The *Spectacular* Death of the Subject in Guy Debord's Philosophy and Georges Perec's *Les Choses*

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I. Introduction

This essay examines the dystopian vision of the post-modern, post-Marxist world that pervades Guy Debord's philosophy and Georges Perec's first novel *Les Choses*. Debord and Perec describe a universe of simulation in which genuine happiness and meaning have fallen by the wayside buried deep underneath an avalanche of consumerist simulacra that concretize the totality of our quotidian existence. The ubiquity of the signs of the good(s) life that we devour incessantly has led to the complete "*falsification of social life*,"[1] or a disquieting situation in which "all social interaction is constituted through hyper-rituals which themselves no longer refer to anything other than themselves […] the commercial and the real are one in the same" (Debord, *La société du spectacle* 63, italics in original; Hancock and Garner 177). Owing to a structural adaptation in the capitalist paradigm, which will be briefly explored later in the essay, Debord and Perec posit that purchaser citizens all around the world exchange empty codes that are void of any real significance outside of the all-encompassing informational matrix. Not only did this "shift from production-oriented capitalism to consumption-oriented capitalism" enable the capitalist system to survive and expand to the farthest corners of the globe, but it also blurred the already tenuous distinction between reality and its representation even further (Stratton 212).

According to Debord and Perec, the postmodern subject now dwells in a world of *spectacle* in which we are constantly bombarded by signs imploring us to obey the summons to consume in consumer republics.[2] Given that there is no exit from this onslaught of image-based (hyper-) reality linked to the acquisition of objects laden with purely symbolic value accosting us from all sides in front of our television, smartphone, or tablet screens, Debord and Perec reach the disconcerting conclusion that post-truth metanarratives have proliferated themselves to such an alarming extent that they have effectively replaced commonplace reality. Since real life could not possibly live up to the chimerical standards of the grandiose fantasies that flicker across our screens, this erosion of the real has left behind a bitter trail of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and existential malaise. Unable to distinguish between an authentic state of contentment and contrived representations of happiness, Debord and Perec lament "the inevitable fate of all those who mistake the image for reality" (Leak 130). The gap between the seductive images of success, fulfillment, and luxury that have allegedly been placed at everyone's fingertips in late capitalism and reality is so great that the "Promised Land" is nothing more than a "desperate quest for happiness" that is doomed to fail from the onset (Perec 25; 116). In simple terms, the endless acquisition of commercial signs of happiness does not actuate a true state of contentment after the ephemeral euphoria of the purchase fades. Debord and Perec affirm that we are witnessing the *spectacular* death of the subject unfold in front of our eyes in an inescapable realm of simulacra in which the logic of the code has permeated all facets of social life, thereby effacing reality in the process. Given that the indoctrinated consumer citizen has nowhere else to turn when the goods and services that she/he acquires do not deliver on their lofty promises, the elusive quest for happiness is more fraught with peril than ever before. Even if their main point is

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somewhat overstated at times, Debord and Perec paint a rending portrait of the ontological anguish experienced by the postmodern subject that is drowning in a deluge of simulacra. It is in this sense in which the tragic *dénouement* of *Les Choses* should be understood.

II. Contextualization of Guy Debord's Post-Marxist Thought: The Origins of Late Capitalism and the Post-Truth Era

Guy Debord attempts to probe the origins of this impoverishment of the human condition throughout his philosophical and cinematic *œuvre*. Similar to Jean Baudrillard, Debord concludes that the roots of this ontological crisis are inextricably linked to the advent of late capitalism. Faced with a situation in which "all of the basic needs of the mases have been satisfied," capitalism suddenly found itself in a state of crisis (Messier 25). For a system predicated upon the principle of constant growth and expansion, it had to adapt in order to survive. Debord's "severe indictment of contemporary capitalist culture" is emblematic of an effort "to revitalize the Marxian project in response to (these) new historical conditions" (Kaplan 458; Best and Kellner 131, my insertion). When the limits of production had been reached, Debord theorizes that the ceaseless reproduction of images would allow capitalism to tap into a well that would never run dry. Specifically, marketers began to obfuscate the difference between needs and desires in a calculated attempt to peddle mindless fantasies representing a symbolic paradise that has never existed anywhere with the exception of a digital screen to a new proletariat.

