

RECONSIDERING THE SPECTACLE OF CAPITALISM IN POLITICS

RECONSIDERANDO EL ESPECTÁCULO DEL CAPITALISMO EN LA POLÍTICA

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the concept of the spectacle by depending on the works of Guy Debord and some secondary sources, and then to evaluate the examination according to post-truth politics that have arisen after Debord. For that purpose, the article is separated into four parts. The concept of the spectacle is analyzed in detail in the first part. After that, in the second part, the societies functioning through the spectacle are elucidated and the mechanism of the spectacle is revealed by some examples. Then, the relation between the spectacle and the formation of historical memory is shown, along with the roles of digital myths in industrial culture, in the third part. As for the fourth part, the spectacle is discussed by regarding the concept of post-truth and post-truth politics, and the article is completed after coming to a point on the issue.

Keywords: Guy Debord, the Spectacle, Hyperspectacle, Capitalism, Society of the Spectacle, Post-truth, Post-truth Politics.

Guy Debord has been a *contentious* philosopher for the reader all the time. He claimed that the contemporary capitalism entered a new phase after the first quarter of the twentieth century, and he justified this claim by the concept of the *spectacle*.¹ Debord puts the concept at the centre of his philosophy and specified the main lines of the concept in *Society of the Spectacle* and his ensuing spoken and written commentaries on the book.

Society of the Spectacle instantly took the attention of the reader due to the serious arguments of the book to understand the relations between technology, everydayness, mass communication, industrial culture, and political propaganda. It was translated into several languages and spread throughout the twentieth century.

It has been more than fifty years since the publication of the book. But it would not be an exaggeration to say that the book has taken much more attention in the twenty-first century than the time it was written. It is still one of the most-read classics in social and political thought. This is understandable because of the changes in the twenty-first century that support the main arguments of the book regarding the critique of contemporary capitalism.

As to this article, it aims to examine the concept of the spectacle by depending on the works of Guy Debord and some secondary sources, and then to evaluate the examination according to post-truth politics that have arisen after Debord. For that purpose, the article is separated into four parts. The concept of the spectacle is analysed in detail in the first part. After that, in the second part, the societies functioning through the spectacle are elucidated and the mechanism of the spectacle is revealed by some examples. Then, the relation between the spectacle and the formation of historical memory is shown, along with the roles of digital myths in industrial culture, in the third part. As for the fourth part, the spectacle is discussed by regarding the concept of post-truth and post-truth politics, and the article is completed after coming to a point on the issue.

THE SPECTACLE

Debord is the philosopher whose arguments on the critique of contemporary capitalism are mostly dependent on the essentials of Marxian concepts. He shows that throughout *Society of the Spectacle* and the other works while explaining the antagonist social relations in the capitalist society. The spectacle is also presented as a concept dependent on the Marxian terms, *alienation*, *commodity fetishism*, and *reification* (see Debord, 2005, §35, 36, 67).² He constitutes the ground of the concept by considering *alienated relations*. Here, Debord offers the spectacle both as an attempt to improve the general arguments on alienation and as an attempt to open a new window for the comprehension of contemporary capitalism.³ He looks for a supplementary change in the theory because what is already at hand is not sufficient to explain the capitalism strengthened with the newly developed means of mass communication and industrial culture.

Debord indicates to the changes from the former capitalism to the latter as “incessant technological renewal” and “integration of state and economy” (1990, p. 11). These are the necessary constituent parts for the arising of the spectacle and the society functioning through the spectacle. So that the spectacle is not an arbitrary creation of an individual or a group of people but the social reality that is the consequence of the transformation of capitalism over time (Debord, 2005, §6, 14, 24, 42). Besides this, the spectacle is an instrument to reconstruct capitalism according to the new interests and the new necessities.

The spectacle is sometimes taken as the equivalent of the concept of industrial culture.⁴ This is true up to a point. It comprises industrial culture but is not limited to. Debord

especially emphasises the broader sense of the concept in many passages (1990, pp. 2, 6-7, 41, 70). The spectacle is thus an integrated and relational structure of everydayness, mass communication, industrial culture, and political propaganda.

¹ For an article analysing why Debord mentions a certain time for the change, see Cray, 1989, pp. 100-105.

² For an analysis of this relation, see Jappe, 1999, pp. 12-19; Gotham and Krier, 2008, pp. 167-178. Also, for the early Lukacs mediation on Debord, see Jappe, 1999, pp. 19-31; Hartle, 2017, pp. 21-34.

³ For the examples regarding the first point, see Debord, 2005, § 30, 31, 32, 161.

⁴ The roles of industrial culture and mass communication in the spectacle are issued in detail in the second section.

He defines the spectacle in an inclusive sense as “the autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty, and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign (1990, p. 2).” Industrial culture is just one part of this totality.

Debord defines the spectacle as a *representation*, above all (2005, §1). It is the representation of alienated relations in a special form. And the materials of this representation are the *images*, which are the appearances that are made ready to cause social illusions. Debord indicates at this point that each image functions as if an indicator of a “semiotic structure” (2005, §10). They take the attention of the masses by narrating everydayness in a desirable content or what seems vital but unknown to the individual. Then, a *monologue* begins through the images and the spectacle takes the individual as a captive, therefore making her a passive *spectator* (Debord, 1990, pp. 27-30; 2005, §18, 24).⁵

The images, which are put in order and integrated as a unity, form a pseudo-reality within social reality (Debord, 2005, §2, 4, 5, 8, 18, 29). Here, what emerges in social reality is not the sum of images, an addition, or an ornament to the existing structures, but a series of social relations which are mediated by the images. The images thus become a special part of alienated relations with the motto, “What appears is good; what is good appears,” while building the *pseudo-events* (Debord, 2005, §12). These pseudo-events become manipulating the masses for the conform with the existing social relations. But how?

