drug abusers like heroin addicts snatched up by industries like fashion and music.(fig 4). This aspect of spectacular society is what Baudrillard terms in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* as the 'loss of the real'. He explains that such 'liberations are just transitions toward a generalized manipulation'. This type of reality within society would continually discourage society from progressing itself towards an overall state of autonomy and unification. This argument is taken up by Henry A. Giroux who describes the situation,

Bodies anorexic, physically abused, and paralyzed from substance abuse - such stylized representations do not evoke sympathy or compassion, but work largely to reinforce our image of youth as symbols of violence, crime, and social disorder and women as sexualized commodities.

The spectacle of capitalism therefore rendered peoples lives with very little control as equality, integration and even to a certain extent governments were being influenced and controlled by capital and the power of multi national corporations. . This in turn led to people's feelings of community and social reality collapsing as the ethic of individual pursuit and profit was postulated within society. This type of society was described by the Situationists as dangerous, because it effectively glossed over the actual reality of everyday life, such as alienation, separation, oppression, war, poverty and drug abuse.

The spectacle of social control

The second aspect of the Spectacular society was that of control by the state and its use of imperial, colonial and military powers to oppress and regiment citizens. This spectacle of social control could also be seen in the city, in the form of architecture, urban planning, institutional art, newspapers and television, which all functioned as forms of social control. These were deployed by centralized institutions and governments to fabricate images of the 'real world' and 'real life', to maintain constant control over the masses. This was portrayed as a spectacular feeling that was only available through participation within capitalist culture. The illusion was continually maintained through exploiting the newest desires of young people. Debord reasoned that these were then used as the raw materials for producing images for circulation within the spectacle. This form of social control, as argued by the SI lured individuals into believing that poverty and class struggle did not exist in the unified domain of the modern capitalist 'real world'. Participation for the masses was therefore extremely controlled.

This was because the framework of social control effectively separated and alienated individuals from their real lives, as shown by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*. At the time this led many thinkers to apply a Marxist critique on the post war developments that were taking place. The condition of state control still prevails in today's society, now in the form of satellite information networks and electronic surveillance systems and also global

businesses such as McDonalds and media corporations and publishers It can therefore be argued that in the sense of the information networks that are being used by the state, some of the vestiges of the spectacular society can be located within today's society.

The Spectacle of science and technology

The banal subject-object relationship created by the alienating effects of capitalism and social control during the 1960s was further reflected within the spectacle of science and technology. The Spectacular society was equally dominated by post war scientific experimentation into the use of nuclear power and weaponry and atomic energy and warfare. Such criteria promoted the unequivocal need for technology to be utilized for the purpose of improving society instead of attempting to aid and facilitate its destruction. This aspect of the Spectacular society, according to Sadie Plant maintained the distinction between art and life and all the means by which the construction of a society enjoying the fruit's of technological and cultural achievements is denied' .

This is because science and technology has always tended to look outward, and has rarely paid much attention to feelings of subjectivity, which was a major concern for the SI. However the SI were not against the emerging society of technology and science, only against its sensationalized activities within the Spectacular society. In their journal it is clear that they had no desire to abolish science and technology or even appropriate it's use to control or destroy peoples' lives, as would be suggested by a right wing manifesto. Instead they wished to use its creative powers of automation and cybernetics to end the drudgery of unskilled labour and to break the tedious deadlock of factory work and all other associated forms of manual dexterity suffered by millions of workers everyday. This could only be achieved by the SI through adopting a discourse of revolutionary theory that would attempt to secure the support of these workers.

The public nowadays however may be consumed by the spectacle of technology and science, awed by its ability to 'achieve the impossible'. If atomic and nuclear power were the children of the Cold War, then synthetic representations by cloning, simulation and virtual electronic spaces are the hybrids of the information age. Baudrillard describes these as the 'nostalgic resurrection of the real in all its forms' as everything is recuperated by capital. The Spectacular society of science and technology has been superseded by today's revolution in hi-tech information systems and such trends by capitalism as recuperation may therefore escape unnoticed. For example , information is now readily available in the form of corporate services that specialize in supplying lists of names and addresses of unsuspecting 'potential' customers to interested clients Data bases contain every detail of an individuals private status as a 'free' citizen.

With this and other areas becoming privatized such as the internet, satellite and digital television and also scientific institutions, global capitalism maintains the similar divisions of the Spectacular society. The main concern is that the public may still believe that all that is necessary is to plug into a computer matrix and Hey - Presto, all the social ills and problems of society are wiped away. For some this may be the reality of the information society, but for others and with an equal degree of conviction, it may be the cosmetic make up of a new Spectacular society.

Two

Theory and practice of the SI

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything which was once directly lived has moved into a representation. (Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle)

The quote above is often used and may even be familiar to the reader. This is because it was freely taken by Guy Debord from Marx's Communist Manifesto and then adapted into the 'Society of the Spectacle'. This act signifies the anti capitalist position which the SI chose to adopt. The commodity status of information prevented knowledge from being distributed within the masses. The SI purposely and skillfully chose to refute the copyrights. This was clearly pointed out in the beginning of every journal of 'Le' International Situationniste' which stated that

This text may be freely reproduced, translated or adapted, even without mentioning the source.

Debord's and Vaneigem's ideas within 'Le' International Situationniste' were greatly influenced by the Marxist sociology professor Henri L  febvre. L  febvre's theories of 'Everyday life' were picked up by Debord, Vaneigem and Baudrillard during the academic semester year of 57/58 at the University of Nanterre in Paris. Debord and Vaneigem were however soon to accuse L  febvre of plagiarism and passing off their work as his own, which led to the break up of their friendship. With the arrival of the Internet in the public sphere, people may now realize the importance and totality of having a service that allows the distribution of free information. Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle' argued that alienation in society was caused by the dominant ideologies of state corporations, and therefore prevented genuine interaction between people in post war society. The internet is a space where it is argued that an individual can experience genuine social interaction that is unthwarted by capitalism. The first chapter of Debord's book is titled 'Separation perfected' and outlines that the spectacle

'is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images'

and further explained that it is also

'a permanent opium war which aims to make people identify goods with commodities and satisfaction with the survival that increases according to its own laws' .

Marx and Debord reasoned that despite the material abundance of commodities that are offered within spectacular society, they 'cannot compensate for the absence of passion and autonomy' ' within the lives of all those who have no control over their daily existence.

The phenomenal levels of information today are equally as useless, unless it can be understood.

The SI therefore chose to apply a revolutionary critique on society, because the society with which they were presented with, that of the capitalist, could not possibly be lived in and therefore could only be used as a platform, from which to move towards a new unitary ambience To create the Utopian society, the SI argued that it would first be necessary to dissolve the spectacle and its incumbent society through revealing the actual possibilities of an integrated, united and poverty free life to the proletariat. This could be described as the process where the purest joy is realized through the liberation of the greatest anxieties within society. Situationist theory is therefore complex as this task was never going to be easy, but the various theoretical and practical tools used were however straightforward.

