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BANKSY, RHETORIC, AND REVOLUTION

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BANKSY, RHETORIC, AND REVOLUTION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Derek Tanios Imad Mkhaiel

June 2017

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the projects outlined by the Situationist philosophers and their impact on revolutionizing consciousness. Alongside of this examination this thesis demonstrates how the appropriate rhetorical means in conjunction with street art—specifically the work of Banksy—may lead to the successful implementation and execution of the Situationist's projects. This thesis examines the concept of the spectacle as developed by the Situationists as its object of critique and the concepts of culture, unitary urbanism, psychogeography, détournement and dérive as the framework in which the spectacle can be successfully critiqued in order to foster a more critical consciousness. In addition to this framework my claim is that the aforementioned elements are accomplished by the work of Banksy and his ability to alter the material conditions of our reality through his rhetorical construction of material enactments by creating appropriate and kairotic works which provide life to the Situationist's projects and affords the potentiality of revolutionizing consciousness.

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Without the financial and emotional support from my father, Imad Michael, I would not be here today, I thank him for providing me with an opportunity that he never had and for supporting my endeavors towards higher education.

DEDICATION

To Dad, Rhodes, and Commander Boland, thanks for believing in me when I didn't know how to believe in myself.

.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SPECTACLE

Introduction

In the documentary *Examined Life* by Astra Taylor, Michael Hardt claims that “revolution requires a transformation of human nature so that people are capable of democracy”. In the documentary, his primary focus is to develop the notion of revolution and examine how individuals in a democratic system should act in order to make that system best serve its end—the people. However, I’m interested much more in this notion of human nature as a transformative phenomena and specifically how we can go about inspiring and promoting humanity towards a more enlightened consciousness. The ultimate goal of the humanities, in general, is to examine human nature, but also to take part in its transformation. Historians remind us of the past so that we may transform into a better future. The artist freezes time so that we may live with the recollection of specific events. The writer and philosopher encapsulates human nature in text for us to reflect and grow. However, it seems that throughout the history of the humanities there have been arguments about how transformative works should be created in order to best reach the masses and create a critical consciousness and revolutionize our nature.

The purpose of this paper is to revive the project set out by the Situationist philosophers and show how their conceptualization of culture, urbanism,

spectacle, and détournement can provide critics with an effective framework, object and method of critique. I feel the Situationists' work can be an effective tool for battling the challenges we face today. My hope is that by revisiting the Situationists' work we will be able to discover new methods of critique that will allow us to successfully penetrate the forces and ideologies which have stagnated society's critical consciousness. Alongside of establishing this schema this paper offers street art, as an example of a potential Situationist praxis. Specifically this paper looks towards the works of Banksy, and how they may rhetorically function as an effective means of cultural critique that can potentially lead to revolutionizing consciousness, and transforming human nature within a Situationist framework.

In order to fully understand the efficacy street art affords as a method of cultural critique it is important to develop the concept of the spectacle as the object of critique. Out of all the Situationists, the philosopher who develops the ideas and intricacies in respects to the spectacle with the greatest detail is without a doubt, Guy Debord. Debord has two books published on the subject, the first being *The Society of the Spectacle* the second, published two decades later, is *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. Within Debord's books we find a perfect representation of our current reality, a reality which is blinded and subsumed by a phenomenon so vast that we have forgotten it is a phenomenon. The relevance of Debord's critique has spanned throughout time and—

believe—will continue to be important in a society where commodity fetishism and images comprise of our real understanding of the world.

Debord makes it evident to readers that the concept of the spectacle is a way of understanding consumer-capitalism in a world where products and images reign supreme. Debord shows readers that the recursive reality of the spectacle puts people in a position of consuming its fantastic products. This fantasy building results in a consumer culture where individual desire shifts towards the images constructed through spectacular representation. When the fantastic representation is desired as opposed to the reality of the products themselves, we begin to lose touch with reality. The spectacle is an elusive concept to pin down. However, in *Society of the Spectacle* Debord shows readers that the spectacle is a hegemonic phenomenon that ultimately attempts to create a reality designed to eliminate human relations outside of our desires as consumers: “The spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation” (23). This alienation can be at the level of thought. For example, the media constructs stories that lead to specific conclusions that are not representative of a reality, but instead function primarily to attract viewers. Advertising companies don't replicate the reality of their product. Instead, they construct a fantastical world in order to inflate the importance of the image of a product far beyond the product itself. Alienation can also exist with the body and it's environment when perfect bodies, perfect moods, and perfect relations are all created and manipulated in a way where an individual's desires will vanish, and

the desire for the spectacle will grow our interaction with the real world and our perceptions of our selves will change. Within this newly formulated and enclosed circle of desire, we experience the process of alienation from the actual material conditions of reality in favor of a fantastic and spectacular image—an image where the reality is no longer of any importance.

Debord further claims in *The Society of the Spectacle* that “Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever” (Debord 12). Our lives have essentially become a series of desires strung together by the images and false realities constructed by the individuals who profit from our desires. Jean Baudrillard in his essay “The Precession of Simulacra” claims that reality “...no longer has to be rational. since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance” (Baudrillard 1557). We know we have entered the world of the simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, when “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself... [a] perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes” (Baudrillard 1557). When a capitalist society can dispose of the real and replace it with the hyper real, manufacturing desires becomes a profitable practice. When our understanding of reality is replaced by signifiers which represent a new and improved reality, we fall into the trap of not questioning our society; there is no need to do so as long as we have nice phones and fancy clothes. The concept of the spectacle is Debord’s way of

describing the total system that makes this hyperreality more desirable than the real. As a social reality, the spectacle is the simulacrum of our desires which we have forgotten is a simulacrum; "...reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation... images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself" (12). The spectacle does not need to be persuasive. Its mere existence justifies its cause and its *raison d'être* by convincing individuals that it is good and necessary. The successful circulation and efficacy of the spectacle is driven by our desire for the "images-of-the-world" (12) that are provided for us. This is the precise notion that Situationists are attempting to deconstruct and stray away from through the action of constructing "situations." Their goal is to create ambiances and desires that do not rely on the spectacle in an attempt to shake us from the unreality of our world.

