

5. We Dreamt a Beach and Found a Desert: What It Means to Live in Post-Situationist Reality

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Abstract: The graffiti slogan that appeared on Parisian walls during May 1968, “beneath the paving stones the beach”, encapsulated the Situationist ambition to uncover a latent real beneath capitalist reality. For the Situationist International, the real demanded excavation, and reality was conceived as lived experience. Yet the desert exposed after May 1968 is reminiscent of Baudrillard’s “desert of the real”, marking a post-situationist condition in which revolutionary expectations collapse into a landscape stripped of structure and orientation. The promised revolutionary beach of play and liberation becomes an exhausted desert where even the memory of water has evaporated, as “the new spirit of capitalism” has absorbed and reconfigured lived experience into another layer of simulation. This paper follows Baudrillard, Jameson, and Fisher to frame and examine the implications of inhabiting this post-revolutionary terrain, tracing the shift from situationist beaches to post-situationist deserts.

1. Introduction: The Shift

A fundamental distinction separates Guy Debord’s theory of the society of the spectacle (1967) from Jean Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality (1981). While Debord maintained that the real existed beneath the spectacle and could be uncovered through revolutionary praxis, opening a temporary moment functional to the collapse of capitalism, Baudrillard conversely argued that hyperreality is more real than reality itself. For Debord, the spectacle was a historically specific formation, understood primarily through Jean Hyppolite’s translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which difference had to be sublated to enable a self-contained dialectical movement. If the spectacle was reducible to a his-

torical moment,¹ then the divergence between Debordian and Baudrillardian views on the structure of reality must also mark a transition in historical and lived time, that proceeds from a capitalist façade that deceptively concealed the real (on which Situationist thought was based) to post-Situationist thought after May 1968,² which co-opted whatever was exposed as real and authentic. Such divergence represents a crucial ontological shift in how the relationship between representation and reality is understood after May '68, marking the end of the Situationist project and its assimilation into capitalist dynamics.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord explains that the spectacle operates as a social relation mediated through images,³ asserting that this form of relation is unique to its historical moment. Yet beneath this mediation, an authentic substrate persists, however alienated or defied. The spectacle, as delineated by Debord, can be imagined as a veil that covers but does not entirely erase the real from the realm of lived possibilities. It thus remains a question of ideology, of “seeing the world upright”, understood as false consciousness masking genuine social relations, *per-verted* precisely by capitalist modes of production. Marx argues that language is “practical consciousness” arising from the necessity of human interaction.⁴ Thus, for Debord, the spectacle substitutes social relations, displacing them as all relations and reality migrate into a plane of representation. As a consequence, social relations are mediated by images that falsely represent what is authentically lived.

Debord never provided a specific formula for how lived experience might be recuperated in its most authentic form, other than through revolutionary action aimed at the collapse of capitalism. Nevertheless, throughout

¹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle: Annotated Edition*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), thesis 11.

² The Situationist International officially lasted from 1957, when it was founded in Cosio d'Arroscia, Italy, until its dissolution in 1972, when only two members remained. By that point, the others had either been expelled from the c movement or had chosen to leave, many following the Situationist Fifth Conference in 1962. For a standard historical account of the Situationist International's founding, internal expulsions, and dissolution, cccsee the overviews in Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), andcTom cccMcDonough, *The Situationists and the City* (London: Verso, 2009).

³ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 3.

⁴ Karl Marx, “The Materialist Conception of History,” in *The German Ideology*, in *The Portable Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 173.

The Society of the Spectacle he relentlessly insists that the spectacle substitutes the materiality of reality with a material consciousness, thereby constructing the very framework of what comes to appear as real. The spectacle not only subsumes, governs and prescribes reality, but it shapes consciousness, pacifying subjects into accepting a self-evident, self-referential circular logic akin to that of capital. According to this logic, the spectacle (which is interchangeable with capital) reproduces everything in its own image, in an almost theological register.⁵ Yet because this inverted world manifests a material basis, its internalization presupposes the persistence of a hidden kernel of reality, external to the structures that objectify themselves as a moment of historical stagnation.

