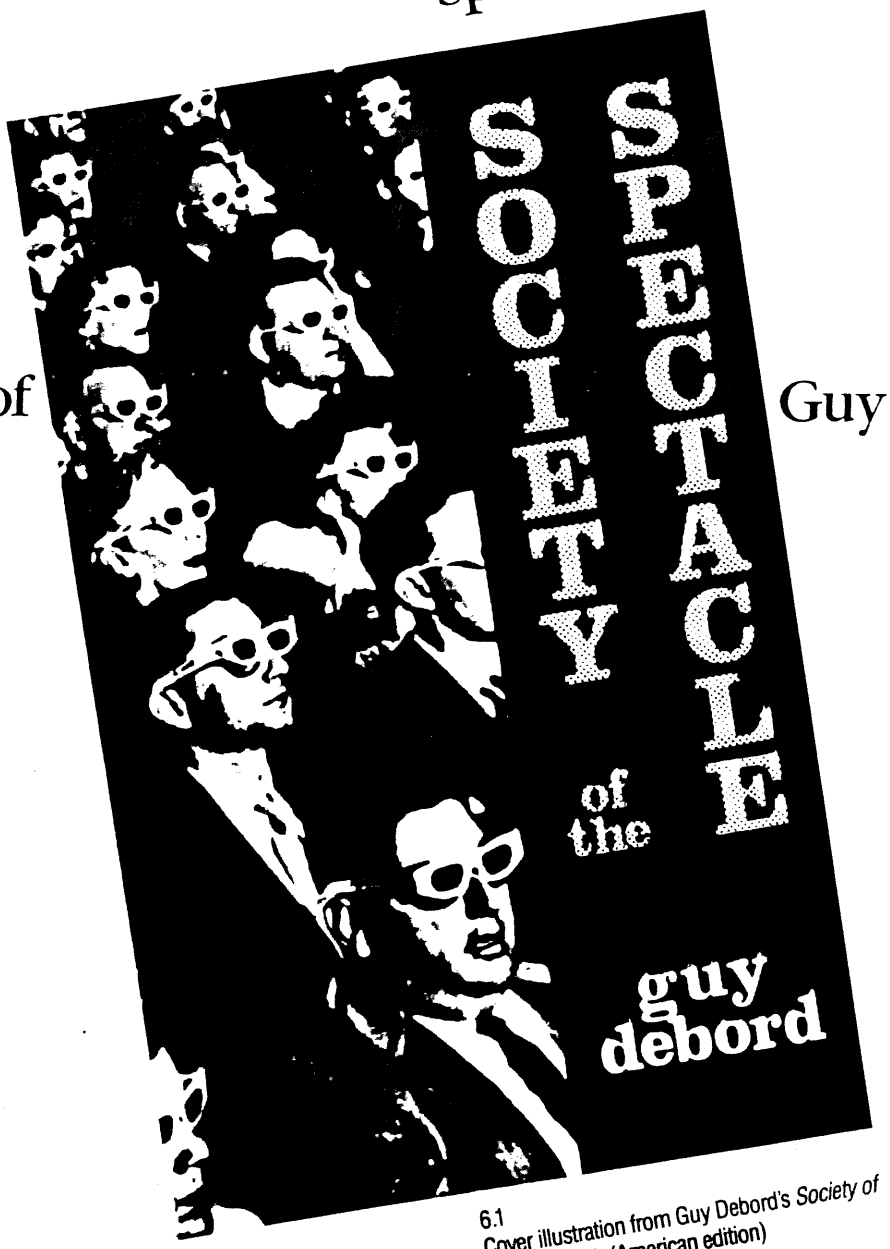
Thomas Y. Levin

Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord



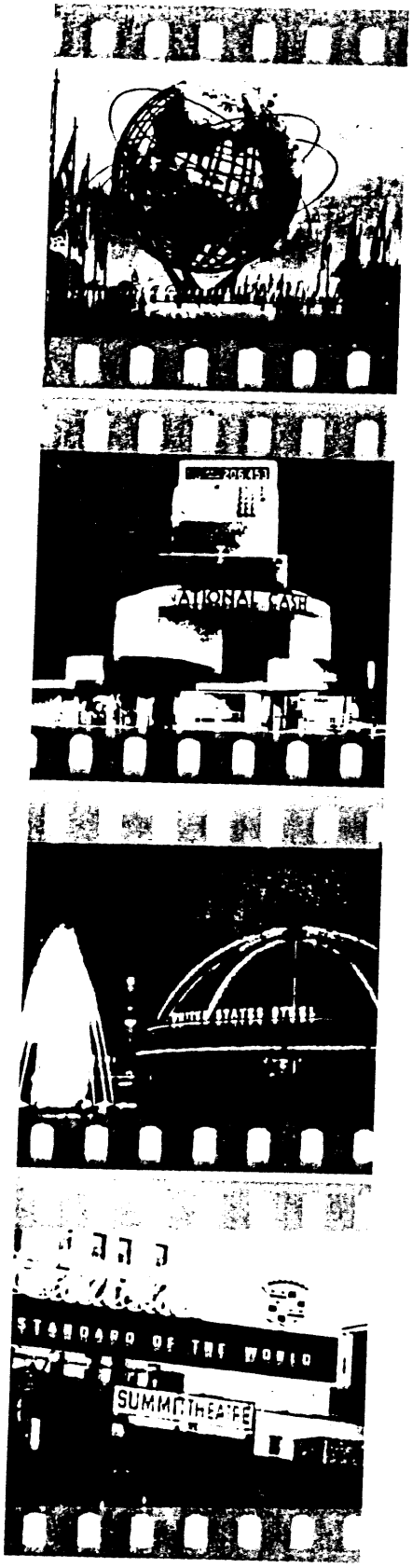
6.1
Cover illustration from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (American edition)

The only interesting undertaking is the liberation of everyday life, not only within a historical perspective but for us and right away. This entails the withering away of alienated forms of communication. The cinema, too, has to be destroyed.[1]

It is society and not technology that has made cinema what it is. The cinema could have been historical examination, theory, essay, memories. It could have been the film which I am making at this moment.[2]

I

Among the various social practices that serve Guy Debord as paradigmatic instances of what he calls the "society of the spectacle," the most often cited are without doubt television and cinema. Typical in this regard is the American edition of Debord's paratactic theoretical text *Society of the Spectacle* (hereafter referred to as *SoS*), where cinematic iconography dominates not only the front and back covers—which incorporate a photograph of spectators at a 3-D movie[3] (fig. 6.1)—but also continues throughout the volume in a series of illustrations located within the socketed frames of a film strip (fig. 6.2).[4] However, although cinema is certainly a privileged *figure* for the society of the spectacle, it is a mistake to assume that Debord's "spectacle" is synonymous with the "spectacularity" of the filmic medium. On the contrary, as is manifest from the very beginning of Debord's text, the theoretical concept of spectacle is used to designate a historical, socio-economic condition: "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (*SoS*, Thesis 4).[5] For Debord, the spectacle designates a ***Weltanschauung*** (simply put, the alienation of late capitalism) that ***manifests*** itself in various spectacular phenomena, among them the cinema: "The world at once present and absent which the spectacle *makes visible* is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived" (*SoS*, Thesis 37).



6.2
Film strip, illustration in *Society of the Spectacle* (American edition)

The confusion surrounding the "spectacle" is to some extent produced by a slippage in Debord's employment of the term. Sometimes it does refer to the realm of representation, as is evident in the structural analogy of the opening thesis of *SoS*:

> In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

However, in the next thesis, Debord differentiates between "images of the world" and "the spectacle in general, [which] as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living." Although this distinction itself merits a close and careful reading, for the present investigation it must suffice to say that the latter use of the expression is *allegorical*: "The spectacle, as the present social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, of the abandonment of history built on the foundation of historical time, is the *false consciousness of time*" (*SoS*, Thesis 158). The conflation in turn stems from Debord's rhetorical employment of the notion of spectacles qua images or representation to concretize his reading of "spectacle" as *the* allegory of late capital.

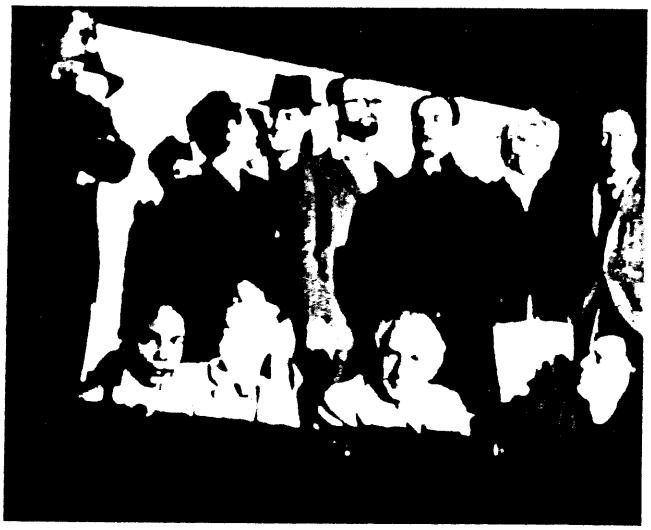
A characteristic instance of this strategy can be found among the illustrations in the journal *Internationale situationniste* (hereafter *IS*)—a rich collection of montage/collage work on pieces of commodity culture, including such *détournements*[6] as recaptioned or reworked advertisements, comic strips, newspaper photographs, problematic depictions of scantily clad women, illustrations from industrial manuals, graphs, and so forth.[7] In one of the last issues of the journal there is a reproduction of a magazine advertisement for German Eumig home movie cameras (fig. 6.3) whose text reads, "I LOVE MY CAMERA BECAUSE I LOVE TO LIVE: I record the best moments of life and revive them at will in all their richness." Underneath the image there is a caption entitled "The Domination of Life by the Spectacle" that reads as follows:

> This advertisement for Eumig cameras (Summer 1967) *evokes* very well the petrification of individual life which has reversed itself into a spectacular

LA DOMINATION DU SPECTACLE SUR LA VIE

Cette publicité de la caméra Eumig (été 1967) évoque très justement la glaciation de la vie individuelle qui s'est renversée dans la perspective spectaculaire : le présent se donne à vivre immédiatement **comme souvenir.** Par cette spatialisation du temps, qui se trouve soumis à l'ordre illusoire d'un présent accessible en permanence, le temps et la vie ont été perdus ensemble.

6.3
I Love My Camera Because I Love to Live, illustration in *Internationale situationniste* 2 (October 1967), p.57



6.3a
"London, September 1960: The Situationists at the cinema," illustration in *Internationale situationniste* 5 (December 1960), p. 8.

economy: the present can now be lived immediately **as memory**. Time is submitted to the illusory order of a permanently available present and, through this spatialization of time, both time and life have been lost together.[8]

Here film functions not as the cause but as an illustration, an "evocation" or figure—albeit a privileged one—for a socio-political and epistemological shift that has taken place under late capitalism. An attitude toward the production of spectacle (home movies) is taken as a symptom of a "spectacular economy" (the temporality of an alienated social condition). As Debord puts it, years later, in a veiled reference to this advertisement: "When one loves life, one goes to the movies (fig. 6.3a)."[9]

The resistance to a facile collapsing of cinema and spectacle is imperative if one is to understand the complex relationship between the Situationist International (SI) and the filmic medium. To the extent that cinema is synonymous with spectacle—a spatialization of time, a staging of separation, a fostering of passivity, alienation, and so on—it is simply unacceptable and must be eliminated. Along with similar forms of spectacle, Debord insists that "the cinema, too, must be destroyed."[10] The question remains, however, to what extent the condemnation of cinema here is a critique of the politics of the "apparatus" analogous to arguments put forth by Martin Heidegger and later by Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean-Louis Comolli regarding the objectification inherent in the very structure of representation.[11] For it might be that what is at issue here is not the cinema as such, but rather a historically specific set of cinematic *practices*, a *certain cinema*—classic, commercial, industrialized, narrativized, and so forth. As Debord notes: "It is society and not technology that has made cinema what it is. The cinema could have been historical examination, theory, essay, memories."[12] This leaves open the possibility of an alternative sort of cinematic activity incompatible with the economy of spectacle, a nonspectacular, anti-spectacular, or other-than-spectacular cinema. Such a realm of possibility is the precondition of what one might call Situationist cinema.

The interest in film on the part of the SI must be understood in light of the significance in its genealogy of the artistic avant-garde: an important dimension of what could be called the "Situationist project" involved the production of (art) works. It was essential, however, that such works be critiques of the current historical moment and contain their own negation—that is, they should be in a sense anti-works. As Raoul Vaneigem phrased it in a statement put forth at the fifth SI conference in Göteborg, Sweden (August 1961):

> It is a question not of elaborating the spectacle of refusal, but rather of refusing the spectacle. In order for their elaboration to be *artistic* in the new and authentic sense defined by the SI, the elements of the destruction of the spectacle must precisely cease to be works of art. There is no such thing as *situationism* or a situationist work of art nor for that matter a spectacular situationist.[13]

Indeed, the conference members subsequently approved a suggestion by Attila Kotányi to call the products of such aesthetic activity on the part of the SI "anti-Situationist" given that truly Situationist conditions had yet to be realized. Similarly, Debord insists—in a formulation astonishingly reminiscent of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*—that "only the real negation of culture can preserve its meaning. It can no longer be *cultural*. Thus it is what in some way remains at the level of culture, but with a completely different meaning."[14] The contradictions and dangers of a radically negative cultural critique that nevertheless insists on the production of (anti) art objects were a topic of continuing polemical debate within the ranks of the SI. Yet they were very aware of what they themselves described as the

> . . . ambiguous and dangerous policy whose risks the SI had to run by consenting to act *in* culture while being against the entire present organization of this culture and even against all culture as a separate sphere. Nor is this most intransigent oppositional attitude and program any less ambiguous and dangerous because it nevertheless has to coexist with the present order.[15]

This strategic concession is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the SI's relationship to that most compromised medium, the cinema.

The first official articulation of the SI position on cinema occurs in a subsection of one of the first articles in the first issue of *IS* in 1958 entitled, indicatively, "For and Against the Cinema."[16] "Cinema is the central art of our society," the editorial begins, and the formal and anecdotal expression in the cinema as well as its material infrastructure are "the best *representation* of an epoch of anarchically juxtaposed inventions (not articulated but simply combined)."[17] But rather than making use of the extraordinary capacities opened up by its technical innovations, so the argument continues, the cinema offers a passive substitute to unitary artistic activity, an exponential increase in the reactionary power of nonparticipatory spectacle. The text makes it clear, however, that this could be otherwise:

> . . . those that want to construct this [new] world must simultaneously fight the tendency of cinema to constitute the anti-construction of situations (the construction of a slave atmosphere, the succession of the cathedrals) while recognizing the significance of the new technological developments (stereo sound, odorama) which are valuable in and of themselves.[18]

The opposite of a knee-jerk Luddite rejection of cinematic technology as such, the editorial attributes the reactionary state of the medium (the absence of avant-garde developments manifest in the plastic arts and in literature) to economic and ideological constraints, but also to the *social importance* of the medium. It is this importance, in turn, that makes it necessary that the medium remain in the control of the hegemonic class.

Instead of abandoning film as hopelessly contaminated, the article closes instead with a call for its appropriation. Cinema is likened to architecture (another major SI concern) in terms of its significance within daily life, the difficulties facing any attempt at its renovation, and the imperative for just such a transformation. This leads to the following conclusion:

> One must therefore struggle to appropriate a truly experimental sector within the cinema. We can envisage two distinct ways of using cinema: first, its employment as a form of propaganda in the pre-Situationist transition period; then its direct employment as a constitutive element of an actual situation.[19]

One could read this as the first, rough outline of a manifesto for an (anti)Situationist film practice.

To gain a more detailed understanding of the motivations behind the SI espousal of film as a revolutionary weapon, one must examine remarks scattered throughout their publications. In one of the more programmatic of these statements, the concluding section of the article "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action against Politics and Art," René Viénet argues that the SI must make use of the cinema—"the newest and without doubt most useful means of expression of our epoch"—as a didactic, analytic, and critical tool:

> Among other possibilities, the cinema lends itself particularly well to studying the present as an historical problem, to dismantling processes of reification. Historical reality can, of course, be apprehended, known and filmed only in the course of a complicated process of mediations. . . . This mediation would be difficult if the empirical existence of facts themselves was not already a mediated existence, which only takes on an appearance of immediateness because of and to the extent that, on the one hand, consciousness of the mediation is lacking and, on the other hand, the facts have been uprooted from the network of their determinations, placed in an artificial isolation and poorly linked together again by the montage of classical cinema. It is precisely this mediation which has been lacking, and inevitably so, in pre-Situationist cinema, which has limited itself to so-called objective forms or re-presentation of politico-moral concepts, whenever it has not been a merely academic type of narrative with all its hypocrisies.[20]

Viénet's conception of an SI film practice enlists the specific capacities of the medium (above all, photographic documentation, voice-over, and analytic montage) to expose the always already mediated status of the seemingly immediate and "natural" world constructed in classical, or pre-Situationist, cinema. The present is studied as a historical problem, history is recast as a problem of representation, and, above all, the practice of representation

itself is continuously subjected to critical interrogation. This staging of mediation takes the form of a work on other mediations, primarily by means of cinema's elective affinity to the important strategy of citation and reinscription referred to as *détournement*. Indeed, in a programmatic essay, the editorial collective of *IS* goes so far as to say that "the signature of the movement, the trace of its presence and its contestation in contemporary cultural reality . . . is first and foremost the employment of *détournement*."[21]

It is in this capacity for visual-acoustic *détournement* that cinema finds its single most important justification as an instrument of SI activity. As Debord and Gil J Wolman confirm in their user's guide to this hallmark SI activity, among the various vehicles for *détournement* such as posters, records, radio broadcasts, and comic strips, none lends itself better than cinema: "It is obviously in the framework of the cinema that *détournement* can attain its greatest efficacity, and undoubtedly, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty."[22] As will become evident below, such *détournement* can take a number of forms. On the one hand, in the double movement of this "powerful cultural weapon" the context and meaning of both insignificant phenomena (newspaper clippings, advertisements, quotidian phrases) and significant elements (citations from Marx or Saint-Just, a sequence from an Eisenstein film) can be displaced and estranged before being subsequently reinscribed and transformed through radical juxtaposition.

On the other hand, entire films can be "detourned": Debord and Wolman propose *Birth of a Nation*, for example, because of its combination of formal innovations unprecedented in the history of cinema with a racist plot that is utterly intolerable. Rather than censoring it, they suggest, it would be better to detourn it as a whole, without necessarily even altering the montage, by adding a sound track that made a powerful denunciation of the horrors of imperialist war and of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan that, they point out, continue in the United States to this very day.[23] *Détournement* could also be used, they go on to say, for the filmic rewriting of history and in order to illustrate theoretical claims.[24] In an early text there is also an amusing suggestion as to how one can recuperate hopelessly commercial films through the use of *détournement* as a mode of spectatorship. At one point during the itinerary of a *dérive*, one should stop into a movie theater for slightly less than an hour and interpret the currently playing adventure film as follows:

> . . . let the heros be some more or less historical people who are close to us, connect the events of the inept scenario to the real reasons which we understand are behind the actions, and connect them also to the events of the current week. Here you have an acceptable collective distraction . . .[25]

Besides *détournement*, however, there are a number of other arguments for the importance of the cinema within the corpus of SI writings. Viénet insists that the SI must require each of its members to be just as capable of making a film as writing an article because film is just as powerful and accessible a polemical medium as articles, books, leaflets, or posters. Moreover, he argues, such cinematic experience would in turn "intensify" the written articulation of the same problems.[26] In an untranslated text entitled "For the Debate on Orientation, Spring 1970: A Note on the First Series of Texts," Debord makes a similar argument, convinced that the production of films is important not only for rhetorical but also for financial reasons.[27] Under the heading "Le cinéma," the last of a series of "Modest Propositions," he writes:

> Each film could give one or two Situationists working as assistants the opportunity to master their own style in this language; and the inevitable success of our works would also provide the economic base for the future production of these comrades. *The expansion of our audience is of decisive importance.*[28]

For these and other reasons Debord claims that of the many young filmmakers in various countries attempting to use film as instruments of revolutionary critique, at present

> only the positions and methods of the Situationists (as formulated in the theses by René Viénet in our previous issue) have direct access to a contemporary revolutionary usage of the cinema—although political and economic conditions can of course still pose problems.[29]

This claim is fleshed out in a series of LI and SI film reviews of movies by Julien Duvivier, the "cinematographic ruin"[30] (an indignant critique of *Marianne de ma jeunesse*), Federico Fellini (a pan of *La Strada*), Agnès Varda (*La pointe courte* faulted for its vacuous politics), Alain Resnais (praised for *Hiroshima mon amour* then lambasted for *L'année dernière à Marienbad*), Norman McLaren (*Blinkity Blank* accused of plagiarizing the Lettrist cinema), and Jean-Luc Godard, "the dumbest of the pro-Chinese Swiss" (attacked in a number of articles for his cinematic politics, especially in *A bout de souffle* and *Le gai savoir*).[31] The greatest insight into the "contemporary revolutionary usage of the cinema" by the SI, however, is to be had from the films they themselves—that is, first and foremost Guy Debord—made.

