

## CHAPTER 2

# Introduction: From the Notion of Spectacle to Spectacle 2.0: The Dialectic of Capitalist Mediations

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### 1. Context and Purpose

Sometimes the literary fortune of a book can almost be unfortunate. We think this is the case of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, which on the one hand succeeded where most of our scholarship concerned with the production of critical knowledge tends to fail, by going beyond the constraining walls of academic discourse and inspiring human emancipation. On the other hand, while the idea of the Spectacle has infiltrated the collective imagery, it has most frequently done so through the popularization of its most glaring surface, thus limiting its overall significance.

It is indeed easier to think of the Debordian notion as spectacularly mediated content – such as media images and extravagant events – rather than the general process of mediation that for Debord propels the Spectacle. That is because we do live in a media saturated environment, but to the point in which

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the mediation logic that drives current conditions of life in many societies has gone beyond spectacular images, and is increasingly subsuming more spheres of social life to the total and integral Spectacle: capitalism. This book aims at re-framing Debord's reflections from being linked to an epistemological question that limits the exploration of the Spectacle to the signifying value of technologically mediated content—thus essentially media images and events—and moving it to the much broader ontological plane of the social being, which implies inquiring into the constitutive mediating factors of social relations in a capitalist society.

Thus, we would like to show how the Spectacle vastly exceeds its superficial theatrical stage, and we will accordingly concentrate on a 'deeper' level that was implied in the original Debordian reflection but also not adequately explored by it: the mediation logic of the sphere of production of value which, in the specific contemporary context, translates into labour in its informational guise. Accordingly, the purpose of our edited book is to empirically engage and to theoretically explore the implications of the notion of the Spectacle applied in contemporary capitalist scenarios, and to understand it as the fundamental intersection of transformative social relations, especially in its informational, cognitive and digital forms. Our aim is to engage and test through different perspectives whether a revisited Spectacle – a Spectacle 2.0 – can function as a heuristic tool, a totalizing framework to understand late capitalism and the subjectivities inhabiting it.

Therefore, informed by this perspective, we revisit Debord's notion of Spectacle to critically inquire how in the context of informational capitalism, knowledge workers produce, consume and reproduce value, which are processes of subjectification as well as precarious forms of (digital) labour. In a context in which information and communication technologies have become both powerful holistic metaphors of many contemporary capitalist societies, as well as the terrain in which current forms of valorisation, exploitation of labour, power structures, ideological practices as well as counter-hegemonic social struggles find their condition of possibility, this project intends to recover a concept capable of articulating the complexity of a media saturated social whole – the Spectacle – in order to historicize it, and to provide a varied recollection of empirical engagements with its concrete manifestations.

In order to provide an adequate context for our argument, we will offer in the pages that follow a review of the original Spectacle of late 1960s, its posterior re-visitation of the 1990s, and finally its re-interpretation in the scenario of informational capitalism and more specifically in relation to digital labour. There will then follow a synthetic account of the structure of the book and a brief description of the content of the chapters that compose it.

In this regard, we pose the following hypothesis: the rising prominence of the intersection of information and communication technology and of work and labour constitute one powerful productive and reproductive factor of current capitalism; we refer to such a holistic mediator as the Spectacle 2.0.

Our assumption is that, under the current mode of production driven by information and communication technology, the Spectacle form operates as the interactive network that links through one singular (but contradictory) language, diverse productive contexts such as logistics, finance, new media and urbanism. Moreover, we assume that such a Spectacle form colonizes most spheres of social life by the processes of commodification, exploitation and reification.

As we shall see in a moment, we explore the Spectacle through the dialectical tensions that define its complexity, its ambiguity but also its capability to comprehend large portions of social life. Dialectics and its operationalisation as mediation, is indeed the grand narrative that links the original Spectacle, its integrated update and our understanding of its 2.0 modality. In fact, despite significant differences between these Spectacles, we also consider them in a continuum consistently marked by the processes of commodity fetishism, exploitation of labour and the tendency of capital to subsume social life. From this perspective, the historically different configurations of the Spectacle appear as determinate negations, that is, relative variations of the ratio/weight that each element that forms them plays in the overall totality of the Spectacle.

## 2. Genealogy of the Spectacle

*Society of the Spectacle* is a manuscript written in 1967 by French philosopher Guy Debord, developed in the context of reflections already started during his militancy in the avant-garde movements Situationist Internationale (1957–72) and Lettrism (1952–57), which were both inspired by Dada, Surrealism, as well as the radical political thought of Marx, anarchism and Utopian Socialism. The members of the Situationist movement were united by a common rejection of advanced capitalism and by the objective to revive the link between art, politics and everyday life (Vaneigem 1994). Wark (2013) claims that the Situationists wanted to go beyond the false needs generated by capitalism and create new ones by radically changing everyday practices, thus trying to implement Lefebvre's recommendations (1958) in critiquing *everyday life*.

Guy Debord developed his thoughts concerning the relation between art and politics as a member of Lettrism, an artistic and literary movement originated in Paris 1940s, which was clustered around Isadore Isou. Lettrism advanced the need to radically reform artistic works by providing new solutions to produce literary and visual art, which heavily shaped the production of Situationist material but especially films (Kaufmann 2006). In the early 1950s, a more politically radical faction of Lettrist broke off from the movement to form Lettelist International. During this period, some of the foundational spatial concepts of the Situationist perspective such as psychogeography, the theory of *dérive*, as well as the signification practices of *détournement* were developed. Thus, in 1957, in a small town of Northern Italy, Pinot Gallizio, Piero Simondo,

Elena Verrone, Michèle Bernstein, Guy Debord, Asger Jorn and Walter Olmo founded the The International Situationist (Perniola 2013).

Members of the Letterist International such as Debord, philosopher Raoul Vaneigem, painter Constant Nieuwenhuys, writer Alexander Trocchi, artist Ralph Rumney and poet Gianfranco Sanguinetti, formed the movement Situationist International when various groups such as Lettrist International, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and the London Psychogeographical Association (and later, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) converged together in 1957. The foundation of the new organization was announced through the publication of the manifesto *Report on the Construction of Situations*. Then, after several scissions, by the early 1960s the movement shifted from a more artistic tendency towards a more political one, which translated into a focus on the theory of the Spectacle and a Marxist critique of capitalist phenomenologies.

*In the Revolution of Everyday Life*, the other significant text published by the Situationists, Raoul Vaneigem (1967) claims that the radical transformation of capitalism starts from the revolutionising of daily practice that shapes subjectivities as social beings, which are presently degraded into passive objects manipulated by capitalist interests. Contrary to the 'scientific' aspiration of Stalinist Marxism and its alleged positivist objectivity, the critique of economy as the autonomous motor of history carried out by Situationism focused on the subject as a real historic being, with his/her capability to acquire consciousness, with his/her body, aspirations, boredom and desires. As Jappe (1993) points out 'In France more than in any other Western Country, the Communist Party conducted a veritable reign of terror over the intellectuals, successfully silencing any thinking on the Left that did not correspond to its manuals' (Jappe 1993, 50–51). Thus, similarly to the movement *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Debord's critique of everyday life also consisted in engaging empirical reality, which represented for him the new front of the struggle. That is because contemporary Fordist capitalism proved to be capable of providing economic security to the working class, and for this reason, the revolutionary objective was not to establish an open confrontation between work and capital but actually the refusal to work, thus 'never work' (Debord, in Jappe 1993, 99).

The Situationist movement, and in particular, Debord's reflections, represented an attempt to respond to the social economic conjuncture of the period of industrialization and modernization that France experienced during the 1950s and 1960s. The social fabric of the country changed significantly due to migration towards the cities from the countryside, the rising of household income and the rise of consumption and acquisition of home appliances such as TV and washing machines. France's civil society tried to cope with the sudden process of modernisation which in other parts of the continent, such as England and the Netherlands, were happening more gradually. In this sense, Situationist International's interest in urbanism also derived from its fascination with those city spaces that were being radically changed by such an abrupt

process of modernisation and industrialisation. Debord intended to capture capitalism as an integral social process, because as Lefebvre (1958) and Vannegeim (1967/1994) have already pointed out, the new arrangement of social life brought by modernisation was rooted at the heart of people's everyday life: new suburban city quarters were now shaped by serialized and standardized life styles; the emergence of supermarkets, touristic resorts that systematically fetishized the idea of traveling and vacationing, fashion streets and commercial centres.

