SPECTACLE AND TRUMPISM

An Embodied Assemblage Approach

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For Pamela

Certainly there are themes that recur. Perhaps a sense of secret patterns in our lives. A sense of ambiguity. Certainly the violence of contemporary life is a motif. I see contemporary violence as a kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfillment in America. Again we come back to these men in small rooms who can't get out and who have to organize their desperation and their loneliness, who have to give it a destiny and who often end up doing this through violent means. I see this desperation against the backdrop of brightly colored packages and products and consumer happiness and every promise that American life makes day by day and minute by minute everywhere we go …

Don DeLillo, interview in *Rolling Stone*, 17 November 1988, reprinted in DeLillo, 1998, p 329

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Notes on the Author

Jacob C. Miller (PhD University of Arizona) is a critical human geographer who focuses on the cultural, political and urban geographies of consumption. His work brings contemporary theories of affect, emotion and assemblage into conversation with critical urban studies around the neo-liberalization of space and the dynamics of post-dictatorship consumer societies in Argentina and Chile. He has also worked collaboratively to advance new perspectives on the geopolitics of tourism, retail, architecture, borders and borderland regions. His work can be found in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Geoforum* and *Consumption Markets and Culture*, among other journals. He is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences at Northumbria University, UK.

Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2016, I began working as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Arizona with Vincent Del Casino Jr on contemporary geographies of tourism, geopolitics and theories of spectacle. As the US presidential campaign accelerated into the autumn, we were amazed to see what seemed like a new kind of politics of spectacle unfolding in front of our eyes. Nevertheless, I was stunned at the election result and felt further conviction that theories of spectacle deserved another look. The seeds of this book were sown in the many conversations we had over the course of the two years we worked together. Thank you, Vin, for your support. Also, thank you, Melissa Vito and UA Initiatives.

As Vin and I worked to reconstruct the spectacle, I began collecting newspaper articles, somewhat inadvertently at first, from *The New York Times*. Earlier in the year Pamela ordered a subscription that included home delivery on the weekend. As she and I constantly discussed and hashed out the details of what was happening in the world, the hard copies of the newspaper would pile up in the corners of the apartment, as either essential reading for later or material for a possible project such as this. Thank you, Pamela, for supporting this crazy project and for your influence on my thinking, which is undeniable. This book is therefore dedicated to you.

There are many others who deserve acknowledgement for their indirect involvement with this project. First, I thank the School of Geography and Development at the University of

Introduction

> In a world that *really* has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood. (Debord, 1995)

> It is true that war kills, and hideously mutilates. But it is especially true after the State has appropriated the war machine. Above all, the State apparatus makes the mutilation, and even death, come first. It needs them preaccomplished, for the people to be born that way, crippled and zombielike. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 495)

This book examines an element of Trumpism that has received little attention to date: the link between consumer culture and politics. What is this alleged link? Everything involved in the emergence of 'post-truth' society. While these linkages have been stewing intensely for several decades, the intrusion of Donald Trump's post-truth spectacle into the formal political sphere at the highest level has caused massive disruption, fear and resistance. No theory is required to recognize the flourishing of this post-truth politics: headline news and tweets from President Trump will suffice. While previous politicians have used similar techniques in communication and performance to gain power, and while he is not the first

celebrity candidate, Trump's presidency has taken post-truth into new territory, notable for its articulation with the far right. The alarms have sounded, and we scramble to respond and, for some more than others, to survive.

Where did post-truth society and its politics come from? Although theory is not required to recognize such trends, it can help understand them. Too many (myself included) were stunned by Trump's victory in the US Electoral College in November 2016. With hindsight it is perhaps easy to ponder how progressives, and especially radicals, should have anticipated his candidacy and done more to ward off such a dangerous confluence of forces. Yes, we should have taken the politics of spectacle more seriously – the brazen outlandishness, the media- and attention-grabbing performances, the horrifying content, the conspiracy theories and lies, all of which culminated in the perceived unlikelihood of an electoral victory. In an era in which the president labels evidence-based journalism that he does not like as 'fake news', Guy Debord's words (1995) resonate even more strongly: 'In a world that *really* has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood' (p 14, thesis 9, emphasis in original).

This statement may seem exaggerated or overinflated, but it is not part of some clever thought experiment designed to confuse the reader. Instead, it is substantiated in a full-blown criticism of capitalism and capitalist society. For Debord and the Situationists (1957–73), there would be a logical explanation for a Donald Trump presidency (see Zaretsky, 2017), namely, that capitalism has *always* relied on post-truth reality and its head-spinning coordinates. Debord's main problem is not just that we are surrounded by commodity spectacles of various kinds – films, TV, advertisements, a certain kind of city and so on – but that these had acquired new status in society at large, thereby causing a shift in the constitution of reality itself, a shift that naturalizes capitalist relations of power. It is the *society* part of the 'society of the spectacle' that matters most (Briziarelli and Armano, 2017; Rosati, 2017). As this

was gaining momentum in the post–Second World War era, the Situationists, perhaps counter-intuitively, lamented the destructive effect it was having: the erosion not only of non-capitalist spaces and possibilities, but of truth itself. Decades later, the politics of spectacle continues to dazzle, horrify and destabilize as much as to solidify and control the population in new ways.

Spectacle and Trumpism highlights how consumer culture paved the way for a political figure like Donald Trump. While Donald Trump is inseparable from the existence of a mass consumer culture under capitalism, few have elaborated on that aspect of his identity and rise to power. This is understandable, considering that Trumpism is driven by blatant white supremacism, nativism, sexism, xenophobia, misogyny and other authoritarian tendencies that require urgent attention, analysis and denunciation. Additionally, this book acknowledges a dispersed infrastructure of capitalist consumer culture – what Debord and others called the 'society of the spectacle' – which plays an important role in creating the conditions for the possibility of someone like Trump. In this way, Trumpism represents the horrifying potential of capitalist techniques of communication to fuse with and enable the far right. With Trumpism, the far right draws power from this key invention of capitalism itself. Fortunately for us, there is another modern theorist of spectacle who witnessed something similar take place before Debord's time. Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) was one of the first theorists of spectacle. Importantly for this project, he tracked a mysterious connection between consumer culture and the flourishing of fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. As we shall see, Benjamin's unusual style of thought is appropriate for the kind of contemporary approach sought here. Along with Benjamin and other more contemporary theorists, this book puts forward a new approach to thinking about spectacle that is important for understanding Trump and Trumpism, but also for how we understand consumption and consumerism more broadly. First, though, let us begin with

Debord's (1995) influential statement and its philosophical origins before turning to the critiques and the requirements for reconstructing the concept of spectacle for today's world.

What is spectacle?

Although the word 'spectacle' has become familiar in colloquial language and in some areas of academic thought, this book pursues the more specific meaning given to the term by Debord (1995) and others who were interested in the power of commodities in social and cultural life. There are two pithy and important definitions provided by Debord (1995) that deserve attention. First, 'The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (p 12, thesis 4). Second, 'The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image' (p 24, thesis 34, emphasis in original). Like much of the book, these lines are provocative and defy easy explanation. However, in both we find the power of an image to hold together, or to crystallize, a set of social relations that are based on violence and exploitation. This powerful image is an advanced version of Karl Marx's commodity, the figure that receives so much attention in the opening pages of the first volume of *Capital*. The commodity form conceals its geographical and socio-political origins and does so by replacing them with (1) a price tag (exchange value), and (2) more or less fictional accounts of what the commodity *is* and what it can do for you. *Commodity fetishism* happens when we believe these stories and allow them to shape our worlds, and ourselves, in intimate ways. The flow of commodities and capital relies on this existential operation. Spectacle, therefore, names an advanced socio-technical apparatus that makes this ever more present in our everyday lives, resulting in a kind of existential dispossession (Retort et al., 2005; Wark, 2013; Barile, 2017). One of Debord's contributions was towards the spatialization of the spectacle in everyday life, insofar as we participate in

any number of consumer practices that link us with each other in perverse ways (atomization, namely) and with precarious labour worldwide; today we hasten to add the ongoing environmental catastrophes that result from mass industrialism and its consumer society, always eager to expand in new and contradictory ways around the globe.

Commodity fetishism obliterates the truth from consumer consciousness and replaces it with something else entirely, an alternative image of a commodity without context – a commodity without culpability. An innocent commodity, an innocent self. *Herein lies the crucial link to post-truth society.* While capitalism might have been focused on the labour process to begin with, its complexity and expansionism have caused it to focus increasingly on life outside the factory. As many 20th-century Marxists have observed, leisure time outside of work had also become the target of capitalist enterprise, insofar as firms were increasingly preoccupied with brand recognition, marketing and consumer science research, to ensure the production of a subject to purchase the goods coming out of the factories. Andy Merrifield (2002) points to a key moment in capitalism when, not satisfied only with extracting surplus value from the labour process itself, it began to survey the landscape for these opportunities. The young Marx, he points out, still saw a division between work and home, home being where the worker could still 'feel himself' (Merrifield, 2002, p 104). In Debord's time, things were different:

> Debord now adds that workers are no longer at home even when they're not working; they're no longer themselves at home, given that work and home, production and reproduction – the totality of daily life – has been subsumed, colonized, invaded, by the exchange value. 'The spectacle,' he notes, 'is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life' (Thesis 42). (Merrifield, 2002, p 104)

In this onslaught, the commodity form becomes ever more pervasive in society and comes to mediate everyday life and social relations. Eventually the power of things shifts from the things themselves to the 'signs' of things that circulate around them. This increasing power 'representation' is an important aspect of the spectacle that is often misinterpreted as a kind of one-dimensional hypnosis that washes over passive observers (Goss, 2004, 2006). What thinkers like Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) would do with these insights was not insist that consumers were 'duped' in some way, but that life was now fully lived through commodities and simulated realities, through which we imagine ourselves in new ways. Our own becoming is now guided by film, television and other agents of the spectacle. Although Debord (1995) clearly resents the spectacle for what it takes away and for what it denies, this alternative interpretation opens the horizon towards potentially exhilarating and even dangerous dimensions of life. The spectacle does not negate life but redefines it as an ongoing (re)production that now includes embodied experiences of simulacra (Grace, 2000; Miller and Del Casino Jr., 2018). Reality is not obliterated but becomes what Baudrillard (1994) called "hyperreality" (p 1): a real, everyday, lived and embodied experience (see Plant, 1992, for more on the differences between Debord and Baudrillard).

While some progressives and radicals have found critical inspiration in this way of thinking and have indeed proposed a less monolithic and totalizing version of capitalism and the capitalist state, conservatives have also aggressively pursued spectacle for their own ends. In recent decades, some scholars have suggested that the political right has become better at deploying spectacle for political ends (Massumi, 2002; Stiegler, 2016; Connolly, 2017). By the mid-1980s, near the end of his life, Debord provided an update of how the society of the spectacle had been further entrenched (Debord, 1990). Some of the revolutionary energy of the 1960s was eventually recaptured by the corporate apparatus. The spectacle, it seems, is capable

of anticipating and re-routing subversive energies back into the capitalist machine (Frank, 1997; Taplin, 2017). Consumer culture itself took on many new forms amid the fragmenting logics of post-Fordist and post-industrial capitalism through the 1980s (Harvey, 1989; Zukin, 1993). In this transformation, political culture began increasingly to resemble the familiar forms of entertainment in popular consumer culture, a transformation with far reaching consequences (Gabler, 1998; Symons, 2019; Wright, 2019) – namely the rise of Trumpism in the United States, but also Brexit in the United Kingdom and other troubling events worldwide (Davis, 2018; Brabazon et al., 2019).

One of the few scholars to elaborate on the connections between consumer culture, spectacle and Trumpism is Douglas Kellner. For Kellner, the concept of 'media spectacle' encompasses basically any particular media story or event that becomes a sudden sensation and grips the attention of large masses of people at the same time. Kellner's *Media Spectacle* (2000) explores the complex politics of meaning and representation found in the major cultural events of the 1990s, including the O. J. Simpson murder trial, Michael Jordan and Nike, McDonald's fast food around the world and the television show *The X-Files*. A final chapter also provides a historical trajectory of political spectacle beginning with the John F. Kennedy presidency (1961–3) and ending with George W. Bush (2000). More recently, Kellner (2016) sees the logics of spectacle clearly operating in the rise of Trumpism:

> Now in the 2016 election, obviously Donald Trump has emerged as a major form of media spectacle and has long been a celebrity and master of the spectacle with promotion of his buildings and casinos from the 1980s to the present, his reality-TV shows, self-aggrandizing events, and now his presidential campaign. Hence, Trump is empowered and enabled to run for the presidency in part *because* media spectacle has become a major

force in U.S. politics, helping to determine elections, government, and, more broadly, the ethos and nature of our culture and political sphere, and Trump is a successful creator and manipulator of the spectacle. (pp 4–5, emphasis added; also see Leeb, 2018; Geoghegan, 2019; and Kellner, 2017, 2019)

We now find ourselves living in a new kind of hyperreal state, one that is itself coming undone under the weight of the advancing disarray of the spectacle, or what Wark (2013) calls the 'disintegrating spectacle'. With Trumpism, this is a state advancing white supremacy in predictable ways (Gökarıksel and Smith, 2016; Pulido et al., 2019), but also a state igniting its own dissolution as Trump regularly attacks the institutions of democratic governance. The abrupt intrusion of spectacle into the highest political office in the United States is also highly disruptive of the state itself in some ways. As such, understanding it requires theoretical materials beyond those articulated by Debord and others, who have updated the many ways in which states use spectacle to gain and hold power today (Koch, 2018, among others). In other words, theories of how the state uses spectacle as a 'political technology' (Koch, 2018) can take us only so far in understanding what is happening with the rise of Trumpism and its complex links to consumer culture. To follow through with Kellner's (2016) observation that Trump rose to power on and through the rising power of the spectacle in cultural life, we need to borrow from a wider array of philosophical and theoretical resources that include but also go beyond Debord and his interlocutors.

Reconstructing the spectacle

While Debord's (1995) theory includes the coordinates of post-truth politics, it is also clearly outdated. In recent decades much scholarship on consumer culture has moved away from

theories of commodity fetishism and its overly structuralist and deterministic overtones. As an arena of life with which everyone engages in some way, the everyday geographies and sociologies of consumption include much more attention to the politics of identity and difference more broadly (Mansvelt, 2005; Stillerman, 2015) and are not restricted to what at times seem like the class-based analytics of Debord. For every mega-mall that substantiates the theory of the spectacle (see Goss, 1993, among others), there are countless 'tales of the unexpected' at the car-boot sale (Crewe and Gregson, 1998; also see Gregson and Crewe, 1997), for example, or any other alternative space of consumption that does not easily fit into the conceptual ontology of spectacle. Moreover, Nicki Gregson (1995) warned that an excessive focus on hyperreal spectacle risks reinscribing the 'masculine gaze' (p 137), albeit in the language of neo-Marxism. More recently, Mott and Roberts (2014) provide a similar critique of 'urban exploration' research, another conceptual area linked to Debord and the Situationists. Feminist geographies of consumption and the city look very different from the grim view of Debord, as many scholars have explored how gender shapes and is shaped by consumption (de Grazia and Furlough, 1996; Roberts, 1998) and the sexual and gendered dynamics of social reproduction as a consumption-related process (Gibson-Graham, 1996; Marston, 2000; Domosh and Seager, 2001; Rose et al., 2010).

Even inside the highly manipulative spaces of the shopping centre, cultural studies scholars like Meaghan Morris (1993) insist that life is not as predictable or dreadful as theories of the spectacle might suggest. A greater sense of agency and spontaneity is required to understand these spaces and the potential for people to actively make meaning with them (see also Fiske, 2010). In these studies 'consumers' appear much more independent, creative and even autonomous or 'sovereign' in the ways they appropriate the materials of spectacle and convert them into unique 'practices' (often following Michel de Certeau). Compared to these approaches the spectacle appears

as only one possible way of interpreting the diverse landscapes of consumption. An 'empirical turn' (Goss, 2004, p 372) had emerged by the end of the 1990s which explored the complex lives of consumers (also see Jackson and Thrift, 1995), often with the implication that these practices supersede, or at least complicate, any instrumental logic that might be found lurking in the architecture, design and management of a consumer-oriented post-industrial landscape (such as commodity fetishism). Geographies of consumption today are about so much more than just exchange. As Juliana Mansvelt (2005) puts it, they 'encompass a wide diversity of subjects: leisure, tourism, work, shopping, information technology, retailing, advertising; urban, rural, industrial and agricultural geographies; and studies of gender, ageing, ethnicity and sexuality' (p 11).

Might the logics of spectacle intersect with all of these? Perhaps. When scholars moved past the spectacle as a theoretical device, though, they seem to have left it behind almost entirely (see Goss, 2004, pp 376–7), with some exceptions. To me, it is surprising how few have explored a more nuanced and complex version of how spectacle overlaps with these other geographies of difference and socio-technical entanglement. What worries me most is that today we are faced with a reality-TV president who excels in the deployment of spectacle, who propagates so many outrageous propositions with dangerous consequences. *The spectacle, it seems, has snuck up on us.* Our response should not be to rush back and blindly embrace Debord and others. Rather, we should stage this re-engagement with and through the more pluralist agenda set out by critical approaches to human geography and other fields, especially those that are explicitly anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-imperialist and radical in a more general orientation (Hughes, 2020; Kinkaid, 2020; Cockayne et al., 2020).

The challenge of understanding Trumpism, in fact, relies on this operation. How do the logics of spectacle correspond to and resonate with geographies of difference and power, including white supremacy, patriarchy and other authoritarian tendencies? *Spectacle and Trumpism* works towards an answer

by engaging with recent scholarship that has made some progress in updating theories of the spectacle. The spectacle continues to lurk in spaces of consumption, from urban festivals (Gotham, 2005) and architecture (Dyckhoff, 2017) to infrastructures of retail (Lee, 2015) and tourism (McIntyre, 2012). These contributions add insight into the ability of spectacle to shape a multitude of spaces (also see Clarke, 2003). When so-called market forces are free to survey and prowl the globe, the materials of spectacle can show up almost anywhere. Interestingly, others in addition to Kellner (2016, 2019) have elaborated on the (geo)politics of spectacle in recent years. Retort et al. (2005) look to Debord (1995) in delineating the linkages between spectacle and the never-ending US-led 'War on Terror' in the post-9/11 era. The power of images in the global politics of the spectacle now intertwines with the racialization of Western empire, which shapes global flows of weapons, oil, information and media, along with other material relations of desire and sexuality (see Puar, 2007).

More recently, in *The Geopolitics of Spectacle* (2018) the political geographer Natalie Koch argues for the continued importance of spectacle for understanding the politics of urban development today. Rather than speculate on what the spectacle *is* necessarily, Koch (2018) puts forward 'a decidedly geographic approach' (p 3) that considers how specific urban spectacles emerge from and reshape particular geographies of connection, power and socio-spatial inequality. Much in line with the empirical turn, Koch's approach produces rich insights into the diverse uses and manifestations of spectacular urban spaces and imaginaries. An engagement with the theories of Michel Foucault leads to two insights that are important for conceptualizing spectacle today. One is that the spectacle often works through 'seductive' and 'productive' registers of experience, including 'pleasure, aspiration, and ideals' (pp 40–1; also see Allen, 2006; Bassetti et al., 2017; Briziarelli and Armano, 2017). There is no grim existential outcome that results from commodity fetishism as in Debord's original

statement, for instance. Second, the spectacle produces effects far beyond its own materiality (Koch, 2018, p 43). This is an important way to formulate spectacle as a 'political technology' that allows us to consider all kinds of political relationships across space and territory, including with 'unspectacular "Others"' (Koch, 2018, pp 13, 4). For Koch, the spectacle appears as much more unpredictable and diversely populated than some of the previous interpretations.

Building on this work, spectacle can be still further reconstructed. Rather than focus on how Trump uses technologies of spectacle for political purposes, *Spectacle and Trumpism* attempts to map the embodied connections between consumer culture and the arrival of post-truth politics. How the state uses spectacle is only one aspect of the problem. Additionally, I am interested in what contemporary spectacle is and how it changes the way that politics operate. While Koch (2018) articulates an elegant geopolitics of spectacular urbanism, the spectacle itself is left unexamined, as it is admitted that the approach is 'less concerned with the internal logic of spectacle and more with the geopolitics of how it has been adopted in certain parts of the world and with what effects' (pp 12–13; also see p 151). While this is a fine methodological decision and appropriate for the field study sites chosen by Koch (illiberal, resource-rich regimes in Asia and the Arabian Peninsula), the rise of Trumpism calls for a different approach that reconsiders the spectacle itself and how its connections to politics reshape how the latter function. To grasp this, and indeed to follow Koch (2018) in some ways, we need to borrow from other more contemporary theories to reimagine the spectacle, not as a monolithic whole but as a socio-technical machine whose influence is never guaranteed but is always threaded through the embodied and material dimensions of life. As an *embodied assemblage*, the spectacle itself can be thought anew and, hopefully, with new scope and potential to articulate with other kinds of alternative and radical politics.

