

“This bad reputation” by Guy Debord¹

“I hope . . . to hold myself to the rule that I fixed at the beginning of my remarks. I have tried to annul the injustice of this bad reputation and the ignorance of public opinion.” – Gorgias of Leontini²

Last May, on the occasion of the reprinting of a book from 1985 in which I was led to quite easily deny my dubious culpability in an assassination,³ I estimated that it would already be fitting to evoke the modernization of the critique that has been intended to contradict me (it is true that I have had all sorts of adventures, and I admit that none has been able to ameliorate the others. I have not sought to be pleasing). Thus I wrote a more complete critique: “Henceforth, to make a bad reputation for myself, I must accumulate preemptory denunciations on every subject. Specialists approved by unknown authorities, or simple auxiliaries, the experts reveal and comment on all of my stupid errors, detestable talents, great infamies and bad intentions in a loud voice.”⁴ I will now provide ample proof.

I will limit myself to the most stunning examples of remarks made by mediatics⁵ in my own country between 1988 and 1992; and I will publish these documents in chronological order, which is more impartial. Dante says that it is with a knife that one must respond to such brutish arguments. That was another time. Sometimes I will make moderate observations, but without ever thinking to pass myself off as better than I am.

In January 1988, the very vulgar illustrated magazine called *Globe* placed me among the “Great Silent People” who keep themselves apart from mediatic vulgarities. This placed me in strange company, notably in the company of General François Mermet, then head of the French secret services, and Jacques Focart, for so long a “man of the shadows” for capitalist schemes in Africa. *Globe* revealed that this Debord fellow, “the only rival to the ruling Marxism, launched the generation of ’68 upon the assault against the Old World and was almost successful.” It doesn’t say how I did this, or if it was a good idea or not.

To me, it seems shocking to say that I was almost successful. Social success, in any form whatsoever, hasn’t figured among my projects. On the other hand, I think that it was impossible, as it were, for me to fail, since, not being able to do anything else, I certainly did what I had to do. Thinking the contrary, on almost all points, of what almost everyone else thinks, I have succeeded in saying it quite publicly, and the predicted catastrophe of an entire society has since demonstrated the fact that I haven’t lacked spirit. Even though I do not believe I have, moreover, been subject to the obligation of succeeding so as to convince people who are profoundly attached to contrary perspectives (or who are at least paid to pretend to believe in them) of my good reasons. I have really tried, but not beyond my talents or historic moments. A character trait

¹ Published by Éditions Gallimard in 1993. Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2010. All footnotes by the translator.

² A Greek Sophist who lived between 487 and 430 B.C.E.

³ *Considérations sur l’assassinat de Gérard Lebovici* (Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1985); reprinted by Gallimard in May 1992.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ There is no adequate equivalent in English for the French word *médiatiques*, which refers to people who work for or express themselves through the mass media.

has, I believe, profoundly distinguished me from almost all of my contemporaries; I would not have concealed it: *I have never believed that anything in the world has been done with the precise intention of pleasing me.* To tell the truth, idiots have always reasoned the opposite way. I also do not think that we were there [in May 1968] to make a success; I quite strongly doubt their agreement on this score. I have not been anyone's rival.

In May 1988, under the heading "Dictionary of our era," the journal *Le Débat* defined me thus: "the most secret[ive] man amidst one of the most significant public wakes of the last twenty-years Debord and his situationist companions furnished to the age of mass culture the complete example of the resources of an active minority, crowned by its mystery and transforming its very absence into a principle of its influence." Here one would like to pretend to place oneself higher, at the level of historical thought, but, in reality, today one can no longer be anything better than the top of the pile at some neo-university that co-opts itself with the help of the *media*. How could one transform one's very absence into a principle of influence? Idiomatic. Could one imagine what puerile conspiratorial rituals could be capable of shrouding a person in mystery? Those who have believed everything think that everything is believable. Very pertinently, they know, but must not say, that mass culture lies or deceives itself about everything that could begin to be of interest. And this isn't due to a regrettable accident: it is precisely its function as mass culture. It was only in such a context that the historian Pascal Dumontier, who wrote *Les Situationnistes et Mai 1968* in 1990,⁶ was led to say: "Indeed, one must recall that only the publications issued by the SI or those who were close to them allow us to speak of them at all." The astonishing absence in contemporary information of any other independent source concerning the SI cannot be attributed to the success of the situationist conspiracy, but rather to the changing of the state of the world. Back in 1960, in Western Europe, "the mediatic thought police" already knew how to deal with journals and books that had been published legally and that were very widely read.

Le Débat has also managed to understand that I added several personal faults to this displeasing adventure: "What is fascinating about Debord is his style. Its impact: the electric result of an apology for the derangement of all the senses poured into the cold firmness of a classical prose that is part Retz, part Saint-Just and part Marx the pamphleteer." One is easily guilty of having style when it has become as rare to encounter style as personality itself. Isn't this admitting his lack of consideration for the democratic-spectacular spirit? I have assuredly been allergic to the methods of deranging the senses that have been fabricated by the industries of today, but I am not surprised that I have been reputed to encourage the deranging of all the senses, along with the hooligan Rimbaud, in the eyes of modest functionaries who always and everywhere believe themselves obligated to respect even the least regulations of the fashions of the moment. The indignant evocation of the clarity of my language seems tasked with recalling the offensive aristocracy, and thus odious times that were less scholarly, that is to say, less rich in diplomas. Each of the three classical authors who were cited – and they weren't chosen innocently – have been dangerous people: they had blood on their hands due to participation in civil wars. At different moments, they have all figured as enemies of Consensus. The preparations having been made, *Le Débat* could then produce with assurance the definitive explanation of a person who, above all, appears worthy of such distrust: "Here one sees the radical aspiration to purity put itself into play on the inside, against the revolutionary enterprise, and there undo its concrete possibility in the very name of the sublimity of its ends." This is saying a lot. And it was written in 1988. This author must still think that "the concrete

⁶ Dumontier's book was published in 1990 by Éditions Gérard Lebovici.

revolutionary enterprise” well and truly exists among the bureaucrats governing Russia and several other satellite states. That imposture would end up crumbling into dust only 18 months later.

In May 1988, there appeared a dense 35-page-long pamphlet titled *Échecs situationnistes*.⁷ The authors, Laura Romild and Jacques Vincent,⁸ seem to have tried not to forget anything that might be able to establish the pertinence of their pamphlet’s title. One doesn’t know who they are, what they’ve done, or what causes their current lively passion. They proceed so gaily that it quickly becomes difficult to understand how their work is necessary after such a long period of time, given the unfortunate subject. Is this a world in which such failures cannot be forgotten, allowing for such tenacious jealousies? Romild and Vincent seem to want it believed that their principal motivation [for writing] is pity, which they display when they measure the ravages caused among so many poor people by this “ideology,” which they claim to destroy quite easily: “It was decisive in the lives of thousands of people, who founded on these theories implacable critiques of unlimited hope, and who because of them threw themselves into aberrant enterprises!”

And why? “Instead of real struggle, the situationists preferred the affectation of a solitary and desperate combat against the ‘spectacle,’ which was erected by their sub-Orwellian efforts, while this stitched-together ‘totalitarianism’ is the pure effect of self-suggestion.” For them, Orwell is also suspect: one sees where he was coming from (“The anarchists still effectively had the upper hand in Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing”). Thus, Orwell merely usurped his retrospective glory by publishing his description of an imaginary totalitarianism. And which even more trivial ruse for me? “The philosophical and psychological presuppositions of Debord, advanced in the first ‘thesis’ of his book, ‘all that was directly lived has moved away into a representation,’ is false. It amalgamates in the same term, *representation*, things that are different and incompatible. It mixes together political representation, the delegation of power, along with the *homonyms* that are the representation-spectacle . . .” One will speak to me of even more incompatibilities, but this will be wasted effort.

“Fierce in his effort to build a retrospective glory for himself, Debord was the worst party-leader of the century. Over the course of 30 years of uncontested authority, he has only completely discredited his cause and his person.” Where did I lead such obedient crowds of people? Thus, one quite cynically pretends that I have sought or exercised an *authority*. In fact, as one knows well, I have made sure that the famous “prestige of the SI” wasn’t exercised too much or too long. Once in my entire life, on 14 May 1968, I signed a circular that was distributed in Paris and that appealed “To the members of the SI, to comrades who have declared themselves to be in accord with our theses.”⁹ It said what needed to be done at that moment. I [still] think that it was right, and also issued at the right moment. But one would think, based upon the excesses of horror expressed twenty years after the fact, that I had unleashed nuclear war instead.

“Debord thinks of the world as a chessboard, and those who govern do not think otherwise. (...) He has demonstrated his lack of humanity, particularly on every occasion that he has shamefully denigrated those who were excluded from situationism, believing he can show through force that he had accepted them previously, just as they were. . . .” One must think, therefore, that, only considering those who had the occasion to participate in the voluntarily restrained SI, I had been too seductive! (But, “just as they were,” did they know how to remain

⁷ Postal address removed.

⁸ Laura Romild and Jacques Vincent seem to be pseudonyms.

⁹ This text appears to have been published on 15 May 1968, not 14 May 1968.

so?) “The language of seduction, when it serves to communicate a theory, is the language of sales, that is to say, prostitution.” One recognizes the “bourgeois,” and even “people of independent means,” in such goals.

“The slogan of this bluff was ‘Never work.’” Is a bluff so easy to maintain? Contradictorily, the authors of this enlightened pamphlet pretend they can teach me to swindle better. I could have made better use of all the money that was taken or, rather, so scandalously cadged from Lebovici,¹⁰ they say, as if they knew nearly everything that characterized the operation. (*I do not make policy.*) “While politicians of all tendencies pass their lives diverting funds from all kinds of sources to the profit of their propaganda, the terrible situationists – who haven’t even had to dirty their hands to get as much as they have wanted – have only known how to make paper birds!” One must say that these two appear to be the last in France to foolishly believe that money diverted by politicians is really intended – in short, civically necessary – to finance the political parties, “without personal enrichment,” as those who seek amnesty always say. Based on this false example, Romild and Vincent invent for me (so as to reproach me with) the imbecilic project (based on who-knows-what unbelievable qualm) of seeking nothing other than the publication of books.

I know my times very well. To never work requires great talents. It is fortunate that I have had them. I have manifestly had no need of them, and I have certainly have not made use of them, to accumulate surpluses, [that is] if I had originally been rich or if I had at least wanted to employ myself in one of the several arts in which I am perhaps more capable than other people, which would mean consenting to bear in mind the current tastes of the public. My personal vision of the world only excuses certain practices concerning money that guard my complete independence, and thus without engaging myself in any exchanges. The era in which everything dissolves has greatly facilitated my game in this regard. My refusal of “work” has been misunderstood and reprimanded. I have certainly not claimed to embellish this attitude with some kind of ethical justification. I simply like to do what I love the best. In fact, I have sought to experience a good number of poetic situations in my life, and also the satisfaction of several of my vices, annexed concerns but still important. *Power doesn’t figure into it.* I love freedom, but surely not money. As the other one says, “money is not one of childhood’s desires.”

I think that one can only believe, where this is concerned, that I have always been too seductive in current society, since I have never dissimulated the scorn that is merited by those who, in so many instances, have tranquilly groveled before the established illusions.

Romild and Vincent maladroitly add the sole realistic explanation for the necessity of their lampoon: “Debord and the situationists are our last photo-souvenirs of May 68; today, all the other protagonists in the affair are well-behaved, sold-out, or completely forgotten.” This is why, so late in the game, I merit having Laura Romild and Jacques Vincent weave special laurels for me.

In *Le Monde* on 22 July 1988, Roger-Pol Droit wrote: “In times of disturbances, one must have some firmness to cultivate the shadows. Guy Debord has become a celebrity in secret. Radical critic of current society, he has worked for the last 30 years to undo the general system of illusion in which both the East and West are stuck. A member of the Situationist International, of which he was one of the founders, he has most notably published *The Society of the Spectacle*. He has signed his name to several films and has distributed a good number of texts under different pseudonyms, not all of which have been identified. The majority of people do not know much more than that. Debord is indeed a faded master of the arts of covering one’s tracks and

¹⁰ Gérard Lebovici only supported Guy Debord by publishing his books, producing his films and being his friend.

sowing silences in the hollows of his phrases, without leaving any traces. One only recognizes him in formulae that are sharp as scalpels and in cold prose of an exemplary hardness. In this regard, there's no doubt: the *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* is in fact by Guy Debord, who has adopted his own name as a pseudonym for the first time. Twenty years later, the diagnosis that won him renown and assured his influence – which is considerable in certain milieus – appears largely confirmed by the facts.”

