

never trust someone because of their job. Yet the highest ambition of the integrated spectacle is still to turn secret agents into revolutionaries, and revolutionaries into secret agents.

## V.

The society whose modernization has reached the stage of the integrated spectacle is characterized by the combined effect of five principal features: incessant technological renewal; integration of state and economy; generalized secrecy, unanswerable lies; an eternal present. Technological innovation has a long history, and is an essential component of capitalist society, sometimes described as industrial or post-industrial. But since its most recent acceleration (in the aftermath of the Second World War) it has greatly reinforced spectacular authority, by surrendering everybody to the mercy of specialists, to their calculations and to the judgments which always depend on them. The integration of state and economy is the most evident trend of the century; it is at the very least the motor of all recent economic developments. The defensive and offensive pact concluded between these two powers, economy and state, has provided them with the greatest common advantages in every field: each may be said to own the other; at any rate, it is absurd to oppose them, or to distinguish between their reasons and follies. This union, too, has proved to be highly favorable to the development of spectacular domination -- indeed, the two have been indistinguishable from the very start. The other three features are direct effects of this domination, in its integrated stage.

Generalised secrecy stands behind the spectacle, as the decisive complement of all it displays and, in the last analysis, as its most vital operation.

The simple fact of being unanswerable has given what is false an entirely new quality. At a stroke it is truth which has almost everywhere ceased to exist or, at best, has been reduced to the status of pure hypothesis. Unanswerable lies have succeeded in eliminating public opinion, which first lost the ability to make itself heard and then very quickly dissolved altogether. This evidently has significant consequences for politics, the applied sciences, the legal system and the arts.

The manufacture of a present where fashion itself, from clothes to music, has come to a halt, which wants to forget the past and no longer seems to believe in a future, is achieved by the ceaseless circularity of information, always returning to the same short list of trivialities, passionately proclaimed as major discoveries. Meanwhile news of what is genuinely important, of what is actually changing, comes rarely, and then in fits and starts. It always concerns this world's apparent condemnation of its own existence, the stages in its programmed self-destruction.

## VI.

Spectacular domination's first priority was to eradicate historical knowledge in general; beginning with just about all rational information and commentary on the most recent past. The evidence for this is so glaring it hardly needs further explanation. With consummate skill the spectacle organizes ignorance of what is about to happen and, immediately afterwards, the forgetting of whatever has nonetheless been understood. The more important something is, the more it is hidden. Nothing in the last twenty years has been so thoroughly coated in obedient lies as the history

of May 1968. Some useful lessons have indeed been learnt from certain demystifying studies of those days; these, however, remain state secrets.

In France, it is some ten years now since a president of the republic, long ago forgotten but at the time still basking on the spectacle's surface, naively expressed his delight at "knowing that henceforth we will live in a world without memory, where images flow and merge, like reflections on the water." Convenient indeed for those in business, and who know how to stay there. The end of history gives power a welcome break. Success is guaranteed in all its undertakings, or at least the rumor of success.

How drastically any absolute power will suppress history depends on the extent of its imperious interests or obligations, and especially on its practical capacity to execute its aims. Ts'in Che Hoang Ti had books burned, but he never managed to get rid of all of them. In our own century Stalin went further, yet despite the various accomplices he managed to find outside his empire's borders, there remained a vast area of the world beyond the reach of his police, where his schemes could be ridiculed. With its new techniques now adopted globally, the integrated spectacle has done much better. Ineptitude compels universal respect; it is no longer permitted to laugh at it. In any case, it has become impossible to show that one is laughing.

History's domain was the memorable, the totality of events whose consequences would be lastingly apparent. And thus, inseparably, history was knowledge that should endure and aid in understanding, at least in part, what was to come: "an everlasting possession," according to Thucydides. In this way history was the measure of genuine novelty. It is in the interest of those who sell novelty at any price to eradicate the means of measuring it. When social significance is attributed only to what is immediate, and to what will be immediate immediately afterwards, always replacing another, identical, immediacy, it can be seen that the uses of the media guarantee a kind of eternity of noisy insignificance.

The precious advantage which the spectacle has acquired through the outlawing of history, from having driven the recent past into hiding, and from having made everyone forget the spirit of history within society, is above all the ability to cover its own tracks -- to conceal the very progress of its recent world conquest. Its power already seems familiar, as if it had always been there. All usurpers have shared this aim: to make us forget that they have only just arrived.

With the destruction of history, contemporary events themselves retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations and untenable reasoning. For every imbecility presented by the spectacle, there are only the media's professionals to give an answer, with a few respectful rectifications or remonstrations. And they are hardly extravagant, even with these, for besides their extreme ignorance, their personal and professional solidarity with the spectacle's overall authority and the society it expresses makes it their duty, and their pleasure, never to diverge from that authority whose majesty must not be threatened. It must not be forgotten that every media professional is bound by wages and other rewards and recompenses to a master, and sometimes to several; and that every one of them knows he is dispensable.

2. "wine experts able to connoisseurs into admiring their new, more distinctive, flavors." The French here is "des experts en vins qui entraîneront les caves a aimer leurs nouveaux parfums, plus reconnaissables." Debord's pun on the two meanings of caves - wine-cellar (fem.) and hopeless dupes or suckers (masc.) - is unfortunately lost in English. The word's under-world etymology is instructive. It originally referred to anyone who worked in a legitimate job; hence to someone who did not know how to live; and hence to any kind of dupe.

3. "under a poor cloak you commonly find a good drinker." The proverb is from Don Quixote, quoted by the Duchess in her conversation with Sancho Panza (vol. II, book 3, ch. 1). The Spanish is, "Debajo de mala capa, suele haber buen bebedor." I have used the Samuel Pumam translation.

## VII.