One of the main reasons why I believe the spectacle is the most important object of critique for revolutionizing consciousness is due to its ability to construct a false consciousness for its spectators. Essentially, institutions of information, entertainment, and commodities can use the "images-of-the-world" to provide consumers of this information or material goods with an understanding of the world tailored to institutional needs. "The spectacle appears at once as a society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges" (Debord 12). Reflecting the Marxist influence on their thought, the Situationists believed that

the base must be revolutionized in order to successfully challenge the superstructure of the spectacle; “For what the spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social formation; it is, so to speak, that formation’s *agenda*” (15). Part of the spectacle’s agenda is to create a reality where the subject thinks about and needs the spectacle, but never questions its agenda. The objective is to unify alienated subjects into seeing, believing, and doing as an institution pleases. The aim of the spectacle is to function as the superstructure for an ever changing capitalist society—as society changes the spectacle adapts in order to construct new ideologies and desires.

One of Debord’s greatest concerns with the spectacle as an object of unification is its ability to collect individuals into a state of passivity and alienation. The magnitude of alienation caused by the spectacle reaches far beyond an alienation between individual and material goods. In a Marxist sense, the alienation caused by the spectacle can result in a collective disconnection from the material conditions that construct our reality, from our relation with that reality, and from critical thought itself. Debord characterizes the experience of individuals subjected by the forces of the spectacle as follows: “...the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires” (23). Since the spectacle is inherently an object of delusion, when a subject demands the spectacle they are demanding a delusion that has masked the reality of their existence. In the Marxist tradition

this form of disillusionment is discussed by Freidrich Engels, who notes in his letter to Franz Mehring that:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. (“Engels to Franz Mehring”)

As a type of false consciousness, ideology can lead individuals into believing and acting in a certain way according to motives and realities that are not fully explored. In Debord’s formulation, the spectacle breeds this false sense of consciousness by constructing its own means of desire. Consequently, the necessity and dependence upon a fictionalized reality leaves subjects in a position of ultimate passivity. When we no longer know why we do the things we do, or why we believe the things we believe, we become consumed by them, unable to push back against any potential pitfalls. It is in this respect that I believe the spectacle does the most harm to society, driving people away from a conscious sense of their reality, and replacing it with a reality that is always already given to them.

In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* Debord further develops his thoughts on the nature of the spectacle, especially with respect to its grasp on society in the realm of power. He claims that in his first book *The Society of the Spectacle* he was working with two conceptualizations of the spectacle—the

concentrated and the diffuse. The concentrated spectacle takes the position of “favouring the ideology condensed around a dictatorial personality, has accomplished the totalitarian counter-revolution, fascists as well as Stalinists” (8). In contrast, the diffuse spectacle is in a position of “driving wage-earners to apply their freedom of choice to the vast range of new commodities now on offer...” (8). Debord believes that a third spectacle has developed, one that truly encompasses our current societal conditions: “The integrated spectacle shows itself to be simultaneously concentrated and diffuse...As regards concentration, the controlling centre has now become occult: never to be occupied by a known leader, or clear ideology” (9). Because of the nature of the concentrated spectacle it becomes difficult to critique ideology due to its invisibility. Because of the ever-changing nature of ideology, it is important for critique to evolve in parallel ways. As Debord puts it, “. . . 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” (9). This wholly encompassing form of the spectacle demands revolutionary critique. My intention in this project is to locate the most effective object of critique in order to revolutionize consciousness, and seek forms of critique that can influence “socially produced behaviour and objects” (9) and will allow critics to alter behaviors and objects.

Institutions of power have not only manipulated the spectacle in order to separate subjects from the real conditions of their existence: it has also been manipulated in order to construct a greater separation between subjects of power

and those subject to power. Within this schema the distance between groups in a hierarchy is ever increasing. Within that gap the spectacle resides and revels in its ability to become an ultimate reality. In Debord's Marxist fashion he claims that this separation occurs through the division of labor. Essentially, so long as workers in a growing capitalist system remain alienated from their product and the process in which a product is produced, they will become more alienated from their world. As Debord puts it, "Owing to the very success of this separate system of production, whose product is separation itself, that fundamental area of experience which is associated in earlier societies with an individual's principal work is being transformed...into a realm of non-work, of inactivity" (21). The Situationist concepts of the derive and the attunement with psychogeography begin to make more sense when we realize their Marxist influence. If our lives are spent working in an economic system which separates workers from the experience of fulfilling work—rupturing this monotony comes from leisure and play, which, in the age of spectacle, are reincorporated into the overall economic order. It is necessary to acknowledge the forces driving our alienation from the material conditions of world, then, to place ourselves in a position of experiencing the world without those constraints, and finally, to attempt to change the world so that our experiential limits are no longer constrained to the spectacle.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SITUATIONISTS

A Framework For Action

There are specific concepts that are paramount to the Situationist project. A successful critique of the society of the spectacle via a Situationist framework would have to take into consideration their concepts of culture, unitary urbanism, psychogeography, and derive. In order to begin understanding their beliefs a good point of departure is a piece published titled "Definitions." The essay provides brief descriptions of terms that are frequently used by the Situationists. In this article they define culture as:

the reflection and prefiguration of the possibilities of organization of everyday life in a given historical moment; a complex of aesthetics, feelings and mores through which a collectivity reacts on the life that is objectively determined by its economy. (We are defining this term only in the perspective of creating values, not in that of teaching them). (Dahou, Gallizio, Wyckaert)

The emphasis on the economy in this definition is derived from their anti-capitalist, Marxist influences. The Situationists believed that breaking away from the oppressive notions capitalism imposes on its citizens would be one of the most effective methods of revolutionizing consciousness. In fact, they believe that capitalism may be the root of all evil—the ideology which has led individuals to living unfulfilling and monotonous lives.