Baudrillard's intervention in *Simulacra and Simulation* both departs from and radicalizes this framework. Writing from within the horizon of the 1980s, he argues that social reality has already surpassed the spectacle's logic of representation and entered what he names the hyperreal. The hyperreal designates a condition or, more precisely, an order of representation in which simulations no longer refer back to any originary reality but instead produce their own reality effects, severed from any source.⁶ Under a Situationist inflection and resonant with Feuerbach, the copy effectively replaces the original and proliferates in its absence, establishing a world in which the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic collapses into nothingness. In this sense, the categories of reality and representation are no longer separable, and simulation no longer conceals reality but constitutes it. This trajectory can be traced from Debord's diagnosis of the spectacle in the late 1960s as capitalism's advanced form of mystification, or phantasmagoria, to Baudrillard's analysis in the 1980s. In this sense, it becomes evident that, whereas Debord located the spectacle within a specific historical and social context, as a distortion of social relations under capitalist production, Baudrillard later argues that society had progressed beyond this stage, entering a condition of pure simulation where reality and its representation merge and simulation generates its own autonomous effects.

This same shift was also noted by Jean-Pierre Voyer, a former Situationist expelled from the Situationist International, who both extended and critiqued Debord's notion of the spectacle and its implica-

⁵ Cf. *Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 25.

⁶ Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 20.

tions for lived experience. Voyer rejects the Situationist understanding of the spectacle as an externally imposed distortion, manipulable at will by those in power.⁷ For him, if the spectacle is not imposed, then there is nothing mediating or concealing an underlying authentic reality; rather, it is produced, sustained, and consumed by society's marginalized or weakened members as a form of escapism or entertainment.

Just like Debord, Voyer too confined the spectacle to a particular historical moment, treating it as a label for a unique socio-historical condition in which, "the slaves must be politically emancipated, with the free use of their bodies, so that they can travel far and wide, even to the beaches of Greece."⁸ What matters more in Voyer's account is the role of those who experience, sustain, and reproduce the spectacle, which he frames as both a remedy and a distraction from the persistent conditions of repression inherent to civilized life and governance, as if these conditions belonged to human essence or natural inclination rather than to an artificial scenography into which subjects are coerced to adapt and perform. In this sense, the society of the spectacle (if such a society exists at all for Voyer) consists of marginalized individuals who produce the spectacle for themselves as a means of alienation from their boring and oppressive reality. Hence, the spectacle is always engendered by its spectators, without whom it would never have come into being.⁹ Yet for Voyer, the spectacle remains a secondary effect: it is not the cause of enslavement but a symptom of it.¹⁰

Baudrillard's departure from Situationist (hence, Lefebvrian) thought hinges on the insight that all phenomena within the capitalist condition operate as staged realities, constructed precisely because there is no underlying reality. These staged realities must therefore be ceaselessly maintained, even if fictitious, lest they collapse, and much like Peter Pan compelling children to believe in fairies: without belief, the fair-

⁷ Jean-Pierre Voyer, "There Is No Society of the Spectacle," in *It's Crazy How Many Things Don't Exist: Selected Writings* (Los Angeles: The Compound, 2015), originally published 1998.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹ Alexander Gungov, "Introduction: Touching Fictitious Reality in Philosophizing," *Sofia Philosophical Review* VIII, no. 2 (2014): 10.

¹⁰ For Voyer, the spectacle is the consequence of being a slave and not its cause; what must be understood for him instead is the cause of enslavement itself, which he sees as a condition that persists across historical epochs. See Jean-Pierre Voyer, *op. cit.*, 70.

ies die. What is also recurrent in this post-Situationist context, is that imagination no longer serves to anticipate action in thought, as Aristotle's *phantasia* described, but to reproduce the already-positing, sustaining thereby social relations that are solely aimed at maintaining what already exists.