It is by design that the postmodern subject is saturated with the kind of (dis-) information that permits the monetary wheels to keep spinning at all times in multinational capitalism. If clients did not impulsively drink "the nectar of simulation," the fantasy-based structure of late capitalism would collapse (Cline). As Adele Flood and Anne Bamford's analysis of the birth of late capitalism underscores, "Needs are created by objects of consumption and exist because the system needs them" (92). Debord does not mince his words about the nefarious effects of this transmutation within capitalist societies. Illustrating that the class struggles outlined by Marx have been exacerbated and transformed in a brave new world revolving around the dissemination of (dis-) information as opposed to production, the philosopher decries "the disastrous result of the general evolution of the economy" (Debord, *La société du spectacle* 11). In his influential reworking of Marxist theory connected to changing historical conditions, which inspired many participants of the May 68 revolution in France, Debord reveals,

> The victory of the autonomous economy must at the same time be its loss. The forces it has unleashed suppress the *economic necessity* which has been the immutable basis of former societies. When it replaces it with the necessity of infinite economic development, it can only replace the satisfaction of the first summarily recognized human needs by an uninterrupted production of pseudo-needs which come down to the sole pseudo-need for the maintenance of one's reign. (*La société du spectacle* 45-46, italics in original)

The philosopher bemoans the conflation of pseudo-needs with actual necessities like food, shelter, and companionship, because these exploitative signs now stand in for reality in the imagination of brainwashed purchaser citizens. Debord traces the origins of the post-truth era back to this fundamental shift in capitalism. The ultimate goal of his group *Situationist International* (SI) is to interrupt the flood of commercial signs in which we are submerged at nearly every waking moment in order to liberate the human subject, at least momentarily. As the final section of the essay will investigate, one of the counter-hegemonic techniques that the philosopher proposes for contesting the forceful imposition of hyperreality is what he calls *la dérive* (the drift).

III. Contextualization of Georges Perec's *Les Choses*

According to the author himself, *Les Choses* is "not primarily intended to be a condemnation of consumer society itself" (Leak 131). Nonetheless, Perec offers a dire assessment of what it means to

live in a consumer republic centered around the consumption of images that are disconnected from reality and which create their own alternative version of it in his first novel. Perec's somber depiction of the "[e]xistential subject in postwar France" where "identity and historical consciousness pass into the vacuous world of signs" closely mirrors the deep-seated anxiety expressed by Debord (Herman 113; 113). Published in 1965, *Les Choses* could be described as a destabilizing "sociological document" that realistically portrays how the ideology of consumerism has spellbound the masses through the force of simulation (Bénabou and Marcenac 20). Compared to the author's later experimental works such as *La vie mode d'emploi, La Disparition*, and *Espèces d'espaces*, Perec adopts a rather traditional style in *Les Choses*. However, the writer's dire warning about how the aforementioned transformation within the capitalist paradigm has hollowed out our grasp of reality and appreciation of existence represents a subversive interrogation. For the protagonists "Jérôme and Sylvie, who have dropped out of the university to take jobs as interviewers collecting data on consumer preferences," hyperreality has essentially substituted itself for the real for all intents and purposes (Strickland 32). Their search for happiness will ultimately fail, because they cannot escape from the omnipresent confines of the universe of simulation. After trading one utopian image for another at the end of the novel, Jérôme and Sylvie decide to accept the banality of their existence as consumer robots. They appear destined to slip deeper into an existential abyss with each passing day in a post-Marxist world in which the nexus of power emanates from seductive images that are grounded in hyperreality.