In such a context, as an aspect of its later stage of politicization, the Situationist International also became more consistently present inside the universities, which culminated with the involvement of SI in the events of May 1968, as exemplified by Mustapha Khayaty's pamphlet *On the Poverty of Student Life* and its participation in the occupation of Nanterre and Sorbonne. In this sense, the Situationist movement became particularly active during the cycle of social mobilization in France and Italy of the late 1960s. In his chronicles of the 1968 uprising, Situationist René Viénet narrates how members of the organisation initiated the protest of December 1967 in Nanterre by blocking streets and disrupting university courses. The student riots were quickly backed up by workers and the unemployed, and were (very) indirectly backed up by many workers' strikes.

For Viénet (1968) Gaullism did not create the sense of capitalist crisis in the eyes of the French Marxist Left but the perception of the overwhelming dysfunctional power of capitalism itself, which caused the growth of unemployment especially among youth and the fact that extension of social security created by the welfare state led to a curtailment of salaries. On the one hand, the pronounced development of French industrial economy moved an important portion of the workforce from small unconnected workshops and agricultural fields into giant productive plants such as the automotive firm Renault, which facilitated the concentration, communication and organisation of the working class. On the other hand, French capitalist growth was built on increased pressure in terms of productivity, a repressive kind of development, which applied considerable pressure on workers, who accumulated discontent and frustration.

In relation to such an increasing level of dissatisfaction of the working class, the Situationists were very critical of the institutional left as they reproached the French Communist Party to have taken a very polemic position against the May 1968 protests. It was only when pressured by popular indignation that the party started acting and pushed the main unions to call for a general strike. While the general strike was not meant to support the mobilization but to actually defuse the tension created by the protest and to channel that frustration through the institutional politics of the party, it ended up triggering a wave of factory occupation such as the one of Sud-Aviation in Nantes, the Renault factories at Cléon, at Flins, Le Mans and Boulogne-Billancourt. Those events attracted peasants and small shopkeepers who joined the strike, set up road blocks and helped the

strikers logistically. In fact, by May 20, 1968 an estimated 10 million workers were on strike and the country remained practically paralyzed for several days.

However, by the end of May 1968 the protest lost momentum and popular consent and at the same time on June 23, 1968 Charles de Gaulle won the elections: the revolutionary dream seemed to be over. Kalle (2000) points out how the Situationist involvement during the May 1968 uprisings in Paris, Strasbourg and Nanterre represented both the apogee of their political action and its decline, as the membership started a steady decline after 1968. In fact, while for the Situationist the 1968 events would have ideally developed into a revolution and the triumph of workers councils, it ended up exhausting the energies of the movement, which held its last conference in 1969. By the beginning of the 1970s the group counted a handful of members and finally dissolved in 1972, inaugurating a sense of defeat for the French radical Left.

While in such a climate of revolutionary excitement and expectations the idea of the Spectacle gained force and visibility, one of Debord's earliest references to the notion of Spectacle dates back to the late 1950s. The Spectacle represented the symbolic manifestations of a bourgeois vision of the world, an ideology instrumental to advanced capitalism because it tried to alienate people from their lives through processes of commodification, manufacturing of false desires, and ubiquitous advertising. Thus, for Debord as a founding member of the Situationist Internationale, the project of constructing situations necessarily implied the antagonizing presence of the Spectacle. Such 'situations' constituted practices of 'counter Spectacle', in other words staging temporary settings favourable to the fulfilment of true and authentic human desires (Debord 1958), which were aimed at re-situating people in their own history and environment, therefore repositioning them outside the Spectacle.

In Debord's view, while the Spectacle became more prominent with the development of capitalism – thus becoming particularly apparent only in the last century – its foundation parallels the emergence of Western civilization.<sup>1</sup> Hence, while the Spectacle pre-dates modern capitalism, rising from a historical tendency of Western societies towards the separation of people from their capability of shaping history via mechanisms such as division of labour and abstract of social relations – therefore an inclination towards alienation and several kinds of fetishism – in Debord's view it reaches its apex more recently, in correspondence with the transition from liberal capitalism to corporate/consumer capitalism (Debord 1967):

Whereas in the primitive phase of capitalist accumulation, 'political economy sees in the proletarian only the worker' who must receive the minimum indispensable for the conservation of his labour power, without ever seeing him 'in his leisure and humanity,' these ideas of the ruling class are reversed as soon as the production of commodities reaches a level of abundance which requires a surplus of collaboration from the worker. This worker, suddenly redeemed from the total contempt which

is clearly shown him by all the varieties of organization and supervision of production, finds himself every day, outside of production and in the guise of a consumer, seemingly treated as an adult, with zealous politeness. At this point the humanism of the commodity takes charge of the worker's 'leisure and humanity,' simply because now political economy can and must dominate these spheres as political economy. Thus the 'perfected denial of man' has taken charge of the totality of human existence (Thesis 43).

From this point of view, the Spectacle constitutes an account of the condition of modernity (and the preconditions of post-modernity), explored from philosophical, socio-economic and cultural perspectives. Debord understands such a condition to be essentially of a fundamental loss, a growing separation between people and their humanness. According to such an argument, people's sociability has been substantially deprived by capitalism, and replaced by a kind of instrumental thinking and productive logic that tends to colonize social life by destroying the social fabric, the organic value of popular culture and to replace dialogic human communication with pre-defined models of behaviour, monologues and silence.

Not accidentally, Debord draws from the Marxist conception of alienation (1988) and Lukács' notion of reification (1971) as analytic categories in order to examine the detachment from a variety of 'genuinely' human distinctive features: free conscious activity that is replaced by alienation; fictitious nature arguments that are replaced by real historical process; the social collective that is replaced by individualism; social institutions that are replaced by social solipsism; creativity and sociological imagination that are replaced by 'sameness' in Adorno and Horkheimer's sense (1974); critical thinking that is replaced by unreflectiveness; and people's own authentic desires that are replaced by false ones.

In that respect there are some relevant similarities between Debord's concept of the Spectacle and Adorno and Horkheimer's hypothesis of the culture industry (1974), which we think are worth considering. Both Debord and the Frankfurt-schoolers provide important contributions to the critical analysis of modern capitalism, and in many ways, offer complementary reflections. That is not actually accidental; as Gotham and Krier (2008) observe, there is a clear connection that links Debord, Horkheimer and Adorno. Besides their common drawing on Hegel, Marx, and Lukács, Debord was directly inspired by Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1958), who in turn read very carefully the two German critical thinkers and built on their insights, especially on the integration of economy and dominant representations in late capitalism. Moreover, those authors share a dialectical critique of culture according to which, the cultural realm produces both potential opportunities for rebellious, anti-conformist and even revolutionary thinking – as per the case of avant-garde art – but also, when commodified, it generates a terrain of reproduction for conformity, reification and alienation. In this sense, the Spectacle and culture industry describe similar phenomena.



Two aspects that made us lean towards Debord instead of Adorno and Horkheimer are their treatment of the concept of totality and technology. Both Debord and Adorno and Horkheimer embrace the concept of totality in a very qualified way, by distinguishing between its normative and its analytical value. Normatively, they reject a social whole that is essentially ‘untrue’ (thus rejecting the Hegelian teleology) as it produces ‘exploitation, violence and injustice’ to the degree that for Adorno and Horkheimer, when treated as an ontologically affirmative category, totality becomes almost a synonym of totalitarianism and oppression (Jay 1984). Conversely, as a descriptive category, totality explains the integrating capabilities of capitalism to connect and mediate most social phenomena. As Jameson (2009) observes, the concept of totality works for those theorists as a framework to articulate various kind of knowledge rather than being a privileged source of knowledge in its own right.

