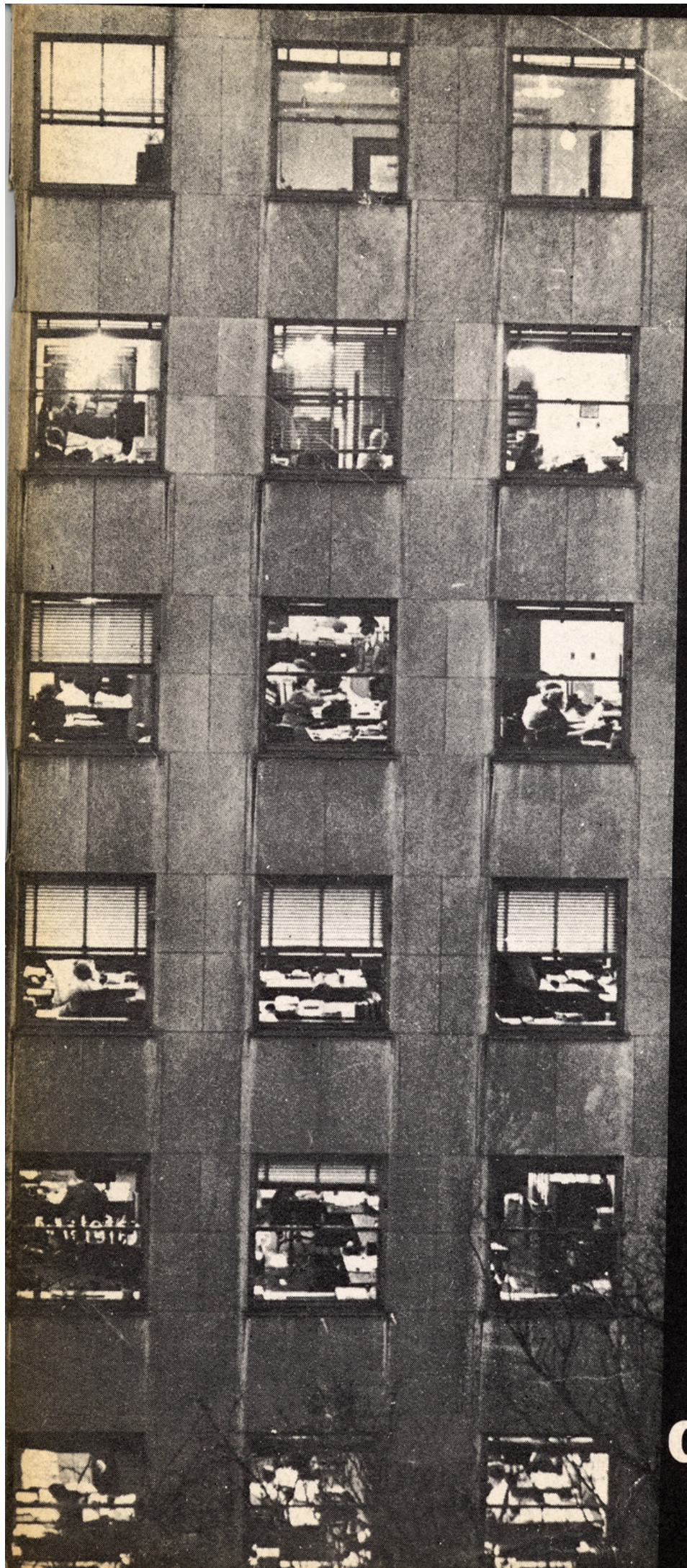


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**SOCIETY
OF THE SPECTACLE**