IV. The Imposition of Hyperreality and the Proliferation of Post-Truth, Consumerist Metanarratives

Although the phenomenon of hyperreality tied to social control over the populace is not a novel problem, as evidenced by the bread and circuses of the Roman empire, Debord and Perec demonstrate that millions of people around the world no longer possess "the capacity to distinguish the real from the hyperreal and simulated" (Hancock and Garner 169). They contend that modern technology has allowed the simulators of hyperreality to conceive the most elaborate informational matrix that seems to know no bounds. Simulations have proliferated themselves to such a point that the postmodern subject is now trapped in a web of stray signs, or a "prison of representation" (Berger 10). Debord highlights a nightmarish vision in which "[s]uch is the extent and power of commodity fetishism by 1967 that it no longer makes sense to refer to it as an illusion. The result [...] is the complete dominance of representation-the 'spectacle'-over what had been thought of as 'reality'" (Hawkes 169).

As the philosopher explains in thesis six from *La société du spectacle*, "The spectacle, understood in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing world of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, its added decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of real society [...] the spectacle constitutes the present *model* of socially dominant life" (17, italics in original). Twenty-one years after the publication of *La société du spectacle*, Debord insists that the realm of spectacle is even more pervasive in *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*. Maintaining that we have arrived at a critical stage in which the real has withered away, Debord declares, "The integrated spectacle shows itself to be simultaneously concentrated and diffuse [...] When the spectacle was concentrated, the greater part of surrounding society escaped it, when diffuse, a small part, no part. The spectacle has spread itself to the point where it now permeates all reality" (*Comments on the Society* 9). Not only does Debord's pessimistic outlook recall Baudrillard's concept of "integral reality," "or the final stage of simulation" in which the hostile takeover of the real is complete, but the philosopher's position is also reminiscent of the concept of the post-truth era (Barron 394). With nothing standing in their way, commercial signs of the good(s) life have eclipsed concrete reality. Evidently, the notion that there is no longer any frame of reference at all for peeling back the thick layers of simulation that have eroded our connection to anything that exists *outside* of representational networks is hyperbolic. Nevertheless, recent events like the January 6th insurrection in the United States have unfortunately validated Debord's main premise. The angry mob that stormed the capital building during this *coup*

d'état was worked up into a frenzy by simulacra disseminated from QAnon, Breitbart, InfoWars, and Trump's infamous Twitter account. Given that the claims made within these (dis-) informational vectors were so absurd and easy to disprove with nearly irrefutable evidence, it is hard to deny that post-truth metanarratives are part of the new human condition in the digital era.

Decades before most other authors were addressing this subject, Perec offers a fascinating and troubling literary depiction of this phenomenon. Jérôme and Sylvie are victims of simulated reality like some Trump supporters who live in a parallel universe. Unable to resist the lure of "these scintillating images, all these images which arrived in crowds, which rushed in front of them, which flowed in a jerky, inexhaustible stream, these images of vertigo, speed, light, triumph," "these characters try to find fulfillment semiotically, but signs can never satisfy them […] Their desire leads them only to the pursuit of signs which can never take away the void in their being" (Perec 114; Petruso 56). The author reveals in an interview that he was motivated to write *Les Choses* because of his conviction that we were already on the verge of living in a post-truth society in the sixties. Perec confesses, "the words I use do not designate objects, or things, but *signs*. They are images" (Bénabou and Marcenac 28, italics in original). These commercial signs have hijacked all aspects of social life in *Les Choses* including the culinary tastes of the protagonists reflecting pre-packaged models of what it means to have a good meal. Jérôme and Sylvie's attempts to breathe life into these artificial signs fail at every turn whether they are enamored with certain types of food or something else. As David Walker notes, "the world of Jérôme and Sylvie in *Les Choses* is nourished by mere appearances. Their approach to food is symptomatic […] The exotic or elaborate or extravagant appearance hides the fact that the ingredients are really quite humdrum" (33). Walker observes that Jérôme and Sylvie's culinary elitism, which finds its origins in a world of simulation, is a microcosmic reflection of a much greater problem: the disappearance of the real. The protagonists in *Les Choses* inhabit a spectacular universe in which "[r]eal experience […] must now bend a knee to the simulation" (Poster 240).