I have never published anything under a pseudonym. It is precisely because the truth finds itself to be such that this mediatic can evoke *different* pseudonyms that are “not all identified.” It is to give the false impression of thoughtfulness that he has, by himself, identified at least one, and not six or eight of them. But no, this is only a lie. Of course, one would like to add much to my shady profile. Perhaps these imaginary pseudonyms might *establish* that I had consented to work? as what? At least Roger-Pol Droit doesn't foresee a posthumous edition that would attempt to make famous a few useful forgeries of such (finally revealed) pseudonyms. Mt. Droit passes for a connoisseur, this crude masperizer¹¹ who perhaps puts himself forth as an authenticator? One reaches a kind of metaphysical humor by providing the absolute proof according to which – one couldn't say this of just anyone – I have come to adopt my own name as a pseudonym. In sum, this is nothing other than a question of terminology. I do not know what is insinuated by the idea that I have acquired a considerable influence “in certain milieus.” Which milieus? Nothing respectable, I presume.

“Debord's cop-outs and coded remarks can irritate or make you laugh. By seeing spies everywhere, has Debord, instead of dismantling the Kafkaesque machine that grinds up humanity, finally sunk into a John Le Carré-like fog? So it seems.” Ignorance is always wrong to make its opinions known; incompetence in the judgment of the literary works of one's era is particularly ridiculous. For more than 60 years, one has easily admitted – without having read his works – that Kafka heralded a large part of the sinister spirit of the [twentieth] century. Likewise, one has for a long time refused to admit that [Alfred] Jarry heralded a much larger part of it. There are those who know what goes on in the world, who enjoy those who know how to speak of it. In his *Anthology of Black Humor*, André Breton showed on the spot that Jarry prefigured the speeches in the “Moscow show trials.” And since then we have seen, all over the planet, from the Kremlin to Bucharest, passing through Peking and the politburo of the Yemenite Communist Party, that the settling of scores or the sudden replacements of modern totalitarian powers are rendered in the exact style of the putschist executions in *Ubu roi* (“I will order him to walk on his feet, he will balk, then I will say *merdre* to him and this will be your signal to throw yourself at him.”) It is not true that I have in any way exaggerated the importance of “spies,” that is to say, the quantitative development of this trade, since it remains the only branch that, today, is unaffected by unemployment and is nearly *the only opening* for graduates in literary studies, and even less have I recognized a notable qualitative in their massive commitment to preserving the existing powers. I have clearly noted the law of decreasing profitability that dominates the usage of spies (see Chapter XXX of the *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* of 1988). One could in fact verify all this in the years that immediately followed, during which so many powers dissolved. [John] Le Carré is merely an over-rated novelist, without the least historical interest, someone who is only preoccupied with illustrating the most hackneyed truisms about the pseudo-axis of the ethical-cosmological partition during the so-called Cold War. There is much more

¹¹ A reference to Éditions Maspero, which became infamous in the late 1960s for publishing excerpted versions without indicating that material had been deleted.

talent, and recognizable verities, in the work of Francis Ryck (*Le Compagnon indésirable*) and elsewhere.

Roger-Pol Droit wants to be funny when he says that I have worked “for thirty years to undo the general system of illusion in which both the East and West are stuck.” First and almost uniquely, I have been employed at living as best suits me. And besides, I have not had the vain and abstract pretention to save the world; at most, I have thought to render service to those whom I have considered my friends. East or West, I have always been sure that all their respective illusions would be inevitably and ceaselessly changed, following the totality of the disasters and catastrophes that they have inevitably caused. Today, half of this road appears to have been taken. Mr. Droit is perhaps even more irritated, but laughing two times less. The West has almost come to be in a similarly bad state. In Chapter VII of the aforementioned *Commentaries*, I said that a central negative result needed to be added “to the list of power’s triumphs” at the moment that the society of the integrated spectacle believes it has only to tele-guide (with no possible response) a single world order unified in its illusion: “A State, during the management of which a great deficit of historical knowledge sets in, can no longer be strategically led.”

Under the signature of someone named André Clavel, *L’Événement du Jeudi* published the following on 15 December 1988: “Thus, to get a portrait of Debord is a challenge. He scorns the press, refuses to give interviews, and maintains Machiavellian enigmas concerning his person. Not a word concerning him on the cover of his most recent essay . . .” One sees what has become the norm today, not without many good utilitarian reasons, but it was in fact quite extraordinary to think this before the very recent conditioning of all sorts of reflexes. What need is there “to get a portrait” of me? In my writings, have I not made the best portrait that one could hope to make, that is, if the portrait in question might have the least necessity for existing? How else could I interest my contemporaries than by exposing what are, according to me, certain crucial and terrible aspects of the life that was made for them? And, generally speaking, don’t the ones responsible for the course of things want to avoid the temptation of watching these aspects from too close up? I scorn the press; I have good reason to do so; and this is why I have long refused to give any interviews. I scorn the press for what it says and for what it is. Obviously, I am not the only one, but I am no doubt the one who can say so with the most frankness, without any difficulty: this is because I am perhaps the only one who doesn’t care for its contemptible praises or its reprimands. In the inverted world of the spectacle, this is what is called maintaining “Machiavellian enigmas surrounding his person” (this is why the man from *Le Monde* – too bad if I’m wrong – thinks that I am the “faded master of the arts of covering one’s tracks and sowing silences in the hollows of his phrases”).

“Among those who grew up on the polemical tracts of May 68, [Debord] is no doubt the only one to have pushed radicalism to the limits of paradox, almost as far as intellectual suicide.” Imprecision of language will be useful to journalists, and this statement hangs together well, since almost all of them will be incapable of writing any better. What exactly does “grew up on the polemical tracts of May” mean? I was thirty-six years old in 1968; I was no longer a child. It is before then that I did the worst. “Grew up” was probably intended to refer to social success. In the words of the lawyer (uttered in 1971, during a literary trial) who reproached me for having unilaterally and without good reason broken a contract that had tied me to my first publisher:¹² “Mr. Debord has made his reputation and his fortune on the misfortunes of his country.” Here one goes almost as far as complaining that I have ventured to the limits of “intellectual suicide,” that is to say, I have not at all lived like a mediatic nor [have I been] mediatized. But since I have

¹² Buchet-Castel published *The Society of the Spectacle* in November 1967.

not wanted to live like that, my situation has been a constant satisfaction. True intellectual suicide has, on the contrary, immediately struck those who have put their trust in the good ideas and good affairs of a society in the process of liquidation.

In December 1988, in the journal *Art press*, a Mr. Joseph Mouton published “Commentaries on the Commentaries of Guy Debord.” I do not know what level of trust the information in *Art press* merits, but if their editorial notes are to be believed, Mr. Mouton teaches aesthetics at the l’École d’Art in Nice. This is given as proof of his existence and the truthfulness of its last name.¹³ Without it, one might believe that he himself had chosen the name as a humorous pseudonym. This functionary seems indeed to have been hired in 1988 as a consultant to help choose the best ways of contradicting my worrisome critique and its atypical points of departure. This – and every word merits being weighed – is what the aesthete thinks from the outset:

“It is difficult to write about Guy Debord. One can certainly get around the difficulty by writing about him without having read him (this is the surest means, to be honest). One can also declare him to be mad, and cross out the entirety of his book with a psychiatrist’s pen (this is the most expeditious medicine). One might also send the book back to that black period that preceded *consensus* and forget about it on the grounds that it is archaic (that is the most-modern dodge). Finally, convinced by the author himself that his book deals with “serious questions,” one might allow oneself to discuss its content, but one then risks writing after or next to him, not *about* him (and this, of course, is the danger).”

One cannot deny that Mr. Mouton possesses great lucidity, a good knowledge of the subject and a true mastery of his trade. I believe that he has seen and said the essential in the order of preference that must indeed be chosen. The most commendable and surest solutions are, naturally, [to conclude] that one cannot read my works (the publishing houses are mortal), and that those who still get mixed up with writing about me have been completely informed by other, more responsible sources. The psychiatric solution is, no doubt, more expedient, and it has been used so extensively in Russia that it has long been and quite fallaciously called “Soviet,” but it isn’t a sure thing. To declare, instead, that my theoretical problematic is absolutely out of date because it was formed in the primitive and obscure times that preceded more than a decade of luminous consensus? Fair enough. Consensual beings have been formed precisely to stick to what they hear restated from all sides of the echo-chamber of the very instant and to react with horror against that which they suspect of not being authorized by the most recent mediatic fashion. Things are such that, on the days on which great expositions of their works are held, Goya or Turner are admirable separately, but not simultaneously. But Mr. Mouton wasn’t duped by such foolishness. He knows that this soon-to-be globalized Consensus will only appear as the end of the world, and even (as in Japanese-American thinking) “the end of history,”¹⁴ in only a few months. This is why, convinced that “the most-modern dodge” will also be the one that becomes old-fashioned the fastest, he only cited it as his third option. The most disastrous option – and he is right to [recommend that the reader] ban it all – would be “to allow oneself to discuss its content.” In such recourse to the barbarity of the nineteenth century, one risks “writing after or next to him and not *about* him (and this, of course, is the danger).” History has shown a hundred times, in pre-spectacular times, and [ever] since the old forms of censorship were abolished, which difficulties and which troubles risk emerging in society when people have the

¹³ In French, *mouton* means sheep.

¹⁴ An allusion to Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, published in 1992.

archaic habit of sometimes writing *in accordance with* what certain authors (who might be spiteful) have said.

In the rest of his study, Mr. Mouton made the mistake of letting himself indulge in some of these imprudent actions, which the Mouton report itself had very clearly condemned: he goes into too many details concerning my thought and what he himself thinks of it. And it is obvious that he is partial to the paranoia explanation, despite the fact that he claimed at the beginning that this choice wasn't to his taste. It is true that applying the word to me would come at the cost of an important revision of the very concept of paranoia. While Mr. Roger-Pol Droit introduced in my honor a kind of anti-Euclidean spatial revolution in the old distinction/opposition between pseudonym and authentic name, paranoia won't be the same after Mr. Mouton. It used to be a mental attitude that, through rationalizations, justifies an error that obviously moves away from a real comprehension of the world. Paranoia in the time of sheep [*des temps moutoniens*] is the inverse: it *seems* to be more of an exact comprehension of the current world than the deficient official explanations of it, which are nothing other than spectacular explanations. I have seen the weakness everywhere, and Mr. Mouton deplors it, too. It is the uncontested and paranoid misfortune of the changed real world that has provided paranoid intelligence with such a grandiose, unexpected and sudden mutation. It is enough to know it.

“Debord is an intelligent paranoiac. Therefore, confronted with the rational obscurity in which ‘post-industrial’ societies are enveloped, confronted with the strange sparkling that constantly refracts all of their elements, it seems that a paranoiac intelligence succeeds better. . .” Or this: “Cut from its object by a kind of heroic defiance, the paranoiac intelligence is, in its solitude, forced to try to be logical.” What could truly assure Mr. Mouton of my “solitude”? Only the simple fact that he himself guarantees that I'm paranoid. He reveals the detail that I *announced* on the cover of the book that I had placed several decoys in it¹⁵ (but did I actually do it? perhaps this remark itself was a trap? perhaps the only one?), and he is astonished. “What a baroque procedure by which to warn people that you are mocking them!” And, moreover, he believes he can say that, “Debord no longer practices the dialectic that held such an important place in *The Society of the Spectacle*.” The fact is that Mr. Mouton doesn't recognize the dialectic anywhere, though he must have a very reassuring and schematic approach to it. I think that Mr. Mouton doesn't like liberty.

In March 1989, *Actuel*, which attempted to summarize the history of the Situationist International, noted the following among a large quantity of invented rumors: “In March 1962, the great scrubbing came to an end. It had taken less than two years for Debord to throw some twenty artists out of the SI.” Such a summary arrived in time to support the *Nashist*¹⁶ point of view of the neo-Museum called the Pompidou Centre, which tried to show that the SI had in truth only lasted during the five year period from 1957 to 1962.¹⁷ In this laughable *Wonderland*,¹⁸ the SI's following ten years, of which the Pompidou makes very bad usage, are crossed out with the pen of a curator at a historical museum. It is not a matter of determining the

¹⁵ *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*: “Readers will encounter certain decoys, like the very hallmark of the era. As long as other pages are interpolated here and there, the overall meaning may appear just as secret clauses have very often been added to whatever treaties may openly stipulate; just as some chemical agents only reveal their hidden properties when they are combined with others.

