

# **UCLA**

## **Paroles gelées**

### **Title**

Oublier l'avant-garde ?

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9tw5f07t>

### **Journal**

Paroles gelées, 16(2)

### **ISSN**

1094-7264

### **Author**

Fourny, Jean-François

### **Publication Date**

1998

### **DOI**

10.5070/PG7162003083

Peer reviewed

## Oublier l'avant-garde?

---

Jean-François Fourny

This presentation will deal with what is generally referred to as the second moment of the avant-garde in France in the twentieth century. The Situationist International (SI) was active in the late fifties and the sixties (1957-1972) so it came after surrealism and before the Tel Quel Group (TQ). These three intellectual movements shared many features, the main one being that they were all self-appointed avant-gardes before the very term avant-garde would be dropped for reasons I will discuss later. As for the differences between surrealism, situationism, and the TQ group, I will just mention for the moment that, unlike surrealism and TQ, situationism and its driving intellectual force, that is Guy Debord, remained largely ignored, underresearched, or, I'd rather say, forgotten until the mid-nineties. Let us just say that it is still somehow shrouded in mystery. Thus, the question of why Guy Debord and the situationists were suddenly remembered, or rediscovered, in the 90s must be addressed as a flow of books keeps appearing in several countries. It should first be said that this quasi-disappearance from the cultural memory for nearly twenty-five years had nothing to do with a lack of relevance: on the contrary, one may suspect that it was voluntary until it became impossible to ignore Debord any longer. Today Debord and his opus magnum *The Society of the Spectacle* are everywhere. However, it would be easy to show that Debord generates an enormous anxiety of influence since most French or Italian intellectuals who have made it their business to talk about society and the media, alleged hyperreality, or the role of images in today's world, define Debord negatively or start by taking a stand against him so that everybody understands that they will not repeat Debord. In other words, let's make sure that we exclude Debord before saying anything meaningful about the society of the spectacle we live in. No doubt Debord, who shot himself in 1994, was aware he was voluntarily forgotten by those who were so indebted to him; but he had never been interested in stardom, unlike Breton or Sollers, leaders of past and future avant-gardes. In fact, he had started killing himself through drink well before he committed suicide, as if his death was the price or the sacrifice to pay for future recognition. He wrote shortly before his death:

[J]'ai aimé ce qui est au delà de la violente ivresse, quand on franchit ce stade: une paix magnifique et terrible, le vrai goût du passage du temps . . . c'est un fait que j'ai été continuellement ivre tout au long de périodes de plusieurs mois; et encore, le reste du temps, avais-je beaucoup bu. (*Panegyrique* 43)

And then Debord, the man who first wanted to forget himself, proudly quotes Chinese poet Li Po: “Depuis trente ans je cache ma renommée dans les tavernes” (47).

Nevertheless, it remains true that the reason why Debord could not be entirely forgotten and is now being resuscitated is because his work amounts to a powerful updating of Marx’s *Capital* that can be summarized by the famous thesis No. 34 of *The Society of the Spectacle*: “The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.” Here, the word “image” should encompass, of course, the images provided by the media but also the spectacle of speculation where capital is denoted by absurdly abstract and unreal numbers such as 7,000,000,000,000 (whatever the currency) manipulated by people who don’t even know what they are referring to (Bracken). In fact, no one knows what these figures refer to because they cannot be broken down into a precise and conceivable amount of hours of work, manufactured objects, square miles of property, and so on.

Along with the first serious, not to say prophetic, thinking on the identity between media and late capitalism, Debord and the situationists also provided a new approach to architecture and the modern city while challenging, well before poststructuralism, the notion of the author. Thus, my point is that situationism was the most productive avant-garde of the century. Surrealism has been relegated to museums and turned into an object of historical study. As for TQ, although credited for diffusing a new type of literary theory in the sixties and seventies, it amounts no more today than to another object of study or section of a PhD exam reading list. Debord, as opposed to Breton and Sollers, remains a most intimidating presence.

I would like, in what follows, to start briefly with three current and accepted definitions of what an avant-garde is in the historical sense. In a second part I will propose to compare surrealism and situationism so as to outline their common features—often typical of all avant-gardes—and their very real differences. I will finally try to ascertain the relevancy of Debord’s writings in the context of French media studies since important figures such as Pierre Bourdieu and Régis Debray are now condescending to busy themselves with the impact of television and images on society. And I will also try to explain why Debord disappeared from public memory for so long.