Before the internet revolution that would take screen-based reality to another level, Debord and Perec suggest that "television is the ideal medium of the hyperreal world" (Coulter 28). For the postmodern subject sitting in front of a TV screen passively devouring images of success, luxury, and contentment, "the possibility of distinguishing truth from falsehood" has been severely weakened (Hawkes 155). Debord hypothesizes in this sense that "the uptake of television was decisive to the society of the spectacle" (Stratton 211-212). Debord attacks the sensibilities of the viewer in his experimental films by presenting nothing but a blank screen for long periods of time in an effort to force us to reflect upon "the ubiquity of networks of screens, consoles, images and data flows" through which our experiences are filtered (Archibald and Lavery 109). Debord posits that television and cinema profoundly revolutionized global society on a deep structural level within the capitalist system. When televisions started to enter nearly every home, the "material infrastructure" of the capitalist paradigm would never be the same (Smith 7). Debord's conflictual relationship with TV-cinema articulated in essays like "With and Against Cinema" should be understood in this context.

Perec's description of the hegemonic force of TV-cinema in *Les Choses* is in keeping with Debord's declaration that "cinema is the central art of our time" (qtd. in Smith 7). As the narrator elucidates, "They were moviegoers; they indulged in it almost every evening. They loved the images, because they are beautiful, they lead them, delight them, fascinate them" (Perec 59). Since televisions often stay illuminated throughout the entire day in many households, this passage resonates with the reader. Moreover, even when the television is not switched on, we are often in front of another screen in the age of information. For Debord and Perec, the problem is that these utopian images, especially the cliché Hollywood happy ending or the Disneyfied version of existence, only bare a vague resemblance to real life. Despite this disconnect, we internalize these semiotic codes that form the basis of our social relations with others. As the narrator reveals, "The screen lit up and they quivered with delight […] the images jumped […] It was not the film they had dreamed of […] Or, more secretly no doubt, that they would have liked to live" (Perec 62). The reality of human life with all of its imperfections pales in comparison to the simulated euphoria on our screens. For this reason,

Jérôme and Sylvie continue to chase an inaccessible, cinematic fantasy despondently hoping to forge a path for realizing these "perfect moments" (Day 255).

As market researchers, Jérôme and Sylvie are important cogs in a larger system of (late) capitalist exploitation. Hence, it would stand to reason that they would not fall prey to the cinematic barrage of "signs of happiness" that they help to conceive (Frank 207). In spite of this internal knowledge related to how the system operates, they "succumbed to the signs of wealth: they loved wealth before they loved life" (Perec 25). Compared to the simulated consumerist utopia on their screens, their actual lives cannot measure up. In the words of the author himself, "What poisons the lives of Jérôme and Sylvie is the tension between these minor moments of real happiness and the art of living they dream of" (Bénabou and Marcenac 26). The enticing force of the image is so strong that these archetypical representations of the postmodern subject will turn their back on the possibility of finding actual happiness, as they slide deeper into a hyperreal caricature of the good(s) life. Striving to attain an illusory ideal that originates from the realm of simulation, Jérôme and Sylvie begin to lose touch with anything real. As the narrator explains, "Admittedly, there was still, in the somewhat static image they had of the model house, of perfect comfort, the happy life, lots of naivety, much indulgence: they forcefully loved these objects that only the tastes of the day said were beautiful, these false images [...] They still dreamed of owning them [...] They knew what their happiness would be, their freedom" (Perec 27). Inspired by the prefabricated models that are presented to them in *L'Express* magazine, the protagonists endeavor to acquire as many metonymical pieces of this consumerist vision of happiness as possible including a Chesterfield couch.