¹⁶ “Nashist” is derived from Jorgen Nash, former member of the Situationist International, and means someone who wanted to remain an artist and/or to keep the SI within the realm of art.

¹⁷ Titled *On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: the Situationist International 1957-1972*, this exhibit was later hosted at the ICA in Boston.

¹⁸ English in original.

duration of these glacial periods; one can cross out two-thirds of a period that took place only three decades ago. This side of the spectacle is that of the “concentrated spectacle,” such as the one practiced by and around Stalin.

Furthermore, *Actuel* claims that the Italian capitalists (Benedetti, Berlusconi and someone named Carlo Freccero)¹⁹ took their best ideas from the situationists. But is this really true? And if it is true, where could these ideas lead them? It is in the essence of belated capitalism that the best educated of its adventurers only want to draw upon their fleeting personal advantages to the extent that their best blows will be capable of further accelerating the patent dissolution of the entire system. “Heads of companies and bankers of the ‘68 generation’ – they wish to keep their anonymity – have been a bit reflective, *Amardi*.²⁰ They are formal: Carlo de Benedetti has read both Censor²¹ and Debord.” Who is the writer to judge *who has read well?* I can also be formal: I know nothing of Carlo de Benedetti. None of the other bankers mentioned have benefited from my advice, and none of them have been the victim of one of my great swindles. This writer still desires to dream about my suspicious relationships. “And Gérard Lebovici? (...) Intimate friend of Guy Debord (...) assassinated in 1984. Why? We still don’t know. There remain shadowy zones around the situs.” At least, today, they don’t know it: they prefer it.

In *L’Antiterrorisme en France*, a book written by Serge Quadruppani²² and published at the beginning of 1989 by Éditions de La Découverte, there is a mere detail that concerns me, but it is also a perfectly extravagant piece of illusion, a kind of cuvée reserved for special objectives: “And when G. Debord assured us that Moro was held in an impenetrable building (implied, no doubt: the American Embassy), we might be disconcerted (...) It is only a shame that we have to take the author of *The Society of the Spectacle* at his word.”

I have shown the following – and it is actually a very recent line in the description of democratic society: “There are still a very large number of places, in the large towns as in several reserved spaces in the country, that are inaccessible, that is to say, guarded and protected from all views (...) Without being properly military, they are (following the military model) placed beyond any possible supervision by the passersby and inhabitants . . .” Wishing to have me appear to be an archaic imbecile, Quadruppani believes that he can confound this sad novelty with the old extraterritorial status of diplomats, to the cellars in the Vatican, or to the excessive embassy of the United States, which is so used to doing what it wants in Italy that it even took charge of sequestering Aldo Moro. Quadruppani has the aberrant audacity to regret that one must only take “at his word” a piece of foolishness that I didn’t utter, which he knows well, since he decides, all by himself, that I have “no doubt” thought as much! One can find it equally suspect that it is someone like Quadruppani who employs the exaggeratedly pompous phrase “the author of *The Society of the Spectacle*.” Would he also like to attribute responsibility to me? The true authors of the society of the spectacle are, it seems to me, you others, employees of strange works.

Libération of 29 June 1989 reports that the *Times* of London published this much more direct revelation: “Guy Debord, the philosopher and revolutionary intellectual hero, was, in the last few months, put into an entirely new light. Last month, an article in the *Village Voice*

¹⁹ Carlo de Benedetti (born 1934) is an industrialist, Silvio Berlusconi (born 1936) is a media tycoon and politician, and Carlo Freccero (born 1947) is a mediatic.

²⁰ A reference to the Amard people, an ancient tribe who lived in current-day Amol, Iran.

²¹ Censor was the pseudonym that Gianfranco Sanguinetti used to publish a book titled *Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy* (August 1975).

²² For Debord’s other comments about Serge Quadruppani, see his letter to Jean-François Martos dated 24 February 1990 and his letter to Renaud Burel dated 20 January 1991.

revealed that Debord had been recruited by the CIA during the first years of the SI and that he received regular payments from its Parisian offices. This long-concealed piece of information was only dug up, by chance, in the course of laborious research into CIA documents that were recently opened to the public . . .” The journalistic hero who “dug up” such a well-hidden fact was called Adrian Dannat this time. Several people from London – including the American historian Greil Marcus²³ – had the innocence to be interested in what might be contained in these “CIA documents” and why the *Times* of London, recently purchased by [Rupert] Murdoch, would spew such remarks about me. Caught out, Dannat limited himself to reassuring them on the fact that his claim was merely an “imaginary” fabrication, “a joke.” He could prove it: Dannat affirmed that nothing of the kind had appeared in the *Village Voice*. As for *Libération*, it assured its readers: “At the *Village Voice* in New York, Scott Samuelson confirmed that he never saw an article in his weekly that spoke of links between Debord and the CIA.” Samuelson displays a positively very prudent moderation on this aspect of the question. And *Libération* even had the air of not approving of the not-really-proven allegation “against a man who has already had his share of defamation.”²⁴ Those who have received what this scrupulous newspaper seems to consider as their just share of defamation are precisely those who haven’t extraordinarily displeased everyone. I leave it to my readers to think, on their own, about how one might acquire this kind of merit. It is a fact that I find myself “put into a new light” so often, and have experienced this for so long, that I believe I find myself placed simply beyond all calumny – and I weigh my words carefully – due to the singular variety of the accumulated abuse. In any case, this is how I think of myself, with good reason.

In this way, one can reveal several precise techniques that will henceforth be placed at the disposition of the defenders of the values of our era. A computerized game of mirrors produces an infinity of citations that are encoded once in the machine of repetition. Anyone who belongs to the sectors of social responsibility for the truth or information, at least, can now restart this piece of false news when it suits them – in any newspaper from Singapore to Bogota – by citing the *Times* of London, *Libération*, or perhaps even the *Village Voice*.

The other notable fact here is that, henceforth, a mediatic has the right, in certain cases, to joke around with his professional tool. For example, a general doesn’t have the right to joke around with the lives of his troops, nor does a judge have the right to joke around when he passes sentence. I don’t even know if the owners of a nuclear power plant are still allowed free reign to “make jokes” when they make their directives known to the public. But it is literally beyond doubt that a mediatic can’t be deprived of this right. He is a remarkably special salaried worker who receives orders from no one and who knows all about the subjects that he wishes to speak about. Thus, following *his* professional ethics, which he will not betray unless hideously beaten, the mediatic carries literally all of the era’s consciousness. If he doesn’t have the right to joke around, where would freedom of the press and even democracy itself be?

The *Times*’ picturesque pleasantry, which might be corrected one day (one believed that it was a joke at the start, but one has seen since then that it was precisely the truth . . .), gives the false impression that it was due to a simple lure of money that “from the first years of the SI” I came to do something that was openly contrary to my well-known and loudly proclaimed tastes. It seems that the same intention reappears under another figure: the confirmation that, before

²³ In an email to the translator, Greil Marcus says that he was in the company of Michèle Bernstein when he challenged what Dannat had said about Debord.

²⁴ *Libération* should know. It was one of the newspapers convicted of defaming Debord in 1984 and was forced to publish the judgment against it on its very pages.

falling so low, I truly had no better means of more honorably procuring resources for myself. To *prove* that I had once been the mercenary for a bad cause, one might go as far as making jokes. I accept the risks of this. I am not someone like Roger Salengro,²⁵ who could be led to suicide by imbecilic calumnies, and still less am I possessed of a character that could be affected by some revelation that would label me guilty of something that I had actually done. I am sure I have done everything for the best.

In October 1989, the journal *Critique* confided the task to someone who used the name Laurent Jenny, who is also ready to testify that, “once megalomaniacal, situationism is now paranoid.” Here the proof is the idea that I distrust half of my readers, which could only mean according an excessive trust in the other half. When has something similar been seen? The world has changed. “There where real life had to happen in the imagelessness [*le sans image*] of a historical practice, a planned-out conspiracy [*conspiration comploteuse*] has taken its place. Phantom of tyranny, it haunts all social appearances without its ever appearing in it.” This conspiracy escapes me so much that it seems to have left me with nothing more to say. Which evokes for the sensible and modern Jenny “the world of Julien Gracq’s *Rivages des Syrtes*, its dusty and empty sumptuousness.”²⁶ This mediocre literary critic tries to keep to this image to the end, so much so that he is thrilled with having found a similar richness of argumentation, such an explosive power of conviction: “At the outpost of a lost admiralty, Guy Debord is on the lookout for an enemy that is all the more impossible to represent because it is identified with the totality of appearances. Scrutinizing the horizon, he detects imperceptible indicators without ever being able to demonstrate the evidence of them to another person with enough surety. Moreover, in whom could he confide? Doesn’t the enemy have branches in the very fortress that is supposed to watch out for them? Shouldn’t the lookout begin by distrusting himself? Lacking trustworthy friends, he puts down on paper thoughts that have no plausible addressees. Debord’s ‘Commentaries’ are those of someone who wrote them down one evening in a humid house of cards to deceive the enemy and the ‘misfortune of the times.’ The citations that he authorizes confirm the austerity of his library: Clausewitz, Machiavelli, Thucydides and Gracian (these are the books that one loves to meditate upon while in voluntary exile, after a life of court intrigues and lost battles). The very style of the watcher shows the effects of his exile: obsessed with possibly insignificant details, he has increased his classical coldness and haughty distance, but he is also limited to keeping things in reserve and deploying ruses because of the omnipresence of spies. For him, writing is only another way of surveying a desolate shore, firing the last of metaphysic’s cartridges at the unrepresentable enemy.”

Unfortunately for him, this critic hasn’t known how to read Gracq’s novel. In *Le Rivage des Syrtes*, the attack isn’t really ended by the invasion and the destruction of the Republic of Orsenna. This leaves no doubt as to whom has read it. On the march to the last page, the heroes, among the luminaries of the sleeping town (as in an empty theatre), say: “I know what this scenery has been built for.” Previously, in the last third of the book, he had foreshadowed the “nightmare that shows to me the red glow of my destroyed homeland.” But perhaps someone neglected to inform the computer of these two fugitive details? One must have read Gracq in the original.²⁷

In November 1989, *Les Temps modernes* – under the signature of Marc Lebiez – went philosophical, as if they had been capable of doing so in the past. *The Society of the Spectacle* is

²⁵ Roger Salengro (1890-1936) was the Minister of the Interior under the first government of the “Popular Front.”

²⁶ Julien Gracq’s *Rivages des Syrtes* (“The Opposing Shore”) was published in 1951.

²⁷ Since Gracq wrote in French, this remark suggests that Laurent Jenny does not know his own language.

approved of, after a twenty-year-long delay. “Re-read today, out of the context of the Situationist International, *The Society of the Spectacle* appears to be a great theoretical work, extremely intelligent and stimulating . . .” Hegel is always less pleasing when the revolution appears to have returned, and the “context of the Situationist International” was May 1968. “One is astonished that this philosophical text . . . elicited reactions as violent as that of F. Chatelet, who spoke of ‘purely and simply *excluding*’ ‘similar utterances (that) discourage all critique in advance.’” What a shame! Thus, I quickly and unfortunately lost the quite recently acquired esteem of those excellent Hegelian heads, who today think I’ve abandoned the dialectic and revolution by having the inconvenient idea of describing the stage of the integrated spectacle and the parallel government of Andréotti.²⁸ “If the totality of the world is inverted, then this inversion becomes the only reality and cannot be presented as a falsification.” One sees the force of this sophism. It is as if I was being blamed for no longer being a Heraclitean because Heraclitus had posed the axiom that “language is what is shared” and yet, in our times, language has been completely expropriated by those who henceforth control its mediatic usage. Where hasn’t this happened? But is this even a thing to say? “When Thucydides takes the place of Marx, the change is political, as well: Thucydides never passed for a revolutionary.” This kind of proof by prior notoriety is not serious, just like all the rest. How exactly will Thucydides appear to us in the struggles of tomorrow?