Spectacle as embodied assemblage

> The spectacle is the key form of social control in present circumstances, but also a source of ongoing instability. (Retort et al., 2005, p 188)

Theories about consumption and society have also changed a lot since Debord's time. In short, landscapes of spectacle today include much more than images and their dense politics of representation. Those same critical concerns are now threaded through a different kind of world, one that includes expansive and all-encompassing built environments with 'smart' urban infrastructures; affective architectures and the materiality and atmospherics of design; the somatic impact of hand-held electronics and the linkages between hardware, software and brain chemicals like dopamine; phantom sensations that we often don't pay much attention to (affects) and fleeting emotions. Social theory today is less about the persistence of ideological hegemony and more about these embodied worlds, more-than-human connections and the affective and emotional dimensions of communication, discourse, ideology and everyday life. In short, diverse theories of 'assemblages' have pushed thinking past the over-reliance on representation since the 'cultural turn' and into new territories for thinking about how power operates today. The collaboration of Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–92) provides a cornerstone for this school of thought. They are appropriate guides for reconstructing the spectacle for a particular reason. In their eclectic body of work they provide a sophisticated theory of power that includes capitalist commercialization, an empirical and historical reality referenced specifically throughout their collaborative work, as well as in Guattari's other work on 'integrated world capitalism' (2009, part V; Guattari, 1995, part 1, and Guattari, 2008; also see Saldanha, 2017, pp 70–82). Their thinking has also been productive for some queer and feminist theories of embodiment (Puar,

2007; Colls, 2012) and other critical approaches to the politics of bodies, race and identity (Saldanha, 2007, 2010; Saldanha and Adams, 2012), thereby expanding the purview of their assemblage theory even further. Today, power flows through bodies, their environments and the intense embodied psychological spaces that emerge between them in formations of subjectivity. Assemblage theories point to these more-than-human coordinates of human life, as well as how affective phenomenon also shape political subjectivity today.

Conceptualizing the spectacle as an *embodied assemblage*, then, is one way of reconstructing the spectacle for today's post-truth scenario. As an 'assemblage', its effectiveness is never guaranteed and it must always operate through a set of more-than-human connections, including technology and the physical, built environment, as well as any other element of the consumer infrastructure. As 'embodied', the spectacle aims at stimulating our emotional and affective experiences, in which 'affect' refers to bodily sensations (ones we contain but don't always consciously acknowledge) and 'emotion' to the complex ways in which humans feel about the world (see Pile, 2010). As an *embodied assemblage*, the spectacle ceases to be a meta-concept that explains something and instead becomes the object of investigation itself that must be explained (see Latour, 2005; also see quotation of Gabriel Tarde in Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 255). Rather than asking about how the spectacle can be appropriated in many ways, this project re-examines what spectacle is and what it does in terms of impacting other areas of life, such as politics. There is no hypostasis here (Bauman, 1989), only action, dynamism, struggle and new frontiers constantly overturning and beginning anew, in a constant process of flows, blockages and complex interlinkages that include power relations of many kinds (Degen et al., 2010 and Woodward et al., 2012, among others).

Importantly, there is also a different kind of materiality to the spectacle that becomes possible with this approach. By re-examining spectacle in this way, we can better account

for the politics of affect and emotion, insofar as sensation and desire gain importance in a different way. These aspects of the spectacle have yet to be fully incorporated into our understanding of its geopolitical potential. As capitalism evolved through the 1970s and 1980s, Deleuze and Guattari (2013) were thinking of a similar, but at the same time very different, kind of political space as the one described by Debord and the Situationists (see Pyyry, 2019). While they report on an expanding capitalism and related state apparatuses, there is nothing of the deterministic universalism and sense of pessimism than some find in Debord (1990, 1995). Instead, the world sparkles in all its unpredictable constellations. Sometimes, and importantly for *Spectacle and Trumpism*, this sparkle is itself enrolled into new relations and modes of power. Following Culp (2016), there is a darker side to their theory that is important for understanding contemporary spectacle, one that goes beyond the common celebratory tone often found in literature on their work (also see Saldanha, 2017). This approach pushes forward that part of Koch's (2018) approach to the spectacle that acknowledges its 'productive' elements and does so with more attention to the role of affect, emotion and materiality in that process. As such, it draws more from Deleuze and Guattari (2013) and from those who insist that an assemblage approach must include a politics of difference (Cockayne et al., 2017; Kinkaid, 2020).

For instance, the parts of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) about the production of 'zombielike' people by the state apparatus are in line with the core critiques of spectacle. What do they mean when they suggest that the state apparatus makes the violence of war 'come first', when it 'appropriates' the so-called 'war machine'? At the heart of their philosophy is a kind of vitality to life that never stops pushing things along and therefore becomes the focus of intense regulatory pressures. They have different names for this vitality: line of flight, war machine, smooth or molecular space, and deterritorialization (among others). These figures are locked in constant interplay

with other figures that seek to control them, what are called the apparatuses of capture, striated space or molar formations, and re-territorialization (also among others). In seeking to govern the population, capitalism and the modern capitalist state work to anticipate a constantly churning material world, attempting to break its inevitable unpredictability. A state of constant *emergence* is the field of attention and prioritization. When the 'State appropriates the war machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013), for example, something happens that is very similar to what Debord (1995) says is going on in the society of the spectacle in terms of dispossession and neutralization. Once stimulated, the vitality of life is only then evacuated, leaving us eventually 'crippled and zombielike' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 495). Capitalism today seeks to intervene at the level of desire, thereby objectifying this intimate realm of humanity and bringing it into the sphere of commoditization (Paterson, 2005; Kingsbury, 2008). A politics of desire is at the core of their philosophy and is also what helps them explore the political violence of modernity, namely, the rise of fascism in early 20th-century Europe.

At the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) theory is the sparkle of difference itself (Cockayne et al., 2017), as an always exterior spatiality that evades control. Aspects of this reality can be brought under control, but never completely and never forever. Lines of flight, as expressions of chance, wonder and novelty, may lead to positive new forms of life, but may also become destructive, oppositional or antagonistic – by forming into the 'war machine'. For this project, the war machine is, in part, the potential for subversive flows that the consumer economy today feeds upon in the constant search for new sources of surplus value. While spectacle today continues to circulate via the images of marketing and social media, it has also expanded its toolbox in terms of how it engages the consumer to ensure such ends. In short, today's technologies of spectacle *intensify* the embodied aspects of place and space as important supplements to the commodity. Rather than insist on a new

form of alienation produced by the ongoing machinations of the spectacle, emotions and affects are intensified in new ways, thereby drawing consumer subjectivity into infinite loops that eventually lose their allure, if only in the eventual and perhaps planned obsolescence of the commodity (Thill, 2015). Meaning, representation and ideology still matter, of course, but are now distributed in a broader landscape that is richer in opportunities for imagining power and resistance, structure and agency, and so on. As we shall see, these technologies of consumption can intersect with and enable a far right politics with its own violent prerogatives. Other, more hideous, war machines can also be activated in such circumstances. Through its exterior relations, the spectacle infects politics itself.

While the war machine signals a kind of potentially destructive vitality at an individual level, it can also become a collective political danger. Fascism, for instance, utilizes this embodied politics to galvanize divisive thoughts and feelings that demonize an 'enemy other' that allegedly threatens the 'homeland' or some other hegemonic formation or identity. In the wrong hands, the line of flight becomes a 'line of death' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 268); it becomes a *fascist* war machine capable of mass destruction and horrific abuse (pp 268–9). *A Thousand Plateaus* helps us to update the spectacle not only as an increasingly affective and emotional consumer technology, but as a likely source of political epistemology for the far right, primarily through the proliferation of post-truth reality.

While not intentional, Retort et al.'s (2005) line is helpful for this version of spectacle as embodied assemblage: 'The spectacle is the key form of social control in present circumstances, but also a course of ongoing instability' (p 188). This is what *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) explores, a world where macro power relies on micropolitics of the smooth space, a world where new kinds of control emerge but also a world that can never be fully controlled (Read, 2003). Moreover, things and their assemblages have exterior relations, connecting with other assemblages in a generative process that

is impossible to predict or fully anticipate. Capitalism today is oriented towards these micro spaces of spectacle, from the affective impact of architecture and urban design to the sensation of electronics in our hands and on our bodies, including the neurology of software and its user interface design. As an embodied assemblage, spectacle is an invitation that is difficult to ignore or reject, thereby complicating our status as 'subjects' of consumption. It is not that we are entirely 'duped' or are entirely 'sovereign', but some complex reality in between (as argued in Miller, 2014, drawing on Zukin, 2004). Deleuze and Guattari provide the kind of vocabulary to explore such a space, as many of their key ideas involve multiple co-constitutive processes holding and producing space simultaneously (see my account of a shopping mall as an embodied assemblage in Miller, 2014). The power of consumption today calls for an updated version of subjectivity that transcends the 'duped' versus 'sovereign' dilemma. A different terrain becomes visible once we conceptualize the spectacle in such a way. Nevertheless, formal politics persists and as we shall see, puts the spectacle into action in disturbing ways.

Trumpism as fascist war machine

> Don't bring out the General in you! (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 26)

Spectacle as embodied assemblage also allows us to go beyond the formulation found in much recent use of the term 'spectacle'. While Trump is a product of the spectacle and certainly uses technologies of spectacle in his politics, he also presents something of a disruption. Trumpian spectacle is one of capitalism's lines of flight that destabilizes the normal functioning of the capitalist state as well as any number of long-standing geopolitical alliances (Page and Dittmer, 2016; Ingram, 2017). As a capitalist line of flight that is willing to question the coordinates of reality itself, sometimes in

absurdist ways, Trump has presented a nightmare scenario for the American state apparatus. 'Will the Presidency Survive This President?' asked *New York Times* contributors Posner and Bazelon in May 2017, when more than enough time had elapsed for Trump to make good on some of his most outrageous proposals during the campaign. When the spectacle forms a war machine that attacks the state from the inside, there may be no limit to what can be dismantled (Lebow, 2019). In this sense, the state apparatus is not appropriating the war machine, but is instead consumed by it.

What exactly is the connection between the spectacle and Trumpism? To continue plumbing this connection we turn to an early theorist of the spectacle who came before Debord, Deleuze and Guattari, and who saw a similar geopolitical problem evolving along with capitalist consumer society. Walter Benjamin focused on the urban experiences of the 19th and early 20th centuries and their crash course with fascism. His unfinished magnum opus, *The Arcades Project* [*Passagen-Werk*] (1999) – nothing less than 'the secret history of National Socialism' (Polsky, 2010, p 79) – chronicled the materiality of an emerging urban consumer culture in the wake of the industrial revolution. This history was 'secret' because it consisted of a material that, at first glance, appears unrelated to the topic of fascism. In seeking to understand the rise of Nazism, what made Benjamin look to the atmospheric commercial arcades of 19th-century Paris and other cities in Europe? The answer is the dialectics of urban spectacle which produces new kinds of space and subjectivity. More precisely, Benjamin observed the emergence of spectacle as the rule of the commodity in everyday urban life and the socio-cultural values compromised therein.

Rather than extinguish the psychological drama of myth in the face of modern reason, Benjamin saw something else happening in the emerging marketplaces and in the colonization of everyday life in the arcades. According to Susan Buck-Morss (1989), whose seminal interpretation of *The Arcades Project* guides this book, these spaces and culture

industries instead nurtured the psychological terrain of myth that occupied the imagination and embodied experience of urban space. Needless to say, this was a very different kind of consumer subject position than that described by Debord, or in Benjamin's time, by Horkheimer and Adorno, whom Benjamin relied upon but also clashed with philosophically. Benjamin's theory was that society was coaxed into a 'dream sleep' by the new technologies and their mythic possibilities, but they could always wake up some day to the catastrophes that modernity was churning out. The arcades appear grand but are not to be admired. Rather, they have to be confronted, and Benjamin saw his work as instrumental in that revolutionary process. The issue became even more urgent in the 1930s as the Nazis consolidated power, pushing Benjamin's theory and his life fatefully closer to geopolitics (Polsky, 2010).

In short, the same media technologies that were expanding with consumer capitalism could be used politically to direct mass populations in divisive ways. It is precisely the embodied dimensions of these media that make them dangerous. The population can be worked into a frenzy, often by focusing attention on a demonized 'other' and encouraging antagonistic and violent feelings and actions towards them. As Buck-Morss (1989) suggests, there was a homology between the mega-spaces of the arcade and the mega-spaces of fascism that Benjamin wanted to elucidate (also see Hagen and Ostergren, 2006). Although this project could very easily collapse into a kind of paralysis that some find in Debord (1995) and other Frankfurt School theorists, Benjamin maintained a radical faith in redemption that could never be extinguished, no matter how sophisticated the culture industries (see Goss, 1999).

Some scholars have commented on how these components of his thinking resonate well with Deleuze and Guattari (see Agamben, 2002; Polsky, 2010; and Miller, 2014, among others). If Trump is a capitalist line of flight barrelling forward against the state apparatus, it is a fascist line of flight that consolidates and multiplies the worst-case scenarios for humanity and for

human–environment relations. Moreover, Benjamin also had a creative method for conducting research into these mysterious connections. In this book, elements of his plan are reimagined as an interpretive mechanism for understanding the 2016 US presidential campaign and its aftermath. Specifically, the technique of montage – in this case blending critical theory and journalistic commentary – seeks to induce new insights into the conditions of possibility for the rise of Trumpism and the role of consumer culture therein.

Plan of the book

Spectacle and Trumpism is not exhaustive, in any way, of anything. It is an inventive experiment inspired by the principles of montage (also see Dittmer, 2010), bringing together three components: (1) critical theories of the spectacle, introduced previously; (2) journalistic coverage of the 2016 US presidential campaign and its aftermath; and (3) other journalistic commentary on popular cultures of consumption. Out of convenience for the author, the main source for the last two is *The New York Times* newspaper, usually its expanded Sunday Edition, which was advantageous for two reasons. First, it provided detailed coverage that at times paid attention to the emerging political logics of spectacle as they unfolded. One guest opinion piece in 2017, titled 'Trump and the "Society of the Spectacle"', even made this explicit (Zaretsky, 2017), while many others simply borrowed the word 'spectacle' to explain what was happening. Second, the newspaper also reports on socio-cultural and 'business' news related to popular consumption but not always directly linked to formal politics. Triangulated with theory and commentary, though, these can be brought together to produce new insights and new perceptions of spectacle as an embodied assemblage. This goal is similar to Benjamin's, in which he sought to generate 'dialectical images' that held the fragments of the past and present together to illuminate their conditions of possibility.

On a much smaller scale, this project seeks to give readers an unusual reading of familiar topics, objects and spaces so as to encourage a new consideration of the consumer landscapes we inhabit and how they might be implicated in the rise of Trumpism in surprising ways.

Conceptualizing spectacle as an embodied assemblage does not require us to imagine consumers as 'duped' or 'tricked' in any way. In cultural studies and the empirical turn in geography, theories of the spectacle were largely rejected, in part, because of this misinterpretation, one that installs a false binary in the field of consumption between a deterministic model of control and its polar opposite, the consumer as sovereign and capable of creative practice. Theories of embodied assemblages help resolve this problem, as the idea is to conceptualize consumer subjectivity as emerging through complex relationships with the objects, spaces and indeed practices of consumption. As an embodied assemblage, spectacle can also be seen as unfolding in more specific and even intersectional ways, insofar as capitalist technologies overlap with other political technologies of colonial modernity, namely racism and patriarchy. Trump becomes a political possibility as a result of how these meta-overlaps express themselves in three more specific assemblages of power that have characterized the spectacle and its development in recent decades, and which are the focus of this book: (1) the affects of celebrity brand; (2) the emerging techno-digital landscape of the internet; and (3) the enduring built environments of architecture and design. Each chapter details activities in these often overlapping domains. The sets of connections detailed in this book help explain the emergence of Trump as one frightening possibility.

First, Trump's political identity builds on his status as a celebrity and as a brand. Trump has long used media technologies of spectacle to enhance his brand identity. As a commercial assemblage, Trump's business model has been to combine the affective dimensions of celebrity and brand in a way that facilitates the flows of capital and finance his business

enterprise requires. The first chapter provides the context for how we have been socialized by these technologies of post-truth reality and how they came to infect political culture. Trump was gaining celebrity status in the 1980s when President Ronald Reagan was putting similar techniques to work in the White House, providing an early model for Trump to later reinvent.

The second chapter considers the impact of new socio-technical worlds, which have transformed society, especially in the last two decades. A new environment of information, social media and digital interfaces has inaugurated new political connections that have transformed the landscape. Rather than ruminate over the ways in which Trump uses Twitter and other technologies to communicate in sometimes bizarre and dangerous ways, this chapter discusses how the spectacle itself has gone digital and how this has produced a kind of hyper-techno-consumer. There is an uneasy resemblance between the narcissism that this technology is capable of producing and the personality of Trump himself.

Third, despite the spectacle going digital, the physical, built environment of cities, infrastructure and everyday space continues to exist, at least for the time being. It is worth emphasizing that the Trump enterprise perfected its post-truth capabilities through the production of spectacular spaces such as hotels, resorts, casinos, shopping centres and other spaces of leisure. Again, the spectacle as an embodied assemblage enrols us in a series of activities that bring us into uneasy proximity with the consumer world promoted by the Trump family business itself.

This version of spectacle, it should be clear, looks different from what has previously been offered. Spectacle is an affective, emotional and more-than-human assemblage that has serious implications for political culture. As such, this version of spectacle goes beyond the mere enumeration and description of the many particular techniques of spectacle used by the modern state to control its population today. Something else is happening, in which the spectacle presents a challenge to the state itself. All the while, the utopian hope driving the project

is that these reflections on the macro-level actors in politics and society will be imagined as running through the micro spaces of everyday life that will be familiar to many readers. While Trump needs to be denounced, this book draws the reader into a familiar landscape in which we may all be differentially implicated in the situation we face today. I'm hoping that the reader will be able to imagine their own lives under the spectacle and to add their own imaginative twist to or make their own psychic interventions in it. The scenes of everyday consumer society presented here are not meant as 'proof' of any necessary and direct connections between consumption and political identity or behaviour, but as partial and open scenarios that the reader can reflect on in this time of epistemological and political crisis. Benjamin had the same hope, that the images provided in *The Arcades Project* would be incorporated into innumerable subjects of consumption who reimagine how they are living in the spectacle and what its intensity really means for them and their lives. Susan Buck-Morss (1989) wrote that

> On their own, the nineteenth-century facts collected by Benjamin are flat, bordering indeed on 'positivism', as Adorno complained. It is because they are only half the text. The reader of Benjamin's generation was to provide the other half of the picture from the fleeting images of his or her lived experience. (p 292)

In any case, *Spectacle and Trumpism* strives to offer a new version of spectacle that includes the crux of what Benjamin, Debord, Deleuze and Guattari were getting at – that something is deeply wrong with a society so obsessively organized around consumer culture and the inequalities that flow through and around it. What difference does it make that our own embodied pleasures are now the target and justification for such a system? How can these same embodied experiences be enrolled into dangerous political formations such as fascism? What happens next?

ONE

The Affects of Celebrity Brand

If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. (Snyder, 2017, p 65)

We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning. (Baudrillard, 1994, p 79)

In sum, fascist regimes are regimes of publicity. (French journalist cited in Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, quoted in Buck-Morss, 1989, p 308)

Bob Dylan is one of the most important and iconic figures in 20th-century American counter-culture. What interests me here is precisely his role as revolutionary artist. I wasn't surprised, though, when he showed up on a bottle of whisky. He is not just selling his name and celebrity brand for whatever nostalgic value it may produce. Instead, he is a 'full partner' in the company Heaven's Door Spirits (Sisario, 2018), a name referencing one of his most famous songs. Even though I wasn't surprised, I still felt agitated. Maybe I missed his other ads for Apple, Cadillac, Pepsi, IBM and Google (Sisario, 2018). There is something amiss about it all, namely using a figure of rebellion for non-revolutionary and commercial purposes. Maybe that's what got under my skin, that it was

Dylan, someone whose work I consider critical, if not at times outright subversive. However, rather than a stale complaint of selling out, there is something more we can learn from this commodification of a nonconformist celebrity icon.