### What is an Avant-Garde?

In his well-known *Sociology of Culture* Raymond Williams spends a fair amount of time on avant-gardes and literary movements so as to establish a typology. Based on what he calls “Internal organization,” Williams

divides these movements into three groups:

- 1) Those based on formal membership, with varying modes of internal authority or decision, and of constitution and election;
- 2) Those not based on formal membership, but organized around some collective public manifestation, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical, or an explicit manifesto;
- 3) Those not based on formal membership or any sustained collective public manifestation, but in which there is conscious association or group identification, either informally or occasionally manifested, or at times limited to immediate working or more general relations (68).

As examples of group 2 (“Those not based on formal membership, but organized around some collective public manifestation, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical, or an explicit manifesto”) Williams mentions the Futurists and the surrealists. I should point out that situationism met the criteria of both group 1 (“Those based on formal membership, with varying modes of internal authority or decision, and of constitution and election”) and group 2 since it was organized as an international association.

More interestingly, Williams argues that the emergence of these so-called “alternative and oppositional groups” is indicative of changes in the social basis such as:

- A. The crisis of the transition from patronage to market.
- B. The crisis of the transition from handwork to machine production.
- C. Crises within both patronage and the market, in a period of intense and general social conflict.
- D. The attachment of certain groups to a pre-capitalist and/or pre-democratic social order.
- E. The attachment of other groups to the democratization of the social order, as part of the process of general liberation and human enrichment to which the arts, if they were allowed, could contribute. It is this last criterion that situationism fits in the pre-1968 years.

As for the other two definitions of the avant-gardes I will ask you to bear in mind, they are those of Andreas Huyssen and Peter Bürger, which pick up and develop the last point made by Raymond Williams about “the process of general liberation and human enrichment to which the arts, if they were allowed, could contribute.”

Huyssen defines modernism as an attempt to maintain art's autonomy and preserve its purity against mass culture, technology and urbanization (one can think of Adorno, among many others). On the contrary, the avant-gardes try to make art closer to everyday life, or equate both, which supposes a social vision or a certain sense of society's future. The important point here is that Huyssen posits an underground complicity between avant-gardes and official culture in industrial societies, since the former do not reject technology as promoted by the latter. They may object to the social uses of technology but still want to put it to better social uses: in other words, technology is liberating if you know how to use it. As we shall see in a moment, this statement fully applies to the situationists.

Finally, Peter Bürger does not differ much on this point with Huyssen, but adds that avant-gardes were always caught in an insuperable contradiction. On the one hand, free or true art supposes a distance that allows for a critical "cognition of reality." On the other hand, merging art and reality would abolish this distance and this freedom (240). That may explain why twentieth-century avant-gardes were destined to fail, and I am thus taking the word "avant-garde" in a limited historical sense.

I will just add, before moving on to situationism proper, that Williams, Huyssen, and Bürger pay very little attention to the role of scandal in the making of an avant-garde—scandal and its orchestration through manipulations of the press as dada and surrealism did. The reason why there are no more avant-gardes may also be explained by the fact that there can be no more scandals since we are used to everything. Or also, as Debord would probably suggest, because it is now the press that manipulates everything.

## Surrealism and Situationism

In 1958 the very first page of the very first issue of the journal *L'Internationale situationniste* opens with the title "Surrealism's Bitter Victory," and from its early days to its official disappearance in 1972, situationism will entertain its own anxiety of influence with surrealism, the first avant-garde, thus initiating a cascade of mimetic identifications with surrealism that will later be picked up by TQ.

Debord and his followers are literally obsessed with what they call the "avant-garde of the 30s," that is, surrealism, because, more than anything, they want to avoid "repetition." And I should point out right away that next to this situationist keyword, the terms "passé," "boredom," "everyday life," "playfulness," and "desire" represent the situationist lexical contributions to the events of May 1968. This obsessive fear of repetition may be ex-

plained by the fact that the structure of the literary field obviously contained since surrealism a space to be occupied by angry young men. It was thus structurally inevitable that the situationists would to some degree repeat the surrealists or would often give new names to surrealist practices while adamantly denying it. But first how did the situationists define themselves? Like the surrealists, they claimed to represent an artistic and political avant-garde aiming at social revolution. However, surrealism lost its revolutionary impulse when it allowed its art to be commodified and also because it believed too much in the unconscious and occultism. But also like the surrealists, the situationists found dictionary-like entries or definitions a most convenient way to introduce key concepts. I will mention just a few:

— PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY that studies the effects of the urban environment on emotions and behavior. On this the situationists are not being deeply original because it is a technocratic concern during this period of post-war reconstruction.