However, in our view, the overarching narrative and sense of process provided by the synthetic notion of the Spectacle, understood in this essay as a totality, provides a heuristic tool, that is not so explicitly present in the two German critical thinkers. The Spectacle, as enacted and at the same time attended by the spectators, provides a framework of analysis, which more effectively than the notion of culture industry, links the objective and subjective experience as described by Lukács:

Man in capitalist society confronts a reality “made” by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself; he is wholly at the mercy of its ‘laws’; his activity is confined to the exploitation of the inexorable fulfilment of certain individual laws for his own (egoistic) interests. But even while ‘acting’ he remains, in the nature of the case, the object and not the subject of events (1971, 135).

Furthermore, when it comes to those authors’ treatment of technology, we think that Debord provides a more dialectical view on media that can explain the kind of phenomena we grouped together through the category of the *Spectacle 2.0*. While for Adorno and Horkheimer (media) technology appears as a force to reify, dominate and deceive people, Debord – closer to Marcuse (1964) – tends to regard it as a neutral device that functions regressively or progressively in relation to the specific social relations in which it operates. We think that that such a view delivers a more consonant environment in relation to our effort to depict contemporary ICT-driven capitalism as a dialectical experience that is thus both unity and separation, coercion and exploitation, creative work and exploitative labour.

While, as just noticed, Debord, like Adorno and Horkheimer, rejects Hegel’s normative and teleological aspect of totality, there is definitively much in the theory of the Spectacle of Hegel’s conceptualization of consciousness. In fact, for instance in the context of overwhelming incapacitation of the subject experiencing the Spectacle, a consequential question arises about where



the critical consciousness that produced Debord's essay originates. As Bunyard notices (2011), Debord's narrative clearly echoes the idea of Hegel's unhappy consciousness (1977), according to which consciousness to a certain extent perceives the alienating Spectacle, it intuitively feels the true dialectical unity behind those deceptive representations but without being able to go beyond them. In this sense, while several authors (e.g. Best and Kellner 1997; Jappe 1993) rightly criticize the Debordian representation of the Spectacle because it does not pay enough attention to how those above mentioned contradictions can create moments of ruptures and therefore moment of possible resistance, the context of the Spectacle still logically (and historically, as Debord's hope for the revolutionary potential of avant-garde art or manifestation as Situationism) allows for those interruptions.

The reference to Hegel is not accidental, as Debord seems to theorize the Spectacle within the boundaries of a Hegelian Marxism, according to which the humanist concern with people's capability to make history through conscious and (dialectically) free agency is deteriorated by alienation, reification and a pervasive instrumental logic. In fact, for Debord, the loss of human genuine praxis mostly depends on the depleting quality of its self-reflectivity, thus revolving around the development of consciousness. Consequently, he is also particularly interested in framing the Spectacle as a totalizing form of alienation because it works as functional mediation among subjects, between the subject and its psyche and between subject and object:

The Spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic growth corresponds almost entirely to the growth of this particular sector of industrial production. If something grows along with the self-movement of the economy, it can only be the alienation that has inhabited the core of the economic sphere from its inception (Thesis 32).

Along the same lines, drawing on the young Marx of the *Philosophic Manuscripts* (1988), Debord considered the Spectacle as the apotheosis of commodity fetishism. Indeed, the Spectacle functions like capital process in Marx, a 'vampire [that] only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (1990, 342). In such a context, workers become the stupefied spectators involved in a de-humanizing trade off: while dead labour (as the means of production) comes alive, living labour turns into the dead mechanism of production:

Here we have the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by things whose qualities are 'at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses'. This principle is absolutely fulfilled in the Spectacle, where the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world yet at the same time impose themselves as eminently perceptible (Thesis 36).

As the passage suggests commodity fetishism in the Spectacle functions as a total inversion of rapports among basic features of human nature: social relations among things rather than people, representation rather than reality, death rather than life. Along the same line of Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness* and his Weberian critique of modern rationality, Debord describes how the Spectacle is propelled by instrumental logic and its embodiment in the money form, which tend to mediate all social relations:

The Spectacle is another facet of money, which is the abstract general equivalent of all commodities. However, whereas money in its familiar form has dominated society as the representation of universal equivalence, that is, of the exchangeability of diverse goods whose uses are not otherwise compatible, the Spectacle in its full development is money's modern aspect; in the Spectacle the totality of the commodity world is visible in one piece, as the general equivalent of whatever society as a whole can be and do. The Spectacle is money for contemplation only, for here the totality of use has already been bartered for the totality of abstract representation. The Spectacle is not just the servant of pseudo-use, it is already, in itself the pseudo-use of life (Thesis 49). The paradox of such a mediation is that it links and, at the same time, separates those social spheres, as well as tending to depict as natural what is historically determined.

### 3. Foundational Elements of the Debordian Spectacle

In his retrospective reflections on the original Spectacle Debord defines it as 'the autocratic reign of the market economy' (1998, 2). The Spectacle appears as both as a particular capitalist tool to defuse contradictions and pacify the masses and as the general appearance of capitalism. Being both the particular and the general allows the Spectacle to assume multiple forms in different spheres of social life: for instance, it can be found in media, in social relations, in the commodity form, in the working experience and in the constitution of subjects. Furthermore, in its dual nature, the Spectacle is both the Marxian 'base' and 'superstructure.' It is both reality and appearance because while it mostly appears operating on the surface through mediated images, it also operates at the productive foundation and organization of late capitalist societies.

The notion of appearance defines the Spectacle as the ultimate achievement of capitalism in its functioning as representation of life, which is implied in Thesis 1 in the reference to the beginning of *Das Kapital* (1990, 128) 'The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities,' and the opening of the Society of Spectacle '[i]n societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *Spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation' (Thesis 1). The reference to Marx has a key argumentative value as Debord considers the Spectacle as a logical evolution of capital.

The Spectacle theory comprises two main components, which can be synthetically defined as the subjective alienation of consciousness that strives to go beyond the spectacular mediation, and the objective alienation of productive activity and historical praxis. However, the former dimension is way more emphasized than the latter, because Debord considers praxis to be meaningful only within the limits of the subjective capability to achieve it. Moreover, possibly because being more focused on the everyday condition of people, Debord tends to overlook the concrete ways in which capital and labour reproduces the Spectacle. Consequently, as Dauvé (1979) and Jappe (1999) remark, the material production of the Spectacle and its social relations seem to be taken for granted and function as a background of Debord's primal concern for the turning of 'historical thought' (e.g. Thesis 76 and Thesis 77) – i.e. the self-consciousness of historical agency – into 'contemplation' (e.g. Thesis 2 and Thesis 8).

The tension between the subjective and the objective dimensions represents only one of the several dialectical manifestations of the Spectacle. Accordingly, with the purpose to provide a brief account of the complexity of this framework we are considering some of the most significant dimension as a way of exploring the range of phenomena which Debord examines.

### 3.1 *Spectacular Separations and Spectacular Totalisation*

As we have already mentioned, the idea of the Spectacle re-proposes a grand narrative of modernity as a loss of people's sociability. Therefore, as a separation, but also as a spectacular paradox – because such a separation occurs in the historic moment in which there is a highly developed social organization of production – the means of transportation and means of communication connect us more than ever.

There are at least two sections of Debord's essay that explicitly deal with the tension between separation and totalisation: 'Separation Perfected' and 'Unity and Divisions Within Appearances.' Such a tension *de facto* becomes the main theme of the entire book because the power of the Spectacle resides in its capability to present itself as a coherent unity made out of separations. Not by accident, the book almost inaugurates with the following statements: 'Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever' (Thesis 2); 'the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation (Thesis 3); and 'The phenomenon of separation is part and parcel of the unity of the world' (Thesis 7).

The ubiquitous semantic field defined by 'separation', 'detachment', 'alienation', and 'estrangement' confirms the general negative diagnostics of Debord in relation to not just capitalism but also modernity and the proficiency to bring about a contradictory nature of capitalist society: rational and functional integration of societal elements through a highly colonizing mode of production and the irrational disintegration of the social fabric as well as the unavoidable class confrontations.