II

Je veux un ciné qua non![32]

Yes. Guy Debord, theorist and critic of the spectacle par excellence, was—as he himself often pointed out—a filmmaker.[33] It is a most curious and rather ignored fact that besides writing, organizing, and editing the *IS*, adjudicating schisms, and denouncing traitors and fools, Debord also directed no less than six 35mm black and white sound films over a period of twenty-six years from 1952 to 1978 and had plans for numerous others as well.[34] If this seems surprising, it is no accident: these films were attended by only a very few in Paris, have rarely been seen outside France, have never been screened in the US, and have provoked almost no critical literature whatsoever beside a number of more or less incidental newspaper reviews.[35]

To some extent this is due to the fact that the films are hard to watch (for reasons that will become clearer below). But until recently, at least, the films *could* be seen. Indeed, Debord's patron and friend Gérard Lebovici—a French film producer whom he had met in 1971—not only supported Debord's work by financing what was effectively a Situationist press, Editions Champ Libre (now called Editions Gérard Lebovici), he also bought a cinema—the Studio Cujas in Saint-Germain-des-Prés—that projected Debord's complete cinematographic production on a continuous and exclusive basis. This lasted only through 1984, however, when following the mysterious and still unsolved murder of Lebovici in a parking garage off the Champs Elysées, Debord suddenly withdrew his films in a gesture of protest and mourning classically Situationist in its decisiveness. Incensed by the murder of his friend and by the manner in which the press reported it, he then wrote *Considérations sur l'assassinat de Gérard Lebovici* (Reflections on the assassination of Gérard Lebovici) in which he announced that

> the outrageous manner in which the newspapers have discussed his assassination has led me to decide that none of my films will ever be shown again in France. This absence will be the most fitting homage.[36]

Today all efforts to view the films in Paris prove futile: the distributor acknowledges that he has the prints but requires Debord's permission to screen them and this permission, for reasons that must be respected, is not to be had.[37]

While Debord's films are thus now strictly speaking invisible, they fortunately are not entirely unavailable since Debord published detailed scenarios of his film works in both journals and books on a number of occasions. The first three scenarios appeared in a volume entitled (indicatively) *Contre le cinéma* (Against the cinema) (fig. 6.4) published by the Scandinavian Institute for Comparative Vandalism in 1964,[38] and in 1978 the scenarios of all six of Debord's films were made available in the collection *Oeuvres cinématographiques complètes, 1952–1978* (Complete cinematographic works).[39] With only one exception, which will be articulated below, the study of Debord's anti-spectacular cinema is forced to take recourse to the only available traces, the appropriately nonspectacular *textual* scenarios.

In the opening moments of Debord's first film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (Howls in favor of Sade; 1952) Debord himself provides the audience with the cinematic tradition in which to situate his work:

> Memory aid for a history of cinema: 1902—Voyage dans la lune. 1920—The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. 1924—Entr'acte. 1926—Battleship Potemkin. 1928—Un chien andalou. 1931—City Lights. Birth

GUY DEBORD

CONTRE LE CINÉMA

6.4
Cover illustration from Guy Debord, *Contre le cinéma* (1964)

of Guy-Ernest Debord. 1951—Traité de bave et d'éternité. 1952—L'Anticoncept—Hurlements en faveur de Sade.[40]

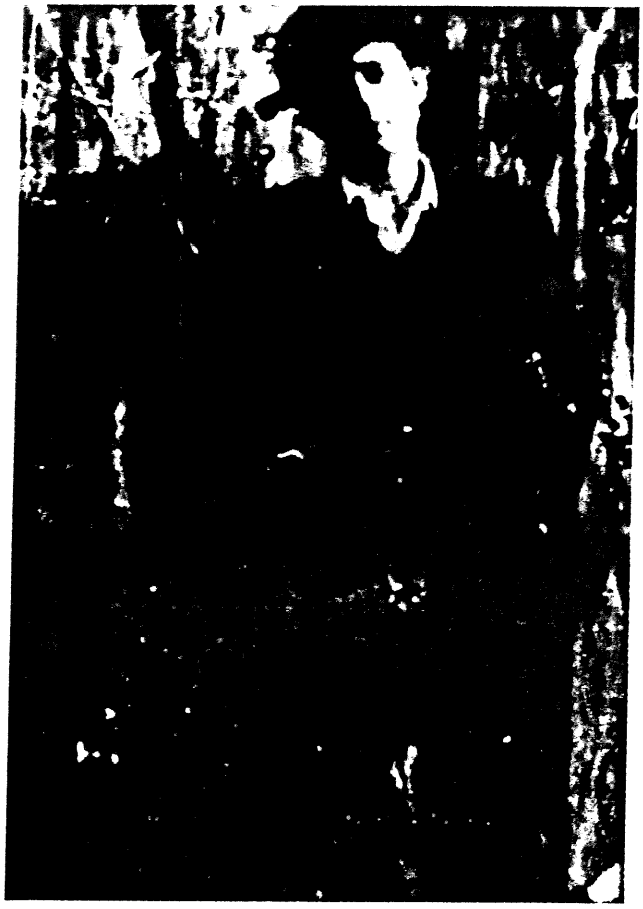
This whirlwind tour of landmarks in film history—genre classics of the early cinema (Georges Méliès), expressionist cinema (Robert Wiene), dada cinema (René Clair), Russian revolutionary cinema (Sergei Eisenstein), surrealist cinema (Louis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí), and socially engaged comedy (Charlie Chaplin)—also sketches the contours of a film aesthetic if one considers each entry as shorthand for a catalogue of formal devices and concerns. This is particularly true of the last two works listed prior to Debord's *Hurlements*, the extraordinary and largely unfamiliar films of Isidore Isou and Gil J Wolman who, along with Maurice Lemaître, are the principal figures of what is known as Lettrist cinema, the cinematic avant-garde that was probably the single greatest influence on Debord's cinematic practice.

In the largely neglected history of postwar French experimental cinema it was the Lettrist movement whose remarkable films, or "movie performances," in the 1950s took up a wide range of radical practices (first explored decades earlier by the dadaists) that later became the basic vocabulary of the American and continental "underground" cinema.[41] These practices include, to take just a few examples, the use of flicker, radical sound-image discontinuity, negative sequences, multiple simultaneous acoustic inputs, direct manipulation of the celluloid surface through tearing, writing, and scratching, and an active engagement of the spectator à la "expanded cinema." According to Dominique Noguez, the historian of the French experimental cinema and virtually the only scholar of avant-garde film to recognize the significance of the Lettrist cinema,

> it was really the Lettrist movement (Isidore Isou, Maurice Lemaître) which laid the foundations in the early fifties for an avant-garde revival. At the same time as, or even before, the American avant-garde, the Lettrists invented a great many of the working methods, the forms and the structures widely used today throughout the international experimental cinema.[42]

Indeed, as will become clearer below, the Lettrist cinema not only provided a formative context for the films by Debord but also anticipated and to some extent may have provoked aspects of the work of filmmakers such as Peter Kubelka, Tony Conrad, Malcolm LeGrice, and Norman McLaren, to name just a few.

The theoretical basis of Lettrist film finds its most eloquent—and extensive—expression in the *Esthétique du cinéma* by Jean-Isidore Isou, a Rumanian Jew who was the founder of the Lettrist movement.[43] It is in this impressively elaborated philosophical architectonic that Isou makes a distinction (fundamental to the Lettrist aesthetic) between two successive tendencies in the development of any artistic medium: the *phase amplique* (amplic phase) and the *phase ciselante* (chiseling phase). The former refers to the period during which an art form is elaborated, develops its stylistic vocabularies, and employs them to explore and give expression to subjects other than itself. In cinema this would correspond to the development of narrative techniques (flashback, subjective camera), the evolution of various genres, the exploration of the camera's documentary capacities, and so on. The second, "chiseling" phase occurs when the first has run its course and the medium finds itself at a point of exhaustion or of bloated, decadent excess (fig. 6.5). This leads to a renunciation of subjects external to the medium itself, a reflexive involution during which basic formal and technical presuppositions are subjected to a radical interrogation.[44]



6.5
"Photograph—on intentionally damaged footage—published in 1952 in the journal *Ion*," of Guy Debord (*Contre*, p. 11)‡

The polemical claim of the Lettrist film aesthetic is that the cinematic medium has exhausted its amplic resources and must now move into the subsequent chiseling phase. This is proclaimed in one of the first of numerous manifestos for the new era of "discrepant" cinema, a manifesto that is itself, as it explicitly points out, a film: the first section of Isou's *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (Treatise of slobber and eternity; 1951).[45] Here the protagonist Daniel, expounding his new ideas on the "art of film" to the unruly members of a ciné-club audience, declares:

> I think first of all that the cinema is too rich. It is obese. It has reached its limits, its maximum. The moment it attempts to grow any further cinema will explode. Suffering from a case of congestion, this

‡ Captions appearing within quotation marks consist of Debord's own description of the image taken from his film scenarios. All citations are either from *Contre le cinéma* or *Oeuvres cinématographiques complètes, 1952–1978*. When the image and image description have been taken from different works, two citations are given: the first is to the source of the image description, while the second is to the source of the image.

pig stuffed with fat will rip apart into a thousand pieces. I announce the *destruction of cinema*, the first apocalyptic sign of disjunction, of the rupture of this *bloated and pot-bellied* organism called film.[46]

Rather than attempting to create new masterpieces, Daniel insists, the future of the cinema lies in the chewing up, digesting, and regurgitating of the masterpieces of the past. In formal terms, this imperative—which could be read as a call for cinematic *détournement*—manifests itself in two practices that have become the hallmark of Lettrist cinema, the radical suspension of sound-image coordination and the intentional mutilation of images:

> The rupture between words and the photograph will constitute what I call THE DISCREPANT CINEMA. *I proclaim the manifesto of discrepant cinema!* I call for filmstrips that have been lacerated or willfully worked over by the filmmaker, *chiseled filmstrips.*[47]

Indeed, referring to what he calls the "sadism of the photo," Daniel explains that the more the filmstrip is decomposed, gangrened, and infected, the more beautiful it will seem to the filmmaker.

Isou's *Esthétique du cinéma* was first published in April 1952 as the lead article in the first (and only) issue of the journal *Ion*, a "special issue on cinema" that also includes virtually all of the major figures and works of Lettrist cinema.[48] Besides Isou's text—which is cited in the introductory remarks as the shared basis of the entire issue[49]—the table of contents includes an important piece by Serge Berna entitled "Jusqu'à l'os" (To the bone), texts by Poucette, Yolande de Luart, and Monique Geoffroy, Marc, O's "Première manifestation d'un cinéma nucléaire," as well as the scenarios of Gil J Wolman's *L'Anticoncept*, François Dufrêne's *Tambours du jugement premier*, of Gabriel Pomerand's *La légende cruelle*, and of Guy Debord's first film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*. It was this very same group that, almost simultaneously with the publication of *Ion*, undertook a "systematic sabotage" of the 1952 Cannes Film Festival that ultimately led to their arrest.[50] As part of their actions these "men of a new cinema" signed and distributed a polemical tract entitled "Fini le cinéma français" (French cinema is over) that condemned current commercial film production and announced the advent of the new "insurrectional" phase of Lettrist cinema:

> A number of men [*sic*], dissatisfied with what they have been given, surpass the world of official expressions and the festival of its poverty.
> After **L'ESTHETIQUE DU CINEMA** by Isidore **ISOU**, **TAMBOURS DU JUGEMENT PREMIER**, the essay in imaginary cinema by François **DUFRENE**, systematizes to the utmost extreme the exhaustion of filmic means, by locating it beyond all of its technology.
> Guy-Ernest **DEBORD** with **HURLEMENTS EN FAVEUR DE SADE** arrives at the end of cinema in its insurrectional phase.
> After these refusals, definitively outside the norms which you like, the **CINEMA NUCLEAIRE** by **MARC,O.** integrates the exhibition space and the spectator into the cinematographic representation.
> From now on, cinema can no longer be anything but **NUCLEAR.**
> Thus we want to go beyond these derisory competitions of sub-products between little businessmen who are either already illiterate or destined to soon become so. Our mere presence here makes them die.
> And here are the men [*sic*] of a new cinema: Serge **BERNA**, **G.E. DEBORD**, François **DUFRENE**, Monique **GEOFFROY**, Jean Isidore **ISOU**, Yolande du **LUART**, **MARC,O.**, Gabriel **POMERAND**, **POUCETTE**, Gil J. **WOLMAN**.[51]

The scenario of *Hurlements* published in *Ion*, a first version later abandoned, is a veritable catalogue of Lettrist cinematic strategies and citations. These include acoustic material by (and/or references to) Dufrêne, Marc, O, and Isou, as well as improvisations of Lettrist poetry, citations of Apollinaire, shouts, noises, and music by Vivaldi. The image track, which includes newsreel footage (a boxing match, young people killed in the streets of Athens, the Indian army), images of Paris, of Debord, and of Marc, O, also contains much graphical work on language, black frames, and film scratched to the point of total destruction. At times, however, it is, as is spelled out on the screen, "T,e,l,l,e,m,e,n,t, v,i,d,e, à, h,u, r,l,e,r, à, h,u,r,l,e,r"

(So empty one could scream, one could scream). The function of these and other devices are elucidated by Debord in an epigrammatic preface to the scenario entitled "Prolegomenes à tout cinéma futur" (Prolegomena to all future cinema).[52] In this programmatic one-page text (whose first and last lines reappear in the scenario) Debord guides the reader through the various Lettrist techniques that will be employed in his film. These techniques, Debord states in a slightly ironic appropriation of Isouian rhetoric, will assure that his film "will remain among the most important in the history of the reductive hypostasis of cinema by means of a terrorist disorganization of the discrepant."[53] According to Debord's poetics of Lettrist cinema, the chiseling or defacement of the image and the Lettrist sound performances "are here envisaged as the expression as such of revolt"; censored phrases "denounce repressive forces"; words spelled out "sketch an even more total dislocation," a "destruction" that continues in the aleatory relation of sound and image that reciprocally invade, duplicate, succeed, or ignore each other.

In the second and final version of *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* that premiered barely two months after the publication of *Ion*, there is hardly a trace of the Lettrist idiom so manifest in the scenario described above.[54] Stripped of all its "chiseled" aspects in both the visual and acoustic domains, the notorious *Hurlements* is a black and white sound film *without images*.[55] Its sound track, devoid of any music or noise, consists of dialogue spoken without expression by Wolman, Isou, Debord, Serge Berna, and Barbara Rosenthal. The image track is literally black and white: when one of the five voices is speaking, the screen is white; during the remainder of the film the sound track is silent, the screen is black, and the entire screening space is dark. The dialogue consists primarily of phrases that have been detourned from journals, works by James Joyce, the French *code civil*, Isou's *Esthétique du cinéma*, and from John Ford's *Rio Grande*, supplemented by quotidian banalities.[56] More remarkable still is the fact that the sound track runs during only a total of approximately twenty minutes in a film lasting one hour and twenty minutes. Needless to say, the audience has become bored and nervous, if not violent, long before the twenty-four minute black silence that makes up the final sequence—a sequence that Debord claims was the inspiration for Yves Klein's monochrome paintings.[57]

The history of the early screenings of *Hurlements* suggests to what extent the film successfully realized the concluding credo of the "Prolegomena" that is also heard on the film's sound track: "The arts of the future will be radical transformations of situations, or nothing at all."[58] At its Paris premier on 30 June at the Ciné-Club d'Avant-Garde in the Musée de l'Homme, *Hurlements* was almost immediately brought to a halt by Armand-Jean Cauliez, director of the film club, and yet still managed to provoke violence in the audience. The film was first screened in its entirety on 13 October 1952 at the Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin in the rooms of the Sociétés Savantes.[59] This time there was no disturbance thanks to the presence of a group of "Left Lettrists" who enforced the peace.[60] Screenings of *Hurlements* at the ICA (London) in May 1957 and then again in June 1960 also caused amusing scandals, the latter event described as follows by Guy Atkins in his study of Asger Jorn:

> During a final silence of twenty-four minutes, when the only sound in the room was the turning of the reel, a member of the audience got up, thanked Mrs [Dorothy] Morland [Director of the ICA] for an interesting evening and apologized for having to leave early. Everyone else stayed to the end, hoping that a sensational tidbit might still be coming. When the lights went up there was an immediate babble of protest. People stood around and some made angry speeches. One man threatened to resign from the ICA unless the money for his ticket was refunded. Another complained that he and his wife had come all the way from Wimbledon and had paid for a babysitter, because neither of them wanted to miss the film. . . .
>
> The noise from the lecture room was so loud that it reached the next audience, queueing on the stairs for the second house. Those who had just seen the film came out of the auditorium and tried to persuade their friends on the stairs to go home, instead of wasting their time and money. But the atmosphere was so charged with excitement that this well-intentioned advice had the opposite effect. The

> newcomers became all the more anxious to see the film, since nobody imagined that the show would be a complete blank![61]

Atkins's account demonstrates rather clearly the extent to which Debord's "blank," this "nothing" of a film, was the very means by which the "radical transformation of [a] situation" was realized, the transformation of an event that would otherwise have been a mere iteration of the avant-garde cinematic spectacle-ritual.

Despite its renunciation of an overtly Lettrist vocabulary, *Hurlements* remains a decidedly Lettrist work. In fact, in abandoning the image track entirely, Debord pushes the gesture of chiseling—the damaging treatment of the filmstrip—to the limit: namely, the total destruction of the image. As Debord observes in a passage from an important article in *Potlatch*:

> Last June, we obtained the scandal which we expected upon presenting in London a film which I had made in 1952, a film which is not a mystification and even less a Situationist work. Rather this film is based on a number of complex Lettrist motivations from that period (the work on the cinema by Isou, Marco [*sic*], Wolman) and thus participates fully in the phase of decomposition, indeed, to be precise, in its most extreme form, yet, with the exception of a few programmatic allusions, devoid of the desire to make positive developments which is characteristic of the works to which I just alluded.[62]

Indeed, as Debord acknowledges, the reductive gesture of *Hurlements* is a radicalization of a negative moment that had already been articulated at various points in the pages of *Ion*. In Serge Berna's essay, "Jusqu'à l'os," for example, which calls for a transformation of cinema that goes beyond the mere flesh of the medium and attacks it at the skeletal level, the opening lines read:

> Today, faced with the imperatives imposed upon us by the cinematographic tradition, we must smash the double magic circle which protects this citadel. The first is the sacred barrier within which one guards the credo: "Cinema-is-images."[63]

This is precisely the project, for example, of François Dufrêne's *Tambours du jugement premier* (1952), a "film" (consisting of only a sound track) that "puts in doubt the very essence of cinema by means of the IMAGINARY CINEMA."[64]

Berna's imperative also characterizes the films of Wolman and Isou. In Wolman's *L'Anticoncept* (1951)[65] the image track consists of nothing but a white circular field that flashes on and off randomly, sometimes at almost psychedelic speed.[66] The result is a dramatic foregrounding of the sound track, a combination of polemical pronouncement, Lettrist sound poetry, and improvised narrative. Following a section toward the end of the hour-long work that plays with the possibilities offered by varying the speeds of the sound recording—an exploration of the creative capacities offered by a manipulation of the apparatus of mechanical reproduction that anticipates by nearly thirty years the "scratch aesthetic" of black street music in the late 1970s—there is a break marked by the line "la vie n'est pas retrospective" (life is not retrospective). Subsequently, the sound track degenerates into a hilarious cacophony of regurgitory and defecatory acoustics.

In Isou's film *Traité*, the assault on the image track takes place not so much on a formal level as in terms of its "*readying of rupture.*"[67] While the print of *Traité* shown on 20 April 1951 at a special screening for journalists at Cannes was without images, according to numerous accounts this absence was due to the simple fact that only the sound track had been completed at the time.[68] By the time of its Paris debut, the film included an image track in high Lettrist style: chiseled and random images, shots of Indochina, the Seine, skiers, portraits of Lettrists, and so on.[69] The issue of the priority of the visual is nevertheless raised in the voice-over. One must, as Daniel puts it:

> Destroy the photograph for the sake of speech, do the inverse of what one has done in this domain, the contrary of what one *thought was the cinema*. Who ever said that the cinema, whose meaning is *movement*, must absolutely be *the movement of the photograph* and not the *movement of the word*? . . . The photograph bothers me in the cinema.[70]

It is crucial to note, however, that the devaluation of the image is here motivated by a passion for the sound or, elsewhere, for the letter as such.[71] This classically

Lettrist concern is, however, at root *aesthetic* and as such far from the imperatives governing the only *apparently* similar gesture by Debord.