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1970



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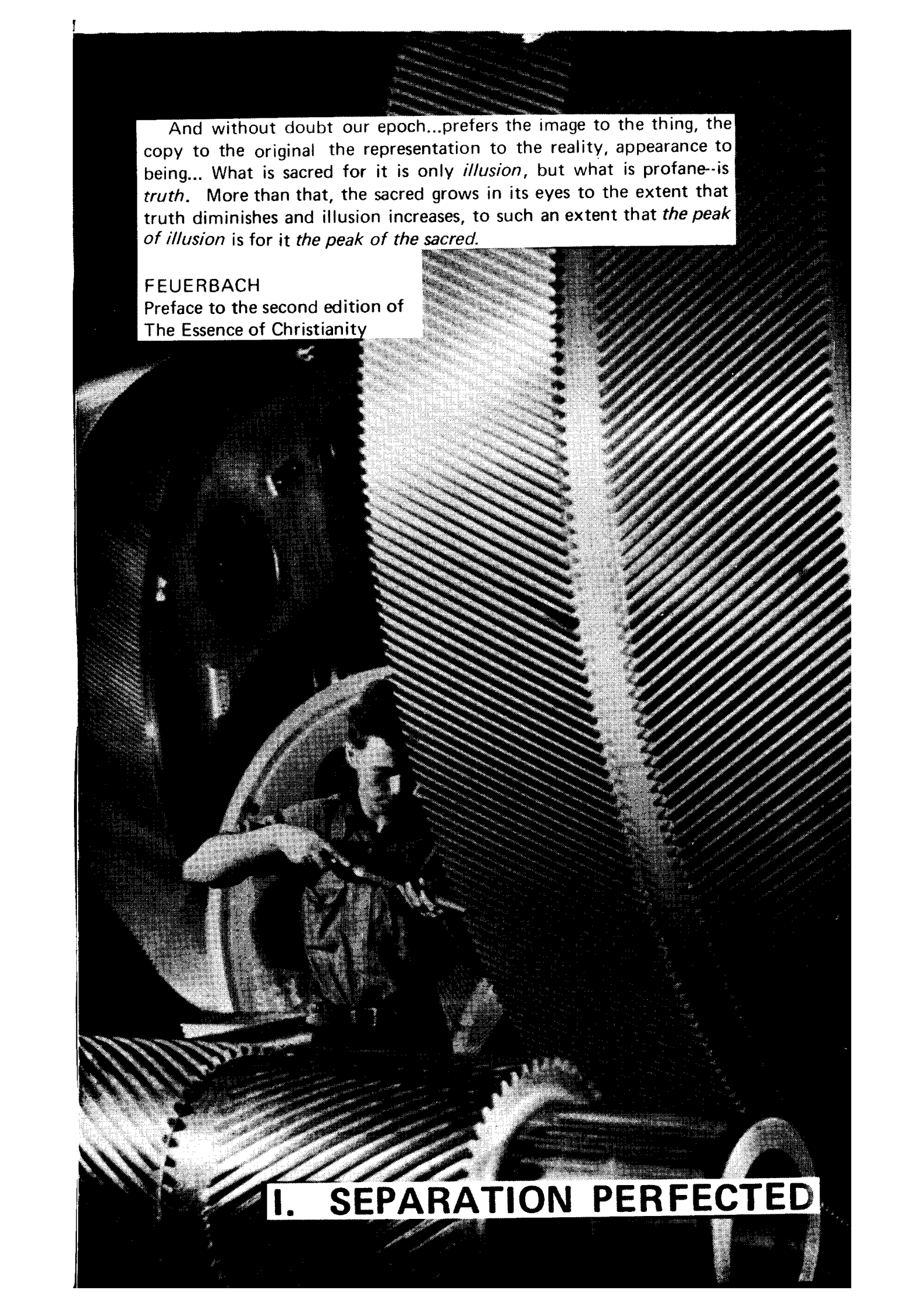


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And without doubt our epoch...prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original the representation to the reality, appearance to being... What is sacred for it is only *illusion*, but what is profane-is *truth*. More than that, the sacred grows in its eyes to the extent that truth diminishes and illusion increases, to such an extent that *the peak of illusion* is for it *the peak of the sacred*.

