Social Club, Social Life, Social Media:
The Spectacle of Existence

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Abstract

We live in a physical reality which has merged seamlessly with a digital reality. Technology is praised as a solution to our problems, but is always spoken as if it is in some near future. *Chatsubo* examines this phenomenon with the lens that our near future is happening now, that technology—our promised savior—has been co-opted for surveillance in our daily lives. In order to circumvent these technologies, such as computer vision, one must become more of a spectacle by donning a cyberpunk fashion and style that disrupts its ability to identify you. This projects creates digital and physical camouflages to obfuscate and disrupt our shared data by utilizing false locations interacted with real ones. Using social media as its platform for creating 'realness', *Chatsubo* stages its whereabouts using geolocation and active accounts on Facebook and Instagram. Our image is actively mediated through social medias' algorithms, where the spectacle rises to the top—receiving the most engagement. With this project's undertaking I pose the question, "What extent do we need to go through in order to protect ourselves in today's world while still participating in society?"

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How to read this paper:

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I) Situationists

1

Situationist Internationale is an art movement born out of the writings of Guy Debord's most prominent work, "The Society of the Spectacle"—written during the years of civil unrest in France. Most notably The Situationists influenced the 1968 protests and general strikes.[2] Debord's works resonates in our current time more than ever with social media being our most used news source—delivering information to us via algorithms based off of our contacts and interactions on the web. There is not a more fitting description of our era and the way our social interactions occur. In this current political climate, it is very important to express the discontent with how our data and privacy are being handled. If We are not heard, we must create new situations and protests against how capitalism is continuing to commodify our every form of existence.

2

Debord's criticism revolved around late capitalism, specifically the spectacle and its proliferation of commodity fetishizing, building off of Marx's earlier work. He defines the spectacle as the mediated image across mass media.[3] I would further expand this to social media, as it continues to become a more pervasive form of media in which we participate in and consume. This is the basis of self-design—being the spectacle and 'curating' your online image. The Situationists worked mostly with found object and literature, believing everything was already made and just needs to be recontextualized and contemporized to fit the new context.[4] We are now hyperconnected and able to exchange our lives immediately, however, this too has been co-opted and commodified. For example, take a highly curated Instagram account: it uses everyday objects (like furniture, coffee, and books) to create an ideal image of yourself, reinforcing your life as spectacle. Taking those few moments to adjust, move, and arrange to get the perfect composition and lighting to maintain your spectacles' context.

II) Dérive

"Dérive's involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll."

- Guy Debord[5]

3

Inspired by the practice of the *Dérive*, or drift, were a deliberate way of navigating the urban environment. Dérive's goal is to have an unplanned walk through the city—being mindful to avoid main streets—and let what catches your attention allow you to experience ambiances quickly.[6]

4

Drifting through the city inspires ways to make subversive situations. The Situationists used Dérive as a technique to combat the malaise attributed to late capitalism, and to become more aware of the spectacle.[7] Take a walk: experience your city in a way that discourages the use of pre-existing urban environments (the same ones that force you to participate in capitalism). Dérive grants permission to witness your environment in a new way, seeing the different ambiances the city has to offer. Dérive is a radical notion in a world that encourages the ideas of consumption as enjoyment. [8]

5

This practice can be taken to the digital realm as well, which I title *Digital Dérive*. As a way to keep our own spectacle broad and flexible, Digital Dérive blends a concept started by the Situationists into our daily digital life.

6

Find a space to start (anywhere in a forum, group, or video) and travel around jumping quickly from text/image/video to drift from genre to genre. This keeps algorithms which gather data moving and attempting to market the correct image.

7

This is the algorithm that continues to try and narrow down who 'we' are while reflecting the created spectacle. Digital Dérive, in the same way the Situationists' Dérive combatted capitalism, challenges socially mediated types of targeted advertising. In addition, it creates a more diverse version of your spectacle/avatar, camouflaging the true self.

III) Détournement

"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."

- Guy Debord[9]

8

The most commonly used process by the Situationists was *Détournement*—a technique of using found objects, text, and imagery to remix, chop, and edit into new context.[10] This technique has inspired much of today's digital culture of remixing, mashing and recontextualization through its use of the meme.[11]

9

The meme splices, cuts, and pastes images / icons into a new situation and meaning—distancing them from their original context. Although, even memes have been co-opted by corporations to capitalize off the proletariat's (a subset of the working class that recognizes it's the working class) culture and ideas.

IV) Constructed Situations

"The constructed situation was thus envisaged as a 'lived', embodied, dynamic event, the outcome of which (its success or failure) was not knowable in advance of its particular manifestations... Such a risk and uncertainty is perhaps indicated by the multifarious tactics deployed, which seem to defy any careful calculations as to expected outcomes."

