GUY DEBORD
UN ART DE LA GUERRE
(BnF François-Mitterrand Paris 13e
27 mars | 13 juillet 2013 | bnf.fr)
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Guy Debord (1931-1994) was both a poet, an artist, a revolutionary thinker, a magazine editor and a filmmaker. The archives purchased by the BnF in 2011 disclose the progress of his whole work but also the story of collective adventures that he often initiated. The exhibition will focus on the theory and methods that he used to fight tirelessly against the 'society of spectacle'.

Manuscripts, leaflets, posters, preparatory documents used for films, photographs, works either by Guy Debord or his fellow comrades are of course presented. But the exhibition also proposes to discover the whole of Debord's reading notes, always at the centre of his work and a mirror of his own life. These notes have never been presented before. All these documents allow to better understand the purpose of an author whose ideas are still very vivid in contemporary society.

“We are delighted to display today, at the BnF, the major part of Guy Debord’s archives. This is an outstanding collection that has been classified as a national treasure and acquired in 2011. The exhibition is going to revive an avant-garde which role is of capital importance, as can be seen every day.” declares Bruno Racine, President of the BnF.

Paris, 1953. At the far end of the rue de Seine, a young man writes on a wall in capital letters: NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS ! (NEVER WORK!)

Guy Debord never worked. He walked a lot on the streets of Paris, drank – and read – certainly more than others. In his works, whether books or films, he imagined the theoretical weapons for a ruthless critical thought of modern society. The avant-garde movements that he initiated - the Internationale lettriste (1952-1957) then the Internationale situationniste (1957-1972) – were the key instruments that allowed an organized struggle against anything impeding life as really lived.

Guy Debord was first of all the strategist of a war of movement against the pretences of our society. Very early, he precisely demonstrated the perverse effects of this society in the book he published in 1967, La Société du spectacle. The spectacle is fuelled by power, media, culture and by the wide variety of connected images. The spectacle governs our lives, separates us from others and is terrible against any form of protest that is immediately recuperated and deviated from its original focus. An illusory and widespread alienation, the spectacle is a culture in the broader sense of the word, governed by the market logic and daily relayed by goods. Fighting it means to organize and make use of a real art of war.

The exhibition organised at the BnF in Spring 2013 will focus on the strategy followed by Guy Debord and his companion-in-arms.

Created as early as 1956, the “Jeu de la guerre” by Guy Debord is both the strategic synthesis of his work and the key element of the exhibition. All periods and works are presented as specific movements within a larger fight to escape an organised system - based on the consumption of constantly renewed goods – and trying to govern our lives.

The exhibition revolves around the never-presented before collection of Guy Debord’s reading notes : this tireless reader wrote out on several hundreds of notecards the passages that he thought to be interesting ; he sometimes commented them, preparing this way future “detournements” (diversions) or sharpening his theoretical weapons by studying other authors.

“To know how to write, you need to have read. And to know how to read, you need to know how to live.” Starting from this principle, essential to Guy Debord’s work, the exhibition proposes to discover, period after period, the works, vision and experience of the thinker; it also focuses on a collective adventure that gathered people fighting to set up a society that they thought to be less absurd than the system of a market capitalist economy in full expansion.

Paris, 2013. On the banks of the Seine river, Guy Debord’s work is listed as a national treasure. The man becomes part of the spectacle that he constantly denounced. Along with him, though, he brought his art of war.
Guy Debord  
an art of war

Dates
March 27rd | July 13th 2013

Venue
Large gallery
BnF I François-Mitterrand
Quai François-Mauriac - Paris XIIIe
Métro : Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand (14), Quai de la Gare (6)
Bus : 62, 64, 89, 132 et 325

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From Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
on Sundays 13 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Closed on Mondays and public holidays
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Robaglia Design

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Illustrations

Illustrations available for promotion during the exhibition.
These illustrations can neither be touched up nor cropped.
Publication is free within the limits of five illustrations per medium.

