

Patrick Greaney

Insinuation:

*Détournement* as Gendered Repetition

*Actif, passif, vieilles conneries.*

—Guy Hocquenghem, “Les culs énergumènes”

### The Gendered Concepts of *Détournement* and Spectacle

*Détournement* is the Lettrist and Situationist term for a specific kind of montage or appropriation; it might seem to be a form of quotation, but it is “the antithesis of quotation, of a theoretical authority invariably tainted if only because it has become quotable.”<sup>1</sup> Examples of *détournement* projects suggested by Guy Debord and Gil Wolman in their 1956 “User’s Guide to *Détournement*” include modified pinball machines and a new version of D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* that would accompany the film’s images with a voiceover narrating the history of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>2</sup> One of the better-known completed works that relies on *détournement* is René Viénet’s redubbing of a martial arts film with a voice track about the proletarian struggle, titled *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?*<sup>3</sup> Debord also uses the term to describe his use of phrases from G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, and others in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* presents *détournement* as a "device" in the struggle against the spectacle (§206). There are many definitions of the spectacle in *The Society of the Spectacle*, but this temporal description is one of the most useful: "The spectacle, being the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is a *false consciousness of time*" (§158; translation modified). Debord presents this false consciousness as the result of a division. On one side of this division, there is the alienated experience of time as homogeneous, quantifiable "blocks" that can be sold (as labor time) or bought (as leisure time) (§152). Debord calls this quantified time "pseudo-cyclical time" because it corresponds to a "pseudo-nature constructed by means of alienated labor" (§150). It is an artificially maintained "backwardness" vis-à-vis spectacular time, the "profoundly historical time" that characterizes capitalism's ceaseless innovation (§141, §149). Historical time is uncontainable, except in one essential respect: its use—that is, the ability to innovate, to transform nature, humanity, and oneself—is limited to the economy and kept from society.<sup>4</sup>

And yet the split in spectacular time is not completely effective. Individuals feel out of sync. Their experience is not, they feel, simply cyclical. Because human beings have no access to historical time, "everything really lived has no relation to society's official version of irreversible time, and is directly opposed to the pseudo-cyclical rhythm of that time's consumable by-products" (§157). The result is an aphasic experience of authenticity: "Such individual lived experience of a cut-off everyday life remains bereft of language or concept. . . . It cannot be communicated" (§157).

It is against this backdrop that the Situationists posit as one of their central goals the establishment of new forms of communication. Explicit in this goal and implicit throughout Debord's presentation of spectacular time are the close relations among history, community, and communication.<sup>5</sup> Communication is alienated because the community necessary for it is lost with the alienation of productive and historical activity.<sup>6</sup> The spectacle's cooptation of historical time entails an appropriation of language and the replacement of community and communication by new forms of separation and isolation (§29 and §185). What passes for communication now is a code made up of "captive words" spoken from within alienation.<sup>7</sup>

*Détournement* aims neither to give voice to the impoverished life lived in pseudo-cyclical time nor to speak from the perspective of historical time. Instead, *détournement* takes place in the gap between the two; it attempts "to take effective possession of the community of dialogue, and the playful relationship to time" (§187).<sup>8</sup> *Détournement's* goal is commu-

nication, which is not the transmission of a message but the simultaneous appropriation of language, historical time, and community.

To summarize the Situationist theories of the spectacle and *détournement*, then: the spectacle reduces the subject to a contemplating spectator who is separated from truly productive, self-transformative labor and thus from communication, community, and history. This formulation brings to light the gendered aspect of Situationist theory, in which the spectacular subject is reduced to the feminized side of these oppositions: nature/history, consumption/production, and above all, passivity/activity.<sup>9</sup> This is especially clear in one of the earliest proto-Situationist formulations of the spectacle, offered by Ivan Chtcheglov in his 1953 “Formulary for a New Urbanism”: “A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences—sewage systems, elevators, bathrooms, washing machines.”<sup>10</sup> This is the spectacle *in nuce*: the immobilized, ill spectator in awe of the self-perpetuating, innovating, productive apparatus. Chtcheglov’s image illustrates what Debord later identifies as the spectacle’s principle of “non-intervention.”<sup>11</sup> In this relation, commodities seem alive, and humans seem dead because they are separated from history and from each other.<sup>12</sup> And they are feminized: “everyone” is reduced to the position of a spectator contemplating feminized and feminizing domestic machines and systems associated with the body and waste.<sup>13</sup> The Situationists propose to overcome this spectacular passivity with *détournement*, the virile intervention in the spectacle and the appropriation of history from sewage systems and washing machines.<sup>14</sup>