- Frances Stracey[12]

10

Often seen as interventions to the capitalist structure, the Situationists would create ambiances and environments which they called *constructed situations* as a way to turn capitalism in on itself for critique.[13] These 'situations' varied from propaganda created from popular culture and text to graffiti in the streets.

11

Constructed situations follow Détournement, which follows Derive--taking from the spectacle's image and remixing it to fit your needs. All three are acts against the spectacle—taking back the iconography being sold to us, giving us the ability to reclaim our icons, and making it our own culture again. Through the creation of new content and images, we reframe the lens through which we see the spectacle.

V) Vaporwave

"Hypnagogic pop and vaporwave both like to manipulate their material to defamiliarize it and give it a sense of the uncanny... and... have an eerie tendency now and again to turn trash, something shallow and determinedly throwaway, into something sacred or mystical."

- Adam Harper[14]

12
Vaporwave spawned from the inner depths of chat forums and music sharing platforms.[15] The subculture has grown and developed a very specific aesthetic, leaving it stagnant and often repeating a very small selection of its iconography. It has been compared to the practice of Détournement because of its remixing with preexisting pop culture imagery.[16] Vaporwave started as a music genre often sampling from 80's lounge, smooth jazz, and R&B. Artists on the internet would slow down and layer the samples giving it a smooth and dreamlike quality. The major hit of the genre was "リサフランク420 / 現代のコンピュ (Lisa Frank 420 / Modern Computing)" by Vektroid, sampled from "It's Your Move" by Diana Ross.[17]

13
Vaporwave can be viewed as a reaction to our consumerist, corporate, and capitalist culture.[18] This critique on 80s-00's capitalism is often about the icons that give nostalgic feelings in reaction to the spectacle. Vaporwave recaptures our youth and collective identity produced by the products designed for us and sold to us. This is where vaporwave resonates as reflection of everything the Situationists argued for—recapturing the icons and images the spectacle has created to turn it on itself.

14
Alongside this musical genre came the visual aspects that used key icons to cut, paste, and recontextualize into 'edits'. These aesthetic elements can be defined by the use of Arizona Iced Tea juxtaposed with Fiji water, ferns, grids, busts, neon lights, pinks and blues, with a lo-fi quality.

15
Vaporwave's uses the concept of Détournement to co-opt the spectacle of our childhood, often resulting in an absurd image. The icons and images are a part of our collective identity shared through this subculture. These edits are a reaction to becoming aware of the spectacle that is used to sell us products.

VI) Cyberpunk

"We are those strange people, almost unknown to the neighborhood. People, indulged in their own thoughts, sitting day after day before the computer, ransacking the net for something. We are not often out of home, just from time to time, only to go to the nearby radio shack, or to the usual bar to meet some of the few friends we have, or to meet a client, or to the backstreet druggist... or just for a little walk"

- Christian As. Kirtchev[19]

16

A world unified by digital technology—and its ability to connect the masses—has been a promise of the internet from its beginning. It pledges to create avenues for anyone to be able to express, share, and manifest their ideas, all thanks to our hyper connected world.[20] The world is controlled by technology and consumerism with a notable distinction between upper and lower class. The Cyberpunk manifesto, which expounded the internet's ability to liberate us from the controlling ideology of government, has been all but forgotten.

17

In this dystopian world, the upper class controls the lower class by ownership over technology and its information. This gives way to the subculture of the cyberpunk--one who works underground amidst the inner workings of technology to create disruptive tools.

18

We now live in a world where our everyday lives have become a much desired source of information. Your face, your locations, even your mundane daily activities have become valuable data available to anyone who will pay. Social media networks exacerbate this phenomenon by curating and disseminating information gleaned specifically from our shared data. This puts the idea of connecting people secondary and makes marketing and connecting to advertisers a primary goal. Technology, the same technology that promised us infinite freedom, has now become our shackle.

VII) Spectacle

19

Debord defines the spectacle as the mediation of relationships between people through images. When *The Society of the Spectacle* was written Debord considered the spectacle to be mass media (television, magazine, and newspapers).[22] This was long before the rise of the internet, web, and social media being present in our daily lives.

20

The spectacle connects to social media and its heavily mediated image via algorithms and our own participation. We as participants inside of this area act as both the spectacle and mediators of image. During this process social media feeds off of our own spectacle to sell as capital furthering its connection to late capitalism. Famous people use these platforms to create over-the-top personas/characters/avatars which are 'genuinely ingenious' in order to seem more appealing to the masses.