The consequence of the shift in imagination in late capitalism, as Fredric Jameson (1991) observed and Mark Fisher (2009, 2014) later developed, is that imagination ceases even to generate possible futures to be created or contested and becomes instrumental only in reproducing the surrounding reality. For Fisher, the future becomes so far removed from any horizon of possibility that thought itself is rendered incapable of productive imagination. Drawing on Franco "Bifo" Berardi's *After the Future* (2011), Fisher describes this process as the "slow cancellation of the future," noting that after the 1970s, time and cultural progress were flattened and absorbed into retrospective nostalgia, even when dressed in the frenzied guise of constant novelty. For both Bifo (who experienced Italy's cultural upheavals and the reverberations of May '68 firsthand) and Fisher, this cancellation is the result of capitalism systematically depriving society of the conditions necessary for creative potential and the imagination's pursuit of new futures. As a result, the future ceases to function as a site of transformation and becomes instead an unstoppable, dizzying merry-go-round of the present, which is little more than a see-through ghost, while the future is reduced to a predetermined, "already-established", a mere style of expression.¹¹ Hence, the future no longer exists as a possibility.

2. A problem of perspective

If the future survives only as style, then the problem is no longer merely temporal but formal. That is, the cancellation of the future manifests not only in what can be imagined, but in how imagination is permitted to take shape. With regard to expression and the problem of representation, Hager Weslati notes that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe a collapse of political and social illusions toward the end of the twentieth century, as a failure of the grand narratives surrounding imperial decline, particularly the myths attached to the supposed exhaustion of

¹¹ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014), 19.

European empires and the corresponding illusion of an American exception. Hardt and Negri situate this collapse as an epistemological problem,¹² one that concerns not only political organization but also the organization of theory itself as knowledge that no longer explicitly anticipates emancipation but accommodates “life in the desert.”¹³

In this sense, following Weslati, philosophical pessimism, reflected in the vanished promise of any future, let alone a better one, renders such insights entirely unhelpful for moving from theory to action, as they point only toward an inescapable void. Yet such an attitude also corrupts the soul, as the contemplation of the abyss and of vacuity intensifies one’s enjoyment of one’s own position, settling more comfortably into the shelter of commodities.¹⁴ Weslati understands “thinking in the desert” and “thinking the desert” as the consequence of a profound theoretical vacuity, one that combines the exhaustion of contemporary theory with the failure of its applicability, that is, its translation into lived reality. The promised beach, an image haunting Situationist imaginaries, thus becomes a catalyst for the accumulation of disappointment characteristic of what may be called the “desert of the real.” At this point it is necessary to recall Marx’s insight that language bears an analogy to consciousness itself. Any impoverishment of language, symbolic forms, or cultural materials therefore entails an impoverishment of consciousness, from which one may deduce the corresponding impotence of imagination, theorized by Jameson as a symptom of late capitalism.

For instance, Jean-François Lyotard’s theory of “language games” in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) and his later concept of *le différend* (1983) function as counter-political devices insofar as they articulate the threshold between the imaginable and the unimaginable, forcing thought beyond its habitual boundaries. In an Aristotelian sense, imagination (or phantasia) here aims at anticipating possibilities and actualizing potential. Yet in the post-Situationist condition, Marx’s “practical consciousness”, which arises from the material necessity of human interaction, is redirected astray. What emerges is a condition governed not by appearances that conceal reality, but by a hyperreal logic in

¹² Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 379–380.

¹³ Hager Weslati, “La pensée du désert: The Paradox of Theory and the Narrative of ‘Boom’ and Bust in Cultural Studies,” *Tropisme* 16 (2010): 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52, in note 8 of the cited text.

which representation itself constitutes reality. This reality is fragmented into heterogeneous, incommensurable discursive practices that oscillate without stable ground. The pendulum between the sayable and its irreducible outside forecloses any stable guarantee of the real. Language and performance thus function less as revelatory practices than as strategic operations that reproduce and stabilize existing social relations. Imagination is compelled to fill capitalism's void with consciousness's own impoverished content rather than generating transformative futures.

As Weslati notes, the "desert" invoked by Hardt and Negri in *Empire* (2000) signifies the simultaneous collapse of old imperial orders, which failed to actualize their promised transformations when their historical moment arrived, and the inability of new, utopian alternatives to materialize. The desert represents not the absence of social life but its reconfiguration through the dispersed category of the multitude, a heterotopian condition characterized by the simultaneity of multiple, irreconcilable possibilities.¹⁵ What disappears is not sociality itself, but orientation within it, along with any stable grasp of the real. The problem of the real and its disappearance is thus fundamentally linguistic and representational, a condition that resonates with Lacan's account of the real as perceptible yet unrepresentable, and with Baudrillard's later visual logic of simulation.