The very different impetus behind the elimination of the image track in Debord's film is best understood in light of a hypothetical narrative in Isou's *Esthétique du cinéma* that recounts, curiously enough, what could be considered as the very first conception of *Hurlements*:

> At the Cannes Festival everyone was speaking about *Traité de bave et d'éternité* which had only been presented at the last moment. The day of the projection it was confirmed that the film did not even exist. A journalist from *Combat* named Arlaud had cried out in the theater: "It would be great if there is no film; we could write our headlines right away." Fortunately (or *unfortunately*) in the end the film did turn up.
>
> Had there been no film, Marc-Gilbert Guillaumin [Marc, O] and Guy-Ernest Debord would have concretely and willingly realized this *lack*. They had planned to speak to a director of a ciné-club that had shown a number of works of our group and to announce an even more sensational creation. The title was already set: *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*. They would have sent out invitations, made posters and called the journalists. They would have then brought the reels from another film in order to reassure the director who, by the way, had taken us at our word. [Footnote #1: And our word would have been kept since, in any case, we would have *offered him a spectacle*]. At the point when the projection was to have begun, Debord would have gotten up on stage in order to say a few words of introduction. He would have simply said: "There is no film." I thought I would get involved and link up their destructive scandal with the theory of the constructive *pure debate*. Debord should have said: "The cinema is dead. There can be no more film. [Footnote #2: The scandal would thereby have acquired a new meaning within a holistic conception]. Let us proceed, if you like, to the debates." [Footnote #3: Since, in any case, the debate would have been presented as an oeuvre, the journalists would have had to chronicle the *premiere* of a new form of work].[72]

The importance of this passage—whose last few lines are cited (albeit in slightly altered form) in the opening moments of *Hurlements*[73]—must be stressed. Unlike both Wolman and Isou, Debord does not critique the image simply in order to invest the spoken or written "letter" with a new poetic vitality. Rather, the absence of the film—and similarly the lack of images in *Hurlements*—is employed as the essential ingredient in a recipe of provocation intended to "radically transform" the cinematic "situation" from a shrine of passive consumption into an arena of active discussion, a shift *away* from the spectacular and *toward* critical engagement. As will become increasingly evident in Debord's later films, already here the focus has begun to shift toward the problem of cinematic *reception*, that is, the issue of spectatorship. In the "Prolegomena," following the enumeration and theoretical articulations of various Lettrist tactics, the concluding remarks read: "But all this belongs to an epoch that is ending, and that no longer interests me. Creative values are shifting toward a conditioning of the spectator . . ."[74]

Debord describes *Hurlements* as a "negation and a move beyond the Isou-ian conception of 'discrepant cinema.'"[75] Despite its indebtedness to the Lettrist cinema, the negativity of Debord's film is in fact much closer in its gesture to what one could call "dada cinema."[76] The term is here employed not as a historical designation (according to which a film is "dada" because it was made by a dadaist) but rather as a description of a type of "anti-object" that frustrates contemplative immersion on the part of the spectator and incites public indignation. The distinction is all the more urgent in light of the fact that most historically dada films were not successful as "dada" events. Even *Entr'acte*, that most paradigmatic of historic dada films, was unable to produce the disruptive effects that had been anticipated despite the film's formal radicality.[77] The spectacular structure of the cinematic event itself, so it seems, is at odds with the disconcerting thrust of the dada gesture. Indeed if, as Thomas Elsaesser points out, "film [was] a less than perfect medium at Dada events," this is a function of the very apparatus itself:

> For the conditions of a reception in the cinema—the dark room, the stable rectangle of the screen, the fixed voyeuristic position of the spectator—all

counteract not only the sense of provocation, but they also compensate for the absence of a coherent diegesis and for the non-narrative organization in the filmed material.[78]

The condition of possibility of "dada" *as* cinema then, requires that the "fundamental degradation of their material," which Walter Benjamin describes as a hallmark dada practice,[79] be carried even further than the suspension of narrative coherence. It is precisely this extreme that is realized in the elimination of the image track in *Hurlements*. Here Debord suspends even the residual referentiality of the white disc in *L'Anticoncept* (which can still be seen as lens, keyhole, eye) and also attenuates the continuous visual absence of *Tambours* by alternating the black imageless void with a blank white field that, although present, is not readable as anything but the apparatus itself—the screen, the projection, the lamp, and so on. Here that which is always—necessarily—present in the mode of absence, "covered" by the representation that it serves to convey, is staged as such. The spectators, confronted with their *desires and expectations* for a (the) spectacle, are provoked to the point of screams (*hurlements*) when it is revealed to what extent they themselves are an integral part of this spectacular economy.[80] It is in this light that *Hurlements* can be called a—indeed perhaps the first—truly dada film.[81] As Debord states with his own voice at a privileged point in his next film where for the first time the screen becomes entirely white: "One never really contests an organization of existence without contesting all of that organization's forms of language."[82]

III

One must insert new forces into the battle of leisure, and we will hold our position there.[83]

The year 1952, during which *Hurlements* was completed and premiered, was also the year in which a number of the more radical Lettrists split off and formed the Lettrist International (LI), a scission that could be read as the political analogon to the aesthetic distanciation from certain aspects of the Lettrist project manifested in *Hurlements*. Curiously, this key development in the genealogy of the SI—whose initial stages were virtually simultaneous with the first screening of Debord's film—subsequently came to a head in the polemics around another cinematic event: the controversial intervention at Charlie Chaplin's press conference held on 29 October 1952 at the Ritz Hotel in Paris on the occasion of the release of *Limelight*. Here, Debord, Wolman, Serge Berna, and Jean-L. Brau broke through police barriers and bombarded Chaplin with an insulting, denunciatory tract entitled "Finis les pieds plats" (No more flat feet)[84] in which they insisted that the very act of holding a press conference indicated Chaplin's sullied commercial values. The tract further lambasted Chaplin's "turn-the-other-cheek" attitude toward oppression, arguing instead that one should respond to suffering with revolution. The attack did not meet with the approval of all the Lettrists, however. Despite an initial endorsement of the undertaking, Isou, along with Lemaître and Gabriel Pomerand, expressed reservations in a public disavowal of the gesture published in *Combat* on 1 November 1952.[85] This in turn prompted Debord, Wolman, Brau, and Serge Berna to disassociate themselves from what they perceived as the "reactionary" Lettrist faction.[86] Their declaration that "the most compelling exercise of freedom is the destruction of idols, especially when they speak in the name of freedom,"[87] reads both as a justification of their attack on Chaplin and of their break (through the formation of the LI) with Isou, Lemaître, and Pomerand as well.

Just as *Hurlements* was a response to the Lettrist movement from a position already beyond it, Debord's next film, which appeared seven years later, *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time; 1959), is largely a retrospective account of the activities of the Lettrist International.[88] As the voice-over "announcer" proclaims: "Our camera has captured for you a few aspects of a provisional micro-society,"[89] a group of young people who congregated in Saint-Germain-des-Prés ("the strange setting of our story") where they "carried out the systematic questioning of all the diversions and labors of a society as well as a global critique of its idea of happiness."[90] While *Sur le passage* is a sometimes slightly nostalgic depiction of the LI, it is at the same time an involuted theoretical meditation. Debord formulates this simultaneity as follows:

> This short film can be taken as a series of notes on the origins of the Situationist movement; notes that, as a result, obviously contain a reflection on their own language.[91]

Indeed, the combination of personal reflection and theoretically articulated reflexivity is not only characteristic of *Sur le passage* but, as will become clearer below, is also one of the hallmarks of all of Debord's subsequent films.

Initially, the most striking feature of Debord's second film is the reintroduction of photographic representation. However, following the filmic tabula rasa produced by the elimination of the visual track in *Hurlements*, the images here have a very special status: they are, for the most part, visual citations. Like the sound track in *Hurlements* that, as described above, was composed of "invisible" citations of fragments from various sources, the visual track in *Sur le passage* is a veritable catalogue of *détournement*, employing found footage of policemen in Paris, England, and Japan, colonialists demonstrating in Algiers, parachutists, a speech by de Gaulle, and a solar eruption, to take just a few examples. The film, described in a methodological discussion of *détournement* as a "detourned documentary"[92] (fig. 6.6), also makes extensive use of a publicity film for Monsavon. In all these cases Debord is doing what Viénet called for years later:

> We should appropriate the first stammerings of this new [cinematic] language; and above all its most consummate and modern examples, those which have escaped artistic ideology even more than American B movies: newsreels, previews, and above all, filmed ads.
>
> Although it has obviously been in the service of the commodity and the spectacle, filmed advertising, in its extreme freedom of technical means, has laid the foundations for what Eisenstein had an inkling of when he talked of filming *The Critique of Political Economy* or *The German Ideology*.[93]

In fact, an initial version of *Sur le Passage* included many more *détournements* of scenes from other films, "limit cases of citation"[94] that ultimately had to be removed because—anticipating by almost 30 years the contemporary legal battles over "sampling"—the film com-

6.6
"Tracking shot of the starlette in her bathtub," Anna Karina in a detourned soap commercial in *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (OCC, p. 29/ *Contre*, p. 55)

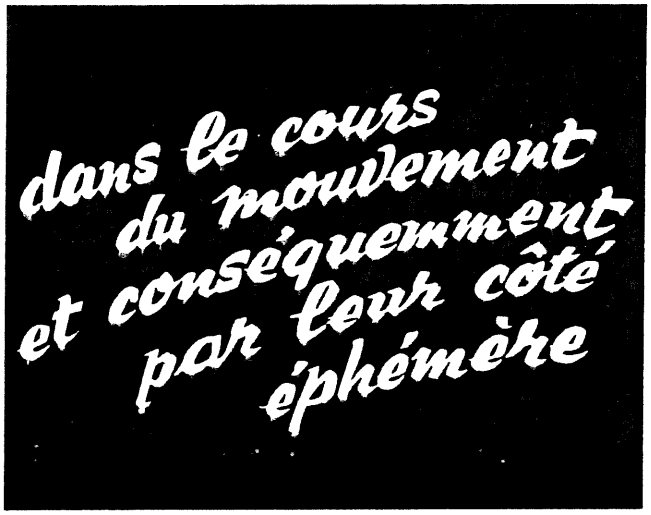
panies who owned the reworked scenes refused to sell the rights for reuse. Like *Mémoires* (1959) and its antecedent *Fin de Copenhague* (1957),[95] the collective collage projects by Debord and Asger Jorn that were composed entirely of prefabricated elements subjected to *détournement*, *Sur le passage* (produced the same year), is also a collage of *détournement*.

The citational quality of the image track in *Sur le passage* is manifest in the sound track as well, beginning with the opening credit sequence during which one hears a recording of the debates—primarily in French and German—of the third SI conference that was held in Munich in April 1959. Throughout the remainder of the film the voice-over consists largely of detourned phrases taken from various classical thinkers (fig. 6.7 and 6.8), from science fiction novels, or from current pop sociology and read in a generally indifferent manner by either Jean Harnois (using the tone of the radio announcer), Guy Debord (sad and muted in tone), or Claude Brabante (voice of a young girl). In general, the sound track in *Sur le passage*—which also includes music by Handel and Michel-Richard Delalande—has a status equal or superior to the image track, a reversal of the historical and formal priority of the image and a revalorization of the sound track that Debord brought about by suspending the visual dimension in *Hurlements*. This preeminence of the sound track is manifest graphically in the very layout of the scenario in which the film "texts" are presented in their entirety in large type, whereas only a very small selection of the images, described *underneath* in a smaller italic script, are reproduced at the end of the scenario.

In homage to the paradigmatic LI practice of the *dérive*, *Sur le passage* also includes another class of images: sympathetic depictions of favorite LI haunts such as the cafés in Saint-Germain-des-Prés (fig. 6.9), Les Halles by night and at dawn (fig. 6.10), the place Saint-Sulpice, the rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, and so forth. As the voice-over accompanying one such image explains, the members of the LI rejected the impoverished and myopic relation to the city manifested by most people:

> We wanted to break out of this conditioning, in search of an alternative use of the urban landscape, in search of new passions. The atmosphere of a few

6.7
"In the process of movement and therefore by their ephemeral side" (Karl Marx), *Sur le passage* . . . (OCC, p. 22)



6.8
"In the prestigious decor especially constructed for this purpose," *Sur le passage* . . . (OCC, p. 23)

6.9
"A photograph of two couples [Asger Jorn, Michèle Bernstein, Guy Debord, and an unidentified friend] drinking wine at a café table, is subjected to an examination by the camera in the style of an art film," *Sur le passage . . .* (OCC, p. 17)

6.10
"Numerous views of dawn at Les Halles," *Sur le passage . . .* (OCC, p. 20)

places gave us intimations of the future powers of an architecture that it would be necessary to create as the support and framework for less mediocre games. We could expect nothing of anything we had not altered ourselves.[96]

Debord's description of this quotidian adventure so central to the LI program also reads like a description of the film itself: "It was a trompe-l'oeil reality by means of which one had to discover the potential richness of reality."[97]

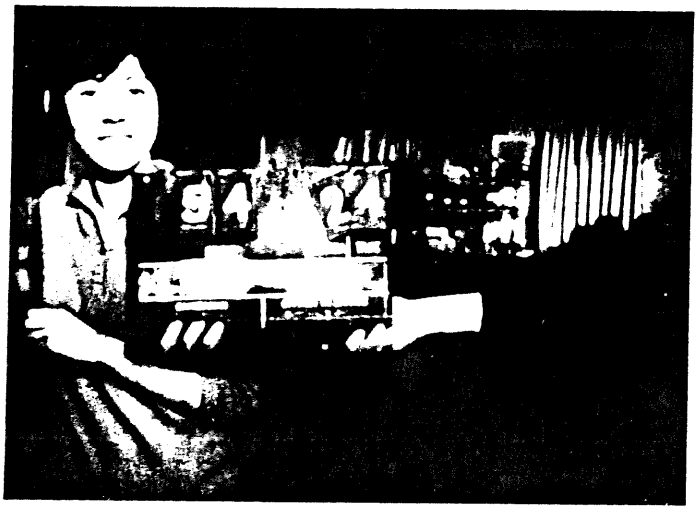
Sur le passage is, however, in no sense an unproblematic documentation of LI exploits. This has its material/political reasons. As one hears in the voice-over at a privileged moment in the film where—in a gesture reminiscent of *Hurlements*—the screen is suddenly entirely white:

> The ruling class monopoly of the instruments we should have had at our disposal in order to realize the collective art of our time had excluded us even from a cultural production officially dedicated to illustrating and repeating the past. An art film on this generation can only be a film on the absence of its works.[98]

As a result the Parisian scenes, sometimes interrupted by text frames,[99] are also subjected to a number of operations that problematize their documentary character. One of the various strategies employed to refashion traditional scenes is explained as follows:

> In order to adopt a position opposed to that of documentary film in terms of the construction of the spectacle, every time there was a danger of encountering a monument we avoided filming it by shooting instead the *point of view of the monument* (just as the young Abel Gance was able to position his camera to shoot from *the snowball's point of view*).[100]

Another important strategy of distanciation involves the depiction of the film crew, images of the clapper (fig. 6.11), the repeated refilming of a still photograph, and the staging of intentionally inept sequences in which the "apparatus" (camera, projection equipment, off-camera spectators) are visible. During one such sequence, Debord makes the following comment on the sound track:



6.11
"Two images of the film's clapboard being held at the start of two shots previously seen," *Sur le passage . . .* (OCC, p. 31)

> Of course, one could make it into a film. But even if such a film were to succeed in being as fundamentally incoherent and unsatisfying as the reality with which it is concerned, it will never be more than a re-creation—impoverished and false like this botched tracking shot.[101]

Here Debord articulates two of the leitmotifs of his cinematic production: (1) the calculated violation and/or analysis of cinematographic convention as a means of exposing the syntax—and in turn the ideological stakes—of the spectacle; and (2) the deliberate staging of confusion as both a refusal of a false and reductive pseudo-coherence of (narrative) spectacle and as a reflection of the fundamental *incoherence* of the reality of late capitalism.

In *Sur le passage*, the analysis/exposure of the economy of spectacle includes, beside the examples already cited above, an extensive—and very early—critique of auteurism, dismissed as hopelessly naive in light of the contemporary utter bankruptcy of individual expression.[102] There is also a lengthy dissection of the function and appeal of the "star." Accompanying the last of a number of shots of the "heroine" of a Monsavon soap commercial in a bathtub is the following voice-over text:

> In the final analysis, stars are created by the need we have for them and not by the talent or lack of talent or even by the film industry or by advertising. It is the misery of this need, the dismal and anonymous life which would love to swell to the dimensions of the life of the cinema. The imaginary life on the screen is the product of this real need. The star is the projection of this need.[103]

Like the desire for the star, the appetite for narrative continuity and general intelligibility is fueled by a (repressed) sense of the absence of just such continuity and intelligibility. Debord in turn justifies the refusal of just such transparency (for example, that the sound track be semantically redundant so as not to overwhelm the spectator) by arguing that incomprehensibility is a quotidian experience and its appearance in a film therefore justified. With the screen entirely white, the sound track of *Sur le passage* proclaims:

> Usually what allows one to understand documentaries is the arbitrary limitation of their subject matter. They describe the atomization of social functions and the isolation of their products. One can, in contrast, envisage the entire complexity of a moment which is not resolved into a work, a moment whose movement irreducibly contains facts and values and whose meaning is not yet apparent. The subject matter of the documentary would then be this confused totality.[104]

Throughout Debord's early films one finds variations of this polemic whose logic one could call the *mimesis of incoherence*: the film is unsatisfying because the world is unsatisfying; the incoherence of the film reflects that of the reality; the poverty of the film's materials serves to emphasize the poverty of its subject, and so on. The task of a radical documentary is thus to refuse the false reduction of a pseudo-coherence and to present as such an incoherence that, in its inpenetrable density, holds out the possibility of an alternative, not yet accessible meaning.[105] If one recalls the false coherence of the quotidian that psychogeographical explorations were meant to shatter, one can see how, in short, Debord's films are to the spectacle of traditional documentary or narrative cinema what the *dérive* is to daily life. They thus confirm Ivan Chtcheglov's prediction (under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain) that "later, once the gestures [of the continuous *dérive*] grow stale, this *dérive* will move partially from the realm of lived experience to the realm of representation.[106]

In Debord's next film, *Critique de la séparation* (Critique of Separation; 1961),[107] the only one of the six films that can still be seen today,[108] the nostalgic and retrospective tone of *Sur le passage* has been almost entirely displaced by critique and analysis. This is evident from the film's very first sequence, a series of random images punctuated by text frames that announce: "Coming soon on this screen—one of the greatest anti-films of all time!—Real people! A true story! On a subject that the cinema has never dared to broach." Simultaneously, on the sound track one hears the voice of Caroline Rittener reading the following citation from André Martinet's *Eléments de linguistique générale*:

> When one considers how natural and beneficial it is for man to identify his language with reality, one

> realizes the level of sophistication he had to reach in order to be able to dissociate them and make each an object of study.[109]

The unbroached subject of the film, it soon becomes clear, is its own operation, the "real people" its audience, and the "true" story that of the alienated relationship produced/staged by the spectacle.

Through a series of remarks spoken by Debord on the voice-over, the film articulates even the considerations that gave rise to the imperative of its own relentlessly involuted focus. It is a striking contradiction, the film insists, that our so-called rational culture develops greater and greater technological powers—among them cinema—whose utopian capacities remain unexplored, however, because those who stand to gain the most from such employment do not have access to them. Even worse, as most people are totally unaware of what is being denied them, they are blind to the need for any transformation. And yet, in a world marked by constant change, where modification is the rule not the exception, most people have been schooled in transformation on a quotidian basis. It would suffice, perhaps, to simply redirect the capacity for technological and other sorts of quotidian revolutions away from the commodity realm. Then, Debord states, "I am sure that those who produce [the world] day after day against their own interests could appropriate it for themselves."[110]

For Debord contestation of the totality—which is to say first and foremost of an entire mode of existence—is without doubt the only worthwhile adventure. However, such an undertaking must confront the fact that

> in the end, no adventure constitutes itself for us directly. As an adventure, it is linked to the whole range of legends transmitted by the cinema or by other means, which is to say the entire spectacular sham of history.[111]

The always already historically mediated status of all endeavors, no matter how critical their orientation—a crucial point—is simultaneously emphasized on the image track, where a photograph of two Situationists is intercut with a shot of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table taken from a Hollywood film (fig. 6.12) (a

6.12
"In a Hollywood photograph, a knight defies another knight," *Critique de la séparation* (OCC, p. 42)

6.13
"Eisenhower in the arms of Franco," *Critique de la séparation* (OCC, p. 45)

chivalric figure also employed elsewhere as emblematic for aspects of Situationist practice).[112] Work on the totality must thus always also be work on mediations and, in a world increasingly dominated by visual spectacle, this in turn means work on the spectacle.

A critique of the spectacle is all the more imperative since, as Debord reminds the viewer in a variation of Benjamin's oft-cited formulation, the spectacle is always the spectacle of the victor. Accompanying images of the UN Security Council, Krushchev, and de Gaulle, as well as Eisenhower receiving de Gaulle, talking with the Pope, and embracing Franco (fig. 6.13), the sound track provides the following commentary:

> The image that society projects for itself of its own history is limited to the superficial and static history of its rulers, that is, those that incarnate the external fatality of what takes place. The domain of the rulers is the very domain of the spectacle. The cinema suits them well. Moreover, the cinema is constantly presenting exemplary actions and constructing heros based on the same old model as these rulers along with everything that this implies.[113]

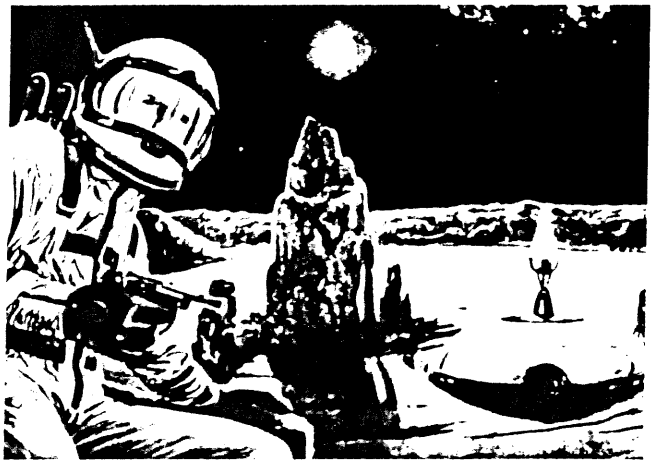
This has numerous ramifications: on the one hand, it is important to gain access to the means of spectacle production in order to begin producing "other" types of images that explore the heretofore largely unexamined utopian capacities of this technology; on the other hand, a media literacy must be developed that will expose the politics of hegemonic spectacle and thereby also simultaneously prepare a sensibility for an alternative employment of the medium in the future. In almost didactic fashion Debord's voice explains on the sound track:

> The cinematic spectacle has its rules, which enable one to produce satisfactory products. But dissatisfaction is the reality that must be taken as a point of departure. The function of the cinema is to present a false, isolated coherence, either dramatic or documentary, as a substitute for an absent communication and activity. To demystify documentary cinema it is necessary to dissolve what is called its subject matter.[114]

One of the best vehicles for just such a dismantling of the spectacular structure of documentary cinema, it turns out, is the cinema itself.