Guy Debord, in his essay “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency Conditions of Organization and Action” speaks for all Situationists at the time when he says “First of all, we think the world must be changed. We want the most liberating change of the society and life in which we find ourselves confined. We know that such a change is possible through appropriate actions” (Debord). These appropriate actions are rarely presented in a concrete sense by the Situationists. Providing specific examples becomes antithetical to the Situationist project. Claiming that there are correct revolutionary actions essentially recycles the nature of corrupt unitary ideologies. However, they provide theories that support appropriate action, constructing a system to inspire revolutionary action instead of strict guidelines for revolutionary action:

A society’s “culture” both reflects and prefigures its possible ways of organizing life. Our era is characterized by the lagging of revolutionary political action behind the development of modern possibilities of production which call for a superior organization of the world. (Debord)

The Situationists define their project as an attempt to revitalize society’s engagement with the world in order to create a world that is better suited for human engagement. Their seemingly vague approach towards this goal is a function of how exactly the Situationists desire to go about creating change: “Our central idea is the construction of situations, that is to say the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a

superior passional quality” (Debord). The Situationists hope that by finding ways to create situations—momentary events—to change the direction of an individual’s perspective and their automotive interaction with their daily life they will be able to facilitate shifts in individual and collective consciousness into something more critical of the cultural environment.

As the above suggests, the Situationists believed there was a way to actually create the material conditions of critical consciousness, that there is a method of altering our perspectival relationship with the material conditions of our reality. They believed that there are two main factors in constructing an effective situation to accomplish such a task. The factors of intervention are “the material environment of life and the behaviors which it gives rise to and which radically transform it” (Debord). The Situationists believed that in order to transform the material environment of life, it is necessary to transform cities. More specifically, they held that a unitary urbanism would be the method of transforming life. Unitary urbanism is defined as “The theory of the combined use of arts and techniques as means contributing to the construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior” (Dahou et al.). Ivan Chtcheglov in “Formulary for a New Urbanism” claims that:

The architecture of tomorrow will be a means of modifying present conceptions of time and space. It will be a means of *knowledge* and a *means of action*. Architectural complexes will be modifiable. Their aspect will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of their

inhabitants. (Chtcheglov)

The conceptualization of unitary urbanism is a courageous endeavor. The central idea is that individuals will become proactive agents constructing the concrete, but ever-changing material society that they live in. For the Situationists, cities are our natural habitat; they are our geography and our homes. If an individual is alienated from the home that they live in then there will be a continuous alienation of life. The Situationists aimed to create a phenomenological rupture in a spectator's perspective, and (considering the central role of the city) they believed that the most convenient method of constructing these situations is precisely through using the urban environment in which we live as both material and medium. Since cities are essential for the emergence of modern society and culture, it is precisely through cities that cultural and social transformation can be accomplished: "This need for *total* creation has always been intimately associated with the need to *play* with architecture, time and space" (Chtcheglov).

The methodology for revolutionary action rooted in urban-centered play is best understood when the Situationist concept of psychogeography is taken into consideration. In Debord's article titled "Theory of The Dérive" he explores the Situationist concept of the Derive and its impact on further understanding psychogeography. The idea of the Derive was that an individual may thrust themselves into a mode of cognitive experientialism—to enter a situation where individuals are attempting to fully experience the psychogeographical effects of a city. For example, if an individual walks past a work of art on a building in their

city (particularly art that is temporary or shifts regularly in form), how does that work of art change his/her relationship with that location, or with the city as a whole? Experiencing a city that deploys art in this way might make that person feel more connected to their environment. It might make them care about the space they inhabit. If our relationship with our physical world can be revolutionized in order to foster creativity, and combat the alienating forces of the spectacle and capitalism, then we will reach a moment of radical engagement where individuals become active agents of their world, versus passive recipients of already-made realities. These are the types of potentialities that the Situationists attempted to construct via concepts like the *Dérive* and their psychogeographical studies. Their efforts were an attempt to create cities that actually make people want to be a part of them by understanding what makes a city worth living in and what actions members of a city can engage in order to create an urban environment that matters. The hope was that during this process Situationists might learn more about how an individual's environment affects them, and how changes may be made in order to construct a better unitary urbanism. A unitary urbanism would be the antithesis of the expected city environment such as the monotonous grey and cold features of an urbanism where individuals are alienated from their environment and from each other. A unitary urbanism implies a city that is made for and by the individuals who inhabit a city, one that is engaging and enjoyable.

A concrete understanding of *dérive* is available in the “Definitions” article where it is defined as “A mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances” (Dahou et al.). The concept of the *dérive* was in many ways a research methodology for the Situationists. They believed that if individuals would be consciously aware of the ambiances in a city it could provide thinkers with “data” in order to better understanding the psychological effects of an urban environment and how they can be manipulated in order to produce further desirable affects. Psychogeography, then, is “The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behaviors of individuals” (Dahou et al.). The Situationists hoped that through intentionally attempting to experience an environment that we normally drift through unconsciously, it might be possible to alter this environment in order to construct a sense of critical consciousness. This conceptualization connects back to the idea of a unitary urbanism. For the Situationists, it was possible to have individuals critically examine the ambiances of a city, gain a greater understanding of the material conditions of our environments and how they affect us, and lastly, to begin producing cities that would provide positive, inclusive psychogeographical effects. This type of project has been picked up by subsequent artists, as well. In Banksy’s book *Wall and Piece* he asks his readers to “Imagine a city where graffiti wasn’t illegal, a city where everybody could draw wherever they liked... A city that felt like a party

where everyone was invited, not just the estate agents and barons of big business” (85). Banksy’s work shows us what an informed Situationists praxis can look like in the present moment. His urban art has deployed images such as the following: a little girl releasing a red heart shaped balloon, or tagging in Trafalgar Square in London using the phrase “DESIGNATED RIOT AREA”. Pieces like these range from aesthetically pleasing to witty and revolutionary. At the same time, Banksy’s work aims to alter viewers’ ideologies and beliefs, such as having soldiers paint a peace sign on a wall, or a recontextualizing of a military helicopter by having the phrase “have a nice day” written nearby it. This type of art places individuals in a position where they have to make a conscious attempt at connecting the images and messages and relating it back to the real world. Hopefully, the irony of both of these images would make individuals think about the true atrocities of military action.