The Science of situations

A situation is created for example, by utilizing any circumstance that is adequate enough to provoke a reaction from the ruling classes or authorities. A picture of a southside Chicago slum as Debord once said, might be shown to someone to invoke 'indignation at the fact that there are people who live like that' . There are however, no specific rules to follow as the nature of the SI - functioning as a revolutionary movement - rejected the doctrines and dogma of authority which attempted to organize and control people's lives within the spectacular society. It was believed that people would soon learn to organize their own lives. However, the contradiction that was noticed by external observers, was the actual blurring between freedom and servitude, as members of the SI were regularly expelled for breaking with the tight discourse of the movement. This resulted in a great number of expulsions, including the only English member Ralph Rummney.

The approach towards creating the 'Science of situations' was outlined in issue #1 (Dec 1958) of 'Le' International Situationniste'. The journal itself was bound in an expensive looking reflective metallic cover with glossy pages inside, an obvious parody of the Spectacular society. The journal described the proposals for the integration between art, politics and creative play. The definitions and terms were described as follows,

constructed situation: a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of unitary ambience and a game of events. situationist: Having to do with the theory or practical activity of constructed situations. One who engages in the construction of situations. A member of the situationist International.

Situationism: A meaningless term improperly derived from the above. There is no such thing as situationism, which would mean a doctrine of interpretation of existing facts. The notion of situationism is obviously devised by antisituationists.

The exact details within the journal about the SI's proposal's for the liberation of the proletariat can be awkward to extract from the texts. Michael McGlinn describes the SI's style of writing in 'A Fatal history of the SI' stating that

The use of language, style of authority and references to its processes coupled with apocalyptic descriptions of existing political and social conditions, all backed up with the ever present call to Revolution makes for powerful heady reading

The appropriation of Art

The role of art within the project incorporated anarchistic aesthetic traditions such as Dada and Surrealism, existentialist activism, psychoanalysis, a Marxist analysis of commodity culture, and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School for social Research. The Situationists applied the various specialized disciplines of art to their own ends in order to encourage active integration between people and to suppress the project of art. The SI formulated an activity known as the *dérive*, which functioned to suppress capitalist urban architecture. It involved groups of situationists traversing the urban environment to seek out reasons for movement, other than ones that had originally been intended. Debord explained that

One or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.

If used within a contemporary environment, the *Dérive* could teach people the true meaning of their surrounding space, as Sadie Plant explains:

Although the artist can create atmospheres and realize fantasies only in the most limited of contexts, the products of the imagination can serve as a propaganda of the possible' .

Internet users may experience the same conditions of the *dérive* as they drift around within its electronic spatial environment.

The *dérive* was perhaps aimed specifically at combating the spectacle of Social control. Extensive critiques of urban town planning were undertaken by the SI as they argued that the new public spaces like shopping malls were the product of capitalist models of social control and would therefore eradicate the true experience and feeling of shopping and buying gifts. This trend is widely evident within today's corporate sponsored environments, like the ubiquitous shopping mall precinct. Baudrillard describes these shopping malls as simulacral simulations of what was once a real, concrete experience within society. Fred Dewey, a telecommunications theorist, explains the construction of postmodern shopping malls within the information society:

We are already very much inside a 'virtual' environment, and what's really impoverished is the world of real experience, and people interacting with each other...what's developing now is an entirely new form of controlled environment. We find malls, theme parks and themed environments. These provide safe, secure environments where people can interact. It looks very much like public life, but in fact really isn't, because the environments are owned and controlled and heavily regulated by, generally, large global corporations. People interact somewhat randomly, but the actual experience is entirely manufactured - all of its terms are defined ahead of time. The experience is very similar to going through virtual reality. While this provides a kind of vitality, at the same time it's based on leaving behind the mess of real urban life. Everyone expects that the Cyberworld is not going to

have these kinds of parameters and controls. This is extremely unrealistic.

The process of gentrification, commodification and capitalist control that Dewey describes can be viewed as a further movement away from the repatriation of exploited workers and their produce. The SI had envisioned that a complete re-unification between workers and produce would result in the total realization of life in the present, and not something that was to happen in a far off distant future, as promised by the spectacle of capitalism. The Situationist project was therefore not an account of how to survive while having as much fun as possible within the capitalist environment, but instead was a 'theoretical transcription of attempts to have as much fun as possible changing it'.

Détournement

Another important technique appropriated by the SI was the powerful tool of Détournement. This is perhaps most familiar as it has been assigned to the group as a distinctive 'logo'. Détournement used a process that can be described as the spatial occupation of a form, an image or an environment by another type of form, in order to reveal the true hidden intrinsic value, identity or meaning of the original object or subject. This could involve the defacement of an old master with a cartoon speech bubble (fig 5), or removing unwanted parts of a city from a map because they were no longer desirable to live in (fig 6), or even actually occupying a section or area within a city, presenting it with a new meaning (as seen in the Latin quarter occupation during 1968). Debord described the process in his article titled 'the theory of detournment':

The discoveries of modern poetry regarding the analogical structure of images demonstrate that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. Restricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention. The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of grater efficiency. Anything can be used.

The SI's relationship with art was very similar to playing a game of chess, much in the style of Marcel Duchamp. In 1917 with his famous fountain piece (fig 7), Duchamp secured a stale mate situation against the institution of art. This was possibly authenticated by his disappearance from the art world for several years. Debord on the other hand, decided in 1963 to remove all the playing pieces from the SI's board - including détournement and the dérive. His resolution to withdraw from passing comment on all art objects is explained by Simon Ford, a curator and writer:

In 'for a Revolutionary Judgment of Art', 1961, he {Debord} wrote that the point was not to engage 'in some sort of revolutionary art criticism, but {to make}a revolutionary critique of all art .

From then until its split in 1972, the SI only produced text based theory that could be used to freely explore the debacle that existed between the institute of art and the capitalist system of commodification and the society of the spectacle without any compromise. The project was to eventually peak in the Spring of May 1968, when demonstrations for educational reforms started within Nanterre University, quickly spread out onto the surrounding streets (fig 8). The occupation of Paris in 1968 heralded a new epoch in revolution. Many of its graffiti slogans such as 'we must take our desires for reality' and 'never work' and are still relevant today because of their direct concern for social reality.

The occupation quickly culminated in a mass demonstration of proletariat strength by young workers and students alike. Paris was brought to a near stand still as millions of workers went on strike around France and the authoritarian government of De Gaulle was almost toppled. At this point, the SI believed it had the support of the proletariat, which was essential to achieve any form of revolution against the consumer society.

Criticism of the SI

Criticism of the SI is widely divergent. Len Bracken for example has claimed in 'Guy Debord - Revolutionary', that the theory of the SI was inadequate and that Debord's interests were merely focused on holding

'out for new states of being, for the discovery of "superior desires", that would be so attractive as to devalue the realization of other works of art and necessarily lead to the conscious realization of situations'.