21

One example of this type of spectacle is Danielle Bregoli--a 13-year-old girl or better known as the "Cash me ousside girl." She came to fame after a video of her on the Dr. Phil show went viral, in which she threatened the entire audience by exclaiming "Cash me ousside, how bout dah!?" This 'performance' gave Bregoli fame in many ways--both in the digital and physical space. Her Instagram, (at)BHADBHABIE, has over 7.8 million followers who consume and interact with her validated online spectacle.[23] This validation opened the door for Bregoli to embody her own spectacle, reflecting of her own mediated image of her idealized self. It was the perfect storm of the spectacle compounding on itself. Due to this she has been able to leverage this fame by gaining access into the music industry and start a career as a performer and model.

VIII) Self-Design

22

Bregoli's spectacle is exactly what Groys is talking about in self-design, however, I disagree that the spectacle has to be "genius = swine". Although, it does need to be an extreme or a pushed extension of the fabricated persona.

23

A model against this idea is Boxxy (Catie Wayne), who manifested in the early days of YouTube and Gaia Online. Wayne created the Boxxy character who was energetic and excitable.[25] She was not 'swine' but an extreme fabrication as an extension of herself, proving it is possible to create a spectacle that breaks the 'genius is swine' set forth by Groys.

24

This enacting of the fabricated persona is the virtual representation of the spectacle you create through self-design. To be clear, this is not a stand in for you but an extension of yourself.[26] This is where the connection lies with the spectacle and the avatar threaded together with the practice of self-design. We want to create an image of ourselves shared through these platforms to exercise our self-expression all while the image is being reflected back to us to be refined and shared again.

25

A key component to the project is the possibility for engagement by means of photography. In particular, the everyday person's mediated image is how we currently construct the ideal self. Everyone consciously or subconsciously participates in self-design--turning their everyday leisure into both props and data to be sold back to them, effectively making their own spectacle that reinforces commodification. If you continually post about a particular brand, you feed into the idea that you are a consumer who cares about brands you consume. These actions create situations that promote the brand, you as a spectacle, as well as your data. Often when a photo is implemented across social media, the user will take the time to stage their photo. These constructed situations reinforce commodification, however, through subversion the user can utilize the medium as a means to resist.

IX) Late Capitalism

26

At its core the Situationist Internationale was an anti-capitalist group, which took the stance that they could not separate art from politics. The Situationists analyzed and criticized how capitalism degrades our everyday way of life. At the time, automated production continued to become more efficient and they argued that the continued effort of the proletariat was absurd.[28] This questioned the idea that the worker continued to work as a means of survival, but with the automation of production, it furthered the triviality of their work.

27

Making both your time at and outside of work a commodity, reaffirms the idea that working is a need for survival--you need the money from your job to buy product that will make you happy. These spectacles--mass media--continues a cycle of commodification. While we are not at work we continue this loop by participating in the spectacle that is social media. We present our lives in a self-designed way, while social media collects data, and sells it to corporations which encourage us to buy more product.

28

Even our moments of leisure have been commodified as a way to target and sell to us. Your attention is commodity.[29] Your likes are commodity. The lingering moments on a photo are commodity. Your everyday life is now a commodity inside our current capitalist cyberpunk dystopian society. This is something we all play into--it is almost impossible not to--unless you actively decide not to participate in society.

29

What if we took this as an opportunity to play into the system and create false environments and data that when viewed online appear real? This is a subversive action against capitalism, data collection, and the 'always on' lifestyle. Flooding your data with misinformation creates a way to hide through data obfuscation. This is an attempt to be an active member in our digital society while providing a certain amount of freedom.

X) Chatsubo

30

The project comes at previously presented ideas from various angles, but at the core, it is a reaction to our own online commodification. Flowing from a variety of techniques and materials as a way to create a convincing and believable online situation, Chatsubo works in whatever medium necessary to create new fabricated situations. These spaces exist in both the physical and digital realms--just as the Situationists saw fit to produce what was needed. Chatsubo shall do the same regardless of the material and its physical capabilities. This includes but is not limited to: chairs, bars, tables, lightings, images, CGI, and audio. The props do not have to be perfect, just believable.

31

As someone who identifies and takes delight with the digital age, but also wants to uphold Cyberpunk ideals, I am required to create a social camouflage. One that allows me to move freely within the spectacle while participating in the new, mediated online social experience.

32

The branding efforts are a mix of blending Vaporwave and Cyberpunk aesthetics together. Chatsubo pulls from the iconography of vaporwave (color scheme, marbling, Greek busts) and Cyberpunk (neon signs, tech, and the urban environment). This creates an umbrella of a technology and data burdened society aware of its own consumerist agenda.