Having set itself the task of a polemical interrogation of the politics of cinematic representation, Debord's "anti-film" deploys a full arsenal of *détournement* in its frontal attack on the conflation of the iconico-indexical signifiers of the cinema with reality. Through a relentless superimposition of detourned images (fig. 6.14) (comic strips [fig. 6.15], press photos, documentary footage, scenes from other films [fig. 6.16]), language (both on the sound track, in text frames, and in subtitles) and music (pieces by François Couperin and Bodin de Boismortier), Debord constructs a work that continuously violates the semiotic redundancy of sound and image characteristic of commercial cinema. Instead of being governed by such reassuring "overcoding," Debord's third film is structured in a radically heterogeneous, contrapuntal manner: written texts interrupt or are superimposed on images, subtitles are often accompanied by other texts read on the voice-over, and so on.[115] According to Debord: "The relation between the images, the commentary and the subtitles is neither complementary nor indifferent. It itself aims to be critical."[116]

The sound-image relations in *Critique de la séparation*, its paratactic formal structure, and its refusal of the economy of "suture" (the catalogue of techniques employed to efface the marks of its own operation and to provide a coherent spectatorial position for the viewer to occupy) are justified first of all by the argument for the mimesis of incoherence already manifest in Debord's previous film. Debord's cinema is not a broken mirror fragmenting a homogeneous reality but an unbroken mirror reflecting a fragmented "reality" (only an unsatisfactory film can correspond to an unsatisfactory reality). At one point in the film just before the screen goes black and the sound track becomes silent, we are reminded that it is also "a documentation of the conditions of noncommunication."[117] The formal specificity of *Critique de la séparation* is also justified, however, in terms of the rhetoric of its address. A construction—or rather de-struction—that makes no claim to totalization thereby denies the viewer the quietistic, substitute satisfaction offered by the pseudo-intelligibility of most forms of cinema. Be-



6.14
"Image from the cover of a book of science fiction," *Critique de la séparation* (OCC, p. 41/ *Contre*, p. 85)

6.15
"Comic-strip image of a blonde with an exhausted expression on her face. The caption reads: 'But she failed. The jeep had sunk too deeply into the mud of the swamp,'" *Critique de la séparation* (OCC, p. 39)

6.16
"Photograph taken from a film; a radio-operator from the US navy; standing behind him, an officer and the heroine," *Critique de la séparation* (OCC, p. 40/*Contre*, p. 40)

cause Debord links the very form of narrative and (usually narratively constructed) documentary films with a specific mode of alienated spectatorship, these reigning strategies of cinematic intelligibility must be rejected. Formal coherence, in its own self-sufficiency, maintains the spectator in the comfortable position of consumer: "All coherent artistic expression already expresses the coherence of the past, already expresses passivity."[118] Incoherence, in turn, expresses if not active engagement, then at least a resistance to this passivity.

Critique de la séparation is thus, as its title indicates, a critique of one historically specific relation between viewer and viewed. As is explained in the voice-over accompanying an image of a riot by "natives" in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire), it does not suffice for a film to present an image of some unknown men trying to live differently (politics of the signified). Although such a depiction does have something of a radical, consciousness-raising effect, this is muted and ultimately compromised by its status *as a spectacle*, which is to say, by our nonintervention as spectators (politics of the signifier). As Debord notes in an important essay written at the time this film was being made:

> A revolutionary alteration of the present forms of culture can be nothing other than the supersession of all aspects of the aesthetic and technological apparatus, an apparatus that constitutes an aggregation of spectacles separated from life. It is not in its surface meanings that we should look for a spectacle's relation to the problems of the society, but at the deepest level, at the level of *its function as spectacle.*[119]

Debord's recognition that the question of politics in the cinema cannot be limited to a question of "content" but is always already also located in the very structure and operation of the representation leads him to link—in a manner reminiscent of the contemporaneous theoretical work of the *Tel Quel* group—ideological critique with modernist formal radicality.

Not unlike Barthes's distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" texts, Debord distinguishes between a form that fosters facile consumption and one that enlists, provokes, and engages the spectator in an active response. Consider the following remarks that constitute the final sequence of the film's sound track:

> This is a film that interrupts itself and does not come to an end. All conclusions remain to be drawn, everything has to be recalculated. The problem continues to be posed, its expression is becoming more complicated. We have to resort to other measures. Just as there was no profound reason to begin this abstract message, so there is none for concluding it. I have scarcely begun to make you understand that I don't intend to play the game.[120]

The emphasis on the disjunctive, incomplete form that calls upon the reader/spectator to articulate conclusions, the acknowledgment of the need for new means of expression, and the explicit refusal to privilege beginning and end (the distinguishing feature of a paratactic construction) is central to Debord's film practice. However, Debord does not depend upon a political formalism that mistakenly presupposes a necessary relationship between a radical aesthetic form and a nonalienated, nonseparated mode of spectatorship. The film makes no positive claims for any sort of nonspectacular, alternative mode as such. Instead, as summarized by the film's concluding self-description as a refusal to "play the game," Debord's position, while didactic, is rigorously negative.

In its denunciation of the operations of the reigning economy of spectacle, *Critique de la séparation* sketches the contours of an alternative only negatively, by means of its relentless violation, refusal, and critique of the contemporary politics of representation. Indeed, as Debord explains in a rather Brechtian formulation from a very early programmatic essay, such negativity is the condition of possibility of the construction of situations:

> The construction of situations begins on the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see to what extent the very principle of spectacle—nonintervention—is linked to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero so as to draw him into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life. The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The

> role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing "public" must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors but rather, in a new sense of the term, "livers," must steadily increase.[121]

It is a strategy captured visually in an image of another "game" that occurs on a number of occasions in the film: a sequence, filmed from above, of a pinball session. What is crucial in this representation of a mass cultural practice that in many ways could be read as a figure for late capitalism— for example, the reward of success in both cases is that one is allowed to continue to play—is that the sequence always ends with a "tilt," that is, the moment when the limit of legal "participation" is transgressed and the mechanism punishes the violation by ceasing to function. As a result of this infraction, however, certain aspects of the game—its limits, its principles of operation, the character of tolerated pseudo-engagement, and so forth—are revealed. Thus one can see how the tilt—together with its semantic associations of medieval contestations—captures a number of the essential features of what one might call Debord's aesthetic of counter-cinema. In *Critique de la séparation* and increasingly in the subsequent films, Debord "tilts" the spectacle and thereby violently brings to a halt a game marked by nonintervention or separation.

In the concluding sequence of *Critique de la séparation*, the new direction charted by the didactic documentation and critique of the spectacle—the itinerary of the tilt—is effectively announced as the program for future cinematographic work. Superimposed onto alternating images of Debord and Asger Jorn one reads the following exchange in the subtitles:

> [Jorn:] One could make a number of documentaries like this, lasting three hours. A sort of "serial."
> [Debord:] The 'Mysteries of New York' of alienation.
> [Jorn:] Yes, that would be better; it would be more boring, more meaningful.
> [Debord (as the camera pulls away from him):] More convincing.[122]

However, the next installation of the "Mysteries of Alienation"—which, as the closing subtitle announced, was "to be continued"—did not appear until six years later and then not in the shape of a film. Following an extended period during which, perhaps also as a result of insights developed through his earlier cinematic practice, the question of the spectacle remained one of his primary concerns, Debord presented the continuation of his analysis of the spectacle in the not entirely uncinematic form of a paratactic series of numbered aphorisms published in 1967 under the title *La société du spectacle*.

IV

The point is not to undertake a critique of revolutionary art, but rather to undertake a revolutionary critique of all art.[123]

Shortly after the publication of Debord's theoretical tour de force, the following announcement appeared in the pages of the October 1967 issue of *IS* as the concluding paragraph of an unsigned article lambasting Godard:

> It is known that Eisenstein wanted to make a film of *Capital*. In light of his formal conceptions and political submissiveness, one might wonder if his film would have been faithful to Marx's text. But for our part, we are sure we can do better. For example, as soon as it becomes possible, Guy Debord will himself make a cinematic adaptation of *La société du spectacle* that will certainly not fall short of his book.[124]

The opportunity to realize this project did not present itself, however, for quite a number of years. In fact it was not until after May '68 and the final dissolution of the SI in 1972 that Debord could make what would be his first feature-length film, the long announced cinematic treatment of *La société du spectacle* (1973).[125]

Whatever the multiple motivations behind Debord's interruption in 1973 of what was effectively a twelve year hiatus from filmmaking, the cinematic translation of *La société du spectacle* underscores the fact that the dissolution of the SI as an organization was not necessarily synonymous with the abandonment of a (post-Situationist) revolutionary agenda. Indeed, in the 1972 volume that constitutes the last public expression of the SI, *La véritable scission dans l'Internationale*, Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti characterize the post-'68 period in the following, markedly optimistic manner:

6.17–6.23
Publicity brochure for Debord's film *La société du spectacle*

> The new epoch is profoundly revolutionary and *it knows that it is*. At every level of the global society *one no longer can, and one no longer wants to* continue to do things as they were done before.[126]

Similar considerations were behind the production of Debord's first post-SI film, as evidenced by the pages of a handsome jet-black glossy brochure that was distributed to the press in 1973 (fig. 6.17–6.23). "Coming soon to a cinema near you," the cover reads in large white letters that continue on the following pages, "*La société du spectacle*," (next page) "and soon thereafter, everywhere else," (next page) "its destruction."[127] Preceding the pages that announce the full credits of the new cinematic work—presented by Simar Films and "written and directed by Guy Debord based on his book published by Editions Champ Libre"—one encounters the following statement:

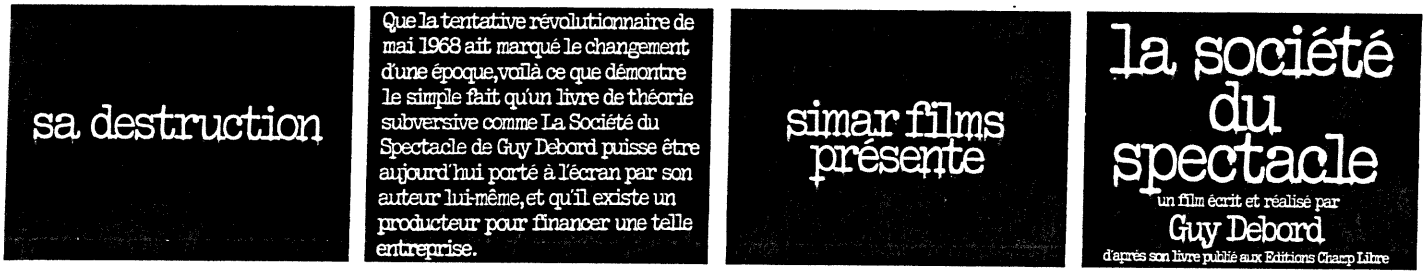
> The extent to which the revolutionary attempt of May 1968 marked the transformation of an epoch is demonstrated precisely by the simple fact that a book of subversive theory like *La Société du Spectacle* by Guy Debord could be brought to the screen by the author himself, and that there is a producer willing to finance such an undertaking.[128]

The producer in question, the man behind Simar Films, the production company that also went on to produce two more films by Debord, was Gérard Lebovici. Indeed, as Debord explicitly points out in the same brochure, his complete liberty in the working relation with Lebovici/Simar was a very unusual but absolutely essential precondition for his renewed engagement with the cinematic medium.[129]

La société du spectacle is not, however, as it is often described, simply the film version of the book (whatever that might mean, given the work in question). First of all, of the 221 theses in the printed version less than half—Debord insists the best ones[130]—are incorporated into the sound track; second, the order in which they are presented is not identical to the original sequence; and third, various additional texts not contained in the book have been introduced in text frames and subtitles. In short, the film offers, among other things, a re-reading (one is tempted to say re-editing) by Debord of his own work. This is especially true with regard to the inserted texts by Clausewitz, Emile Pouget, Machiavelli, Marx, Soloviev, Debord, and the Comité d'Occupation de la Sorbonne. These citations—differentiated by their visual presentation in text frames—serve not only as punctuation, marking the points where the original sequence of the theses has been interrupted, but also as elaborations, comments, and critique. One passage in particular, a quotation of August von Cieszkowski, can be read as an elucidation of the impetus behind Debord's cinematic rearticulation of his theoretical study:

> Thus, after the immediate production of art had ceased to be the most eminent activity and the predicate of eminence had shifted to theory as such, at present it has detached itself from the latter to the extent that there has developed a post-theoretical, synthetic practice whose primary purpose is to be the foundation and truth of both art and philosophy.[131]

According to the Hegelian logic of this assertion, it is the *theoretical art work*—which features both the particularity of the object and the generality of the philosophical—that is uniquely capable of fulfilling goals previ-



ously assigned to art and/or philosophy. *La société du spectacle* thus represents Debord's attempt to produce just such a "post-theoretical, synthetic" work. As such it could be read as the culmination of the avant-garde artistic project begun in the early 1950s, temporarily suspended in favor of theoretical inquiry and political engagement in the years preceding May 1968, and now reactivated *as* theory. In this light, it is precisely the interrelation of the visual/artistic and the theoretical—an object lesson in spectacle analysis —that is of great significance.

As the theses from Debord's book are impassively read on the sound track, the image track presents an unending stream of detourned visual material. In fact, unlike the previous films that included some original film material shot by Debord, *La société du spectacle* employs *exclusively* found materials (figs. 6.24–6.36). These include—to cite only a selection from the first section of the film—street scenes, publicity stills (the majority focusing on the objectification of women), scenes from American Westerns and from Soviet and Polish films, fashion commercials, news footage of Nixon meeting Mao, the Sorbonne General Assembly in May '68, the earth filmed from space, astronauts, a police panoptical headquarters with TV monitors showing Metro stations and streets, the footage of the "live" murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, speeches by Giscard d'Estaing, Servan-Schreiber, Séguy, and Castro, bombing runs in Vietnam, and a depiction of a couple watching television. One also encounters sequences appropriated from numerous classics of film history, including *Battleship Potemkin, October, New Babylon, Shanghai Gesture, For Whom the Bell Tolls, Rio Grande, The Charge of the Light Brigade, Johnny Guitar,* and *Confidential Report.* As the intricate and multifarious imbrications of the theoretical and the visual cannot be examined in detail here, I will limit myself to a few general observations on Debord's cinematic translation of critical theory, a language of contradiction—dialectical both in content and form—that "is not the negation of style but rather the style of negation."[132]

Like the book *La société du spectacle*, Debord remarks that "its current cinematographic adaptation also does not offer a few partial political critiques but proposes instead a holistic critique of the extant world, which is to say, of all aspects of modern capitalism and its general system of illusions."[133] As the cinema is one of the tools of this "system of illusions," its language must be revolutionized for it to serve other ends. The coherence of the text-image relations is thus neither one of illustration nor of demonstration but rather of *détournement*—"the fluid language of anti-ideology"[134]—here defined as a mode of communication that contains its own critique. Employing a strategy reminiscent of Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* (Arcades Project) in its practice of citation without quotation marks, Debord insolently throws back at spectacular society the images with which it depicts itself.[135] Indeed, one could say that Debord's critique consists in an *incriminating, analytical quotation of the spectacle.* This marks a turning point in the history of cinema that, according to Debord's Hegelian logic, is nothing less than the *Aufhebung* (sublation) of the medium: "In a way, in this film, the cinema, at the end of its pseudo-autonomous history, gathers up its memories."[136] Debord's film is simultaneously a historical film, a Western, a love story, a war film—and none of the above; it is a "critique without concessions," a spectacle

6.24
"A long striptease," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 61)

6.25
"A couple, stretched out on a sofa, watches television," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 68)

6.26
Sterling Hayden and Joan Crawford in Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 74–75)

of spectacle that as such, like the double negative, reverses the (hegemonic) ideological marking of the medium.

As one might expect, *La société du spectacle* was hardly a box-office success. But then, the telos of this cinematic production had never been financial gain: even prior to its release the hostility towards its violation of the syntax and economy of pleasure characteristic of spectacle was anticipated in the official "preview" for the film at the Studio Git-le-Coeur. This announcement of what one can only call a "coming un-attraction" consisted of the following message—a *détournement* of an infamous reaction to Schiller's *Die Räuber*—slowly spelled out on a black screen:

> When the idea occurred to me to create the world, I foresaw that there, one day, someone would make a film as revolting as *La Société du Spectacle*. Therefore, I thought it better not to create the world. (signed): God.[137]

Many of the industry critics that reviewed the film seemed to have been of similar opinion: Alain Remond of *Télérama*, for whom the theoretical voice-over was incompatible with the images, concluded that "Debord has almost completely failed"; for S. L. P. of *Téléciné* "the result was far from convincing," and Bernard Pauly of *Cinéma 74* wrote that the film, despite some interesting aspects, was "disappointing and annoying . . . a total failure." Curiously, enthusiastic responses to the film came not only from an informed Leftist cinephile camp—*Zoom* critic J. F., for example, places *La société du spectacle* in the avant-garde pantheon of *Un chien andalou* and *Entr'acte*—but also in intelligent reviews in more establishment (conservative) papers. In an extensive article in *Le Monde* entitled "The 'Theoretical' Western by Guy Debord," François Bott describes in careful detail how "the collision of the images against each other and against the text gives rise to the truth of the spectacle," and in *Le Nouvel observateur*, Claude Roy not only praises Debord as a remarkable writer but raves about a film that is described as "powerfully thought-out . . . a masterpiece of joyous irony and critical humor."[138]

The critical response to *La société du spectacle* is important not only because it was far more extensive than that accorded any of Debord's previous films, but also because of the hostility that Debord insists was much greater and much more univocal in the reaction to his films than it had ever been in response to his writings.[139] Given the radical thrust of *La société du spectacle*, the contempt for the book on the part of the society it criticized at its roots was inevitable and even welcome. Indeed, to a certain extent the resistance confirmed aspects of the book's diagnosis, as was pointed out in an often hilarious survey of misreadings of SI works entitled "How Situationist Books Are Not Understood," published in the last issue of *Internationale situationniste*.[140] Continuing the longstanding SI tradition of targeting and analyzing criticism, Debord also plundered the commentaries on *La société du spectacle* for symptomatic material. This was then presented in a montage sampling across the full ideological spectrum under the title "Some Judgments on the Book" on the last four pages of the publicity brochure for the film.[141]

6.27
"The Stalinist [Georges] Marché speaks . . .," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 76)

6.28
"The camera pulls back from a photograph of a nude girl, then pans across another," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 76)

6.29
"Mao with his closest lieutenant Lin Piao," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 93)

It is not surprising then, that the responses to the film *La société du spectacle* were also, in turn, subjected to a similar ideological dissection. What is remarkable, however, is that this treatment itself *took the form of a film.* Less than two years after the release of *La société du spectacle*, Debord completed his fifth cinematic work, a short film adorned with the impudent, polemical title *Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu'hostiles, qui ont été jusqu'ici portés sur le film "La Société du Spectacle"* (Refutation of all the judgments, both complimentary and hostile, which have been brought to bear up until now concerning the film "The Society of the Spectacle"; 1975) (fig. 6.37–6.39).[142] A landmark in the history of cinema, this film is (to my knowledge) the first to take as its explicit and exclusive focus the analysis of the *reception* of a prior film. In its elaboration of an aspect of the *institutional* critique of spectacle nowhere to be found in the various traditions of avant-garde film—onto-materialist, subjectivist, and so on—*Réfutation* performs a sociological analysis reminiscent in many ways of Brecht's symptomatic investigation of the juridical wrangling in conjunction with his project to film *The Threepenny Opera.*[143]

Through an examination of the few real arguments to be found in eight representative reviews of his most recent film, Debord is able to establish a catalogue of the blind spots in their rhetorical strategies and to demonstrate their integral function in the economy of spectacle. If the focus here seems to have shifted from the analysis of spectacle proper to an investigation of the economy of its reception—that is, film criticism or, more generally, art criticism—this is only because the two are, as Debord demonstrates, effectively synonymous. As Debord had already noted over ten years earlier in the context of a discussion of the limits and significance of film criticism within a revolutionary project:

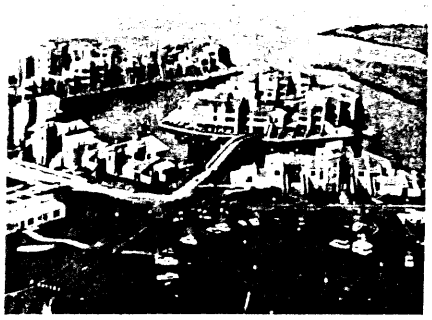
> Art criticism is second-degree spectacle. The critic is someone who makes a spectacle out of his very condition as spectator—a specialized and therefore ideal spectator, expressing his ideas and feelings *about* a work in which he does not really participate. He re-presents, restages, his own nonintervention in the spectacle. The weakness of random and largely arbitrary fragmentary judgments concerning spectacles that do not really concern us is imposed upon all of us in many banal discussions in private life. But the art critic makes a show of this kind of weakness, presenting it as *exemplary.*[144]

According to this logic one can read *Réfutation* as a rearticulation at the institutional level of the earlier "critique of separation."