Bracken claims that with all the upheaval going on in the world, Debord was more interested in holding 'out for superior desires'. Today the superior desires of society are still material. The study of desire has produced many theories associated with human needs. Maslow's pyramid (fig 9) is one such example of a hierarchy which describes the various levels of needs. This begins with physiological survival (the need for food and water), next on top of this is placed comfort (a house for shelter and clothes for protection). Next is acceptance, which we seek in the form of friendships and a place to work. Maslow finally places at the top of the pyramid that of the 'superior desire' of actual self realization, which few people can actually claim to have achieved and subsequently experienced. After the events of May 68, the Situationists became famous. But once famous, they fell into vicious internal disputes and were reduced to their founder member, Guy Debord, who eventually announced himself disgusted by his own celebrity and disbanded the movement in 1972.

The SI produced an art discourse which can still be used in today's ever increasing system of commodification. Pre-SI theory by Debord and Vaneigem centered around the 'potlatch', which is an African term meaning the exchange of art and craft as gifts. With the development of science, technology and information to the degree of radically altering the course of nature, artists now incorporate a wider social critique and are forced to overlook the sentimental spiritual value of art. Situationist ideas in relation to contemporary society are therefore important because they remind us that everyday life should involve creativity and the use of play and 'potlatch'. SI theory is also a valuable reminder of that particular epoch in time, when art was much more widely separated from life and it was deemed as necessary for its complete subversion by its own negation.

The position of the SI as a small group of revolutionaries dedicated to changing the world is challenged by Stewart Home, who disputes the notion of the movement as an autonomous organization. He claims that it existed within the safety zone of bourgeois society and states that

The Spectro Situationist hoped to 'realize and suppress' art through a reinvention of everyday life; the idea that art would disappear into a poeticized construction of daily existence, to be practiced autonomously by a proletarian class who would in effect become 'masters without slaves'. But an aestheticisation of everyday life, and by implication of the proletariat, is in no sense a neutral concept - and such ideas

are ultimately the aspirations of an avant-garde fraction within the bourgeois class. Art, poetry - indeed any system of aesthetics that privileges form over content - are ultimately bourgeois concerns. Because the Specto-Situationists failed to break with these ideas their practice came to reinforce the overall position of the bourgeois.

In order to suppress bourgeois authority and reveal the existence of 'superior desires' to the public, contemporary revolutionary art groups will undoubtedly have to rely on using the support of the information network. The shift from production to information means that the computer - as well as the proletariat - will be essential in restructuring society towards autonomy and unification.

Three

Jean Baudrillard and the new postmodern society of technology and information

To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. (Jean Baudrillard, the Precision of Simulacra)

Jean Baudrillard was professor of sociology at Nanterre University up until 1987 when he retired due an increased amount of public lectures and interviews. It was at Nanterre, that after being inspired by the Situationists during the 1960s, he began to theorize his view of the consumer society and the commodity status of society within the modern world. Baudrillard has admitted that the SI influenced his critique on everyday life and his later conception of 'simulation' owes much to Debord's theory of the 'spectacle'. In 1968 he wrote *Le système des objets*, in which he theorized mass consumption as 'the virtual totality of all objects and messages which were at the time constituted in a more or less coherent discourse'. He then abandoned using a Marxist critique, believing that it was too inappropriate as a paradigm for application on a rapidly developing contemporary society. During the mid 1970s he then began to explore the proliferation of technology in society, choosing to focus on hyper reality, cybertechnology and simulations. The essays were later collected together in 1983 and published as *Simulacres et simulation*. The postmodern tracts of hyper-reality, simulation, media advertising and consumer consumption are all focal points of Baudrillard's polemics. In *Simulations*, he argues that the properties of communication and capital were responsible for constructing new paradigms of consciousness and explained that a system of implosion was in operation. This involved the recycling and commodification of all spent cultural forms which thus created what is now effectively known as postmodern society.

A vast amount of theories surround postmodernism and the emergence of the information society. The main bulk of the masses now appear to be slowly absorbing the cyber revolution, with an estimated guess of 1 in four UK households owning a PC computer. However many people still find themselves alienated by cybernetics and the myriad of different levels of technology and jargon at play. The following aspects of Baudrillard's work may therefore be used to view the assimilation of information in society and explain its actual perceived current status in relation to Situationist theory. According to Baudrillard, what is presented as the 'Real' in society, is the product of capitalism in the form of mainstream newspapers, magazines and television. This appears to the viewer in a similar fashion as the Spectacle - a collection of abstracted images, icons and behavior that only exists in the meta physical space created by media. This image 'presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification' and is reflective of the present condition of information and capitalism, which seems to happen everywhere, but can actually be found nowhere. As we have seen it was first argued by Marx and later by Debord and then by Baudrillard, that what is created through objects - commodities and more recently the media, is a voyeuristic relationship between 'the dominant ideology' (capitalism) and the masses. The masses therefore have no direct engagement and assume the role of spectators. This symptom is the direct result of the commodity and media world that began in the 1960s and has extended itself into the successive decades. This reincarnation, according to Baudrillard has appeared in the form of the media society and its continuum within the 90s as the 'information society' Baudrillard argues that mass control is appropriated through the power of media and information within society. He theorizes that because only a minimal form of participation is happening - through the use of phone-ins, write-ins and commodities - no direct expression will ever happen. He also states that the system is flawed because the information which is transmitted has to pass through the dominant model or ideology that is constantly asserted by capital. So rather than having a pure system of dialectic thought and inquiry, what actually take place is an indirect form of communication. Baudrillard argues that this type of infrastructure is now enforced today by the global hegemony of communications.

This theory is supported through examining the existing sets of models that are used for maintaining a political economy and the production of needs. He layers new meanings onto these by suggesting that everyday life is determined more and more by the manipulation of these models and messages, which are used to control movement within society. Hence subconscious interactions with objects that take precedence over real life social interaction with other people. 'One should not forget', he warns in the Consumer Society, 'that these goods are the product of a human activity and that they are dominated not by natural ecological laws but by laws of exchange value'. This type of engagement produced by capitalism maintains the illusion that individuals are integrated with the 'real' world, when in actual reality what is happening is the systematic purchasing of commodities. The complete organization of objects, fashions, commodities, supermarkets and people are placed within a system of codes and models formulated by information and capital. This system of organization is what Baudrillard refers to as 'the loss of the real' and that Use/exchange values have collapsed into a meaningless void. Meaning is replaced by new values, which Baudrillard terms as 'Sign value'. Where use value referred to an object's symbolic and spiritual value and exchange to its market value; Sign value no longer refers to any subjective reality, but instead to a particular system of signs and values to which it belongs. The more prestigious one's commodities are for example; houses; car's and clothing; the higher one stands within the sign value system.

Simulacra

Signs therefore began to no longer refer to universal concerns such as welfare, social values, humanism or any other basic values, but instead to each other. Within this system, they compete against one another for attention, supremacy and hegemony. Baudrillard uses the term 'Simulacra' to refer to this autonomous system. He states that its first manifestations were in the form of the 'first order of Simulacra' at the beginning of the Renaissance during the 16th Century and was initially proposed in *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (1976). Baudrillard conveys that simulacra is the reproduction of objects or events, while the 'orders of simulacra' form various stages or 'orders of appearance' in the relationship between simulacra and 'the real'.