This chapter starts here because it gets to the heart of what the stakes are when considering consumer culture. Somewhere in Heaven's Door Sprits lurks the nostalgic yearning for radicalism, at least for those who associate him with counter-culture and have perhaps even felt the rush of his songs. While ideal consumers might feel savvy enough to recognize such processes, the marketing model banks on it working nonetheless to engineer a transaction. What potential does this kind of commodity really possess? Does commodification necessarily signal capture? What, in short, becomes of the radical spirit of Dylan when it is mediated by the commodity form itself? Is there really a radical potential here, or just the shadow of a former self? The main point here is that a counter-intuitive capturing mechanism is created in consumer markets like the 'booming celebrity-branded spirits market' (Sisario, 2018). By utilizing nonconformism to engineer behaviour, we get an empirical sense of the kind of power outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (2013). These are ideal scenes in which we can imagine their 'smooth spaces' of rebellion being recaptured by the 'striated spaces' of the apparatuses of capture as markets, in this case, are shaped in more or less predictable ways in the modern era. Importantly, to understand this celebrity-brand assemblage is not to make any claim to what people might be doing with the commodity in their everyday lives; there is no need to get stuck on tricky issues around authenticity and false consciousness, for example. One alternative would be to imagine the commodity's relations of exteriority as a more useful analytic (Müller and Schurr, 2016; Barua, 2017; Miller, 2018), one capable of understanding not only the affective and emotional connections that shape a consumer market but also how it relates to its broader surroundings and the consequences therein. Looked at in this way, commodities

are much less determined than we might have assumed in some past interpretations of the spectacle.

Today, celebrity brands have exhausted the socio-cultural field and are merging into formal politics. Or, rather, they are barging in. Here, the reckless logic of the spectacle can do real damage. The spectacle takes off on a line of flight into new territory, changing the way it is organized and how it operates. Again, the exteriority of the spectacle is what allows it to find its way into previously unexplored territory. As capitalism cultivates lines of flight as part of its business model, it unleashes untold monsters into the world. In *The Three Ecologies* (first published in 1989), Guattari (2008) even names Donald Trump specifically as a menace to the cities he has shaped with such brutality (p 29). Trump's capacity for lying moves us into a post-truth reality that draws its power not just from capitalism and commodity rule, but from racism, sexism, nationalism and other authoritarian tendencies. As theorists of spectacle like Walter Benjamin noticed in the 1920s and 1930s, there are deeper connections between modernity, consumerism, totalitarianism and fascism, connections that remain active today. These have culminated today in the Trump presidency in the United States and related political shifts around the globe (Brabazon et al., 2019).

This chapter considers brands and celebrity as affective devices within the repertoire of spectacle. That the general public even knew who Donald Trump was in the 1980s is astounding. Why were people from the business world becoming celebrities? What is the link between celebrity-obsessed consumer culture and post-truth politics? This chapter provides some context. Moreover, politics at large has had to adapt to the changing expectations and judgements of the spectating public. As the spectacle continued developing in the post-Fordist era, a more affect-oriented style of politics, which favours the political right and the far right (Massumi, 2002; Stiegler, 2016; Connolly, 2017), have become more prominent. By the end of the George W. Bush

administration with its never-ending 'War on Terrorism', scholar Sheldon Wolin (2008) was formulating a theory of 'inverted totalitarianism' that include strong doses of post-truth politics. Given this context, Trump seems less of an enigma or surprise. Gökarıksel and Smith (2016) implore that

> we should carefully consider the ways that Trump is not an aberration but perhaps a more transparent revival of nationalist tendencies and white supremacy that is an integral part of US history through the erasure of native people, slavery, and the Jim Crow era, as well as through the scapegoating of Othered workers in the Chinese Exclusion Act and the paranoia of enemies within that led to the Japanese internment. (p 80)

While this is true, the Trump campaign was also unusual in many ways, not least of how blatantly it was willing to pursue such a fascistic politics. If we had taken spectacle more seriously, perhaps we would have anticipated the possibility that Trump might have a chance at winning in 2016, especially given the present circumstances of deindustrialization and suppression of minority voters and the structure of the Electoral College. As we shall see, there is actually a longer trajectory where fascism and technologies of spectacle meet and intersect.

Lines of celebrity, lines of flight

> I'm not a journalist, I'm a talk show host. (Fox News host Sean Hannity, quoted in Wright, 2019, p 17)

As Douglas Kellner (2016) suggests, Donald Trump 'is the first celebrity candidate whose use of the media and celebrity star power is his most potent weapon in his improbable and highly surreal campaign' (p 6). This happens in the context of a 'merger between entertainment, celebrity and politics' (p 18), of which he is an advanced prototype (also see Higgins,

2019). This socio-technical assemblage that is the Trump brand and its articulation with far right politics arrives after several decades in which celebrity candidates became more common and accepted. In *Star Power: American Democracy in the Age of the Celebrity Candidate*, Lauren A. Wright (2019, p 9) provides this longer historical view of the rise of celebrity candidates, going as far back as the American Revolution. Even the framers of the US Constitution wanted to safeguard the powers of government from a potentially dangerous candidate, someone who, according to Wright (2019, p 9), might be 'popular' but not 'capable and responsible'. Already in the late 18th century the authors of *The Federalist* acknowledged the distorting power of celebrity in democratic rule (Wright, 2019, pp 24–5). Alexander Hamilton referred to the hypothetical celebrity candidate as a threat to democracy, insofar as they have could garner power from 'mastering' the 'little arts of popularity' (p 9) while lacking the necessary qualifications. Since then, Wright points out, it is clear that American politics has been increasingly oriented around these 'arts of popularity' that have brought us not only Donald Trump, but other recent figures such as Ronald Reagan, Jesse Ventura, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Al Franken (p 25), who have held high office, as well as any number of celebrities who have recently pondered the prospective run for office (p xiii). Following Wright, we have yet to see how the actual experience of a Trump presidency impacts on the propensity for future celebrity candidates to win.

Wright (2019) provides some starting points for answering the question about what makes celebrities powerful in the first place. However, her analysis avoids the development of capitalism as a system with a specific use for celebrity and its affective dimensions. If politics has always had a spot for spectacular performance, going all the way back to Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar (Wright, 2019, p 23), by the middle of the 20th century industrial capitalism and the modern capitalist state had pushed these circuits into hyper-drive.

Celebrities appear in Debord's (1995) *Society of the Spectacle* not just as representations to entertain, but as representations that produce embodied impact in an intimate way. In some kinds of media consumption, consumers effectively *become the celebrity* as a way of escaping what is, in fact, a very non-spectacular life under capitalism. Jappe (2018) puts it this way:

> Debord's analysis is based on the everyday experience of the impoverishment of life, its fragmentation into more and more widely separated spheres, and the disappearance of any unitary aspect from society. The spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the *image*. Everything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle, conceived of as an ensemble of independent representations. As an example here, Debord evokes celebrities, such as actors or politicians, whose function is to represent a combination of human qualities and of *joie de vivre* – precisely what is missing from the actual lives of all other individuals, trapped as they are in vapid roles. (Jappe, 2018, pp 6–7, emphasis in original)

Some of these dynamics, no doubt, are what inform Wright's (2019) 'Seven Deadly Ins' (p xiv), which empower celebrity candidates. Yet, following Jappe's (2018) interpretation of Debord, we can consider more closely the ontology of spectacle as the mechanism that supercharges the figure of the celebrity. Following Jappe (2018), the celebrity excites the consumer subject, but then evaporates into the very real background of alienation and constricted subjectivity, states of (zombielike) being that in fact lack what the celebrity represents. If we imagine the spectacle as an embodied assemblage, however, we can imagine it as something more than temporary relief from an allegedly vapid everyday life. Even though the spectacle does profound damage to truth itself, today it succeeds precisely because it does not end in nihilistic despair and existential collapse for the consumer subject. Rather, the cycle goes on

and takes on new depth. The image of the celebrity becomes a model for imagination, insofar as consumers will adore and even mimic the celebrity image. The models of hyperreal spectacle (Smith, 2003) become enacted and produced anew with every consumer practice (Baudrillard, 1994; Grace, 2000). The inauthentic spectacle is produced anew, authentically transforming the material coordinates of 'real' life (see Deleuze, 1994).

In other words, *the spectacle is generative of something.* Rather than focusing on what the spectacle might mean, this approach is more concerned with what it is, what it does and what it connects with. What deserves greater attention are the affective components that act as the mainstay of the contemporary spectacle. Without naming it as such, Wright (2019) identifies the affective qualities of celebrity as something 'ethereal', something 'on which we cannot quite put a finger' (p 5). Politics itself is, perhaps, suffuse with these affective qualities of personality and mystique, potentially helping generate subtle and nuanced influence, and dire consequences for the conduct of collective organization. Ronald Reagan channelled these qualities in his performance of the presidency (1981–9), in which it was his gestures and affects that mattered most, much more than any message he was attempting to communicate (Massumi, 2002; Connolly, 2017). Wright (2019), too, has a possible answer for how incoherence translates into popularity. Celebrities are often professional performers, which means that they have an automatic advantage over traditional politicians (Wright, 2019, p 3). Nevertheless, celebrity candidates will often make mistakes because of their inexperience. Their celebrity status, though, provides an excuse:

> Gaffes that result from inexperience reinforce their outsider status, and enable voters to put themselves in a celebrity candidate's shoes. This particular artifact of relatability may be one of the more striking features of Donald Trump's candidacy and presidency. Underneath

the president's inarticulate bumbling and embarrassing indiscretions is an imperfect person that reminds Americans of their own mistakes and *makes them feel better* about their moral shortcomings. Trump is not better than the average American. In many ways he is one. (Wright, 2019, p 3, emphasis added)

This final proposition, of course, depends greatly on the reception of a diverse public and their subject positions as named 'enemy' or 'ally' of Trump's fascist war machine. There is something more particular about today's media environment that has brought us to Trump. Wright (2019), like Kellner (2016) identifies the merger of entertainment, news and politics in what is referred to as '"infotainment" and "soft news", mediums through which viewers are exposed to political information incidentally or in the context of entertainment' (Wright, 2019, p 15). In these media formats, consumerism has simply suffused and overtaken politics. These outlets increasingly confirm the viewers' pre-existing beliefs, rather than seek to challenge them in any substantive way by reporting on complex realities. Openly partisan cable news sources have enjoyed high ratings in recent years as the political landscape has polarized (Wright, 2019, p 17). This polarization amid the multiplying spectacle is mirrored in the social media landscape, where 'fake news' circulates with ease (Happer et al., 2019). Moreover, Trump's antagonistic relationship to the truth is largely strategic. In blasting evidence-based journalism as 'fake news' and thereby inverting truth, Trump builds on the momentum of his absurdity to gain attention and stoke his base supporters. As Pulido et al. (2019) point out, even the racism becomes spectacular in these conditions and acts as a necessary cover for other structural transformations and injustices, such as environmental deregulation.

During the campaign, however, something else was happening that gave Trump an advantage. His absurdity and blatant disregard for truth and convention plugged into a media

system that worked in two ways. News media used Trump's performance to gain ratings, while Trump used the coverage to advance his campaign. A synergy resulted that gave him a leg up, *courtesy of the spectacle*. No Russian interference was required for this, just people's attention and the embodied rhythms of media consumption, regardless of any actual political opinion. Trump used the assemblages of media spectacle to propel himself above the field in dramatic and absurdist ways.

Trump's performance was 'ratings gold', according to Kristof (2016). His outlandishness made for prime viewing material, for critics and followers alike. Kristof (2016) reports that by March 2016 Trump had received $1.9 billion in free media coverage, '190 times as much as he paid for in advertising, and it's far more than any other candidate received'. Bond (2016) reported that the CEO of CBS, Leslie Moonves, even remarked that Trump's campaign 'may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS' (also see Happer et al., 2019). Our incessant need to be entertained, and the merging of news and entertainment, provided the conditions for the possibility of Trump gaining attention, and therefore legitimacy, in the age of spectacle. In these ways, the spectacle reaches out through its relations of exteriority. The important part about this equation is that it does not rely at all on beliefs or values. Much of the coverage from liberal news sources was highly critical of Trump and his positions, and traditional sources still had to check the facts. Trump used the media as a networked set of relations of media production and consumption, in which people's attention is calculated in terms of ratings, which then determine future programming decisions. We do not need to make any claims about consumer subjectivity being directly linked to support for Trump. Rather, we were all participating in those practices of media entertainment that advantaged a celebrity candidate like him. Almost as an unintended consequence, then, we inaugurated this new phase of celebrity politics. While it was not the only possibility, Trump and Trumpism shows that it can lead to a

kind of fascistic politics, together with its associated violence. Line of celebrity, line of flight, line of death (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 268).

Journalists and writers for *The New York Times* mapped how the fountain of post-truth performance resonated with the public. Tim Wu (2017) described brilliantly how 'Trump wins by losing' through an embodied logic of the spectacle. At times, Trump's impulsiveness negates fact in favour of – *whatever*. As such, a line of flight emerges. In March 2017, only weeks into the Trump presidency, already mired in controversy, Wu (2017) captured the magical art of the spectacle as performed by Trump, for at least his followers and maybe even those simply enthralled by his entertainment value:

> Traditionally, politicians have measured 'success' or 'failure' by public approval or the achievement of political goals. But these may be the wrong ways to assess a president who, in his heart, seems interested in a different metric: attention, or less colloquially, 'mindshare'. While he may prefer winning to losing, he can still win by losing. For what really matters are the contests themselves – the *creation of an absorbing spectacle* that dominates headlines, grabs audiences and creates a world in which every conversation revolves around Mr. Trump and his doings. By this standard, Mr. Trump is not just winning, but crushing it. (emphasis added)

At this point in 2017, we had already seen that Trump was not going to conform to the norms and conventions of the presidency. Wu (2017) suggests that there is a kind of logic here, that Trump can benefit from a constantly turning media cycle guided, at times, by randomness. As long as it keeps churning, Trump benefits. Wu (2017) cites the concept of a 'variable reward schedule' from behavioural science to explain this barrage strategy of constant performance and outrage. This

political strategy banks on catching consumers in a feedback loop of affective performance that includes fewer and fewer 'economic' outcomes than in traditional terms (Kellner, 2016, p 33; Connolly, 2017, pp 5–17). Or, as Wu (2017) puts it, 'whether anything is actually "accomplished" will end up being entirely beside the point'. A logic of television entertainment informs this political strategy, insofar as the strategy doesn't actually have to 'accomplish anything'. Wu (2017) points out that 'One doesn't ask whether an episode of "The Oprah Winfrey Show" or a season of "Survivor" accomplished anything'. A very different kind of politics is at play here, one that seems to be metastasizing in dramatic fashion.

Other journalists such as Peter Baker (2018) tracked the proliferation of Trump's lies and how they informed the spectacle. Baker cites Amanda Carpenter's (2018) *Gaslighting America: Why We Love It When Trump Lies to Us*, which seems to suggest that Trump's performances become more-than-representational in the way they move the receiver emotionally and affectively. They land with the public, perhaps, because they are loaded with figures from the entertainment society. Baker (2018) links Trump's experience as a 'businessman' to this tendency to 'fabricate or exaggerate' in order to advance business deals. Baker (2018) reports that 'In his memoir, *The Art of the Deal*, he called it "truthful hyperbole" or "innocent exaggeration"'. Resonating with Wu (2017) from above, Baker (2018) also suggests that these performances gain strong affective purchase. It is important to be clear about how this takes place.

Conceptualizing the spectacle of Trump solely in terms of form and not of content would be sorely shortsighted. The spectacular performance itself can set off another set of exterior relations through the 'punitive state' (Gökarıksel and Smith, 2016, p 79) and the full array of geopolitics in the Trump era – namely, white supremacism, nativism and xenophobia. For Carol Anderson (2017), the Trumpian spectacle is inseparable from this racial logic of postcolonial America:

That's why Mr. Trump's policies are not aimed at ameliorating white resentment, but deepening it. His agenda is not, fundamentally, about creating jobs or protecting programs that benefit everyone, including whites; it's about creating purported enemies and then attacking them.

Herein lies a possible answer to one of the conundrums of Trumpism and working-class support for neoliberalism at large. The result of these politics doesn't have to actually address the concerns of working-class whites around social reproduction; it will suffice to engrain 'white resentments' that have such a long-standing place in American history and political culture. No actual economic restructuring will take place that would abolish the catastrophe of neoliberal capitalism or ameliorate the impacts of deindustrialization. Those systems of inequality can remain in place, underwritten by white working-class resentment, particularly in the Midwestern swing states that have suffered severely from deindustrialization. Carol Anderson (2017) warns how this fascist war machine could do irreparable damage to the institutions that govern American society and politics:

In the end, white resentment is so myopic and selfish that it cannot see that when the larger nation is thriving, whites are, too. Instead, it favors policies and politicians that may make America white again, but also hobbled and weakened, a nation that has squandered its greatest assets – its people and its democracy. (Anderson, 2017)

Sowing, feeling and performing the spectacle

In fact, it was entertainment, and not, as Marx declared, religion, that was the real opiate of the masses. (Gabler, 1998, pp 16–17)

Commodities acquire a strange power in capitalism. They become the means through which we display, practise and experience our very humanity. We do not become less human because of our imbrication with them. Rather, our humanity itself is plugged directly into these flows, which are simultaneously economic and cultural. So much of what makes us human is seized upon by capitalism, from the retail spaces that shelter us to the gifts that bring us to tears. To discuss the spread and consolidation of the society of the spectacle does not mean we have to make any judgemental or moralistic claims about those participating in that cultural economy. It is all the other things that happen once this is achieved – the environmental crisis of climate change, for example, and now the crumbling of democratic governance through spectacular sabotage – that are great cause for concern. These are the exteriorities of the commodity that draw our attention here.

One of the greatest challenges for this system is warding off resistance by anticipating, frustrating, curtailing and otherwise neutralizing it. As Deleuze and Guattari (2013) detail in so many ways, no matter how consolidated and powerful capitalism might seem, it is constantly working to cut off and redirect these rumblings from below. These lines of flight emerge in many ways, not always from 'below' but sometimes from above, as is the case with spectacle, one of capitalism's notable lines of flight. An individual's struggle against the spectacle may be fleeting and go unnoticed by most, or that same struggle may connect with others and take on a life of its own. Deleuze and Guattari (2013) write of so many examples of how the line of flight can be 'plugged', 'sealed' or 'blocked' (pp 257, 261, 484), thereby neutralizing its transformational and destructive potential. At other times these lines of flight are redirected to other areas, where they are rendered less destructive. Not only that, but these manoeuvres are crucial to the generation of new kinds of value in the capitalist economy. Once the 1960s

uprisings were suppressed and a new international division of labour came into being in the 1970s and 1980s, an ever-expanding world of commodities would reshape capitalist culture and society. Revolution and counter-culture itself became commodified, as exemplified perfectly in the image of the revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevarra circulating on T-shirts and other merchandise. Thomas Frank (1997) details brilliantly how marketing changed in the 1960s as it borrowed heavily from the counter-culture in order to recapture savvy consumers who were growing suspicious of marketing itself. Those revolutionary and nonconformist tendencies were folded back into compliance through the machinations of the spectacle that was finding new ways of engaging with consumers. There was a strategy for this kind of activity long before Bob Dylan considered getting into the spirits business.

With post-Fordist activities ablaze, a new consumer assemblage was in the making. Neil Gabler's (1998) *Life: the Movie* expounds on the transformations of the new media landscape. Rather than ruminate about how disabling it all is, Gabler (1998) takes a slightly different approach, which gets us closer to a key area of the spectacle: affective and emotional life. In short, as entertainment suffuses all aspects of life, we live and experience it in profound ways. When television multiplies and enters our lives, our sense of reality is warped as news and entertainment begin to blur. Although Gabler (1998) does not explicitly criticize this by explaining it through some meta-theoretical lens such as spectacle, they do track a destabilizing pressure that emanates from the commodity itself. By the 1980s and the Reagan presidency, politics was getting closer to a post-truth politics as reality mirrored entertainment and politics became a 'means of distraction' from the actual lack of solutions being put forward:

> This genial reassurance was often cited as the primary
> source of Reagan's appeal, but what was both less obvious
> and more significant was that it was also his primary

presidential objective. For Reagan, the presidency was a movie not only in the sense that it was scripted from Hollywood conventions to play better on the media screens but because it had the same exact function as the majority of Hollywood movies: escapism. Ronald Reagan was the first president to see politics not as a means of addressing problems but as a way of distracting the public from them, the first to design his presidency for the express purpose of *making people feel better* the way they seemed to feel better watching an entertaining film. (Even substantive policies like shrinking the government or challenging the Soviets as an 'evil empire' were framed in movie rhetoric as simple panaceas.) With Reagan in the White House, it was always, to use his 1984 campaign slogan, 'morning in America', even though in this theater the lights never came up. (Gabler, 1998, p 112, emphasis added)

Many have since commented on the similarities between Reagan and Trump, with his dramatic performances, especially at campaign-style rallies, which he continued to stage even after he was sworn in. This politics of spectacle is a politics of affect (Connolly, 2017) and it points to a very different kind of mobilization which has coalesced as Trumpian populism. Do his supporters actually believe that he is capable of reversing the flows of globalization that have shifted around traditional industrial activity? His goal, of course, is not to actually achieve these unrealistic goals but to provide a performance that pleases a base that has nothing to lose and everything to gain in terms of an affective politics: Trump at least reminds his base that they matter and, importantly, that they are superior because they are white. The Trumpian spectacle, rather than evacuating meaning and purpose, ignites a fascist war machine that fills these existential voids between self and other in divisive and horrifying ways.