For Debord such a twofold movement towards a fragmentation of both human consciousness and society, and their successive re-integration thanks to the mediating and articulating power of the Spectacle, represents the reason why the Spectacle succeeds as a hegemonic system. In fact, such an organization can afford to create consent over its repressive, coercive and deceptive nature but also, and more importantly, can keep resistance to marginality. For Debord, the reflections about the Spectacle also constitute an occasion for self-reflection for problematizing current critical theory and its tendency to trade theoretical speculation for revolutionary praxis. Such a position should be also contextualized in relation to the influence that essays such as Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1970) and Lukács's already mentioned *History and Class Consciousness* (1971) played in Debord's conceptualization. Both perspectives prefigure the Situationist and Debordian invitation to recover the Communist project from its own over-theorized re-presentation, and thus to become a historical movement rather than a theoretical depiction.

Especially for Korsch, the inclination towards the practice of theorization tended to obscure the real goal of Marxism, which should have concentrated on human emancipation and its history-making emancipatory practices. Both Lukács and Korsch (and then Gramsci 1975; and Althusser 1971) suggest a new battleground for political struggle that goes beyond surplus value extraction and is concerned with production and reproduction of social relationships and subjectivities operating at the level of an ideological and culturally material battleground.

The acknowledgement of this new terrain of disputation can be found in Debord's pessimistic considerations about the proletariat becoming consumers of images and ideas on top of being producers of commodities and value. When it comes to production then for Debord the contradiction between fragmentation and unity (i.e. separation and totality) can be understood as one of the necessary cooperations that capitalist production requires (Marx 1990) and the division of labour that prevents workers relating with each other in politically significant terms. Then, the fragmentation generated by division of labour is recomposed by the ruling class's social order that gives organizational coherence to society through its consistent obsession with extracting value and accumulation of capital.

In our view, Debord, with his continuous re-proposing of this tension between unity and separation, sheds light on the peculiar power of late capitalism to integrate all prior forms of separated powers by specialization and/or hierarchy. As we shall see, the tension between 'separation' and 'connection' will remain a central feature of the Spectacle 2.0, which will be re-proposed via digital media in the dialectic between hyper-connectivity and individualized productive practices, online and off-line levels, socialization of work and its privatized monetization. Such all-embracing representation makes all action equivalent and at the same time all of it significantly removed from the chance to 'make history'.

For this reason, the Spectacle constitutes a totalizing mediation: ‘the Spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification’ (thesis 42), which means that the Spectacle appears simultaneously universalized, as a particular historically contingent manifestation, and the mediation that connect all manifestations. Thus, the Spectacle combines at the same time universality, particularity, and singularity. It is a false unity because is only a partial and deformed representation of reality, but its ubiquity makes it into a real tangible environment as the only way people know reality.

As previously mentioned in our comparison with Adorno and Horkheimer, Debord is interested in the explanatory power of the notion of totality. Like Lukács (1971), Debord sought to understand society under the general rubric of a concept able to capture the capability of capitalism to fluidly integrate most aspects of life. Totality then appears as a concept able to grasp the essential, common, structuring nature of each determination within the social whole. While for the author of *History and Class Consciousness*, this central mediation was provided by the commodity form, for Debord the commodity’s increasing domination of society requires a new meta framework that could go beyond such traditional Marxist categories as labour, union organization and the factory. In this sense, the Post-operaist argument of the process of subsumption of labour that extends to life as a whole seems to draw from this body of literature, here represented by Debord, that recognizes the importance of totality as an analytical category.

### 3.2 *Spectacular Reification and Spectacular Lack of History Making: Or the Autonomous Movement of the Non-living*

History making and consciousness of ‘historical time’ is what for Debord is escaping the spectators’ way of living. This kind of anthropological alienation for Debord depends on different modes of production for any historical moment. In this sense, the particularity of contemporary capitalism is that dead labour and technical power have grown so great that they have replaced people as active agents, therefore perfecting the separation, social control and the capability of the Spectacle of mediating social experience. Thus, as we already mentioned, the Spectacle is at the same the triumph of alienated human agency and fetishized dead labour becoming alive. For Debord then, the dominance of the Spectacle does not only rely on alienation but on its capability to appear as a natural and objective phenomenon, the most impressive instance of reified history.

In many ways, Debord builds with the Spectacle a counterintuitive concept of real abstraction as conceptualized by Marx in the *Contributions to the Critique of Political Economy* (1977) as a way to show how commodities’ fetishism becomes exceedingly real in social practices and not just a subjective illusion, which is consistent with Debord’s insistence on the fundamental character of late capitalism to give life to abstract categories and to abstract living forms.

The result, as we have already indirectly suggested, is that together with a persistent material poverty, capitalism, in its spectacular forms, the Spectacle creates existential and cognitive deficiency.

Because of alienation becoming a concrete operating force in social life, the way in which people could take back their history-making capability – thus re-acquiring the condition of historical subjects – critical consciousness had to be incredibly strategic about the particular circumstances in which the Spectacle could be attacked. To this purpose, the several references to Clausewitz's theory of war (1984) revealed how any counter-Spectacle actions had to be fought with quasi militarist strategy, paying particular attention to the highly contextual and contingent validity of any insurgent theory – as the opportunity represented by the so-called French May of 1968. In this sense, the idea of construction of situations represented a way in which people re-appropriated space and time by organized praxis.

As we have already observed, Debord regards the Spectacle in dialectical terms, which is to say that if, on the one hand, the historical tendency towards separation seems to develop progressively (i.e. a perfecting separation), on the other hand the Spectacle also potentially produces a new proletariat movement as well as critical consciousness. Hence, Debord and the Situationist circle envisioned a new form of revolutionary associationism that they linked to the workers' council, a participatory assembly made of local community members and workers. In a Situationist International document, entitled *Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization* the council is defined as 'a permanent basic unit [...] the assembly in which all the workers of an enterprise (workshop and factory councils) and all the inhabitants of an urban district have rallied' (Riesel, 1969). Evidence of such an approach is the way Debord regarded May 1968 social protests: on the one hand, he considered the insurrection positively as the emergence of a chance to re-appropriate history, but on the other, he also recognized in that the capitulation of critical resistance against the Spectacle. As Bunyard (2011) reports, for Debord the defeat of the Spectacle would have meant the self-conscious creation of history by the workers' movements.

In sum, against an exploitative system of dead labour that steals life from people, the taking back the power of making history for Debord derives from a combination of practical and self-reflective consciousness that aims at re-appropriating social space and social time by the constructions of situations.

### 3.3 *Spectacular Mediation and Spectacular Immediacy*

As we just mentioned, the power of the Spectacle in pervading all aspects of social life consists in the capability of mediating all its manifestations, in both thought and action. For Debord, while omnipresent, the Spectacle becomes particularly active and visible in the sphere of commodity consumption, which offer false satisfactions:

Every given commodity fights for itself, cannot acknowledge the others, and attempts to impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one. The Spectacle, then, is the epic poem of this struggle, an epic which cannot be concluded by the fall of any Troy. The Spectacle does not sing the praises of men and their weapons, but of commodities and their passions. In this blind struggle every commodity, pursuing its passion, unconsciously realizes something higher: the becoming-world of the commodity, which is also the becoming-commodity of the world. Thus, by means of a ruse of commodity logic, what's specific in the commodity wears itself out in the fight while the commodity-form moves toward its absolute realization (Thesis 66).

Thus, when the commodity form becomes the central logic for every aspect of social life, its mediation approaches immediacy (thus augmenting reification), that is the apparent condition of not needing any mediations at all. For Debord such a process can be detected in consumer capitalism's tendency to superimpose exchange value over use value:

Exchange value could arise only as an agent of use value, but its victory by means of its own weapons created the conditions for its autonomous domination. Mobilizing all human use and establishing a monopoly over its satisfaction, exchange value has ended up by directing use. The process of exchange became identified with all possible use and reduced use to the mercy of exchange. Exchange value is the condottiere of use value who ends up waging the war for himself #46).

Exchange value, similarly to the critique of Frankfurt Schoolers, marks all commodities by sameness, abstract exchangeability, so that difference is only performative. The consequence is that the 'satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs which are reduced to the single pseudo-need of maintaining the reign of the autonomous economy' (Thesis 59). In such a dialectics between mediation and immediacy, Debord understands the compound epistemology of the Spectacle: a two-layer understanding of reality, according to which the deeper level of alienation, separation and reification of the actual world dominated by late capitalism is covered by a superficial spectacular layer in which material social relations are mediated by imaginary ones. As we shall see, the tension between mediation and immediacy will re-propose itself under a different guise in the Spectacle 2.0, for instance through the tension between separation and hyper-connectivity and creative work and alienated labour.