Devant la galerie du Double Doute, passage Molière
De gauche à droite : Gil J Wolman, Mohamed Dahou,
Guy Debord, Ivan Chtcheglov, Juin 1954
Photographie anonyme
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Les amis du cinéma, annonce de la projection de
Hurlements en faveur de Sade, Octobre 1952
Papillon
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Tract d’annonce de la parution de l’Internationale situationniste,
photographie anonyme, n°4, Juin 1954
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Internationale situationniste, annonce pour
l’ouverture du bar La Méthode, (octobre 1958)
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Guy Debord photographié passage Molière, Paris
Juin 1954
Photographie anonyme
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Guy Debord, fiche de lecture, dossier « Philosophie, sociologie »
August von Cieszkowski, Prélégénères à l’histoire philosophique
[publié en français par les Editions Champ Libre, 1973]
Manuscrit autographe
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

International lettriste, « Si vous vous croyez du génie... »
Tract, décembre 1954
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Guy Debord, fiche de lecture, dossier « Marxisme »
Anton Pannekoek, lettre à un ami, publiée dans
Conseils ouvriers et utopie socialiste, 1952,
uméro spécial des Cahiers de discussion pour le socialisme de conseil,
Novembre 1968
Manuscrit autographe
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Tract d’annonce de la parution de l’Internationale situationniste,
edition n°4, Juin 1954
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Les amis du cinéma, annonce de la projection de
Hurlements en faveur de Sade, Octobre 1952
Papillon
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord
Guy Debord, In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni
Manuscrit autographe du titre, 1978
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Guy Debord, note inédite
Manuscrit autographe,
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

CMDO [Conseil pour le maintien des occupations]
Occupation des usines, mai 1968
Affiche
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

CMDO [Conseil pour le maintien des occupations]
A bas la société spectaculaire-marchande, mai 1968
Affiche
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

CMDO [Conseil pour le maintien des occupations]
Fin de l’université, mai 1968
Affiche
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Guy Debord, Le jeu de la Guerre
Un des cinq exemplaires fabriqués, avec ses pions (34 pièces), 1979
Cuivre argenté
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Alice et Guy Debord jouant au Jeu de la Guerre, août 1987
Photographie de Jeanne Cornet
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord

Guy Debord, photo-montage conservée dans l’ensemble des « Chutes de phrases découpées (après Mémoires) », 1958
BnF, dpt. Manuscrits, fonds Guy Debord
Foreword

The exhibition ‘Guy Debord – An Art of War’, presented at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, is mainly organized around Guy Debord’s archives. Classified as a national treasure in 2009, they have been added to the BnF’s collections in 2011. They are open to researchers at the Department of Manuscripts. Gathered in the same place, manuscripts and working documents interact with one another to disclose the interplay of thoughts underlying the construction of Debord’s work. In the exhibition, documents will be displayed, presented and placed in their historical context so that visitors can reorganize the network of information contained in the archives: it is an opportunity to bring this adventure back to life for a while.

Founder of the two avant-garde movements, the ‘Internationale lettriste’ (1952-1957) and the ‘Internationale situationniste’ (1957-1972), Guy Debord always had comrades to share his projects. Very much concerned by the memory of their actions, he took care to preserve his own manuscripts and the ones with which he had been entrusted. The exhibition will propose to discover a wide and rich variety of documents about the activities of the ‘I. L.’ and the ‘I. S.’

The center of the exhibition space presents a large selection of Debord’s collection of 1400 reading notes. These manuscripts have never been presented before and are the focal point of the exhibition. Over four hundred other documents are on display: manuscripts, photographs, working papers, posters, leaflets, art works and extracts from sound and video archives. The exhibition aims to provide visitors with ‘keys’ to understand the story of Guy Debord and his comrades and how their projects and ideas can relate to a period that vastly shaped our contemporary world.