V. The Death of the Subject Drowning in a Deluge of Simulacra

In addition to the fact that this middle-class couple is not wealthy enough to buy the vast array of products that their hearts desire, their search for happiness in the universe of simulation reduces their intrinsic worth to nothing but market commodities themselves. The "fake spectacular choices" that fuel their consumerist reverie are merely "artificial realms of pseudo-agency" that have stripped humanity of any kind of genuine subjecthood in the philosophical sense (Debord, *La Société du spectacle* 107; Langman and Morris). Debord deconstructs Georges Bataille's concept of the "sovereign spender" that allegedly possesses the ability to influence market forces through the power of the purse strings by reminding us that the system itself creates all of the choices (Bennett 269). Instead of enabling us to express genuine individuality, Debord argues that "all of the *selected goods* by the spectacular system are also weapons for the constant reinforcement" of an economic system that depends on incessant consumption (*La société du spectacle* 30, italics in original). Each prepackaged model is a "representation of different types of personality" linked to the purchase of clothing, electronic gadgets, fashion accessories, and other products that portray purchaser citizens as "having equal access to the totality of consumption, and finding their happiness there in the same way" (Debord, *La société du spectacle* 56). Since these supposed expressions of individuality are manufactured out of thin air by the simulators of hyperreality, "the *humanism of the commodity* [...] 'the complete denial of man' has taken over the totality of human existence" (Debord, *La société du spectacle* 41, italics in original).

Drowning in a deluge of simulacra from which there is no escape, Debord concludes that we can no longer relate to others in a meaningful way or define ourselves outside of the (dis-) informational matrix. The litany of simulated objects that we consume connected to consumerist visions of happiness and models are on the brink of effacing the subject entirely. In reference to this "collapse of the distinction between subject and object," Debord asserts, "The economic *Id* must be replaced by the *I*. The subject can only spring forth from society, that is to say, out of the struggle within society" (Best and Kellner 145; Debord *La société du spectacle* 46, italics in original). Alone in front of our screens longing to satisfy the pseudo-needs that the system creates to sustain itself in the form of *personalized* models, Debord contends that our relationship to the world and others is replete with

deadness and despair. From a philosophical angle, it is no longer possible to know thyself, or to constitute a stable sense of Self, in a hyperreal society where objects with purely symbolic value now define subjects. As Black Hawk Hancock and Roberta Garner underscore,

> The subject/object is obliterated in a world where there are no longer stable coherent meanings, no knowable coherent world. The notion of an "independent" reality vanishes into a world of simulations where all significance and meaning comes through the entertainment codes, norms, aesthetics, and values of media culture in which everyone now evaluates selves and others' behaviors, ideas, identities, according to the now dominant hegemonic ideals. (174–175)

Debord theorizes that the inception of a post-truth society has not only imploded reality, but it has also transformed human beings into empty shells on an ontological level. Decrying this impoverishment of the human condition in late capitalism, Debord declares, "It's the concrete life of everyone that has been degraded in the *speculative* universe" (*La société du spectacle* 24, italics in original).

Perec also implies that there is nothing *spectacular* whatsoever about living in a world of spectacle in *Les Choses*. Behind the veil of simulated glitz and glamor, Jérôme and Sylvie "feel utterly 'erased' by commodity culture" (Oniki 114). Their allegiance to "a code or model that finds its origins outside of concrete reality" prevents them from having a true awareness of the Self that has not been implanted by an endless stream of commercial signs (Jordan and Haladyn 253). The aforementioned publication *L'Express* informs them about how they should think and act in accordance with preexisting models. As the narrator divulges, "they were *L'Express* people, they read it […] they absorbed it […] *L'Express* offered them signs of comfort […] They dreamed, in low voices, of Chesterfield sofas. *L'Express* dreamed of it with them" (Perec 47). Based on this description, it is apparent that Jérôme and Sylvie engage in very little (if any) critical reflection about the images that they seek to transform into reality. Furthermore, the narrator indicates that they belong to a social group that closely aligns to the model(s) presented in *L'Express*. As opposed to being autonomous individuals, the protagonists in *Les Choses* are blind sheep that follow the bewildered herd. Explaining that there is no subject of which to speak with either Jérôme or Sylvie, the narrator adds, "the group they formed defined them almost entirely. They had no real life outside of it" (Perec 54). On a structural level, Perec suggests that all we have left is "loose associations of people focused on consumer goods" that have replaced any semblance of individuality (Stratton 211). This situation is the same ontological degradation to which Debord refers.