Donald Trump himself appears in Gabler's (1998) account of 'how entertainment conquered reality'. As the demand

for entertainment increased, the forms of being entertained multiplied and assumed new formats. Celebrities took on a new importance as figures who could grab the consumer's attention and take them elsewhere. By the 1980s so many celebrities were needed that the industries of spectacle searched for new ones and sought previously untapped sources, including the business world. Gabler (1998) gives an account of Trump's emergence as a celebrity who would prove important and tragic for American democracy decades later:

> Of them all, though, the one with the most perspicacity about celebrity and the one most representative of the new celebrity businessman may have been Donald Trump, a relatively minor New York real estate mogul whom the media made a household name in the 1980s. To the media, the brash, bloviating young Trump was the perfect symbol of the new avarice, rapaciousness and ostentatiousness of new business wealth, and they loved to report his grandiose exploits. But what really made Trump a symbol of the 1980s was less his showy greed than his willing compliance with the secondary effect of the media – namely, that in order to compete with entertainment, one had to turn oneself into entertainment. (pp 156–7)

Born in 1946, Trump grew up with the postwar spectacle in high gear. He used it to his advantage and would eventually evolve with the aesthetics and conventions of television in particular (Poniewozik, 2019). By the 1980s Trump was using the same techniques as President Reagan, and years later he would continue to employ these techniques to forge a powerful and destructive political machine. Complicated imaginaries are required to understand these processes of simultaneous atomization and populism. While the campaign-style rallies provide supporters with a momentary sense of collectivity, the politics involved is that of separation, division and antagonism.

At the same time, an individualist logic is said to also permeate a capitalist culture of consumption. As noted above, Debord's (1995) original theory included ideas such as 'atomization' and 'alienation', which ward off the formation of collective forms of existing and resisting. Right-wing politics channels collectivist desires into racialized formations that have long been the source of political power, while also exalting individualism as a moral good and motor of capitalism itself. Alternative ways of imagining self and other, and the kinds of non-capitalist collectives that are possible, are precisely what the society of the spectacle short-circuits and sabotages from the start (Miller and Del Casino Jr., 2018).

Post-truth politics would continue to evolve through the 1990s and into the post-9/11 world. George H. W. Bush presided over the Gulf War (1990–1), a highly mediated event that brought the conflict into Western viewers' homes in dramatic ways as another form of entertainment, including the use of theme music and captivating graphics and visuals (Gabler, 1998, pp 82–3). One of Debord's leading interlocutors, Jean Baudrillard (1995), would craft a unique theory of spectacular politics to suggest that 'the Gulf War did not take place'. Shortly after the dust settled (he does not *really* deny that the conflict happened), another kind of spectacular president would take over. President Bill Clinton (1993–2001) was also described as the 'Entertainer-In-Chief' (Gabler, 1998, p 102). As mentioned in the Introduction, Douglas Kellner's (2000) *Media Spectacle* covers various case studies from the 1990s that substantiate the insights of Debord, Baudrillard and others (also see Laketa, 2019). By the time President George W. Bush launched the 'War on Terror', the world was facing a powerful new articulation of post-truth politics, now fused with the destructive power of the US armed forces.

As the post-9/11 world descended into imperial violence and the absurdity of endless wars and proxy battles, theorists like Sheldon Wolin (2008) wrote convincingly about the emergence of a frightening new political culture. Towards the

end of the George W. Bush era (2001–9), Wolin (2008) called this 'inverted totalitarianism' a form of authoritarian control immanent in the population, which means that we largely do it to ourselves. In other words, the public has become complacent and is losing its capacity to fulfil the civic duties required by democratic regimes. Wolin (2008) does not specify the sources of this decline explicitly, but a close reading suggests that an infrastructure of spectacle has led to the advancement of post–truth reality:

> Again the inversion is striking: the Nazi Party had a strong antipathy toward big business and, early on, professed a 'socialist' tendency that was later reflected in several programs aimed at eliminating unemployment and introducing social services. Indeed, a socialist or, better, a collectivist element figured as well in the Soviet Union and even in Mussolini's Italy. Collectivism might be defined as a conception of society as a compact, solidaristic whole in which the *Volk* or 'workers' are exalted – while being reshaped into a manageable mass that loves its solidarity and anonymity. Inverted totalitarianism, in contrast, appears as anticollectivist: it *idealizes individualism and adulates celebrities.* (Wolin, 2008, p 112, emphasis added)

As the politics spectacle evolved in American society, democratic institutions, according to Wolin, became weakened under the pressure of celebrity culture. Seemingly channelling Debord, Wolin (2008) hits on the confluence of celebrity culture with rampant individualism, with everyone locked into their own personal commodity drama. While fascism in Germany and Italy required a figurehead, this is quite different from the kind of celebrity culture that drives inverted totalitarianism. It is a perverse kind of totalitarianism, one that appears to self-govern, insofar as the industries of the spectacle are constantly finding new things to focus attention on and, if successful, turn into

an obsession. The same kind of adulation is distributed, but now through celebrity-driven entertainment rather than the saviour head of state. Wolin's (2008) wager is that the result is largely the same. Citizenship has been evacuated in this system for Wolin (2008), who clearly laments what appears to be a subtle and yet hostile *takeover of the state by the spectacle.*

These logics and tendencies were to gain intensity in a new form of entertainment: reality TV.

Reality-television presidency

> The essential opposition between the real and the spectacle would seem to be lost forever, drowned in a flow of images which 'carries everything before it' and leaves the spectator with neither the time nor the space to think, reflect, remember, or judge. (Plant, 1992, p 152)

Celebrity adulation, as Wolin (2008) observes, is a curious aspect of the spectacle today. There is a kind of homology between celebrity adulation and authoritarian power and its fascistic potentials. Perhaps one of the more important shifts in media consumption has been the emergence of reality television, where 'normal', everyday people can also become celebrities. Instead of actors playing scripted parts, any kind of person can appear on reality television, with their unpredictable responses and behaviours giving shape to the entertainment value of the production. This kind of programming often involves some competition between contestants that makes for good viewing as conflict and drama ensues. For all of the drama of *Masterchef*, for example, with its contestant profiles and backstories, a recurring slogan in the show is that 'There can be only one *Masterchef*'. A kind of romantic individualism is ripe in these competitions, with the format challenging the boundaries between reality and contrived performance for the spectacle. Apparently channelling Gabler (1998) and Baudrillard, Teddy Wayne (2017) links these kinds of competitions to broader

socio-political and cultural formations that contextualize self and other in the precarity of neoliberal times:

> Likewise, union membership has drastically shrunk in the private sector over the last four decades. Why sacrifice for another person when there can be just one top chef or model or singer, one bachelorette with the final rose, one survivor – or in your own workplace, one promotion this financial quarter amid a spate of layoffs?

This radical individualism of the spectacle has been nurtured by neoliberal governance in recent decades. Trump was an archetype in the 1980s and 1990s and, in some ways it makes sense that he has come to occupy the White House. This is what we should expect from neoliberalism, as the forerunner of capitalism's 'superior deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 528) compared to that of the state. The confluence of what brings him to the White House is what is most important: its fascistic assemblages. For now, it is worth considering how the Trumpian spectacle works explicitly as a war machine because of how it fills up hateful reservoirs in desire. Yet Trumpism as a war machine is more than this. It aggressively seeks out the opposing political forces and attacks them through affective technique. While Trumpism fulfils positive fascistic affects for the base, it produces a different set of political affects for everyone else. On this front, the strategy seems to include a mixture of overwhelm-and-exhaust.

Frank Bruni of *The New York Times* has been a keen observer of this political strategy of Trumpism. Following President Trump's tantrum during a news conference, Bruni (2017) speculated on the new kind of politics that was on display in this performance, which had been repeated on the campaign trail, where Trump indulged in 'more petulance and vulgarity than an adult in a civilized society is supposed to get away with'. But, then again, says Bruni (2017), 'that's actually his secret':

> That's his means of survival: the warp speed and whirl of it all. He forces you to process and react to so many different outrages at such a dizzying velocity that no one of them has the staying power that it ought to or gets the scrutiny it deserves. (Bruni, 2017)

Bruni goes on to actually specify the affective nature of this politics:

> He was cluttering the landscape. *Overwhelming the senses*. Betting that a surfeit of clangorous music would obscure any particularly galling note. That wager got him all the way to the White House, though he has no place being there, and so he sticks with it. The news conference was a case study in such *orchestrated chaos*. (emphasis added)

'Orchestrated chaos'. Sounds a lot like what Deleuze and Guattari (2013) have in mind with their political ontology of contemporary capitalism (also see Merrin, 2019). This is exactly what they mean by the state apparatus being locked in a struggle to contain the war machine, or the lines of flight that are always shooting out of even the most molar formations. Bruni (2017) called this 'the appall–and–anesthetize political strategy'. The point is that the spectacle stages an aggressive front, insofar as the norms of state institutions are scrambled in the proliferation of post–truth machines. It does not just yoke together a xenophobic nationalism and white supremacism, but it also goes on the attack against the institutions that safeguard the truth and the legal protections of citizenship (see Snyder, 2015). This suicidal self-consumption of the spectacle in its attack on the state is one of the most disturbing features of the Trump presidency. It is willing to question and take down institutional relations and firewalls, what Ingram (2017) has referred to as 'deterritorialization' in the specific terms of Deleuze and Guattari (2013).

In August 2019 Bruni wrote another column titled 'Donald Trump Has Worn Us All Out'. What Bruni is describing is a *war strategy* of the Trumpian spectacle. It is not content with filling up the base with the predictable and long-standing tropes of racism and sexism. It never stops producing new scenes and actual policies that are so outrageous that they boggle the mind for anyone who has not been fully enrolled in the Trump machine (the base). Like a sitcom or a reality-television show, new episodes are constantly forthcoming. Little wonder that bingeing on shows on streaming services has become a cultural phenomenon in recent years (see more in Chapter Two). This emerging consumer practice is entirely about withdrawing into private space, even if you do it with friends or loved ones. The Trumpian spectacle is also never ending, with episodes seamlessly blending into one another. Poniewozik (2019) observes how much of it actually 'follows reality-TV rules':

> The taunting. The insults. The dog whistles. The dog bullhorns. The 'Lock her up' and 'Send her back'. *All of it follows reality-TV rules.* Every season has to top the last. Every fight is necessary, be it against Ilhan Omar or Debra Messing. (Poniewozik, 2019, emphasis added)

To the extent that politics and the presidency have come to resemble entertainment, it is not accurate to say that Trump lacked experience and qualification for the office. He was, after all, the star of the reality-TV series *The Apprentice* and *The Celebrity Apprentice* between 2004 and 2015 (Kellner, 2016, p 7), a role that elevated his celebrity status nationally (p 8). The show was made powerful by the star producer Mark Burnett, who was behind the milestone reality-TV mega-hit *Survivor*. Trump quickly learned the ropes of reality TV and indulged himself in other TV appearances over the years, sometimes in bizarre realms like professional wrestling (Von Drehle, 2017), a spectacle-oriented sub-industry all the way.

In 2013, Donald Trump was inducted into the WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) Hall of Fame (www.wwe.com/superstars/donald-trump).

In a society driven by so-called market forces, how can the political system be protected from these outside influences? Trump's presidency is much more disturbing than just another politician using technologies of spectacle to communicate with followers. Rather than merely use the spectacle, Trump and Trumpism present an antagonistic force against elements of the state. As a war machine, Trumpism attacks elements of the state apparatus while also using others to shore up support for his white nationalist agenda. Importantly, Trump causes fascistic politics to proliferate in society at large, leading to so many encounters of violence and hate. This politics is a war machine that goes beyond the state apparatus and infects everyday life. The potential nihilism of post-truth is in the end negated by the arrival of a more fulfilling substance, that of antagonism and action, and within that space the ongoing maintenance of relations of power in racist, sexist and classist ways.

Conclusion

> The spectacle, we have been arguing, is a social process that is hollow at the core. The reality it offers its subjects is that of Reality TV. And its subjects are always in flight from this emptiness, even as – especially as – they snort their line of nothingness with the true user's delight in all the latest paraphernalia. (Retort et al., 2005, p 182)

Retort et al.'s (2005) *Afflicted Powers* was written in the context of the post-9/11 'War on Terror', and in particular the US-led invasion of Iraq. They detect a kind of corrosion of citizenship similar to that described by Wolin (2008) and detail a global politics of spectacle, evident in the lines above. However, to suggest that the spectacle is 'hollow at the core' is to misunderstand how the spectacle has come to operate

today. Retort et al.'s (2005) global perspective makes it difficult to appreciate the micropolitics of spectacle that has evolved along with the entertainment industry throughout the shift to post-Fordism (Read, 2003). Instead, as an embodied assemblage, the spectacle includes more or less intense affects and emotions. These can be produced through language and representational registers, as Trump is clear, for example, about who is to blame for the decline of the white working class. As we shall see, capitalism has elaborated ways of engaging consumers that turn the spectacle into a complex network of feelings, sensations, experiences and fantasies. The spectacle gains power because it offers something that fills the hollowness it also relies on. A more nuanced version of the spectacle as embodied assemblage explores the shifting experience of consumer subjectivity between pleasurable satisfaction and unacceptable absence (Patterson, 2005; Berlant, 2011; Barile, 2017). In addition to the commodity's exterior relations described previously, there are also an emerging set of interior relations formed between commodities and those who inevitably encounter and use them. Spectacle as an embodied assemblage includes both the interior and exterior relations of the contemporary commodity.

This chapter has sought to illustrate, for the most part, the exteriority of these relations and confluences of power. The spectacle must interface with many other realities for it to become possible in the first place. Through this analytic, we can move beyond many of the stale criticisms of spectacle theorizing, namely, that it makes too many assumptions about consumer subjectivity. The confluence of Trump's brand name, entertainment culture and a ratings-obsessed news media gave him an advantage during the 2016 campaign. Viewers were no doubt pulled into the latest outrage, the latest spectacular performance, whether they were supporters or critics. The entertainment infrastructure of spectacle enables something that really has little to do with opinions about Trump and Trumpism. Yet this set of mediated relationships

allows him to spread his vile messages. Trumpian spectacle, as one of capitalism's notable lines of flight, has become a war machine in its antagonism to elements of the state and also to minorities, women, the environment and others. Trump is a product of the spectacle and has fused its logics with other aspects of American life and politics, forming and igniting a powerful war machine. From this perspective, Retort et al. (2005) were correct in labelling the spectacle not only as a form of power, but as a source of instability as a result of these volatile exterior relations.

The embodied assemblages of Trumpian spectacle are also informed by what has become perhaps the most cutting-edge frontier of spectacle: the internet. As the next chapter details, rapid advances in information technology and computing in the neoliberal era have reshaped how many people communicate, shop and experience reality in everyday life. As Briziarelli and Armano (2017) and others have pointed out, it is under the direction of the new techno-lords of Silicon Valley that *the spectacle has gone digital.*

TWO

(Head)phoning It In

> And to ask who the 'real' Donald Trump is, is to ignore the obvious. You already know who Donald Trump is. All the evidence you need is right there on your screen. He's half-man, half-TV, with a camera for an eye that is constantly focused on itself. The red light is pulsing, 24/7, and it does not appear to have an off switch. (Poniewozik, 2019)

Public space today is radically different from what it was only 15 or 20 years ago. I am sure I am not the only one who notices large groups of students waiting outside a lecture hall in eerie silence as they all stare into their personal hand-held screens. An entire new socio-technical machine has come into being that links us to electronic devices that are coordinated and enabled by digital technologies connected to the internet. While these devices are visual and affective in terms of how they physically feel in our hands or on our wrists and other parts of the body, they are also sonic devices. Our ears are often clogged with a device pumping in the sounds of *our* choice. Public life suffers as a result, as more and more people cocoon themselves while in public spaces. Withdrawing into a book or magazine, of course, could constitute the same mechanism. The difference is that books and magazines have a fixed content that does not

automatically update or renew or offer portals onwards into infinity. Nor are they designed to necessarily ensnare you into divulging personal data that are then monetized for profit and turned back on yourself.

The spectacle, in addition to becoming more and more affective and emotional than has been previously acknowledged (Chapter One), has been interconnected and charged with today's digital technology. Instead of dying away along with the decline of certain retail formats (like some mega-malls), the spectacle has now fractured and dispersed itself into the digital landscape (Thatcher and Dalton, 2017). So much of consumer society is planned for in advance by a complex of financial, scientific, corporate and often technocratic politics. Under 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019), the spectacle is transformed into a more mundane experience of everyday life (Briziarelli and Armano, 2017). With headphones, for example, we can privatize almost any space, any time. To be clear, this is not always a bad thing. Immersive spaces of all kinds offer a kind of protection from the chaos of the world (Sloterdijk, 2013). These devices, then, also provide a degree of protection from a threatening and aggressive world, particularly one emboldened by Trumpian aggression and belligerence. In these conditions, headphone usage in public space could be considered a mundane *counter-spectacle*, one that avoids the potential violence of everyday encounter through stealthy and strategic retreat. Moreover, social media also empower the activism of marginalized people. Jennifer Senior (2018), considering a hypothetical total boycott of social media in response to its obvious shortcomings, is quick to add what is by now a familiar riposte: '*Fine. Got a way to do that while protecting #blacklivesmatter and #metoo?*' (emphasis in original).

Yet it is impossible to separate the all-encompassing sensation offered by a pair of headphones, for example, from an increasingly complex set of socio-technological relationships that prey on the consumer in a particularly intimate way. Headphones have infiltrated everyday life as their design

has become sleeker, more comfortable and more attractive. One businessperson reported 'designing it to be like jewelry' (Bernstein, 2016). This increasingly seamless connection between the body and the technology adds to the power of its software and computing capabilities. In other words, we have become increasingly addicted to our smartphones and computers because of how they feel, in addition to what happens on the screens themselves, which is also designed to capture attention and lead to addictive behaviours. Senior (2018), in the end, is more concerned with the effects of technology than with celebrating it. Consumer society today is all about the sensational aspects of being integrated into multiple online systems, resulting in new affective experiences all together (Stiegler, 2016; Rose, 2017). These include sensations of convenience and the terror of its fragility; narcissism and its atomized grip; and the many outrages of populist geopolitics that circulate online today. By that, I refer specifically to Trump's capacity to use these technologies to unleash the forces of violence on specific minority communities, the effects of which have already been felt.

This chapter builds on the spectacle as an affective and emotional technology to consider today's digital political geographies of everyday life and consumption. Since the spectacle has since been incorporated and reworked as the logic of today's techno-consumerism, we must also look towards these emerging horizons. What is happening as technology further transforms everyday life with the proliferation of hand-held electronics and its paraphernalia – headphones, screens, cameras and microphones? Does citizenship expand or contract, and for whom? While this chapter does consider the individualizing logics of today's online spectacle, it focuses more intently on another issue, about which we can be more certain: these socio-technical assemblages are sometimes fused into far right assemblages of hate. While it remains tricky connecting techno-narcissism to the rise of Trumpism specifically, we know that Trump has been able to manipulate

this techno-ecology to his advantage by stoking traditional fires with the powerful mechanisms of spectacle and the decentralized structures of platforms.

Trump operates not only as a TV personality and branded celebrity, but also as a socio-technical apparatus (Legg, 2011). As Poniewozik (2019) writes, Trump is 'half-man, half-TV, with a camera for an eye that is constantly focused on itself'. His performance is integrated with multiple online systems of distribution. His political identity has finally coalesced with the rising power of platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Through these and other channels, he has been able to consolidate a formation of support among the far right and the Republican Party. In these ways Trump unleashes a fascist war machine on the population and on the state:

> This brings us back to the paradox of fascism, and the way in which fascism differs from totalitarianism. For totalitarianism is a State affair: it essentially concerns the relations between the State as a localized assemblage and the abstract machine of overcoding it effectuates. Even in the case of a military dictatorship, it is a State army, not a war machine, that takes power and elevates the State to the totalitarian stage. Totalitarianism is quintessentially conservative. Fascism, on the other hand, involves a war machine. When fascism builds itself a totalitarian State, it is not in the sense of a State army taking power, but of a *war machine taking over the State*. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp 268–9, emphasis added)

Trump organizes these emergent powers of technology to create a fascist war machine that works against the familiar enemy-others of empire, as well as elements of the state apparatus itself. In this way, we might consider not only how the state utilizes the spectacle, but how the spectacle attacks the state. This should be deeply worrying as a prelude to further abuse to come (compare with Snyder, 2015).