FEUERBACH

Preface to the second edition of
The Essence of Christianity

I. SEPARATION PERFECTED

1

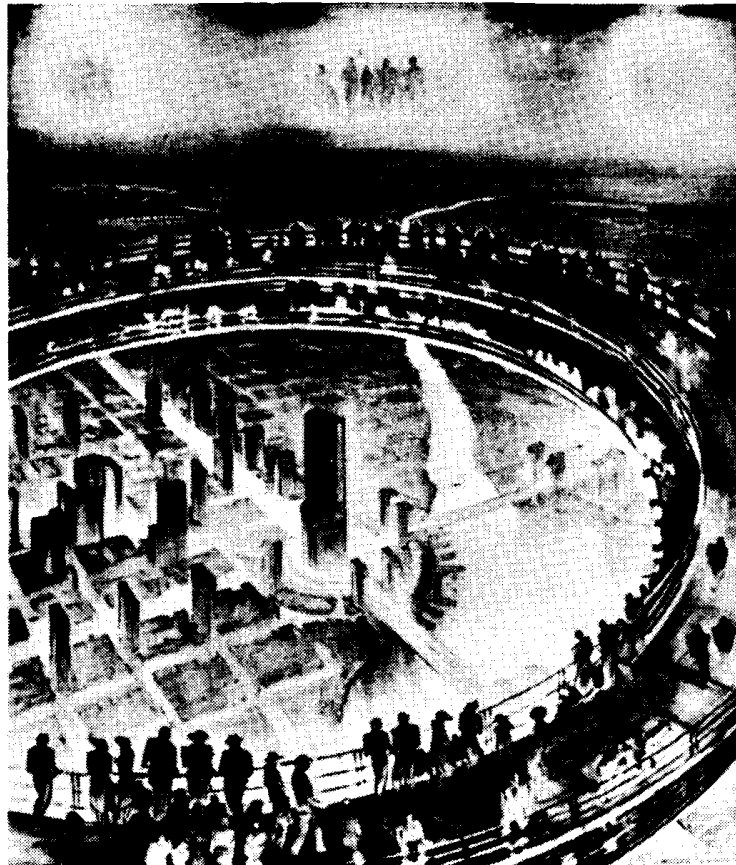
The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

2

The images which detached themselves from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream where the unity of life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered *partially* deploys itself in its own general unity as a pseudo-world apart, an object of contemplation only. The specialization of images of the world is rediscovered, perfected, in the world of the autonomized image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.

3

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as *instrument of unification*. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all looking and all consciousness. Because of the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is the location of the abused look and of false consciousness; and the unification which it accomplishes is nothing other than an official language of generalized separation.



4

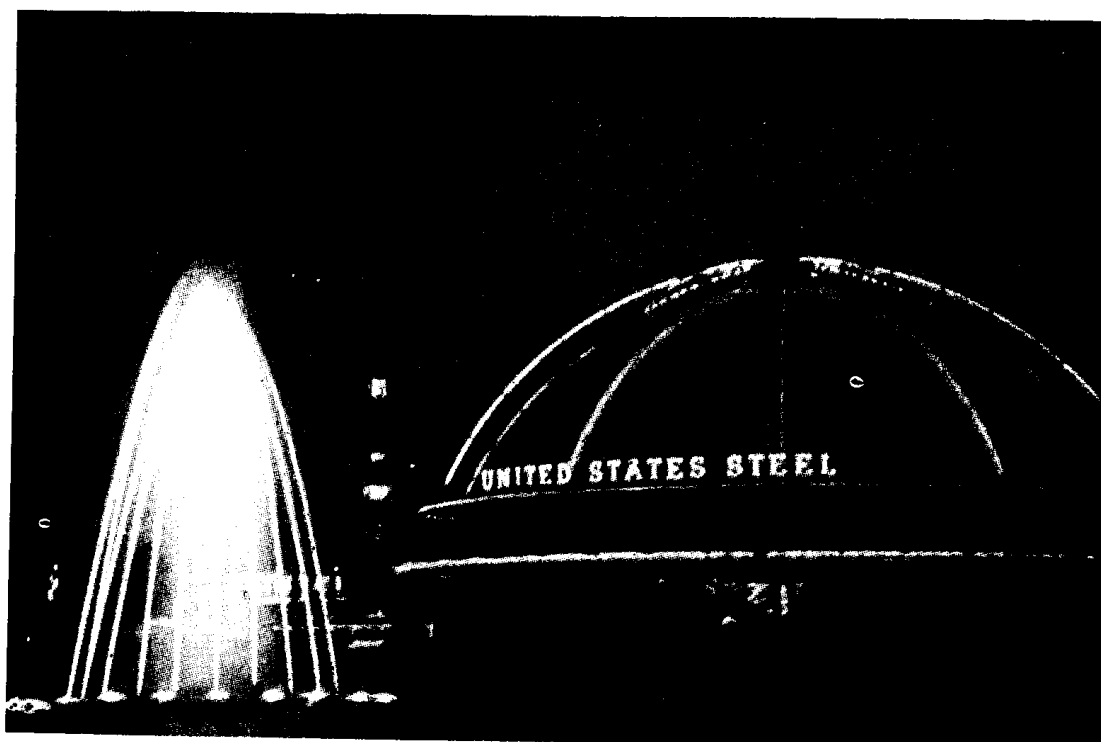
The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images.