On 14 November 1989, at the moment that Gorbachev threw himself into his perilous flight forward, *Le Quotidien de Paris* – under the name of the neo-philosopher Jean-Marie Benoist – wrote that, “Gorbachev verifies the analyses of Guy Debord.” Thus, right in line with all that we have already seen, one supposes me still capable of drawing upon other resources due to my various competencies; this time by becoming the advisor to a tyrant. And one also insinuates here that I have deliberately betrayed my client, since I have pushed that imbecile down a road that I knew with the most inscrutable certainty would condemn him to a complete defeat in the briefest period of time. No good strategic analyst would be unaware that, for several centuries, the most dangerous moment for a bad government is exactly the one in which it undertakes to reform itself. And that the cards with which Gorbachev planned to play his hand were precisely the most illusory of all.

In January 1990, issue #12 of a bulletin titled *Les mauvais jours finiront* . . . once more returned to its favorite subject. The bulletin is the platform of someone named Guy Fargette,²⁹

²⁸ Giulio Andreotti (1919-), Christian Democrat leader and many times President of Italy. In 1990, after a series of denials, then Prime Minister Andreotti made a partial admission of the existence of the secret NATO sponsored “stay behind” network code named “Operation Gladio” in Italy (after the two-sided Roman sword). In the initial agreement that formed NATO in 1949, there was a secret clause that required that, before a nation could join, it must establish its own national security service capable of “Civil Emergency Planning,” that is, of “intervening effectively [...] in the event of external socialist aggression or internal political upheavals.” As a result, Operation Gladio was formally established in 1956, involving American and domestic intelligence organizations, as well as committed “anti-communists.” The latter group inevitably contained a significant number of fascists. Many were drawn from the ranks of veterans of Mussolini’s last stand, the Salò Republic. Armed with weapons located in hundreds of secret arms dumps around the country, they were originally established to go into action in the event of an Eastern Bloc invasion or domestic “subversion.” Andreotti – a P2 member – attempted to legitimize the Gladio Networks, in a clear damage-limitation exercise. Andreotti was implicated in the March 1979 murder of journalist, one-time P2 member and publisher of *Osservatore Politico* Mino Pecorelli, but was later cleared in court. Pecorelli had revealed details of the P2 conspiracy shortly before his assassination, in an attempt to blackmail participants.

²⁹ Among his other activities, Fargette had denounced the erection of barricades and the occupation of the Sorbonne by student protestors in November-December 1986, which led to Debord and several others breaking off relations with the *Encyclopédie des Nuances*.

who seems very well informed about everything that one must know about the question, especially several Italian dossiers. Not only does he know about the most tragic of my errors, but also what caused them. He has always been able to discern my errors' furthest-away origins, the most disastrous of their certain consequences, and, moreover, my most secret intentions. He assures his readers of the following.

"G. Debord has played a wicked trick on his admirers: while he never knew how to take the measure of the social reflux after 1968, now the reflux is all he sees. His tardy awakening to phenomena that he had ignored for 20 years saddles him with a quite comprehensible illusion: things appear to him to be even more terrible than they are in reality. But, by getting lost in his fascinated descriptions of power's procedures (which were invented in Central Europe between the two World Wars and sometimes even before the First World War), he falls into a defeatism that is at once scandalous and enlightening about the meaning of all of his activity. Responding to my note in issue 9 of *Mauvais jours* . . . , but without seeming to do so, the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances* affirms that the integrated spectacle describes successful bureaucratization. But the 'theory of the spectacle' of the 1960s excluded such a historical possibility by postulate. By returning to it without explaining [this apparent anomaly], situationist theory reached its point of disintegration. Guy Debord's position presents an even more remarkable lack of consequence: one has never seen a 'revolutionary' (that is to say, this is what people claim) describe the counter-revolution so as to declare it victorious in advance. This strangeness is narrowly tied to G. Debord's style, because it rests upon a tone of 'self-fulfilling prophecy.' His method appears necessarily as a desire for the advent of catastrophe.

"His attitude is in conformity with the words of Commandant Schill, hero of the failed insurrection against Napoleon in 1809 and shot some time later: 'Better a horrible end than endless horror.' A passage in another recent book by G. Debord, *Panegyric*, volume I (1989), describes desperate military assaults with a revealing, nihilist admiration. It is clear that for him the historical catastrophe constitutes secret revenge against a humanity that he has understood in a very random fashion. The attention that he accords to the expression of emotions that bring acts and words to life has degenerated into a morbid irrationalism."

In February 1990, the magazine called *Globe* managed to establish that I live "almost clandestinely in the heart of Paris, in a beautiful bourgeois building" on the rue du Bac; *Globe* also revealed several other facts that, thanks to its habitual ingenuity, allowed it to make the most symptomatic usages of them. "The co-founder of the Situationist International, the *énragé* of 1968 today lives a pleasant life in his comfortable apartment on the third floor, the door recently armored. From all the evidence, Guy Debord is a mysterious man. Those who are on bad terms with him don't want to speak of him." The writer pleases himself with the conclusion that I live a calm life, nay, even a bourgeois one. But one recalls several signs of the violence of the past. Those who were led, in other times, to compromise themselves with me especially do not feel authorized to speak of it. André Breton was often exposed to the false testimony of real surrealists who had repented for everything that they had done that was great. Nothing of the kind going on here. Otherwise, what good is it to be a mysterious man? I have found no one who wanted to take the risk. Two or three sub-mediatic impostors have claimed to know me in prior days, but naturally they have nothing to say. And I have had exactly nothing to say in response, reserving myself so as to harm an authentic friend from the past who might dare to play this game. None of those whose names appeared in *Internationale Situationniste* have clearly revealed anything since then. One knows what can ordinarily become of the preferences of many

people when twenty-five years have passed. But one must remember that, even in the pure SI of 1967, there already were two or three provocateurs who had infiltrated into it.³⁰

“In any case, his address isn’t known by anyone. Or almost anyone. Guy Debord isn’t hiding: he refuses.” One can say this. And *Globe* also knows that, between July 1957 (the founding conference at Cosio d’Arroscia) and 1969, the SI never included “more than seventy members; forty-five were eventually excluded” and several others were forced to resign. Thus, more than half of the total. What scorn for the Rights of Man! And so it is easier, given such a fine team, to foresee that everyone would prefer to mind their own business. “In 1957, in his film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, Debord announced the end of the cinema: there’s a twenty-four-minute-long sequence in it during which the screen remains black.” I did this even a little earlier, and the proof had to wait five years, since this frightening exploit, as a matter of fact, offended the year 1952. And isn’t the title alone a sufficient indication of a sinister youth? What has followed is worthy of it. “Today, Guy Debord doesn’t own a telephone and declares as his principal residence his farm in Bellevue-la-Montagne, where he spends several months during the summer.” I can elect this place as my residence because, among my many residences over the course of the last twenty years, it is in fact the oldest and has been the most-often occupied during that time.

“He is still married to Alice Becker-Ho, his wife for the last ten years. He still drinks a lot and declares very little taxable income.” None of this good news is very surprising: one knows that salaried workers are the only ones who pay a lot of taxes.

Claude Roy speaks of me a little in his book *L’Étonnement du voyageur* (Gallimard, 1991). He says that, “Guy Debord is cheerfully megalomaniacal.” He also says that he himself wrote, almost twenty years ago, that he recognized in me a “*forte tête* in all senses of the word.³¹ He hasn’t ceased to prove it, perhaps more obviously in what he refuses than in what he proposes.” One knows how much Roy himself, and the totality of his entourage, haven’t ceased to prove that they have weak heads, perhaps as obviously by all that they themselves have agreed to believe and follow, as by all that they have proposed that other people believe and follow.

Thus, I haven’t imagined that my excesses might attract the sympathy of such people. It is vexing to refuse. It is megalomaniacal to refuse. Oh, the unhealthy pretense. *To refuse!* Paranoid rationalizations cannot be far away. “Besides, Debord has never wielded any power other than his style.” And yet this isn’t an everyday occurrence. Claude Roy, this man of taste and moderation, who has long delighted in the beautiful clarity of Mao and Stalin, once said my writing was “disappointing gibberish.” In 1967, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, I détourned two short passages from Hegel, and I was reproached for this boldness – which brought me the esteem of Mr. Marc Lebiez – twenty-five years later by Claude Roy. He directly declares: “I joyously agree to be treated like an old imbecile like Boileau, but I’m persuaded that ‘what one conceives well is clearly enunciated,’ and that when Debord, instead of simply being difficult, which is the right of any thinker (and sometimes his duty), is quite simply macaronic,³² I fear

³⁰ The “Garnautins” (Théo Frey, Jean Garnault and Herbert Holl), excluded from the SI on 15 January 1967.

³¹ A person who is a rebel, headstrong, obstinate and willful.

³² According to Wikipedia, this word, which appears in none of the French dictionaries I consulted, “refers to text spoken or written using a mixture of languages, sometimes including bilingual puns, particularly when the languages are used in the same context (as opposed to different segments of a text being in different languages). The term is occasionally used of hybrid words, which are in effect internally macaronic. A rough equivalent in spoken language is code-switching, a term in linguistics referring to using more than one language or dialect in conversation [...] The word *macaronic* comes from the New Latin *macaronicus*, from Italian dialect *maccarone* (“dumpling, macaroni”, regarded as coarse peasant fare). The term *macaronic* has derogatory overtones, and it is usually reserved for works

that the concept is as muddled as the style.” Who would be so unjust as to consider Claude Roy to be an “old imbecile”? The times don’t care.³³

In the spring of 1991, a journal that gloriously calls itself *Maintenant, le communisme* proposed that it finally deal with the necessary “critique of the SI”: “The SI has communicated sufficient illusions and myths about itself so that it appears as an obligatory point of reference for critical theory. It isn’t a question of surpassing the SI in the sense in which the opening essay in issue 12 [of *Internationale Situationniste*] – in full Hegelian-pastiche-mode – understood the idea (‘We are sure that there will be a satisfactory outcome to our activities: the SI will be surpassed’). If the SI remains an important movement in many domains (critique of the spectacle, the notions of roles, urbanism, etc.), it has nothing to do with communism. (...) Thus, the workers have not become dialecticians, but the events of May 68 were the SI’s historic chance, which it knew how to seize in a leap. (...) The denunciation of market society has never been the SI’s monopoly.” Perhaps the author has over-estimated this disturbing SI a little too much?

It seems to me that it was me who had, twenty years before this article was written, caused the dissolution of the SI and who wrote: “So that one ceases to admire us.” But the author has masperized this passage: “Who speaks of ‘admiring you,’ Debord?” The journal announces that soon, in the next issue, it will publish a long-overdue demystification: *Contre Debord: la magie situationniste ne constitue pas la théorie révolutionnaire de notre temps*.³⁴

In the winter of 1991, in the journal *Trafic*, Serge Daney indicated that, at the Taormina Festival – where they presented via a rostrum camera a few photos taken from my films due to their quite fortunate inability to get a hold of copies of the disappeared films themselves³⁵ – “a session was devoted to Guy Debord and learned discourse was engaged in. The scene quickly became worthy of Moretti, when someone in the hall remarked that *no one had seen Debord’s films, not even the participants*. This was almost true.”

I must admit that, in my negative aesthetic, there’s always been something displeasing to the point of annihilation. Is this not authentically representative of art modern? When one “announces the end of cinema” so long ago, is there not coherence in making these films disappear? No doubt one must see here an uncommon kind of success. I believe that I would never have impressed anyone, were it not for this tranquil sincerity, which doubted nothing.

Revelations are in fabulous abundance in the memoirs of Mr. Gérard Guégan, which are titled *Un cavalier a la mer* (F. Bourin, January 1992). He wants to speak to us of his life. Everything makes him think of me. And each time that he thinks about me, I am wrong. The best-hidden secret in this false rhetoric of personal indignation is the fact that I have only met Mr. Guégan once, when he was an employee of my publisher.³⁶ This brief moment gave him the occasion to produce false testimony (very representative of his manner) concerning my first meeting with Lebovici, at which he was actually present, and silent, but this is not at all how he reports things: “Debord asked for beer, and coffees for us. His plan was the simplest one. Since Buchet-Chastel had not given his book the renown that it merited, he estimated that he’d fulfilled

where the mixing of languages has a humorous or satirical intent. It is a matter of debate whether the term can be applied to mixed-language literature of a more serious nature and purpose.”