— DÉRIVE: “a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psycho-geographical effects, which completely distinguishes it from the classical journey and the stroll.” I would say that you still have to take a walk and that, in spite of their disclaimers, the situationist *dérive* remains very close to the surrealist stroll in Paris as described in *Nadja* or elsewhere. I would even add that the situationists here maintain, although in a repressed manner, the romantic element that since Baudelaire confers upon cities magic and mystery.

— SITUATION: Here I should mention that in the intellectual context of the times the word “situation” meant Jean-Paul Sartre, or his use of the term both as a key philosophical concept and the very visible title of a twelve-volume series of literary criticism started in 1948. When Sartre’s name is mentioned in situationist literature it is usually followed by insults, as to be expected in a general context of Sartre scapegoating. Still, the word “situation” is to be understood as “a constructed situation,” “a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events.”

— And finally, DÉTOURNEMENT: as “the integration of present and past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense, there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist

use of these means.” There is an essay (No. 3, p. 11) explaining what a *détournement* is supposed to be, but, to make a long story short, suffice it to say that Marcel Duchamp had already practiced it when painting a moustache on Mona Lisa. It simply means removing cultural artifacts from their context so as to show how meaningless they are. All these playful practices were to contribute enormously to the festive and carnivalesque atmosphere of May 1968.

As for other feared “repetitions” of features and tics of previous avant-gardes one could mention:

— the QUESTIONNAIRE addressed to readers, echoing the famous surrealist questionnaires on people’s sex life.

— the appeal to REVOLUTIONARY ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS, a surrealist “specialty” in the 1930s.

— the ANONYMOUS LETTERS from within the group and false death announcements as a symptom of the same INTERNAL CONFLICTS that had plagued surrealism. A dissident situationist faction announces officially in 1967 that Guy Debord passed away, an announcement that triggered an avalanche of angry denials and subsequent purges. Over fifteen years, and out of 70 members, 45 members were excluded, 19 resigned, and 2 took a secessionist stand (Gray 163). Debord will later be accused of being a CIA agent.

— HEGELIANISM. Hegelianism, here, should be understood as an attempt to reconcile what has been separated, to reunite the extremes within a totality. Breton yearned to reconcile the conscious and the unconscious or, as he put it so poetically, to reunite night and day. The twentieth-century avant-garde’s project to abolish the distinction between everyday life and art, as pointed out by Huyssen and Bürger, partakes of the same totalizing ambition aiming at reuniting the contraries. And I would add, in Debord’s case, a most Hegelian obsession with time.

### **The Society of the Spectacle Then and Now**

I don’t think that it would be too far-fetched to suggest that some current media events are not only predicted but described by *The Society of the Spectacle* that Debord wrote in 1967. To take a few examples thirty years later:

— As president in a recent movie Michael Douglas appears to be a better actor than Bill Clinton but not as good as Ronald Reagan.

— However, Bill Gates may very well be the best actor in the world and Karla Faye Tucker and Monica Lewinsky are in dead heat for the prize for best supporting actress.

— And in the past an important event used to be followed by a movie. Now, a movie featuring Dustin Hoffman (*Wag the Dog*, 1997) and depicting a sex-crazed president about to launch a questionable war comes first.

In other words, as Debord put it in Thesis No. 9 of *The Society of the Spectacle*, “In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood.” But what did Debord mean by “spectacle”?