Anticipating Hardt and Negri's analysis by two decades, Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) had already described this collapse through the same Borgesian allegory of the Empire and its map.¹⁶ This marks the historical moment when simulations give way to the order of the hyperreal, or a coordinate of a place Baudrillard sees as "the desert of the real." Invoking Borges's fable of the map that becomes co-extensive with the territory it represents, Baudrillard clarifies that "even *inverted*, Borges's fable is unusable."¹⁷

Historically speaking, it is not too bold to suggest that the Situationists inhabited the last era in which one could keep their head in the clouds and feet on the ground, where a leap in either direction remained

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶ Negri and Hardt's text was written in the nineties, but only published in 2000.

¹⁷ Emphasis mine. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, *op. cit.*, 1. Baudrillard also references the Empire, but in this instance the Empire remains, as imperialism. What has disappeared is the difference between differences in the category of Empire and of past, present and future.

conceivable and actionable. Debord's *interruptionism* (with the Letterists), for instance, still had the power to alter reality and could still reshape *non-places* and, in doing so, create history and change meaning at will.¹⁸ But, May '68 allowed capitalism not only to survive but to refine its strategy by absorbing rupture into the spectacle as a narrative effect, a mere shift in plot. The result was a flattened plane of reality that admits no outside, where the real, reality, art, and artifice collapse into a one-sided Möbius strip, Baudrillard's figure for the hyperreal and the basis of a new capitalist realism.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard shows that simulation cannot remain simulation. A staged bank robbery is immediately converted into a reality where police shoot, hostages may die, ransom is paid. This violence does not testify to the reality of money or order but exposes the real's function as the annihilation of simulation. It is here, finally that the order of the hyperreal enters the scene, sustained precisely by erasing the distinction between simulation and reality, making meaning itself dependent on their very collapse.¹⁹ And precisely in this respect, the Situationists did experience the final historical moment in which "the world of art" could still be conceived as distinct from the real, and in which sabotage could function as a strategy for dismantling theatrical props, instead of being part of the same spectacle. In practice, the Situationists' deployment of *détournement* often amounted to an inflation of the very forms they denounced through an intensification of the spectacle under the guise of its negation, a tactic subsequently absorbed and amplified in turn by capitalism's post-'68 logic.²⁰ What followed as observed in the *Comments to the Society of the Spectacle* was not the disappearance of illusion but its totalization in an organic unity.²¹

¹⁸ Most famously the disruption of Charlie Chaplin's press conference in 1952, at the Ritz Hotel, because of the actor's being the epitome of critique without action.

¹⁹ Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 20.

²⁰ See, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999). Similarly, Félix Guattari and Antonio Negri argue in *Communists Like Us* (1984; Semiotext(e), Foreign Agents Series, 1990) that the post-'68 global regime functions by absorbing differences, staged as multiplicities, into a unified operational logic.

²¹ This unity is realized through the fusion of what Debord terms the "concentrated spectacle," characteristic of bureaucratic-totalitarian regimes such as the USSR, and the "diffuse spectacle," typical of advanced capitalist societies, particularly the United States. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Debord argues that these two

This leads us to the observation that, within the Marxist tradition, what is often misidentified as a problem of perspective is in fact a problem of content and its form.²² As Christoph Schuringa observes, following Althusser's demarcation between Hegelian idealism and Marxian materialism, rotating a subject leaves its content intact, merely inverted. To engage content at all, form must be turned inside-out. The material basis of an inverted world should not be understood as a reality turned upside down, but as one rendered inside-out. Direct experience thus translates into a problem of representation, particularly in Debord's analysis and in the technique of *détournement*, as the reversal of direction cultural elements.