Of course, the inherent ambiguity of work such as Banksy’s points toward some of the challenges involved in implementing Situationist ideas as a practical revolutionary project. Often, when trying to take into consideration the Situationists’ understandings of culture, unitary urbanism, and psychogeography, we are left with more questions than answers. To return to Debord’s, in his article “Theory of the Dérive” he claims that:

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions

of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones. (Debord)

Debord is claiming here that individuals should engage in a game of chance, allowing themselves to fully experience, without any obstruction, the mental effects an environment has on them and then to consider what this could potentially mean. An issue here, of course, is that this does not seem like a particularly concrete project. There isn't much of a discussion in the Situationist literature regarding what types of psychogeographical implementations could be made to a city in order to increase an individual's critical consciousness and to allow them to change the culture they live in. The vague qualities of the Situationists' writings are driven in part by their fear of creating a strict revolutionary ideology that produces specific realities. It is for this reason that it is helpful in understanding the potentiality of Situationist ideas to look at concrete examples of artistic practices that seem to put them in motion. For example, we can gain insight into Situationist praxis by looking at the work of Thomas Hirschhorn. In one of his installations titled the *Gramsci Monument*, Hirschhorn created a physical space equipped with a bar, workshop, classroom, theater, museum, library, newspaper computer room, and radio station. The monument was placed in the Forest Houses housing projects in the Bronx. Hirschhorn even

hired people from the housing projects to help him construct the monument while he was living among them in Forrest Houses. This monument creates a cultural space where individuals can come and learn about an incredible scholar and expand their perspectival horizons. Its geographical location is central to the impact of this work, as well, for being placed in a lower socioeconomic area the installation critiques the assumption that only the elite should and can read/experience philosophical ideas. In an interview Hirschhorn explains the most important element of his series "'Presence' and 'Production' is fieldwork, it means confronting reality with the real. 'Presence' and 'Production' is the form of a commitment toward myself but also directed toward the inhabitants" (Birrell "The Headless Artist"). This direct engagement with community, and the move to establish works of art that raise the consciousness of city inhabitants shows the potentiality of a Situationist praxis which takes seriously the possibility of the transformation of our physical world and the subjectivity of its inhabitants.

CHAPTER THREE

RHETORIC, MATERIALITY, AND DÉTOURNEMENT

One of the major critiques of the left, especially of the Marxist tradition, is the lack of an actual concrete project that functions as an effective representation of generative theoretical thought. Leftist projects are generally dismissed due to their fanciful nature and seemingly improbable nature. However, rhetorically speaking, I believe many leftist projects, especially the Situationists, are engaging in plausible forms of world making. In the Marxist tradition, there have long been discussions of the concept of utopia. In its original Greek etymology the term *utopia* refers to “no place”. Popular understanding of the concept believes the term only references a place of perfection, and in literature it is common for utopian societies to be presented as being flawless and perfect for all people. However, the reason that many Marxist and leftist thinkers have adopted a term that defines itself as non-existent and non-being is precisely to project into the world possibilities that are currently unimaginable due to societal circumstances. In his lecture titled “The End of Utopia” at the Free University of West Berlin in 1967, Herbert Marcuse claims that:

Utopia is a historical concept. It refers to projects for social change that are considered impossible. Impossible for what reasons? In the usual discussion of utopia the impossibility of realizing the project of a new society exists when the subjective and objective factors of a given social

situation stand in the way of the transformation – the so-called immaturity of the social situation. (Marcuse)

Marcuse refers to utopia as a historical concept due to the fact that utopian visions must always battle with the factors that create subjects that stand in the way of their realization in the present. If society is meant to transform for the better, it must negotiate with the present and the past, in order to ultimately project a more positive future. Utopian projects are seen as absurd due to the factors in society that restrict revolutionary thinking. Societies become complacent, and in their passivity they struggle to see a “no place.” This is precisely the problem that the Situationists set out to address I believe that with a better understanding of rhetoric and its world making potentialities the utopian projects the Situationists had in mind will become increasingly possible. In my opinion, rhetorical theory's potential to understand the elements of meaning making and persuasion can assist in the construction of complex projects in the minds of millions.

In her essay “The Rhetorical Function of Utopia: An Exploration of the Concept of Utopia in Rhetorical Theory” Marlana Portolano explores how rhetoric can assist in the successful achievement of utopia. Portolano claims that “utopia is not an impossible political dream or a philosophical ideal but, rather any kind of symbolic expression of hope for a better world...” (114). This concept allows us to truly reconcile with the vague qualities of the Situationist projects. If we accept the Situationist projects as attempting to establish frameworks for the creation of

a better world, rhetoric may help us in the pursuit of creating criticisms by understanding how to successfully construct symbols that establish the plausibility of a better world. Portolano builds on the claims made by Karl Mannheim and Ernst Bloch that human nature is inherently distilled with a “utopian impulse” (125) and that “utopia is the imaginative means by which material culture is propelled to social change” (125). This concern with materialism coincides with the Situationist desire to transform the existing conditions of our world. However, these changes are difficult to envision and even more difficult to create. Portolano claims that “Communitarian socialists, from Marx’s point of view, were really reactionaries adhering to a static model of society, not progressives at all” (125). I believe that the Situationists may have had a similar mentality when it came to their theories and philosophies. Constructing frameworks that don’t necessarily imply a specific product allows for society to apply these evolutionary frameworks to whatever conditions may be prevalent in society at the time. Constructing a utopia requires the ability to provide individuals with the understanding that the present conditions of existence are not static, that they are dynamic and worth changing. When Debord mentions that the spectacle should function as the locus of critique, he is providing readers with an understanding that a utopic world should be one that strays away from whatever spectacle is in place at that specific time and place. In short the Situationists have provided us with static theories to combat a dynamic world—their methods are timeless, and their products are not specific, but my

hope is that with a greater recognition of their work in conjunction with rhetorical theory, we can construct symbols which will lead to a better world. According to Portolano “Utopia is an idea that is meant to be realized” (127) an idea which can be realizable if the appropriate message is delivered effectively at the right time and place—a kairotic practice is necessary, one which seeks the best spaces for conveying a message and understands that the best message is one that counteracts the alienation inducing force of the spectacle.