The spectacle is the means of *unification* in society (Debord, 2005, §3). It takes the attention of individuals and thereof gathers many consciousnesses involving different worldviews to the same point. Despite the nuances in the comprehension, individuals confront with the same narrative that forces them to experience the reception planned. It seems the spectacle calls every single individual separately while imposing the same contents. And, each content reflects the spectacle as “an image of happy harmony surrounded by desolation and horror, at the calm centre of misery” (Debord, 2005, §63). Different forms such as advertisement, entertainment, political speech may represent the spectacle at this point (Debord, 2005, §6). But in every

case, the aim is to persuade the individual to be more conformed with the society of the spectacle.

The persuasion process of the spectacle depends on the existing illusions in the consciousness –the consciousness would resist against the process, otherwise. Here, the social illusions refer not to comprehend the object of knowledge as it is but as a *misconception* like in commodity fetishism.⁶ It occurs due to the alienated relations in society, as Marx puts.⁷ The spectacle intervenes in the alienated consciousness for manipulations done through more effective illusions, in which the pseudo-events are at the centre (Debord, 1990, p. 32; 2005, §20, 157, 172, 219).

If the spectacle succeeds, the individual completely loses his own character and becomes putty in the hands of the spectacle. It imposes the individual what to do, think, and consume. Thus, “the spectator,” “[i]mprisoned in a flattened universe bounded by the screen of the spectacle that has enthralled him,” “knows no one but the fictitious speakers who subject him to a one-way monologue about their commodities and the politics of their commodities” (Debord, 2005, §218). The more the individual experiences the spectacle, the more she moves away from a possible contemplation on the self (Debord, 1990, p. 32; 2005, §30). She, therefore, becomes much alienated to her own reality than to the other subjects have. Debord defines this fact as a *bad dream* full of illusion, where the spectacle is *the guardian of that sleep* (2005, §21).

The spectacle manages this dream by creating its own plot and rules (Debord, 2005, §2, 25, 29, 54). It disrupts the wholeness of social reality. It either borrows appearances from everydayness or creates new ones and presents them as illusory pieces and wholes (Debord, 2005, §10, 29, 54). Hence, as Debord points out, an event arises that is partly real and partly pseudo-real (2005, §8).

Debord sees the spectacle as the specialization of the power, which is the oldest of all social specialization (2005, §23, 25). The difference between the former and the latter specialization is the transformation of the output to a commodity. It is produced as a commodity from the very beginning. The spectacle is thus the product of a unique economic sector, which specifies its own work as forming

⁵ Kati Röttger has remarkable commentaries on the words of the spectacle and the spectator. See Röttger, 2017, pp. 133-136.

⁶ For the relations between the concepts of ideology, social illusion, and misconception, see Debord, 2005, §212, 213, 215.

⁷ For example, see Marx and Engels, 2010, p. 36.

and processing the images on the one hand and advertising the commodities for the consumption of the masses on the other hand (Debord, 1990, pp. 16, 17; 2005, §15, 16, 17; 2006b, p. 32).⁸

Individuals from many different backgrounds in society participate in the producing process of the spectacle (Debord, 2005, §194, 195, 196). For example, intellectuals, actors and actresses, journalists, professional politicians are the parts of this process. Meanwhile, the path to obtaining the opportunity of being a *star* is open to all individuals who succeed more in the specialization. This is the dream of the most.

The star is the role model of the spectacle (Debord, 2005, §60, 61). The individual is expected to identify the self with the star, who may be an intellectual, a journalist, an actor or actress, a sportsperson, etc.⁹ The star is the representation of how an individual should participate in the existing social relations. If it is necessary, she also acts as an opinion leader to influence the masses to follow her. She has a privilege to say everything within the bounds of the spectacle. Because the star is the spokesperson of the social system.

The individual thus identifies the self with the star, if she does not tend to resist against the manipulation.¹⁰ What is included in the pseudo-events are experienced and adopted through the copying of the star. Transferring these experiences to the everydayness is the consequence at this point. The individual then becomes not able to realize his own everydayness that is laden with unhappiness, while the spectacle succeeds to hide the class, exploitation, and oppression relations from her (Debord, 2005, §72). If she finds a way to resist against the spectacle, then the violence takes the place of the persuasion (Debord, 2005, §64). Because the existing social order is presented as infinite as the God, and to resist against the “infinite” is already forbidden.

If the individual dares to be against the spectacle and the pseudo-events, she is declared as the *enemy of society* after a while (Debord, 1990, p. 18). Then, the person is tagged as a

“terrorist,” “fanatic,” “extremist,” or something else, according to the level of hostility. What the spectacle does at this point is to form one more fiction regarding the opponent to protect the whole fiction (see Debord, 1990, pp. 18-19).

Most people are always ready to accept the charges against the opponent due to the fear of sharing the same fate with her. The rest choose to be silent or to resist like the opponent. Here, the legitimacy of the spectacle is every time justified by the support of the majority. Meanwhile, the most organised power is the individuals and groups who want the spectacle to continue (Debord, 1990, p. 21). So that the situation of the opponent is difficult, and her only chance is to find a way to invite the masses for noticing the reality of the spectacle and organising against it.

THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

The society functioning through the spectacle, in other words, taking the spectacle to the centre of all social relations, is the *society of the spectacle*.¹¹ Debord specifies two different forms according to the society of the spectacle: “the concentrated and the diffuse” (1990, p. 8; 1995, p. 8). He indicates to the former society as depending on an authoritarian structure that intervenes in every choice of the individual. Nazi Germany may be taken as an example for the society adopted the concentrated spectacle. As to the latter society, it recognises the choices of the individual under “the right of free will” but decides to which choices are on the table. The United States, before the Cold War, may be thought of as a suitable example at this point.

According to Debord, now there is a *third* form, which is dominant in all over the world (1990, pp. 8-9).¹² This is the unequal combination of the other two forms. It means that one of the forms has much more impact to determine the character of the combination. Debord calls this form as the integrated spectacle and explains it as follows:

As regards concentration, the controlling center has now become occult never to be occupied by a known leader,

the people who rules. So that there is always more than one aspect inside the spectacle. Here, the first point is considered to limit the article. For some of the arguments of Debord according to the second point, see 1990, pp. 81-82.

¹² The short factual summary of Agamben explaining this combination may be considered here, see 2000, pp. 79-81.

⁸ Douglas Kellner indicates to many factual examples at this point, see Kellner, 2005, pp. 60-61.

⁹ For example, Michael Jordan. See Kellner, 2003, pp. 63-93.

¹⁰ For this identification experience, see Debord, 1990, p. 61.

¹¹ The society of the spectacle is a form of contemporary capitalism functioning through the spectacle. The spectacle is a structure that is homogenous for the people who are ruled but heterogeneous for

or clear ideology. And on the diffuse side, the spectacle has never before put its mark to such a degree on almost the full range of socially produced behaviour and objects. For the final sense of the integrated spectacle is this - that it has integrated itself into reality to the same extent as it was describing it, and that it was reconstructing it as it was describing it (1990, p. 9).

Debord focuses on several examples in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* to explain the mechanism of the spectacle based on the integrated form. He especially indicates in the examples to the specialist, who is the star among the consultative authorities of special subjects. Debord thinks that the specialist is one of the secret heroes and heroines of the spectacle.

The spectacle always needs specialists to persuade the individual that she has none or little knowledge on certain issues and should listen what is conveyed to her (Debord, 1990, pp. 16-17; 2005, §195, 196). Here, the specialist is not the person who explains the object of knowledge as it is.¹³ For example, a specialist on wine or nuclear energy may equally defend the interests of the existing social order, if they accept to take part in the spectacle (1990, p. 17). Both consider the consequences of their expressions rather than natural or social reality. Therefore, what such a specialist says is absolutely for the benefit of the order, whether it is positive or negative.¹⁴ As an example, the nuclear energy may be expected to be explained positively, if there is an idea of building a nuclear plant in the country, while it may be expected to be explained negatively, if a rival country has a nuclear plant, and the country does not have any. The specialist comes into prominence in ordinary times but hides behind the politician in extraordinary or emergency cases.

In such cases, for example, in natural or social catastrophes, the most important thing for the political power is to manage

the discontent of the masses.¹⁵ If it cannot manage that, mass actions may occur and weaken the existing structures. So that the spectacle is immediately arranged to prevent such incidents from the outset.¹⁶ Here, the role of the politician is much more important than the specialist.¹⁷ The politician is expected to show to the masses that everything is *under control*, even though it is not. She performs that by the public statements, along with the commentaries of the specialist. What is important in a public statement is the fiction built by the words chosen. For example, during a catastrophe that triggers a panic environment, the phrase “in hospital” may be chosen for individuals rather than “death.”¹⁸ People are thus made to believe that there are fewer casualties in the event. Moreover, the negative statistics, information, and the course of events may be hidden if there are serious faults belonging to the state or officials (Debord, 1990, p. 35). While the public statements of politicians and the supportive commentaries of specialists are conveyed to the masses, the means of mass communication exists at the centre of the spectacle.

The spectacle cannot be imagined without the *advanced* means of mass communication. However, it is also not equal to them. Debord indicates that individuals usually use the word *media* rather than the word *spectacle* (1990, p. 6). He finds this choice *problematic*. It is problematic because the responsibility is attributed to the media and its use rather than the mechanism. Hence, the public blames the media for the events seen as faults, even though the spectacle as the whole system is responsible. The spectacle, therefore, succeeds to hide the rest from the individual.

The *constitutive* part of the spectacle takes place in the media (see Debord, 2005, §24). As to the example, both the public statements and the supportive commentaries are conveyed to

¹³ For the relationship between the spectacle and sciences, see Debord, 1990, pp. 39-43.

¹⁴ There is a remarkable example in *Spectacle of the Society* about meteorologists who “are severely limited in what they say by the obligation to maintain certain economic, touristic and regional balances”, see Debord, 1990, p. 17.

¹⁵ The spectacle about Hurricane Katrina may be considered as an important example at this point. For an analysis regarding that spectacle, see Gotham, 2007, pp. 75-80.

¹⁶ For how the social order deals with the examples on “[o]cean pollution”, “the destruction of equatorial forests”, “the earth’s

ozone layer”, and the other catastrophes, see Debord, 1990, pp. 34-39.