5

The spectacle cannot be understood as the abuse of a world of vision, as the product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is, rather, a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a vision of the world which has become objectified.

6

The spectacle, understood in its totality, is simultaneously the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, its added decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, advertisement or direct consumption of entertainments, the spectacle is the present *model* of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The form and the content of the spectacle are identically the total justification of the conditions and the ends of the existing system. The spectacle is also the *permanent presence* of this justification, to the extent that it occupies the principal part of the time lived outside of modern production.



7

Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis which is split into reality and image. The social practice in front of which the autonomous spectacle parades is also the real totality which contains the spectacle. But the gash within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear to be its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.

8

One cannot abstractly contrast the spectacle to actual social activity: such a division is itself divided. The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. At the same time lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and it takes up the spectacular order within itself, giving it a positive adhesion. Objective reality is present on both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and the support of the existing society.

9

Within a world *really on its head*, the true is a moment of the false.

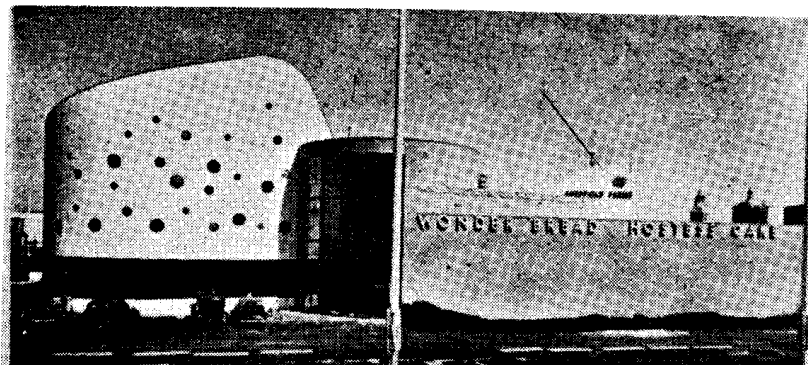
10

The concept of the spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are the appearances of this socially organized appearance which must itself be recognized in its general truth. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is the *affirmation* of appearance and the affirmation of all human, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle uncovers it as the visible *negation* of life; as a negation of life which *has become visible*.



To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions, and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish some inseparable elements. When analyzing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves across the methodological terrain of the society which expresses itself in the spectacle. But the spectacle is nothing other than the *sense* of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its *use of time*. It is the historical moment which contains us.

The spectacle presents itself as an enormous unutterable and inaccessible actuality. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears." The attitude which it demands in principle is this passive acceptance, which in fact it has already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.



The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are at the same time its goal. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally *spectaculist*. In the spectacle, image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development is all. The spectacle wants to get to nothing other than itself.

As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general exposé of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the *main production* of present-day society.

The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers.