I believe that if a better world is to be constructed and if Situationist projects are going to be implemented effectively, individuals must reconcile with the fact that better worlds begin with better ideas. It is important for an individual to successfully construct a world that is possible in the minds that he or she wants to connect with. This task can best be accomplished by the knowledge provided to us by rhetorical studies, and in my opinion, specifically the sophistic tradition. By connecting the rhetorical works by the sophists with Situationist theory and projects, we may be able to find a way to best construct utopias in the minds of millions. For the Sophists, rhetoric is an art form that has mastered persuasion through the understanding of very specific elements. Those elements include space, time, content, and potentialities. My belief is that street art is a modern form of Sophistic rhetoric, and that, as such, it is uniquely positioned to provide us with the means of deconstructing the spectacle and revolutionizing consciousness, while simultaneously accomplishing the Situationist project in respects to altering culture, affecting psychogeographical elements, and

approaching a unitary urbanism. If the Situationists were really attempting to construct a better world, and if “Utopia is an idea that is meant to be realized” (Portolano 127) then understanding the rhetorical art of constructing realizable ideas will allow us to effectively construct projects that may lead us to the revolutionization of consciousness and to a better world.

In order to gain a better understanding of the Sophistic perspective of rhetoric I want to turn to an article published by John Poulakos titled “Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric”. The Sophistic definition of rhetoric Poulakos develops throughout his article is as follows “*Rhetoric is the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible*” (Author’s emphasis 36). This conceptualization of rhetoric as an art form which attempts to advance a reality of possibilities to its spectators/listeners/readers makes the Sophistic definition an effective fit for the task of presenting a world of possibilities outside of the spectacle. Or, as Poulakos would phrase it “...this definition links rhetoric to a movement originating in the sphere of actuality and striving to attain a place in that of potentiality” (36). One of the most difficult tasks of critiquing the spectacle effectively is developing the ability to convince individuals of a world that is currently impossible. The revolutionary images constructed literally have to dissolve the meaning originally established by the spectacular image. Portolano claims that “For Bloch, utopia is the expression of hope not only as an emotion but as an aspect of collective will and goal-making” (130). A Situationist project

that attempts to rhetorically construct the prospects of a better world would be more likely to successfully critique the spectacle via the material conditions of our existence in a way where a better possible future becomes evident.

According to Polouakos, great thinkers like Philodermus Metrodorus claimed that “the rhetoric of the Sophists has the status of an Art” (36). Alongside of Philodermus’ comments similar comments were made by Plato, Thrasymachus, Gorgias, and potentially so many more. In my perspective one of the most valuable tools for this art form presented by the Sophists is the concept known as *kairos* “the opportune moment” (36). For the Sophists “...rhetoric moves beyond the domain of logic and, satisfied with probability, lends itself to the flexibility of the contingent” (37). *Kairos* is the idea that rhetors, must adapt to certain situations in order to capture the most effective means of meaning making. My belief here is that if individuals who are aiming to critique phenomena such as the spectacle must establish critiques with the realization that content and time are inherently intertwined. Due to the spectacle’s rapidity of representation and our society’s nature of planned obsolescence it is important for criticism to follow at the same speed. Essentially, criticism must accept that its production has to be a relentless onslaught to counteract the image production of the society of the spectacle. The opportune moment in this situation, is the moment the spectacle attempts to act, critics must be ready to counteract in order to show the folly behind the spectacle, slowly deteriorating its importance, shaking individuals free from its fantastical grasp.

According to Poulakos "...the Sophists were interested in the problem of time in relation to speaking" (38). The Sophists understood the concept of exigence and its reliance on time alongside of its potential impact on shaping the content being delivered by the meaning making subject. For the Sophists "...situations exist in time and that speech as a situational response does also...The Sophists stressed that speech must show respect to the temporal dimension of the situation it addresses, that is, it must be timely" (39). In respects to critiquing the spectacle it's important for critics to actually move at the pace of the spectacle and to constantly bombard the spectacular with criticism before it has the ability to act. Critique must be constantly evolving and always creating new potentialities to a point where the images produced by the spectacle will fade into the background and the product of criticism will hopefully inspire a new reality. If criticism does not arise in a society so controlled by the spectacular image, images will continue to consume us and drive us deeper into a shared void of non-being. The effective rhetor/critic must assist his/her audience in escaping from a reality which makes itself concrete and propel themselves into a future of possibilities. The Sophistic tradition and the Situationist philosophers share similar projects here. I believe it is possible that with a Sophistic understanding of rhetoric, specifically their emphasis on time, space, exigence, and producing potentialities, will provide guidance for constructing effective situations which will revolutionize consciousness and break us away from the monotony of the society of the spectacle.

In respects to the discussion of content. Poulakos also expands on the Sophists' notion of *to prepon*, which he translates as appropriateness. Poulakos claims that "Appropriateness refers to that quality which makes an expression be correlative to the formal aspects of the situation it addresses. When appropriate, speech is perfectly compatible with the audience and the occasion it affirms and simultaneously seeks to alter" (41). This method of identification with an audience, in my opinion, allows for a greater opportunity to construct realizable worlds. Identification with an audience is key in rhetorical practice, this concept can potentially make it easier to sway a skeptical audience of a utopia. The ability to adapt an audience's subjectivity and present its potential evolution is key within this attribute of rhetoric. The importance of identifying with and constructing appropriate messages that coincide with an individual's subjectivity is to limit skepticism. It is difficult at times for people to accept that the world can be different from how it is now—this is potentially a byproduct from the forces of alienation. However, with the proper means, ideas can become realizable, skepticism can fade away, and critical consciousness can be attained. We can apply the notions of appropriateness to the concept of content and how content must be adjusted according to every situation. Street art is a peculiar subject to refer to as rhetorically effective. But in my opinion, street art is an appropriate method of communicating revolutionary ideals and critiquing the spectacle because of its ability to reach its audience. Street art is an art form that is exceptionally obtrusive. It isn't stowed away in a museum in order for the elite

class to enjoy. There are no barriers for access. Because of this ability to be always present for anyone, I believe street art is the appropriate form for revolutionizing consciousness and critiquing the spectacle. Combating the spectacle must be done in a way where critics must fight it at its own game. The wholly encompassing fantastical images that cover society's streets, buildings, screens, and literature, must be pushed back with the exact same force. This moves us closer to the unitary urbanism and psychogeographical affordances that the Situationists theorized about. Street art will appropriately seize the means of producing a new environment. An environment which will be artistic and bestowed with meaningful critique.