¹⁷ By considering the politician as the president of a country, see Erickson, 2009, pp. 141-150. Also, for the analysis of Kellner on the recent US presidents as the stars, see Kellner, 2003, pp. 160-179. Moreover, for how the presidential speeches have become parts of the spectacle, see Keller, 2011, pp. 131-143.

¹⁸ For a similar example, “replacing the word illiteracy by ‘language difficulties’”, see Debord, 1990, p. 42.

the spectator by the means such as radio, television, printed media and the Internet. However, the function of the media is not limited to transfer the expressions. It provides *digital representations* for the content narrated in the expressions. Here, the montage and the pretend are the prominent tools to find or invent the stimuli that overlap with the fiction put by the spectacle (see Benjamin, 2008, pp. 29, 32). The media thus supplies supportive vocal and visual stimuli to take part in the construction of the pseudo-event. For example, if the phrase “in hospital” is chosen in the expressions, then the visuals from the hospital are shown on the screen without wasting time. Some other visuals may also be expected like the officials who devote themselves to the solution of problems, and the crowds who appreciate the official institutions due to their proper actions against the catastrophe. These visuals take the attention of the spectator more and more and make the fiction believable. But one more piece is needed at this point to complete the puzzle of the mechanism: industrial culture.

Debord thinks that the spectacle maintains culture as a death object (2005, §184). Culture completely becomes a commodity; the commodity which is the most popular among others (Debord, 2005, §193). Here, the efficient control of the spectacle over the communication and use of language plays an important role.¹⁹ It pushes the individual for loneliness by depending on alienated relations and make her obligate to industrial culture to bear that situation. Then, the spectacle begins to shape and dominate how to communicate and how to use language (Debord, 2005, §185). No space is allowed for a unique and creative attempt at this point. Culture, therefore, is occupied by the spectacle. Watching a film or a series is not an ordinary activity anymore but a fetter of the spectacle now.

All the forms, but especially films and series, are on the service of the spectacle to reanimate the pseudo-events again and again.²⁰ The *repetition* makes them widespread among individuals and thereof provides sufficient conditions to

make individuals believe in them. Two distinctive points distinguish industrial culture from the other parts of the mechanism here. These are the *promises* and the *consumer happiness*.

The spectacle gives promises through the cultural commodity. The general content of these promises is that the living conditions of the individual may change one day if she obeys the rule of copying the star. Why not? The individual is made to believe that everything is possible in the everydayness and everyone may be popular among others like in the cultural commodity (see Debord, 1990, pp. 10-11).²¹ What she needs is to obey and wait for the role change in the spectacle - for example, a change from the spectator to the figurant.

Although the advertisement of consumer commodities is done through all the mechanism directly or indirectly, it is much more effective in the cultural commodity. Consuming is presented as the path to happiness in the plot, but all are used “as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender ‘lonely crowds.’” (Debord, 2005, §28). Just then a wide range of consumer commodities is suggested to the individual for consuming (Debord, 2005, §65, 67). Each is introduced like a magical entity, and several imaginary features are attributed to it – like the car representing freedom. “But the object that was prestigious in the spectacle becomes mundane as soon as it is taken home by its consumer – and by all its other consumers” (Debord, 2005, §69).

As to the example, several non-existent events, individuals, happenings are inserted in the cultural commodity to support the fiction in the process. The digital representations provided in the other parts of the mechanism are completed by these more effective ones. They are more effective because are produced in isolated areas rather than the venue. Hence, the spectacle obtains an infinite opportunity to create whatever is needed to support the fiction.

¹⁹ The argument belonging to Agamben that the spectacle may be considered almost equal to the alienation of language is remarkable at this point, see 2000, p. 82.

²⁰ For example, *The X-Files* series has been an important part of many different contents of the spectacle, see Kellner, 2003, pp. 126-

160. Also, *Tintin* may be taken as another popular example here, see Mountfort, 2016, pp. 40-51.

²¹ For example, Arnold Schwarzenegger has become everything in his films, even a robot. Moreover, he became the governor of California in reality. But how? See Garoian and Gaudelius, 2004, pp. 302-306.

The spectacle thus constructs a pseudo-event through the mechanism consisting of mass communication, industrial culture, political propaganda, and everydayness that participates to the process as the ground to combine the three (see Debord, 2006a, pp. 92, 93).²² It makes individuals believe that the event happens as is narrated to her, while what is narrated is supported by the images. So that they think and participate in the event under the manipulation of the spectacle. The social relations mediated by the images are then included to the former, and the existing structure becomes different than the before through this articulation. It is restructured as a pseudo-event under the control of the spectacle. What is real becomes *fictional*, then.

THE FORMATION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Debord states that the first of the main purposes of the spectacle is to distort the historical knowledge and thereby to control the historical memory dependent on it (1990, p. 13).²³ He indicates to an expression of a “forgotten” French president at this point: “knowing that henceforth we will live in a world without memory, where images flow and merge, like reflections on the water” (1990, p. 14). The passage shows that the president seems happy due to the weakness of the historical memories belonging to individuals in society. Why not? People are devoid of the mediation of past experiences in such a situation. It is in favor of the existing social order if considering the crimes and faults such as starvation, corruption, massacre committed again and again by the governments. If the spectacle thoroughly succeeds to make individuals forget what was happened in the past, the masses become not able to establish the ties between the past and the present and to judge anyone for any crime committed (see Debord, 1990, p. 15).

The spectacle uses this oblivion of the masses to present the time as an ambiguous and meaningless now-time to the spectator (Debord, 1990, p. 16). This is a *spectacular time*.