The first order of simulacra

The first order of simulacra is described as the 'counterfeit' period between the Renaissance and the start of the Industrial revolution in the late 18th Century. Feudal society before the Renaissance produced no signs other than ones that were fixed in meaning and could be read from a person's clothes, indicating their rank or social status. Post medieval bourgeoisie was liberated from this fixed hierarchy and subsequently began to mourn the loss. This resulted in an art practice which attempted to imitate the natural world and its stratification - as witnessed in the sculpture, architecture and painting of the Renaissance, the Baroque and the Romantic periods. Baudrillard suggests that the inherent goals of the simulacral orders, have been to produce a flexible and controllable universal system of order and power;

The counterfeit is working, so far only on substance and form, not yet on relations and structures. But it is aiming already, on this level, at the control of a pacified society, ground up into a synthetic deathless substance: an indestructible artifact that will guarantee an eternity of power'

The second order of simulacra

The second order of Simulacra is dominated by serial industrialization, when infinite reproducibility was introduced into the world in the form of the industrial simulacra. Productive mechanization turned out mass objects: exact replicas, infinitely produced and reproduced by assembly line processes and eventually automation. With the introduction of photography and film, as Walter Benjamin saw, even art was taken over by mechanical reproduction, losing its aura and therefore being forced to relinquish its claims to represent a higher dimension which offers alternatives and allegedly superior values and representations. In this order of simulacra, there is no longer nostalgia for a natural order, nature becomes the object of domination, and reproduction itself becomes a dominant social principle governed by the laws of the market. Baudrillard sees the industrial order as ruled by the 'commercial law of value', equivalent exchange, and no longer by the 'natural law of value'.

The third order simulacra

Today 'we are in the third -order simulacra; no longer that of counterfeit of an original as in the first order, nor that of the pure series as in the second' Baudrillard claims in *Simulations*. The third stage is 'simulation proper', the end result of a long process of simulation where simulation models have come to constitute the world, and overtake and finally 'devour' representation. Society thus moves from a 'capitalist-productivist' society to a neo-capitalist cybernetic order which aims at taking total control'. Models and codes

thus come to constitute everyday life and the society of simulation and information attempts to control and produce an individual's complete range of behavior. This is the new model of social control where codes and programming become the principle of social organization and individuals are forced to respond to pre-coded messages and models in the realm of economics, politics, culture and everyday life. Although one is allowed a range of choices - indeed such choices are constantly demanded - the options are predetermined and precoded. Douglas Kellner points out that 'Foucault's 'disciplinary society' with its modes of surveillance and punishment thus become, for Baudrillard - a society which is simulated through 'tests' and programmed differences' This process is termed by Baudrillard as the 'cyberblitz' of society, where individuals, objects and society are subjected to the effects of cybernetic codes, models, modulations and the steering system of a society which aims at perfecting its instruments of social control. Political economy, the media and cybernetics coalesce to produce a new social order beyond the stage of capitalism described by Marxism. Kellner points out the nature of this rationalization:

Artificial materials like plastic, synthetics, stucco and glass replace natural 'living' material like wood or cotton; they are 'homogenous as cultural signs and can be instituted in a coherent system. Their abstraction permits combining them as one wishes...The entire modern environment thus passes globally into a system of signs... In short, the system of objects leads people to adapt to a new, modern world which represents a transition from a traditional, material organization of the environment to a more rationalized and cultural one(SO,pp.54-5)

Intelligent Machines

With the introduction of global telecommunications for public consumption (namely the Web and satellite GPS systems), military and commercial developers have further mapped out the peripheral edge of geographical contact between human beings. The next logical frontier is then perhaps for the Descartes - Baconian institute of science and technology to 'conquer' the more abstract and artificial concepts such as Nanotechnology , Cryogenic preservation, DNA engineering and genetic cloning. If such technologies are developed, they will fulfill Baudrillard's theory of a hyper real spectacular society that is based on the code. This will then be more real than the real and science will have no where else to go and then 'perhaps only death, the reversibility of death, is of a higher code than code' . Baudrillard is also cautions that,

any system approaching perfect operationally is approaching its own death and that when the system declares "A is A," or "two and two make four," it simultaneously arrives at the point of complete power and total ridicule - in other words, of probable immediate subversion.'

Each new scientific discovery steers society further towards this possible spectacular abstraction between the real and the artificial. The consequence of this imbalance is that both artists and mass media alike, are then able to speculate on the exact prognosis and current status of interaction between science and technology through the use of art and mass media alike to describe the 'condition' of reality. Information technology and artificial Intelligence systems are advancing towards superior decision making abilities than before. These machines now have autonomous decision making capabilities and assert new

paradigms within society, that it is perhaps no longer viable for a concrete social or self identity to be formulated in relation to intelligent machines . Instead our natural identity as a race or species in general may further be developed through a bottom up interactive engagement with the organic subjectivity of thinking machines. Baudrillard states that the, **industrial machine corresponds to the rational, referential, functional, historical consciousness. But it is the unconscious - nonreferential, transferential, indeterminate, floating - that corresponds to the aleatory machine (actions) of the code' .**

This artificial freeplay could possibly imply that we can no longer align ourselves to learn from machines in the usual fashion. The belief that science maintains a governing top down sort of approach in order to create the future for society may be challenged by new machines that can now create new forms of social control far beyond the ideas of Debord and the SI. They may ultimately even control the very people who have designed and constructed them. This could then effectively authenticate the Situationist concept of spectacular society, all be it - a very different type of society.

Baudrillard notes that technology gives us information and machines, but in turn takes away the enjoyment of real life. He relates this equation in a hypothesis which derives from the perfection of technology. As such phenomena as art and music are perfected he claims that these disciplines will disappear into a state of implosion, and as a result society will enter a new realm of social history. He therefore suggests (in a typical Baudrillardian contradiction), that the masses have asserted power over the media, but as a consequence have ended up in a no win situation, becoming more silent and apathetic, thus still susceptible to conditioning and control.. In the future environment of advanced scientific experimentation, capital relations, technology and information, the misinterpretations and inherent dangers will undoubtedly create problems, such as personal identity, the physicality of the body, social well being and the integration between freedom, the self, community and society.

War in the Gulf

The increased dissemination of technology and information such as electronic debate, uses of fax, discussion groups, computer bulletin boards, talk radio and television are viewed by Baudrillard as traversing away from the metaphysical resonance of sign value within the spectacle, and moving into the region of everyday use value. This migration of technology and simulation according to Baudrillard, removes some of the elite status awarded to it by sign value. By way of illustration the spectacle of the Gulf war is much debated over because of its paradigm shifts between the real and that of pure simulation. He has written in 'The Gulf War did not take place' that the appearance and totality of the Gulf War was in fact engineered and censored by the military and world media - for the purpose of consumption by TV audiences. This was evidenced by CNN and CBS news networks who refused to show footage shot by independent film crews within the war zone because it had not been censored by the Pentagon. The fact that thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed was literally glossed over by publicly showcasing the spectacle of new technology, simulation and electronic warfare to the masses. Baudrillard correctly states that 'We are no longer in a logic of the passage from virtual to actual but in a hyperrealist logic of the deterrence of the real by the virtual'

The use of the media to indoctrinate the masses serves only to increase levels of distancing and alienation from the actual subject and create further distortions, **the images of war nonetheless have real effects and become enmeshed in the ensuing material and social reality. In this sense Baudrillard argues that we live in a**

hyperreality that results from the fusion of the virtual with the real into a third order of reality'.