For Debord, the migration of the world into representation still presupposes the existence of reality somewhere--alienated, deferred, and temporarily inaccessible. Reality is not absent but displaced. Yet the Situationists never fully grasped the consequences of this inside-out condition, nor did they develop methods capable of confronting capitalism beyond the critique of false consciousness. As Schuringa argues, "Marx himself goes on to specify *not* that Hegel's dialectic must be 'turned the right way up,' but that it must be turned inside out."²³

In the same year in which Debord published his most famous text, used as a manifesto for the upheavals of May '68, Raoul Vaneigem published *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, a work approved and praised by Debord for spreading situationist thought.²⁴ Written as a guide to revolutionary thinking for younger generations, Vaneigem advocated a 'reversal of perspective' meant to lead the reader toward a rectified vision of life and reality. This reversal was intended to expose everyday perception as already distorted, or in the sense of the very optics shaped and

forms converge into what he calls the "integrated spectacle," a configuration that combines centralized control with diffuse commodified mediation. While not identical to Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, the integrated spectacle approaches it insofar as representation no longer merely mediates reality but becomes indistinguishable from it. See, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988), Commentary 160.

²² See Christoph Schuringa, *Karl Marx and the Actualization of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 8.

²³ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

²⁴ Guy Debord's Telegram to Raoul Vaneigem, 8 March 1965. Available at: <https://www.notbored.org/debord-8March1965.html> (Accessed: 1 January 2026).

sustained by capitalist interests in order to reproduce reality in a form compatible with its own continued existence and operability. Yet a mere reversal of perspective, turning the view right-side-up, changes nothing about the nature of the objects themselves.

3. Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible **(Be realistic, demand the impossible)**

One might be tempted to conclude that the Situationists, like other avant-gardes committed to the sublation of art into life, were paradoxically oriented toward a flattening of reality that would later characterize their own historical defeat. As Debord observed, “Dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it; and surrealism sought to realize art without abolishing it.”²⁵ Yet within Debord’s critique of the spectacle, this flattening remained a mediated distortion rather than an ontological closure. The difference is that by incorporating Lefebvre’s theory of moments, the Situationists sought to interrupt spectacular mediation by opening everyday life to a plurality of qualitatively distinct moments irreducible to representation, that is moments, that are singular, non-reproducible, and resistant to spectacular circulation.

In Baudrillard’s hyperreality, representation no longer mediates reality but replaces it, eliminating the distance on which Debord’s critique depends. The Situationists’ failure is thus historical: they operated within a spectacular regime that still presupposed an outside, precisely when capitalism was reorganizing itself around a logic in which difference proliferates without producing internal ruptures. This condition has since been actualized through technological mediation that transforms everyone into producers of their own alienation, as Voyer had suggested,²⁶ rather than into passive spectators of a coerced spectacle; spectators create the spectacle for themselves. The flattening realized after 1968 is therefore not the paradoxical defeat/fulfillment of the Situationist project, but its negation under conditions in which the spectacle becomes reality as lived-experience itself.²⁷

²⁵ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Zone Books, 1994), thesis 191.

²⁶ Cf. Jean-Pierre Voyer, *It’s Crazy How Many Things Don’t Exist*, 71.

²⁷ In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1990), Debord acknowledged that the society he had analyzed in 1967 had met exactly its concept, and that his earlier critique had, in effect, prophesized the very developments he hoped to counter.

Today's reality is flat and indifferent to different moments, based on a hypnotic oxymoronic structure²⁸ that forecloses openings for difference, and as such wars are peaceful when experienced from screens, the spectacle is participative as we disclose our most intimate thoughts online. When Baudrillard pioneered the theory of the hyperreal, there was no longer any border separating art or artifice from life. The dream of realizing art into life becomes perverted into a condition where the hyperreal has subsumed both into its own self-referential logic without transcendence.²⁹ Without difference in moments or situations, everything bears the same taste.

For instance, it is already unimaginable to think of a day in which the news palimpsest has nothing to report, or nothing of importance worth inserting into the fabric of one's individual everyday life.³⁰ Yet even during Baudrillard's hyperreal, there remained detectable traces when television screens showed only static after midnight sign-offs. In those moments, the void was signaled and the contingency of the spectacle briefly exposed. Absence, indeterminacy, and multiplicity (understood in a Situationist sense as constitutive of lived experience) were still perceptible, precisely what contemporary hyperreality has effaced, leaving only self-reproducing images as proxies for difference, possibility, and the real.

4. The hypocrisy of the *révélateurs*

Filtered through Situationist imagination, May '68 should have marked revolutionary sublation. The workers' movement was neutralized through wage increases and minor concessions while students dispersed for summer holidays. Capitalist antagonism was absorbed, not sublated, and the struggle for recognition was resolved into a (mis)recognition of workers' rights rather than their transformation into non-workers. Theory was severed from praxis and the hoped-for rupture never actualized.