³³ The French here, *Le temps ne fait rien a l’affaire*, is a reference to a song from 1961 by the French musician and wordsmith Georges Brassens. “The times don’t care, when you are an asshole.”

³⁴ It appears this text was never published.

³⁵ In response to the assassination of Gérard Lebovici and the French press’s subsequent campaign against him, Debord withdrew all of six films from distribution in 1985.

³⁶ Éditions Champ Libre, a side project of Gérard Lebovici, circa 1971.

his duties for this publishing house and, consequently, authorized us to republish it. It was a question of a pirate edition, no more or less, because breaking a contract requires both parties. Gérard Lebovici accepted this principle out of bravado.”

Guégan always arranges things according to very instructive intentions and, first of all, hides the essential. Buchet, whose head had been turned by the success of [*The Society of the Spectacle*], and who perhaps believed that he had the opportunity to make it a little more profitable for him, added to the third or fourth printing of the book – and without my knowledge – a false subtitle that claimed to mark the contents as, quite simply, “situationist theory.” When a thus masperized copy came to my attention, I wrote to Buchet via a simple registered letter and told him (a little threateningly, I will admit) that he was no longer my publisher.³⁷ Lebovici learned of it, and he soon proposed to reprint my works. Thus, I demanded nothing of him [Buchet] that day; likewise, my reasons for acting were quite serious. I am not unaware that the single weakness of my position had to do with the unfortunate detail that I – disgusted by the idea of carrying to the terrain of vulgar judicial chicanery a principled conflict that was so obviously superior to it – obviously needed to get justice on my own.

Furthermore, I note that in the first volume of my *Panegyric*, which was published in 1989, I affirmed in explicit terms the following with respect to the entirety of the freedom with which I have been able to conduct myself: “This has only gone well because I have never gone in search of anyone. My entourage has only been composed of those who have come to me and have known how to make themselves accepted. I do not know if a single other person in this era has dared to conduct themselves as I have.” This single observation will suffice to show that the scene imagined by Gérard Guégan is impossible. This is another way of showing the great utility of a book that I precisely intended to establish the complete truth concerning many of the little-known circumstances of my conduct. And yet it is very rarely cited.

Thus, that was the day that Gérard Lebovici went down the path of crime, which led him so far, instantly seduced by the style of the hooligan and without wanting to consider anything else. To defend his bad cause, Buchet sued the “Champ Libre” publishing house. When the trial was held, the judges in Paris, who still remember the ridicule that accompanied their condemnations of Baudelaire and Flaubert, and who are still loathe to give offense to authors, concluded that, due to the gravity of Buchet’s breach, the contract had been dissolved at the moment I sent my registered letter. The title would remain with Lebovici a long time, even after his death. This is what happened, and one will admire Guégan’s art for the way it succeeds in portraying me badly, even though it was the most justified case in my whole life. I believe that he didn’t lie when he said that I drank beer in some café somewhere.

Mr. Guégan seems proud of having known in Stalinism the only sort of grandeur that he believed had a future, and in any case he knows enough to show us that he has done his best to retain the lessons that allow him to gracefully simplify the history of the Situationist

³⁷ See letter to Guy Buchet dated 13 May 1971: “Upon examining the third edition of my book *The Society of the Spectacle*, printed 25 February 1971, I have discovered that, without advising me, you have added to it the ridiculous subtitle ‘The situationist theory.’ In your letter of 6 February 1969, which announced a second edition of this book, you believed it necessary to ask me if it ‘would be possible to add a subtitle more explicit than the title to the cover.’ I responded to you clearly, as far as this incongruous request, in my registered letter of 10 February 1969: ‘I can not authorize any kind of subtitle.’ The second edition indeed conformed to the first; but, since then, you decided to unilaterally and by surprise modify the meaning of the [entire] book. I advise you that I do not accept this *fait accompli*, which is contrary to all of the customs of publishing, and that you were explicitly prohibited by Article 7 of the contract that I signed on 6 September 1967 with your company: ‘No modification can be made to the work without the express authorization of the Author. The same goes for any addition, whatever it is.’”

International: “I knew Stalinism in its gigantic format. How could Debord’s petty version of it tempt me? There were plenty of people like Boudarel³⁸ around Debord. . .” “Very quickly, Debord imposed himself as the only leader, and all those who thought that art didn’t die with Dada deserted (crestfallen or disgusted) an organization that functioned thereafter like any political apparatus. With its catechism and its exclusions. Because they had read enough Stirner, Cravan and Castoriadis, the situationists occasionally displayed analytical abilities that their contemporaries lacked. . .” “I openly said to Jacques Baynac, who remembers when the conflict with Lebovici led to our collective resignation, that we’d become economically redundant, because we only had our meager salaries to live upon, not [the resources of] a brother-in-law who is an antique dealer in Hong Kong, like Guy Debord.”³⁹

It so happens that I do not have a brother-in-law who is an antique dealer in Hong Kong. But, Guégan would say, why not? And if I did, would I not be obviously guilty? Who is ignorant of the immense traffic through Hong Kong? Everyone jokes about it, even the BERD!⁴⁰ By the way, it is enough that someone is rich for contemporary envy to deduce mathematically that I have levied the ordinary tax (as well as several extraordinary ones, in addition) on his friendship. Why deprive oneself? After all, no one has ignored what I think about money and could expect to do good business with me.

I see that at the moment there is talk about Italian financiers who want to flatter themselves by saying that they know me, but at what price? Haven’t I already spoken of Gianfranco Sanguinetti?⁴¹ And, much more extraordinarily, [what about] the Stalinist Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, whose offers to publish me I refused and in outrageous terms? I have never detested rich people simply because they were rich. It sufficed for them to know how to conduct themselves tactfully and with style. Have I been much more blamable because the wealth of this or that individual appeared to impress me? Did this allow the person in question to think that he could influence me due to this single detail? Or simply that he could speak to me from a higher position? I think that they know well that the answer is “no.” In any case, this is what I have continually thought, and I have acted accordingly, as I must. I have never been rich, and I haven’t had [any reason] to recognize myself as someone who is necessarily poor. Nothing is ever guaranteed. “Time is out of joint,” to say it in Shakespearean terms,⁴² and this time it is truly out of joint everywhere: in society, art, the economy, in the very way people think about and experience life. Nothing has measure anymore. Above all, I have been someone of these times, but without sharing its illusions. I flatter myself with having above all reasoned according to this principle: “Do not look a gift horse in the mouth.”⁴³ I have practiced *potlatch* with enough grandeur to not worry about some excessive delicacy.

Remarkable Guégan mentions one other detail that is true. He says, without adding any kind of commentary: “This year, Debord will be sixty years old.” It is very improbable that he has recognized something rare or admirable in this event. Perhaps he shares Balzac’s opinions about what might inspire “a consummate thief who long ago broke with society, who wants to

³⁸ Georges Boudarel (1926-2003) was a French Communist who allegedly tortured French soldiers on behalf of the Viet Minh in the 1950s.

³⁹ A fairly vicious allusion to Eugene Becker, brother of Alice Becker, who married Guy Debord in 1972 (aka “Alice Debord”). Eugene Becker lived in France, not Hong Kong.

⁴⁰ “BERD” is *La Banque européenne pour la reconstruction et le développement* (the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development). Formed in 1990, it attempts to facilitate commerce between Europe and Asia.

⁴¹ The reference is to Sanguinetti’s personal wealth (inherited).

⁴² *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Act I, Scene V.

⁴³ *à cheval donné, on ne regarde pas la bride* (literally: “A horse given, do not look at the bridle”).

remain a thief all his life, and who remains loyal *despite it all* to the laws of the *high underworld* . . . What a confession of powerlessness by justice that there are thieves so old!”

In April 1992, issue #15 of the *Encyclopédia des Nuisances* (publisher: Jaime Semprun, Paris) offered a kind of general historical conclusion about the Situationist International or, rather (without hesitating to envision things with a disabused look), my own personal adventures, under the title “Abrégé” [Summary].

“This fact obliges us to seek the obstacle to the development of situationist theory at the origin of that theory, in the valorization of permanent change as the passionate motor of the subversive, the idea of the infinite richness of a life without works, and the discredit consequently thrown upon the *partial* character of all positive realizations. To speak of error would be futile, since one must especially think that this ‘error’ was unavoidable, that is, imposed by the needs of the negation of art and politics. This work of demolition, with its consequent valorization of a life devoted to the ephemeral, was historically necessary, and it fully corresponded with Debord’s personal genius (...) In fact, the ‘goal of the situationists,’ ‘the immediate participation in a passionate abundance of life,’ through the changing of deliberately planned, perishable moments (Debord, “Theses on the cultural revolution,” *I.S.* #1, June 1958) – this goal was attained, but by Debord alone, as a brilliantly conducted individual adventure, and reaffirmed against the collective debacle of the SI (...) It would be more interesting and concrete to ask, not why the SI failed (if one remained at the level of generalities, one might be content to incriminate the weakness of the social movement in its entirety), but why it failed *in the way it did*, among all the other possibilities. This subject is so much more worthy of attention since the SI managed to avoid the habitual end of avant-gardes, which is comfortable obsolescence (...) In fact, the self-important historical justification for the dissolution of the SI – like the justifications for the exclusions in the prior years – constituted an obligatory *defensive* measure: in the simultaneously very weak and very exposed position in which the organization found itself in 1970-1971. No doubt this was the best manner of limiting the damages. It was necessary *to drop out* good and fast, or end up shamefully. But how did the organization get to that point? (...) There’s no doubt that Debord sincerely sought to make the SI as anti-hierarchical and democratic as it said it was: his interventions in 1966 and 1972 showed that he was in no way concerned with perpetuating his preeminence, and that he had very quickly and better understood what was at stake. The explanation of his failure in this respect must be sought in the very character of his genius, such as his singular history had formed it, and in the changing relationship between ‘the active element that puts universal actions into motion’ and the conditions (themselves changing) in which he had been able to exert himself. This putting into perspective, which is simply a matter of providing a few elements, will at the same time permit us to return to their exact place two facts that have, until now, dissuaded the undertaking of this project by rooting the SI in an admirable past. On the one hand, there’s the fact that Debord himself has quite remarkably succeeded at transforming the historical success of the collective operation of the SI into a new *individual* stake (that is to say, he has managed, according to his own terms, to not ‘become an authority in the contestation of society within that very society’); on the other hand, there’s the fact that since then he has had – as a function of this personal ‘success’ of an assuredly original type (a little as if, after the [Paris] Commune and the collapse of the First International, Marx had written *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*⁴⁴) – a tendency to retrospectively neglect the failures of the SI that he had, nevertheless, felt more vividly than anyone at the moment. . .”

⁴⁴ The title of François-René de Chateaubriand’s 42-volume-long autobiography, which was posthumously published in 1848.

I do not know what one thinks one has discovered thanks to such bitter considerations. I am as I am, and nothing very different could have come about. I am not saying that others didn't have the ability to end up with results that might have been better, but which would have suited me less well. Furthermore, the SI gained more from some of my unbelievable faults than from several of my fairly common qualities. The adventures of men must unfold starting from what is there. Everyone knows that even strategy becomes much easier when the hour of choice has passed. It was precisely with respect to the destruction of Paris that I described the 1970s as "repugnant." One need not pretend to deduce more universal judgments from what I thought of the period: I principally said that I was no longer living in Paris.

Which necessary talents have the authors sometimes found lacking in people who had the merit of being there? Over the course of the last few years, *one has seen a single disinformant*⁴⁵ show himself to be capable of exercising the most ridiculously strong influence upon this very scholarly *Encyclopedia*. Someone who knows how to live will always quickly recognize a disinformant, simply by remarking his favorite themes, and will know how to anticipate, in an experimental fashion, what arguments he would use to bring them down easily, in a moment, because machines always obey the same mechanical laws. (Of course, here I only evoke the destabilizing disinformant, who acts to support certain interests. Disinformants who remain *dormant* are, due to this very fact, virtually undetectable.) This is a domain in which mistakes, even ones that exist briefly, are literally not permitted. People could die. Thus, to be a disinformant, one must deploy a kind of art, perhaps the last one that is necessary to practice. In any case, the SI didn't lack disinformants.

