

Public talk

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There Is No Outside

In the lead-up to May 1968, the Situationist International (SI) gave to the concept of *recuperation* a certain strategic bite as part of their critical theory of society. Here, within postwar abundance, the SI named their adversary as ‘the society of the spectacle,’ and recuperation appeared as one of its broad mechanisms through which the negativity of revolt and revolution became neutralized and collapsed into the pervasive social integration commanded by the commodity economy under the capitalist mode of production.

For the SI, recuperation was a category that helped map a terrain of opposition, a way of naming the maneuverings which sought to extinguish the revolutionary critique of the society of the spectacle, that peculiar form of domination capitalist society had assumed during the twentieth century in which human beings came to identify with the appearances and images of social life. My paper will explore how the concept of recuperation relates to the society which carries it out, namely, the society of the spectacle, and evaluate the prospects of critique within such a social landscape.

In a certain sense, the category of recuperation remains mired within an antinomy of critique. More or less synonymous with corruption, recuperation is a dichotomous notion that always presupposes the absolutization of exteriority and idealization of opposition. It is a military simile through which critique attempts to elude capture. Here it could be said that such a concept poses a problem for a critique insofar as it understands itself as outside that which it attempts to critique. Instead, my paper will return to the question of *immanent critique* as part of the very practices of the SI (*détournement* as the use of society’s cultural language in order to unravel it from within), and assess how to situate the concept of recuperation within a critique that grounds itself on nothing external, concedes that there is no outside, and that the only way out of this world is *through* the false, not through its evasion.

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