What is therefore experienced in society is a new form of reality, the simulacra of cybernetic technology that attempts to remove all the imperfections of real life. The desensitization of war is appropriated through highlighting the genius of technology. Technology then becomes the perfect alibi for war. Soldiers, fighter pilots and teenage video gamers alike can experience the war in the form of computer generated images. Reality is then lost, hidden behind a virtual screen (fig 10). Wolf-Gunter Thiel explains the reality created by simulation,

In the run of the twentieth century first the cinema, then the radio and finally television, with its different show formats, became the decisive scenarios for simulation. The television news business has always been dependent on simulated reports in order to transmit images in times of economic and political crisis, or in war situations, as for example, the images of 'Operation Desert Storm' seen on Television during the gulf War. These pictures released by the military, were calculated to serve tactical and strategic ends, while in their public broadcast, they simultaneously functioned as propaganda. These simulations looked much like the computer game animations that are installed in many home computers, and the general spread the visual conventions associated with these kind of computer games raised credibility and acceptability of military images. The simulation of war situations in games has led to the acceptance of simulation of actual images of war.

This type of VDU reality is a symptom which is unerringly identical to the condition of mass consumption within of the Spectacular society described 30 years previously by Debord. People were alienated from the objects they produce and viewed images of their own lives through the prism of media and capital control. Similar arguments can found in earlier critical modern thinkers such as Lukacs, the Frankfurt School, Sartre, and others who were concerned about the decline of subjectivity and the processes whereby human beings were becoming thinglike and reified. It was infact the sociologist Max Weber's final analysis and extreme fear before he died, that society would end up full of tiny little people, who were all tiny little cogs that formed the different gears that turn the wheels of the larger institutional machine. Baudrillard however reverses Weber's premonition and instead, proposes that society and people becomes more like things, more like objects and that we should divest our illusion and hubris of all subjectivity. Like wise, he proposes that it is useless to try to change or control the world and that we should give up such strategies and adopt the 'fatal strategies' of objects. This involves using extreme measures of consumption. In 'Fatal strategies' (1983) he first proposed that a Weimar type economy of over consumption would result in the radical transformation of society. The reader learned that,

A system is abolished only by pushing it into hyperlogic, by forcing it into an excessive practice which is equivalent to a brutal amortization. "You want to consume - OK, let's consume always more, and anything whatsoever; for any useless and absurd purpose.

The actual lived social conditions within contemporary society and the effect of the information age, are now key factors in providing a ground for the proposition of new ideas that focus on aspects of integration between art, technology and cultural theory and radical politics. Thinkers such as Marx, Debord and Baudrillard have all noticed a similar trend - that the indigenous social orders in which people have lived for thousands of years, are being wrenched away by capitalism. Conditions of life for previous generations were always insecure: society was at the mercy of natural disasters, plagues and famines. In the industrialized countries of the modern world, people are however now largely immune

from these insecurities; uncertainties about the future are now derived from the social forces that we ourselves have unleashed. The shift from production to information appears to create more global problems, in the form of rampant capitalism. Debord stated in the Society of the Spectacle that,

Economic growth frees societies from the natural pressure which required their direct struggle for survival, but at that point it is from their liberator that they are not liberated .

Today the advancement of information capital threatens to enforce the servitude of the absurd cycle of poverty described by Marx. The threat of the information society would therefore seem to be inherently the same as the spectacular society, primarily that it can effectively gloss over everyday life such as crime, poverty, and ultimately situations like the Gulf War. This creates more serious problems for radical groups for example, **when the pentagon's stage management of media reality, coupled with war's made-for-TV brevity and its Nintendo bloodlessness {from an American perspective, at least}, presented the anti-war movement with a frustratingly stealthy target, seemingly designed to evade or outmaneuver the tactics of traditional activism.**

Debord Vs Baudrillard

Where Debord gave the Spectacular society certain merits realizing, as Marx did, its potential for transforming society, Baudrillard goes all the way and condemns it totally. The SI intended to unzip and turn its very contents against itself. According to Sadie Plant the groups,

entire theory was based on the assumption that both the objective and subjective ingredients of a new society are already present within the spectacle, so that all that is needed is a reversal of the perspective in which spectacular society is lived" .

The sign posts of information and technology would therefore appear to contest against each other for supremacy and acceptance within the new structure of simulacra and hyperreality. Participation is possible, as Baudrillard has noted, though only through the channels of the world mass media, in the form of 'Nintendo' game play. Each program on TV offers the latest technology and appears to be more inviting than the rest of its competitors. This consumerist-media showcase is prevalent in today's society and has resulted in a public awareness that expects art, science, & technology to provide entertainment, spectacle and sensationalism in equal measures. This criteria therefore establishes a theoretical relationship between Debord's Society of the Spectacle and Baudrillard's theory of hyper-reality. The application of Baudrillard's Simulacrum theory on society can therefore provide an adequate reflection on the inner environment of technology and information - but in general it provides neither an adequate nor an all encompassing perspective on society. This flaw occurs because although the advent of new technology has brought many good prospects into society, the real lived social conditions still continue to largely be ignored - even by Baudrillard.

Four

Postmodern art

The end of cultural history manifests itself on two opposite sides: the project of its suppression in total history, and the organization of its preservation as a dead object in spectacular contemplation. One of these movements has linked its fate to social critique, the other to the defense of class power. (Debord Society of the spectacle).

This section will focus on how artists have responded to the growth of capitalism, media power and technology since the 1960s. I feel here that it is important not to forget the virulent times that were experienced during the 1960s and 70s, when radical art groups fought hard to increase awareness within the public sector of both cultural and political alternatives to capital domination. Each movement shall therefore be viewed with direct regard to this qualifier. Debord and the Situationists were within the same era as several large trans-Atlantic avant garde art movements and others that were smaller in size. Their main source of inspiration was Marx, Freud, Dada and Surrealism, and their main concern was that art had become more inward looking, unrealistic and that it had also become debased through commercialism. Conceptualism, Fluxus, Land art, Performance art, video art and installation art explored alternatives to an object based art practice that allied itself with the infrastructure of capitalism in order to provide marketable objects.