A gathering tweet storm

> When is the last time you went a day without seeing the 'great leader'? (Wu, 2017)

'Technology has ruined us … You go to a restaurant and look around, and maybe 80 percent of the people are looking at their phones' (quoted in Bernstein, 2016). This is the result of advances in the techno-digital spectacle, or what has more recently been referred to as the 'attention–finance complex' (Akhtar, 2017), or 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019) in which value is generated through flows of personal information, data processing, analytics and marketing. Is the logic of these activities significantly different from that articulated by previous critical theorists of the spectacle? How does industry produce consumers in today's circumstances? Because there is an existential imperialism involved in the spectacle, many have misunderstood the process as entirely one way and deterministic. This false assumption leads to antidotes that are equally problematic, in which consumers are suddenly 'empowered' as revolutionary subjects in their everyday activities. Instead, the production of consumption today is more about understanding the so-called consumer in terms of their actual desires, whims, tics and basic everyday comforts, habits and annoyances.

For example, what happens when we use customer loyalty cards in retail settings? This is much more than merely gaining access to a special deal. This mundane act implicates us in a biopolitical network of data, statistical calculation, marketing and finance (Coll, 2013). These institutions are intensely interested in personal data and have flourished on the basis of its management, storage and analysis in recent years. So how is consumer subjectivity produced if it isn't a one-way determinism? Borrowing from the perspective of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013), it is a question of getting into the 'molecular' that 'makes or breaks it' (p 259). This is

achieved by knowing the consumer better than they know themselves, and being ready to deliver what they, statistically, will prefer, which will only *appear* to be an autonomous action on their part. Desire isn't directly programmed but is anticipated, monitored and nurtured in profound ways (Zwick and Knott, 2009; Beckett, 2012; Barile, 2017). Importantly, we self-enrol in these schemes.

In Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) terminology, today's techno-structure of consumption works on finding consumers' line of flight and allowing it to flourish in particular ways – enough to keep them engaged and enough to extract value and profit, but not enough that they go off the rails entirely. An excellent example is, again, Frank's (1997) history of marketing in the 1960s in the United States, in which the radicalism and counter-culture of the era was recaptured by the new engines of spectacle. Many of the recent works on the biopolitics of consumption pick up where Frank (1997) left off in their explorations of the psycho-dynamics of embodied consumption in hyperreal circumstances. New kinds of marketing are made possible with these techniques – marketing that gets close to the consumer.

Through an invitation to engage with the platform, that same platform will monitor your behaviour and monetize your personal data. This results in detailed consumer profiles that allow for precise marketing techniques. As a result of the networked and infinite possibilities of platforms, these have become the main sites where spectacle is experienced today. And it is here that I think Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) apparatus of spectacular capture takes aim, when they say that the violence 'come[s] first':

It is true that war kills, and hideously mutilates. But it is especially true after the State has appropriated the war machine. Above all, the State apparatus makes the mutilation, and even death, come first. It needs them preaccomplished, for the people to be born that

way, crippled and zombielike. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 495)

If this vision applies at all to what Debord (1995) had in mind, it emphasizes the one pole of the operation, which is a kind of capture taking place. How this occurs, though, deserves greater attention. Life itself is what is surveilled and nurtured and corralled into profitable formations for capitalism. Spectacle hovers around desire and its most intense expressions – its lines of flights – in an effort to know us more intimately and then use that information against us. In these ways, our desire is actually restricted rather than allowed to roam freely. At the very least we imagine a model of perpetual and ongoing catch–and–release, catch–and–release, intertwining in never-ending spirals.

To return to the headphone as artefact of this advanced techno-society, we may consider how its phenomenology corresponds to broader geographies of neoliberalism and the privatization of public space. In some ways, they have altogether further reduced the relevance of public space. Jacob Bernstein's (2016) article 'My Headphones, My Self' describes this vividly, as the evolving comfort of the ear piece overlaps with an emerging capacity of life in the city, one that 'gives city dwellers the ability to largely avoid an experience that was once arguably the whole point of living in the crowd – interacting with others'. Here we find a contradiction of urban America today, where gentrifiers are always on the hunt for 'cool' and 'authentic' places, while at the same time almost everyone is also intensely committed to their own channel. Gentrification, then, appears as an even more crass and superficial motor of urban trends today. In another way, Bernstein (2016) may be describing the symptom of a much deeper and systemic problem, which is the decline of the public sphere at large:

> In a fraught public sphere, headphones provide a measure
> of privacy. Those who fall deeply into a Spotify playlist

or the latest installment of an addictive podcast enter a cocoon-like zone all but impenetrable to tourists, beggars and those do-gooders with clipboards.

Even if they are couched in terms of a public sphere in decline, there is something sad about these scenes of intense privacy and self-absorption in the ruins of public space. There is something profound in this desire, something that links to the entire project of colonial modernity as described by Sloterdijk (2013), for whom the entire globe is encased in a Benjaminian arcade. Today its grandiosity has become individualized and tailor made. The same desire runs through the globe, the shopping arcade/mall and today's individualized thread of non-stop stimulation via the feed, instant notification or another automated process. For Bernstein (2016), there is perhaps more hope for what the headphone craze might stand for. Rather than a cause of the problem, the headphones perhaps stand in as a flimsy and half-hearted solution to the crisis that is upon us. Headphone popularity 'may be an expression of our disaffected times' in which 'people holding different views on matters political and cultural struggle to open their mouths without triggering an argument' (Bernstein, 2016). In a way, this signals a conservative tendency, one that avoids confrontation. 'Arguments' could be a sign of a strong democracy, and our inability to have them a sign of decline. In another way, by refusing an engagement with everyday surroundings that are often enrolled in spectacle's urban scheme, the headphones potentially effectuate a mundane counter-spectacle that is detached, one that operates according to a different logic. This may, at the least, be a defensive posturing in the face of a violent and aggressive world. Headphones on the bus communicate 'please leave me alone', or 'let's just get through this', a more or less urgent need depending on your embodied subject position. For some this is entirely understandable. For others and in different circumstances, it is

a total and blatant cop-out from participating in community and collective life. Neoliberal privatization of space also becomes mundane, as we tend towards atomization in a fragmented urban landscape.

Perhaps it is the convenience factor that is most at play in the proliferation of these new everyday spatial practices. As the spectacle has washed over us guaranteeing convenience, enjoyment and entertainment at all times, we fall easily into these always mobile and privatized spaces among the public landscape. Any time you feel bored, just plug in. Any time you feel uncomfortable, just plug in. Any time you don't want to engage, just plug in. While this may be justified for some in some cases, a lot is compromised when we can switch off so easily. This affective cocooning is also part of the capitalist state apparatus and its attempt to harness the power of the line of flight and its potential war machines among the population. As it burrows into us, it looks into our psyches and extracts information that it uses against us, for our rebirth as consumers. An irony of the system is that it claims consumption to be an autonomous area of life, unobstructed as such and touted as evidence of a free society, even as enormous industries rise up all around us whose main aim is to shape our behaviour.

This is somewhat of a depth model of the spectacle's interiority, rather than one that appears hollow (see Chapter One). The spectacle gets intimate as consumers trade data and privacy for bargains and convenience. 'Can't put down your device?' asks Singer (2015) – '*That's by design*' (emphasis added). More and more of life is arriving pre-formed, as we settle into all the new habits required by Apple, Facebook and the other big tech companies. Singer's (2015) main point is that there is a manufactured rhythm and ecology to the way digital entertainment technologies operate today, all coaxing us into an opiate-like state of flow from one thing to the next. Everything that could be illuminated by our dynamic life force is subsumed into the flow–rhythm of reality

television, or the eternal sports play-offs, or whatever format of televised entertainment is hot at the time (today Netflix). Singer (2015) points to the form of how this expanding mass of content is organized technically, and the aesthetic flow that goes along with it:

> There's Facebook beckoning with its bottomless news feed. There's Netflix autoplaying the next episode in a TV series 10 seconds after the previous one ends. There's Tinder encouraging us to keep swiping in search of the next potential paramour. (Singer, 2015)

These built-in features make the interface smooth and easy. Others such as Adam Alter (2017) have also outlined the ways in which the technology industry works to 'hook' its consumers through these seamless interfaces, similar to the ways in which food companies engineer 'bliss points' from the combination of fat, salt and sugar (Singer, 2015, drawing on Moss, 2013). These mechanisms are intriguing to consider as they relate to the overarching political ideology of the time, which prioritizes and celebrates the 'individual' (Miller and Stovall, 2019). Corporations are allowed to pollute the food system mostly because of an overarching belief in the freedom of consumers to choose or reject that diet, avoid those cigarettes or whatever. Singer (2015) cites a tech executive who argued, for instance, that 'The "I don't have enough willpower" conversation misses the fact that there are 1,000 people on the other side of the screen whose job is to break down the self-regulation that you have'. Sloterdijk (2013) would appear to be on the right track when he suggests that today 'sovereignty is about choosing what to fall for' (p 65). These new techno-realities seem to confirm the logics of spectacle from which they emerge. They resize the spectacle from a large-scale kind of event (like the Olympics) to a more distributed and mundane version, where everyone can shine in their own spotlight. 'Cybertechnology', wrote Retort

et al. (2005) during the Bush years, 'proved itself, over the past two decades, the perfect instrumentation of "spectacular" dispersal, isolation and derealization – the machinery of a *self-administered* dreamworld' (p 4, emphasis in original). The spectacle is therefore fully realized in miniature form, tailor made for each individual participant.

These dreamworlds became weaponized with the rise of Trumpism in 2016. It is this possibility of self-enclosed knowledge production that concerns me here because, as we have seen, extremist ideologies and narratives can flourish in these spaces. Frank Bruni would go as far as to write a piece on 'How Facebook Warps Our Worlds' (Bruni, 2016). The cocoon-like atmospheres that are made possible by digital technology can turn into political 'echo chambers', where we hear only what we want to hear. Importantly, this happens not as a result of some political conspiracy theory, but because of the way the algorithms operate:

> The Internet isn't rigged to give us right or left, conservative or liberal – at least not until we rig it that way. It's designed to give us more of the same, whatever that same is: one sustained note from the vast and varied music that it holds, one redundant fragrance from a garden of infinite possibility. (Bruni, 2016)

This is Bruni at his most poetic. Later in the piece, though, he is less so in his assessment of what this kind of media environment is capable of producing in the field of subjectivity. Despite the world-expanding capabilities of the internet, the result as Bruni saw it in 2016 was constriction and foreclosure. 'The proliferation of cable television networks and growth of the Internet promised to expand our worlds, not shrink them', he rightly complains. Citing Eli Pariser's (2011) *The Filter Bubble*, Bruni (2016) laments what he sees as a kind of web-based political practice that is involved in 'creating a tailored reality that's closer to fiction'. At its worst, these tendencies can tend

towards 'groupthink'. At the heart of this is a rescaling of political imagination:

> We're less committed to, and trustful of, large institutions than we were at times in the past. We question their wisdom and substitute it with the groupthink of micro-communities, many of which we've formed online, and their sensibilities can be more peculiar and unforgiving. (Bruni, 2016)

This kind of argument is convincing, but it is also dangerous if it falls into the trap of false symmetry in which all so-called group thinking is rendered equal. Using the perspective of the spectacle, we can avoid this by assessing the content much more critically and theoretically. Not all claims are equal, of course, and only some articulate with historical structures of power. Not all claims are aimed at polarization, yet some are more likely to thrive in the context of political polarization. This is what the far right requires: a constant war footing.

Weathering the storm

> An official at Twitter encouraged me to block the anti-Semites and report them to Twitter, but I have chosen to preserve my Twitter timeline as a research tool of sorts, a database of hate, and a shrine to 2016. (Weisman, 2016)

What kind of politics has emerged from this media environment? This section examines a few specific features of today's digital landscape of spectacle and how it relates to Trumpism. First, there is an eerie resemblance between the kind of techno-narcissism described by critics and the personality of Trump himself. While this should be a troubling resemblance, the main and perhaps more important point is how the Trumpian spectacle unleashes a fascist war machine. The point is that Trumpism represents not only the production

of spectacular space (through misinformation, information bubbles, 'alternative facts', etc.), but the erosion of parts of the state apparatus itself. Part of this assault happens immanently, through the embodied technics of the spectacle itself. That is, the technology is shaping a new kind of subjectivity that is favourable to a Trumpian political strategy.

At the same time, there are many digital practices that are not directly linked to a Trump strategy. The now ubiquitous 'selfie', for instance, has become a widespread practice. Rather than pose for a photograph taken by someone else, we can now pose in our own framing, our own creation. Rather than make a judgement about selfies in themselves, this section begins with an example of how such an everyday digital practice becomes monetized as it is transformed into data for corporate America, which is always pursuing new ways of perpetuating, maintaining and exploiting the spectacle. The journalist Courtney Rubin (2016) tells of how people willingly take selfies of themselves during their daily routine as a way of making extra money. Pay Your Selfie is a company that takes these images and monetizes them by turning them into consumer research data. It works like this:

> Companies set a target number of selfies to be collected, in the thousands or tens of thousands, and give Pay Your Selfie at least $2 per usable image, a portion of which goes to the selfie taker. A computer scans the photos to make sure that there's a face and that the shot isn't too dark. (Rubin, 2016)

This kind of data is unique, says Michelle Smyth, a founder of Pay Your Selfie: 'It's not data you could get through Nielsen … It's one-of-a-kind research' (quoted in Rubin, 2016). Because we can, and because we are already accustomed to practices such as the selfie, we willingly let the spectacle into our homes and most intimate spaces – our bathrooms, kitchens, bedrooms. Such intangible qualities as 'rituals' and 'authenticity'

are captured by such participatory methods. The images are automatically sorted by computers into usable data about us in our everyday environments.

While the biopolitics of consumption is not dependent on judging the selfie as an expression of narcissism, other commentators have ventured into such waters. Jennifer Senior (2018) describes social media as 'the high school we can't log off from'. Senior finds that it has a power over us insofar as some of us obsess about how we are seen by others. Drawing on the psychoanalyst Erik Erickson and the developmental psychologist David Elkind, Senior (2018) writes that 'the fact is, Twitter is changing us – regressing us – in ways developmental psychologists would find weirdly recognizable'. Elkind's idea of the 'imaginary audience' provides a point of departure to rethink Twitter, where 'you actually are living your life on a stage'. Elkind wrote about the 'the idea that teenagers somehow see themselves as stars of their own productions, believing themselves to be watched by an eager, if sometimes judgmental, public' (Senior, 2018). Here the spectacle is clearly an embodied experience, one that carries with it all the sappy weight of human drama.

Selfies can no doubt also be considered acts of self-love, preservation, respect and even resistance. The ontological status of the selfie aside, there is simply an eerie correspondence between this now widespread practice and the narcissistic personality traits of Donald Trump himself. In his criticism, Kellner (2016) frequently points to Trump's narcissism, but he does not explore its deeper meaning or its implications. Instead, he draws on Eric Fromm to highlight the ways in which Trump fits his model of an 'authoritarian personality' (Kellner, 2016, p 31). But what about the resemblance of this personality trait and that widespread socio-technical practice which has caused some to label it as narcissistic? Rather than making a normative judgement about self–technology relations and the relevance of narcissism, others have pointed to a different kind of psychological transformation taking place with the new

technology. The more dangerous possibility is that Trump's way of communicating resonates with a larger transformation in the public and their brain function: the rapid growth in the tech world changes politics because it changes our sense of reality on a more fundamental level (Codeluppi, 2017).

Drawing on Nicholas Carr's (2011) *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, Teddy Wayne (2016) contemplates 'the end of reflection' in digital times. The pull of the spectacle is omnipresent with the new hand–held electronics, making it possible to always be occupied with some task, programme or opportunity for self-promotion. Rather than cultivating an openness to knowledge, we become obsessed not only with ourselves, but with the comforts of convenience and efficiency. Most importantly, we never have to feel the awkwardness of thought itself, creeping along with the constant emergence of difference (Deleuze, 1994, part III; also see p 190). As electronics become more and more portable and ubiquitous, they sabotage the likelihood of reflection and thought ever occurring. Adapting to the quickening pace of technology and information transfer, we also rely on the devices themselves to offer a palliative. Carr is quoted in Wayne (2016) as saying that in these contexts 'We become less patient. When moments without stimulation arise, we start to feel panicked and don't know what to do with them, because we've trained ourselves to expect this stimulation – new notifications and alerts and so on' (quoted in Wayne, 2016). Then Carr delivers the devastating takeaway message:

> We've adopted the Google ideal of the mind, which is that you have a question that you can answer quickly: close-ended, well–defined questions. Lost in that conception is that there's also this open-ended way of thinking where you're not always trying to answer a question. You're trying to go where that thought leads you. As a society, we're saying that that way of thinking isn't as important anymore. It's viewed as inefficient.

Certainly, the decline of the humanities in higher education in recent years reeks of such transformations (Schmidt, 2018). Equally as worrying is Sherry Turkle's (2011) conclusion that today's techno-society is becoming less and less empathetic as it becomes more imbricated with technology (also see Stiegler, 2016). Part of this shift is consistent with the privatization of public space in the context of neoliberalization. As the private sector attacked the postwar state apparatus, part of what crumbled was the idea of collectivity itself, withering under an ascendant individualism. Many critical approaches to urban studies see the new corporate architecture as antagonistic to public space (Sklair and Gherardi, 2012; Ferreri and Trogal, 2018; see Chapter Three). As quasi-public spaces replace the more fully public spaces of the street or park, the conditions of possibility for democratic life and practice are constantly infringed upon. The accelerating proliferation of devices and their connectivity in recent years, however, has brought about a new phase of the privatization of public space. Plugged into their devices, everyone is living their own intimate privatization.

For Ayad Akhtar (2017), there is no doubt that the digital onslaught results in the impoverishment of life and society. 'Dehumanization' is the word Akhtar uses to describe the result of the society constructed by the 'merchants of attention – Google, Facebook, Twitter, Apple, etc. – married to the mature technologies of finance, what we could label the attention–finance complex'. Akhtar (2017) knows that it is our 'pleasure principle' that has been 'turned against us' in the corporate techno-spectacle. This pleasure principle, perverted from our own activity, falls into the orbit of the spectacle, thereby confusing our pleasure with the corporate logics of industry. Akhtar (2017) warns:

> Transformed into economic subjects, our humanity is being redefined; we are valuable only insofar as our economic behavior can be predicted and monetized. Indeed, the technology has enabled the very movements

of our mind to become a steady stream of revenue to someone, somewhere.

Then, Akhtar (2017) points to the neoliberal context and to the demise of 'society', with the impending prospect of an atomized, narcissist consumption where value and desire are confused in an infinite loop:

> Indeed, the great fracture begun in earnest more than 30 years ago – the collapse of a vision of collective well-being – this fracture has finally been completed. We are little more than data points in a society that isn't really that anymore. It's a marketplace, nothing more than the sum of its sold and purchased parts.

This is rich material with which to interpret the new horizons and frontiers of the spectacle (also see Codeluppi, 2017). A president like Trump has been in the works for some time. Trump, in fact, was training for this his entire life, perhaps without always knowing it. As a capitalist line of flight, Trump would be the perfect leader for a nation so thoroughly steeped in spectacle. The most dangerous part about this emerging digital spectacle is not the disregard for truth, but its alliance with the far right and its propensity for violence. Ultimately, however, these processes rely on one another in profound ways.