In the same little journal that is called *Actuel* and continued to appear in May 1992, Bizot messes around the best he can. "Let's be done with Guy Debord and his renewed fashionability. Debord, who writes like Cardinal de Retz, inevitably didn't anticipate what one finds today in his works. Why did he stand aside and in an almost premonitory way? In Retz's time, one could get oneself thrown into the Bastille. Today, Debord is in the Bastille all by himself. Moreover, one can no longer find his books because Champ Libre, his publisher, has problems. Debord has withdrawn them from the network."

There is no "renewed fashionability" where I am concerned: it is in a very constant and natural fashion that I displease. I do not write like Cardinal de Retz. I have inevitably anticipated what I will put into my "works" before writing them, since they are intended to be disagreeable portraits of current society, and they have been recognized as *lifelike*. I didn't "stand aside" on a certain day. I have literally never allowed myself to be convinced or even approached (with the sole bad justification that this is what is ordinarily done) by what disgusts me. I am not "in the Bastille" from any point of view; I have, rather, played my game well. The only problems experienced by my publisher, [Éditions Gérard] Lebovici, came from me. Following the generational change in the ownership of this publishing house, I withdrew my confidence in the Lebovici family; in any case, I made it known that I was leaving them.⁴⁶ They were promptly led to conclude that they no longer had to liquidate their company. I had ordered the pulping of all my books [published by Éditions Gérard Lebovici] because I didn't want to let those suspect people profit from the prestige of still appearing to be linked to me, and even less did I want them to have the opportunity to manipulate unsupervised funds. The world would have been too

⁴⁵ Guy Fargette.

⁴⁶ See Debord's letter to the then-current proprietors of Éditions Gérard Lebovici, Mr. Nicolas Lebovici and Mr. Lorenzo Valentine, dated 4 February 1991.

scandalously *upside-down*⁴⁷ if I ended up allowing bourgeois to pluck up their courage as far as dreaming of stealing from me. If “one no longer finds his books” as imbecilic Bizot exults a little too quickly, it will be logical to deduce that such a situation won’t go on for too long.

In *Lettres françaises* for October 1992, the writer Morgan Sportès,⁴⁸ who is no doubt better educated than many others in the affairs of this era, seems to start at the heart of the question and forecasts nothing good in addition: “To affirm oneself, in a world in which everything conspires to liquidate identities, is already a salutary act to the highest degree, and it is the propaedeutic of any authentic revolt. To say ‘I.’ This is an exceptional individual, to say the least, in French society (...) Isn’t it urgent to Pléiade Debord, to stuff him, to mummify him, at the very moment that, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, we see the crumbling of regimes (see *The Society of the Spectacle*), which even Debord would consider to be the adversaries or pseudo-adversaries that are the most useful to the capitalist order, when they spectacularly appropriate negation. (...) Situationism needs its antidote: the ‘pro-situs.’ Because Power – such as it instaurates itself at the global level, reduced to the barnyard of a spectacularized ‘global village’ – wants to have all the cards in its hands: to enthrone both itself and those who will take the places of its allies and its enemies. The others – the ‘outsiders,’ the black sheep, those who can’t be assimilated (ardent Islamists) – will be suffocated in its silence or it will ‘stage’ their destruction under the gaze of its cameras and the passive eyes of the citizen-spectator and the tele-spectator, among others . . .” It is possible that the pessimism of Morgan Sportès is justified in several respects. And what must one think of that? Behind the rather delirious reproaches that I write like the classical authors, there’s most often been envy because I have read the classics and sometimes have had the freedom to *reason* like them (“nothing touches me except what is inside me; one dies equally everywhere”).⁴⁹

“Life is short; we must all disappear one day.” So said President Mohamed Boudiaf, who was assassinated the moment he finished uttering this phrase in Annaba on 29 June 1992. This kind of observation has always been quite true; it has only taken on a lively intensity since the catastrophic dissolution of the existing order in a number of States that were still growing when I wrote [the *Commentaries*].

In *La Croix* (modernized)⁵⁰ for 11 October 1992, the holy-water sprinkler was waved by Michel Crepu, put on guard against a dangerous imposture, perhaps the first one that had shocked it since the time of the Councils: “Those who open these two books for the first time will not know that, before becoming a prophet despite himself, Guy Debord was one of the most original figures in the situationist movement of the 1950s, which was the final branch of the European adventure of the avant-gardes, so passionate and so poorly known. The situationists will not become well known quite simply because the Gallimard publishing house really doesn’t give a damn about making them known. Its objectives are elsewhere. It isn’t a question of making an author known, but a matter of re-launching a prophet on his course.” I think that it is a question of the tireless pursuit of research, which has been conducted with obvious relentlessness and good faith, so as to discover what my work should truly be. Thus, the writer asks himself, should Guy Debord be a prophet (a false prophet, naturally) and perhaps *despite myself*? Who would this please? But is that not quite obvious? One knows all about the venal adventurer,

⁴⁷ English in original.

⁴⁸ Morgan Sportès and Guy Debord exchanged several letters in 1988-1989.

⁴⁹ Quote from Cardinal de Retz’s *Mémoires*.

⁵⁰ Debord inserted the note “(modernized)” because, in January 1972, this Catholic newspaper (founded in 1880) changed its name to *La Croix-l’Événement* (“the Cross-the Event”).

always pressed to engage himself in new shady affairs, as much due to a taste for the game as forced by the necessity of paying off his immense debts. One knows as luminously that, at the same time, Antoine Gallimard would like to “re-launch a prophet on his course.” And of course one understands the means by which he easily charmed me, the false author.⁵¹ The added benefit for Crepu is forgetting for an instant that I “prophesized” what is unquestionably present today and what was already present back in 1967.

“What did the oracle say to crystallize around himself the fascination that one recognizes by the sacred approach of divine fire?” Crepu should better control his vocabulary, which smells too strongly of the original sacristy.

“In sum, a thing, a single thing: henceforth everything is subjected to the law of the ‘integrated spectacle’: which we understand simply as nothing other than a technique of governing beings and things entirely ruled by a kind of ‘one humanity show.’⁵² Outside the spectacle in which everything summarizes and annuls itself, there’s no salvation. We recognize that it isn’t a mere stream that powers Guy Debord’s watermill, but a torrent.” But all the same this isn’t a reason to fall into excess. The Christians who have been recycled in this way, one understands, do not want to be like Bloy or Bernanos.⁵³ The Council Father has been the name of their own “integrated spectacle.” They proudly rallied to spectacular democracy. The eyes of faith reckon it to be the best.

“About Debord’s glacial observation about generalized alienation, one dares to point out that this isn’t the first time that a writer has claimed to see, better than everyone else, which kind of hell each person will end up in. The stunning thing, the pathetic thing, is that one obviously doesn’t find anything to say in response to such a disposition of thought. The radical principle in the interpretation of the world that it proposes *a priori* evacuates that which nevertheless defines any true experience with thought: *uncertainty, infinite questioning*.” Tartuffe-like, Crepu wants his readers to believe that he recognizes this “true experience with thought, *uncertainty, infinite questioning*” in the effective conduct of the spectacle, which is disastrous at every turn and irremediable; in economic production and its total transformation; in global pollution and the disaster to public health; in the replacement of [human] language by computers, which are easier to control; and, finally, in the replacement of the human species by another species that is better adapted – in sum, in everything that is being decided and executed today.

“And then, finally, how can one acquiesce to the old ontological equivalence (which has done so much service already!) now maintained by Debord between the totalitarian wickedness of the Stalino-Nazi empire and ‘America’ (understood as the ensemble of liberal societies), which is only ‘tempered by the rights of man’: here again the facts favor him; however, here again the essential thing is missing. There is a history of democracy, *via* Tocqueville, that Monsieur Debord lacks.” Crepu has masperized the quotation. I said that the globally unified integrated spectacle is “the dictatorial liberty of the Market, tempered by a *recognition* of the Rights of the *Spectator-Man*.” In addition, one will observe that, when it comes to Crepu, the facts are opposed to the spirit, which is superior to them. He recognizes that the facts favor me, and that these aren’t trivialities that might, perhaps, have been interpreted abusively. They are facts of a grandiose and terrible decadence. Nevertheless, in these poor facts, “the essential is missing.” The essential only resides in the values of the spectacular Holy Spirit (the absolutely

⁵¹ It required a lot to get Debord to agree to be published by Gallimard. See his letters to his intermediary, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, dated 9 September 1991, 23 April 1993 and 27 May 1993.

⁵² English in original.

⁵³ Leon Bloy (1846-1917) was a French author and devoted Catholic, as was Georges Bernanos (1888-1946).

democratic-spectacular Holy Spirit). Tartuffe-Crepu teaches us: If liberal *values* can only be safeguarded by totalitarian techniques, that doesn't bother us! And what about false reasoning of the totalitarian type? We can do that, too.

The real history of democracy, which is indeed very fragile, doesn't pass through Tocqueville. It passes through the Republics of Athens and Florence, and through the revolutionary moments of the last three centuries. It is the victory of the totalitarian counter-revolution in Russia and some of the apparent intentions to combat it, which have gathered around the intellectual heritage of Tocqueville the thought of conspicuous research into the defense of liberty. During his lifetime, Tocqueville did not guarantee that liberty would really have a place in future liberal societies. I love Tocqueville, especially his *Souvenirs* about the revolution of 1848, the weaknesses of which he saw so well. Furthermore, he was a man who was quite impassioned about improving the prisons.

Having accomplished the essential part of his task, which stipulated para-Vatican responsibilities, Crepu has only to conclude with a few very flat pleasantries, so as to erase a little of what was horribly serious in his performance. "Guy Debord has written an *Apologetics* inverted by solitude against the illusions of comedy: it doesn't lack panache; it is a beautiful illusion to the end. At bottom, Debord is a religious spirit. He aims for immortality; this is why he makes it a point of honor never to correct himself. Isn't he ready for the Academy?"

In *Libération* for 15 October 1992, Arnaud Viviant wrote: "At the University, they recommend that we read many things, but never Debord. As if the book and its author were still too hot to handle. It is true that during 'the long winter of the 1980s' we often passed into the hands of ex-revolutionaries who are distraught and sheepish because they failed their big thing of 68, and who half-unconsciously reveal to us the mood of failure. When, after leaving our *alma mater* and its ideological disenchantments, we find ourselves politically haggard but summoned by life itself to take a stand, we think of the book by Guy Debord. Alas! It has disappeared from the market: rare or out of print. Today *The Society of the Spectacle* has been republished by Gallimard."

This story is charming, decent, melancholy, and even probable. But it is false, naturally. *The Society of the Spectacle* has constantly been present and sold on the Parisian market, with a new printing practically every eighteen months, for twenty-five years (with the sole interruption of a few weeks in 1971, when Buchet had the "Champ Libre" edition seized, and for a year at most [in 1991] when I had the Lebovici edition suppressed but before Gallimard reprinted it). Everyone, even mediatics, could read it. Only the mediatics had to abstain from speaking of it: they couldn't speak of it to their friends or in their professional activities. One of the many utilities of the spectacle itself, precisely, is that it can direct the greater public towards debates that are well-known and even prefabricated *ad hoc*. One mistrusts the "perverse effects" that could sometimes inspire agglutinated tendencies that have been encouraged in the public of the era, which reads something simply because it is a *best-seller*.⁵⁴ Thus, one economizes with the honor of the greater public, which must become interested in the true great problems supported by the machine. Umberto Eco, for example.

This amiable mediatic [Arnaud Viviant] finds it very suitable that Gallimard has published my book, since it has become historical: "Some snigger, having nothing left but this strength. Not us, who have never read it. First of all, because, on principle, we are not completely against immorality. Then, we ended up having the feeling, as with [Sade's] *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, that something is being hidden from us (...) We thought we were dealing

⁵⁴ English in original.

with a kind of philosopher; we were in the company of a strategist. A kind of a modern Machiavelli or Clausewitz, who is designing, with the rigorous coldness of geometry – in fragments, corridor after corridor, room by room, and without windows – the plan for an impregnable citadel (the society of the spectacle) and the infinite complexities of its defensive system in a cascade of mirrors.”