The spectacular time is the use of time as *pseudo-circular*: “both in the narrow sense as time spent consuming images and in the broader sense as image of the consumption of time” (Debord, 2005, §153). It almost occupies the time ranges that are out of work time, and the individual is expected, through this time of use, to accept that the *actual* time begins with the images and then rebegins with the following images. (Debord, 2005, §153). Here, the spectacle “considered as the reigning society’s” method for paralysing history and memory and for suppressing any history based on historical time, represents a false consciousness of time” (Debord, 2005, §158). And every distortion is built on such a consciousness. Debord explains the spectacular time at this point as follows:

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 (1990, p. 13).

This now-time provides the political power with the opportunities to be out of any responsibility for the past and to rewrite the historiography in the favour of the existing social order (see Debord, 1990, pp. 14, 15-16, 18). Here, some of the facts are distorted or not recognised, and many fictional incidents are integrated with the formers. Thus, the fictional historiography, in other words, the *pseudo-history*, replaces the other, which depends on facts and the interpretation of them (Debord, 2005, §200).²⁴ It is as easy as pie here to invent fake evidences, witnesses, documents to support the fiction against the fact (see Debord, 1990, pp. 18-20), because whatever the spectacle puts is accepted as the truth by the spectator.

The spectacle imposes itself as the only authority to affirm

²² For the relevant arguments on time-use, see Debord, 2005, §43, 145.

²³ Debord makes short analyses on some historical incidents while explaining this distortion of historical knowledge. For example, the

assassination of Jean Jaures (1990, pp. 67-69), the Paris Riots in May 1968 (1990, p. 14), the Panama affair (1990, pp. 57-58).

²⁴ I want to take attention to an example that shows how the official history is narrated like a tale to the individuals in Canada through the spectacle, see Rogers and Grant, 2017, pp. 3-20.

and confirm each particular knowledge. It bases that situation on the individual's acceptance to be a spectator rather than an opponent, and the case does not change as long as the approval of the spectator sustains, even though the spectacle contradicts itself. Debord indicates to the spectator as an *addicted* who does not look for logic or consistency but only something to believe (1990, pp. 29, 30).

The spectator is especially addicted to the cultural commodity in the distortion of historical knowledge. As Debord says, the spectacle uses industrial culture "to bury all historical memory" (2005, §192). If thinking of the most efficient form on the masses, *the historical drama series* may be particularly considered here because of several reasons.

The series provides the spectator with consistent vocal and visual stimuli, the time allocation to process everyday life elaborately, and the continuity that keeps alive the attention and suspense of the spectator. The historical series also depends on such a structure. As to its leading functions in the spectacle, they may be specified as to consolidate the historiography represented and to connect the past to the *ongoing agenda*. It is relevant to say here that myths are used generously throughout the historical series. They are useful means for the spectacle to make transitions between industrial culture and political propaganda.

Myths are not based on any factual or logical basis. Then, the spectator is expected not to affirm or falsify the presented narration by depending on a form of reasoning but to accept and believe what is put as it is, without question. They are integrated with the historical facts, and therefore the historical facts are reconstructed as parts of a fiction. The digital representation arisen here becomes a reference *per se* to impose what is fiction as if a fact. It makes the spectator to be persuaded that the plot is only a reanimation of the past, and nothing else. This is the crucial point to connect the series to the mechanism of the spectacle: the starting point for the *reciprocal* relationship between industrial culture and political propaganda.

The plot of the historical series efficiently shapes the historical memory. While the spectator identifies the self with the characters and integrates her attention with the plot, the

cultural commodity finds an opportunity to intervene in the consciousness for imposing the fiction as a part of the historical memory. Additionally, the fiction is spread in daily life through the conversations on the cultural commodity or the historical fact itself. This is easy in the absence of knowledge on the fact. But in the other case, along with the cultural commodity, the whole mechanism of the spectacle forces the consciousness to replace the knowledge and the perspective on the fact with the fiction designed by myths. For example, political propaganda may help at this point to break the possible resistance in the consciousness.

During planning the plot, the ongoing political agenda is always directly or indirectly considered. The plot provides beneficial contents in the service of the politician and the specialist. The contents, which directly support the political agenda, are on the rise these days. For example, when a contentious project changing the whole structure of a city is announced by the existing government, it would be not surprising that the project was also the dream of the emperor seen on the screen.²⁵ Also, the emperor may be expected to explain this dream by using very similar words with recent politicians and specialists. The myth at this point is one of the means for the politician to persuade the masses, whether it is derived from the old myths or produced as a new one. It is a *reference point* in both cases hereafter.

The scenes involving the digital representation of the myth become sources among individuals to affirm the politician, even though she does not refer to those scenes directly. But how can the spectator justify the myth as if a fact? There is nothing *concrete* about the myth but only the myth itself. Nevertheless, the specialist comes forward with a piece of assumptions to claim that the myth is not a "myth." The speeches of the politician are then accepted as the reference point for the digital representation of the myth likewise, along with the assumptions of the specialist. This is what Debord calls as the *tautological character of the spectacle* (1990, p. 13): It affirms and confirms itself by referring to the different parts of the mechanism.