Pop and Minimal art were movements that explored objects - though in dissimilar terms. Pop incorporated the emblems of modernist society into its work - such as newspapers, food cans, beer tins, magazines, refrigerators and automobiles to produce Dada type collages (fig 11) and ready made objects. It is because of this that Pop art is favoured by Baudrillard as the movement which explored the very logic of contemporary culture and an art that represented the serialization of capitalism. Baudrillard stated that 'Pop artists could not be reproached for making it evident...the worst thing that could happen would be for them to be condemned'

The reciprocal movement to Pop within American culture during the 1960s was known as Minimalism, because of its use of geometric shapes and forms that searched for purity through a self referential system of autonomous shapes. Minimalist theory attempted to relieve the object of any unnecessary illusion and grandeur that it appeared to have accumulated through its previous allegiance with production and industry, such as observed in the work of David Smith. The medium then effectively became the message, a point that Baudrillard also criticizes because of its alienating effects on the audience, which is interestingly the same view that the Russian state held on Constructivism. The desire to directly confront with the spectator was also a motivating force within the Conceptual Art movement. All unnecessary references were relinquished in favour of presenting the idea itself, much in the same manner as Duchamp proposed with his infamous Fountain piece. Much of conceptual art was text based as in Marcel Broodthaers La Salle Blanche (1975) (fig 12) with the written word functioning as a replacement for visual signs. Artists made works that avoided the commodification of capital by choosing to use theory as the primary medium for inciting action. These strategies serve as a modus operandi for those who wish to make art that expresses that life has a real purpose, other than profit. This is described by Kristine Stiles in a recent anthology of artists writings :

Artists looked to science, social science and cultural theory - anywhere except to dealers, critics, or aesthetics for leads and inturn attacked head-on the commodity

status of art "Objecthood" was an issue not only because art objects were commodities but because they seemed insignificant and inert next to the electronic and mass-produced offerings of the mass media.'

However this art could be viewed as pedantic and intellectual, alienating the public from enjoying visual art. In theory this was conceptualism's positive aspect as it could not be commodified. Dealer's did find a way around this and traded in the documentation presented by the artist. The SI's approach was of course to cease all art production, which arguably alienated the group further away from the very public that it sought to unify. Another flaw with conceptual art was that although it sought to evade commodification, it relied heavily on the gallery system for its meaning. Thus outside the space of the gallery it would be in danger of failing to be recognized as an art piece. Artists have therefore realized that in order to engage with the opposition, which in these movements has always been commodification by capital, they must work from within a system in order to understand it. In order to present a significant challenge, a system can be more fully explored from inside, rather than attempting to meet with it head on. This factor is a central strategy for artists who intend to explore and use the power available within the information society.

The regimentation of everyday life

As we have seen, capitalism attempts to control every aspect of an individual's life which results in the complete separation between work, leisure and spare time. If a person works for 40 hours a week for £4.00 an hour, they earn £160. The 40 hours does not include other time that is devoted to the job so this figure is then increased to 60 hours a week. After paying taxes, insurance, food and rent money, the amount that is left over is rarely sufficient enough to buy any goods outright. But it is sufficient enough to buy them on credit - house payments for thirty years, a car for 7 years, washing machines, TVs, Videos and Hi Fis. This is life on the installment plan where people live at the mercy of credit and are controlled by their possessions. All workers feel that their life therefore begins when they arrive home after work, when the possibilities of pleasure and desire are opened up to them. This begins around 6 or 7 o'clock at night, but even then the only time available is four hours for 'real living'. But even here at home away from work, he or she is not left alone. For every attempt is made to regiment people's pleasures within the reciprocity of the spectacle; television; movies; package holidays; books; radio; advertising and magazines invade the precious space of private life. Ideology is also enforced, with people being told that it is acceptable behavior to become entertainers or athletes.

New York art - Jeff Koons and the Simulationists

New York artists such as Jeff Koons explored such domestic relationships between humans and machines during the 1980s. He identified their forms as engendered objects by framing commodity machines such as vacuum cleaners (fig 13), as having holes that are metaphorically similar to human orifices. This creates a more intimate relationship between the consumer and the object. It also identifies aspects of Baudrillardian theory between the object and the subject, where the subject fetishes the commodity object.

Koons has reasoned throughout his work that this is how we relate to machines - the same as we do to other human beings, and that we see them as having personalities. The work that Koons and also Peter Haleey, Ross Bleckner, Haim Steinbach and Philip Taaffe produced during the 1980s was termed as 'Simulationist' or 'Neo-geo' art work. The work offered a critique of consumer society and in turn received great critical attention from art critics because of its 'controversial' analysis of Baudrillard's theory. However, Baudrillard subsequently rejected this notion and has maintained a distance from the group, stating that because art is a simulation of reality, it cannot represent his theories.

Critical Art Ensemble

Critical Art Ensemble(CAE) are a group of five artists influenced by the SI, radical 60s street theatre and Berlin Dada. They propose a similar type of 'nomadic resistance' to that of the structures used by capitalism. In their work CAE stress the need for an art orientated to the left in order to use the cybercultural revolution and its power to engage with the ill effects of capitalism. They define their goal as 'bringing social justice and economic equality within the wired world', while the plight of poverty and oppression are also central motivating factors. Groups like CAE have proposed theories of nomadic resistance in the form of active hacking, which blocks offender's access to their own data bases in an effort to engage with the discourse of capitalism. This is of course illegal and CAE claim they do not have any association with such acts. Umberto Eco reifies this strategy, stating that,

through acts of harassment, exploiting their own logic - if there exists a completely automated factory, it will not be upset by the death of its owner but rather by erroneous bits of information inserted here and there, making work hard for the computers that run the place.

The role of the Artist

An example of contemporary 'nomadic capitalism' is posited by Rupert Sheldrake in the collection of essays titled 'Random Access'. He cites that from Monday to Friday an I and it type of relationship takes place between the capitalist and the natural environment while 'extracting the resources as effectively and efficiently' as possible. This persona then shifts to an I and thou type of set up at the weekend, when it is then OK to get back to nature and visit the countryside with family and even perhaps cry tears at a Live aid concert. The capitalist is then back at work first thing on Monday morning to repeat the whole absurd process. This kind of transition suggests the levels of hypocrisy that exist within the capitalist society. The most basic refusal by artists to function within this type of organization, leads to the assertion of stereotypical identities by capitalism such as 'unthreatening...the individualist, the eccentric, the disaffected, or the revolutionary'. These roles and identities are developed by Spectacular society much in the same way as marketing strategies, as in Maslow's theory of productivity which attempts to fabricate a generalized identity for use within the consumer society. Artists have been obliged to integrate themselves within this type of capitalist set up, whether it be that of the patronage system or in the form of the gallery system. In return he or she is offered the safety and security of the larger institution. Raoul Vaneigem described the commodification process where people can be made to fit into 'the stereotyped images of the star, the poor man, the communist, the murder-for-love, the law abiding citizen, the rebel, the bourgeois' and that they in turn 'will replace man, putting in his place a system of multicopy categories.' It would therefore seem that capitalism threatens to govern and structure all identities within society - indigenous, cultural, artistic

and ethnic. In the present society of increased information and technology, the identifiable task would be for artists to calibrate the extent of de-centralized institutional power that is no longer visible nor stable.