The Spectacle can be said to represent a higher stage of capitalism and is consubstantial with the rule of the mafia. That is, the Spectacle and organized crime embody the supreme stage of capitalism when the mafia becomes the model for all business, but more on this later. The Spectacle is both a principle of world-wide unification and a principle of separation since access to reality is now mediated through representation and the word must somehow be understood as a *re-presentation* without origin in the Derridian sense. However, contrary to Derrida (and I mean the “classic” Derrida of the 60s and early 70s), this re-presentation or Spectacle is a social relationship translating class domination:

The Spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. (Thesis No. 4)

And again, mediation in the sense of separateness and unity:

The spectacle divides the world in two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division. Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness. (Thesis No. 29)

The society of the spectacle is the result of a long historical process that starts with the traditional privilege granted to *sight* by Western philosophy along with the technical rationality that turns the spectacle into the material reconstruction of the religious illusion (No. 20). However, this slow maturation will reach its full effects only when the modern State emerges through



Bonapartism. I do not need to dwell upon the importance of the two Napoleons to Hegelianism and Marxism, and Debord, after Marx, reads the Bonapartist episodes as the first fusion of State and capital, fusion that leads the bourgeoisie to relinquish all historical life so as to be reduced “to the economic history of things” as Marx put it. Consequently, the social cleavage expressed by the Spectacle goes hand in hand with the modern state. In Debord’s Hegelian *total history* very few periods can be said to represent freedom and true democracy.

Along with other twentieth-century left-wing mavericks such as Simone Weil, Debord developed a special fondness for Renaissance Florence. He agreed with Marx that the growth of cities and their increasing power as opposed to the backward countryside was an important step in the civilizing process. Here, the sixteenth-century Florentine Republic, maintaining its independence both against the feudal class and the emerging state, allowing a noisy street life and carnivals, epitomizes the very freedom the bourgeoisie and its state were soon to erase. Cities are at the heart of history, and in a way they are history, so the next step had to do with the reorganization of space and time.

In terms of space, and I am now returning to the situationist interest in urbanism through their concepts of psychogeography and urban *dérive*, the present period is marked by the disappearance of the traditional opposition between city and countryside. Let’s remember that Debord is writing during the post-war reconstruction era that saw the generalization of cars, television, and suburbs, and the quick elimination of the rural life millions of Europeans had shared for many centuries. Out of the same political milieu, for example, Jean Baudrillard was publishing his early books such as *La Société de consommation* or *Le système des objets*.

Through the suburb, the city disappears but so does the countryside: the suburbanized middle class replaces the peasants on the land in a pseudo-countryside without being either peasants or city dwellers. The reason is that the city means history and, of course, violence (because they are one and the same) so it had to be destroyed:

The city is the *locus of history* because it embodies at once a concentration of social power, which is what makes the historical enterprise possible, and a consciousness of the past. (Thesis No. 176)

And after all, what kind of truly historical event mobilizing masses of people could take place in a shopping mall parking lot? Moreover, if capital was in the past concentrated in cities it now needs to spread everywhere and absorb the periphery so as to reshape geography in its own image. A suburb

can thus be said to be the very face of capitalism for all to see. As Thesis No. 50 states: "Society in its length and breadth becomes capital's faithful portrait." But next to space, the reorganization of time also involves the eradication of memory, be it individual or collective.

A recent best-seller in France (Jean Ziegler, *Les seigneurs du crime: Les nouvelles mafias contre la démocratie*) is a fascinating study of the emergence of criminal cartels after the Cold War and the problems the authorities encounter when dealing with them. We are not talking here about the traditional neighborhood mafiosi but rather about gigantic organizations involved both in violent acts on a planetary scale so as to enforce their rule and crimes such as drug-trafficking, arms, and petrochemical and nuclear illegal exportation and, of course, money laundering. According to Ziegler, one of the reasons why the authorities' task has become nearly impossible is because time seems to have disappeared. Electronic communications make it possible to transfer money in a matter of seconds from one point of the planet to another or to make it vanish. I doubt very much that Guy Debord ever used a fax machine or sent an e-mail, but the 1967 book already announces the complete unification of human time and its natural cycles by the world market. And by natural cycles, I mean things as simple as night and day, with the different moods and maturation processes they may involve, the elementary sense of geographic distance, and so on. In other words it is history that has to go, history with its fragmented, parallel, and often contradictory times and memories. The Spectacle and the market can only tolerate the false immediacy of representation:

The development of capitalism meant the unification of irreversible time *on a world scale*. Universal history became a reality because the entire globe was brought under the sway of this time's progression . . . Unified irreversible time still belongs to the world market—and by extension, to the world spectacle. (Thesis No. 145)

If time in its individual and historical dimensions is now abolished, both history and memory are paralyzed (that's the word Debord uses). And one can think of the way the movie *Amistad*, with its false appearances of slaves in a Massachusetts court, is now marketed to high school teachers along with a Hollywood-designed handbook. The *Amistad* hero appeared before a Massachusetts court, even though historians deny he did, but he still did because we saw the movie. Guy Debord himself never appeared before a TV camera, so he never existed because we never saw him, and this *Amistad* anecdote clearly means that the Society of the Spectacle has completed Napoleon's project of "monarchically directing the energy of memories" (Debord's quote, Thesis No. 108).