Violent assemblages

> Spectacle is an exertion of social power. It does violence to human actors just as much as does the discipline of the production line. (Retort et al., 2005, p 15)

An embodied assemblage approach is attentive not only to new technologies, but also to wider contexts of trends shaping the technological landscape, such as deindustrialization and a sprawling prison–industrial complex. Trump himself

represents and performs a kind of toxic masculinity which is crucial for such systems to reproduce. In fact, this macho bravado and violence is a driver of the tech industry itself, known for its sexism. This is perhaps not surprising considering the centrality of another centre of power in the rise of the internet: the US military. Maureen Dowd (2017) warned us of 'Trump, Uber and the Hazards of Broism' by highlighting the similarities between Trump and the rising star Travis Kalanick, then CEO of Uber. For Dowd (2017), they both represent not only toxic masculinity but a dangerous drive for power at all costs, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake:

> Even though one embodies the tech economy and the other is celebrating coal mining and curtailing globalization, Travis Kalanick and Donald Trump displayed similar traits as they rose to power, ignoring boundaries and smashing institutional structures. (Dowd, 2017)

As such, both embody the potential violence of a line of flight, which produces much disruption and damage to its various environments. Reinvigorating the anti-state ideology of Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s, Facebook's one-time motto of 'Move fast and break things' (see Taplin, 2017) also embodies the disruptive potential of these corporate lines of flight. We are only now beginning to grapple with the geopolitics of social media platforms, as Russia's meddling in the 2016 US election and its chaotic legal and political aftermath are becoming clearer. Trump's spectacular politics is underpinned by companies that have long been antagonistic to the state.

The result is a number of social transformations, some of which resemble the very personality of the Trump himself. While there is plenty to speculate on in this regard (and much yet to study empirically) we do know for sure one possible

result of these developments: Trumpism itself as a digitally mediated populism feeding on the historical antagonisms of the American experience – white supremacy, patriarchy and xenophobia. Trumpian spectacle is a war machine that, when pressed, will 'double-down' into its post-truth coordinates, no matter what truth it faces and seeks to discredit. Even the affective flows of the digital media frenzy are turned into a war machine that works to wear down the opposition, much as Bruni described (see Chapter One). In *On Tyranny* the historian Timothy Snyder (2017) again articulates post-truth as not only a fabrication but an offensive and aggressive strategy when it is pursued as relentlessly as it has been by the Trump administration. Snyder's focus on television could just as easily apply to social media:

> Politicians in our times feed their clichés to television, where even those who wish to disagree repeat them. Television purports to challenge political language by conveying images, but the succession from one frame to another can hinder a sense of resolution. Everything happens fast, but nothing actually happens. Each story on televised news is 'breaking' until it is displaced by the next one. So we are hit by wave upon wave but never see the ocean. (Snyder, 2017, p 60)

Snyder's maritime figure of post-truth obstruction leads to an affective experience – 'wave upon wave' – which obscures the larger picture. Post-truth is surely, on some level, a line of flight in its refusal to conform. Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) main point is that this same emancipatory energy can become toxic if it is left unattended or falls into the wrong hands. Fascism for them involved a politics on this level, in which sadistic exhilaration leaks out and, left unrestrained, can turn into violent torrents that flood the landscape. The fascistic character of Trumpism was clear in August 2016 when Steve Bannon of the far right Breitbart News was hired as Trump's

campaign manager. Kellner (2016) appreciates the gravity of this formal alliance:

> The hardright website Breitbart News had been one of Trump's most ferocious supporters that fed on Trump's most extreme nationalist, racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, and aggressive instincts and tendency to promote the most extreme conspiracy theories and extremist ideas, a feature of both Trump and the Breitbart site. (Kellner, 2016, p 64)

By bringing these figures into the official campaign, Trump was sending clear signals that were indeed incendiary. If Trump is one of capitalism's notable lines of flight in recent decades, the more important and disturbing moment is when it becomes a war machine set against certain minority groups that have been long oppressed in the United States. Not all lines of flight do something like this. The extent to which this really represents a line of flight in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology may be questionable, depending on the role of 'becoming' that is often associated with such lines of flight and their possible war machines. 'Becomings are minoritarian', they insist (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 339). This poses a conundrum for their overall system of how the power of capitalism operates today. Trumpism is not a becoming, but a fascist war machine from the beginning. The feelings that are dispersed through the Trumpian spectacle are of the darkest and most aggressive kind. If some kind of affective capture device is effectuated through this spectacle, it is one that is doomed from the start because of its historical and geographical imbrication with other mega-machines of power, such as colonial modernity and its racism and patriarchy. While Trumpian spectacle appears as a somewhat unique culmination of a confluence of forces, it also draws power from these other geographies of power and violence. Much more work is required to trace the connections between capitalist

spectacle and other forms of spectacle that are more aligned with racial and sexual politics.

Conclusion

As an embodied assemblage, the digital spectacle is much more than the play of images on social media. In its fragmentation and dispersal among the population via self-administered surveillance technologies, the digital spectacle enhances the affective and emotional dimensions of consumption. In so many ways, from the design of the hand-held electronic device to the sinister software inside, we are networked in profound new ways with which we are just beginning to come to grips. The logics of entertainment described in Chapter One are taken into new domains in the digital spectacle.

In addition to this intensification of the spectacle, the connectivity provided by the internet has proved highly disruptive of political practice today. If Trump is a line of flight as an expression of capital's most extreme tendencies, he enables a war machine by linking with certain kinds of politics and not others. It isn't just that an affective spectacle sometimes churns out non-sense. The more serious issue is its articulation with the far right (Rasmussen, 2018). Trump's spectacle, then, is capable of holding within it two temporalities at the same time: the extreme presence of post-truth – as in 'anything goes' – and the historical legacies that inform the fascist war machine – namely, white supremacism and patriarchy.

In this sense, little has been said about how the spectacle enables an aggressive political front to take control of the White House and unleash so many forces that are antagonistic to civil society and to the institutions of the state that safeguard democracy itself. Scholars have come around to acknowledging how states use technologies of spectacle to govern. Few have yet considered how this spectacular war machine is actually undermining the institutional foundations of the state itself. Citing the breakdown of European democracies in the

early 20th century, Timothy Snyder (2017) pleads with us to consider that democracy is not guaranteed and must be defended in everyday life as much as in institutional spaces. Snyder provides 'twenty lessons from the twentieth century' adapted for Trump's America. These come as a combination of warnings and pieces of advice on how to act in everyday life. In the context of digital 'dehumanization', as Akhtar (2017) calls it, Snyder's twelfth lesson stands out as especially curious:

> Make eye contact and small talk. This is not just polite. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society. It is also a way to stay in touch with your surroundings, break down social barriers, and understand whom you should and should not trust. If we enter a culture of denunciation, you will want to know the psychological landscape of your daily life. (2017, p 81)

As so many socio-technical forces militate against this kind of everyday practice of citizenship, we may be tempted to ignore the ongoing investment in the built environment by the enterprises of spectacle. While the techno-digital landscape adds a powerful new circuit to spectacle's repertoire, our everyday physical surroundings are also, in some places, gaining new inputs. In other places, these investments in the built environment have diminished as capital finds more lucrative spaces in the global marketplace. The alternative universe made possible by the web was first made possible by spatial design in places like shopping malls and their antecedents, department stores and the commercial arcades. It is also notable that Trump's business enterprise is primarily invested in these kinds of built environments, from skyscrapers to casinos, resorts, hotels and other spaces of leisure, all of which are flush with the logics of spectacle.

THREE

Architectures of Wonder and Dismay

Only microfascism provides an answer to the global question: Why does desire desire its own repression, how can it desire its own repression? The masses certainly do not passively submit to power; nor do they 'want' to be repressed, in a kind of masochistic hysteria; nor are they tricked by an ideological lure. Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from micro-formations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination. Leftist organizations will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 251)

In '1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity', Deleuze and Guattari (2013) insist that all political formations rely on

gaining traction in what they call 'the molecular'. In this political ontology, subject formation relies a lot more on sensations and embodied feelings than has been previously theorized. Subjectivities form only when intense feelings are activated, created and/or engaged. What does this have to do with desire desiring its own repression? There is more going on in the expression than the mere appearance of repression. This helps us undo a key mistake in some spectacle theories: that the public mistakenly chooses the candidate that does not best represent their 'interests' (Brabazon et al., 2019). This reading can be found in coverage of Trumpism, often by baffled journalists, academics and others. What it misses is precisely the affective dimension of a fascistic war machine, for which the repression is secondary to the more primary objective of attacking the alleged enemy. These outcomes are highly dependent on organization, what Deleuze and Guattari (2013) refer to as being an 'engineered setup'. Spectacle, then, works not as an 'ideological lure', but as the unstable modulation of desire through the molar and molecular coordinates of consumer society. Following Deleuze and Guattari, an idea like the society of the spectacle can be considered a molar formation, operating as a kind of structuring force with a particular explanatory logic. The extent to which this involves the molecular is a question for empirical research.

As Trump is a master of spectacle in a nation that has been governed by spectacle for some time, now is the time to consider the linkages between consumer culture and far right politics. As mentioned previously, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1999) was exemplary in this regard. With Benjamin, the spectacle is reread not as an image-bound containment centre, but as the always-transforming and chaotic combinations conjured up by the culture industries and their techno-magic, spliced with the geopolitical prerogatives of the state, whatever form it takes. Benjamin not only traced the connections between the commercialism of the industrial revolution and the rise of fascism, but also found the philosophical resources

to remain hopeful and not despair. As others have previously noted, his unusual kind of Marxist theorizing blends nicely with the system invented by Deleuze and Guattari (2013), insofar as technologies of power aim at the body itself while also remaining open to an uncertain future, ridden as much by inconsistences as by the requirements of order.

If the spectacle includes this level of intimate existence, and fascism is underwritten by similar intimacies (including desire; see Kingsbury, 2008), there is an uncertain overlapping that takes place which should be the focus of future work. This chapter provides the reader with a composite of built environments of spectacle that will be no doubt familiar to many. This chapter argues that, in addition to the landscapes of media and digital technology that were the focus of the previous two chapters, the built environment of architecture and design will continue to play a role in the overall drama of global and everyday spectacle. Recall that the Trump family business is involved in the actual production of spectacle-oriented buildings around the world. Labelling these buildings with the Trump name and selling the Trump brand is no doubt a signal of narcissism (see Kellner, 2016, p 32; also see Gökarıksel and Smith, 2016). It is worth it, though, to consider these buildings as embodied assemblages that go beyond any attempt to psychoanalyse Trump himself. They are, of course, dedicated to numerous leisure activities: vacations, golf, gambling and shopping. It is easy for critics of Trump to sound-off in opposition, but less easy to honestly dissociate themselves from many of these activities. If spectacle is built from desire, then these pleasurable lines of flight are what can take an entire society into the disarray of unrestrained power and its horrific abuses. What kind of spectacular micro-fascism do we all carry with us to the extent that we are included in these kinds of spaces, albeit in contradictory and uneven ways? Where is the spectacle leading us?

This chapter is structured as a mobile passage or stroll through four 'arcades' under the guidance of Susan Buck-Morss,

whose *Dialectics of Seeing* (1989) provides a rich and enabling engagement with Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. The 'wish images' (Buck–Morss, 1989, p 110) that flowed through the Arcades signalled a kind of psychological control over the emerging industrial masses, but they also harboured in them something potentially destabilizing. This melding of micro and macro – the molecular and the molar – is what brings the arcades into line with an embodied assemblage approach inspired by Deleuze and Guattari. As such, we can consider the array of opportunities to experience the spectacle and how it often intrudes on our everyday lives. As such, it becomes a space for geopolitical interventions, from the spectacular maintenance of socio–spatial inequality and illiberal governance (Koch, 2018) to the endless 'War on Terror' waged by the United States and its allies (Retort et al., 2005).

Arcade 1

> Commodities here as elsewhere (like religious symbols in an earlier era) store the fantasy energy for social transformation in reified form. (Buck–Morss, 1989, p 29)

Benjamin insisted that the emerging consumer society of his time remained tethered to the world of myth, despite the grandiose Enlightenment claims to have dispelled such influences. To sell more things, capitalism was figuring out how to make consumerism an integral part of everyday life. Along with these spatial dimensions were the images of marketing and advertising that invested commodities with an alleged power (Buck–Morss, 1989, p 139). But because this element of reality was now incorporated into the industrial system, a profound instability now threatened it at every turn. The embodied and affective powers of the mythic are not so easy to control after all. Benjamin was hopeful that, despite this reality becoming increasingly commoditized, commodities and their mythic powers would nevertheless hold within them the essence of

humanity itself, which for Benjamin the Marxist was something worth fighting for in the face of capitalist expansion. A fantasy energy (mentioned previously) signals for Buck-Morss (1989) something utopian, a radical belief in a post-capitalist future. The realm of the mythic, though, also gets us closer to a kind of embodied desire that Deleuze and Guattari (2013) claim is at the heart of politics and fascism in particular.

Benjamin had an intense interest in urban spaces and their role in capitalism. The arcades were urban spaces where the embodied experience of the street was combined with the science and technology of an emerging industrial society. Leisure activities like strolling came together with new retail technologies that placed commodities on display. Here commodities were 'mystified' so as to conceal all the violence and brutality that went into their production (Merrifield, 2002, p 63). Along with the arcades, there were large department stores, and both would eventually be brought together in today's shopping centres and malls. As a new kind of consumer society emerged following the destruction of the Second World War, these shopping centres and malls played an increasingly important role, first in the expansion of the suburbs, and then as a more dispersed urban logic that returns to the city in a post-industrial form. The coincidence of this growth with the rampant privatization of public space and the inequalities of post-Fordist/neoliberal deindustrialization is one of the most compelling drivers of continued interest in spectacular urban landscapes (Hetherington and Cronin, 2008; Chu and Sanyal, 2015).

In *The Age of Spectacle: The Rise and Fall of Iconic Architecture*, Tom Dyckhoff (2017) indeed provides such a narrative trajectory for understanding the enduring role of architecture in this geopolitical, political-economic and socio-cultural transition. Architectural spectacle took off in the US postwar landscape and had a strong impact in the United Kingdom as well. Importantly, these spaces are increasingly oriented towards the stimulation of the senses in the visitors themselves as an

attention-grabbing scheme, or in themselves. Today, buildings work to produce such affective responses such as 'the thrill of the odd, the pulse-racing peculiarity of dazzling new architecture', and Dyckhoff claims that this 'had become government policy' (Dyckhoff, 2017, p 8), resulting in the growth of a certain kind of mega-urban structure, from shopping centres to everyday infrastructure such as the Millennium Bridge linking Newcastle and Gateshead in the United Kingdom (Dyckhoff, 2017, p 174). Writing in the wake of the rise of digital technologies in recent years (described in Chapter Two), Dyckhoff makes a case for the continued importance of built environments and architectural spaces in the new society of the spectacle: 'You can ignore adverts on the internet, fast forward them on TV, turn the page in magazines, but you can't (yet) block out the space around you' (2017, p 156). These spaces still matter.

Dyckhoff (2017) insists that architecture will always be important because of its physical and affective materiality, offering a particular kind of 'experience' (p 189); we are not yet in a fully digital spectacle that annihilates space completely (something like the pods in *The Matrix*). Spectacular industries would be flexible and profitable enough to make them key motors of the emerging post-industrial society. Rather than rehash the theories of the society of the spectacle as a hegemonic ideological system, Dyckhoff (2017) pays close attention to the business of spectacle and to its constant forays into the public's embodied sphere of existence. How does it work – not only psychologically but affectively? In an interview with a neuroscientist, Dyckhoff even participated in a 'neuromarketing' experiment that shed light on the depths that retail capital is now able to plumb with and through the architecture of spectacle (also see Stiegler, 2016). Jaunting through the mall, every movement of his eyes is tracked and recorded by a set of goggles worn over them. As he scans his surroundings and 'feels' (Dyckhoff, 2017, p 193) his way through the space, his eyes dart from here to there, from the faces of the people to the advertisements, window displays

and built environment all around him. When his vision lingers embarrassingly on the 'scantily clad male and female figures used in shop windows', the scientist assures him:

> This is biological … we look at other faces to see if they are potential mates, aggressors. We can't help but do it. You have neurons in your brain that will move your eyes towards a face. It's unavoidable. This is what marketing is: it's about *appealing to our basic biological instincts*. (Quoted in Dyckhoff, 2017, p 193, emphasis added)

These kinds of logics have long been used in retailing, going back to the 'Gruen transfer', whereby retailers are continually moving the environment and merchandise around to induce confusion and therefore render the visitor 'vulnerable' to subtle pressures and prods to behave in a certain way (Dyckhoff, 2017, p 192; see Healy, 2014, on this kind of vulnerability). For example, in some shopping centres the windows to the outside world are designed to create a scattering of sunlight and shadow on the floor inside the mall, a 'disco-ball effect' (Dyckhoff, 2017, p 194). This kind of patterning keeps visitors' eyes moving around the environment, making them more vulnerable to branding and other signage. So many details of the environment are calculated to work on the visiting body, making it a socio-technical assemblage of its own.

These logics have gone far beyond the shopping centres and malls, insofar as a new kind of architectural space has proliferated through 'airports and railway stations' and 'civic spaces like schools, parks and libraries – rebranded as "one-shop stops" or "idea stores"' (Dyckhoff, 2017, p 186). Additionally, outdoor advertising has also continued to seep out from the billboards and retail spaces into everyday life (Dekeyser, 2018). These logics of spectacle, therefore, leak into more subtle interventions in the landscape. Tim Wu (2016) reports on this expansion and its consequences. Their article, 'Mother Nature brought to you by …', includes an insight into how

some US school districts allow students' lockers to be plastered with ads, which lead to a 'fully immersive experience' of commercialism in this essential civic space (Wu, 2016, p 169; also see Klein, 2000). These logics of spectacle even seep out of their urban architectural encasements. In outdoor parks, for example, restaurant chains like Chipotle add an element of playfulness to their marketing. Wu (2016) reports that 'King County already partnered with Chipotle to hide 30 giant replica burritos on parkland bearing the logo of the agency and the restaurant chain. People who found the burritos won prizes from Chipotle.'

These somewhat bizarre examples point to the ongoing importance of physical and built space for the formation of consumer subjects. What is important for Wu (2016) and Dyckhoff (2017) is the work that these objects and spaces do for the spectacle. They are spatial lines of flight that potentially shape the embodied consumer subject, one that feels enthused even as the bonds of power close their grip. Actually, following Deleuze and Guattari, the enthusiasm and the grip *are one* in these assemblages. They qualify as lines of flight because they offer a sense of exhilaration and excitement, perhaps contrary to what is normally experienced. The power of the spectacle often depends on the level of intensity of the excitement that can be generated around any particular thing. As we know today, the shopping centre can also wither and fade away and become a dead, dying or zombie mall.

The Trump real-estate empire is one of so many that are dedicated to building these kinds of experiential spaces. Poniewozik (2019) notes that a young Trump 'dreamed of going to Hollywood' but when settling on taking over the family business he vowed to 'put show business into real estate', says Poniewozik (2019), citing Timothy O'Brien's *TrumpNation*. The family business has expanded into an empire of resorts, hotels, private apartments, skyscrapers and other leisure spaces. Trump's empire of spectacle includes much more than ephemeral media spectacles. Actual spaces

are carved out and managed that enrol the population into a complex set of networked relations that press on our feelings and sensations. In addition to the socially constructed meaning that articulates with the landscape, the spectacle is itself embedded into the landscape and emanates outwards as so many apparatuses of capture. The 'productive' elements of geopolitical power mentioned by Koch (2018) are here multiplied and dispersed across registers of experience that exceed representational theories of power (see Allen, 2006; Briziarelli and Armano, 2017).

A closer look at one of these spectacles, though, reveals a close articulation between the powers of brand, celebrity and media (discussed in the previous chapters) and architecture. Trump Tower was finished in 1983 and was one of the most spectacular of Trump's buildings. Its luxury and its commercial capacities attracted a curious crowd of 'celebrities and charlatans', including far right European politicians; the former Haitian dictator Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier; mega-stars such as Michael Jackson; and Paul Manafort who later became Trump's 2016 campaign manager and eventually went to prison (Bernstein, 2017). Following Bernstein (2017), Trump used this as publicity to further promote the brand. Here is a complex assemblage of architecture, brand, celebrity and media that connect together to form a mega-spectacle. Bernstein (2017) documents how the most advanced techniques of spectacle were deployed, from misinformation about the actual dimensions of the building itself, to the alleged celebrity tenants. Most absurdly, Trump used to his advantage false stories that Prince Charles and Princess Diana, members of the British royal family, had purchased property in the building. In full post-truth mode of the spectacle, Trump allegedly referred to this as 'the sale that never occurred', which was, importantly, 'the one that most helped Trump Tower' (*The Art of the Deal*, quoted in Bernstein, 2017). For theorists of the spectacle like Jean Baudrillard, the post-truth coordinates of spectacle allow power to operate in new, absurd ways that defy any logic or

sense of reality (Rubenstein, 2008). This doesn't mean that the public passively accepts anything thrown its way, but that they are increasingly up against political formations that rely on such absurdist positions (Miller and Del Casino Jr., 2018; Brabazon et al., 2019). Trump, after all, has been doing this for a long time.

