PART III

REVISITING SOCIAL THEORY AND POLITICS
In this article, I draw on the work of Guy Debord to critically rethink prevailing narratives on the fate of socialism in the twentieth century and beyond. There are critical differences between the spectacle of socialism (or socialism as ideology), on the one hand, and socialism as philosophy or political theory, on the other. While the spectacle of socialism is real in material and ideological terms, it is not really socialist. On this basis, I contend that the future of any socialist politics depends, at least in the first instance, on philosophy. I aim to show, not only how Debord’s work helps us to see the revolutionary value of philosophy and political theory, but also, how his ideas on situationist praxis can help us to think through current impasses for political action.

I. Socialist Spectacle and Philosophy

Revolutionary theory is the domain of danger, the domain of uncertainty; it is forbidden to people who crave the sleep-inducing certainties of ideology, including even the official certainty of being the strict enemies of all ideology... When the revolution is still a long way off, the difficult task for revolutionary organization is above all the practice of theory.¹

Various imposters have played the part of socialism in the short twentieth century (1914–1989).² And wherever such imposters were not self-consciously playing a role with the help of an ideological script,