The individual is thus made to believe that a recent project is indeed the dream of an emperor, who is seen as a mighty leader of the past among the supporters of a specific political

²⁵ This content regarding the Channel Istanbul project of the present Turkish government will be probably seen in the next episodes of

several historical series in Turkey. Also, for similar examples, see Carney, 2018, pp. 93-114; Çevik, 2019, pp. 6-11; 2020, pp. 1-18.

attitude in society. So that the myth is used to form an imaginary continuity from the emperor to the government which undertakes the project. Then, the government introduces itself as the successor of the emperor. The ensuing step is to equalise the opposition that is against the project with the enemies of the emperor, who did not want the country to progress.

The historical memory is, therefore, redesigned through the myth to persuade the masses for supporting the project. And the project becomes understood by many individuals as a historical task to realise the dream of the emperor rather than to exploit the resources of the country for the interests of the existing government.

THE SPECTACLE AND POST-TRUTH POLITICS

There have been important changes in contemporary capitalism since Debord's last contributions to the concept of the spectacle. The digitalisation integrated with the Internet and the ensuing social consequences are the foremost factors at this point.

The Internet, along with the digital technology advanced in the last twenty years, has either directly restructured the means of communication, or compelled them to be redesigned. So that all forms have been combined in *smart devices* over time. Besides this, the Internet has created an environment where millions of people are now able to meet in digital spaces. For example, individuals have the chance to share unlimited songs, photos, videos, books, and information on social media platforms nowadays. They are both consumers and producers of these activities in most cases (see Sciortino and Wright, 2017, pp. 85-90).

The social changes through the digitalisation, from the economy to the social consciousness forms, have caused a domino effect for the whole mechanism of the spectacle.²⁶ The spectator has become more passive against the deception but more active in the producing and consuming processes. Meanwhile, the digitalisation has made the spectacle much

delicate than before. Individuals have found some escape points over time to resist or disrupt the spectacle by using its means against the spectacle itself. So that the alternatives against the spectacle have also obtained new opportunities through the digitalisation.

It is not false to say that these changes do not negate Debord's main arguments but push the boundaries. Hence, it is critical to rethink and improve them to understand the contemporary capitalism properly. But there is one recent development that forces us to think outside the concept of the spectacle and to analyse it if the concept is sufficient to explain what is happening. This development is about *post-truth* and *post-truth politics*.

Debord indicates the limits of the society of the spectacle in the *Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of the Society of the Spectacle* as follows:

The essential contradiction of spectacular domination in crisis is that it has failed on its strongest point - certain paltry material satisfactions that excluded many other satisfactions, but which were presumed to be sufficient to procure the continued adhesion of the masses of producers/consumers. And it is exactly this material satisfaction that spectacular domination has polluted and ceased to supply. The society of the spectacle began everywhere in coercion, deceit and blood, but it promised a happy path. It believed itself to be loved. Now it no longer says "What appears is good; what is good appears"; now it says simple "It is so." The society of the spectacle admits frankly that it is no longer essentially reformable, though change is its very nature (the transmutation of everything for the worst). It has lost all its general illusions about itself (2015, par. 22).

He thinks that the society of the spectacle would not have an easy future, because it has reached to a point that it is not able to provide individuals with the minimum material satisfaction anymore, both as qualitatively and quantitatively. Due to this is a *sine qua non* for the persuasion of the individual, several difficulties should be expected in the mechanism of the spectacle hereafter.

There is more than one aspect here to discuss this impasse. The first of them is about the problem of the decrease in

labour-process regarding the digitalisation, see Frayssé, 2017, pp. 76-77; Surugiu, 2017, pp. 190-192.

²⁶ For the remarkable attempts to update the concept of the spectacle according to these changes, see Best and Kellner, 1999, pp. 135-153; Briziarelli and Armano, 2017, pp. 30-40. Also, for the changes in

purchasing power. So that individuals, who constitute the *majority* of society, become more and more devoid of consumer commodities, while a minority becomes increasingly richer. This fact depends on the inevitable consequences of contemporary capitalism, above all.

Besides this, the individual is atomised and becomes lonely under the grip of the spectacle. And what is suggested to her are consumer commodities and cultural commodities instead of direct human relations. However, neither the fetishized commodities nor the repeating promises are satisfactory for her, in most cases. She feels the need for positive emotions repressing the *daily boredom*.

Thus, the individual, who is devoid of the minimum material satisfaction, may be thought as is much closer than the before to find a *katharsis* moment and to resist the images and move away from the spectacle. Although Debord was right at this point, the philosopher could not foresee that the contemporary capitalism might find an exit from this impasse. This exit has been post-truth since the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The spectacle is the organising of the images consciously to cause social illusions, while depending on the existing social illusions. Here, the spectator does not know that the producers of the spectacle mislead her, and preventing this awareness is taken as the precondition for the success of the manipulation. Conversely, the success of post-truth politics is not built upon that. What is adopted as the strategy is to create an atmosphere that the spectator does not care about the truth value of anything conveyed.²⁷ It then becomes less important whether the individual is aware of the misleading or not. This is provided through a silent bargain to persuade the individual for her surrender and thereby to sustain the obedience with the social order.

The offer does not promise for minimum material satisfaction but maximum emotional satisfaction. What is

more important than this offer is its refusal. Because the refusal means gaining the open hostility of the political power. And the political power threatens the individual from the very beginning to accept the offer instead of worse living conditions resulting from that hostility. It seems an irrefutable offer for the most. Therefore, a *polarisation* in society occurs: the individuals who accept the offer and the ones who refuse.