It was important to focus on very specific moments of that story. This is why several sets of documents – besides Guy Debord’s reading notes – are particularly highlighted: photographs by Ed van der Elsken from the series that provide material to his 1956 book, ‘Love on the left bank’. These show some of Debord’s friends in their everyday life, wandering the streets of Paris or meeting at Moineau’s, a café set in the margins of the more bourgeois and touristy Saint-Germain-des-Prés of Café de Flore and Le Tabou club. Some of these photographs have never been presented before; a picture wall showing over 40 portraits of Situationnists, that should give some presence to this collective adventure; a set of audiovisual extracts from INA collections which will allow to contextualize the situationnists’ position towards the events that took place at that time, from Watts riots (United States) in 1965 to cybernetics and how it can be used in everyday life; extracts from filmed interviews by Olivier Assayas of key witnesses of the lettrist and situationnist stories; a highly visual presentation of some of Debord’s material for his 1970s movies, La Société du spectacle and In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni: these wide collection of clippings from lifestyle, news or erotic magazines gives a strong sense of what Debord analyzed as the development of frenetic consumerism in the Seventies. Eventually, the ‘Jeu de la guerre’, one of Debord’s main – though less famous – works, will be presented in a dedicated room.

Art works, manuscripts and audiovisual or sound archives in addition to INA’s collection complement the documents from the Guy Debord collection. These pieces have been generously loaned by Olivier Assayas, Michèle Bernstein, Alice Debord, Paul Destribats, Anneke Hilhorst, Bernard Renardineau, Luc Volatier, Barbara and Hedy Laure Wolman, the Pompidou Centre, the Hôtel Ambassade (Amsterdam), the Länsmuseet (Halmstad, Sweden), Ronny van de Velde Gallery (Anvers) and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam).
Though often very superficially, we know Guy Debord’s and project mainly through his most famous work, La Société du spectacle (The Society of Spectacle). Today, the expression is widely used and the word’s meaning covers all spheres of life, even more than in the Sixties. A widespread alienation and illusion, the spectacle is a culture in the broader sense of the word, governed by the market logic and daily embodied by commodities.

Another way of life is possible and one should try to set it up: this project guides Debord as soon as he enters the avant-garde. His whole life was dedicated to this struggle. The spectacle is a force in constant motion that shapes everything in its own image. Fighting it and meeting such a challenge means to organize and make use of a real art of war. Since the struggle cannot be achieved on equal terms, the only way to impede the enemy’s movements is to have a tireless determination and organize the necessary means and forces.

The Jeu de la guerre was imagined by Guy Debord as early as in the mid-fifties. It shows how Debord considered any action plan from a strategic perspective. His archives’ reading notes disclose the same concern: to make one’s voice heard, one should understand the enemy’s strategy and become a strategist in one’s own art. Strategic reflection and reading are recurring elements in Guy Debord’s archives; they guide our steps and thoughts to review the author’s actions and the story of the two avant-garde movements that he created. The exhibition follows a chronological order with a highlight on major themes and moments that will be described according to the vocabulary of the Jeu de la guerre. They allow to understand the different stages of Guy Debord’s thoughts and actions.

1931 - 1951
Blowing up bridges

Guy Debord spends his childhood and youth in a rather comfortable family background. But the young man soon starts singing the battle song, stating that his current way of life is contrary to his need of broader horizons. In his letters to Hervé Falcou, his closest friend at secondary school, Guy Debord identifies the problems for which he will then try to find concrete solutions. One question sums up everything: how to find a better way of life? What is the sinews of war, the problem which stops individuals from realizing their aspirations in everyday life? ‘Blowing up bridges’ should be the first step.