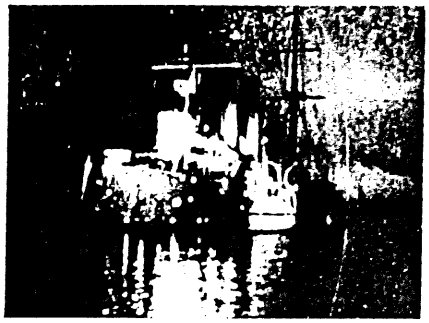
While the polemical thrust of *Réfutation* is directed at the practice of the "exemplary" spectators, they are not the film's intended audience. Those who will be capable of understanding the film, the voice-over explains, are those who understand

> . . . that when, according to a very old power strategy, the French people were given a new minister called "The Minister of the Quality of Life" it was quite simply, as Machiavelli put it, "in order to retain at least in name that which they had lost."[145]

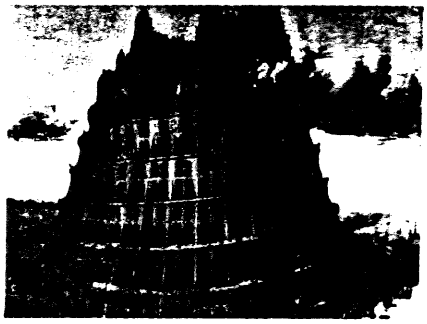
6.30
"A few models and a few realizations of recent architecture for vacation spots, so-called 'marinas' at the seashore that can also be found, however, in the mountains," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 99)



6.31
"The cruiser 'Aurora' sails up the Neva at the end of the night," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 9)



6.32
"The tower of Babel," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 101)



The lambasting of the critics, on the other hand, is sustained throughout the film, as indicated by the opening quotation of Chateaubriand: "There are times when one must be economical in one's expenditure of contempt, because of the large number of those in need of it."[146] Despite the variety of critical responses—analogous to the seeming variety of commodities in late capitalism—they all stem from the same culture industry. *Both* of the two general types of critical responses—naive falsification and incompetent approbation—are equally marked, Debord points out, by the position from which they speak. Whatever their position on the film, the critics remain "writing employees of the system of spectacular lying."[147]

The bulk of the comments dissected in *Réfutation* are ones that deal specifically with the cinematic spectacularization of *La société du spectacle*. The most popular objection, for example, is that the film is too difficult: according to one critic the theory on the sound track is too dense to follow, and according to another the images distract one from concentrating on the words. Such arguments not only imply that the critic was able to understand the text in book form (which Debord doubts), they also disguise as aesthetic objections to a certain conception of cinema what are at root political objections to a certain critique of society. To this Debord responds with a series of variations on the mimesis of incoherence argument discussed earlier: "The stupidity of their reactions goes hand in hand with the decadence of their world"; "The difficulty does not reside in my film, it is in their supine heads"; and "No film is more difficult than its epoch."[148] Dismissing the charge that his work marginalizes itself and thereby becomes a "ghetto cinema," Debord insists that he prefers "to remain in obscurity together with these masses rather than consenting to harangue them in the artificial illumination manipulated by those who hypnotize them."[149] As a final example, one must cite the almost clichéd move that points out the contradiction involved in a public denunciation and examination of the spectacle by means of the spectacle. Such a logically unimpeachable, ultra-purist stance—Debord calls it "Jesuitical"—is of course strategically naive in its insistence that nobody appear within the spectacle as its enemy. It fails to recognize, above all, that the spectacle can be made to serve various ends, including those of a critical theory that "understands, describes and works to overthrow a movement that is effectively taking place under our eyes."[150] Taken together, the films *La société du spectacle* and *Réfutation* are perhaps the most powerful realizations of a critical anti-cinematic film aesthetic already articulated over a decade before either of them were made. As formulated in the concluding lines of an important and largely ignored essay on the politics of communication, for the Situationists,

> any use of the legitimate modes of communication must thus both be and not be the refusal of this communication: a communication containing its own refusal; a refusal containing communication, which is to say the transformation of this refusal into a positive project. All this must lead somewhere. Communication will now contain *its own critique*.[151]

6.33
"The forces that maintain order in action . . . in the streets of Nantes [May 1968]," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 138)

6.34
"Christian Sebastiani," *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 135)

6.35
"Guy Debord," *La société du spectacle* (OCC p. 135)

V

Revolution is not "showing" life to people, rather it is making them live.[152]

In 1978—a decade after May '68—Editions Champ Libre published the collection of Debord's complete cinematographic works, *Oeuvres cinématographiques complètes*. It contained the film scripts, shot descriptions, and illustrations as well as indications regarding text frames and sound material for all five of the films discussed above, as well as for a new, as yet unknown cinematic work by Debord: *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* (We go around in circles in the night and are consumed by fire).[153] Produced the same year that the book was brought out, *In Girum*, Debord's second feature-length film, was not actually screened until three years later because no cinema was willing to take it. This created a predicament curiously similar to the current situation: from the outset *In Girum* was a film that existed first and, for a number of years, *exclusively* as a text. Furthermore, it was a film that only premiered years after Debord's relation to the cinema was—as indicated by the adjective *complete* in the title of the volume of his cinematographic works—already over. Thus *In Girum* was not only Debord's sixth film, it was also his last—a finality that is perceptible in the retrospective, historical, and subjective quality of the film. A coda not only to Debord's relation to the cinematic medium (and, one might argue, to artistic practice as such), *In Girum* is, more than any other work since *Mémoires* (with which it shares both structural and thematic features), Debord's commemorative review and homage to the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals.

From the outset, *In Girum* raises the question of spectatorship that dominated the previous films. As the voice-over announces that this movie will make no concessions to the viewers, the opening image depicts, in Debord's words, "a contemporary audience in a movie theater, staring straight ahead and looking right at the spectators—in a perfect reverse shot—who thus see nothing but themselves on this screen"[154] (fig. 6.40). In the subsequent remarks on the current state of "separation," the "pseudo-experience" of the film audience is taken to be paradigmatic for the "pseudo-life" of quotidian alienation. Parallel with images of daily life in suburban "neo-houses," of spectators waiting in line to go to the cinema, of people playing Monopoly as they eat dinner, and so on, the voice-over argues that in fact the situation of employer and employee are quite similar, not least in their shared delusion—described as that of the "unhappy spectator"—that they are truly participating (in government, in success, in happiness, and so on) despite all evidence to the contrary. According to Debord, the mimetic appeal of a cinema based on the principle "when one loves life one goes to the movies" stems not from the supposed "realism" of the depiction but rather from the fact that, since this cinema is *just as impoverished as the real world*, both film and world are similar in that they are contemplated with the same indifference.

6.36
"Arkadin ends another story: 'Logical?' cries the frog as it drowns with the scorpion, 'Where is the logic in this?' 'I can't help it,' says the scorpion, 'it's my character . . . Let's drink to character!'" Shot of Orson Welles as Arkadin in *La société du spectacle* (OCC, p. 143)

Rejecting what he sees as the dominant cinematic practice of simply portraying meaningless events—a cinema "able to deceive boredom for the space of an hour by means of the reflection of that very same boredom"[155]—Debord characterizes his film as part of a project to destabilize the forms of "false consciousness" that have flourished under the current relations of production.[156] Having alerted the viewers that this film will not presuppose the "innocence" of its audience in order to lull them with scenes to be viewed through the "keyhole of a vulgar familiarity," Debord states:

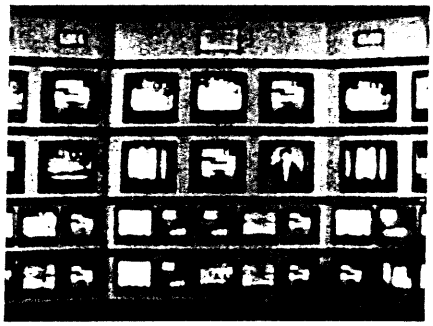
> Since the cinema audience above all must be brought to think about a number of harsh truths that are of direct concern to it, but most of the time kept hidden, one cannot deny that a film which for once renders the difficult service of revealing to that audience that its own affliction is not as mysterious as it thinks, and may even not be incurable if only we could one day go so far as to abolish classes and the State; one cannot deny, I say, that such a film has, at least in this regard, some merit. It will have no others.[157]

This program, which determines the overall structure of *In Girum*, has ramifications for both the sound track (which carries the burden of responsibility) and the image track as well.

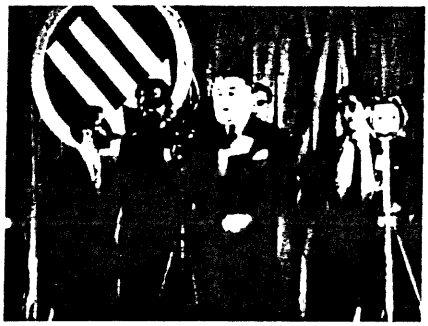
Responding to the criticism that because he does not "prove" his claims with images, his films are simply dogmatic, Debord lambasts the dominant fetishism of the image. In a move reminiscent of the Lettrist disdain for the photographic component of the cinema, Debord contends that, in fact, images as such can prove nothing, save perhaps the reigning deception. By *mis*using images however, by subjecting the cornerstones of the cinematic edifice to *détournement*, something may perhaps be revealed about the medium itself, Debord suggests, even if only negatively. The visual citations in *In Girum*—including sequences from *Les visiteurs du soir* (Marcel Carné, 1942), *Les enfants du paradis* (Marcel Carné, 1943–1945), *Orphée* (Jean Cocteau, 1950), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Michael Curtiz, 1936), *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1939), *They Died with Their Boots On* (Raoul Walsh, 1941), and many others—are thus either inserted into new contexts or provided with new voice-over texts taken, to cite just a few examples, from works by Bossuet, Shakespeare, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Pascal, Omar Khàyyàm, Gracian, Sun Tze, and Homer. Debord's position on the status of the image is actually articulated explicitly at an early point in the film. As we watch a scene in which the masked Zorro, leg trapped in the train tracks, frees himself in the last moment before the train passes by, the voice-over states:

> This is a film, for example, in which I only state truths about images that are all either insignificant or false; this is a film that has contempt for the visual dust of which it is composed. I want to conserve nothing of the language of this outdated art, except perhaps the reverse shot of the only world that it has observed and a *tracking shot* along the fleeting ideas of an epoch.[158]

6.37
"Pan across a large group of television screens which are broadcasting simultaneously all the sports events that are taking place at any moment at the 'Olympic Games' in Munich," *Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu'hostiles, qui ont été jusqu'ici portés sur le film "La société du spectacle"* (OCC, p. 163)



6.38
"In a newsreel film from 12 July 1936, [Robert] Salengro speaks on stage at a socialist meeting. A ridiculous and odious little man doing everything he can to give his appearance a Mussolini quality," *Réfutation de tous les jugements . . .* (OCC, p. 172)



6.39
"A publicity film pushing a brand of pants: on a music-hall stage, some men get dressed to the sound of music applauded by a female audience," *Réfutation de tous les jugements . . .* (OCC, p. 178)

Such disrespect is imperative, we learn, in order to counteract the impression (conveyed by hegemonic cinematic production in order to justify itself) that virtually nothing other than commercial spectacle has ever existed or *was even possible.* On the contrary, Debord asserts

> it is society and not technology that has made cinema what it is. The cinema could have been historical examination, theory, essay, memories. It could have been the film which I am making at this moment.[159]

The resistance manifested in the refusal on the part of the culture industry to allow *In Girum* to be screened is perhaps the best indication of the extent to which such "otherness" (and the unexplored possibilities it reveals) poses a very real threat.

Even more than the previous films, much of *In Girum* is about "an important subject": Guy Debord himself. Far from facile autobiography or narcissistic indulgence, however, this focus encompasses—as Debord puts it citing a line borrowed from *Orlando furioso*—"'the ladies (fig. 6.41), the knights, the weapons, the loves, the conversations and the audacious undertakings' of a unique era."[160] Indeed, the tenor of historical retrospection in *In Girum* is best conveyed by the title Debord had initially proposed in 1964 when planning a film on the exploits of the previous years: ***Eloge de ce que nous avons aimé*** (Homage to the things we loved). Foremost among these cherished memories are Debord's world (Paris, the "short-lived capital of perturbation"), his haunts (Saint-Germain-des-Prés), his heroes, his friends, and also his work. Images of a nineteen-year-old Debord, a nineteenth-century Parisian map, and aerial views of Paris (fig. 6.42) are coupled with citations from Dante, Li Po, and Machiavelli to evoke the quality of a bygone urban landscape—at this point there appears a scene from *Les enfants du paradis*—a magical Paris that no longer exists and on whose Left Bank there was "a neighborhood where the negative held court."[161] It was here, Debord notes, among a group of people whose only guiding principle was "Nothing is true, everything is permitted,"[162] that an extremism burst forth independent of any particular cause. At this point, the screen suddenly becomes entirely white as the sound track broadcasts a series of citations of phrases from *Hurlements* (themselves in turn already citations) until an image of an indignant audience at a theater appears, screaming from the balcony for the curtain to be drawn.[163]

What follows is in effect an extended tribute to the members of the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals, to that group of individuals whose

> intention was nothing other than to trace, through [their] practice, a line of division between those who want to maintain the existing world and those who want nothing of it.[164]

As we hear accounts of various adventures—the Notre-Dame event, the planned bombing of the Eiffel Tower, and so on—we see images of Gil J Wolman, Ghislain de Marbaix, Asger Jorn, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, Attila

6.40
"A contemporary audience in a movie theater, staring straight ahead and looking right at the spectators—in a perfect reverse shot—who thus see nothing but themselves on the screen," *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* (OCC, p. 189)

6.41
"She who was the most beautiful that year" [Photograph by Ed van der Elsken], *In Girum* (OCC, p. 237)

6.42
"The sixth arrondissement seen from above, with the Seine in the foreground," *In Girum* (OCC, p. 223)

Kotányi, and Donald Nicholson-Smith interspersed with depictions of favorite SI spots in Paris—Les Halles, cafés in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the Ile de la Cité (fig. 6.43)—as well as photographs of Debord. A short sequence about Ivan Chtcheglov, taken from an earlier unrealized film project entitled *Portrait d'Ivan Chtcheglov*, juxtaposes photographs of Chtcheglov with comic strip representations of Prince Valiant. Debord's voice-over commentary indicates that, despite the history of the SI's exclusions, scissions, and disputes, a profound allegiance toward these figures endured:

> When I speak about these people, I perhaps may seem to be grinning: but one should not take this seriously. I drank their wine. I remain faithful to them. And I do not believe that I have subsequently become, in any way, better than what they themselves were at that time.[165]

Scattered among the above photo portraits are sequences of Venice—the only new footage shot expressly for *In Girum*—that are suddenly given new significance by a subsequent shot that pans across the people involved in "mapping out the program best suited to throw the totality of social life into total suspicion"[166]—the participants at the eighth conference of the SI in Venice in 1969.

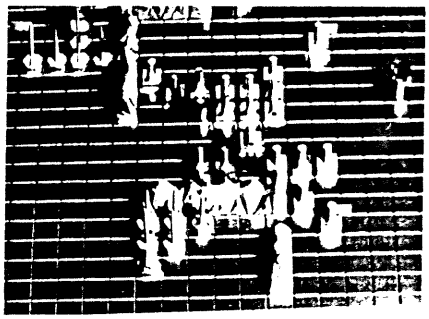
A tracking shot of the *Kriegspiel* [*sic*] (fig. 6.44), a board game based on Clausewitz's theory of war developed by Debord in the 1950s as an exercise in strategy and dialectic,[167] sets the tone for the next section of *In Girum*, one that is concerned with the problem of strategy. Following a pan across a map of the Old World from the Roman to the Chinese empires, there are shots of West Point cadets about to set out for battle in the US Civil War and then various detourned images of the Light Brigade (figs. 6.45–6.48) making its famous charge in the "Valley of Death" at Balaklava. These are accompanied by voice-over observations on the unavoidable compromises that arise in the course of the reality of actual struggle: politics, Debord reminds the "spectators of history," always takes place in the dirty, risky space of uncertainty. Theoretical work, Debord points out, also has a tactical dimension. It is just one of many weapons in a revolutionary arsenal and, like these, it too must be deployed at the strategic moment. Furthermore, he adds,

> just as theories must be replaced because they become worn out by their decisive victories and even more so by their partial defeats, so too no living epoch has ever arisen from a theory: rather, such an epoch is above all a game, a conflict, a voyage.[168]

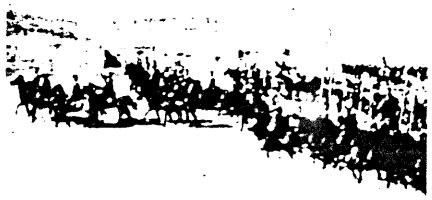
As an example of tactical practice, Debord unpacks the logic behind his self-imposed "strategy" of obscurity. His resolute refusal of the media stems from the commonplace insight "that this society signs a sort of peace treaty with its most outspoken enemies by giving them a spot in its spectacle."[169] It is precisely this recuperation that Debord prides himself in having resisted. And as if to underscore his tactic of obscurity, the next image is followed by a text frame that announces: "Here the spectators, having been deprived of everything, will even be deprived of images."[170] Then, in a move by now readable

6.43
"The Seine and western tip of the Ile de la Cité," *In Girum* (OCC, p. 239)

6.44
"Establishing shots and close-ups of a 'Kriegspiel' [board game], in which two armies are deployed," *In Girum* (OCC, p. 213)



6.45–6.46
The Light Brigade, in battle formation behind its flag-bearers, begins its famous charge through the 'Valley of Death' at Balaklava" [Both shots



as an auto-citation, the screen goes black and remains so for the entire duration of the subsequent monologue. This is finally punctuated by a series of shots of the *Kriegspiel* and the announcement of the "only good news of the current presentation": that the results of Debord's extensive research into strategy will *not* be presented in cinematic form.

What Debord *does* present in the final section of *In Girum* is an answer to the nagging question: "What now?" The effect of the SI, Debord had claimed on the sound track, was to destroy once and for all the air of innocence cultivated by the "dominant system of deception."[171] Yet, as he is careful to point out,

> Avant-gardes have only one sole moment; and the best thing that can happen to them is, in the fullest sense of the term, for them to have *made their moment*.[172]

Where does this leave Debord in 1978? In visual terms, the response takes the form of a juxtaposition of a topography of Debord's previous endeavors (as well as a selection of the comrades—intellectual, amorous, revolutionary, and otherwise—that accompanied him at various stages) with the more recent traces of the violence (in urban planning, commodity production, and elsewhere) of advanced capitalism. Images of Florence (where Debord lived during a period of exile), of various houses that Debord lived in at different times, of Alice Becker-Ho (fig. 6.49), Cardinal de Retz, Clausewitz, of the dadaists and various Situationists, as well as a series of photographs taken of Debord from age nineteen to age forty-five (fig. 6.50 and 6.51), are juxtaposed with shots of "neo-Paris" with its "neo-houses," of breweries of "neo-beer," of industrial waste sites and "other landscapes ravaged for sake of the surplus of merchandise." On the one hand, the situation is grim. Seen dialectically, however, the victories of the enemy are themselves a negative articulation of everything that still needs to be changed. Such optimism in the face of overwhelming setbacks was even expressed by Marx, as Debord points out in a citation that conveys the concluding tone of film:

> It was already the dawn of that tiresome day that we now see coming to an end when the young Marx wrote to Ruge: "You can hardly say that I value the present time too highly; and yet if I nevertheless do not despair, it is only because of the desperate situation of this time, which fills me with hope."[173]

The polyvalence of the present development is also captured by the palindromic structure of the Latin title (as emphasized by the opening credit sequence, it can be read in both directions). Within the film the title is read as a figure for the hopelessness of the current epoch:

> But nothing translated the dead-end and the restlessness of the present time better than the old phrase that circles back around itself completely, given its construction letter by letter as a labyrinth from which one cannot exit, and thereby conveying perfectly the form and the content of perdition.[174]

taken by Debord from *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, the 1936 film directed by Michael Curtiz], *In Girum* (OCC, p. 257)

6.47–6.48
"The Russian chief of staff is astonished at the strange recklessness of this frontal attack. Cannons open fire. The soldiers, advancing directly toward them, fall by the dozens. The Light Brigade begins to gallop and continues its charge in open ranks. It is almost entirely annihilated" [Shot taken from *The Charge of the Light Brigade*], *In Girum* (OCC, p. 258)

However, in the concluding text frame of the film, which reads "To be recommenced from the start," the palindromic structure reappears, now as the more positive appeal to re-read (the text of the film), to re-make, re-write, or re-think from the start (the history, the revolutionary ideals, the lives which *In Girum* describes).

When it was finally screened in 1981, *In Girum* provoked a great variety of critical responses, ranging from the by now standard anti-intellectual accusations of boring obscurantism (*Le Monde*) and intolerable pretentiousness (*Télérama*) to hymns of praise that placed the film in a pantheon alongside Mallarmé and Cocteau (*Les Nouvelles littéraires*), compared the film with the modernist subjectivity developed in Marguerite Duras's *Aurelia Steiner* and Straub/Huillet's *Fortini cani* (*Feuille foudre*), and included Debord in the "exclusive club of great filmmakers" (*Quinzaine littéraire*). The focus on the "second-degree spectacle" of the film's journalistic reception that was undertaken cinematographically for *La société du spectacle* then took on yet another form. One year after the screenings (and pirate broadcast)[175] of *In Girum* a modest volume appeared from Champ Libre entitled *Ordures et décombres déballés à la sortie du film "in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni"* (Refuse and rubble unpacked upon the release of "in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni"). This small book contains nothing but the reprints of fourteen reviews of *In Girum*, without a single word of commentary![176] Here, at its culmination, Debord's cinematic practice has functioned as a means of provoking a highly indicative reception that is then presented as material to be subjected, in turn, to a political symptomatology.

VI

In "Guy Debord et le problème du maudit" (Guy Debord and the problem of the accursed), the opening essay in the first collection of Debord's film scenarios *Contre le cinéma*, Asger Jorn warns against canonizing Debord as a filmmaker. To do so, he argues, would have the anesthetizing effect of inserting him within the very economy of stardom and cinephilic "achievement" that his work attempts to undermine. Furthermore it would fail to recognize that for Debord the cinema *as a medium* was incidental, just one of a number of vehicles—including journals, pamphlets, "metagraphical" collages, board games, translations, and radio programs[177]—employed at various points to explore different questions and make certain points. Despite its focus on Debord's six films, the present essay does not propose to enshrine Debord as an avant-garde cinematic "auteur." Rather, it hopes to direct attention to an important site of creative activity within the SI project whose significance both for the SI and for the history of experimental film and film theory has been heretofore ignored. For Debord's theoretical and artistic production, the films constitute an important and largely unexplored domain by means of which numerous problems can be cast in a new light. Read together with Debord's prolific output as a writer, the films function sometimes as an elaboration, sometimes as an experiment in practice, and sometimes as a translation into another language of central theoretical concerns such as the analysis of spectacle. This is true not only of films such as *La société du spectacle*, where the intimate connection with Debord's theoretical work is manifest.