Post-truth politics becomes one of the main trends in politics since the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The first examples that come to mind are the governments in the US, the UK, France, Italy, Hungary, Turkey, and the Philippines. As to the most prominent figure of such politics, it is Donald Trump – so much so that the concept of post-truth and post-truth politics have been begun to be discussed after the *2016 US Presidential Election*. So that what is mentioned about post-truth politics above may be directly shown by the examples of Trumpian politics.

Kellner argues that the story of Donald Trump from the election to the presidency “is the culmination of the politics of the spectacle that was first described by Debord” (2017b, p. 2).²⁸ Moreover, it represents an example beyond the “Debord’s model of spectacle” at the same time (Kellner, 2017b, pp. 4; Bleakley, 2018, pp. 8-15) because of some distinctive points.

Trump was also a popular figure among people before the election. It was due to the television programme *The Apprentice* prepared and presented by him, and the success stories of The Trump Organisation in the business and investment in the US.²⁹ He used this celebrity throughout the election campaign, as is expected. His strategy was based on introducing himself as an *extraordinary* politician who had nothing with the mainline politics, along with promising the public a new beginning in politics. This was an illusion, but it became successful in a short time to take the attention of many individuals to the Trumpian campaign because of their

²⁷ For the concept of post-truth and post-truth politics, see Ho and Cavanaugh, 2019, pp. 160-162; Fuller, 2018, pp. 19-23; McIntyre, 2018, pp. 7-15; Sismondo, 2018, pp. 73-74.

²⁸ Debord is the main figure who influences Kellner for the concept of the *media spectacle*. The concept is an updated version of the term of the spectacle according to the changes in contemporary capitalism on the one hand and is a revised version of the term

through the other influences on Kellner and own unique arguments on the other hand. For the influence of Debord on Kellner and also for the differences, see Kellner, 2005, pp. 65-66.

²⁹ For a critical short biography of Donald Trump, see Kellner, 2016, pp. 5-18. Also, for the rise of the Trump family in business and investment after the election, see 2017a, pp. 89-99.

anger at the politicians of the mainline (Kellner, 2017a, p. 43). Trump thus gained confidence in time for his campaign “collapsing politics into entertainment and spectacle” (Kellner, 2017b, p. 4).

Trump consciously caused a division among the voters in the first stage of his campaign. He succeeded this through the aggressive speeches in the media and the provocative tweets on Twitter.³⁰ For example, the anti-immigration policy, which was taken to the centre in that speeches and tweets, was one of the prominent topics in the campaign.

Trump triggered a discussion with the claim that immigrations from Middle America to the US increased the crime rates because of letting the criminals in. Although there were eligible factual analyses showing the opposite (Dick, 2019, p. 181), the immigrants were accused of being criminals through the expressions based on hearsays.³¹ What is more, social problems such as poverty and unemployment were explained according to the former immigration policies of the US. These all were followed by Trump’s expressions implicitly supporting the idea of white supremacy.

Trump thus promised his supporters to stop all the so-called problems originating from the immigration by expanding the security walls throughout the borders between Mexico and the US. He justified the “Trump Wall” through a fiction, without depending on any persuasive facts. Indeed, there was no need for facts. Trump only needed the support of the extreme right to be elected and the pretext to restructure the NAFTA for a solid start in the presidency. Meanwhile, the immigrants and the US citizens with different origins increasingly consolidated their opposition to him, while his campaign only considering the extreme right and the people who are ready to be persuaded in the moderate right.

The first Trump-Clinton presidential debate on September 27, 2016 was an important milestone before the election (Kellner, 2017a, pp. 1-2; 2017b, pp. 7-8; CBS News 2016). It was seen on the screen that Trump was too weak to make a discussion based on arguments. On the other hand, he began

to develop a different form of response by the following day, instead of sustaining the discussion depending on arguments. He directly targeted Clinton’s image on the media through several claims, whether the claims were dependent on facts or not (Kellner, 2017a, pp. 50-51). What the aim was to gain the support of the individuals who were angry at the Democrat Party because of the previous term. He then followed such a line in the following presidential debates (Kellner, 2016, pp. 7-9).

Trump became quite successful in these debates by shifting the ground from the argument-based debate to the accusation-based debate. He also imposed such a form as one of the main ways of making politics in the US. So that it is not false to say that Trump has already proved himself as an expert in the politics of the spectacle when looking at this shift. Here, there is one more thing to be mentioned regarding his success, especially the success after the election: *alternative facts*.

The concept was first mentioned on January 22, 2017 in a live conversation between Chuck Todd from NBC News and one of the counsellors of the president, Kellyanne Conway (Kellner, 2017a, pp. 154-156; NBC News 2017). The question of the interview was about the contentious statement of the press secretary of the White House, Sean Spicer, on the number of people attending to the inauguration. Spicer stated the number as much more than the inauguration of Barack Obama. However, the number seemed *exaggerated* when considering the participants in the inauguration. Todd thus asked Conway why Spicer stated an imaginary number, even though it could be easily falsified by the statistical information and the sense of proportion belonging to the individuals there. Conway’s response was confusing, stating that Spicer was talking about an “alternative fact” so that there was no falseness. After the opposition of Todd that an “alternative fact” was not a fact, Conway responded to him that the desired fact could be taken as the “fact”.

The concept of the alternative facts is accepted as “meaningless” for many people. However, such contents

³⁰ For a detailed discourse analysis according to Trump, see Montgomery, 2017, pp. 1-21.