*Détournement*’s implicit gendering becomes explicit when the term’s sexualized origins are examined. A Situationist list of definitions reports that *détournement* is an abbreviation for “*détournement* of prefabricated aesthetic elements” (“*détournement d’éléments esthétiques préfabriqués*”), but the term is also part of the expression “*détournement de mineur*,” “corruption of a minor.”<sup>15</sup> “*Détournement de mineur*” was one of the highlights of the Lettrist movement, if we believe Debord and his colleagues’ retrospective accounts, which refer to the pleasures of corrupting minors and the trouble that ensued when guardians reclaimed their young charges.<sup>16</sup> The term *détournement* is thus itself *détourné*, and according to the Situationist definition of *détournement*, we should always retain the memory of a *détourned* element’s origins: *détournement* “has a peculiar power which . . . stems from a double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within [*détourned* elements] of their old and new senses,” the function they served in their source context, and their new function in Situationist works.<sup>17</sup>

### Jack the Ripper

In 1958, Guy Debord and Asger Jorn published the slim volume *Mémoires*, whose pages are covered with phrases and photographs that Debord clipped out of canonical literary texts, newspapers, and literary and popular magazines.<sup>18</sup> These disparate textual fragments are woven together to tell, allegorically, the story of Debord's involvement in the Lettrist movement and in the nascent Situationist International. Jorn applied a variety of marks in paint—from splatters to skeins to puddles—with the drip technique; these marks sometimes connect Debord's texts and sometimes serve as independent figures. The book is divided into three chapters, each of which opens with an epigraph and a date that contributes to the book's narrative aspect. These dates correspond to important events in Debord's life: June 1952, the premiere of his first film, *Howls for Sade*; December 1952, the formation of the Lettrist International; and September 1953, the birth of the *dérive*.<sup>19</sup> According to Debord, the book was never sold and was distributed only to Debord's friends and political allies (until it was reissued as a mass-market book in 1993 and again in 2004). It appears in Situationist texts as an exemplary work of *détournement*, and it occupies a pivotal position in Debord's life: it relates his past as a Lettrist and announces his Situationist future.<sup>20</sup> *Mémoires* will also serve here as an exemplar, not only of *détournement* but also of the ways in which the Situationist concepts of *détournement* and the spectacle are gendered.

*Mémoires* thematizes the sexual origins of *détournement* in at least two passages.<sup>21</sup> One of Debord's underage, *détourned* lovers appears in the book: seventeen-year-old Eliane Papiï. Her photograph is included in the second chapter, and the book contains *détourned* descriptions of the "reform school" where she lived, its inhabitants, and their crimes, most notably prostitution.<sup>22</sup> "Détournement de mineur" is explicitly linked to prostitution—and thus to *Mémoires's* mention of the nineteenth century's most notorious serial killer of prostitutes, Jack the Ripper.<sup>23</sup> In *Mémoires*, Jack the Ripper's name appears in a *détourned* simile: "like that other night prowler, named Jack the Ripper, in a dark dead end street in Whitechapel, in London, some sixty-five years earlier" ("Comme cet autre rôdeur de nuit, surnommé Jack l'Eventreur, dans quelque sombre impasse de Whitechapel, à Londres, quelque soixante-cinq ans auparavant"). Jack the Ripper, who cut open women with the professional skill of a surgeon or butcher and in some cases removed and arranged their organs around their corpses, is like that other prowler, Guy Debord, who cuts up texts and removes and displays the detached elements.

Jack the Ripper appears at a crucial juncture in Debord and Jorn's book. The first chapter ends with the screening of Debord's first film, *Howls for Sade*, and with an ultimatum: "The arts of the future will be radical transformations of situations, or nothing at all" ("Les arts futurs seront des bouleversements de situations, ou rien").<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of the next chapter, the die seems to have been cast: they will be nothing at all. The second chapter seems to be nothing more than a melancholic interlude between *Howls* and the invention of the *dérive* documented in the final chapter; the date that gives chapter 2 its title, December 1952, marks the beginning of Debord's splinter group, the Lettrist International, but this group doesn't do anything until chapter 3.