I will now move on to my conclusion.

### For a Debordology

There is now in France something called *la dianologie*, in reference to the late Princess of Wales. One of the most amazing phenomena is that a sort of shrine has developed in Paris just above the tunnel in which she died and where people still come to pay their respects and leave flowers and notes. The first wave of mourners in the aftermath of her death was mostly American and European. Even more amazing, Lady Di's shrine is now mostly visited by poor Muslim women who have turned her into a saint because they think she was murdered by the British when about to convert to Islam. So Guy Debord was both right and wrong.

He was right because Lady Di somehow epitomized the society of the Spectacle and the false temporality of glamour and paparazzi, when land mines only become real because there is a picture of the Princess next to them before we move on to the next issue, be it the Albanians or the next White House scandal. He was wrong because this *unspectacular* anonymous female Islamic devotion brings back the archaic, such as a medieval spontaneous sanctification and the theological resistance that Islam, by the way, opposes to images. It is really not for me, as a man, to comment on Lady Di, who obviously struck a very deep chord in many women, but she was the Society of the Spectacle incarnate. Nevertheless, it is through her that what Debord was most concerned about is maintained. Debord feared that the little people, the average person, would never be able to register their lives or, literally, inscribe them. Thesis No. 157 about the little people:

Such individual lived experience of a cut-off everyday life remains bereft of language or concept, and it lacks any critical access to its own antecedents, which are nowhere recorded. It cannot be communicated. And it is misunderstood and forgotten to the benefit of the spectacle's false memory of the unmemorable.

To begin with, I doubt very much that the lived experience of the average person in Debord's beloved Florentine Republic was better recorded. Secondly, the little personal notes in Arabic and the flowers left every day on the Lady Di shrine are just that. They individually commemorate an event that took place a very long time ago in media terms—August of 1997—and are not meant to generate any money. They represent *the archaic* that the Society of the Spectacle still lives with and that Debord's books failed to envision.

And why is Debord both forgotten and remembered? That's what a *debordology* should explain and one easy, but also obvious, possible answer would be to say that he always refused to deal with the media. We all tend to personalize everything at the urge of the society of the spectacle and there are very few pictures of him and very few witnesses to his life. Moreover, and for reasons unclear, after May 1968 he spent several years hiding in Spain and Italy. A *debordology* would thus have to do without pictures, biography, literary anecdotes, and salacious stories, which would be a refreshing exercise.

A book as old as 1979, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France* by Régis Debray, created a scandal because it claimed that books' sales were strictly related to television appearances. In other words, literary fame and intellectual power had become a beauty contest with TV personalities as referees. Nearly ten years later, another book, *La République du centre*, written this time by three bourgeois intellectuals Debord would have deeply despised (Julliard, Rosanvallon, Furet), announced that le "créateur" had now replaced the flamboyant intellectual in the tradition of Voltaire, Hugo, Zola, Sartre, and Foucault. Since then, those in the generic category of *créateur*, which includes movie stars, top journalists, high fashion designers, great soccer players, and advertising executives, among others, were claiming for themselves the title of intellectuals. Hence the avalanche of bad novels and essays turned best-sellers written by journalists, reviewed by other journalists and promoted by newspapers, magazines, and TV programs run by the very same journalists. What the three authors of this book were worried about was the disappearance of scholarship or serious thinking at the expense of quickly written essays aimed at traditional Fall sales ("le roman de la rentrée") or at the literary prizes of the season.