Such a hermeneutic of suspicion, that is distinguishing between surface and deeper layers, is also exemplified by Debord's interests in the urban environment since the Spectacle also mediates the physical environment, where people live:



The society that molds all of its surroundings has developed a special technique for shaping its very territory, the solid ground of this collection of tasks. Urbanism is capitalism's seizure of the natural and human environment; developing logically into absolute domination, capitalism can and must now remake the totality of space into its own setting (Thesis 170).

Urbanism represents for Debord a very tangible document of the Spectacle as alienated praxis. In fact, as per the Marxian notion of labour, for Debord people cannot change themselves without changing the surrounding environment. For Debord, the Spectacle functionally re-configures the cities as venues to facilitate capitalist reproduction and, in doing so 'freezes life' (Thesis 171), thus privileging instrumental space over the genuinely lived one. Urbanism materializes abstraction and separations at all levels, by building 'different kind of grounds' (Thesis 172), by atomizing the individual space of workers (Thesis 173), by relegating public 'manifestations on the street' (Thesis 173), separation among people mediated by mass communication (Thesis 173). Debord claims that the investment of the Spectacle in urbanism can be observed in the fact that for the first time architecture, once dedicated to the elite class, is now aimed at managing the space and time of poor classes (Thesis 174).

Summing up, we have tried to provide a general account of the original description of the Spectacle by examining its multi-layered development and the tensions that characterize it, such as separation and totality, appearance and essence, cognitive and practical alienation. In the next section, we examine how the Spectacle evolves following the evolution of economic and geopolitical orders.

#### 4. Beyond the Integrated Spectacle: From Integration to Subsuming Digitalization

By the end of 1980s, when the ideological polarization of the Cold War was already fading, Debord published an update on his earlier reflections entitled *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. According to this renewed reading, the Spectacle alternatively materialized into two different social imaginary forms (Clark 2015): one concentrated around long term rational planning, state power and nationalist symbolism; the other diffused and operating at the level of individual sphere, mass consumption, and codified patterns of behaviour. For Debord those two historical forms of the Spectacle, that is the diffused capitalist Spectacle and the concentrated 'socialist' Spectacle eventually combined into a new form of Spectacle. The so-called integrated Spectacle (7) originated from the superimposition of the Americanizing diffused Spectacle over the concentrated one (1998, 8) at the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union

collapsed. Debord claims that the integrated Spectacle grew stronger compared to its original version: and ‘that the Spectacle’s domination has succeeded in raising a whole generation moulded to its laws’ (1998, 7).

While within the concentrated Spectacle alienated social power was condensed within a ruling body such as a party or a dictator—with whom society is obliged to identify—conversely, within the diffused form power is dispersed across society through the actualization and normalization of conspicuous consumption of commodities, fashions, fads, behavioural models, and images of subjective satisfaction. Yet, whilst the diffused Spectacle is able to take mediation to a higher level through its abundance of commodities, the relative ‘quantitative weakness’ (30) of the concentrated Spectacle’s own mass of commodities precludes it from disseminating its merits and *raison d’être* in this way. Thus, where the diffused Spectacle relies on the dispersal of ‘image-objects’ (31), the concentrated Spectacle tends to present its ruling body as the embodiment of the will, agency and identity of the social whole.

For Debord, the narrative connecting the integrated Spectacle to its original form is one of capitulation because while in his original analysis there were pockets of social life, practices that could remain unaffected by the Spectacle—such as art or the very initiatives performed by the Situationists and avant-garde art—in the *Comments* he claims that the Spectacle has colonized everything. The integrated Spectacle, especially detectable in countries such as France and Italy, could be identified by five principal features: ‘incessant technological renewal’ that continues both mode of production and consumption; ‘integration of state and economy’ produced by state capitalism; ‘generalized secrecy’; ‘unanswerable lies’ created by systematic disinformation that eliminated the critical function of public opinion (pp. 8–10) and an eternal present.

Looking at the news as the Spectacle, Compton considers the aestheticization of everyday life, as ‘the central logic of the Spectacle.’ As Compton (2004) observes, one of the salient aspects of such an integration, which in our view allows the transition into the Spectacle 2.0, is that current manifestations of the Spectacle need to be understood as a result of the practical use of the spectacular commodity, marketed as both production and promotion, that is, as an *integrated* system of production/promotion. In doing so, Compton tries to address some of the shortcomings that the original definition of the Spectacle represented by exploring in more depth the complex unity among various instances of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange. He also replaces the mass society critique narrative of passive individuals he detects in the original Spectacle, with a more nuanced account that recognizes a more active involvement of the spectators.

Along the same lines, Kellner (2005) in the early 2000s offered an updated reading of the Spectacle by advancing the notion of media-driven spectacular events. Media Spectacles can be described as exceptional events that break the daily routine through highly public special events such as the celebration of public rituals

(e.g. the Superbowl; Michael Jackson or Princess Diana's funerals) and therefore legitimate society's core values like the Olympics, 9/11 but also scandals like Bill Clinton's impeachment case. In doing that, Kellner wants to materialize the abstract original account of Debord by offering examples that can be empirically assessed in terms of construction, circulation and function of the Spectacle.

Kellner's engagement is based on the argument that the contemporary Spectacle cannot be understood as an overwhelming hegemonic regime but rather as a space of contestations in which competing forces meet and confront each other. In such a disputed arena, as Phillips and Moberly (2013) notice, electronic media such as video games simulating social life (i.e. Sims, Social life) provide a perfect platform in which the Spectacle and spectators negotiate, more than confront each other, a perception of 'eternal present' in which history has ceased (Marx, 1990, 11–12).

Certainly, Debord was not the only author to explore the ideas of a social and consumer based spectacularization, mass mediation via emerging new means of communication and the construction of a manipulated collective imagery that replaces reality via advertising. We refer to apologetics authors such as Marshall McLuhan and the more radical ones such as Henri Lefebvre and Edgar Morin, who in the years while Debord was developing his ideas, had already elaborated important aspects of the Spectacle. Also relevant is Baudrillard who deals with the representational aspects of capitalism from a complementary perspective. Drawing on Lefebvre and Barthes he stresses the importance of semiotics to deconstruct the commodity form, the notion of value and the importance of media in creating meanings in consumer societies. It is also worth mentioning the work of Romano Alquati, who argued how in late capitalism serialized kind of production colonizes all social life, which for him works like an integrated serialized performance (Working Paper 2003).

While Debord's notion of Spectacle and Baudrillard's theory of simulation are clearly linked, because for instance both are drawn from Lefebvre and intended to critically explore French consumer society through processes of abstraction from reality, they also differ in significant ways. In his seminal book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Baudrillard emphasizes the process of abstraction in a media saturated society by advancing a theory of simulation 'about how our images, our communication and our media have usurped the role of reality, and a history of how reality fades' (Cubitt 2001, 1), and replaces dialogue with one-way communication. However, Baudrillard moved his analysis away from a political economy centered around production of commodities and Marxist categories such as alienation, deception, commodification and exploitation, and approached it instead through the political economy of signs (1981): according to which a world of commodified objects then turned into a world of signs without material referent, thus a post-modern hyper-reality.

Similarly, in the *Eclipse of the Spectacle* (1984) Crary tries to re-contextualize the Spectacle by looking at the dominance of television as a spectacular commodity and commodity producer. He argues that, since the mid 1970s, TV

passes from being a medium of representation to being the centre of mass distribution and regulation of cultural commodities. In such a shift, Crary, similarly to Baudrillard (1994), considers the boundary between objective and subjective forms, between the Spectacle and the spectators, to be collapsing. The Spectacle for Crary ceases to have a defined content but mediates its own being and transition into a digital Spectacle, a form that produces a consciousness shaped by the programming and logic imported through television and its related politico-economic interests.