As we have already seen in the brilliant example of Mr. Mouton, I am far from considering all mediatics to be imbeciles, although one cannot doubt that this system has done much to augment the amount of imbecility in society, which has never been small. Furthermore, I am not someone who exaggerates the direct responsibility of the mediatics, personally: they are only salaried workers, few of whom elevate themselves to the status of swindlers. To take them as a kind of dominant caste would be as stupid as imagining that under Napoleon III – just because one obviously had a taste for the pleasures of the table – the headwaiters had to assume a more majestic importance than the ironmasters. Nevertheless, one must in passing enjoy the talent with which this critic maintains – even through his clever comparison with *The Hundred Days of Sodom* – what I have noted as being the principal point that must be placed at the fore. He is a young man who will go much further than *Libération*.

For *L'Événement du Jeudi* of 29 October 1991, Régis Debray had the bad idea of wanting to compare himself to me: he said that, if one doesn't make several concessions to the *media*, one is condemning oneself to disappear (*what would the problem be with that?*) “To really disappear, when one has – as in my case – neither a teaching rostrum, nor a journal to serve as a megaphone, nor a place in academia; this is to condemn oneself to speak in the wilderness. Or, like Debord, one must be able to wait thirty years to see one's message in a bottle return to the shore, without ceasing to identify oneself with a single idea, a single ‘ism,’ one's whole life. I have too many bottles in reserve . . .” *I have never waited*. At every instant, I have only identified myself with myself and notably with no ‘ism,’ no ideology, no project. My times have been the present. What quarrel does Debray dare to have with me? He speaks of having too many bottles in reserve. If this isn't a dispute between drunks, one could perhaps congratulate him on his foresight: his glass isn't large but he drinks from it. But no. This ambitious and ridiculous man has pursued everything, has thrown himself at everything, everything that has failed. Castro, Guevara, Allende, the reign of Mitterrand (first variant). Today, he would like to create a kind of science of mediatization; naturally, he isn't even capable of it. This poor guy is upset that he doesn't have a rostrum, a journal or a place in the academic institution.

In November 1992, the journal *Trouvailles*, reviewing the republication of *The Society of the Spectacle*, advises the reading of “this revolutionary text” – I don't know with what goal in mind – “by the Communications Directors of the General Council of Moselle, which will publish a communiqué that reviews the exposition ‘Qin Shi Huangdi: the Soldiers of Eternity.’”⁵⁵ In its genre, a completely remarkable text, which measures the quality of an exposition, its success and its pertinence in millions of francs, in numbers of entries (details concerning paying and non-paying entries), in the types of visitors, in ‘merchandizing,’ in a ‘*hit-parade*’⁵⁶ of sales’ (posters, post cards, statuettes), in ‘communications expenses,’ in the economy of communications (given the echo provided by the *media*), in ‘economic repercussions,’ in ‘public relations repercussions’ . . . This press release, about which I will deliberately report nothing more, is too long to cite in

⁵⁵ These excavated, terra cotta Chinese soldiers are also discussed by Debord in his *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* (chapter XVII).

⁵⁶ English in original.

its entirety, but it is truly the typical product of what society currently furnishes and must develop widely.”

Trouvailles specializes in the history of art and the commerce in antiquities. The press release that it cites is indeed crudely typical of our era, but what is still more typical of this era is the fact that this elite group of connoisseurs has been unable to perceive that these statues are nothing other than crude fakes, obviously so, unquestionably so. Their authenticity is already impossible on the level of the history of forms, since the discovery of such supposedly ancient artifacts required the prior existence of *identical* Stalinist and Nazi statuary at the Exposition of 1937; the extreme vulgarization of the figurations of Asiatic peoples provided by Gauguin and the American comic strip *Dick Tracy*; and, above all, the techniques that destroy reason inaugurated by the modern totalitarian regimes and the degree of universal gullibility that allows the development of the spectacular management of all contemporary knowledge, especially at the stage of the “integrated spectacle.” The editors of *Trouvailles* haven’t wanted to see this for themselves, have considered this “detail” to be negligible, or perhaps haven’t wanted to dare speak up in order to preserve their fraternal *omertà*. Moreover, I believe myself to be one of the rare ones who has revealed this imbecilic deception, but not in *The Society of the Spectacle*, since these “two-thousand-year-old” statues had yet to be fabricated by Chinese industry in 1967. I spoke of them in my *Commentaries*⁵⁷ of 1988, which was reprinted at the same time that the first, more general work was reprinted, but one can be assured that no mediatic echo about this trivial detail has reached the ignoramuses at *Trouvailles*, who are more daring when it comes to railing against the most open excesses of the passion for “merchandising” in cultural matters.

China made a rustic work, unveiled in March 1974 and quickly exported all over the world. The same principal is being applied today in France – and, above all, following the motifs exposed with such wonder-filled fanaticism by the press release of the General Council of the Moselle – when the Meeting of the National Museums, with greater talent and thoughtlessness, mixed together authentic pieces and embellished details (attractively assembled in the well-built stalls that were staged by experts and those who amuse themselves with neo-Egyptology) for the very popular exposition concerning Pharaoh Amenophis.

As early as 1986, jokers claimed to have found a real photograph (lost until then) of Lautréamont in the archives of a Bearnaise family.⁵⁸ They published it as an illustration for National Lottery tickets and thought to authenticate the imposture in this way. Naïve people found this bizarre homage to the poet questionable; but they did not dispute the insignificant photograph itself, which of course hadn’t been proven to be real. All these examples are “cultural” applications of Goebbels’ theory, which established that a lie, unbelievable at first, passes so much better when its extravagance appears incompatible with its patronage by respectable official authorities.

In *L’Événement du Jeudi* for 5 November 1992, Polac confesses that I disappointed him: it would, of course, be necessary to be suspicious as soon as he heard that I was being published by Gallimard: “Will Debord become ‘consumable’ and even anodyne because he’s old-fashioned? (...) The message appears strong to me (...) Until 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall; that day, the décor of the society of the spectacle began to tear itself apart and quite bloody reality didn’t wait to sweep away the simulacra.” Of course this powerful Polacian intuition thought, not only after “that day” in 1989, but after all of the following days and their constant

⁵⁷ Here we correct the original, which mistakenly says *Considerations*.

⁵⁸ See Debord’s letters to Annie le Brun dated 4 October 1989 and 13 September 1991.

confirmations, that one could feel that the time of the spectacular lie was already dissipating before a “quite bloody reality.” *They grew together*.

Since then, one has been able to see Democracy judge so well the tyrant in Romania (*the country in which the urbanists went crazy*) and triumph thanks to the victims of Timisoara-martyr-town;⁵⁹ Ubu become King of Poland again, in the Walesa dynasty; the formation of the global coalition against Iraq and its crushing non-results; the Russian republics and the development of all their respective civil wars, along with the democracy of embezzlers, under Yeltsin; the opening of concentration camps in Serbia and the ethnic negotiations in Sarajevo, which continued during the extermination campaigns, despite the courageous mediation of Europe; the mediatic-humanitarian shipments to Mogadishu, carrying so much rice; the victory of the Rule of Law against Escobar in Colombia, as well as the cleanups carried out by the “death squads” in the entire South American continent; the formal abolition of *apartheid* and the subsequent massacres of the blacks in South Africa; Algeria, which one would like to pass off as the only country in which the economy no longer functions at all, perhaps due to the fault of the Islamists; the Italy of “Clean Hands,” which has finally established the proof of Andréotti’s innocence. In the end, everywhere *speculation* becomes the sovereign part of all property. It more or less governs itself, according to the local power relations, the stock exchanges, or the States, or the mafias: all federate themselves in a kind of democracy of the elites in speculation. The rest are poor. Everywhere the excesses of the Simulacra have exploded like Chernobyl, and everywhere death has spread as fast and as massively as disorder. Nothing functions any longer, and nothing is believed.

Only Polac has judged it necessary to deduce the following, without waiting further: “Of the *show*,⁶⁰ only the harsh reality will remain, and Debord will only be the prophet of past times.” (It is undoubtedly since this beautiful blunder was made that the following catchphrase has been popularized: “And who is that in the lake? It is Poluc!”)

In the 5 November 1992 issue of *L’humanité*, a disgusting newspaper that is as soaked with blood and lies as the accounts of Doctor Garetta,⁶¹ there were several praises for me. But this is insignificant, since the praises were signed by Philippe Sollers.

I do not think that Doctor Garetta is much more than a kind of scapegoat for a monstrous era of medicine. Long ago, *The Communist Manifesto* had already observed, “the bourgeoisie has stripped the halos from all of its previously respected activities (...) Doctor, lawyer (...) scientist: the bourgeoisie has made them into its salaried workers.” Blood being a commodity, it was inevitably necessary for the bourgeoisie to follow the laws of the commodity. Blood is finally recognized as a commodity when a court has described as a simple “deception concerning a commodity” what had unquestionably been a decision to put to death all French hemophiliacs for reasons of profitability. What memories of the “contaminated hemophiliacs” will remain after so many indulgent trials, restarts and amnesties? No doubt nothing other than the echo of the nursery rhyme sung much later by illiterate children in the inflammable offices of their neo-

⁵⁹ On Dec. 17, 1989, a bloody crackdown on a protest against the eviction of dissident ethnic-Hungarian priest Laszlo Tokes left dozens dead, prompting further mass unrest across the country.

⁶⁰ English in original.

⁶¹ Michel Garetta was charged and convicted of furnishing blood that had been contaminated with the HIV virus to hemophiliacs in France in 1992.

schools: “There was once – Not very far from Foix county – And of very good faith – Georgina Dufoix⁶² – Who sold blood.”

Here I must make a digression. I have read so many extraordinary accusations, made in a large number of clever and unscrupulous ways, that I supposedly employ my talents procuring occult resources for myself and that I write like La Rochefoucauld, Retz and sometimes Swift (this reproach is made so thoughtlessly) – there have been so many of these accusations that I have thought that I might perhaps fear that, one fine day, someone might reproach me for letting myself be bribed by Madame Georgina Dufoix, based on the sole fact that I didn’t say a word about her notorious excess of personal baseness. It is rare, I will confess, that one is of the mind to think in advance of the almost infinite variety of the things that people are capable of reproaching someone like me for. But one must say that, in the final account, it isn’t difficult – if one thinks about it with sufficient vigilance – to radically suppress in advance, thanks to such counter-fire, many [even] worse possibilities that would otherwise have been abandoned to calumny.

In *Le Point* for 28 November 1992, Jean-François Revel doesn’t waver in his enthusiasm: “What a feeling of painful contrast when today one re-reads *The Society of the Spectacle*, written by Guy Debord, published in 1967 and reprinted without any changes (the author makes sure to tell us)! On the one hand, the idea of describing how reality has metamorphosed and become uniform by the *media* in a global spectacle is new. On the other hand, the style, the thought, and the theoretical and terminological framework have aged. They remain walled within the Hegelian-Marxist-Marcusian *volapük*⁶³ that appears as outmoded today as the jargon of medieval scholasticism. The author certainly rejects Stalin and Mao, and even Trotsky, because their projects seem insufficiently revolutionary to him. The unique adversary, appearing under the name ‘Society of the Spectacle,’ remains no less than capitalism. (...) What weakens many analyses of mediatic communication is the fact that their authors often attack democratic liberalism. The classical critiques of the economic and political terrains, directly inspired by Marxism, are discredited. Henceforth, it will be the spectacle that will serve as the relay concept in the attacks against liberal civilization. (...) It is their theory of the ensemble that is flawed. Yes, the spectacle simplifies, unifies, abolishes and frequently travesties reality. But to claim that the spectacle totally replaces reality in the mind of human beings is a phantasmagoria. An example: rarely are electoral campaigns as far away from reality – to play with the pure and the worst spectacle – than the American presidential campaign. And yet, before and after the election, the polls as well as the commentators clearly articulated the reasons for the rise and then the victory of Bill Clinton: the desire to bring a new generation to power. . .”

And so, a new generation has come to power. Clinton appears to be the ideal man for an electoral campaign that lasts perpetually. But he was pressed to act. Now he decides. And the results are so marvelous that one wonders if someone else would even dare to govern after this saxophone virtuoso.

In *L’Idiot international* of December 1992, someone named Charles Dantzig undertakes to make himself notable by speaking of me. He begins this way: “One always looks Guy Debord in the face. What a beautiful bull’s forehead! What stones he must lift, since he tells us! We step

⁶² Georgina Dufoix was the Minister of Family Affairs from 1981 to 1986. In 1999, she and two other French politicians were charged in the administration of HIV-contaminated blood to hemophiliacs. They were found not guilty.