As we shall see in the next section, Trump's architectural spectacle as embodied assemblage is even more complex. The logics of spectacle overlap with the urban geographies of racism and discrimination that characterized the real-estate market in New York in the 1970s and earlier. By looking back to the racial dynamics of Trump's real-estate practices, we can continue to track the embodied geopolitics of architectural spectacle.

Arcade 2

Necessity of a theory of history from which fascism can become visible. (Benjamin, quoted in Buck-Morss 1989, p 303)

The geopolitics of *The Arcades Project* is often left out by many commentators. Not Buck-Morss (1989), however, who is very specific and clear about this. As is Stephanie Polsky (2010), who writes that Benjamin's project 'stood at the brink of revealing the secret history of National Socialism' (p 79), which took him, of all places, towards the commercial arcades of the 19th century. There was something about how the Nazis used technologies of spectacle to inflate their sense of the mythical that underpinned their murderous project. This mythic capability was accentuated by capitalist industrialization and the ways the Nazis replicated its more affective technologies. In focusing on 'urban illumination' (Buck-Morss, 1989, p 309), Benjamin was making a case that links each political regime of feeling. These mundane technologies made an impact, from a Parisian urban retail landscape of neon and

electric light to a Nazi rally with a 'Dome of Lights' and a giant swastika made up of hundreds of human bodies (Buck–Morss, 1989, p 310-1) (also see Hagen and Ostergren, 2006). Again, citing Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the section on 'Types of Lighting', Buck–Morss (1989) writes: 'Here again, fascism was not an alternative to commodity culture, but appropriated its most sophisticated techniques – while robbing them of material content' (p 309). The mundane materials of lighting and design 'can be dangerous' (Benjamin, quoted in Buck–Morss, 1989, p 309), after all.

In Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) terminology, affective lines of flight are produced by these modes of urban illumination. The Nazis then harnessed the line of flight and made it into a war machine by articulating those sensations with an aggressive disposition towards the world and towards the 'other'. Is there a similar confluence between the architectures of consumer culture and the rise of Trumpism today? Trump used the building by combining it with celebrities and media coverage in a way that promoted the Trump brand. Others have gone further to plot the similarities between Trump's campaign rallies and those of other populist and fascist leaders (see Kellner, 2016; Connolly, 2017).

The early warning signs of a fascist war machine can be traced through the Trump organization's commercial assemblage. Before Donald took control of the family business, it was focused not on luxury property and spectacular architecture, but on what Mahler and Eder (2016) describe as 'utilitarian housing' in working-class parts of New York City, including Queens and Coney Island. Before the spectacle of Trump Tower, there was Trump Village, then the 'jewel in the crown' of their 'middle-class housing empire' (Mahler and Eder, 2016). Civil rights organizations documented racial discrimination against black renters by the Trumps, and in 1973 the Justice Department sued. While Donald always 'denied any awareness of any discrimination at Trump properties', as the company's president he was named as a defendant in the case and surely played a role

in their shocking response. While racial discrimination is already underwritten by the embodied politics of white power, the Trump response to the charges is further proof of an emerging fascist war machine through the Trump commercial assemblage.

Mahler and Eder (2016) point to the difficulties in enforcing the Civil Rights Act in housing at the time and cite other cases of racial discrimination. Rather than follow the example set by other high-profile cases at the time – signing a 'consent agreement' promising desegregation – the Trumps did something very different. First, they hired lawyer Roy Cohn, former counsel to Senator Joseph McCarthy, and counter-sued the Justice Department for $100 million for defamation (Goldberg, 2019). As an early example of the Trump organization employing technologies of spectacle, they fought the government in dramatic fashion:

> Looking back, Mr. Trump's response to the lawsuit can be seen as presaging his handling of subsequent challenges, in business and in politics. Rather than quietly trying to settle – as another New York developer had done a couple of years earlier – he turned the lawsuit into a protracted battle, complete with angry denials, character assassination, charges that the government was trying to force him to rent to 'welfare recipients' and a $100 million countersuit accusing the Justice Department of defamation. (Mahler and Eder, 2016)

Their counter-suit was eventually dismissed by a judge and they signed a consent agreement. However, only several years later they were again under scrutiny by the Justice Department for violating the agreement based on ongoing discriminatory practices. Mahler and Eder's (2016) report highlights the complex intricacies of a commercial assemblage and its constitutive war machines, which produced racial segregation in Trump-operated housing. Specifically, while their response was belligerent in the face of the civil rights movement and the

federal government's role therein, it also worked to improve the image of the brand elsewhere: 'By the spring of 1982, when the case was officially closed, Donald Trump's prized project, Trump Tower, was just months from completion. The rebranding of the Trump name was well underway' (Mahler and Eder, 2016). In any case, Trump himself continued his pattern of racist public behaviour, including the 'Central Park Five' incident in 1989 and propagating the 'birther' conspiracy theory about President Barack Obama, which was a post-truth invention signifying the extreme lengths to which a fascist war machine is willing to go.

While buildings can contain such complex histories and power relations, theorists of the architectural spectacle such as Benjamin never become deterministic. For Buck-Morss (1989), it was Benjamin's enduring believe in the 'dialectical image' that would help to ignite a more critical consciousness – that, with a 'flash', the past and present could merge, shedding critical light on to things and relations of power that risk becoming normalized and taken for granted. Benjamin tried to break this fossilization of power by connecting the past and the present in ways that illuminate these power relations by refusing them their commodified mythic status. Buck-Morss (1989) writes:

> The conception of 'dialectical image' is overdetermined in Benjamin's thought. It has a logic as rich in philosophical implications as the Hegelian dialectic, and, indeed, the unfolding of its complexities is a task of each and every chapter of this study. In the present context it refers to the use of archaic images to identify what is historically new about the 'nature' of commodities. The principle of construction is that of montage, whereby the image's ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into one 'harmonizing perspective'. For Benjamin, the technique of montage had 'special, perhaps even total rights' as a progressive form because it 'interrupts the

context into which it is inserted' and thus 'counteracts illusion' and he intended it to be the principle governing the construction of the *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project). (p 67)

Through montage, then, Benjamin sought dialectical images that would transform our understanding of the present by way of illuminating their connection and imbrication with legacies of the past. Ideally, we could recognize the manipulative forms that were guiding society towards fascism. Commodities have gotten into our intimate lives, but we should always be able to free ourselves from the commodifying process, which is manipulating and exploiting the most human aspects of us. The dialectical image is a 'dialectics at a standstill', as it provides the illumination of the present with the full weight of the conspiring past. Benjamin described a kind of historical layering, or correspondence, between the arcades and the emerging techno–spaces of Nazism (Polsky, 2010), as a critical perspective on an evolving landscape of capitalism, consumption and catastrophe. As Polsky (2010) portends, 'Benjamin's use of the dialectical image is prompting historical consciousness to occur, so as to bring about a state of emergency at the level of historical awareness' (p 99).

This notion of dialectical layering or simultaneity makes Benjamin a useful source for other critical theories of violence and society. For Melissa Wright (1999), the labour behind the consumer spectacle inhabits its own contradictory set of forces amid the logics of commoditization. In the maquila factories in northern Mexico, along the border with the United States, the female labour force 'hangs in the balance' amid an 'ambiguity' (Wright, 1999, p 471) central to that mode of production. The manufacturing corporations need her labour power, but they also need to dismiss her when it decreases past a certain level. Wright's goal and purpose in invoking Benjamin is related to a simultaneous geography of violence that had gripped Ciudad Juárez, as hundreds of

young women, many of whom worked in the maquilas, were violently murdered and their bodies left in the desert. With Benjamin, Wright (1999) runs a dialectical line between the official narratives explaining the killings and the operational logics of the maquilas. Public officials typically blamed the victims and excused male violence, while the factory operated a dense system of surveillance and discursive control over the 'untrainable' female worker, whose labour power was destined to always depreciate over time, rather than appreciate, as with the 'trainable' male worker. There is a general dehumanization in these dual logics, as the woman always moves from value to waste. Her 'dialectic image' (Wright, 1999, p 460) is just this, suspended between value and disposability, caught in a violent 'ambiguity' (p 471).

For Trumpism today, we could similarly put forward another kind of ambiguity. For Trumpism needs post-truth to proliferate, but it also needs to solidify political feelings somewhere, somehow, in the historical legacies of power, namely, in white supremacy and patriarchy. An embodied assemblage approach can accommodate these conflicting impulses and requirements. It can also accommodate the more utopian potential that the dialectical image was meant to harbour. Buck-Morss (1989) writes that 'Against the backdrop of fascism, the pedagogic plan of the *Passagen-Werk* [*Arcades Project*], a presentation of history that would *de*mythify the present, had become all the more urgent' (p 36, emphasis in original).

Arcade 3

> The tremendous power of the new technology has remained in the hands of the ruling class that wields it as a force of domination, while privately appropriating the wealth it produces. In this context, dream symbols are the fetishized desires that advertise commodities. And the collective goes on sleeping. But should it awaken, the

utopian symbols can be redeemed as a manifestation of truth. Essential to this truth is its transitoriness. The wish symbols, sign–posts in a period of transition, can inspire the refunctioning of the new nature so that it satisfies material needs and desires that are the source of the dream in the first place. Wish images do not liberate humanity directly. But they are vital to the process. (Buck–Morss, 1989, p 120)

Wish symbols, wish images, dialectical images – these are the explosive elements of Benjamin's philosophy. One of his key insights was that, because these technologies are so intrusive and invasive, their practice will always be coexistent with the most basic elements of human experience. As such, we can always find something vital and authentic in spaces of consumption, even the most manufactured consumer landscapes such as shopping malls, which so clearly lack authenticity (see Goss, 1999). These explosive figures hold open the door to an undetermined future, one that could be configured differently. In this way, these Benjaminian images are like the disruptive and emergent qualities of the line of flight from Deleuze and Guattari (2013) – they free up a line of flight towards the unknown, a flight from the dream sleep perpetuated by spectacle. Something else can happen, even through the spectacle itself – 'something always escapes' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 254). For Deleuze and Guattari, it is precisely this domain of life that becomes the target of new biopolitical mechanisms, of which the spectacle forms an important part. Yet an embodied assemblage approach to the spectacle does not resort to any kind of determinism, even one that is routed through the vocabulary of biopolitics, modulation, anticipation, apparatuses and 'Control Societies' (Deleuze, 1990).

One of Trumpism's most egregious offences is perpetuating the climate crisis by questioning the science behind it. The commercial assemblage that is Trump's business empire relies

on a series of flows that include certain images of spectacle that are mundane and one-time only. These often correspond with the corresponding global expansion of an industry that has a significant impact on the climate: tourism. In this industry of and for the spectacle, we locate an additional environmental dimension to the spectacle as a catastrophic historical figure. Consumers are escaping from everyday life and engaging in any number of tourist experiences in increasing numbers: adventure, entertainment, shopping, pleasure and so on. Trump's celebrity as a member of an elite consumer class adds to their ability to garner value by mimicking this supposed lifestyle. When we worship and fetishize the luxury leisure experience as the high point of expectations, we dream the same dream as Trump.

It was only a matter of time before the aesthetic and atmosphere of spectacle was exported, not only through the marketing of destinations, but also through the journey itself – entertainment in transit, the pinnacle of this being the cruise ship. These are laden with entertainment events, yet their main appeal, as Michael Ian Black (2018) observes, is their banality, their 'unapologetic, gleaming banality'. Black's reflections at times seem to justify, redeem and praise this performance as the production of a restorative space and ethics of care. The close quarters of the ship and the safety protocols even encourage a more collective ethos among the passengers, reminiscent of Goss's (1999) jaunt through the Mall of America guided by Walter Benjamin. The power of the dialectical image can shock us into awareness of what is actually missing from most of our scenes of choreographed and commodified leisure and consumption. Dialectical images, though, are not wishful fantasies. They are not meant to interpret banal reality as actually and always holding the secret key to revolutionary change. They are meant to illuminate the configuration of life, knowledge and history in ways that denaturalize their conditions of existence. They are dangerous precisely for that reason, that we can awake

from the 'dream sleep of capitalism' and there is an urgency to move us towards that waking. Is Black (2018) on the cusp of a dialectical image of the cruise ship? Such a hope is dashed when Black acknowledges and then dismisses the catastrophic knowledge that comes with the cruise experience, the knowledge that a lot hangs in the balance of the continued operation of these machines. As a space of spectacle, it is perhaps fitting that the ship they were riding and commenting on is called the *Celebrity*:

> As for the cruise industry's woeful environmental record, I ignored that for the duration of my cruise because I am a monster, but for the record, Celebrity received an overall grade of D+ from the Friends of the Earth, an environmental advocacy organization, in 2016. Not good. (Black, 2018)

So, while Black can reassure us that a D+ is 'not good', there is something more troubling here. Black anticipates criticism of his flippant attitude and forces the reader to encounter another kind of unforgivable subject – the ironically self-aware 'monster'. We have access to more information than any previous generation, and ignorance of the impact of our consumer-oriented lifestyle is less defensible than ever. We have the knowledge, yet major changes are slow to come, if at all. Importantly, we typically act on much more than knowledge; there are also pleasure, affect, myth, fantasy and delusion. While this may be true, Black (2018) also exemplifies a new kind of consumer subject. In acknowledging his status as eco-monster, Black (2018) shows us how easily we justify our own wasteful and unethical consumer practices – with ironic and melancholic self-awareness. Black ridicules his own inability to follow his own better judgement, or at least his awareness of what he is participating in. It is, in fact, a refusal of dialectical thinking – or what Goss (1999) called a 'failure

in dialectical thinking' – insofar as dialectical thinking links discrete events with their broader conditions of possibility, both spatially and historically, to trigger the emergence of something new.

As consumers, we accomplish this manoeuvre constantly. For those of us who are like Black (2018), there is a gnawing ambivalence about our monstrous lives. For people like Trump and even more traditional conservatives, there is no need for this: post-truth clears the way. From the perspective of the spectacle, though, what purpose does the ironic hipster attitude serve? Not everyone in society can go full post-truth in terms of just ignoring the catastrophic damage caused by consumer society. Yet for those who are more or less aware but are nevertheless enrolled in its embodied rhythms, expectations and modes of governance, there is another option: capture them in an act of ironic self-awareness that does nothing to actually make a difference. On the *Celebrity*, you can let off a little ambivalent steam while recognizing the micro-fascism of the Anthropocene. It is no surprise, then, that Black (2018) concludes with a nostalgic image of a cheeseburger: 'And I don't want the "perfect" meal. I want a cheeseburger. Simple, banal, uncool. Cheeseburgers are delicious. I think a lot of people just want a cheeseburger.' Dialectical image for the Anthropocene? I don't think so.

A similar trajectory can be found in Ann Patchett's 'My Year of No Shopping' (2017). Patchett, too, gets close to the power of the dialectical image of consumption, this time in shopping itself. Their experiment with actively not shopping leads Patchett (2017) to a series of genuine insights. Perhaps most outstanding is that, once we learn to control the impulses that the spectacle as embodied assemblage build into us, we re-learn what else life can be all about. 'Not shopping frees up a lot of space in your brain', according to Patchett (2017). Perhaps anticipating the criticism that this is a nice-sounding but naive experiment by someone with privilege to restrict

their conspicuous consumption, Patchett, the owner of a bookstore, writes:

> I know there is a vast difference between not buying things and not being able to buy things. Not shopping for a year hardly makes me one with the poor, but it has put me on the path of figuring out what I can do to help. I understand that buying things is the backbone of the economy and job growth. I appreciate all the people who shop in the bookstore. But taking some time off from consumerism isn't going to make the financial markets collapse. If you're looking for a New Year's resolution, I have to tell you: This one's great. (2017)

On the cusp of making a significant and incisive criticism of the spectacle, Patchett (2017) withdraws. All the insight gained from a year of no shopping is subsumed back into the spectacle with the following words: 'I understand that buying things is the backbone of the economy and job growth.' We glimpse the wicked and perverted substructure of the system, only to have Patchett reverse course and reinscribe it in our spectacle-oriented desiring machines. Rather than a revolutionary call for change, the incipient dialectical image is reduced to a trivial pursuit that we all dabble in, but that usually fizzles out – a perpetually failing New Year's resolution.

It is important to note that Patchett's experiment includes a reflection on why they were shopping online so much in the first place. As a critic of Trump, Patchett's (2017) online behaviour is self-diagnosed as retail therapy:

> At the end of 2016, our country had swung in the direction of gold leaf, an ecstatic celebration of unfeeling billionaire-dom that kept me up at night. I couldn't settle down to read or write, and in my anxiety I found myself mindlessly scrolling through two particular shopping

websites, numbing my fears with pictures of shoes, clothes, purses and jewelry.

Spectacle, then, runs through even this kind of political opposition.

Others took retail matters into their own hands in other ways. Rachel Abrams (2017) reports on the activities of the person behind the 'Grab Your Wallet' boycott movement, organized through social media and email, which emerged in the months following Trump's inauguration. The campaign was the work of Shannon Coulter, who decided to boycott retailers that sold Trump-branded items. They drew up lists of retailers and other companies that did business with any of the Trump brands, and eventually shared the information with others. The result was an outpouring of interest in and engagement with the boycott, resulting in long days of online organizing for Coulter as the campaign became 'another full time job'. In some ways, Coulter's network of information and like-minded shoppers represents an emergent online 'counter-spectacle' to the radical nature of Trump's fascist war machine (see Bassetti et al., 2017; Bulut and Mert Bal, 2017). Coulter admits to not having expected the campaign to take off in the way it did. Indeed, Abrams's (2017) article describes how Coulter was swept up in a series of events that took them by surprise. Suddenly, the not so simple act of consumer activism on the internet sparked a blaze, which was directed specifically and exclusively *against* the Trump brand.

Yet, even in this mutant anti-Trump digital formation lurks the logics of the spectacle. Coulter shares Patchett's (2017) refusal to rethink the fundamental coordinates of consumer society itself. 'The goal', Coulter says, 'came originally from a place of really wanting to shop the stores we loved again with a clear conscience' (quoted in Abrams, 2017). Shopping remains centred as the taken-for-granted way of life. Benjamin, however, wanted to expose this activity as implicated in the

unfolding catastrophe of his time. Again, it is not an 'anything goes' philosophy, where the easiest and most superficial reflections on consumption signal the arrival of a revolutionary subject. Coulter's catalysing of the digital counter-spectacle in opposition to the Trump brand, though, does seem closer to the dialectics in which Benjamin found hope. It isn't always clear where the line is between benign consumerism and when it turns bad – when it authorizes itself on the basis of a selfish micro-fascism that dooms the entire planet. The commodity itself, of course, remains a violent object. Yet, if Trumpism is in part an external offshoot of consumer culture – as one of capitalism's lines of flight – then the question of how much responsibility consumer culture bears remains open. My wager is that it isn't just a little.

Arcade 4

This is an unorthodox undertaking. It is a picture book of philosophy, explicating the dialectics of seeing developed by Walter Benjamin, who took seriously the debris of mass culture as the source of philosophical truth. (Buck-Morss, 1989, p ix)

What does the debris of the 21st century say about the emerging political landscape? Coexistent with the new digital shopping landscapes are deserted built environments collapsing under the weight of post-industrial globalization. While a new kind of convenience is possible through the landscape of consumption today, there are also large zones of dereliction, abandonment and desperation. For every booming and vibrant Aventura Mall in Miami (Hughes, 2020), there is a 'zombie mall' in Ohio (Gelles, 2017) and a 'skeleton of a mall' in Kentucky (Cohen, 2016). While Amazon finds ways of blending its digital technology with actual physical retail space, there have been so many reports of the decline of traditional retail giants, such as Sears and other big-box retailers. The

United Kingdom's high streets have also been plagued by vacancies and uncertainty in recent years (Hubbard, 2018). Again, this a good time to consider dialectics as a philosophical concept that contains simultaneity and multiplicity (Dixon et al., 2008), notwithstanding those who insist that dialectics and assemblage thinking are incompatible (see Polsky, 2010, p x; Saldanha, 2017, p 42).

The overinflated promises of the spectacle have created the potential for chaos to break loose in the event that it is ever suspended or destabilized. In addition to white supremacy and patriarchy, an important part of the context for Trumpism is deindustrialization. As Lauren Berlant (2011) has shown, images of the consumer 'good life' continue to circulate and find purchase in our emotional lives, even as the means to actually achieve it have been very much compromised in the shift to post-industrial economies. Trump channels the anger of working-class whites not against the corporate power structure driving these transformations, but against familiar fascist scapegoats, such as people of colour and immigrants. White supremacy may be considered a post-truth politics of its own. As a product and a master of spectacle, Trump fuses together these components to produce a new kind of political actor, one that nevertheless tends towards the solidification of power in conservative forms.