The excerpts from letters to Hervé Falcou next to photographs of the young Debord in Cannes illustrate the gap that separates him from his home background and will be impossible to fill. In 1951, on the fringes of the Cannes festival, the lettrists come and attend the screening of Isidore Isou’s film, Traité de bave et d’éternité. Guy Debord takes this opportunity to meet the members of the only protest movement that he considers to be worthwhile. Childhood ends with this meeting that takes him from Cannes to Paris, where he starts discovering the avant-garde.
Guy Debord’s reading room

A rebellious spirit and an avid taste for reading link this first phase of Debord’s life to the one starting in 1951. The reading notes with quotations to be remembered are at the heart of his thought in the making. This set of documents is an opportunity to approach Debord’s work in a way that was never proposed so far.

For over forty years, Debord wrote down quotations to be remembered or re-used and sometimes commented them. He would use any piece of paper he could find at his fingertips but most of the time small white Bristol cards, namely over 1400 pages in all. These notes make up a continuous dialogue between the author and those who formerly attempted to understand the world; a dialogue between them all and us as readers of these notes today.

These reading notes compose the key element of the exhibition; not only because they have never been presented before but also because they are preparatory documents for the whole of Debord’s work. Eventually, they arouse emotions as they are both the starting point of Debord’s reflection and the final set of documents to refer to. Personal notes are regularly added to the quotations. The past meets the present to make up the near future: this is one of the main goals of the situationist practice of “détournement”. This weapon of choice in Debord’s arsenal consists in diverting from general culture an element of text (or and image) and use it in a new, unexpected context, with no reference to the original source. “Détournement” soon became the situationist hallmark.

1951 - 1954
The approach

Parties involved

The ‘détournement’ is also the method used by Guy Debord to create his first work, the 1952 film, Hurlements en faveur de Sade. Gathered around Isidore Isou and Gabriel Pomerand, the lettrists claim the results of their work not only in the field of poetry and painting; in their films, they systematically use deconstructions, ruining the status of images as it was formerly conceived.

Le Traité de bave et d’éternité by Isidore Isou (1951), L’Anticoncept by Gil J Wolman (1952) and Guy Debord’s film are the three mainstays of this experimental cinema that tries to revolutionize the codes of representation.

This period is also the happiest moment in Debord’s youth. He succeeds in living a life that won’t be possible to experience anymore in the future. In cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, especially at Moineau’s, a crowd meets night and day, does not work, succeeds in living on hardly anything, shares pleasures and games. Immortalized by Ed van der Elsken’s book, Love on the left bank, this crowd seems to live a life both intense and idle.

Numerous and never-presented before photographs of the artist will be projected to recreate this atmosphere.
The avant-garde of the avant-garde

Very soon, Guy Debord perceives that widening the actions of this avant-garde movement – and of lettrism also – means to go further than the mere artistic field. Since the spectacular society touches all areas of life, fighting its pretences means to go and uncover them wherever they can be. So, it is essential to be even more scandalous and get involved in a global criticism of society. With Gil J Wolman, his closest friend at that time, Debord decides to set up his own avant-garde movement in June 1952. At the Conference of Aubervilliers in December the same year, the founding principles of the new Internationale lettriste are laid down. An eponymous magazine will disseminate the movement’s ideas. Four issues will be published, and soon replaced by a cheaper but more efficient and widely distributed periodical publication, Potlatch.

During the first public demonstration of the movement, a flyer entitled Fini les pieds plats is distributed to a selected audience; this event really stirs things up. Criticizing Chaplin who came to Paris and promoted his last film, Limelight, the ‘Internationaux lettristes’ attack an artist whose art – cinema- they considered as reactionary because it favours a passive behaviour of the audience. The technique of “metagraphy”, or collage, first imagined by the lettrists, is then widely explored by the 'Internationaux lettristes'. As in ‘détournement’, photographs and sentences are cut and organized to arouse another meaning: criticism and humour are prominent in these works. The first exhibition of metagraphies is presented at the Galerie du Double Doute, passage Molière, in 1954. The same year, Gil J Wolman makes HHHHHH, Un Homme saoul en vaut deux.