Finally, now in 1998, another book became a best-seller—but this one Debord might have liked a lot because it could be regarded as an additional footnote to *The Society of the Spectacle* itself, an additional chapter to Marx. I should say, to be fair to Debord, that Serge Halimi's *Les nouveaux chiens de garde* adds very little at the theoretical level to *The Society of the Spectacle* but was not meant to be marketed the same way because it is, precisely, a 100-page essay. Halimi describes the interesting schedule of a well-known TV personality, Alain Duhamel, who can be described as a newspaper and TV journalist, a self-appointed authority on contemporary literature, a talk-show host, an expert on international and French politics, and, if time allows, a political science professor specializing in elections with an appointment in a Paris University. Here is his weekly schedule according to Halimi:

Duhamel speaks seven times on national radio between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1995. The following Saturday Duhamel is involved in a TV literary program. On Sunday morning, at 8 am, he hosts a political radio program. At noon, he quizzes a national politician on national TV. The next day, that is Monday, at 7:25 am, he is back on the same radio program. At 7:00 pm Duhamel runs a political TV program featuring the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, then departs immediately to another TV studio to interview, thirty minutes later, the President of the Republic. The following day, that is Tuesday, Duhamel is "l'invité" of a political program on the French equivalent of CNN. (Halimi 77)

I suppose that I do not need to comment on the quality of Duhamel's comments or recommendations when it comes to novels. More interestingly, *Les nouveaux chiens de garde* quotes Debord twice and, in particular, Debord quoting Hegel. So here is Halimi, quoting Debord's Thesis No. 127, himself quoting Hegel:

*C'est "l'interminable série des affrontements dérisoires" qu'évoquait Guy Debord dans La société du spectacle, avant d'en conclure, citant Hegel: "L'errance des nomades est seulement formelle, car elle est limitée à des espaces uniformes."* (Halimi 95)

So the nomads can go anywhere they want, but for Debord after Hegel, and unlike his contemporaries Deleuze and Guattari, they go nowhere because they never run into the mountains, the valleys, or city streets. It is because they travel the desert, the most enclosed of all territories, that their moves are meaningless just like Duhamel reviewing books he admits he did not have time to finish, or like Pat Buchanan "for the right" or Geraldine Ferraro "for the left" on CNN arguing within the confines of an intellectual desert preset by the network.

So Debord was both right and wrong. He was right, and convinced to be very right, in everything he predicted, well before Debray, Julliard, Rosanvallon, Furet, and Halimi, minus technicalities and anecdotes. He was wrong regarding memory. But first, why did Debord want to disappear?

An interesting essay on the Situationist International states that:

The quasi-clandestine nature of the organization as well as the systematic censorship that it had been subjected to by the political and artistic establishment, explain why so little is known and said about it. (Tardy 102)

And it is also true that Debord had also written:

Je méprise la presse, j'ai raison; et voilà pourquoi je refuse depuis toujours toute interview. Je la méprise pour ce qu'elle dit, et pour ce qu'elle est. (*Cette mauvaise* . . . 32)

I would only make one comment that may also apply to Huysen's and Bürger's views on the avant-garde, be it political or artistic. Revolutionary organizations want to change everyday life, that among their members themselves to begin with. Interpersonal dealings are supposed to be emancipated from greed, selfishness, and sexism as well as from any repressive type of morality in the midst of a society that is still dominated by them. Debord himself wrote:

The revolutionary organization cannot allow the conditions of division and hierarchy that obtain in the dominant society to be reproduced within itself. (Thesis No. 121)

However laudable this undertaking may be in itself, it amounts to claiming that the avant-garde is ahead of the rest of society and can only nurture an "us versus them" paranoia. Two left-wing groups that were born during the situationist / May 68 years, that is, the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* and *Lutte Ouvrière*, have been making an unexpected comeback during recent French elections. They claim to be the avant-garde of the proletariat and seem to be more interested in fighting each other rather than the bourgeoisie because, like all Girardian mimetic twins, they are very much alike. They are the most paranoid political organizations in France, with secret membership and meetings, their archaic Bolshevik rhetoric of the twenties, and an obsession with "deviationism" and police informants. These pathetic remnants of the sixties give us a good idea of what life was at the Situationist International. Thus, all I am suggesting is that the elitist mentality often cultivated by all these different groups and quickly turning into paranoia should be taken into account in the definition of the avant-garde in the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, and in spite of his own paranoid attempts to disappear and refusals to deal with the media, Debord is better known and read today than thirty years ago. In other words, the very unspectacular Debord survives in the Society of the Spectacle. And I would finally add that through

him the living memory of what was perhaps the true twentieth-century avant-garde survives because it was never commodified or turned into a spectacle as a pre-condition to being quickly forgotten.