The body and technology

The power of information and technology and its possible boundaries are viewed in a different way by Australian performance artist Sterlac, who appropriates robotics and the Internet to explore the boundaries of his own body. He embraces computer systems that control his body to the extent of creating a cybernetic-human organism - or cyborg (fig 14). This integration between the human body and cybernetics provides a visual metaphor of Baudrillard's postmodern theory of simulation, simulacra and hyper-reality all enmeshed into one. This aesthetic schema of spectacle, simulation and technology is indicative of the new condition of art and technology in society.

Sterlac works to explore the information society in aesthetic terms rather than as a means of information capital. His work looks at the postmodern speed and transfer of information with performances objectively explaining to the audience the machine like vision of Descartes, that the world is laid out within a complete mathematical system. This type of rationalization is what Sheldrake describes as the dominant model within advanced societies, one that believes that the purpose of science and technology is to conquer and appropriate nature for our use and control. Glasgow based artist Will Bradley, discusses the reality of art, information and technology;

It's obvious and true that life has got faster over the twentieth century, but people still operate at roughly the same speed they always did. You can E-mail me War & Peace from St Petersburg in half a minute but I'm still never going to get around to reading it. There's more information around now than ever, and it's more available in more compact formats - except American Vogue which for some reason is at least the size of a phone book - more TV channels, more CDs, more semi-autobiographical first novels, more giant posters, more tiny adverts on the back of bus tickets, more new and improved, instantly updated, transnational. Telemarketed everything.

The question of self identity and the relationship of art to society is therefore of importance to postmodern artists. As art historian Rosalind Krauss has written, the new postmodern practice is now 'not defined in relation to a given medium.... but rather to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium - photography, books, lines on walls, or sculpture itself might be used' . Michael Fried agreed with this stating that 'Postmodernism is articulated not within the mediums but in relation to cultural terms. These forms are conceived logically, not derived historically, and so must be regarded in terms of structure'

In relation to cultural terms, radical groups such as CAE can be quantified by their demonstrative efforts to maintain that spatial environments such as cyberspace remain genuine public spaces. After all, the net was primarily seen as a place for social and cultural experimentation. It now appears to be in danger of turning into a privatized domain commodified by commercial and multi nationals, much in the same way that Dewey has described the fate of shopping malls turning into virtual spaces maintained by corporate interests. It is this type of selfish control that groups like the SI and more recently CAE have attempted to curtail with their doctrine of equality, unification and liberation of the proletariat. However, the commodification of life still continues and the search for new areas to exploit extends itself further into genetics and cyberspace.

Information Black holes

Manuel Castells is widely acknowledged as the world's foremost authority on the emergent 'network society'. He argues that global capitalism dominated by information networks and knowledge intensive services, has emerged to be the most productive system that the world has ever known. It has also produced steep rises in inequality, crime and exclusion. His polemic against the authoritarian technocrats demonstrates that mega cities like New York, Mexico City and Jakarta are connected to global networks in such a way that the local poor are effectively disconnected from the sources of wealth. Whole countries and regions may fall into what he calls the 'informational black holes'. Those who cannot learn the information based skills - will simply be excluded and left to suffer. The integration between technology and the masses has to therefore extend itself further into the under privileged classes. Playwright Arnold Wesker conceptualizes the size of the gap within the context of what visual art may have achieved,

After 70 years of talking films and fifty years of TV, only 1 percent of the world have a college education and 70 percent can't read .

This would suggest that the information super highway may further add to this disenchantment. Wesker's analysis leaves technology and computers within the arts with a status equivalent to that of fetishistic. Technology is used and presented as an aesthetic banality, rather than mediating a sense of new integration and purpose within society. Debord raised similar thoughts when he said 'what is more important, a painting that changes the way we look at paintings, or a painting that makes us see the depravity of everyday life?' Wesker finally asks 'what more can the arts expect to achieve no matter how spectacular the technology is?'

The danger is then obviously the 'progressive conquest of nothing' . This could happen if artists chose not to offer alternative models to the ones offered by capital. After all technology belongs to all of society - and not just to the chosen few or the privileged elite.

Five

Conclusion

Everywhere, excess Simulation has exploded like Chernobyl, and everywhere death spreads as fast and massively as disorder. Nothing works anymore, and nothing is believed anymore (Guy Debord, This Terrible Life, Gallimard)

With impartial judgment applied, it would seem possible that society is in the process of being dominated by information networks. Several theories can be drawn from the various philosophical doctrines discussed throughout the essay. The majority of radical or progressive ideas within the postmodern environment of speed and information appear to be structured around a critique that neither embraces socialism nor capitalism. Instead what is proposed is a form of neo nomadic liberalism for appropriation within the

information age. The events of 1968 are also appropriated, as a point of reference used by many theorists. However for some the events only function as a magical well that can provide a source of libertarian spontaneity and folklore nostalgia to 'pepper' up their own writing.

CAE for example, criticize many of today's activists for having no living memory or experience of the 1960s and also for adopting strategies that are drawn from radical politics during that particular period. This is a valid point to some degree, as Baudrillard and the SI have shown, that conditioning by the minority creates a perpetual present or 'here and now'. Baudrillard believes that society is constantly replaying the past in the form of recuperated images, such as old Western movies, fashions and music. Activists and radicals can invalidate or break the eternal present by offering alternative models and structures to those of capital. Therefore there can be no danger in drawing from previous revolutionary theory in order to subvert the present condition of banality. Groups like the SI were undoubtedly providers of a powerful radical theory and also equipped society with some very useful tools such as *détournement*. These have contributed significantly to radical art, philosophy and politics. If these can be used to construct a new framework that can give the majority control of their lives, then it would appear to be a forward approach. It is also important to remember, that as Noam Chomsky has stated, 'even the most familiar phenomena require explanation', and the 68 movement was after all anything but simple. The structure of the present information society therefore appears to direct peoples attention away from the underlying reality. These are glossed over and hidden by the spectacle of the technology itself. This effectively demonstrates that there is a link in the framework of the past, mainly the type of bureaucratic thinking that attempts to organize peoples lives. If society is divided then individuals are more susceptible to conditioning as capital bids to take over and control everything from the internet to genetic cloning. It is therefore developing into a highly organized system that will strive to maintain the illusion and appearance of the spectacle at all costs. Anyone who attempts then to subvert the spectacle in order to build a more integrated society is instantly alienated by its mechanisms and reproached as a danger to the establishment. This method of control has now become far easier to deploy than in Debord's era, due to the development of the information nexus. However, Debord seemed to know that this was going to happen,

when constantly growing capitalist alienation at all levels makes it increasingly difficult for workers to recognize and name their own misery, forcing them to face the alternative of rejecting the totality of their misery or nothing, the revolutionary organization has to learn that it can no longer combat alienation with alienated forms.'