Finally, Wark (2013), provides one of the most recent engagements with the Spectacle, when in his *The Spectacle of Disintegration* he offers an alternative understanding of the evolution of the Spectacle. He claims that in the digital era the Spectacle did not disappear but its experience significantly changed, as instead of being perceived as a unified whole, it appears as a fragmented micro Spectacle. Its dis-integration is highly deceptive because, while experienced as a sort of liberation from the intrusive and manipulative aspects of traditional media and tied to the rhetoric of democratization of media production of new media, its reproduction depends on the free labour of the 'spectators'. In fact, those spectacular fragments are frequently not produced by digital platforms but by their users and therefore constitute a representation that is even more pervasive.

Although with its emphasis on media technology and its expansion towards more areas of social life, the integrated Spectacle may be considered a more accurate depiction of current circumstances. In this volume we assume that in the context of contemporary capitalism and the prominence reached by information and communication technologies in such a mode of production, the Spectacle has evolved into a new qualitatively different modality that we define as the *Spectacle 2.0*, which presents both aspects of continuity and ruptures with its previous arrangements. As we have already mentioned previously, we considered that although the Spectacle 2.0 is still founded on the core dialectical tensions defining the original Spectacle, it is reconfigured in such a way that qualitatively deserves a new taxonomy.

In this sense, we believe that Compton, Kellner, Philips and Moberly, Crary and Wark offer us important insights for a definition of the Spectacle 2.0, a Spectacle certainly propelled by a new aesthetics, with a renewed prominence of (new) media, and characterized by interactivity. In relation to that, in the next section we provide our own definition, which is centred on a revived interest in commodity fetishism and the capability of the Spectacle 2.0 to use information and communication technology to subsume social life via productive activities such as digital labour.

## 5. The Emergence of the Spectacle 2.0

We hypothesize the Spectacle 2.0 to be incorporating some of the media and informational language that requires contextualization in a period of history

in which the process of digitalization and the ‘spectacular’ emergence of social media, have significantly changed the scenario compared to the early 1990s. For this reason, in the same way as Debord envisions the Spectacle evolving as a geopolitical context and mode of production, we assume that the trajectory defined by the original Spectacle and its evolution into the integrated one has, on the one hand, maintained its progression in contemporary capitalism; on the other, has also developed in contradictory ways. For this reason, after having provided a designation of the Spectacle 2.0, we will expand its description by exploring its contradictory viewpoints, which simultaneously confirm and problematize the original notion of the Spectacle.

We define the Spectacle 2.0 as both a historicized continuum of the Debordian Spectacle (and its development as integrated Spectacle), as well as a materialist corrective of the Hegelian tendency that positioned the original one too close to the gravitational poles of ‘consciousness’ and its ‘alienation’. Thus, if Debord described a mode of production centred around commodities consumption and mass industrial production, characterized by homogeneity, procedural thinking (Marcuse 1967), disciplinary control and channelled through means of communication such as cinema, TV and Radio, the transition to digital capitalism leads us to the necessity to re-elaborate the notion of the Spectacle as discursive and interactive, but also keeping fundamental elements such as commodity fetishism, commodity as Spectacle and the idea of unity and vision within appearances.

Our understanding of the Spectacle 2.0 builds on Best and Kellner (1999) in terms of interactivity and in relation to digital technologies and new media practices and the productive sphere. While in the original conceptualization the spectator represented the passive actor, recipient of Spectacle agency, passively consuming cultural products, thus being more and more object, the spectator of the Spectacle 2.0 is the interactive subject who socializes through language tools and flexible digital technology, characterized much more ambiguously by initiative, creativity, exploitation and precariousness.

The Spectacle 2.0, as the name suggests, takes cues from the evolution of web media from the first generation (so called 1.0) of bounded environments in which users were constrained in utilizing the products – thus still mimicking many central features of classic electronic media such as TV – into flexible platforms in which previously considered passive audiences have now apparently the agency to participate in the provision of content and the construction of the web environment. Certainly, the Web 2.0 changeover did not happen in a social historical vacuum, but actually reflects the general economic shift from fixed to flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989) and to post-industrial and post-Fordist production, and its tendency to move from an economy selling products to one providing services (Lazzarato 1997). Both the shift in the political economic model of production and the new participatory perspective materialized via web 2.0 based applications have created

a social and cultural milieu allowing the formation and exchange of user-generated content in the social media.

While the features of Web 2.0 media contribute to defining an important aspect of the Spectacle 2.0 in terms of a renewed interactivity, the implications of the Spectacle 2.0 are much broader. First of all compared to the previous one, the Spectacle 2.0 is characterized by an even more extended integration at the social and economic level by comprising both the moment of production and consumption and combining them together into an indissoluble whole. In fact, if the previous Spectacle relied on production and consumption as important but also separated moments and considerable more emphasis was given to the latter, the Spectacle 2.0 appears as the amalgamation of compound practices such as consumptive production and productive consumption.

Such a characteristic leads to another important feature of Spectacle 2.0 that has to do with organization of labour and value production. Thus, while mass production in the original Spectacle mostly revolved around a Fordist model of paid labour, the Spectacle 2.0 revolves around a combination of work, unpaid labour, underpaid labour and paid labour. In other words, the Spectacle 2.0 comprises a much wider range of productive social relations, their combination lead to a highly contradictory scenario in which a wider range of subjectivities operate.

For this reason, we think that our focus on labour can be seen as a materialist account that explains more in detail how both objective and subjective conditions of (re)productions get created. Thus, in order to be able to speak of Spectacle revisited in the current circumstances of informational capitalism we need to consider the specificities of this context in which the processes of digitalization of information have significantly transformed labour processes, which implies the crossing of boundaries between technologies and digital platforms, paid and unpaid, work sphere and leisure sphere, public and private sphere, consumption and production (Neilson & Rossiter 2011). Like many authors of the critical literature that links information and communication realms with capitalism, we essentially ask how the present capitalist mode of production manages to extract value from labour (Fuchs & Fisher 2015) and digital rent (Rigi & Prey 2015)

One of the reasons for our interest in Debord's notion of the Spectacle is that it provides a framework that allows us to use and historicize Marxist analytical and theoretical categories, which have proven exceedingly effective in understanding and criticizing contemporary capitalism as well. In this sense, we previously mentioned that the Spectacle 2.0 also functions as a materialist corrective but that does not necessarily mean we neglect Debord's Hegelian Marxian insights. In fact, the holistic and consciousness driven perspective of the Spectacle, allows us to combine labour theory of value with other important tools that Marxist tradition has produced such as the focus on alienation, rent, reification and mediation, which represents the equally important aspect of digital, knowledge driven labour.

### 5.1 *Spectacle 2.0, Knowledge Work and Devices of Extraction of Value, in Between Digital Rent and Valorization of Subjectivities*

In Thesis 193 of *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord makes reference to economist Clark Kerr and his prediction of industries involving the consumption of knowledge (i.e. arts, tech. and entertainment) that would become the driving force in the development of late capitalist economy. However, while for Debord the task of the various branches of knowledge that are in the process of developing *spectacular thought* is to justify an unjustifiable society and to establish a general science of false consciousness (Thesis 194), we believe that in the Spectacle 2.0 knowledge goes beyond its ideological reproductive function to become the fulcrum of a culturally materialist strategy to produce value.

In order to explore such a development in more detail, we examine the Spectacle in the particular context of knowledge work, a mode of production of value that heavily relies on the mediation of informational and communication technologies. We consider the Spectacle 2.0 still working on the assumption that real and concrete social relations are concealed, but that they do so in more ambiguous ways. For instance, on the one hand, relations among things are still invisible behind the screen of our computer and mobile phones. On the other, as Fuchs remarks (2015), the environment of social media creates the condition for an inverted fetishism in which we see people but not the social relations among commodities that shape those relations.