³¹ The impact of the films and series in streaming platforms, such as Netflix and HBO, was remarkable at this point. It is no coincidence that the criminals are shown mostly as from Middle America.

have made many individuals believe in pseudo-events. The number of people in the inauguration was one of them.³² For example, it was shared by numerous people on social media as if a fact and its reference point was directly the White House, the main office of the US state.³³

What the Trumpian politics offers is to direct the social anger, which is mostly due to the social problems of the contemporary capitalism, to the fake enemies and threats, along with emotionally strong symbols and slogans.³⁴ This offer imposes many individuals to be persuaded for discrimination and oppression of the rest of society. Hence, through the division of society, the majority is mobilised against the other part, when it is needed to protect the political power.

It is seen in the examples of the Trumpian politics that the experience of post-truth is not an alternative for the spectacle but a recent form. Post-truth politics is a form of the spectacle that abandons to concern about hiding the facts from the masses. Because of that distinctive point, it should be referred with a new term such as *hyperspectacle*.

Hyperspectacle has become possible after some changes in the mechanism of the spectacle. There are three main changes at this point. The first two of them are related to the threat of the political power against the individual to obey the existing social order, which is explained at the beginning of this part. These are the intensification of the use of violence and the surveillance by the new means owing to the digitalisation. Although there are some predictions of Debord on these points, the present situation is much more serious than Debord would imagine. As to the third one, it is the impact of the Internet on the spectacle, especially the role of social media and its relations with industrial culture.

CONCLUSION

Debord thinks that the characteristics of capitalism after the first quarter of the twentieth century are dependent on the incessant technological renewal and the integration of state and economy. He takes attention to these changes and states that the specialization of the power has advanced in

connection with the technological progression in the means of communication. He argues that a new mechanism consisting of the reciprocal relations between mass communication, industrial culture, political propaganda and everydayness which is the base combining the three, has arisen to manipulate the individual what to do, think, and consume. Debord prefers to use the concept of the spectacle for this mechanism by the aim of showing the passivity of the individual in the grip of the process.

The spectacle is the processing of the images to *consciously* cause social illusions. Thus, it is responsible for reconstructing the event as the pseudo-event through the images. It makes the individual believe that the event happens as is presented or narrated to her – and what is imposed is supported by the images. Individuals then think and participate in what is happening under the manipulation of the spectacle. Meanwhile, those social relations designed by the images integrate to the former so that the existing structure becomes different than the before through this articulation. The event, therefore, is restructured as a pseudo-event in the mechanism.

The society functioning through the spectacle is the society of the spectacle. Debord states that the integrated spectacle has replaced the other forms and become the sole form over time. The society of the integrated spectacle has promised to individuals a piece of happiness, even though it is a pseudo one. But it could not keep the promise anytime, because, after a while, it has reached to a point that it is not able to provide the individual with the minimum material satisfaction, both as qualitatively and quantitatively. Debord considers this point as the main impasse of the society of the spectacle and thinks that the unsatisfied individual is much closer than before to resist the manipulation of the spectacle hereafter. However, the philosopher could not foresee that the contemporary capitalism might find an exit from this impasse. It is post-truth.

Many changes have taken place in the contemporary capitalism after Debord. Hence, several changes have also been seen in the mechanism of the spectacle. Most of these changes are about the digitalisation integrated with the Internet. Despite the changes in the mechanism, the main

³² Another prominent example is also about the conspiracy theory known as Pizzagate and the tweets of Trump on the issue. See Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017, pp. 4-5.

³³ For the followers of Trump, see Kellner, 2016, pp. 20-28.

³⁴ For an attempt to explain the emotional factor at this point, see Block, 2019, pp. 55-58.

lines of the model belonging to Debord have been maintained in most cases, and what has pushed the boundaries are considered in many articles and books so that the concept has been improved by different aspects. However, the concept of post-truth and post-truth politics seem to force us thinking them outside the concept of the spectacle for a while and to analyse them if the concept is sufficient to explain the changes brought with them.

What the distinctive point of post-truth politics is related to the concept of the *truth*. The spectator in the usual spectacle does not aware that the spectacle misleads her – she is expected to lose her attention to the spectacle, otherwise. Here, the spectacle involves a concern about hiding the facts from the individual, because the success of the manipulation depends on the prevention of her awareness. On the other hand, an atmosphere, where the spectator does not care about the truth value of anything conveyed, is created by post-truth politicians. It then becomes less important whether the individual is aware of the misleading or not, in comparison to the usual spectacle.

The examples such as “Donald Trump” show that post-truth politics is not an alternative for the spectacle but a recent form of it – the *hyperspectacle*. It is both the culmination of the Debordian model in most cases and the form that goes beyond in some respects. The latter is about abandoning to concern about hiding the facts from the masses in comparison to the usual spectacle, as is explained. Besides, this condition becomes possible regarding some recent changes in contemporary capitalism. These changes are the intensification of the use of force, the surveillance empowered through the new means owing to the digitalisation, and the role of social media and its relations with industrial culture.

The hyperspectacle offers the individual maximum emotional satisfaction, even though it cannot provide her with minimum material satisfaction. Not to mention, the individual is threatened for an open hostility with the political power, in the case of refusing to obey the social order. Therefore, a polarisation in society occurs. And a part of society is persuaded for the discrimination and the oppression of the rest and mobilised against the other individuals to protect the permanence of political power.

It is not false to say that the hyperspectacle regarding post-truth politics is expected to replace the former spectacle form

in time – as like the replacement of the integrated spectacle with the concentrated and the diffuse forms.

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