33

Chatsubo targets an audience who has invested into the current tech-focused society. Anyone who spends time on the internet and wants to disrupt, play, and proliferate image online. The situation doesn't have to exist in the physical or digital, but rather anyone can create a Chatsubo themselves with the provided style guide.

XI) Social Media

"First in the history of advertising there have been similar moments. It seems that about every 30 years or so there's a kind of revolt. Usually because things have gone too far in one way or another and I think in some ways things have gone too far in the web. That there is just too much, too intrusive, too much privacy invasion and people are starting to say, you know, this is not what I bargained for."

- Tim Wu [31]

34

Social media as a medium can influence a high number of viewers quickly with little effort. It can be used to inform and show users whatever they want to perceive, using the same techniques advertisers and viewers use on a regular basis. The name Chatsubo was chosen as reference to the William Gibson novel "Neuromancer". In the novel, there is a bar for expatriates, hackers, and netrunners called Chatsubo.[32] I appropriated this name as a way to leverage my social media by targeting people who have engaged Facebook with the interests with Cyberpunk and William Gibson.

36

Chatsubo created a business profile page and added in only little, vague information. The description states, "Portland-based Cyberpunk Bar & Lounge" with no additional details. An Instagram account was created with the same phrasing and branding as the main image mediation platform. I have purposely kept the images vague and cropped to give the idea that this establishment has physical location. The images are taken of the actual props built for the physical installation, but with some fabricated digitally and rendered using photorealistic techniques. The opening of the bar and exhibition will be live streamed in order to further establish Chatsubo's online community.

37

Chatsubo created an event that coincides with the opening of the practicum show. This was to reinforce the idea that it is a real bar and to generate interest around the event. Social media is so effective that $10 was enough for the one ad to reach over 2,700 people and have over 814 people interested in attending the event. This data provides evidence that a mediated image can garner traction as long as it targeted and branded in a cohesive way.

38

The digital media efforts are continued by creating additional promotional materials, outside of Chatsubo's branding, for the Practicum show. The purpose here is to separate myself away from Chatsubo furthering the idea that my practicum is not the bar but some vague unexplained project. This creates two narratives: 1) a disassociation from me as Chatsubo's creator, and 2) me as an employee at Chatsubo.

XII) Performance

"Oh, got me, no…I mean I think that it does have a lot to do with what Brittany said about how you just don't meet girls like her you don't meet anyone as nice and sweet and kind and compassionate and forgiving and loving and angelic as she is one hundred percent of the time and I mean of course 4chan. Thanks babe."

- Catherine Wayne (Boxxy) [33]

39
Pushing my own spectacle persona, I designed a costume that is branded with the aesthetics of Chatsubo. As well as the outfit, my hair and makeup will be stylized using the CV Dazzle guidelines developed by Adam Harvey.[34] This type of styling continues the ideas of data obfuscation by obscuring my face and preventing computer vision from detecting and continuing to catalog my appearance.

40
This suggests and hints towards the fashion that is often associated with Cyberpunk, but also creates the persona of a 'digital shaman'--making my own spectacle a further and more extreme version of myself. I create my spectacle as a way to guide viewers into buying into the event so it can continue past its opening. The performance and live stream engage Chatsubo's main audience--people of the internet--to push my self-design even further. As stated before, a successful spectacle needs to be an extreme extension of yourself.

XIII) Space

41
The physical location of the 'bar' is to give the viewer a chance to interact and share their experiences, if they chose too. There will be geolocation allowing them to tag themselves across Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Designed to be photographed, shared across social media, obscure / disrupt your data, and as a means of social capital--Chatsubo sets the stage to give small moments for photography. It stages these moments using colorful lights to saturate the 'bar' and mirrors for selfie opportunities--allowing the viewer to engage in their own spectacle.

42
Chatsubo acts as way to disrupt your data by allowing anyone to check in, photograph, and share at a bar that pseudo-exists. The project fabricates and proliferates the image as an act of subversion against surveillance and data collection, using Détournement. From physical props to computer generated images, everything created has the intention to make Chatsubo look like a physical establishment online. The tangible elements reinforce the notion that the computer generated images could be from actual cameras.

XIV) Next Steps
43
There is a lot of flexibility for the future of Chatsubo.

44
Following the same information and guidelines provided in the rest of the manifesto, Chatsubo can take on many forms by anyone who wishes to engage--reincarnating as a cafe, bookstore, or park. The more people that play and join Chatsubo, the more real it becomes--creating larger data sets.

XV) So Aesthetic

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