Incapable of defining "themselves as individuals," Jérôme and Sylvie suffer from Sartrean nausea at the end of the novel (Strickland 32). After following the crowd in their passive consumption of image-based (hyper-) reality, the protagonists are struck by strong feelings of existential *ennui* and emptiness. The narrator discloses that "they felt neither joy, nor sadness, nor even boredom, but sometimes they wondered if they still existed, if they really existed" (Perec 138). Although the idea of a sentient being questioning her-his very existence may initially appear to be ludicrous, Perec's main argument is cogent. Perec is evidently alluding to the Debordian-Baudrillardian death of the subject, or the commodification of the human experience, in late capitalism. When commercial simulations take the place of reality, the human subject becomes yet another piece of merchandise.

VI. The Tragic *Dénouement* of *Les Choses*

Given that Debord would ultimately commit suicide in 1995 as a last-ditch effort to expose the fantasy-based structure of the signs that have profoundly altered what it means to be human in late capitalism, he is hardly the eternal optimist. Regardless, as the name of his organization *Situationist International* implies, Debord maintains that it is possible to create *situations* in which the flood of banal images that define the postmodern subject can be momentarily interrupted. When the "unreflective reception of representations" is temporarily suspended through counter-hegemonic techniques, the philosopher hypothesizes that at least a kind of rudimentary critical reflection can occur outside of the informational matrix (Bueno 57). No matter how daunting the predicament appeared

to be in the age of (dis-) information, Debord never gave up on the possibility of resuscitating or reconstructing the human subject. At the beginning of "a position statement titled report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency," Debord announces, "First we believe that the world must be changed. We desire the most liberatory possible change of the society in which we find ourselves confined. We know that such change is possible by means of pertinent actions" (Trier 69; Debord qtd. in Trier 69). The postmodern subject may be on the threshold of symbolic death in the world of spectacle from which nearly all meaning has been abolished, as illustrated by Jérôme and Sylvie's fictitious saga, but Debord "challenge(s) us to invent ways to subvert and transform" contemporary capitalism (Best and Kellner 153).

One of the counter-hegemonic strategies for resisting the imposition of hyperreality promulgated by Debord that would soon catch Perec's attention in later works like *Un homme qui dort* was the notion of *la dérive* (the drift). Without any predetermined objective, the drift was like an aimless stroll designed to permit the subject to experience the urban space dominated by commercial simulacra at every turn differently. As Carly Lavery summarizes, "In Situationist parlance, the drift was proposed as a walking practice that sought to perform the city differently [...] the drift was originally intended to place the body at the heart of the city. The aim behind this re-corporealisation of everyday experience was to posit physical sensation in the city as something collective, pleasurable, and political" (173). Debord provides the following operational definition of his concept of the drift in the essay "Theory of Dérive": "one or more persons during a certain period (who) drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there" (Debord qtd. in Lavery 173, my insertion). It should be noted that these seemingly purposeless promenades are non-representational in nature. Instead of trying to conceive an alternative representation of the world and our place in it, *la dérive* "functions as a kind of strike against representation or a monkey wrench in the system of image production" (Shukaitis 259).