I think one of the most beautiful concepts of a Sophistic rhetoric is the belief that a speaker, or in this context, a meaning maker, has the ability to provide an audience a world that is not deemed presently possible to individual's current material conditions. The details of actuality make the world seem limited and its potentially is essentially invisible. An effective rhetorician has the ability to essentially turn the invisible visible, to bring what is feared nearer, to push the present into the future, to take what's concrete and show its pluralities, to show the follies of believing in an equivocal universe especially when this universe can be altered by human action and human cognition. "The rhetorician is not confined to a single movement. After he captures the appropriate and places it temporally, he moves toward the suggestion of the possible" (Poulakos 42). If street art is indeed, an appropriate form, which can produce appropriate content and be

produced at the rate of the spectacular, I believe the images being produced can compete with the spectacle and even promote their projects as potentialities. It is necessary for an effective rhetor to make the transformative nature of our reality possible. “The starting point for the articulation of the possible is the ontological assumption that the main driving forces in man’s life are his desires, especially the desire to be other and to be elsewhere” (Poulakos 42-3). Understanding the concept of desire allows us to better understand two important things—the nature of the spectacle and how to combat it. If what Poulakos is saying has any merit, it is safe to say that an individual who is in the process of meaning making has the ability to provide for his spectators/listeners/readers the opportunity to take part in a new form of desire. The spectacle has managed to convince society to desire the images behind things more than things themselves. If that’s possible then it is possible for an individual who takes appropriate measures in respects to content and timeliness to provide individuals with new ways to desire, and hopefully, in the case of for street art, to desire in ways that we have never imagined before or that we have lost touch with.

Finally, after establishing the object of critique—the spectacle—and discussing the effective ways of making meaning within a Sophistic context, it’s important to return to the methodology of critique as established by the Situationists. The primary mode of critical production developed the Situationists is probably the idea known as “détournement,” In the “Definitions” essay the term *détournement* is glossed as follows:

Short for “détournement of preexisting aesthetic elements.” The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres. (Dahou et al.)

Essentially détournement aims at preserving elements that are easily recognizable but shifting their appearance and affect in order to construct new meaning. The hope of effective détournement is push the object of critique to the background while bringing the desired critique to the forefront. In respects to critiquing the spectacle, détournement can take elements from politics, the media, commodities, political figures—any desired spectacle—and retain its image while skewing its nature so the spectacle may drift away in respects to importance and a new reality can be established.

An article published by the editorial committee of the *internationale situationniste* #3 titled “Détournement as Negation and Prelude” discusses how détournement functions as an effective method of critique. “Détournement has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old and new senses” (Constant, Jorn, Sturm, Wyckert). The efficacy of détournement derives from its ability to preserve and critique, to physically alter the material

condition of the spectacular into a new reality. Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman offer a form of *détournement* that is most relevant to street art and its effectiveness, “In closing, we should briefly mention some aspects of what we call *ultradétournement*, that is, the tendencies for *détournement* to operate in everyday social life” (Debord and Wolman). In their essay they refer to *ultradétournement* as being entwined with basic signs and language. This could involve the alteration of a linguistic signifier in order to create new meaning—the kind of practice commonly used today in the creation of memes. What I find important in this conversation is the importance of having a *détourned* object existing in everyday life (as we say with Hirschhorn’s use of objects and images related to Gramsci in his installation). In connection with Banksy, the reason why I find street art—especially his—compelling is due to the fact that it *détourns* the material conditions of our reality, placing critique in a space where it becomes an everyday object that may have an impact on culture and a city’s psychogeographical affect.

Banksy manages to manipulate the environment so that the material conditions of our existence are radically altered by his art. Finding his art on a telephone booth, or on the walls of a bank, or in a subway makes the art essentially inescapable, but it also stops your engagement with the real world and forces you to observe. Banksy’s work ruptures the monotony of everyday life and places subjects in a position of observing art, versus walking directly to work or to the store. Alongside of Banksy’s constant critique of culture and politics, his

work literally détourns the material conditions of our reality, which I feel situates him quite nicely as a revolutionary artist within a Situationist framework, attempting to construct utopias in the minds of his observers.

In Figure 1. Banksy critiques the idea of spectacularization. There is a fear that technology will distract individuals' from living and experiencing their lives to the fullest, that their desire to record moments will get in the way with actually living through experiences. In fact the concept of recording events, for many people, is bringing more life to those events than the event itself. We're currently living in a society where the record of the thing itself is greater than the thing itself. Of course, whenever something is recorded it can be spectacularized--elevated to a greater degree of importance--and shared with many. At the same time, urban architectural achievements have become idols unto themselves. People visit the Eiffel Tower for the purposes of visiting the Eiffel Tower. Even in the act of being a tourist or a spectator we are being placed in positions of passivity. The goal is to absorb whatever man made phenomena has been constructed for the purposes of enjoying it intrinsically without understanding why.

In their article "Rhetoric and Materiality in the Museum Park at the North Carolina Museum of Art" Kenneth Zagacki and Victoria Gallagher rhetorically analyze the complex and interwoven spaces of the North Carolina Museum of Art. Their research claims that "the move from symbolicity to materiality involves a shift from examining representations (what does a text mean/what are the

persuader's goals) to examining enactments (what does a text or artifact do/what are the consequences beyond that of the persuader's goals) and, as Carole Blair suggests, to considering the significance a particular artifact or text's material existence: What does it do with or against other artifacts? And how does it act on persons?" (Zagacki and Gallagher 172). This move from the purely symbolic importance of a text or artifact to its materiality is exceptionally important when discussing how potential Situationist projects can be materialized into and implemented effectively in the real world. The Situationists were essentially radical realists—their critiques need to exist in the most material form possible in order to generate the conscious liberation that they desired. That being said Margaret LaWare and Victoria Gallagher "...suggest that material rhetorics contribute to discourses of public identity by inviting visitors to see and experience landscape (or physical context) around them in new, and very much embodied ways" (as cited in Zagacki and Gallagher 172). The recursive nature of material rhetorics allows us to analyze exactly how environments are affecting individual's subjectivities and how they too can go about affecting their world in new ways.

I turn to this article specifically for the methodology that Zagacki and Gallagher construct in order to discuss in a more concrete fashion the rhetorical complexity of these spaces and their potential affect on visitors:

we argue, through two material enactments of the human/nature interface that we characterize as "inside/outside" and 'regenerative/transformative.'