6.49
"Alice [Becker-Ho] and Celeste," *In Girum* (OCC, p. 269)

6.50
"[Guy] Debord: age nineteen," *In Girum* (OCC, p. 273)

6.51
"[Guy Debord:] age forty-five," *In Girum* (OCC, p. 273)

but also of his other films as well. It is in these films—veritable laboratories of *détournement*—that one finds, for example, the most sustained examples of Debord's artistic practice and an important meditation and instantiation of the practice and politics of citation, as well as a critical review of the theory and practice of the SI itself.

The members of both the Lettrist and the Situationist Internationals were very aware of the importance of their films within the development of cinema. Although the Lettrist films from the early 1950s are described in an editorial note in a 1954 issue of *Potlatch* as being "of mere historical significance,"[178] it is acknowledged in a later issue of the same journal that the scarcity of these films also permits subsequent filmmakers to claim as theirs innovations introduced by the Lettrists many years earlier. Always alert to the plagiarism of their ideas (despite an often proclaimed nonproprietary relation to the products of intellectual labor), the editors regret the current unavailability of their films, thanks to which Norman McLaren's *Blinkity Blank* (1955)—a film that incorporates extended black sequences and various Lettrist practices of *cinéma ciselant*—was given honorable mention at the eighth Cannes Film Festival. It is not without some bitterness that McLaren is warmly congratulated for providing hard evidence that, as they put it, "despite various interdictions, the most scandalous innovations can make their way even into the heart of the official propaganda organizations of our enemies."[179] It is thus not entirely surprising that when the plans were drawn up a few years later for a Situationist library in Silkeborg (Denmark), the conception of the envisaged archive included a "cinema annex" to house copies of all SI films.[180]

Without any doubt, there is much in the Lettrist cinema and the later cinematic works by Debord that has subsequently been taken up and explored—whether consciously or not is unimportant here—in "pioneering" works of the postwar American and European avant-garde, "underground" cinema.[181] As space considerations preclude an exploration here of the full extent of the revisionist ramifications entailed by the rediscovery of the films of the LI and SI, I will limit myself to the following preliminary suggestions. In its radical reduction of expressive means and the slowness of its pace, for example, *Hurlements* antedates both Stan Brackage's *Reflections on Black* (1955) and Peter Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer* (1958–1960), as well as certain films made by Warhol or Michael Snow over a decade later. The aesthetic of cinematic *détournement* developed in Debord's subsequent films could be productively compared in turn with the more aestheticized work on found footage undertaken in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Bruce Connor. Debord's films also could be argued to be a crucial moment in the genealogy of the "theory film," a largely ignored genre that one could trace back to Eisenstein's project to film *Kapital* and which, by way of Godard, Marker, and Resnais, would also include works by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (*Penthesilea* [1974] and *Riddles of the Sphinx* [1977]), Yvonne Rainer (*The Man Who Envied Women* [1985]), and Manuel de Landa (*Raw Nerves: A Lacanian Thriller* [1979]).[182]

6.52
"Image of the cover of a detective novel entitled *Imposture*. A woman in profile; a bit further stands a man with a glass in his hand," *Critique de la séparation* (OCC, pp. 51–52/*Contre*, p. 87)

Godard's indebtedness to Debord, from whom he learned a great deal, itself merits a particularly detailed examination. In what appears to be a rather marked instance of unacknowledged appropriation, an inordinate amount of Debord's concerns reappear in later works by Godard, both in terms of iconographic or thematic concerns and on a formal level as well (fig. 6.52). As regards the former, one encounters in Godard's films the sociological interest in Paris (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*), the *détournement* of advertisements, legal documents, and citations (in *Weekend* there are quotations from Emily Brontë, Balsamo, and Saint-Just!), and of sequences from other films (*Le petit soldat* employs the "Tell me lies" sequence from *Johnny Guitar*). One even encounters the same "stars": years before she became the leading actress in numerous films by Godard as well as his wife, Anna Karina appeared as the actress in the Monsavon commercial detourned by Debord in *Sur le passage* (see fig. 6.6). In formal terms, Godard takes up the philosophical voice-over, the use of black sequences (in *Le gai savoir* and *Vladimir and Rosa*), paratactic, non-narrative constructions, refusal of sound-image synchrony, extended use of text frames, the exposure of the "means of production," intensive intertextuality, and so on. Indeed, well over a decade before Godard's *Vent d'est*, Debord was producing a revolutionary, materialist "counter-cinema" that met all criteria established in Peter Wollen's discussion of this alternative cinematographic practice: narrative intransitivity, estrangement, foregrounding, multiple diegesis, aperture, unpleasure, reality.[183]

The comparison with Godard is motivated not only by the fact that for many years Godard was the "good object" of an historically, semiologically, and politically informed film theory. Nor is this simply a question of locating "originality" or of establishing vectors of influence. What is at stake here is the claim that, well before Godard, Debord's "epistemological" cinema had already resolved the dichotomy of the "two avant-gardes," representing a "third avant-garde" that synthesizes a formal modernism (a politics of the signifier) and a semiotic and ideological reflexivity (politics of the signified). Moreover, what one might call the "political modernism" of Debord's cinema avoids, I would argue, the various pitfalls—formalist essentialism, aestheticist myopia, politically naive fetishism of reflexivity, and so on—typical of certain avant-garde cultural practices linked to radical political agendas.[184] Specifically, Debord's films do not manifest the problematic characteristics of the "epistemological modernism" identified by Sylvia Harvey in her study *May '68 and Film Culture:* they do *not* "replace an interest in the *relationship* between specific means of aesthetic representation and a social reality conceived of as distinct from those means, with an exclusive concern with the means of representation . . ."; they do *not* make any essentialist claims regarding the inherent politics of any specific cinematic form; they do *not* articulate the problem of formal innovation solely in terms of the internal architectonic of the "filmic text" but rather insist on "the insertion of that text within a particular apparatus, within a distribution or exchange specific to a particular society and a particular historical

moment"; and finally, in their repeated emphasis on spectatorship and the structure of separation, they do *not* disparage pleasure and "offer a puritanical defense of the 'work' (of reading, of meaning production) that the modernist text invites the reader to perform."[185] Rather, in the socio-historical analysis of the separation that structures the spectacle, the possibility of an engaged, *enjoyable*, nonseparated experience—such as that of the *dérive*—is always held out as the aim of an alternative model of cinematic practice. In Debord's own words:

> It seems to me that my work [in the cinema], very succinct but extended over a period of twenty-six years, did indeed correspond to the principal criteria of modern art: (1) a very marked originality from the start and the firm decision never to do "the same thing" two times in a row, while still maintaining a personal style and a set of thematic concerns that are always easily recognizable; (2) an understanding of contemporary society, *id est* explaining it by criticizing it, since ours is a time which is distinctly lacking less in apologetics than in criticism; (3) finally, to have been revolutionary *in form as well as in content*, something which always struck me as following the direction of all the "unitary" aspirations of modern art, toward the point where that art attempted to go beyond art.[186]

In its dismantling of the spectacle, the cinema of Guy Debord is thus also the dismantling of the (modernist, avant-garde, political) cinema as well.

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Society for Cinema Studies annual conference in Montreal (May 1987) on a panel entitled "Dismantling the Spectacle." I am grateful to the panel chair, Edward Dimendberg (UC Santa Cruz), for provoking that initial engagement with the topic and to Lindsay Waters (Harvard University Press) and Greil Marcus for the critical mediation that made this further exploration possible.

1. Ken Knabb, ed. and trans., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 33. (Where published translations are employed within the body of the text, the original language citations are provided following the translated reference. Where no English-language source is given, the translation is mine.) Guy Debord, *Sur le passage de quelques personnes a travers une assez courte unité de temps*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques complètes, 1952–1978* (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1978), p. 31.

2. Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 207–8.

3. This picture, taken by J. R. Eyerman, has since become a veritable cliché not only for the alienation of late consumer culture but also for the ten years following World War II: it appears, for example, on T-shirts, bags, and buttons as well as on the cover of the brochure that accompanied an exhibition of photographs from *Life* magazine held at the International Center of Photography (New York) and entitled: "The Second Decade, 1946–1955." Few realize, however, that this depiction of the latest stage in the drive towards cinematic verisimilitude exists in at least two versions: the one, employed for the cover of the *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970, repr. 1977 and 1983), depicts its elegantly attired audience in a virtually trance-like state of absorption, their faces grim, their lips pursed. In the other shot of the same audience, however, the 3-D spectators are laughing, their expressions of hilarity conveying the pleasure of an uproarious, active spectatorship.

4. It is entirely appropriate that these illustrations appear only in the unauthorized translation of *Society of the Spectacle* published in America, the country in many ways paradigmatic for the culture of consumption and alienation that is the focus of the study. In the first edition of *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967), the pirate German edition of *Die Gesellschaft des Spektakels* (Düsseldorf: Projektgruppe Gegengesellschaft, 1971), and the "authorized [German] translation" by Jean-Jacques Raspaud (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1978) there are no illustrations whatsoever. Only the current French

reprint (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1971) has an image on its cover, a reproduction of a turn-of-the-century world map whose colors indicate the current and projected state of global commercial development. Debord's account of the choice of this map can be found in his small book, *Considérations sur l'assassinat de Gérard Lebovici* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1985), pp. 33–34.

5. The first 34 theses of *La société du spectacle* were first published under the title "La séparation achevée" in the SI journal *Internationale situationniste* 11 (October 1967), pp. 43–48 (hereafter *IS*).

6. The translation of *détournement*, one of the key terms of Situationist aesthetic practice, poses a number of problems. Its rendition as "diversion" in the American edition of *Society of the Spectacle* (see, for example, Thesis 208) is unacceptable because it is burdened with the connotation of "distraction." In French, *détournement*— deflection, turning in a different direction— is also employed to signal detours and to refer to embezzlement, swindle, abduction, and hijacking. The criminal and violent quality of the latter four connotations are closer to the SI practice of illicitly appropriating the products of culture and abducting or hijacking them to other destinations. Nevertheless, these terms are also too marked to be employed. Instead, I have followed the practice adopted by Ken Knabb in his *Anthology* (cf. his footnote on this subject on p. 371) and have simply anglicized the term.

7. This visual material, an important supplement to the articles in the journal, is unfortunately not available to the English reader since, unlike the two-volume German edition of the journal, *Situationistische Internationale* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1977), which retains the images and even the layout of the original French version, the selections published in translation in the Knabb anthology have no illustrations.

8. *IS* 11 (October 1967), p. 57; first emphasis in translation is mine.

9. Debord, *In Girum*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 190.

10. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 33; cf. the epigraph that opens this essay.

11. Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" in *Holzwege*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977 [1938]), pp. 73–110; translated as "The Age of the World Picture," in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishers, 1977), pp. 115–54, esp. 128ff.; Jean-Louis Baudry, *L'effet cinéma* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1978) and "The Apparatus: Metaphysical Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in Phil Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 299–318; Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 121–42.

12. Debord, *In Girum*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 207–8; cf. the second epigraph that opens this essay.

13. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 88; "La cinquième conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg," *IS* 7 (April 1962), pp. 26–27. Compare also "Le sens du déperissement de l'art," *IS* 3 (December 1959), pp. 4 and 7.

14. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 210.

15. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 111, translation modified; "L'opération contre-situationniste dans divers pays," *IS* 8 (January 1963), p. 24.

16. "Avec et contre le cinéma," *IS* 1 (June 1958), pp. 8–9.

17. Ibid., p. 8.

18. Ibid., p. 9.

19. Ibid.

20. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 215; René Viénet, "Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action contre la politique et l'art," *IS* 11 (October 1967), p. 35.

21. Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 55–56; "Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude," *IS* 3 (December 1959), p. 11.

22. Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, "Instructions for the Use of Detournement," in Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 12 (translation of title modified); "Mode d'emploi du détournement," in *Les lèvres nues* 8 (May 1956), p. 6. For the epistemological genealogy of the SI it is important to note that the authors of this theoretically central article were listed on the cover of *Les lèvres nues* as "Aragon and André Breton"! Both the text and the cover are reprinted in the very useful collection of reprints of rare original materials edited by Gérard Berreby, *Documents relatifs à la fondation de l'Internationale situationniste*

(Paris: Editions Allia, 1985), pp. 301–9. Another important aesthetic affinity is evident from the publication of a German translation of this essay—"Gebrauchs-anweisung für die Entwendung"—in a collection of the poetry of Lautréamont [Isidore Ducasse], *Poésie* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1979).

23. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 12; Berreby, *Documents*, p. 306.

24. *La dialectique peut-elle casser des briques* is an amusing example of the use of *détournement* to rewrite or re-function—to use a rendition of Brecht's term *Umfunktionierung* that is most appropriate here— an otherwise highly compromised product of the culture industry. This full-length 35mm color film by Doo Kwang Gee is a transformation by Gerard Cohen and René Viénet of a classic Hong Kong Kung-Fu film (originally titled *The Crush*) into a didactic suspense narrative illustrating the conflict between the proletariat and the bureaucrats! Produced in 1973 by "L'Oiseau de Minerve," the movie—which introduces itself as "the first entirely 'detourned' film in the history of cinema"—effects this metamorphosis simply by supplying a new synchronized sound track. As it is (curiously) part of the permanent collection of the ultra-hightech Vidéothèque de Paris, it can be screened upon demand. Another Chinese film detourned by Inez Tan and René Viénet through the use of French subtitles, *Du sang chez les Taoïsts* (1971; color, 80 min.), seems to be currently unavailable. Very little information is available concerning the three further films that Viénet and his collaborators are supposed to have detourned: *Une petite culotte pour l'été*, *Une soutanne n'a pas de braguette*, and *L'aubergine est farcie*.

25. "Panorama intelligent de l'avant-garde à la fin de 1955," *Potlatch* 24 (November 1955); all issues of the journal have been reprinted in a single volume with an introduction by Guy Debord, *Potlatch, 1954–1957* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1985), above citation, p. 186; the journal can also be found in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 161–261, above citation, p. 231.

26. René Viénet, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action Against Politics and Art," in Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 215–16; "Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action contre la politique et l'art," *IS* 11 (October 1967), p. 35.

27. Guy Debord, "Pour le debat d'orientation du printemps 1970: Note sur la première serie de textes," in his *Textes rares: 1957–1970* (Paris: n. p., 1981), pp. 34–36.

28. "Chaque film pourrait donner à un ou deux situs travaillant comme assistants l'occasion de maîtriser leur propre style dans ce language; et l'immanquable succès de nos oeuvres apporterait aussi la base économique de la production future de ces camarades. *L'élargissement de notre audience serait décisif*" (Ibid., p. 36).

29. Guy Debord, "Cinema and Revolution," in Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 297–98 (translation modified); "Le cinéma et la révolution," *IS* 12 (September 1969), p. 105.

30. This description as well as the label for Godard further on stem from the "List of Insulted Names" included in the very useful index volume by Jean-Jacques Raspaud and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *L'Internationale situationniste: Chronologie/Bibliographie/Protagonistes* (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1972), pp. 25–65.

31. The following chronological list offers a preliminary bibliography of the film reviews and/or texts on film published in the journals of the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals. Where no author is listed the texts appeared unsigned; lead articles are indicated as such; data regarding reprints and short summaries of content follow the main entry:

"Le grand âge du cinéma: Le 8e festival de Cannes sera mauvais," *Potlatch* 19 (lead article; April 1955); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 124–25; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 205

"Encore la jeunnesse pourrie," *Potlatch* 19 (April 1955); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 126–27; also in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 205–6
Review of *Marianne de ma jeunesse* (Julien Duvivier, 1955)

"Le grand chemin qui mène a Rome," *Potlatch* 21 (lead article; June 1955); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 142–43; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 213
Review of *La Strada* (Federico Fellini, 1954)

"La Bible est le seul scénariste qui ne déçoive pas Cecil B. De Mille," *Potlatch* 21 (June 1955); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, p. 147; Berreby, *Documents*, p. 215
Review of ***Blinkity Black*** [*sic*] (Norman McLaren, 1955)
[Correct title is ***Blinkity Blank***]

"Au vestaire," *Potlatch* 25 (lead article; January 1956); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 191–95; also in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 233–34
Review of *La pointe courte* (Agnès Varda, 1956)

"Le cinéma après Alain Resnais," *IS* 3 (December 1959), pp. 8–10
Review of *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)

Michèle Bernstein, "Sunset Boulevard," *IS* 7 (April 1962), pp. 42–46
Review of *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961)

G.-E. Debord, "Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art," *Notes critiques: Bulletin de recherche et d'orientation révolutionnaire* 3 (Bordeaux) (2 trimestre 1962); reprinted in Debord, *Textes rares*, pp. 13–17; for a translation, see Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 310–14. Debord's text was a position paper intended as the basis for a discussion between the SI and the group Pouvoir Ouvrier that ultimately did not take place. It was a response to a review of Godard's *A bout de souffle* by S. Chatel published in *Socialisme ou barbarie* 6 (December 1960–February 1961), pp. 104–7

"L'I.S. vous l'avait bien dit!" *IS* 9 (August 1964), p. 23
A series of citations about Alain Resnais

"Le rôle de Godard," *IS* 10 (March 1966), pp. 58–59; for a translation, see Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 175–76
On the films of Jean-Luc Godard

"Le cinéma et la révolution," *IS* 12 (September 1969), pp. 104–5; for a translation, see Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 297–98
Review of *Le gai savoir* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1968).

32. François Dufrêne, *Tambours du jugement premier*, *Ion* 1 (April 1952), Numéro spécial sur le cinéma, Marc-Gilbert Guillaumin [Marc, O], General Editor, p. 195 (footnote 1).

33. Beneath a full page photograph of Debord on the second page of the catalogue *Destruktion af RSG-6: En kollektiv manifestation af Situationistisk Internationale* (Odense, Denmark: Galerie EXI, 1963), for example, one reads the following caption: "GUY DEBORD: filminstruktør og redaktør—film director and editor—cinéaste et directeur de revue. c/o 'Internationale Situationniste,' B.P. 75–06 Paris." Similarly, the description of the author of *La société du spectacle* on the back cover of the Editions Champ Libre reprint (Paris, 1971) begins: "Se disant cinéaste" (Calls himself a filmmaker).

34. Debord at various times announced films that he was planning or hoping to make. These include the following four titles of *films prévus* that are listed on the back cover of *Contre le cinéma* (see note 38 below), framed by the two lines "Prochainement sur les écrans . . . Des films écrits et réalisés par Guy Debord" (Coming soon to the screen . . . Films written and directed by Guy Debord): *Portrait d'Ivan Chtcheglov, Les aspects ludiques manifestes et latents dans la fronde, Eloge de ce que nous avons aimé dans les images d'une époque*, and *Préface à une nouvelle théorie du mouvement révolutionnaire*. Elsewhere Debord states that he wanted to make a film of Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967, repr. 1981), translated as *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Practical Paradise Publications, 1975); see "Pour le débat d'orientation du printemps 1970: Note sur la première serie de textes," in Debord, *Textes rares*, p. 36.

35. One of the few exceptions is an intelligent article in a rather obscure Austrian art journal by Roberto Ohrt, "Wäre ich nicht Alexander wäre ich gern Diogenes," *Durch* 3/4 (November 1987), pp. 27–48, translated by Ian Brunskill in the same issue as "If I Wasn't Alexander, I Would Like to Be Diogenes," pp. 161–75. Ohrt has also published an interesting piece on the SPUR group and the German side of the SI story: "Die Spur von der Kunst zur Situationistischen Internationale," in Veit Loers, ed., *Gruppe SPUR, 1958–1965* (Regensburg: Städtische Galerie, 1986), pp. 33–44.

36. Guy Debord, *Considérations sur l'assassinat*, p. 48. Debord's most recent book, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1988) is also dedicated to Lebovici: "A la mémoire de Gérard Lebovici, assassiné à Paris, le 5 mars 1984, dans un guet-apens resté mystérieux."

37. In response to a query as to whether the films could ever be seen *outside* France, Debord explained to me in a letter of 29 May 1987 that his emphasis on France was in response to the particular injustice perpetrated by the French press. "Naturally I should have said: never again anywhere." In the remainder of the missive Debord goes on to articulate why, in light of the recent restructuration of the film industry, he was concerned about the manner in which his films might be exploited and thus decided to disavow in advance any and all screenings of his work. However, as he notes in conclusion: "It goes without saying that I do not disavow a single word or even a single image of my entire cinematographic work."

38. Guy Debord, *Contre le cinéma* (Aarhus, Denmark: L'Institut scandinave de vandalisme comparé/Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, 1964). This volume, now out of print, includes the complete scenarios and selected images from Debord's first three films (*Hurlements en faveur de Sade, Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps,* and *Critique de la séparation*) along with a prefatory essay by Asger Jorn entitled "Guy Debord et le problème du maudit" (pp. 3–8). The German translation by Pierre Gallissaires and Hanna Mittelstädt entitled *Gegen den Film: Filmskripte* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1978) drops three of the four explanatory notes that follow the scenario of *Hurlements*, but provides the full text of "Grande fête de nuit" under the title "Eine große Nachtfete."

39. Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques.* This hardback volume, which features a map of metropolitan Paris with subway routes on its dust jacket, includes the scenarios from *Contre le cinéma* (minus the introductory essay by Asger Jorn and the technical data supplied for each film). It also contains a selection of stills from each film; the format for these images, however, is slightly smaller than in *Contre le cinéma.* An Italian translation of the collection by Paolo Salvadori was published under the title *Opere cinematografiche complete, 1952–1978* (Rome: Arcana Editrice, 1980).