⁶³ Volapük (“World Language”) was invented in 1879 by Johann Martin Schleyer, a German priest who lived in Baden.

away and look from the side: there is no plough.” Where have I ever claimed to be useful for something? Why must he make me dig a furrow? “I am horrified by all the trades . . . A hand with a pen is better than a hand on the plough.” If one considers the form and content of all that I have ever wanted to do (in the arts or social critique), I even flatter myself with never engaging in any activity that could pass for something that is socially honest, except for a very brief period in my youth in which I managed to live quite well simply by playing poker, not by cheating, but due to pure strategic ability.

Dantzig’s essay continues, and one will remark *that he has the proof*. One will also see that he has received the same *velina*⁶⁴ (to use the word commonly used in the Italian press under fascism) as Bizot: “The proof is that the book that made Debord’s glory, *The Society of the Spectacle*, doesn’t want to say anything. If one reads Debord, instead of admiring what one puts there oneself, one finds that it is written in an imitation-Marxism that isn’t clear.” In sum, all that is good about this book is what has been projected upon it by my generous but far too innocent readers, who have believed that they knew how to read when they left school, but who their unworthy teachers have delivered up, unarmed, to a skillful plagiarist, who – worse than Attali⁶⁵ – strips his own readers away from their ideas. One has never seen despoliation so vile. A vampire would be content to drink their blood.

“Debord never gives a definition of the famous spectacle: he gives fifty. One time it is the bad dream of unchained modern society; another time it is the uninterrupted discourse that the current order holds with itself; yet another time, it is the other face of money. One never knows which one it is.” This is an argument that perhaps will go down in the history of artificial thought. It must surely come from the era of the scientific thinking of computers. A definition is trustworthy because it is the only one. How could one have confidence in three arguments? Which reading can you be assured of, if all three definitions are complementary? “One never knows which one it is!” And, indeed, concerning the three citations that summarize fifty: one of them is falsified (so as to prove the contrary of what hides among the “fifty”); the one that actually says, “the bad dream of *enchained* modern society.” He has simply replaced the epithet with its contrary, “unchained,” which would certainly not be a very serious way of evoking our society, especially in 1967. Today, one could perhaps believe it was a honest mistake in reading if he had claimed to have read “detached,” because that is what has happened to modern commodities, which can no longer even be consumed and which (as a totality) can no longer be mastered.

Dantzig says: “Example of the bluff ‘there where the real world turns into simple images, simple images become real beings and the efficient motivators of a hypnotized behavior.’ Where is the French? (...) ‘The spectacle is the bad dream of enchained modern society, which finally simply expresses its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of this sleep.’ The spectacle is a dream and the guardian of sleep. Where is the logic?” Dantzig hasn’t recognized that the first phrase that he reproaches me for is, to start with, a *détournement* of a celebrated argument made by the young Marx, and all that follows concerning dreams are exact citations of Freud. Where is the learning? Has this joker such an imperious requirement for immediate and total integration that he reproaches the French translation of German thinkers, whoever they are, or only these particular German thinkers, whom he has abstained from reading? One sees that he says nothing about his thoughts about Marx, and perhaps due to force. One also sees that he doesn’t want to

⁶⁴ Italian for “propaganda.”

⁶⁵ Jacques Attali (born 1943) is a French economist and government advisor who claims he’s been influenced by the situationists.

know anything about psychoanalysis either. At a trial in which suspects of the most diverse origins are notoriously lumped together in the same gang, would Dantzig's truly excessive taste for the clear genius of French lead him to imitation-xenophobia, which isn't clear? "He makes nothing precise. There is suspense. One waits. Debord is the Agatha Christie of the moralists. Only he is less honest: he never solves the mystery. We will never know the identity of the ten little niggers at the Bologna train station."⁶⁶ This is quite simply because I do not write detective stories. Nor I am a Leftist journalist: I never denounce anyone.

"The plan must remain a little unclear," Debord says. Apart from the fact that the plan is indeed unclear, this remark suggests that he is in danger. No one notices that it is much more dangerous to imply and that Debord has not been assassinated by the secret services." It is obvious that the greatest danger in which I find myself is the danger of having only too well persuaded the adversary of the truth of my conclusions: I take this into great account. One can see in the documents gathered together here that I'm often reproached for having greatly influenced this or that type of person. Back in 1979, in the *Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of "The Society of the Spectacle,"* I wrote: "One believes this book hasn't addressed the problem of the State; another believes it takes no account of the existence of history; yet another rejects it as an irrational and inexpressible eulogy for pure destruction; a fourth condemns it for being *the secret guide for the conduct of all the governments constituted after its publication.*" (I emphasize the extravagance.) I have always had critics who were astonishing buffoons. Despite so many exaggerations, I know that there has also been a share of the truth: too many people have been brought to believe what I have said. Everything can be deciphered, but not easily by computers, which do not understand dialectics. There have been moments in the process – and 1988 was precisely one of them – in which it has been good to delay certain conclusions for a year or two.

I have never implied anything. In 1988, I even said, "I do not propose, on any aspect of the question . . . to convince. The present commentaries do not care to moralize." The most secret services never assassinate anyone without having exactly evaluated, as a whole, the advantages and the inconveniences, as well as the urgencies of acting.

Let's return to Dantzig. This deadbeat⁶⁷ wants to give himself the air of being an expert in literature and publishing; he acts like a connoisseur: "After the imitation-Marxism of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord says in the *Commentaries* (he comments on himself, because he thinks he is important): 'I will write in a new fashion.' This isn't the phrase of a writer." I have not commented on myself. The *Commentaries* is not about my book from 1967. He who knows how to read immediately understands that it is about the evolution of the society of the spectacle itself, in 1988. I am not "a writer"; I have respected none of the values of this art. I have left such ambitions to people like Dantzig. And this same Dantzig masperizes me. I said, "The misfortune of the times thus obliges me to write, *once more*, in a new fashion," because I had in fact already done so several times before.

The specialist wants to conclude: "Others are better. They steal their ideas from Debord, and they are right. As Karl Kraus says, an idea doesn't belong to the one who discovers it, but to the one who enunciates it the most brilliantly." This idea had been enunciated much more brilliantly before Karl Kraus. The spectacle and its products are not *my ideas*. As for the critique of the spectacle, whatever one says, I do not at all believe that current society truly desires to see it appear in an even more brilliant form. One dose was enough.

⁶⁶ *Ten Little Niggers* was the original title of Agatha Christie's novel *And Then There Were None* (1939).

⁶⁷ *tête de mort* can also be translated as hoodlum.

It isn't interesting to prolong, for the year 1993, the abundance of obstinate repetitions of or unfaithful variations upon the same multitude of ineptitudes. To do so would make the manufacturing process seemed too dated. I will thus stick to the technique with which I have my readers familiar. On the other hand, I believe that several reflections that testify to a great renewal of critique in the last five years are worthy of being indicated. I recall that I was most generally accused of being paranoid, and the alleged proof was the fact that I was almost alone in discerning the presence of secret agents, conspiracies and instances of hidden information almost everywhere. The fashion might change quickly, if one remarks what was published by the serious Mr. Yves Baumgarten in the *Globe* for 5 May 1993, which on this point appears to be excessively Debordian. This critic writes: "Today, Guy Debord occupies a singular position in the heart of the spectacular-commodity society, that of its appointed revolutionary critic. Through a reversal that only appears curious, even paradoxical, to those who lack all sense of strategy and history, which amounts to the same thing, the radical theoretician of spectacularization (the neologism is ugly, but necessary), of the domination of men by market logic, henceforth finds himself in the situation of being an agent of the secret services of this or that country, employed and remunerated by the services of an enemy State. Of course the analogy is misleading, even insulting, in that it could lead the reader to believe that, following the example of an agent 'turned' by the enemy service, Debord – along with his weapons and his baggage⁶⁸ – has gone over to the adversary's camp. (...) The first and least important of his reasons are purely financial. All through his existence as a man and a thinker, Debord has advocated the abolition of the order of existing things and one of its conditions, salaried work. He has put this demand into practice himself, with virtuosity, and the signing of the [publishing] contract with Gallimard no doubt is an instance of this virtuosity."

First of all, one will notice that it is so much a part of the essence of *our times* to interpret everything in terms of secret agents that even my own historical singularity – despite striking differences and contradictions – now seems better viewed in the figure of the secret agent. Mr. Baumgarten recognizes that I have continually been hostile to salaried work and loyal to a universal (but dangerous, of course) historical opinion, and that I have had the sincerity to put this into practice where it is a question of my own preferences and experiences in life. He is willing to recognize in me, on this terrain, what he calls "virtuosity." I will even specify that I do not consider this independence in matters of money, which has been preserved in conditions that may have been difficult at certain moments, as the "least important of his reasons," as this observer has the politeness to declare. Without any difficulty or embarrassment, I confess that, above all, I do not want to work under any circumstances. Like Mr. Baumgarten, I think that the meaning of strategy or of history is the same thing. But I propose to clarify everything that might be obscure or vague about the metaphor of the secret agent. Does Mr. Baumgarten believe that it is enough to be published by Gallimard for me to be "appointed" by "the spectacular-commodity society"? Do things appear to him to be so far advanced in their fusion? I wasn't even "appointed" by Éditions Gallimard. I am only tied to this publisher by a perfectly liberal contract that concerns the publication or republication of a certain number of my books. Does Mr. Baumgarten estimate that the deal was consummated, precisely, in another manner, nearby or alongside Gallimard? Perhaps all that remains to be negotiated? Is it simply a question of being "employed and remunerated" under false pretenses [*titre fictif*], like others, or really being "employed and remunerated" by more occult elements? Does one suppose that I'd like to insist on other conditions, political ones, for example? Where could this notion of virtuosity lead?

⁶⁸ *bagages* can also mean credentials.

Mr. Baumgarten himself recognizes that his analogy of a secret agent from “this or that country” who has been “turned” by the service of another is “misleading.” If he used it, nevertheless, I suppose that he thinks there’s some truth to it, but he hasn’t known how to make precise its obvious limits. All the “services” are linked to the States, which are partially rivals. But obviously none of them has ever been opposed to the global interests of the government of the spectacle. I am not mixed up in any of these subordinate confrontations. I have not been in the service of anyone. Therefore I could not betray any of these services, since I have not wanted to know any of them. It is out of the question that I would leave my weapons and baggage [behind] to console the Spectacle. My only weapons and my few cumbersome possessions are my capacities for strategic analysis and my great historical knowledge; and, without them, I would interest no one. At the beginning of *Anabasis*, Xenophon formulates a very just argument where this is concerned, when one finds oneself in a perilous position.

But isn’t the center of the question the fact that no one doubts any longer what must be “turned [back],” me or the progress of the world, if there is still time to do it? Or perhaps only those responsible for the progress of the world would like to have it believed that there is still time?

In the deep catastrophe into which spectacular democracy has thrown us, it is certain that nothing remains as precious as strategists.

I must also remark that having been “the radical theoretician . . . of the domination of men by market logic” is a merit that I have never contested in Karl Marx.

I have also explained, in 1979, in the aforementioned *Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of “The Society of the Spectacle,”* what I proposed to accomplish in 1967: “For those who examine the question coldly, it isn’t doubtful that those who would like to really shake an established society must formulate a theory that fundamentally explains that society, or at least has the air of giving a satisfying explication. (...) No doubt, a general theory calculated for this end must at first avoid appearing to be a visibly false theory, and thus it must not expose itself to the risk of being subsequently contradicted by the facts. But it is also necessary that it is a perfectly unacceptable theory. Thus, it is necessary that this theory declare the very center of the existing world to be bad – to the indignant stupefaction of all those who find it to be good – having discovered its exact nature. The theory of the spectacle responds to these two requirements.”

I have been pleased to quote myself here on several occasions. I am not unaware that many people will find this shocking. No one would be shocked – and it wouldn’t even have seemed useful to build this bad reputation for myself – if I found myself, like the others, in the impossible situation of quoting what I’d thought previously. To revive the regrets of those who didn’t understand at the right moment, I will add that what was most admirable about the quotation that I just evoked was in the terrible truth of the phrase “the very center of the existing world.”

It is this success that explains the sometimes excessive emotion that has for so long accompanied *The Society of the Spectacle*. A book capable of responding simultaneously “to these two requirements” seemed to me essentially flawless. Those who do not accept this book will therefore be mistaken. And I do not see how else I could ever have demonstrated better abilities, being as I am.