By “inside/outside,” we refer to the experience of moving (1) between constructed spaces, such as a museum space or an urban landscape, to less constructed, more organic spaces such as the outdoor park or the rural landscape; and (2) between what we refer to as natural history and human history. By “regenerative/transformative,” we mean moving (1) from natural states to human-constructed states and back again to nature, and (2) from one state of understanding to another. The capacity to create spaces of attention that call forth particular experiences reveals the potential rhetorical impact and reach of the Museum Park’s material forms.

(173)

The framework established here is specifically most affective when discussing these specific spaces—not every material space will have an inside/outside which would lend itself to phenomenological observation. However, for the purposes of this project, I find it important to reflect on how the "static/dynamic" enactments produced by the space harboring Banksy's work functions as a method to produce the "concrete/utopia" enactment by *détournant* expectations of space via messages whose kairotic nature—its location in time and place—and content create a specific psychogeography which can revolutionize our expectations and engagement with the world.

The reason why I find Figure 1. so important is its ability to actually *détourn* the material conditions of a spectator's surroundings. The static spaces—curbs, cliff sides, cement fixtures—become transformed by Banksy's

graffiti. His graffiti produces a dynamic enactment for the space itself—he proves that these spaces do not have to be fixed in their design, they can be altered. The concrete aspects are the a priori assumptions of what this space affords—space creates a place where photos can be taken for the remarkable view. However, an utopian enactment is generated by the content of Banksy's statement. Expectations are détourned via the denouncement of a photo opportunity in a place where a photo opportunity is normally evident. Instead, this appropriate denouncement appears in a space and at a time where a specific situation was going to occur but shifts the attention to other possibilities—a move towards a more realizable idea, an idea outside of spectacularizing a moment. If an individual were attempting to record this moment and stumbled across this piece, their spectating opportunity is completely ruined by this statement. Rhetorically speaking, this piece is situated appropriately within a perfect shot of a spectacular object, but at the same time it places individuals in a position of rethinking the opportunities available to them. If the material environment that surrounds you claims that the action you're partaking in is not appropriate perhaps it may place individuals in a position of rethinking actual available opportunities. Perhaps there's a part of Parisian culture that could provide individuals with an incredible experience outside of the capitalistic tourist affairs. There could be valuable experiences outside of photographing a bridge, or a tall building that could teach us something. This piece successfully, and appropriately, détourns the space, which in our minds is meant for one thing, but

can lead to another. It places individuals in a position of having to become agents of new potentialities if they take the graffiti to heart—a new exigence is constructed through the act of experiencing a dynamic and utopian enactment.

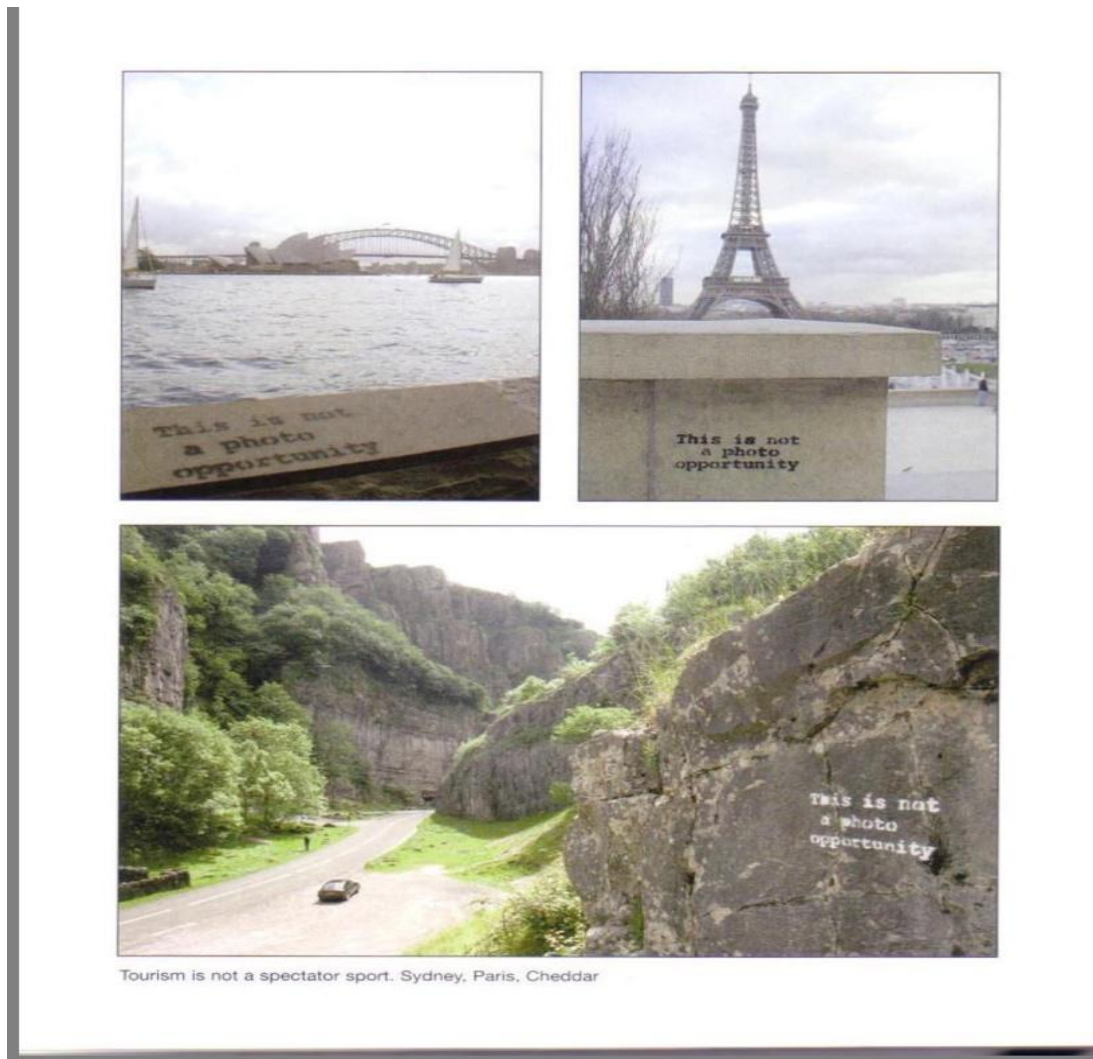


Figure 1. *Tourism is not a spectator sport* (Wall and Piece 100)