This chapter has worked to expose how the hyperreal logic of the spectacle creates an infrastructure for a widespread post-truth society (Clarke, 2003). The convenience of this consumer spectacle has been enhanced by today's online shopping environments and modes of consumer engagement. The 'tyranny of convenience' (Wu, 2018) places us at the mercy of these always-evolving techno-ecologies that have reshaped society in the last 30 years (Chapter Two). In short, we have experienced the acceleration of a process that pulls us deeper into post-truth circumstances in an increasing number of places and experiences in real life. The techno-ecologies we inhabit today make it easier and easier to dissociate ourselves from

reality. Politically, this becomes dangerous. On an individual and existential level, anyone can just take the easy way out and *believe anything they want.* Total convenience. No assembly required. All that remains are the pleasurable flows of the embodied and spectacular assemblages that one plugs into directly (Roberts, 2012).

Online shopping provides ultimate convenience. Yet we know that something is lost by cutting out the drama of in-person, in-store retail. Even the online retail giant Amazon is pushed into these domains (Wingfield, 2017) and the traditional retail sector itself struggles to reinvent itself. The sensations of an 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) abound more than ever as retailers expand the activities of 'experimentation' that might lead to 'winning back shoppers' (Gelles, 2017). Gelles takes us through 'An Alternative Universe of Shopping, in Ohio'. The city of Columbus has become a test lab for retail science. 'We are Test Market, U.S.A.', said Irene Alvarez, director of marketing and communications for Columbus 2020, a trade group that promotes the region: 'We decide the fate of cheeseburgers and presidents here in Columbus' (quoted in Gelles, 2017).

These emerging retail strategies respond not only to the rise of online shopping, but also to a broader transition in the economy itself. Gelles (2017) suggests a kind of desperation in these activities: 'Stores are trying out all manner of gimmickry – anything, really – to win back shoppers. And when brands want to try out new concepts, they often come to Columbus.' Just down the road, however, are the zombie malls of retail decay. Many of the places that helped construct the society of the spectacle through the consumer landscape in the postwar era have been recently abandoned. Their spatial machinery no longer generated the kind of returns required for them to keep operating in their original form. Complex decisions must be made whether to revamp the familiar forms of spectacle or to invest elsewhere entirely. Individual spaces of spectacle can

always fail, as is evident in today's post–industrial landscape of urban dereliction (Mah, 2017; also see Wark, 2013).

In a post–industrial landscape, jobs in retail are a poor substitute for the well–paying and often unionized jobs of the past. Working–class communities have become more and more desperate as even these jobs disappear (Corkery, 2017). The decline in retail, as spaces of labour, only adds to the woes of the working classes, which are ill prepared for today's techno–neoliberalism. The decline of just one retail giant, Sears, resulted in the loss of 175,000 jobs alone in the last decade (Creswell, 2017). Cresswell reports on the effects of this retail decline, which are evident in the 'demoralized personnel' and 'dilapidated stores', featuring 'stained carpets, broken mannequins and cracked display tables'. These bleak images of failed spectacle resemble the shambles of what has become of Trump's Atlantic City casinos:

> At the nearly deserted eastern end of the boardwalk, the Trump Taj Mahal, now under new ownership, is all that remains of the casino empire Donald J. Trump assembled here more than a quarter-century ago. Years of neglect show: The carpets are frayed and dust-coated chandeliers dangle above the few customers there to play the penny slot machines. (Buettner and Bagli, 2016)

These scenes of spectacle in crisis show us what happens when the work of the spectacle is suspended. We see the fundamental myth of the spectacle unravelling in front of our eyes (Wark, 2013). Do we also feel it in our bones, in our flesh? The unevenness of today's economic structure breeds a complex landscape of emotions, including frustration, resentment, despair, anger and distrust. The feelings of anger in the workers and businesses that were allegedly exploited by Trump in the construction of the casinos were directed at Trump himself (Buettner and Bagli, 2016). However, one of the biggest contradictions of Trump's presidency has been

how he was able to convince working–class people traumatized by deindustrialization that he was the best option for them. However, it is not that difficult to understand if one takes into account the post–truth politics of white supremacy and patriarchy as being perhaps even more deeply ingrained in the population than the emerging geographies of spectacle. As one of capitalism's lines of flight, Trumpian spectacle brings these all together in one gigantic horror show, which moves through the embodied landscapes of everyday life.

In the weeks leading up to the fateful November election of 2016, the *New York Times* reporter Roger Cohen (2016) elaborated on the feeling from 'Trump country' in rural Kentucky, a place that had once relied heavily on coal extraction. In the scenes of this report, we glimpse a precarious landscape in a town called Hazard which supported Trump:

> Hazard, set in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, is a once bustling town with its guts wrenched out. On Main Street, the skeleton of a mall that burned down last year presents its charred remains for dismal contemplation. Young people with drugged eyes lean against boarded–up walls on desolate streets. The whistle of trains hauling coal, once as regular as the chiming of the hours, has all but vanished. So have the coal trucks spewing splinters of rock that shattered windshields. In the age of cheap natural gas and mountaintop removal mining, a coal town is not where you want to be.

This sets the scene for Cohen's (2016) reporting on the embodied assemblages that have been forged here through the formation of Trump's fascist war machine. The trauma of deindustrialization creates an emotional and affective field of anger that is directed not at the corporate world, but at the federal government and at specific minority groups. Cohen (2016) emphasizes the political formations of this assemblage:

That anger simmers. It's directed at Obama, and by extension Clinton, and by further extension a Democratic Party that, as the former Democratic senator Jim Webb from Virginia told me, 'has now built its constituency based on ethnic groups other than white working people'. The frustration of these people, whether they are in Kentucky, or Texas, or throughout the Midwest, is acute. They are looking for 'someone who will articulate the truth of their disenfranchisement' as Webb put it. Trump, for all his bullying petulance, has come closest to being that politician, which is why millions of Americans support him.

Cohen (2016) listens to these Trump supporters and documents the formation of their fascist war machines. Supporting such an unusual candidate as Trump is further proof of the intense nature of his political assemblage as a line of flight that fuses desperation with the embodied legacies of white supremacy and patriarchy. Cohen's (2016) interaction with a delivery driver reveals this perfectly:

'I love Trump,' she declares. 'He shoots from the hip.'

'But', I ask, 'isn't that dangerous?'

'I don't care. After all we've been through, I just don't care.'

Conclusion: arcades, dead or alive?

What are we to do in times of 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019) when so many new fronts have been forged in the expansion of spectacular technologies? Do we just keep searching and hoping for the eventual arrival of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' to save us? Can we possibly seek redemption

in the fake Chipotle burritos hidden in the park? Or the monsters on the cruise ship? Merrifield (2002) assures us that Benjamin would be horrified by today's landscapes of consumption. However, Benjamin's methodology and underlying philosophy have much to offer consumption studies today, especially in these times of crises and danger when the society of the spectacle seems more unstable than ever. Benjamin's is more than just another theory of how the power of capitalism is spatialized in the landscape; more important is our ability to subvert and redirect the same technologies. Despite the political context of his research and writing – the rise of fascism in Europe – Benjamin remained committed to a kind of political ontology that resembles Deleuze and Guattari's, particularly its micropolitics (see Miller, 2014; Polsky, 2010). How does the materialist philosophy of *A Thousand Plateaus* complicate or enhance the possibilities of a 'dialectics of seeing' in the Trump era?

If the technologies of spectacle are gaining power by getting closer to the consumer, perhaps this intimate proximity will prove too much to handle. What happens to desire when it is corralled in such insidious and instrumental ways? Does anything happen to the mass dream sleep of the spectacle, which now proliferates through so many smartphones and computer screens? Spectacle, as a complex of interior and exterior relations around the so-called consumer subject, is fundamentally an open and always-transforming process. There is an inherent risk involved in this kind of intimate governance. It is risky because governance of the spectacle has the line of flight as its primary 'target-object' (Anderson, 2012). The spectacle may veer off course and, under the right circumstances, compromise the entire system through its mutation and intrusion into other spheres of activity. Its interiority manifests in the intimate proximity to consumers, while its exteriority brings it into contact with other spheres of life where potential conflict takes places.

What we can observe in the built environments of spectacle is contradictory and difficult to summarize. While some retail formats are in decline, new forms of online activity are now highly organized and expanding rapidly. In areas hit hard by deindustrialization, little has been done to help the working classes, and so they join the majority of the population disadvantaged by neoliberal and racial capitalism. This has made it easy for Trump to deploy far right assemblages of racial identity, resentment and hatred, which have long-standing legacies in defence of whiteness and white power. Post-truth spectacle can coordinate with the embodied and post-truth logics of racism and patriarchy to form war machines that spread through the population. Following Koch (2018), this final observation is how the technologies of spectacle always unfold amid the specificities of uneven development. The trauma of deindustrialization is real, helping set the stage for the emergence of the Trump machine.

This is the embodied geopolitics that haunts the glossy surfaces of today's architecture of spectacle, geopolitics that continues to spill out beyond the materiality of the architecture itself. In these scenes of tension, we can even glimpse the spectacle in shambles, incapable of delivering on its promises. As Wark (2013, 2015) describes it, the spectacle today advances in its 'disintegration'. Maybe the time is right for a new way of considering consumer society, through an introspective and critical excavation that works with the precise materials offered by Benjamin and his goal of getting us to face the 'state of emergency' that coexists with the aesthetics and sensations of the spectacle (Polsky, 2010, p 99). Why not just snap out of it?

Conclusion

Post–truth is pre-fascism. (Snyder, 2017, p 71)

A contemporary version of the spectacle that helps us understand Trumpism does not require any assumptions about consumers themselves or even the content of their practices. Political subjectivity today is only partially about convincing someone of something anyway, and is more and more oriented around establishing and maintaining patterns and rhythms of behaviour, areas that are now targeted by powerful digital technologies. The embodied dimensions of consumer society today are more and more focused on these sensational aspects of everyday life that are less about conscious thinking and more about habitual feeling. These are not really that separate, however, as politics is often about how those feelings intersect with historical relations of power and their associated ideas, discursive formations and so on. As an embodied assemblage, the spectacle appears as a bundle of intense feelings and sensations that enrol us into new relationships with commodities, technology and data, as well as with the materiality of the consumer infrastructure itself, including built environments and the technologies therein. For Deleuze and Guattari (2013) subjectivity is always somewhere between the molar formations that aggregate things in the world and the molecular sites where those apparatuses

actually press against specific agents, bodies and situations. Such a theoretical–methodological approach is helpful for overcoming some specific issues for consumption studies around subjectivity. As such, we can reimagine an infrastructure of spectacle as inclusive of new forms of invasive corporate activity, but also as one that is differentially experienced by a diverse population. Bodies are not all treated the same in racist and sexist consumer societies, of course.

Importantly, this reconstruction of the spectacle responds to and builds upon Natalie Koch's (2018) call to theorize the spectacle 'geographically' (p 6). As Koch's painstaking research reveals, the production of urban spectacle can overlap with so many of the foundational concepts in political geography, particularly around the 'spatial imaginaries' of the nation–state, its territories and populations (pp 23, 28). Importantly, Koch recognizes that spectacle is more productive and affirmative than some interpretations have allowed in the past (also see Briziarelli and Armano, 2017). *Spectacle and Trumpism* attempts to further these goals while also providing an additional approach suitable for post–industrial consumer societies that are rapidly moving from liberal towards illiberal styles of government. In the so–called liberal democracies governed by what Wolin (2008) calls 'inverted totalitarianism', the technologies of spectacle surely have their own unique logic, which is distinct from more familiar styles of totalitarian rule. Indeed, Koch (2018) charts a fine line between liberal and illiberal forms of governance, thereby problematizing any sweeping statement about what kind of political society so–called spectacle can circulate within (p 15; also see Wark, 2013 and Codeluppi, 2017). At the least, the long arch of the capitalist spectacle is more firmly established in the North America, Europe and elsewhere, thereby requiring more focus on emerging forms of socio–technical culture as a motor of spectacle.

This book has offered one perspective, focused mostly on the North American context. US consumer culture remains a vital area for spectacle to engage with, despite the decline

of the middle and working classes in the context of neoliberal globalization and deindustrialization. Perhaps for these reasons, this book has reconsidered the 'internal logic of the spectacle' more closely than Koch (2018, p 12), as it seems to hold something important for understanding the solidification of post-truth politics, particularly that of the far right in the United States. From an assemblage perspective, however, this reconsideration of the spectacle's internal logic leads, counter-intuitively, to an ontological lack of any internal logic while still explaining the spectacle's ability to reproduce itself as a historical actor. This version of spectacle, then, shifts the focus to the spectacle's exteriority, or sets of consequences. In engaging with the spectacle in this way, this book has attempted to display a different kind of state–society relationship, one with a greater role for spectacle itself. In some ways, the spectacle comes from outside the state. At the same time, we must consider and debate the extent to which Trumpism was made possible by widespread trends in consumer society and culture that the capitalist state has actively cultivated in recent decades.

There are four conclusions regarding the Trumpian spectacle as an embodied assemblage.

1 Spectacle is embodied and intense, not passive and hollow

One of the major complaints of Debordian spectacle thinking is that it overdetermines the field of consumption with an idea of commodity fetishism that can only destroy the fabric of humanity and the potential for community (although see Pyyry, 2019 and Levin, 1989). This kind of one-dimensional thinking, though, is unacceptable today. The vision of spectacle as a governing apparatus must be updated. Rather than hollowing out subjectivity, consumption is often filled with many other intense feelings that tie us to other communities and the politics therein. This project has nevertheless attempted to reconstruct the spectacle for a more pluralist agenda, one that acknowledges

not only the propensity to produce post-truth consciousness but also other circuits of influence and meaning that run through spaces of consumption. The emotional and affective impacts of spectacle should be studied with sensitivity and nuance.

Additionally, the spectacle itself has also turned towards the manipulation of these very fields of experience. A new kind of intimacy is created through consumer data, for example, leading to the creation of a new digital landscape in which the logics of spectacle have fragmented and multiplied. Embodied pleasures, habits and desires now emerge *through* the constant connectivity and the ability to withdraw from physical space into digital space. With the rise of Trumpism, we confront the danger of an extremist leader who is capable of using these same techniques to generate political support from the population. Trump's rallies and campaigning mode constantly fuel these embodied registers, linking powerful sensations of the spectacle to specific ideas, rhetoric and relations of power. To reflect on these dimensions of spectacle is to focus more on the spectacle's internal logic, but in an expansive and pluralist way. More work needs to be done to link capitalist spectacle to other theories of racial and sexual power – linkages that have been only loosely sketched here.

2   Donald Trump is as much a product of the spectacle as one of its masters

The main objective of this book is not to provide a definitive list of Trump's spectacles over the years. Rather, it maps a set of relations through which Trump's political career has become a possibility in the first place. These include the assembling of entertainment, news and politics, a process that has accelerated during Trump's lifetime, according to the literature referred to here. My hope is that these familiar images of life in a consumer society show how we are all integrated into these systems with varying degrees of intensity and contradiction; we may relate to them only in our exclusion, in some cases

(Miller and Stovall, 2019. The extent to which we are *complicit* with this regime, following Zaretsky (2017), is up for debate. In any case, I want readers to consider their own connections to consumer modernity and its arrival in our political system. What I mean by proposing the spectacle as an embodied assemblage is precisely this – that some areas of life that appear separate can actually overlap and/or link together to produce new futures. Right now, we are witnessing what appears to many as a very frightening new confluence of forces: a star of the spectacle has found his way into the White House, despite his lack of traditional expertise, experience and qualification. In fact, it is this very lack that has helped him gain the position (Wright, 2019). At the least, we should think carefully about how the news media gave Trump an automatic advantage during the campaign because it boosted ratings. With even more perspective, we can better understand how the public was *prepared* for someone like Trump; perhaps he did not appear so suddenly after all (Gökarıksel and Smith, 2016). Yet it is from the confluence of an affective celebrity brand, powerful new socio-technical apparatuses and an existing built environment of wonder and dismay that a Trump presidency has emerged. There was nothing inevitable about it – yet here we are.

3   Donald Trump uses spectacle politically, but as one of capitalism's lines of flight he also threatens the state

Despite Trump's dialectical emergence described in the second conclusion (he emerges from the same thing he produces), his sudden and abrupt arrival has caused widespread disruption and a reconfiguring of the Republican Party as it scrambles to contain and make the most of this mutant candidate. While there were clear antecedents in terms of performance driven post-truth presidencies (George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan) something has changed with Trump. His full embrace of the post-truth possibility provided by the spectacle surpasses what had come before. Trump is the first celebrity candidate

to become president and governs by balancing the chaos of erratic behaviour and lack of consistency with the volatile materials of racism and sexism. As an alleged 'outsider' who is unpredictable and often acts in an unhinged manner, Trump embodies a line of flight that originates in the spectacle but is now entering new territory. However, this line of flight is not just unhinged and unpredictable, but it also articulates with something particular – the right and the far right. As such, this line of flight has become not only a war machine but a fascistic one because of its racist and sexist violence and aggression. Authoritarian politics of all kinds include the violence of fascism in the proliferation of post-truth politics: male power and white power include their own extreme and irrational claims to power, their own war machines, which ultimately end in strict ordering and disordering. Smooth space, in these cases, is 'reimparted' into the striated (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p 567) in an authoritarian manner. To be clear: the authoritarianism of Trump and Trumpism threatens parts of the state and society that protect democracy.

4   The spectacle develops both interior and exterior linkages among consumer subjectivity and its broader environments

The first conclusion is really about reconceptualizing the spectacle's interiority. At the same time this project also charts an exterior set of relations that perhaps bypass the difficult ontological issue of consumer subjectivity altogether. Regardless of whether or not consumers can find and express their humanity through the commodity form, consumer society is producing effects elsewhere, particularly in the physical and political environments. In short, the society of the spectacle may be capable of producing changes beyond the landscape of consumption that it directly produces. Koch (2018) says as much in exploring how urban spectacle can become a force for shaping politics across territory, thereby linking the 'spectacular'

and the 'unspectacular' (p 4), for instance. Something changes when we become massively enrolled into these techno-networks of spectacular experience. We may not be supporters of Trump, but we all participate in the consumer culture that helped bring him to power. It is not only the content of the spectacle that should concern us but also what it allows to develop in its larger field of connections and relations.

This book has sought to illuminate how Trump embodies the frightening potential of capitalist consumerism to intersect with and further enable fascistic forms of power. Readers may be repulsed by the idea that they bear any responsibility for the arrival of such a repugnant figure and recoil from the notion that they are in any way complicit. An assemblage approach means that we have to always be mapping the connections between complex systems as they become active. This project is not about blame but about building an awareness of how we all participate in an ethics of everyday life in consumption (Popke, 2006). The historian Timothy Snyder (2017) explained the collapse of democracies in early 20th-century Europe as a kind of warning for us today. We should think carefully about how our own actions correspond to broader socio-political regimes that more or less excuse, or take responsibility for, the externalities of our consumer-oriented lifestyles. In addition to the many ongoing environmental externalities of consumer society (climate change, namely), Trump has arrived as the first major political externality of such a system.

Through a combination of theoretical resources and select newspaper articles, this book has provided a provisional map for an ethics of consumption. The theory offered by Deleuze and Guattari (2013) is oriented precisely to answering the question that many continue to pose regarding Trump's popularity and the rise of other far right leaders around the world: how can so many people vote against their own interests? By expanding politics to include the embodied dimensions of affective and emotional life, we can better understand the precise kind of confusion and conviction that has taken hold

of large swaths of the population today. Deleuze and Guattari (2013) observed something similar with the rise of fascism in Europe in the 20th century, in which 'desire desires its own repression' (p 251). So far in American politics, the right wing has been more adept at directing these potent political forces. The opposition would do well to consider these underlying embodied geographies of the spectacle if they are to stand a chance. In fact, one obvious gap of this book is the great extent to which the presidency of Barack Obama (2009–17) was also highly conscious of the power of technology, media and spectacular politics (see Kellner, 2010). There is nothing predetermined about the current state of affairs as an embodied assemblage, or the fascistic turn spectacular politics has taken with Trumpism. And even if Trump is no longer in office by the time this book is published, there will be another Trump unless something changes. In an era when 'sustainability' and 'ethical consumption' have gained widespread attention, there is no reason why the power of the spectacle cannot be suddenly suspended by a radical flash in which consumer society contemplates itself: enough is enough, now is the time …

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This radical and experimental book advances a new approach to understanding spectacle, one that helps us better understand how consumer culture paved the way for the post-truth politics of Donald Trump.

Miller innovatively blends social theory, newspaper articles on consumer culture and contemporary commentary on Trump and Trumpism to provide a unique perspective on how capitalism intersects with and enables fascistic forms of power.

His analysis contributes fresh insights to the rise of Trump and the politics of everyday consumer culture today.

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