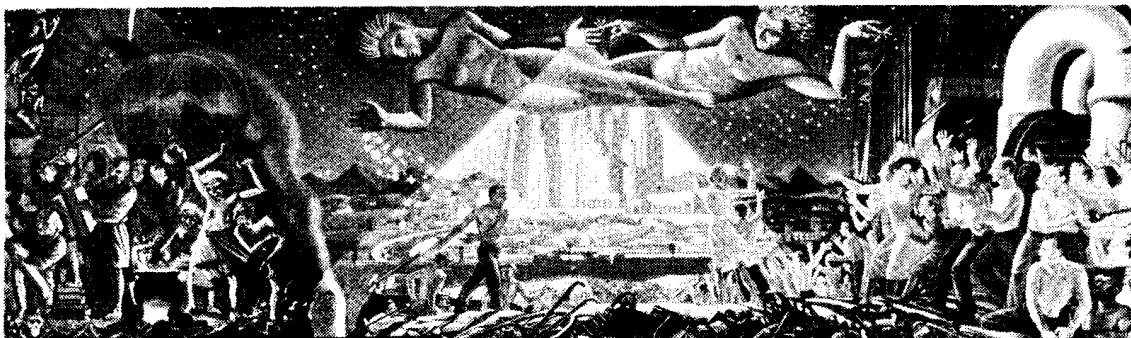


The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life had brought into the definition of all human realization an obvious degradation of *being* into *having*. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*, from which all actual "having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social, directly dependent on social force, shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only because it *is not*.

When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of a hypnotic behavior. The spectacle as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is no longer identifiable with the mere look, even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent *representation* the spectacle reconstitutes itself.

The spectacle is the heir of all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which was to understand activity, dominated by the categories of *seeing*; indeed, it is based on the incessant deployment of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. It does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. It is the concrete life of all which is degraded into a *speculative* universe.

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself overcome theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dissipated the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. Thus it is the most earthly life which becomes opaque and unbreathable. It no longer throws into the sky but houses within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; separation perfected within the interior of man.



To the extent that necessity is socially dreamed, the dream becomes necessary. The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.

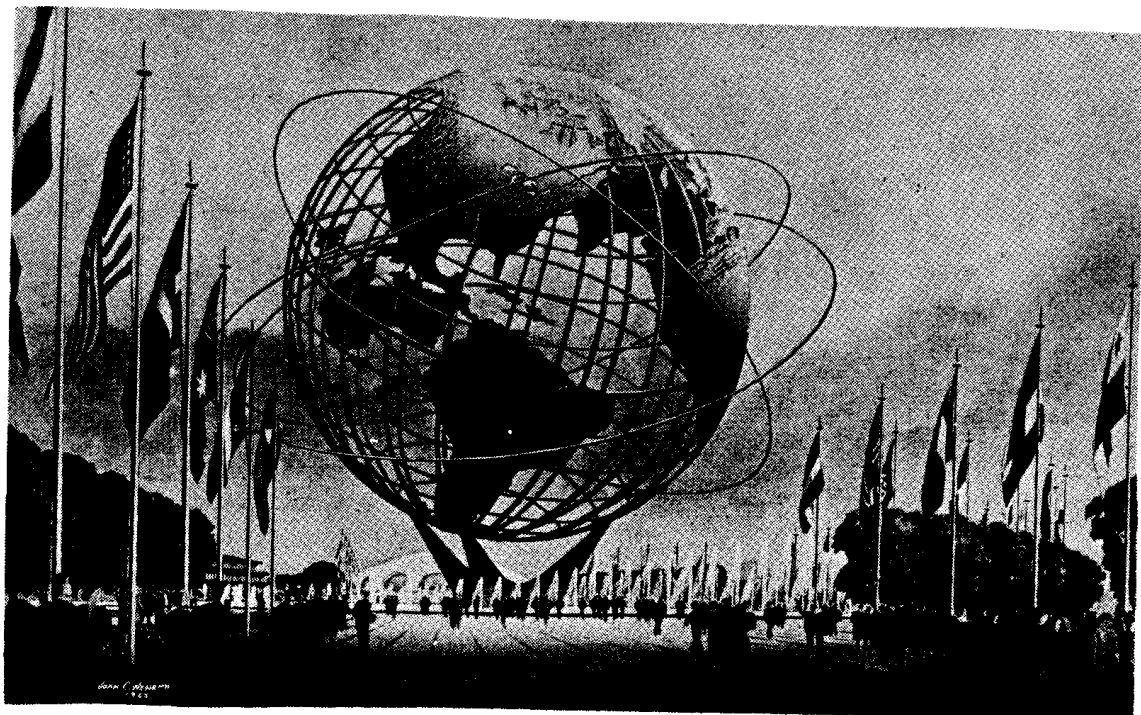


The fact that the practical power of modern society detached itself and built itself an independent empire in the spectacle can only be explained by another fact, the fact that this practical power continued to lack cohesion and remained in contradiction with itself.

The oldest social specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. The spectacle is thus a specialized activity which speaks for the ensemble of the others. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society in front of itself, where all other expression is banished. Here the most modern is also the most archaic.