1954 - 1961
Deployment

Lines of communication : from Potlatch to the ‘Internationale situationniste’

After the period of the four ‘Internationale lettriste’ issues, the movement spreads out with the publication of Potlatch, a formidable and hilarious newsletter: conceived as critical observation instrument of political and cultural events in France and abroad, Potlatch prepares the ground for the future ‘Internationale situationniste’. Guy Debord’s avant-garde turns progressively to the main goal to reach: the revolution of everyday life.

In contemporary lives, there is room for art as the expression of feelings and desires. However, if it remains confined to a circle of initiates, art loses its subversive power. This is why the ‘Internationale lettriste’ and the ‘Internationale situationniste’ wish to put art at the core of everyday life and give it the necessary impetus and power to supersede itself.

As early as September 1953, Guy Debord puts down these new strategic elements in the unpublished text, Manifeste pour une construction de situations. It will be reused four years later in the I.S. founding text, the Rapport sur la construction des situations, et sur les conditions de l’organisation et de l’action de la tendance situationniste internationale. One month later, in July 1957, the ‘Internationale situationniste’ is founded. Thanks to its eponymous magazine, much more distributed than Potlatch, the ‘I. S.’ finds the way to broadly disseminate its ideas. Various working documents illustrate this organization dedicated to the dissemination of I.S.’ issues: an unexpected colour chart of metallic papers, an edited layout of the magazine, a selection of situationist flyers, and various inking-pads for correspondence.
The arsenal: theories and practices

The Situationists keep leading actions in the sphere of art but in their own way. On January 1958, the series of situationist practices to set up is presented in a flyer entitled Nouveau théâtre d’opérations dans la culture: continuous play activity, “dérive” (urban drift), psychogeography, experimental behaviour, ‘détournement’, unitarian urbanism and construction of situations should allow to broaden one’s horizon with an opportunity to live unexpected, surprising and exotic situations.

Each of these methods will be illustrated by a few creations. For ‘Détournement’, two paintings by Asger Jorn, Apollinaire and Bersaerkerne sont parmi nous; for unitarian urbanism, model of the project New Babylon by Constant or the Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau by Ivan Chtcheglov; for experimental behavior, photographs of Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio’s workshop of industrial painting; for the urban drift and psychogeography, two maps by Guy Debord, The Naked city and Discours sur les passions de l’amour, printed in May 1957 in Copenhagen. At that time, the most beautiful illustration of ‘détournement’ is Mémoires, a book created by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn in 1958. The three phases of the work’s creation will be presented: organization of sentences cut by Debord, creation of supporting elements by Asger Jorn, juxtaposition of the two former phases before final printing.

Troops

Each member of the group contributes to setting up the situationist movement; the group grows and evolved with new meetings and according to the way the project progresses. The Situationists are famous for exclusion practices of which certain excluded members have particularly bad memories. The names of leaving members were mentioned in the group’s magazine and departures justified by the necessity to carry out the situationist project and reflect an constantly evolving context. These exclusions also matched the refusal of the I. S. to be over-zealous in recruiting new members. Eventually, human relationships, certain members’ preferences and mistrusts of the others, also played a part in the group’s inner changes. Asger Jorn, Michele Bernstein, Constant, Pinot-Gallizio, Mustapha Khayati, Raoul Vaneigem, René Viénet and many others: to pay tribute to this collective adventure, a wall of portraits will present the faces of about 40 members of the movements, some famous, some little known.

Internal revolts and rebellions

Some of the former situationists kept a specific place among the excluded members: either dissidents or rebels, they went on with the adventure, always taking a stand in front of the movement which had excluded them: today, they allow to write a broader and more international story of the I. S. Debord paid particular attention to everything connected to Jorgen Nash’s ‘2nde Internationale situationniste’, the path of members of the SPUR group and to Jacqueline de Jong’s Situationist Times.