Part of the Spectacle derived from the paradoxical condition synthesized by the twofold notion of being ‘free’ (Terranova 2000) ranging from being unpaid, underpaid, socially produced and crowd-sourced (Fuchs 2010; Briziarelli 2014; Bruns 2008). Such a condition may be considered as an amplification of the original Debordian Spectacle, as it seems to have generated a kind of media driven labour that colonizes almost all spheres of social life and it appears to be one of the most powerful exemplifications of the mediating power of the Spectacle. In fact, from the point of view of the entertainment economy, the saturation of social life by mediated images and the fact the same media metaphors are used for labour and leisure (Lund 2014) could be taken as evidence of the pervasive power of the Spectacle to provide reciprocal conceptual and linguistic translation from disparate phenomena. From this perspective, the logic of Spectacle 2.0 can be seen as so pervasive to collapse and blur the traditional Marxist distinction between work and labour, between genuine creative tendencies and their alienated *alter*. Furthermore, as Srnicek (2017) has recently noticed by his notion of ‘platform capitalism,’ while the digital economic base on which the Spectacle 2.0 seems to be built provides new capitalist modalities of production and consumption (Armano, Murgia, Teli 2017), it also displays old tendencies to monopolization, cost reduction and increased productivity based on workers’ exploitation (p. 653).

Therefore, if Debord describes in the section *Separation Perfected* that the, ‘Spectacle is a social relation among people, mediated by images’ (p. 95), the



Spectacle 2.0 appears as an evolution of such a social relation towards interactivity, which in this volume is explored through the powerful mediation of digital labour and its annexed ideologies. It corresponds to the degree of subsumption of productive practices in which our lives function both as the mediated object and the mediating subject. Thus, it is a Spectacle that revolves around a digital language that socializes this new mode of production driven by new media, maybe even more than ever, in which media are not the host of representation of the Spectacle but (one of) the material terrain on which we live the Spectacle.

The Spectacle 2.0 re-composes objective and subjective forms by combining processes of production of social relations, value and subjectivities. As Baroncelli and Freitas (2011) claim, the current Spectacle is centred around the self-spectacularization of individuals via information and communication technology such as social media, as the personal life becomes entertainment for others to consume and actively used as a basis for production of value. In this sense, we claim that for knowledge workers there is also capital that is being used to reproduce the condition of reproduction of knowledge work. In the context of the Spectacle 2.0, social media are not simply the platform for commodification of life (Wright 2012) but also a platform for the creation of value through unpaid or underpaid knowledge work. Thus, the unified framework provided by the Spectacle allows us to look at the dialectics between the subjective side of forces of production, that is the labourers and media users, and the objective side, that is the means of production and relations of production.

While much of the critical literature on digital capitalism and knowledge work constitutes an invaluable compilation of study of these new forms of Spectacle, we believe that the notion of the Spectacle 2.0 deserves further exploration. The use of both the metaphoric and literal notion of 'rent' are exemplary in order to make sense of the processes of value creation and extraction. The assumption is that since only labour exchanged with salary is considered to be productive, therefore excluding some of what we defined as free labour, then the value created in the context of knowledge work derives from rent-seeking. The Spectacle of free labour allows us to both examine the question of production traditionally linked to labour theory and the question tied to consumption (consumptive production). In doing so, our perspective integrates within the spectacle, the notion of audiences' labour as understood by Smythe (1977) and the production of metadata, which are processed by digital capital assets such as algorithms (Goffey 2008; Fuller and Goffey 2013).

As we have already mentioned, in this engagement with the Spectacle 2.0 we want to pay particular attention to digital labour as one powerful medium of the Spectacle. In fact, we think that labour allows us to reveal the ambiguity of the Spectacles in the same way Marx (1990) considers labour as the archetype of the two-sided nature of capitalism. Labour presents a dual character of capitalism that creates both abstract value that can be quantitatively assessed and concrete value with specific aims that can be qualitatively assessed. In

addition, labour is at the same time the producer of both indigence and wealth in a capitalist environment. Thus, in many ways, labour in its capitalist form has always been ‘free labour’ as free enriching activity and not paid enough, thus approaching gratuity labour. Furthermore, the notion of free labour allows us to capture both the value creation of knowledge work as formal wage workers, producing data and social media users as unpaid and exploited labourers. The Spectacle 2.0, also defined in this specific context as the Spectacle of free labour, shows dialectical aspects associated to the Spectacle and the current forms of valorization.

Accordingly, some of our essays will try to make sense of a reality in which creativity, independence and self-valorization take place in the context of what for Wright (2012) appear as relations of exploitations: the wealth of informational capitalists depends on the inverse interdependent welfare of knowledge workers; who are for the most part excluded from the profit generating conditions.

The Spectacle 2.0 considers digital and knowledge labour as the manifestation of real subsumption of capital (Marazzi 2008) in which surplus value is mostly not produced by prolongation of labour days (which of course finds its limit in the limits of 24 hours) but by technological progress, intensification of labour process (Huws 2016) and neo-industrialization and digital Taylorism (Cominu 2015) in terms of productivity, and its significant re-organization in the context of neoliberalism and post Fordism. However, while being in the Fordist mode of production of real subsumption of labour changed the ratio between living and dead labour, constant and variable capital in favour of the latter, in the context of knowledge work, the appropriation of value from all social life, what previously could be considered as extra-laboral life such as leisure time, thus implies a revision of that ratio in favour of living labour and at the same time (Vercellone 2006), the transference of knowledge from living to dead labour. In this sense, this volume tries to enter into the debate about whether those new forms of subsumption of labour by capital require a new theory of value or not.

## 5.2 *Spectacular Subjectivities*

In the original Spectacle, Debord marginally engages with subjectivities. He sees, for instance, celebrities as the subjective embodiment of those who actually lose their individuality to become signs, a living semiotics of capitalism, a living witness of commodification who, in fact, behave like commodities. Thus, celebrities are, actually, de-humanized subjects:

‘The admirable people in whom the system personifies itself are well known for not being what they are; they became great men by stooping below the reality of the smallest individual life, and everyone knows it’ (Thesis 61).

Compared to such a perspective, we think that the Spectacle 2.0 constitutes a much more articulate stage for a development of subjects, according to which persistent alienating and de-humanizing processes are accompanied by their opposite. Indeed, from this reproductive perspective subjectivities constitute one of the products of the Spectacle 2.0, which, in the original Spectacle, were framed in a narrative of overwhelming psycho-physical subordination, and are thus inadequate to account for the Spectator 2.0.

When it comes to the production of subjectivities we can distinguish between the unpaid subjects involved in digital processes (Huws 2016) and the unpaid subjects using social media (Terranova, 2000). Digitalization makes commodities de-constructible and re-constructible, and commodified individuals are then equally fragmented by distinct representations and understanding of the self, caused by a variety of processes such as management impression strategies both at the moment of production and consumption, self-valorization and division of labour. Subjects experience production as social activity marked by collaboration and emotions (Benski and Fisher 2013; Risi 2012).

Nevertheless, informational capitalism and its reliance on media technology could be considered as the *appearance* of a mitigation (of an *actual* development) of some of the degenerative tendencies of the Spectacle because the role played by new media in informational capitalism could be regarded as a way in which the Spectacle returns to less alienated/abstracted forms of existence. In fact, through social media social life *allegedly* comes back from 'having' – by producing goods and values – to 'being' – by producing subjects as in the case of knowledge workers. From this point of view, a powerful rhetoric both concerning popular and academic discourse (Florida 2006) claims that digital, knowledge labour, thanks to technologies such as social media, has liberated and empowered the worker with creativity, high interaction and a renewed sense of sociability (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012).

The productive activity of knowledge workers is based on exploitation, informal and affective relations, utopic aspirations, perceived freedom, the will to share, and the undefined boundaries between free time and 'free' labour, which entails being *free* understood as having both expressive freedom and the freedom to enjoy the sociability of affective relations and *free* as gratuity and voluntary unpaid and therefore exploited work as *working for exposure* (Ross 2017). The spectacular precarity of knowledge workers is founded on *connective and relational networks* (Armano 2010), on individual and socially based *online reputation* (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012), and on the creation of an *audience* (Fisher, 2012) made of 'likes', 'friends', 'followers', in a sort of showcasing (Code-luppi 2015) that provides a measure of appreciation of the individuals in the web. Thus, human experience tends to be repositioned and reframed within a digitally mediated Spectacle that functions according to its own rules. From such a perspective, the Spectacle 2.0 represents the stage where the objective and subjective tensions implied by the contradictory condition of being 'free' are free to move but are not necessarily resolved. In fact, the original dialectics

of separation and unity of the Spectacle remains a fundamental characteristic of the current Spectacle.