The appropriate strategy that must be deployed to combat global capitalism therefore involves the replacement of the symbols that people at the bottom of society are using to organize their lives - such as media programs, mass commodities and fashion logos. To use Baudrillard's language, they however 'cannot be reproached' for trading and interacting with the symbols that they have been placed there by global capitalism. The task now is to identify and replace these symbols with real ones that refer to genuine feelings within society. Symbols of autonomy, unification, and equality will encourage people to be strong and to respect each other. Ultimately people will then begin to realize that taking control of their own lives is possible and will eventually lead to freedom from the servitude and spectacle of capitalism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary source list

- Augé, Marc, *Non-places - Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Translated by John Howe, London:Verso, 1995
- Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulations*, London: Verso, 1983
- Baudrillard, Jean, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991
- Birringer, Johannes, *Media and performance: Along the board*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University press, 1998
- Britt, David, *Modern Art: Impressionism to Postmodernism*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1992
- Brook, James & Iain A. Boal, *Resisting the Virtual Life - The Culture and Politics of Information*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995
- Burger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984
- De Lana, Manuel, *War in the age of intelligent machines*, New York :MIT Press/ Zone Books, 1991
- Drexler, Eric, *Engines of Creation*, London: Fourth Estate, 1990
- Eco, Umberto, *Travels in hyper reality: essays*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish*, Gallimard, Paris 1975, London: Penguin, 1991
- Foster, Hal, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural politics*, USA:Bay Press/ Seattle, 1985
- Foster, Hal, *Return of the Real*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996
- Gibson, William, *Neuromancer*, London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1984
- Gledler, Ken & Thornton, Sarah, *The Subcultures Reader*, London: Routledge, 1997
- Graham, Stephen & Marvin, Simon, *Telecommunications and the City - Electronic Spaces, Urban Places*, London: Routledge, 1996
- Gray, Hables Chris, *The Cyborg handbook*, London: Routledge, 1995
- Grey-Labels, Chris, *Postmodern War*, London: Routledge, 1997
- Kellner, Douglas & Best, Steven, *Postmodern Theory Critical Interrogations*, London: McMillian Education Ltd.
- Kellner, Douglas, *Jean Baudrillard*, Oxford: Polity, 1989
- Krauss, Rosalind, *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, USA: MIT Press
- Mazlish, Bruce, *The Fourth Discontinuity*, New York : Yale University Press, 1993
- Natoli, Joseph & Hutcheson, Linda, *A Postmodern reader*, New York: State University of New York press,
- Negroponte, Nicholas, *Being Digital*, London: Coronet books, 1995
- Poggiolli, Renato, *The Theory of the Avant Garde*, USA: Harvard Uni Press
- Poster, Mark, *Jean Baudrillard ~ selected writings*, Oxford: Polity press, 1988
- Richter, Hans, *Dada and Anti - art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978
- Roszak, Theodore, *The Cult of Information*, University of California, 1994
- Stiles, Kristine & Selz, Peter, *Theories and documents of contemporary art*, USA: University of California press, 1996
- Virilio, Paul, *Speed & Politics*, Originally Pub 1977 as *Vitesse et Politique*, Éditions Galilée, Paris: Translation 1986 Semiotext(e) and Mark Polizzotti, Columbia University, New York
- Wiener, Norbert, *Cybernetics: control and communication in the animal and machine*, J.Wiley, 1948
- Wiener, Norbert, *The human use of human beings: Cybernetics and society*, Houghton and Muffin, 1954
- Woolley, Benjamin, *Virtual Worlds*, London: Penguin, 1992

Situationist International and related

Barrot, Jean, What is Situationism?, USA: Flatland, 1991
Bracken, Len, Guy Debord Revolutionary, Venice, California: Feral House, 1997
Debord, Guy, Society of the Spectacle, Detroit: Black & Red, 1983
Ford, Simon, The Realization and Suppression of the Situationist International, Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995
Gay-Lussac, Rue, Paris: May 1968, Dark Star Press and Rebel Press, London, 1986
Greil, Marcus, Lipstick Traces, USA : Harvard University Press, 1989
Home, Stewart, Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis, Edinburgh: AK press, 1995
Home, Stewart, The Assault on Culture, Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991
Home, Stewart, What is Situationism? Edinburgh: AK press, 1996
Knabb, Ken, Situationist International Anthology USA: Bureau of public secrets, 1981.
Plant, Sadie, The Most Radical Gesture, London: Routledge, 1992
Quattrocchi, Angelo & Nairn, Tom, 1968 - The Beginning of the End, Panther 1968, London: Verso, 1998
Sadler, Simon, The Situationist City, London : MIT Press, 1998
Vaneigem, Raoul, The Book of Pleasures, London : Pending Press, 1983
Vaneigem, Raoul, The Revolution of Everyday Life, London : Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983
Various, edited by Home, Stewart, Mind Invaders, London: Serpent's tail, 1997
Vienet, Rene, Enrages and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68, London : Rebel Press, 1992

Secondary source list:

Articles & documents

Art Monthly October 1997, no210, Pseudo Situationism, Simon Ford
Black ,Bob, The Realization and suppression of Situationism, a short history, Not Bored!, www.nothingness.org/SI/index.html
Chasse, Robert, Hall of Mirrors, Council for the liberation of daily life, 1967, Not Bored!, www.nothingness.org/SI/index.html
Henry A. Giroux, Heroin chic
Kellner, Douglas Intellectuals and New Technologies, Internet document
Kellner, Douglas, Computers, Surveillance and privacy, Internet document
Kellner, Douglas, Intellectuals, the New Public spheres, and Techno-Politics, Internet document
Kellner, Douglas, Marxism & the Information superhighway, Internet document
Lemaitre, Maurice, Lettrism, a short history, www.nothingness.org/SI/index.html
Leonardo, Vol29, no 2, pp95-100, 1996, Virtopia: Emotional Experiences in Virtual Environments, Mike Goslin and Jacquelyn Ford Morie
Mute, issue 10, 1998, Critical Art Ensemble in Conversation with Mark Derry
Public Art review, Fall/winter 1995, Public Art Anarchy, Nicholas Drake
Ross, Kristen , Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International, Printed in 'October' issue 79, winter 1997, also available on internet at Not Bored!, <http://www.nothingness.org/SI/index.html>
Vague, Tom, The Twentieth century and How to Leave it : The Boy scout's handbook to the Situationists', Not Bored ! web site.

Variant volume2, no4 1997, Assuming positions, David Burrows

OTHER SOURCES

GSA

Calcutt, John , Modernism in dispute, GSA H&C second year course notes,

Calcutt, John, Art: commodities: signs: desires, GSA H&C second year course notes

McGlenn S, Michael, A Fatal History of the Situationist International, GSA dissertation
No 1256

Talks, lectures, seminars

De Lana, Manuel, 1000 Years of non linear history, Glasgow School of Art SoFA
Friday event, 1998

Foster, Hal, Return of The Real, Book launch, ABC Cinema, Sauchiehall Street,
Glasgow, 1998.

Sadler, Simon, The Situationist City, Edinburgh College of Art, Nov 1998

Sterlac, Glasgow School of Art SoFA Friday event series, Oct 1997

[Other business](#)