²⁸ Alexander Gungov, *Logika na izmamata* (Sofia: Avangard Prima Press, 2021), 122.

²⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 191. The full text of the thesis concludes that the transcendence of art is the telos of this pursued sublation.

³⁰ Yet even in this totalization, reality is not abolished but displaced, glimpsable in historical fissures. On April 18, 1930, BBC Radio announced, "There is no news," and played piano music instead of the bulletin. BBC News, "'There Is No News:' What a Change from 1930 to Today," April 17, 2017, accessed January 6, 2026, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-39633603>.

As Weslati observes, “in bourgeois modern tyrannies, the pleasures of recognition are replaced by a different discourse on the pleasurable rewards of work.”³¹

On the other hand, the Situationists may have aspired to function as *révélateurs* to a (ideal) societal *réalisateur*, revealing to society its own environment and hence its perpetual unconscious re-enactment into reality. Following Weslati’s explanation of the duality of *révélateur*–*réalisateur* that Kojève identifies in the Napoleon–Hegel pairing,³² universal action is coupled with absolute knowledge, the Situationist International in turn might have sought to provide the absolute knowledge that would interpret the meaning of their epoch’s universal action: the society of the spectacle.

If their aimed positioning was that of mere *révélateurs* to the social *réalisateur* of action, this would explain and justify not only the Situationist failure to exit contemplation and *theoria*, but also the disappearance from the scene of the protests of other scholars and Marxists, such as Althusser, who earned himself his own graffiti on the wall asking, “A quoi sert Althusser?”³³ Literally, the graffiti asking of what use the most famous Marxist lecturer of the time was did denounce how he himself failed to apply one of the most important Marxist principles precisely because of his absence from the events of May ’68. Althusser was then perceived as preaching revolutionary doctrine without participating in the historical moment that demanded its practical realization. This slogan can undoubtedly be read as a broader critique of the *intellectual* who remains confined to theory, exposing the perceived sterility of a Marxism detached from lived struggle and immediate praxis.

In this sense, Vaneigem’s famous exhortation, “one more effort if you want to become revolutionaries,”³⁴ need not be read as inherently hypocritical. Rather, it points to a necessary duality and preserved tensions, revealing that the separation of thought from action the Situation-

³¹ Hager Weslati, “Kojève’s Letter to Stalin,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 184 (March/April 2014): 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 14

³³ Axel Honneth, “Althusser’s Philosophical Disorder,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 2016, accessed January 6, 2026, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/althussers-philosophical-disorder/>

³⁴ Raoul Vaneigem, “The Nihilist,” in *The ReVolution of Everyday Life* (1967). Vaneigem references Marquis de Sade’s manifesto, “One more effort, Frenchmen, if you would be republicans!” (1795).

ists sought to abolish was ultimately reinscribed in the telos of its own actualization, as they assumed the role of mediators between theory and praxis in the situations of May '68 as the most kairotic moment when revolution might finally materialize.

Similarly, if, in a Hegelian-Marxist sense, Vaneigem's aim in *The Revolution of Everyday Life* was to disseminate cognitive tools for uniting ideas with action, the Situationists' strategic failure lay in their adherence to a Hyppolitian framework demanding the escalation of difference into contradiction and sublation—precisely when capitalism prospered through the multiplication of non-contradictory differences that never crystallize into antagonism.

Debord's engagement with Hegel was indeed mediated through Jean Hyppolite's translation and interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³⁵ Hyppolite insisted that difference must be pushed to contradiction, where indeterminate differences convert into determinate oppositions that can then be sublated. *Détournement* was intended to push contradictions to the point where the spectacle would negate itself, following the formula that “the more a détourned element makes logical sense to the viewer, the less effective it is.”³⁶ This tactic, however, paradoxically inflated the very forms it sought to negate, intensifying vacuity while masking it in the grandiosity and exaggeration of form. But exposing contradiction through intensification only works if the system still operates dialectically.