We refer to the ambivalent context of the so-called Spectacle 2.0 which produces subjects and a sense of sociability that capitalize on one particularly exemplary product/producer of the Spectacle: knowledge workers. On the one hand, we investigate the productive activity of knowledge workers, which is based on exploitation, informal and affective relations, utopic aspirations, perceived autonomy and freedom, the will to share, and the undefined boundaries between free time and 'free' labour. We refer to situations in which the consumer-user voluntarily and gratuitously participates in the creation of value, propelled by motivation linked to leisure, expression of identity, consumer display (Codeluppi 2007; 2015), through (online) management impression (Gill & Prat, 2008), and by the neo-liberal normative thrust that revolves around the idea of the gift economy (Barbrook 1998; Scholz 2012).

On the other hand, the Spectacle of digital capitalism mediates the ambivalence of free workers/labourers (Terranova 2000; Briziarelli 2014), which entails being *free* both understood as (apparent) expressive freedom and (apparent) freedom to enjoy the sociability of affective relations and *free* as gratuity, voluntary, unpaid, and therefore exploited work. Through free work/labour people organize their life around 'creativity' and self-activation (Armano and Murgia 2013), according to which the hetero-direction logic typical of the Fordist model is replaced by a new sphere of participation, self-promotion of subjective resources (Armano, Chicchi, Fisher and Risi 2014) and self-responsabilization (Salecl 2010).

The combination of those features creates a neoliberal subjectivity (Dardot and Laval 2009), which is both created and at the same time actively reproduced by the very subjects operating in the context of knowledge work. Such subjectivity may live this Spectacle both as alienation and a form of dis-alienation. Drawing on Han (2015), the Spectacle 2.0 may appear as a digital swarm that, as a whole, cannot crystallize but only remains as at the fragmentary and episodic level (an alternative reformulation of the tension between unity and separation of the Spectacle). Thus, it creates an alienating experience in which the subject is subject-of-performance that adds to the picture, but he/she does not actually make it. At the same time, the social interaction occurring in social media may exemplify the condition of dis-alienation through the promise of hyper-connectivity, sociability and transparency.

## 6. Book Structure and Content

Having examined the main questions and themes that propel this project, we provide here a synthetic account of the structure of the book and we synthetically highlight the reason for their relevance. The book begins with the insightful preface from Douglas Kellner that tries to make sense of the notion of the

Spectacle and its re-elaboration via spectacular events, that now appears more interactive, and therefore, more dialectical than in its original formulation, by concentrating on the phenomenon of the recent American election.

Subsequently, the book comprises two main sections: contributions to Part I, 'Conceptualizing and Historicizing The Spectacle' consider the possibility of reviving the notion of the Spectacle in the context of informational capitalism. This section contains essays providing theoretical reflections and definitions of concepts, which resonate with Bunyard's observation (2011) about the Spectacle that can be understood both in natural alignment with the critical political economy typical of Marxian literature as well as a call for its historicization and sympathetic critique.

Vanni Codeluppi inaugurates the first section by providing a genealogy for the Spectacle of 'hypermodern' societies. He utilizes the notion of the Spectacle in order to understand fundamental perspective changes in capitalism from an aesthetic of popular culture as they manifest in artefacts such as movies. Codeluppi claims that the integrating nature of the Spectacle has been facilitated by mediated collective imagery that contributed to aestheticize – therefore creating consent around it – prevailing forms of value production. Then, in the second chapter, Olivier Frayssé notices an important tension in Debord's notion of the Spectacle in relation to productive processes: potentially offering many significant insights but also recognizing that Debord never really dealt with the subject, leaving it in a blind spot. Thus, he attempts to 'historicize and re-territorialize' Debord's Spectacle in the context of digital capitalism by exploring the relationship between Debord's envisioning and current elements of US economy, politics, culture and society and the subjects that inhabit it.

Steve Wright and Raffaele Sciortino use the notion of Spectacle as a lens through which to explore the online relationship between production and consumption, different forms of digital rent, and between 'free activity' and capital's process of valorization and accumulation. The two authors claim that the Spectacle 2.0 should be considered as the representation of a system of total social reproduction. Rosati, in the last chapter of the first part, delivers a theoretical exploration of the Spectacle 2.0 in relation to commodity fetishism, and current relations of production. His essay draws on the arguments developed by Williams on advertising as a magic system and political economy critique of market economy as it appears in Debord's *Comments*. Rosati's chapter argues for how the two perspectives provide a useful historical narrative for understanding the changes which have occurred in the economic sphere since the 1960s.

Contributions in Part II, 'Phenomenology and Historicization of the Spectacle: From Debord to the Spectacle 2.0 of New Media,' deliver empirical cases for a historicization of the Spectacle *vis a vis* the multifaceted context of digital capitalism, and thus show how the Spectacle 2.0 can function as an illuminating perspective to deconstruct specific aspects of contemporary social reality. In the first chapter of this section, Barbara Szaniecki explores the notion of

the Spectacle in the spatial dimension of the city of Rio de Janeiro, in the context of recent years' 'immense accumulation of Spectacles' witnessed in Brazil. She treats such a scenario as a space where spectacular subjectivities are constructed through spectacular events such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games, critically examined in the realm of political economy of media.

Jim Thatcher and Craig M. Dalton reflect on the limits and possibilities offered by big data by inquiring into the processes of separation that subjectivities living in the Spectacle experience when it comes to their digital and geographic information about their lives. Their critical analysis utilizes geographical information system (GIS) as big data characterized by cultural and political representations with contingent value, which offer a potential terrain of contestation. Accordingly, the authors wonder how GIS data can be used in subversive ways in order to construct Situationist experiences that aim at re-appropriating life experiences such as walking around the city. Nello Barile examines the dynamics of the Spectacle 2.0 linked to the hegemony of global trademarks through the logic of selfbranding. Barile focuses on the cognitive exploitation of the consumer, who simultaneously stands as the centre of the universe inhabited by brands and the victims of identity theft enacted by the same brands. Such a process, while originating a few decades ago, has been significantly aggravated in the context of the digital economy.

Chiara Bassetti, Annalisa Murgia and Maurizio Teli discuss the intertwining of different levels of the Spectacle in which knowledge workers are reproduced as subjectivities by discussing their findings of the ethnographic study of role games as the manifestation of the Spectacle 2.0's particular facet of gaming capitalism. Along the same lines, exploring how capitalist Spectacle valorizes playfulness, Romina Surugiu aims at investigating the activity of a 'creative' residence/hub for independent digital journalists/writers in Romania who strive to navigate interstitial positions in relation to the general Spectacle, who are caught between the structural political economic constraints of their field and determination to operate as counter-Spectacle apparatus.

In his chapter, Jacob Johanssen shows how in a British reality show, *Embarassing Bodies*, patients are exploited because they receive no monetary return for their performances and are frequently shamed on camera for the voyeuristic gaze of the audience. The author theorizes the exploited labour on reality television through an updated version of Debord's notion of Spectacle. Finally, Ergin Bulut and Haluk Mert Bal conclude with a message of hope, by offering a study of the 2013 Gezi Uprising in Turkey as an effort to create Debordian situations to oppose the Spectacle enacted by the ruling government by deconstructing its hegemonic representations.

All contributions included in this volume show us how productive the revisited category of the Spectacle really is when it comes to making sense of both the general features and particular aspects of informational digital capitalism. We believe that the present scholarship can open the possibility to develop a stimulating compendium for the critical literature on media studies.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In fact, trying to provide its intellectual history, Crary (2004) claims that the Spectacle finds its origins in Greek philosophical thought, reached its embryonic stage during the European Renaissance, and finally completely established itself in the early twentieth century, with the rampant commodification of space and time, the emergence of electronic media, and the spectacular display of commodities (Benjamin, 2002). Like a Greek tragedy, the Spectacle functions as an interface between the spectator and social reality, a powerful medium with pedagogical and epistemological functions. When subsequently such a representation becomes mediated by the technology of mass communication, the Spectacle expands in scope and meaning, which projects its reach beyond the image and gaze, towards a more embracing perception (Crary 1999).

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