These movements will be presented through printed documents and flyers. A painting of the German SPUR group, hung on the walls of Guy Debord’s flat in the Sixties, will be presented as well.
1961 - 1967

Maneuvers

External maneuvers: political and international repositioning

It is precisely the changes in the strategy of the I. S. that justify the exclusion of such artists in 1962. From 1959 to 1962, a series of maneuvers makes the movement move from the artistic to the political field. Art is though once again used by Debord to express this re-orientation: on June 1963, for the exhibition ‘Destructuon of RSG-6’ at the EXI gallery (Odense, Denmark) he writes out on blank canvases the five directives that will become famous: ‘Dépassement de l’art’, ‘Réalisation de la philosophie’, ‘Tous contre le spectacle’, ‘Abolition du travail aliéné’, ‘Non à tous les spécialistes du pouvoir / les conseils ouvriers partout’. These slogans illustrate a concern to be more immediately and efficiently active in the battlefield, but also a significant contradiction: how can one seriously pretend to supersede art by using paint on a canvas?

In the early 1960s, Debord meets the group gathered around Cornelius Castoriadis, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and collaborates with Daniel Blanchard, alias Canjuers, to write Préliminaires pour une définition de l’unité du programme révolutionnaire. As a notebook shows, Debord attended some of the group’s meetings. Another notebook records exchanges with the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Debord also attends the sessions of the ‘Groupe de recherche sur la vie quotidienne’ organised by Lefebvre at the Centre d’Études Sociologiques located rue Cardinet. For Debord, this is a good opportunity to promote the ideas of the I. S. without compromising his position towards an academic circle that he condemns. But he knows that, in this circle, he can reach interlocutors ready for revolutionary practices.

Foreign countries also take an active part in this new strategy. A rather wide network of transnational communications is set up and grows during the Sixties: for instance, it is from Japan that Debord gets news from the Zengakuren movement; he receives publications by Dieter Kunzelmann, former member of the SPUR, from Germany; the anarchistic artists of Black Mask, Ben Morea and Ron Hahne send him their magazines from New York.

To complement archive documents housed in the Debord collection, a rich selection of audiovisual excerpts from the INA collections will also be presented. An opportunity to discover faces and voices of protagonists in the field.

Opening fire and calling to arms

While getting in touch with sympathizers abroad, at the very moment when the I.S. really takes a political turn, Debord works on his major work, La Société du spectacle. It is first published by Buchet-Chastel in 1967. The same year, Raoul Vaneigem publishes his Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations. Both texts offer a theoretical basis for a growing protest movement. They also contribute to increasing the situationists’ audience after the scandal that took place in Strasbourg the year before.

Scandal is a practice inherited from the avant-garde. In November 1966, the Strasbourg scandal is partly organized from Paris by Guy Debord, then taken over on site by Mustapha Khayati and a group of sympathizers who publish at the UNEF’s expense the pamphlet entitled De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectual et quelques moyens pour y remédier. The pamphlet is distributed to students and prominent academics. The Situationists state the fact that students live in poverty both at university and in general; but they also add that students do not deserve to be taken seriously from a revolutionary perspective: students think they are free, rebellious and Bohemian whereas they just learn how to comply with and take part in the system. Widely passed on by the national press, the ‘Strasbourg scandal’ is a success.
1968
The charge of the light brigade

The years 1966 and 1967 are trial gallops before the charge of the light brigade that occurs the following year. May 1968 is the climax in the situationist attack on the old world. The forerunners of an international revolutionary fervour have been announced for the past ten years in the pages of the I. S.’ magazine. Analyses and theories then developed by the Situationists have been corroborated by the events: role of young people and workers, mistrust towards bureaucratic and trade-union apparatuses, criticism of alienation as the instrument of capitalist domination in all fields of existence.