The spectacle is the uninterrupted conversation which the present order maintains about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the

conditions of existence. The fetishist appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relations hides their character of relations among men and among classes: a second nature seems to dominate our environment with its fatal laws. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a *natural* development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "means of mass communication," which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, may seem to invade society as a simple instrumentation, this instrumentation is in fact nothing neutral but is the very instrumentation which is suited to the total self-movement of the spectacle. If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially *unilateral*. As a result the concentration of "communication" accumulates within the hands of the administration of the existing system the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *State*, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination.



Separation is the alpha and the omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor, the formation of classes, had

constructed a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order with which every power covers itself from the beginning. The sacred has justified the cosmic and ontological order which corresponded to the interests of the masters, it has explained and embellished that which society *could not do*. Thus all separate power has been spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation for the poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition. The modern spectacle, on the contrary, expresses what society *can do*, but in this expression the *permitted* is absolutely opposed to the *possible*. The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product, and it has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred. It shows what it *is*: separate power developing within itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labor into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever more expanded market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which the forces which could have grown have separated and have not yet been rediscovered.



With the generalized separation of the worker from his product every unitary viewpoint of accomplished activity and all direct personal communication among producers, are lost. Accompanying the progress of the accumulation of separate products and the concentration of the productive process, unity and communication become exclusively the attribute of the directorate of the system. The success of the economic system of separation is the *proletarianization of the world*.

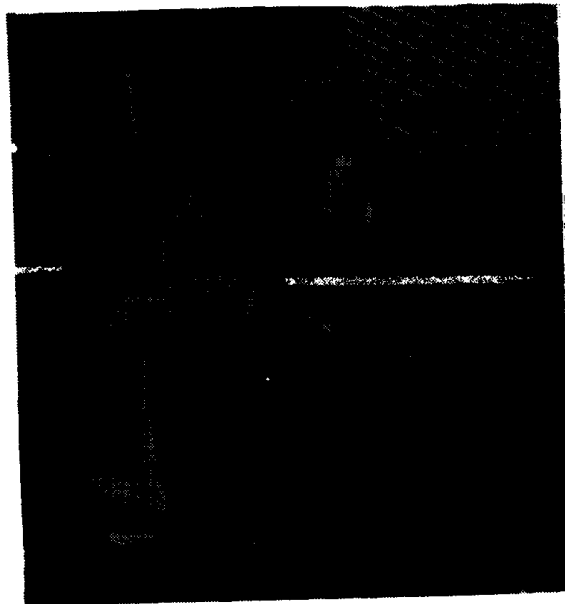
Through the very success of separate production in the sense of production of the separate, the basic experience related in primitive societies to a principal work is in the process of being displaced by non-work, by inactivity, at the pole of the system's development. But this inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity: it depends on productive activity, it is an uneasy and admiring submission to the necessities and the results of production; it is itself a product of its rationality. There can be no liberty outside of activity, and in the context of the spectacle all activity is negated, just as real activity has been captured in its entirety for the global erection of this result. Thus the present "liberation from labor," the augmentation of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor, nor a liberation of the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity stolen within labor can be rediscovered in the submission to its result.



The economic system founded on isolation is a *circular production of isolation*. The technology is based on isolation, and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to television, all the *goods selected* by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of "lonely crowds." The spectacle constantly rediscovers its own assumptions more concretely.

The origin of the spectacle is the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly translated in the spectacle, whose *mode of being concrete* is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world *represents itself* before the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What ties the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it *as separate*.

The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.



The worker does not produce himself; he produces an independent power. The *success* of this production, its abundance, returns over the

producer as an *abundance of dispossession*. All the time and space of his world become *strange* to him with the accumulation of his alienated products. The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which covers precisely its territory. The very powers which escaped us *show themselves* to us in all their force.



32

The spectacle within society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion is mainly the expansion of precisely this industrial production. That which grows with the economy moving for itself can only be the alienation which was precisely at its origin.

33

The man separated from his product himself produces all the details of his world with ever increasing power, and thus finds himself ever more separated from his world. The more his life is now his product, the more he is separated from his life.

34

The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.