40. Debord, *Hurlements,* in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 7.

41. The standard work on Lettrist poetry is Jean-Paul Curtay's *La poésie lettriste* (Paris: Seghers, 1974). For English-language material on Lettrism, see *Visible Language* 17 (Summer 1983), a special issue that includes introductory discussions of various aspects of the movement, translations of primary texts by Isou and Lemaître, as well as a chronology and bibliography. For a short illustrated discussion of Lettrist work in the plastic arts, see Carol Cutler, "Paris: The Lettrist Movement," *Art in America* 58 (January–February 1970), pp. 117–19. The literature on Lettrist cinema is almost as limited as that on the cinema of the SI: see, for example, the short piece by Frédérique Devaux, "Approaching Letterist Cinema," trans. David W. Seaman, in the above mentioned issue of *Visible Language*, pp. 48–56. Devaux has also published a very useful "Petite introduction au cinéma lettriste" in her journal *7ème Art* 12 (Spring–Summer 1988), unpaginated. I am grateful to Ms. Devaux for her generosity in providing me with material that was a valuable source of general orientation for my research on the Lettrist genealogy of Debord's early work in film. In Italian a discussion of "Il cinema lettrista francese," complete with bibliography and short sections on Isou and Lemaître, can be found in the well-documented catalogue *Cine qua non* (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1979), pp. 67–76.

42. Dominique Noguez, "The Experimental Cinema in France," trans. Alister Sanderson, *Millennium Film Journal* 1 (Spring–Summer 1978). In light of the fact that none of the studies of avant-garde, underground, or experimental cinema (for example, those by Jean Mitry, Parker Tyler, and David Curtis) as much as mentions Lettrist cinema, Noguez must be credited as the first to point out in print both its aesthetic significance and its revisionist ramifications for the history of postwar avant-garde cinema. In a 1976 essay on the state of experimental cinema in France, Noguez remarks in a footnote that the work of Isou and Lemaître constitutes "an 'underground' French cinema whose historical and aesthetic importance has not yet been grasped. To do so is today one of the most pressing tasks of a criticism worthy of the name" (Dominique Noguez, "Qu'est-ce que la cinéma expérimental? Sa situation en France," in *Une histoire du cinéma* [Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1976], p. 51, note 23). A few years later, in his study *Eloge du cinéma expérimental: Définitions, jalons, perspectives* (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979), Noguez follows up on his earlier claim and devotes a short section to the Lettrist cinema (pp. 101–4), which is described as "a movement that has been ignored for much too long and whose innovations are so numerous and go in so many different directions that one should stress their *avant-garde* character (in the strong sense of the term) as well as the fact that these preceded a number of the works produced by the American 'underground' cinema" (p. 101). In the years following this publication, Lettrist films began to be "rediscovered" with increasing regularity: in 1980 the Pompidou Center held a retrospective of the films of Lemaitre, and in 1982 the show *Thirty Years of Experimental Cinema in France* curated by Noguez (which subsequently travelled to the USA, Canada, and Japan) included a number of Lettrist works.

43. Jean-Isidore Isou, *Estbétique du cinéma* (Paris: Ur, 1953). The following cursory remarks can hardly do justice to a work that deserves a much more detailed treatment than is possible here. A helpful overview can be found in Frédérique Devaux's "Notes sur *Esthétique du cinéma* de Isidore Isou," in *Revue d'histoire du cinéma* 5 (Spring 1981).

44. In a text by Maurice Lemaître "written especially for American readers" the Isouian distinction is explained as follows: "The *Amplic (amplique) phase* is the period in which the art 'swells' and in which public interest is high because it is constructed around *pretexts exterior to the art itself*: anecdotes (battles, epics, divine struggles), sentiments (romantic) or ideas (philosophical, social, etc.). . . . The second phase is called the *Chiseling (ciselante) phase*, and is the period in which the art turns in upon itself" (Maurice Lemaître, "What is Letterism?" [*sic*], trans. and adapted by Lowell Bair, in *Ur: La dictature lettriste* 3 (1952), pp. 47–48.

45. "This is the first time that one presents a *manifesto of cinema in the cinema*. It is the first time that one shows a ciné-club in the cinema, which is to say, that one prefers reflection or *debates on cinema in the cinema to ordinary cinema as such,"* (Jean-Isidore Isou, *Traité de bave et d'éternité*, 35mm BW, sound, 175 min.). The scenario is contained in Isou, *Oeuvres de spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 7–88; above citation, p. 27. This volume comes with a red banderole wrapped around it on which the publisher announces: "The transformation of the theater and the cinema." Begun on 15 August 1950 and completed in May of the following year, the film's original length of four and a half hours was reduced for "practical reasons." At the premiere of the first version of the film (which caused a near riot among the journalist audience) on 20 April 1951, the last day of the Cannes Film Festival, *Traité* was awarded the "Prix des spectateurs d'avant garde" and also the "Prix en marge du Festival de Cannes" by a renegade jury that included Jean Cocteau (some of the press reactions to this screening are reprinted in *7ème Art* 8). It premiered in Paris on 23 May 1951—the very day the final version was completed—at the Cinema Alexandra and then ran from 25 January to 7 February at the Studio de l'Etoile. The poster for the Paris premiere, designed by Jean Cocteau, is reproduced in small format on the cover of *7ème Art* 12.

46. Isou, *Traité*, in *Oeuvres de spectacle*, p. 15. Isou's rhetoric is strikingly similar to a proclamation by Dziga Vertov published (admittedly under very different circumstances but with surprisingly analogous imperatives) nearly 30 years earlier:

> WE declare old films, the romantic, the theatricalized etc., to be leprous.
> —Don't come near!
> —Don't look!
> —Mortally dangerous!
> —Contagious.
>
> WE affirm the future of cinema art by rejecting its present. The death of 'cinematography' is necessary so that the art of cinema may live. WE *call for the acceleration of its death.*

Dziga Vertov, "We. A Version of a Manifesto," in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*, trans. Richard Taylor (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 69.

47. Isou, *Traité*, in *Oeuvres de spectacle*, p. 24. Further on Isou employs a classically philosophical rhetorical device in order to argue that a destroyed photograph *must* be superior to the ordinary photograph since otherwise the former could not have destroyed the latter (p. 75)!

48. *Ion* 1 (April 1952) (see note 32 above). The table of contents of *Ion* and the Debord scenario are reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 111–25. Although Maurice Lemaitre's film *Le film est déja commencé* is missing from this Lettrist pantheon, there is a full page advertisement for the published scenario, Maurice Lemaître, *Le film est déja commencé? Séance de cinéma* (Paris: Editions André Bonne, 1952). This volume also contains a lengthy preface by Isidore Isou.

49. In the notice to the reader that prefaces the volume, one reads: "The only set of values with which the members of this journal are in agreement remains Isou's complete system which has been revealed to us either in written or oral form. It is the point around which our traditional or original opinions are unified for the moment" *Ion* 1 ([April 1952], p. 6).

50. "Doyen des Lettristes: Wolman a 24 ans," in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 281.

51. "Des hommes insatisfaits de ce qu'on leur a donné dépassent le monde des expressions officielles et le festival de sa pauvreté.
Après **L'ESTHETIQUE DU CINEMA** d'Isidore **ISOU**,
TAMBOURS DU JUGEMENT PREMIER, l'essai de cinéma imaginaire de François **DUFRENE**, systématise à l'extrême l'épuisement des moyens du film, en le situant au delà de toutes ses mécaniques.
Guy-Ernest **DEBORD** avec
HURLEMENTS EN FAVEUR DE SADE, arrive au bout du cinéma, dans sa phase insurrectionnelle.
Aprés ces refus, définitivement en dehors des normes que vous aimez, le **CINEMA NUCLEAIRE** de **MARC,O.** intègre la salle et le spectateur dans la représentation cinématographique.
Désormais, le cinéma ne peut être que **NUCLEAIRE**.

Alors nous voulons dépasser ces dérisoires concours de sous-produits entre petits commerçants analphabètes ou destinés à le devenir. Notre seul présence ici les fait mourir.
Et voici les hommes d'un cinéma neuf: Serge **BERNA, G.E. DEBORD**, François **DUFRENE**, Monique **GEOFFROY**, Jean Isidore **ISOU**, Yolande du **LUART**, **MARC,O**, Gabriel **POMERAND, POUCETTE**, Gil J. **WOLMAN**" (Pamphlet found in the archive of the Silkeborg Kunstmuseum, Silkeborg, Denmark; see also the remark in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 205. Indicatively, the first statement of this tract reappears in the opening moments of Debord's *Hurlements*: compare *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 7 and Berreby, *Documents*, p. 295).

52. Guy Debord, "Prolégomènes à tout cinéma futur," *Ion* 1 (April 1952), p. 217; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 109; a German translation by Ursula Panhans Bühler and Roberto Ohrt, "Prolegomena für jedes zukünftige Kino," can be found in *Durch* 3/4 (November 1987), p. 69.

53. Ibid.

54. Guy Debord, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952): 16mm BW, sound, 80 min.; Production company: Films lettristes. The various scenarios of the film—which was dedicated to Gil J Wolman—were published in (a) *Ion* 1 (April 1952), pp. 219–30; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 111–23 (this first version, with images, was never made); (b) *Les lèvres nues* 7 (December 1955), pp. 18–23; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 293–98 (a new version without images preceded by a short descriptive text entitled "Grande fête de nuit"; German translation of the latter as "Eine große Nachtfete" in Debord, *Gegen den Film*, pp. 35–6); (c) Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, pp. 13–22 (a final version with sections not included in *Les lèvres nues*, followed by a short prose description [p. 9] and four short statements relating to the film [pp. 21–22]; German translation of the scenario in Debord, *Gegen den Film*, pp. 23–34); and (d) Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 5–14.

55. Although Isou claims that *Hurlements did* have an image track that was suppressed during the projection upon the suggestion of a sympathetic colleague (Isidore Isou, *Contre le cinéma situationniste, néo-nazi* [Paris: n. p. 1979], p. 24), in discussion with me Debord insisted that the first scenario was never more than a conceptual experiment and the second version *never* had an image track.

56. On the cowboy motif that reappears with astonishing regularity in Situationist and neo-Situationist productions well into the 1980s, see Greil Marcus, "The Cowboy Philosopher," *Artforum* 24 (March 1986), pp. 85–91.

57. Although Debord criticizes the notion of originality, he nevertheless resents the failure of film historians and critics to recognize the innovation of his cinema without images. Objecting to a description of himself in *France-Soir* of 8 March 1984 as an "extravagant writer and filmmaker," Debord notes: "Anyone else would have been credited with a bit of originality. Some filmmakers since have taken twenty or thirty years to move towards a cinema without images and one has praised their patience. To give another amusing example, the painter Yves Klein, whom I knew at the time and who was present at the first very tumultuous public projection of this film, was overwhelmed by a convincing black sequence lasting twenty-four minutes. Out of this experience he developed, a few years later, his 'monochrome' painting which, to tell the truth, wrapped in a bit of zen mysticism for his famous 'blue period,' was what provoked many an expert to call him a genius. Some still insist that he is one today. As far as painting is concerned, however, it is not I who could obscure Yves Klein's glory, but rather what Malévitch did much earlier and which was momentarily forgotten by these very same experts" (Debord, *Considérations*, pp. 45–46).

58. "Les arts futurs seront des bouleversements de situations, ou rien" (Debord, *Hurlements*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 8). The phrasing of this line, similar to many formulations in Breton's *L'amour fou*, is also reminiscent of the last line of *Nadja* that reads: "La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas" (André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, I [Paris: Gallimard, 1988], p. 753). As noted by Marguerite Bonnet, one of the editors of this Pléiade volume, this is a *revolutionary* syntax, as it is the very form employed by Thiers in his famous speech to the National Assembly on 13 November 1872: "La République sera conservatrice ou ne sera pas" (Ibid., p. 1,564).

59. Cf. *Les lèvres nues* 7 (December 1955), p. 18, footnote; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 294.

60. A few months later the same group also precluded a *Squelette sadique* in the same ciné-club that had been publicized and attributed to a certain René Guy Babord and that was to consist of turning out the lights in the hall for fifteen minutes (Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 9).

61. Guy Atkins (with Troels Andersen), *Asger Jorn: The Crucial Years, 1954–1964* (New York: Wittenborn Art Books, 1977), pp. 57–59.

62. G.-E. Debord, "Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes," *Potlatch* 29 (November 1957); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, p. 239; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 251. This passage is also quoted as the last of the four "explanations" following the scenario of *Hurlements* in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 22. In this issue of *Potlatch* it was announced that following the formation of the Situationist International as resolved by the Cosio d'Arroscia conference in July, the journal would heretofore appear under the auspices of the SI: consequently, *Potlatch* 29, the last issue of the journal, carries for the first and last time the subheading "Information Bulletin of the Situationist International."

63. Serge Berna, "Jusqu'à l'os," *Ion* 1 (April 1952), p. 187. After explaining that the second "chastity belt" is the financial dimension, Berna again calls for a reexamination of "the categorical imperative of cinema . . . which is—the image, the image, the image is what constitutes the cinema" (p. 188).

64. *Ion* 1 (April 1952), p. 196; the complete scenario of Dufrêne's work is contained in this issue, pp. 193–214.

65. Completed on 25 September 1951, it was first screened at the Ciné-Club d'Avant-Garde on 11 February 1952. The projection—onto a large meteorological balloon—caused an uproar and soon thereafter the film was officially censored (cf. *Potlatch* 12 [September 1954]; *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, p. 69; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 281). For Debord's polemical condemnation of the censorship of a film he praised as "more offensive today than Eisenstein's images which had been so threatening in Europe for such a long time," see "Totem et Tabou," *Internationale lettriste* 3 (August 1953), reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 156–57. The scenario of the film, first published in *Ion*, is reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 87–107. See also Wolman's "explanatory" text, "Le cinématochrone—nouvelle amplitude," first published in *Ur: La dictature lettriste* 2, no. 10; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 141.

66. Compare the following description of a film attended by the narrator in Robert Desnos's *Nouvelles Hébrides*, written over 30 years earlier: "On the blank screen, a luminous disk was projected without any images of people or landscapes. The assembly of empty seats attentively followed some magnificent spectacle invisible to me" (Robert Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes, 1922–1930*, ed. Marie-Claire Dumas [Paris: Gallimard, 1978], p. 100). The translation cited above is taken from an article by David Wills, "Slit Screen," *Dada/Surrealism* 15 (1986), p. 88. I am grateful to I. L. Bifidus for pointing out this striking similarity.

67. Isou, *Oeuvres de spectacle*, p. 87.

68. The generally negative accounts of the debut of the festival's "enfant terrible" in the press make no mention of images: see, for example, R. M. Arland's report in *Combat* (April 21–22), p. 2. Jean Cocteau describes the "Isou affair" on the Rue d'Antibes as follows: "Isidore Isou had invited us to *see* his film—a 9,000 meter spool—in the off-circuit of the festival. However, he had only finished the soundtrack. He considered his ideas sufficient to destroy the unstomachable cinema" (Jean Cocteau, *Entretiens autour du cinématographe* [Paris: Editions André Bonne, 1951], p. 90; English translation in Jean Cocteau, *Cocteau on the Film*, trans. Vera Traill [London: Dennis Dobson, 1954], p. 135). Maurice Lemaître recounts more or less the same story: "As Isou and I had not finished the film in time, we projected only the *soundtrack*" (Maurice Lemaître, *Jean Cocteau et le lettrisme* [Paris: Centre de créativité, 1976], p. 2, note 3). In Isou's own account of the Cannes screening of *Traité*, the first "chapter," entitled "Le principe," *did* have an image track and it was only following this section that the audience was plunged into darkness due to the lack of images, which in turn caused the uproar (Isou, *Contre le cinéma situationniste, néo-nazi*, p. 24). During the ensuing commotion, Cocteau recounts, Isou had asked him to speak, but he had declined. However, Cocteau appends to the above description the text of the statement that he would have liked to have made on the occasion. Here he discusses the cleansing function of the void in Isou's work, citing as a proleptic comment an episode from the beginning of his own film *Orphée*, in which the journal *Nudisme* contains only blank pages: " 'This is ridiculous,' Orpheus says, to which the man from the Café des Poètes responds: 'Less ridiculous than if these pages were filled with ridiculous texts. No excess is ridiculous.' This is why I was content to say to the audience that an insolent attitude is always alive and that they would do well to take Isou's strange screening seriously" (Cocteau, *Entretiens autour du cinématographe*, p. 90).

69. Frame enlargements from the film depicting Isou and Lemaître can be found in *Une histoire du cinéma*, p. 144.

70. Isou, *Traité*, in *Oeuvres de spectacle*, p. 17.

71. As in the following passage from Isou's subsequent film, *Apologie d'un personnage unique* (Apology of a unique personality): "One day the cinema will be disgusted by its images, even when they have been *destroyed*. It will not dare present anything but *subtitles*. The film of tomorrow will be *lettrist* and composed of *subtitles*. If at its inception cinema was by virtue of its images an attack on *reading*, the day will come when the cinema will be a mere *form of reading*" (Isou, *Oeuvres de spectacle*, p. 269).

72. Isou, *Esthétique du cinéma*, in *Ion* 1 (April 1952), pp. 147–48.

73. Much to Isou's annoyance, years later, Debord simply integrates his suggested amplifications, without acknowledging their provenance. Compare Debord, *Hurlements*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 7. For Isou's protest, see his delirious polemic *Contre le cinéma situationniste, néo-nazi*, p. 25, footnote 1.

74. Debord, "Prolégomènes à tout cinéma futur," in *Ion* 1 (April 1952), p. 219; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 109.

75. Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 9.

76. In response to the question "Lettrism: A Neo-Dadaism?" Jean-Paul Curtay writes: "So if Lettrism, like Dada, came out of a reaction against a world war, Lettrism did not remain a protest . . . [but became] an exaltation of permanently renewed arts, philosophy, scientific knowledge, technology; a fight for a conversion of destructive powers and trends into constructive powers through original education, planning, administration, and banking systems [!]; a global positive move" (Jean-Paul Curtay, "Lettrism, Abstract Poetry, Mouth Symbols, and More...," *Dada/Surrealism* 12 ([1983], p. 72).

77. Conceived together with Picabia's ballet *Relâche* as an event that would challenge and outrage the spectators, *Entr'acte* took place in a theater adorned with large signs that read, "If you are not satisfied, go to hell" or "Whistles for sale at the door." The plan was that during the *entr'acte* (intermission) the sound track for the film would be provided by the traditional acoustics of intermission: small talk, coughing, drinking, and general murmur. Instead, the audience remained obediently seated and watched the film in silence, not even provoked by the film's dramatic violations of the conventions of cinematic narrative.

78. Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" *Dada/Surrealism* 15 (1986), p. 20.

79. In the original, Benjamin's phrase reads "grundsätzliche Entwürdigung ihres Materials" (translation modified); Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (zweite Fassung), *Gesammelte Schriften*, II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), translated by Harry Zohn as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 237.

80. As Raoul Vaneigem puts it in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*: "The more we contemplate, as spectators, the degradation of all values, the less likely we are to get on with a little real destruction" (p. 173).

81. It is important to distinguish the *cinematic* "dada" dimension of Debord's film from practices employed to similar ends that are in a strict sense *extra-cinematic*. Typical of the latter is Maurice Lemaître's project to educate film audiences in critical viewing by employing trained spectators to strategically interrupt the screenings of commercial films, a hilarious plan outlined in scrupulous detail in Lemaître's "Base d'une éducation cinématographique du public par la critique permanente," *Ur: La dictature lettriste* 2, pp. 19–20. Similarly one must make a distinction (purely descriptive, not normative) between Debord's reductive strategy and those adopted in Lemaître's film *Le film est déja commencé* (1951; 35mm, BW, hand-colored, sound, 60 min.; scenario published as *Le film est déja commencé? Séance de cinéma* [Paris: Editions André Bonne, 1952]). In this work, whose dada gesture is of the "happening" variety, "trained" spectators were to converse with the film, the screen was covered with cloth, the spectators were showered with water, and so on. A filmography of Lemaître's extensive cinematic production can be found in *Une histoire du cinéma*, p. 87; this volume also reproduces a (incorrectly identified) sequence from the film (p. 143).

82. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 30; "On ne conteste jamais réellement une organisation de l'existence sans contester toutes les formes de language qui appartiennent à cette organisation" (Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 22).

83. Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Conditions of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Trend," in Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 24 (translation of both title and citation modified); originally published as *Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendence situationniste internationale* (Paris, n. p., 1957), p. 16. This seminal text, an internal report published in Paris in June 1957 and presented to the members of the Lettrist International, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, and the London Psychogeographical Society, served as the basis of discussion at the Cosio d'Arroscia conference where, on 27 July 1957, the Situationist International was founded. Largely unavailable for many years, the text has been reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 607–19, followed by an Italian version, pp. 621–37; it is also reprinted in facsimile in the pamphlet produced by the Centre Georges Pompidou to accompany the exhibit *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (Paris 1989).

84. A facsimile of the tract can be found in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 262.

85. Following the distribution of "Finis les pied plats" both the tract and the disavowal were reprinted in the first issue of *Internationale lettriste* under the title "Mort d'un commis voyageur" together with an introduction by Debord, an open letter by Berna, Brau, Debord, and Wolman to *Combat* (which refused publication) in response to the disavowal, and a letter by Brau admonishing Isou for his cowardice; this dossier is reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 146–51. See also the unsigned "Doyen des lettristes: Wolman a 24 ans," in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 281. Debord could hardly have been unaware of the overdetermination of attacking Chaplin given that the surrealists had explicitly endorsed Chaplin in their statement "Hands Off Love" signed by Breton, Aragon, Desnos, Leiris, and many others and published in *La revolution surréaliste* 9–10 (October 1927), pp. 1–6.