A group of activists, Les Enragés, gathers anarchist students behind the first clashes in Nanterre. They share with Situationists an anti-authoritarian and anti-bureaucratic perspective and their critique of traditional activism; they will be their comrades in struggle. Together, they publish flyers and take part in the night of the barricades, rue Gay-Lussac, on May the 10th and 11th; on May the 14th, they make up the Enragés-Internationale situationniste Committee that joins in the Sorbonne Occupation Committee.

But fairly soon, groups of the far Left, in particular the Fédération des étudiants révolutionnaires (Trotskyists), are irritated by the preponderant role of the Enragés-Situationnistes in the Occupation Committee. On May the 17th, in the crush, the Enragés-Situationnistes leave the Sorbonne. The day after, they set up a “Council for the Maintaining of the Occupations” the C.M.D.O., rue d’Ulm. Posters edited by the C.M.D.O tell for instance: ‘Occupation des usines’, ‘A bas la société spectaculaire marchande’, ‘Fin de l’université’. Graphically speaking, they are still striking today as typical of that period.

Jacqueline de Jong or Asger Jorn – the latter after May 68 – also participate in making posters that are the best communication documents - with graffiti and flyers - between protesters. Photographs of graffiti made by Jo Schnapp illustrate the situationist inspiration at work in the streets. They were first edited in Walter Lewino’s work, L’imagination au pouvoir : inscriptions murales de mai 1968 (Paris, Eric Losfeld Editeur, Le Terrain Vague, 1968), then in Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations, published the same year by René Viénet.

1969 - 1994
New lines of communication

The Internationale situationniste breaks up

Today, May 68 is considered as the conclusion of the situationist adventure because the group refused to take advantage of laurels that would have been to the movement’s advantage. The I. S. thought that the movement would go even further in keeping with the results of May 68 revolution. On the contrary, the movement was followed by a countercultural wave and most of May radical practices were dissolved. In the long-term, the revolutionary upsurge was going to die.

First of all, it is the political hijacking of May riots that pushes Guy Debord and the Situationists out of the future course of events; then, it is the official history. The movement tends to be cumbersome, a feeling increased by Debord’s mistrust towards the ones who then started to admire en masse the famous ‘situs’. In September 1969, the 18 members of the I. S. meet in Venice and dedicate themselves to long working sessions using numerous preparatory documents. One of the major issues is the organization of the movement which illustrates the crisis within the I. S. The new statutes adopted at the end of the conference confirm the dissolution of the movement: the I. S., accepting the principle of different tendencies within the movement, condemns itself to scission. In April 1972, La véritable scission dans l’Internationale is published; it is the end of the situationist adventure.
The post-situationist extension

At the same time, situationist ideas are very successful among young people. There is an increasing number of ‘pro-situs’ groups - having a real taste for scandal and hating bureaucracy - who keep disseminating the group’s theories. They have played an active part in transmitting the history and spirit of the movement up to now. Magazines such as En cuestión or Re-fuse result of this legacy. But much criticized in essays about the I. S. and its time (introduction to La Véritable scission dans l’Internationale), the ‘pro-situs’ are blamed for favouring the commodification of revolutionary radicalism.

Definitely against the spectacle

Guy Debord keeps struggling against spectacle wherever it may be. With the agent and producer Gérard Lebovici, his new comrade, he takes up direction again, more than ten years after his last short film, Critique de la séparation. In 1973, he adapts La Société du spectacle for the screen. Like In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni shot five years later, the film is essentially made up of a succession of magazine clippings. Girls in bikini, piles of food, interior decoration, happy consumers promoting the qualities of new products, conflicts and wars as presented in the media: all these images show how the spectacle pervades the perception of our lives and the one of others. They do not need any other words or explanations; they tell that the battle against spectacle has been lost. Only a total rejection of these illusory and authoritarian representations of our lives would allow to win.