Perec's epitextual comments demonstrate how intrigued the author was by some of the counter-hegemonic initiatives of the SI, especially the drift. When asked by a journalist how he writes, the writer confesses, "I like to work outside. I am a bit like the Situationists a few years ago: I start from a place which is generally quite far from where I live, and then I walk for a very long time trying not to follow the paths that I know or I take to the small streets. Sometimes it can be amazing" (Perec qtd. in Rémy 6). The author Daniel Williams, whose first novel was inspired by *Un homme qui dort*, elucidates that the theory of the drift plays a major role in the final pages of this narrative. The protagonist of *Un homme qui dort* is a rebel who attempts to contest the empire of signs through *la dérive*. However, his efforts to subvert the system of representation in which he feels encapsulated fail miserably. As the narrator reveals on the last page,

> You have learnt nothing, except that solitude teaches you nothing, except that indifference teaches you nothing: it was a lure, it was a mesmerising illusion which concealed a pitfall. You were alone and that is all there is to it and you wanted to protect yourself; you wanted to burn the bridges between you and the world once and for all. But you are such a negligible speck, and the world is such a big word: all you ever did was to drift around a city, to walk a few kilometres past façades, shopfronts, parks and embankments. (Perec qtd. in Williams)

Two years after the publication of *Les Choses*, Perec simultaneously valorizes and problematizes the Situationist idea of the drift.

The reader is left with no facile optimism that the narrator will find an authentic path outside of the universe of simulation in *L'homme qui dort*. The situation is even bleaker in *Les Choses* for Jérôme and Sylvie. After exchanging one empty image for another, the characters seem resigned to their terrible fate. To be more precise, a picturesque image of the bucolic life in rural Tunisia convinces Jérôme and Sylvie to move to North Africa for approximately a year. Hoping to find refuge from the consumerist reverie that concretized their daily life in France, "They dreamed of living in the

countryside, safe from all temptation, their life would be frugal and simple" (Perec 120). This misguided adventure would soon culminate in failure, because the couple falls into the same trap of conflating utopian images with actual reality. The vision of the simple life in rural Tunisia that they discovered on brochures and other tourist materials is just as disconnected from the real as their consumption of models in *L'Express*. In this regard, Leroy Day affirms, "This view of rural life is obviously idealized and is an extension of, rather than a solution to, their dilemma" (255). Jérôme and Sylvie have accomplished nothing with the exception of trading one "void lifestyle" for another (Georgescu 13). Upon their return to France, they accept their ontological status as consumer robots or puppets. Leaving little room for doubt about Jérôme and Sylvie's destiny, the narrator declares, "their solitude was complete" (Perec 134).

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, Debord and Perec mourn the *spectacular* death of the subject and the erosion of the real in their harrowing portrayals of consumer culture in the sixties. They depict a ubiquitous world of spectacle mediated through a plethora of screens that is on the precipice of erasing reality altogether. Even if their dystopian tableaux take it a step too far at times, researchers from numerous disciplines have now validated their central claim. In a post-Marxist world revolving around the transmission of images denoting the good(s) life, it is undeniably harder for many people to discern between reality and its representation. The representational crisis to which they allude is all too real at the dawn of the post-truth era. From a social and psychological standpoint, Debord and Perec demonstrate that the birth of hyperreality coinciding with a fundamental shift in the capitalist paradigm has resulted in an existential crisis of epic proportions. Without any meaningful way of relating to others or defining ourselves outside of prefabricated models, they proclaim that the death of the subject is just around the corner. Debord and Perec endeavor to inspire forms of counter-hegemonic resistance to the new image-based world order, yet they admit that commercial signs have already commodified many facets of our quotidian existence. For instance, it is debatable whether the counter-hegemonic technique of *la dérive* is very effective at all in a world awash with a tidal wave of simulacra. Nevertheless, Debord and Perec suggest that we have no choice but to struggle against the realm of signs, given that reality and meaning are at stake.

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Notes

[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[2] I am borrowing this expression from the historian Lizabeth Cohen. See *Consumers' Republic*: *The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*.

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