*Jean-François Fourny is Associate Professor of French and European Studies at the Ohio State University.*

### Works Cited

- Baudrillard, Jean. *La société de consommation*. Paris: Denoël, 1970.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Le système des objets*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.
- Bracken, Len. *Guy Debord Revolutionary*. Venice, CA: Feral House, 1997.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Debord, Guy. *Cette mauvaise réputation....* Paris: Gallimard, 1993.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Panégyrique*, I. Paris: Gallimard, 1993.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1994.
- Debray, Régis. *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*. Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1989.
- Furet, François, Jaques Julliard, Pierre Rosanvallon. *La République du centre*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1988.
- Gray, Christopher. *The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*. London: Free Fall Publications, 1974.
- Halimi, Serge. *Les nouveaux chiens de garde*. Paris: Liber-Raisons d'agir, 1998.
- Huysen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
- Internationale Situationniste (1958-1969)*. Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1997.
- Tardy, Yvan. "The Situationist International: 1957-1972." *Contemporary French Civilization* 20.1 (1996): 91-105.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Sociology of Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Ziegler, Jean. *Les seigneurs du crime: Les nouvelles mafias contre la démocratie*. Paris: Seuil, 1998.

# Sites of Memory

Tracing France's Cultural Self-Consciousness



**Paroles Gelées**

**Special Issue**

**Volume 16.2 1998**

*Selected Proceedings from  
UCLA French Graduate Students'  
Third Annual Interdisciplinary Conference*





# *Sites of Memory*

Tracing France's Cultural Self-Consciousness

Selected Proceedings from  
The UCLA French Department Graduate Students'  
Third Annual Interdisciplinary Conference  
April 17-18, 1998

*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de  
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici  
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

**PAROLES GELÉES**

Special Issue

*UCLA French Studies*

Volume 16.2 1998

Sponsors: Albert and Elaine Borchard Foundation  
Consulat Général de France, Los Angeles  
UCLA Department of French  
UCLA Program in European Studies  
Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies  
Center for Modern and Contemporary Studies  
Campus Programs Committee  
UCLA French Graduate Students Association

Editor: Stacey Meeker

Assistant Editor: Vanessa Herold

Special Committees: Stacey Meeker, Vanessa Herold, Martha Moore,  
Marcella Munson, Madeleine LaCotera, Vera Klekovkina,  
Sheila Espineli, Daniel Johnson, Julie Masi, Bendi Benson,  
Brian Brazeau, Helen Chu, Diane Duffrin, Heather Howard,  
France Lemoine, Alison Rice, Michael Stafford, Lena Udall

*Paroles Gelées* was established in 1983 by its founding editor, Kathryn Bailey. The journal is managed and edited by the French Graduate Students' Association and published annually under the auspices of the Department of French at UCLA.

Information regarding the submission of articles and subscriptions is available from the journal office:

*Paroles Gelées*  
UCLA Department of French  
212 Royce Hall  
Box 951550  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1550  
(310) 825-1145  
gelees@humnet.ucla.edu

Subscription price (per issue): \$10 for individuals  
\$12 for institutions  
\$14 for international orders

Back issues available. For a listing, see our home page at  
<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/parolesgelees/>

Copyright 1999 by the Regents of the University of California  
ISSN 1094-7294

# CONTENTS

---

Introduction .....	5
<i>Stacey Meeker</i>	
Sites, Sights, and Silences of Memory .....	9
<i>Eugen Weber</i>	
Oublier l'avant-garde? .....	19
<i>Jean-François Fourny</i>	
Details and Reproducing Domination: The Birth of the Ballet School, the Prison, and Other Correctional Facilities .....	33
<i>Regina Fletcher Sadono</i>	
Memory as Construction in Viollet-le-Duc's Architectural Imagination .....	43
<i>Aron Vinegar</i>	
Clichés of Unity: History and Memory in Postwar French Film .....	57
<i>Marc Siegel</i>	
Naming <i>la Guerre sans nom</i> : Memory, Nation and Identity in French Representations of the Algerian War, 1963-1992 .....	65
<i>Naomi Davidson</i>	
Swann, Vinteuil et Marcel, et la mémoire involontaire .....	91
<i>Joseph Jenkins</i>	
French Folie: Memory and Madness in Buñuel's <i>Belle de Jour</i> .....	101
<i>Mary M. Wiles</i>	
Conference Program .....	119
Ordering Information .....	122