These images can be read as the photographic negatives of Debord’s work between 1972 and 1994. They try to claim the supremacy of a world while Debord tries to show this world is deceptive. These images, like written or filmed works made during this period, illustrate the same goal: even if theories developed in former years were not enough, even if the May 68 revolution had no impact on the economic organization of our lives, it is essential not to lose sight of the enemy and denounce its actions.

Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu’hostiles, qui ont été jusqu’ici portés sur le film La Société du spectacle (1975), Ordures et décombres déballés à la sortie du film In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni (1982), Considérations sur l’assassinat de Gérard Lebovici (1984), Commentaires sur la société du spectacle (1988) or Cette mauvaise réputation (1993)… : all the texts written during the last twenty years of Debord’s life are not only biographical documents or texts used to defend ideas. The Commentaires sur la société du spectacle, though less well-known, are the necessary and incisive complement to thoughts developed in 1967. In Réfutation, Debord both comments the bad reviews about his film La Société du spectacle and the nature of blindness at the source of criticisms: “No film is more difficult than its era. For example, there are people who understand, and others who do not understand, that when the French were presented with a new ministry called the “Quality-of-Life Ministry,” this was nothing but a ploy, designed, as Machiavelli put it, “to allow them to retain at least the name of what they had already lost. (…) Those who understand such things will understand my film; and I don’t make films for those who don’t understand such things, or who make it their business to prevent others from understanding.”
Another way to make people ‘understand’ is to give an account of one’s projects and desires all through one’s own life.

This is Guy Debord’s aim during the last ten years of his life when he writes *In girum*, then the two volumes of *Panégyrique*. When writing the first volume of *Panégyrique* in 1989, he does not know he already suffers from an alcoholic polyneuropathy. Instead of physical degeneration irremediably connected to that kind of disease, he will rather choose to commit suicide.

So, it is not because death approaches that Debord hurries to tell the story of his life. He even started to write his Mémoires very early, when he was still a young man, in 1958. In *Panégyrique*, Debord rather depicts a specific way of living and states that another life is possible. The text can be read as Debord’s last opportunity to be heard: the situationist project can take shape in a specific way of life. At the end of his life, Debord stays in several countries and cities. The map, as the essential tool of both the traveller and the strategist, is a recurring iconographic element of *Panégyrique* tome second (published posthumously in 1997): Paris, Italy, Spain, even the map of the *Jeu de la guerre*, illustrate Debord’s own course through life and the world.

The “*Jeu de la guerre*”

As if to practice tactical moves, Debord devises a *Jeu de la guerre* as soon as 1956. The rules are written in 1965 and state that one should aim to ‘destroy entirely the enemy’s military potential’ – or in a few words, to prevent him/her from causing damage. In *Le Jeu de la guerre*, relevé des positions successives de toutes les forces au cours d’une partie* (Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord, Paris, Gérard Lebovici, 1987), Debord notes that “this result can be achieved either by destroying all the fighting units or by attacking the enemy’s two arsenals.” Another tactics consists in stopping the enemy army by cutting its communication lines.

What could appear as a hobby like playing chess or draughts becomes the symbol of a form of protest. This is why it is tempting to compare the *Jeu de la guerre* with Guy Debord’s avant-garde activity. Does he not mention in the rules written in 1965 that “this game is primarily dedicated to the international situationist movement so that its members can practice dialectics in case of necessity”? We must not forget that certain games have been used for a long time in battle training. The *Jeu de la guerre*, and formerly chess, were conceptual models intended for those who would like to go to war.

On the back of a 1965 prototype of Debord’s game one can read ‘Kriegspiel Clausewitz-Debord’. The game is presented as a faithful development on Clausewitz’s theory. The items on display all illustrate a Kriegspiel imagined with much strategy: they include preparatory documents, various notes, the board made in 1978, the small soldiers from Guy Debord’s collection, documents about the creation of the Société des jeux stratégiques et historiques. This game was invented in 1956 and improved until the late eighties at the least. As with any other game, each time, one should ‘start again at the beginning’ to improve the impact of one’s moves.