86. In this context the line from Debord's "Prolegomena"—"I made this film before it was too late"—takes on a new significance when it reappears in the sound track of the final version of *Hurlements* followed by the phrase "Jean-Isidore, to get out of that ephemeral crowd." It is tempting to read it along with Debord's renunciation of the explicit Lettrist vocabulary as a proleptic indication within the realm of the aesthetic of a multiply motivated alienation from the Lettrist program that would soon thereafter manifest itself decisively in the scission.

87. *Internationale lettriste* 1; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 151.

88. Guy Debord, *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps*: 35mm BW, sound, 20 min.; produced by Dansk-Fransk Experimentalfilmskompagni; shot in April 1959, cut in September 1959. Scenario in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, pp. 23–50 (followed by 12 stills); reprinted in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 15–35 (followed by six stills). An English translation (without shot descriptions, subtitles, text frame information, or images), "On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Period of Time," can be found in Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 29–33. Another still image from the film is reproduced in *IS* 11 (October 1967), p. 36.

89. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 29; Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 19.

90. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 29 (translation modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 17.

91. Technical notes on *Sur le passage* in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 3. This technical data is not included in either Debord's *Oeuvres cinématographiques* nor in the translations of the two scenarios in the Knabb *Anthology*.

92. "Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude," *IS* 3 (December 1959), p. 11.

93. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 215; Viénet, "Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action," p. 34. Viénet also calls for increased activity in the domains of (1) experimentation with photo-novels; (2) the promotion of guerilla tactics in the mass media; and (3) the perfection of Situationist comics. In his reference to the work by Marx that Eisenstein intended to film, Viénet most probably was thinking of the project to film *Das Kapital* for which there are a series of highly illuminating notes published in *Iskousstvo Kino* 1 (Moscow 1973). These notes from Eisenstein's work journal are also available in translation in both English and French: Sergei Eisenstein, "Notes for a Film of *Capital*," trans. Maciej Sliwowski, Jay Leyda, and Annette Michelson, *October* 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 3–26; Sergei Eisenstein, "Filmer le Capital," trans. Jean and Luda Schnitzer, *Ecran 74* 31 (December 1974). For contextualization and analysis, see, above all, Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*," *October* 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 27–38, and *October* 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 82–89. Further material can be found in the following two articles: Barthélemy Amengual, "L'aventureux projet d'Eisenstein: Filmer *Le Capital*," *Vertigo* 2 (Paris) (November 1988), pp. 19–20; Raymonde Hébraud-Carasco, "Dialectique Eisenstein [*sic*]: 'Filmer le Capital,'" *Macula* 1 (1976), pp. 58–76.

94. Technical notes to *Sur le passage*, in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 3.

95. Guy-Ernest Debord, *Mémoires* (Paris: L'Internationale situationniste, 1959); Asger Jorn (conseiller technique pour le détournement G. E. Debord), *Fin de Copenhague* (Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957), published under the auspices of the Bauhaus imaginiste in a limited edition of 200 in May. *Fin de Copenhague* is reproduced in facsimile in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 553–92 and in a separate paperback facsimile edition published in 1985 by Editions Allia in Paris.

96. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 31 (translation slightly modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiqes*, p.26.

97. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 30 (translation modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 21.

98. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 31 (translation slightly modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 25.

99. One such text frame is reproduced as an illustration in Viénet, "Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action," p. 36.

100. Technical notes to Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Contre le cinéma*, p. 3.

101. Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 32–33 (translation modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 30.

102. Cf. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 33; Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 30–31.

103. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 33 (translation modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 31–32.

104. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 31 (translation modified); Debord, *Sur le passage*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 23–24.

105. To the extent that Debord's insistence on the documentation of incoherence is motivated by a utopian hope that once the confusion of the world is revealed it will provoke a long-overdue political and social change, it is not unlike the theory of radical distraction articulated by Siegfried Kracauer in the 1920s. Compare, for example, Kracauer's recognition of the redemptive and mimetic aspects of Weimar mass culture:

> In a profound sense, Berlin audiences act truthfully when increasingly they shun these art events (which, for good reason, remain caught in mere pretension), preferring instead the superficial glamor of the stars, films, revues and production values. Here, in pure externality, the audience encounters itself; its own reality is revealed in the fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions. Were this reality to remain hidden from the audience, it could neither attack nor change it; its disclosure in the practice of distraction is therefore of *moral* significance.
>
> However, this is the case only if distraction is not an end in itself. Indeed the very fact that the shows which cater to distraction are composed of the same mixture of externalities as the world of the urban masses; the fact that these shows lack any authentic and materially motivated coherence, except possibly the cement [glue?] of sentimentality which covers up this lack but only in order to make it all the more visible; the fact that these shows convey in a precise and undisguised manner to thousands of eyes and ears the *disorder* of society—this is precisely what enables such shows to evoke and maintain that tension which must precede the inevitable radical change.

Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987), pp. 94–95.

106. Gilles Ivain [Ivan Chtcheglov], "Formula for a New Urbanism," in Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 4 (translation modified); "Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau," *IS* 1 (June 1958), p. 19.

107. Guy Debord, *Critique de la séparation*: 35mm BW, sound, 20 min.; shot in September–October 1960; cut during January–February 1961; produced by Dansk-Fransk Experimentalfilmskompagni. Scenario in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, pp. 57–81 (followed by 12 stills); reprinted in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 37–58 (followed by six stills). An English translation (without shot descriptions, subtitles, text frame information, or images) can be found under the title "Critique of Separation," in Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 34–37.

108. This print, part of the collection of the Silkeborg Kunstmuseum (Silkeborg, Denmark), belonged to Asger Jorn (who set up and largely bankrolled the Dansk-Fransk Experimentalfilmskompagni that financed both *Sur le passage* and *Critique de la séparation*). According to Troels Andersen, the curator of the museum, the 35mm print was given to the museum around 1960–1961 on the condition that it not be shown in public: "The reason for the latter decision was an ideological and artistic quarrel with some of the people involved" (Letter to the author dated 19 October 1987). It can, however, be screened for research purposes upon special request.

109. Not included in either Knabb's *Anthology* nor in Debord's *Oeuvres cinématographiques*. Text frames: "Bientôt, sur cet écran—Un des plus grands anti-films de tous les temps!—Des personnages vrais! Une histoire authentique!—Sur un thème comme le cinéma n'a jamais osé en traiter." Citation from André Martinet, *Eléments de linguistique générale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970), p. 2: "Quand on songe combien il est naturel et avantageux pour l'homme d'identifier sa langue et la réalité, on devine quel degré de sophistication il lui a fallu atteindre pour les dissocier et faire de chacune un objet d'études" (Technical data on *Critique de la séparation* in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 10).

110. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 35 (translation modified); Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 42.

111. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 35 (translation modified); Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 42.

112. Compare, for example, the visual references to Robin Hood and Prince Valiant in Debord, *In Girum*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 204 and 245. In the latter case, a comic strip image depicting "Prince Valiant, in search of adventures" alternates with a photograph of Ivan Chtcheglov.

113. Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 35–36 (translation modified); Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 45.

114. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 34; Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 39–40.

115. In this regard Debord's films are very reminiscent of the montage aesthetic articulated by Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler in their study of sound-image relations in cinema, *Komposition für den Film* (Munich: Rogner und Bernhard, 1969 and Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976). For details of the complicated publication history of this seminal study, as well as the status of the English-language edition signed by Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), cf. the editorial pre- and postfaces in the two German editions cited above.

116. Technical notes to *Critique de la séparation*, in Debord, *Contre le cinéma*, p. 10.

117. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 37 (translation modified); Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 50.

118. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 37; Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 49.

119. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 310; "Une modification révolutionnaire des formes présentes de la culture ne peut être rien d'autre que le dépassement de tous les aspects de l'instrumentation esthétique et technique qui constitue un ensemble de spectacles séparés de la vie. Ce n'est pas dans ces significations de surface que l'on doit chercher la relation d'un spectacle avec les problèmes de la société, mais au niveau le plus profond, au niveau de *sa fonction en tant que spectacle*" (Debord, "Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art," p. 13).

120. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 37; Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 52–53.

121. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 25; Debord, *Rapport sur la construction des situations*, p. 17; reprinted in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 618. The passage cited above is also employed as an epigraph for one of the first essays in the first issue of *IS* (June 1958), "Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation," p. 11; compare Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 43.

122. Not included in Knabb, *Anthology*; Debord, *Critique de la séparation*, in *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 52–53. "Les Mystères de New York" was a series of 600-meter silent film episodes (twenty-two in all) made by Louis Gasnier in 1915 under the title "The Clutching Hand/Exploits of Elaine" and starring Pearl White. It was based on a serial novel by Pierre Decourcelle that was published in *Le Matin*. Louis Aragon pays an ironic homage to the film in *Anicet ou le panorama* (Paris: NRF, 1921).

123. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 310 (translation modified); Debord, "Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art," p. 141.

124. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 298; "Le cinéma et la révolution," *IS* 12 (September 1969), p. 105.

125. *La société du spectacle* (1973), 35mm BW, sound, approximately 80 min.; produced by Simar Films (Paris); scenario in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 59–144, followed by twenty stills.

126. *La véritable scission dans l'Internationale* (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1972).

127. Publicity brochure for *La société du spectacle* produced by Simar Films (Paris) in 1973.

128. "Que la tentative révolutionnaire de mai 1968 ait marqué le changement d'une époque, voilà ce que démontre le simple fait qu'un livre de théorie subversive comme *La société du spectacle* de Guy Debord puisse être aujourd'hui porté à l'écran par son auteur lui-même, et qu'il existe un producteur pour financer une telle entreprise."

129. As evidenced in the following passage from the contract signed with Simar, Debord's total creative freedom was stipulated in writing: "It is agreed that the author will have complete liberty in the accomplishment of his work, without supervision from anyone, and without even any obligation to take into consideration any comments whatsoever on any aspect of the content or of the cinematic form that he deems appropriate for his film"; "Il est entendu que l'auteur accomplira son travail en toute liberté, sans contrôle de qui que ce soit, et

sans même tenir compte de quelque observation que ce soit sur aucun aspect du contenu ni de la forme cinématographique qu'il lui paraîtra convenable de donner à son film" (Contract between Simar Films and Guy Debord, cited in publicity pamphlet for the film *La société du spectacle* [1973]).

130. In conversation with the author, April 1989 (Paris). The film employs all or part of the following theses in the order listed: 1–4, 6–7, 9–10, 12, 16, 18, 21–24, 29, 31, 33–34; 204–9; 187–88; 195; 35–37, 41, 44, 46, 48, 50, 54–56; 59–60, 63–66, 69–72; 166–69, 171, 173, 178; 147–48, 150, 153, 155–58, 162; 134, 133, 141, 145–46; 75–77, 85–86, 88, 90, 100, 104, 106–7, 114–15, 122–24.

131. August von Cieszkowski, *Prolégomènes à l'historiosophie* (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1973), p. 102; cited in *La société du spectacle*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 75.

132. *La société du spectacle* (Thesis 204), in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 70.

133. "Sa présente adaptation cinématographique, elle aussi, ne se propose pas quelques critiques politiques partielles, mais une critique totale du monde existant, c'est-à-dire de tous les aspects du capitalisme moderne, et de son système général d'illusions" (Publicity brochure for *La société du spectacle*).

134. *La société du spectacle* (Thesis 208), in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 72.

135. In the methodological preface to this unfinished project, Benjamin writes that the practice of citation without quotation marks, which he identifies with a strategy of montage, is one of the aims of the work: "Diese Arbeit muß die Kunst, ohne Anfuhrungszeichen zu zitieren, zur höchsten Höhe entwickeln. Ihre Theorie hängt aufs engste mit der Montage zusammen" (Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, I [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985], p. 572 [Thesis N 1, 9]).

136. Ibid.

137. "*Communiqué*: Quand la pensée me vint de créer le monde, je prévis qu'on y tournerait un jour un film aussi révoltant que *La Société du Spectacle*. De sorte que j'ai préféré ne pas créer le monde. (signé): Dieu" (Text provided from private archive).

138. Reviews of the film *La société du spectacle*: *Art Press* 50 (Summer 1981); *Charlie-Hebdo* 181 (6 May 1974), p. 15 (D. D. T.) and a reader's letter in *Charlie-Hebdo* 182 (13 May 1974), p. 11; *Cinéma 74* 188 (June 1974), pp. 146–47 (Bernard Pauly); *Le Monde* (9 May 1974), p. 20 (François Bott); *Le Point* 87 (21 May 1974), p. 19; *Nouvel observateur* 494 (29 April 1974), p. 62 (Claude Roy); *Nouvel observateur* 496 (13 May 1974), p. 28; *Quotidien de Paris* 24 (2 May 1974), p. 9; *Télécine* 189 (June 1974), p. 24 (S. L. P.); *Télérama* 1,269 (11 May 1974), p. 73 (Alain Remond); *Zoom* 22 (Jan–Feb 1974), pp. 27 and 29 (J. F.).

139. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 209.

140. "How Not to Understand Situationist Books," (excerpts) in Knabb, *Anthology*, pp. 265–69 (translation of title modified); "Comment on ne comprend pas des livres situationnistes," *IS* 12 (September 1969), pp. 44–54. It is precisely this practice of symptomatic citation of critical responses that Knabb also employs in an appendix entitled "The Blind Men and the Elephant (Selected Opinions on the Situationists)" (*Anthology*, pp. 381–92).

141. The citations are taken from reviews in *Edmagramme* (6 December 1967), *Le Nouvel observateur* (3 January 1968; 8 November 1971; 22 May 1972), *La quinzaine littéraire* (1 February 1968), *La gazette littéraire de Lausanne* (13 January 1968), *Réforme* (9 March 1968), *Le Monde* (14 February 1968), *The Times Literary Supplement* (21 March 1968), *New York Times* (21 April 1968), *The Sunday Times* (21 July 1968), *L'Espresso* (15 December 1968), *Umanità nuova* (15 May 1971), *Les temps modernes* 299–300 (June 1971), *Etudes* (June–December 1968).

142. *Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu'hostiles, qui ont été jusqu'ici portés sur le film "La Société du Spectacle"* (1975), 35mm BW, sound, 30 min.; produced by Simar Films (Paris); scenario in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 155–85, followed by six stills.

143. Bertolt Brecht, "Der Dreigroschenprozeß. Ein soziologisches Experiment" in his *Gesammelte Werke* XVIII (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), pp. 139–209. A French translation of this remarkable document can be found in the volume of Brecht's writings entitled *Sur le cinéma* (Paris: L'Arche, 1976).

144. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 312; "La critique d'art est un spectacle au deuxième degré. Le critique est celui qui donne en spectacle son état de spectateur même. Spectateur spécialisé, donc spectateur idéal, énonçant ses idées et sentiments *devant* une oeuvre à laquelle il ne participe pas réellement. Il relance, remet en scène, sa propre non-intervention sur le spectacle. La faiblesse des

jugements fragmentaires, hasardeux et largement arbitraires, sur des jugements fragmentaires, hasardeux et largement arbitraires, sur des spectacles qui ne nous concernent pas vraiment est notre lot à tous dans beaucoup de discussions banales de la vie privée. Mais le critique d'art fait étalage d'une telle faiblesse, *rendue exemplaire*" (Debord, "Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art," p. 15).

145. *Réfutation*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 166–67.

146. *Réfutation*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 157.

147. *Réfutation*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 162.

148. *Réfutation*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 159 and 166.

149. *Réfutation*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 174.

150. *Réfutation*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 169.

151. "Communication prioritaire," *IS* 7 (April 1962), p.24.

152. Knabb, *Anthology*, p. 312; Debord, "Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art," p. 15.

153. *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* (1978); 35mm BW, sound; approximately 80 min.; produced by Simar Films. Scenario in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 187–278, followed by twenty-four black and white stills (pp. 278ff.). A selection of passages from the film translated into English and introduced by Lucy Forsyth, together with shot illustrations (some cropped, others upside-down) from four of Debord's films, can be found under the title "In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni," in *Block* 14 (Autumn 1988), pp. 27–37. A complete translation has been announced as forthcoming from Chronos Publications (London). A German translation of the scenario is available as *Wir irren des nachts im Kreis umber und werden vom Feuer verzebrt* (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1985).

154. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 189.

155. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 204.

156. To those who might rightly object to the problematic model of ideology as false consciousness employed here, one should point out that such a critique, while theoretically sound, would do well to attempt to take account of the specificity of the site of the enunciation: the cinema.

157. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 202.

158. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 208.

159. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, pp. 207–8.

160. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 217.

161. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 223.

162. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 225. [This aphorism, which intrigued Nietzsche, was the motto of an eleventh-century Islamic Shiite sect located in northern Iran, the Nizārī Ismā'īlīyah. More commonly known as the Assassins (Arabic, *hashīshīyah*, "users of hashish," from which the English word *assassin* comes), the sect and its leader, Hassan-i Sabbāh, were mythologized in Western accounts starting with Marco Polo in the thirteenth century. Revolting against the rule of the Seljuk dynasty, which was Turkish in origin and militantly Sūnni in character, Sabbāh seized a fortress in the Elburz mountains and sent forth his followers to assassinate the ruling "infidels"; reportedly using both hashish and promises of the attainment of paradise (if a follower was "martyred" while attacking) to motivate his men, Sabbāh relied upon the spectacularity of these assassinations to overcome the overwhelming military superiority of his enemies. For the sect's legend and its transmission in the West, see Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967)—ED.]

163. The continued capacity of the absence of any image to dumbfound spectators is confirmed by a critic who describes how, during this sequence, someone in the audience was in the process of going out to complain but then the image reappeared and they returned to their seat (Dominique Païni in *Cinéma 81* 271–272 [July/August 1981]).

164. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 256. Elsewhere Debord characterizes the same group as one in which "everybody consumed more glasses of wine daily than the number of lies told by a union leader during the entire duration of a wildcat strike" (p. 232).

165. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 235.

166. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 252.

167. For more information on "The Game of War," see the rulebook published by the Société des jeux stratégiques et historiques (Paris 1977). Together with Alice Becker-Ho, Debord has published a detailed record of one "game" under

the title *Le jeu de la guerre: Relevé des positions successives de toutes les forces au cours d'une partie* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1987).

168. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 215.

169. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 265.

170. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 265.

171. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 264.

172. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 262.

173. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 278.

174. *In Girum*, in Debord, *Oeuvres cinématographiques*, p. 237–38.

175. As announced in an extended article on the film in *Libération* (3 June 1981), there was a screening of *In Girum* at 4 A.M. on the pirate television station "Canal 68" on 4 June 1981.

176. *Ordures et décombres déballés à la sortie du film "in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni"* (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1982). There are at least two further reviews of the film not included in this volume: the first, by Régis Jauffret, was published in *Art Press* 50 (Summer 1981), p. 34; the second, an extended, sympathetic, and quite informed treatment by Lucien Logette, appeared in *Jeune cinéma* 137 (September–October 1981), pp. 23–25.

177. In *Potlatch* 15 ([December 1954]; *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, p. 91; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 192) the journal announces the completion of the first LI experiment in radio propaganda, a piece entitled "La valeur éducative" (The educational value). This "unusual" tape, offered to any radio station willing to take the risk of playing it, was composed *entirely* of detourned phrases taken from Bossuet, Demangeon and Meynier, an article in *France-Soir*, Marx and Engels, Saint-Just, and from the books of Jeremiah, Psalms, and Samuel. The text of the program was then published in its entirety in the subsequent issues of the journal: *Potlatch* 16 ([January 1955]; *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 100–102; also in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 195–96); *Potlatch* 17 ([February 1955]; *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 112–13; Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 199–200); *Potlatch* 18 ([March 1955]; *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, pp. 121–23; also in Berreby, *Documents*, pp. 203–4). It is signed Guy-Ernest Debord.

178. *Potlatch* 15 (December 1954); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, p. 91; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 192.

179. *Potlatch* 21 (June 1955); *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, p. 147; also in Berreby, *Documents*, p. 215.

180. *IS* 5 (December 1960), p. 11.

181. This fact, in turn, renders all the more curious (or perhaps symptomatic?) the virtually total lack of any reference to the films by Debord and the Lettrists in the secondary literature on the postwar experimental cinema. This striking absence is manifest not only in the already "classical" English-language accounts of the "international free cinema" by David Curtis, Stephen Dwoskin, P. Adam Sitney, and Parker Tyler, but even in more recent and specialized studies such as Peter Gidal's *Materialist Film* (London: Routledge, 1989).

182. It would be interesting to explore the connections between the "theory film" genre and other cinematic works that explicitly acknowledge their indebtedness to the SI such as Dusan Makavejev's *Sweet Movie* (dedicated to Raoul Vaneigem) and Godfrey Reggio's *La Prophétie* (dedicated to Debord).

183. Peter Wollen, "Counter Cinema: *Vent D'Est*," *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), pp. 6–16.

184. My treatment of the question of "political modernism" has benefited greatly from David Rodowick's impressive discussion of 1970s film theory in his recent study *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), esp. chapter two: "Modernism and Semiology," pp. 42–66.

185. Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 69–70.

186. "Il me semble qu'ici mon travail, très court mais étendu sur une période de vingt-six ans, a bien correspondu aux principaux critères de l'art moderne: (1) l'originalité fortement marquée au départ et la décision ferme de ne jamais faire 'la même chose' deux fois successivement, tout en ayant un style et une thématique personnelle toujours reconnaissables; (2) comprendre la société de son temps, *id est* l'expliquer en la critiquant, car il s'agissait manifestement d'un temps qui manquait davantage de critique que d'apologétique; (3) enfin, avoir été révolutionnaire *dans la forme et dans le contenu*, ce qui me paraît aller dans le sens de toutes les aspirations "unitaires" de l'art moderne, vers ce point où il a voulu aller au delà de l'art" (Guy Debord, letter to the author dated 24 April 1989).

on the Passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time:

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The exhibition was organized by Peter Wollen and Mark Francis, with Paul-Hervé Parsy, in consultation with Thomas Y. Levin, Greil Marcus, and Elisabeth Sussman

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