Figure 2. détourns the concept of advertisement, which saturates any available wall or billboard in an urban environment. His piece produces a "static/dynamic" enactment by making it evident that the material conditions of our reality are not owned by corporate advertising. He situates individuals in a moment of architectural juxtaposition, where the claimed spaces of advertisement is disrupted by an artists' work, expressing the type of potentialities evident when we abandon the concrete perception of our reality, and realize that a unitary urbanism—an environment constructed by the people—is a realizable notion; the utopia emerges from shifting the possibilities of space. In Banksy's book *Wall and Piece*, he discusses the negative influence that advertisers have in the world. Products are advertised in a way to sell fantasies, to sell ideas not products. Advertisers provide individuals with images of a more perfect life with a certain product, whether it be the ability to achieve a more perfect body, to increase the ease of living in a stressful world, or to entice people into buying into things that will somehow make them happier. However, Banksy doesn't find all this appealing, he says "Screw that. Any advert in public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours. It's yours to take, re-arrange and re-use. You can do whatever you like with it...They have re-arranged the world to put themselves in front of you. They never asked for your permission, don't even start asking for theirs" (Banksy 160). This piece critiques the spectacle of advertisement in a way that rhetorically situates it as always appropriate. By using the phrase "Another crap Advert" Banksy is implying here

that all advertising is a waste of our attention, it doesn't matter what the content is, it is all equally as vacuous as this vague statement. The beauty of this phrase is that contextually speaking, it critiques the form and space that an advertisement takes up. regardless of what spectacular image inhabits this space it is all "crap" and should not be worth our attention. I believe that détourning this space itself, what seems to be a bridge over a busy road, approaches the psychogeographical utopia that the Situationists were after. This piece places city dwellers in a position of having to rethink their relationship with the content of their city. It places individuals in a position of having to rethink the importance of, and actually affect that advertisements have on their lives. Instead of being passive observers of the images and phrases that congest their roadways and buildings, perhaps people will become greater critics of the images that surround them and that they have to see on a daily basis.



Figure 2. (*Wall and Piece* 103)

One of Banksy's more heroic and political endeavors has to be his work at the West Bank segregation wall in Palestine. In *Wall and Piece* he claims that "Palestine has been occupied by the Israeli army since 1997. In 2002 the Israeli government began building a wall separating the occupied territories from Israel...Palestine is now the world's largest open-air prison and the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti artists" (Banksy 110). This wall functions as a perfect spectacle of power and "security". Nations around the world raise

barriers between them and other countries for the sole purpose of expressing their power and providing their citizens with a false sense of security. In Palestine's case, this wall has been a barrier for a better life. Many who believe that the concept of barriers are an effective measure for security never take into consideration the lives that they are harming on the other side of the wall.

To protest its existence, Banksy has placed numerous pieces on the wall. However, the one that stands out the most to me is the image in Figure 3. A child with a ladder attempting to escape to the other side of the wall really calls into question the damage that this barrier creates for the Palestinian people. The static dimension of this wall—from the Palestinian position—is that it exists permanently to separate them from the rest of their country, however, Banksy's work produces a dynamic enactment, one which places this spectacle of power in a vulnerable position. It forces individuals to battle with its concrete materiality and to recognize the utopian potentialities of escape and freedom. For the outside world it places us in a position that makes us question the integrity and ethics of this wall—hopefully the message is powerful enough to create within the minds of millions an agentic enactment, one where individual's fight for the rights and potentialities of the Palestinian people. Rhetorically, this piece seizes a kairotic moment and places individuals within a new temporal dimension, where time is spent focusing on escape, freedom, sovereignty, and for the hope of a better future outside these barriers. The kairotic appropriateness of this piece comes from the exigence constructed by the enactment produced by the

juxtaposition of the spectacle of security on contradistinction with an image of escape. For those unaware of the political and humanitarian strife suffered by the Palestinians this piece places us in a position to think and imagine a world where walls between nations don't exist. This art détourns the material conditions of this wall from a spectacle of security, to a spectacle of imprisonment. For individuals who don't understand the lives and conditions of the Palestinians behind this wall, Banksy's art builds within the mind of his spectators a world of entrapment always striving for liberation. Oddly enough, the utopia for the Palestinian child, is the world that citizens of the west live in, a world with the freedom of movement, expression, and most importantly, safety. Banksy's art here actually builds a world for westerners, a world of imprisonment that we don't understand, but have to be confronted with in order to begin protesting anti humanitarian acts. In this sense, Banksy builds a dystopia out of our concrete understanding of the world—the world that exists is the world that should exist— in order for us to empathize with the Palestinians and strive for the utopia of freedom.



Figure 3. (*Wall and Piece 117*)

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, my hope for this project is to successfully demonstrate how the Situationist philosophers have concepts and ideas that can assist in understanding how we can revolutionize consciousness. Banksy's work—in my opinion—functions as the revolutionary product that could arise from a Situationist project. Due to the nature of Banksy's art existing in our urban environments it allows the artist to partake in constructing a unitary urbanism, one where members of the city partake in constructing its potential psychogeographical affordances. Banksy's works carry weight, within them we can find a critique of culture that brings the spectacle to the forefront and détourns its importance in our world. Banksy shows the importance of a Sophistic and material understanding of rhetoric in respects to constructing meaning. Banksy's works are timely, they occupy a space, their content is appropriate in order to critique the world we live in, and most importantly Banksy shows us possibilities. Through the construction of enactments by détourning our static world into a dynamic one and by destabilizing our concrete understandings of the world Banksy creates the space for utopias to become realizable and actually places individuals in an agentic moment where action is inspired. Imagine a world, a utopia, where Palestinian children are not trapped inside of a concrete containment cell. Imagine a world where we weren't so busy desiring objects and ideas on screens, and lived life directly and to its fullest, instead of

living to record the spectacles around us. Imagine a world where animals were not objects of our entertainment. Imagine a world where individuals helped each other, where the rich extended their hands to the poor, where the sheltered provided a space for the homeless, and most importantly, where our indignation is replaced with empathy.

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