“Exaggeration is the mother of invention,”³⁷ proclaimed a May '68 graffiti, while another compared it to a weapon,³⁸ which also captured late capitalism's ability to absorb and neutralize critique by amplifying it. As *pharmakon*, exaggeration inflates situations lacking content, revealing the void itself as spectacle. The Situationists inhabited a moment when dialectical space still existed. By 1991, imagination could only reproductively repeat current reality. Fisher's distinction between the real and reality marks the definitive foreclosure of the Hyppolitian project.

³⁵ Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 128n.

³⁶ Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, “A User's Guide to *Détournement*,” *Les Lèvres Nues* no. 8 (May 1956). English translation by Ken Knabb in *Situationist International Anthology* (2024).

³⁷ Julien Besançon, *The Walls Have the Floor: Mural Journal, May '68*, trans.

Adrian Nathan West (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

As Lacan would put it, the real is suppressed by reality, and any alternative is erased.

5. Conclusion. Or, how to look for shade in the desert

The slogan *sous les pavés, la plage* has been interpreted as the emblem of the Situationist aspiration to uncover an authentic life beneath the spectacle of capitalist everydayness. Yet this archaeological metaphor misreads Marx's base superstructure model, because what lies beneath the pavement should not be imagined as a hidden Eden but as the very economic foundation that makes capitalist social relations possible. The beach is not a buried authenticity awaiting excavation, but the material ground already cleared, reorganized, and occupied by capitalism itself.

It was perhaps precisely through May 1968 that capitalism learned to thrive on non-contradictory differences, absorbing dissent through simulation, as Boltanski and Chiapello suggest.³⁹ What remains beneath the paving stones is therefore not the beach, but the hyperreal surface itself, a terrain in which authentic experience is foreclosed and replaced by the simulation of depth.

Baudrillard would eventually choose to embrace and dwell in the desert of the real.⁴⁰ His ultimate proposition, enacted through his own theoretical and existential praxis, was to cease searching for a concealed real altogether. Having discovered nothing left to excavate, Baudrillard turned to the phantasmagoric as the only available realism, inhabiting the quasi-situations of the hyperreal rather than opposing them, perhaps thereby also confirming with a Sisyphian smile that *there is no alternative*.⁴¹

As Hager Weslati observes, the desert should be understood as a possible revolutionary space, but without the impatience of applicability of theory into praxis.⁴² It provides the coordinates of a terrain in which the impossibility of return to pre-spectacular authenticity is acknowledged without abandoning the possibility of transformation itself. The aporia we face is therefore not one of choice between beach and desert,

³⁹ Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), 167–217.

⁴⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1989).

⁴¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

⁴² Hager Weslati, "La pensée du désert: 'The Paradox of Theory' and the Narrative of Boom and Bust in Cultural Studies," *Tropisme*, no. 10 (2010): 56, 59.

as it is late to return to an unmediated *real*. Yet we cannot simply accept the totalization of hyperreality. The question is then that of building life in the desert, precisely because if the desert of the real is our only terrain, the only revolutionary task is learning to assemble forms of life on our desert island. Kojève already anticipated this condition when he suggested inventing a “simulacrum” of revolutionary ideas once the production of genuinely new ones had become impossible,⁴³ paradoxically also describing the mechanism through which post 1968 capitalism would absorb all opposition through the multiplication of non-contradictory differences. In this sense, Situationist critique appears Hyppolitian in its theoretical structure and Kojévian in its actualization, yet ultimately turned on its head by history itself.

Here, we can conclude that Debord’s tactical orientation in living on a beach that slowly became his desert remained marked by the Kojévian struggle for recognition, a logic of confrontation that if literally read culminated in exclusion, contraction, and ultimately, in Debord’s own self-annihilation. As Baudrillard warned, “he who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning.”⁴⁴

But while the dialectical stage has emptied and the critical stage dissolved,⁴⁵ what remains is not the promise of a buried beach but the fragile task of enduring and orienting oneself within the unfolding desert.⁴⁶ For once, theory has proven that even philosophizing from the depths of *nothingness* can become “an instrument for practical life.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Hager Weslati, “Kojève’s Letter to Stalin,” 15.

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 161.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *America*.

⁴⁷ Alexander Gungov, “Introduction: Touching Fictitious Reality in Philosophizing,” 9.