In the narrative of the second chapter, the page on which Jack the Ripper appears marks a transition from the inactivity and depression evoked in the second chapter's first pages to new forms of activity. The Jack the Ripper passage concludes a page of *Mémoires* that is about the emergence of the new, which, we read, has been mistaken (by "one") for the old. I read the page as a miniature narrative. It opens with the line, "It can't be said that I haven't said anything new: the arrangement of materials is new" ("Qu'on ne dise pas que je n'ai rien dit de nouveau: la disposition des matières est nouvelle"). This is a theoretical introduction that presents a position and then immediately contests it. The rest of the page aims to show that, despite claims to the contrary, there is something new here. The next few lines present the setting for this discussion before re-engaging with the argument in the *détourné* line that mentions "an itching to innovate without end" ("une démangeaison d'innover sans fin"). The following lines then turn this "itching" into a prelude to sexual and violent conquest; the itch is stilled in a violent interaction between a childlike woman and an apocalyptically strong figure who is not named but is compared, in the simile quoted above, to Jack the Ripper.<sup>25</sup>

Jack the Ripper appears in *Mémoires* as a figure of violent, masculine innovation. The association of progress, masculinity, and gendered violence has a long tradition in the avant-garde, and it appears explicitly in texts by two of Debord's peers. At the end of Jorn's book *Pour la forme*, published in 1958 by the Situationist International, he claims that progress and innovation are exclusively masculine: "Anthropology shows us that matriarchies maintain themselves by means of one sole taboo: a taboo on introducing anything new in the community. . . . This analysis will surely be considered extremely reactionary. But what if there is no good objection? If the objections are dictated by laziness and fatigue? There is thus but one

sole conclusion: progress is man's domain."<sup>26</sup> For Jorn, women tend toward stagnation, while men innovate. Art proceeds toward the unknown, Jorn goes on to say, and this is why art is a perpetual adventure pursued solely by men.<sup>27</sup> This is a variation on Debord's theory of time, a variation that makes the gendered aspect of Debord's theory manifest: pseudo-cyclical time—natural, feminized, and free of development—must be overcome by a masculine appropriation of historical time. This may be why the "itching to innovate" in *Mémoires* can be felt and satisfied by men alone.

This sentiment is echoed in the writings of Lettrist Isidore Isou. In his 1952 *Esthétique du cinéma*, he presents his films as the opening of what he calls the *ciselante*, or chiseling, phase of cinema, in which the filmmaker rediscovers the individual frame and the vertical relations among frames.<sup>28</sup> The frame is what Isou calls film's "particle," whose importance, he claims, has been obscured by the horizontalization used to create the illusion of narrative. The particle of film is the new territory of the Lettrist filmmaker, who takes on the task of intensifying the impoverishment of cinema, in which all the riches of narrative cinema and existing aesthetic values will be abandoned in favor of a new immediate art.<sup>29</sup> Isou will accomplish these goals by getting his hands on the negative: "In this way, we will render our presence visible in the secret flesh of representation. The negative remains the work's fetus, or the monstrous element from which the beautiful image of reality will spurt. . . . By getting our hands on grace's lower depths, she will be deflowered even before her wedding night with the audience."<sup>30</sup> But before Isou can accomplish these things, he must take back film from the anonymous, feminine editors, the *monteuses*.<sup>31</sup> Isou's deflowering work must be preceded by theft, and this appropriation imprints a masculine proper name on what was once anonymous and feminine.<sup>32</sup>

There is nothing in *Mémoires* or in Debord's other texts as explicitly gendered as Jorn's or Isou's theories, but at first glance there seems to be nothing that contradicts them. The final chapter of *Mémoires* even seems to follow exactly Jorn's model by including images of collective action by exclusively male groups: the Knights of the Round Table, the Swiss Guard. But these gendered figures are not Debord's invention; he reuses them, perhaps with critical intent.

I claimed that there is nothing in Debord that explicitly contradicts Jorn and Isou, but perhaps the theory of *détournement* does. *Détournement* is meant to be *détourné*—criticized, reallocated, reironized—and it can be *détourné* and transformed into a theory and practice of gendered critique, even if this is not Debord's intention.<sup>33</sup> In *The Society of the*

*Spectacle*, Debord insists that détournement cannot “enshrine any inherent and definitive certainty,” including, I would add, the certainty that intention would bestow on Debord’s texts (§208). Jorn and Isou are on the contrary very certain about their claims. Jorn asserts that he has arrived at the “sole conclusion” possible, and Isou insists that he has found an origin and deflowered it. Debord makes similar statements, but even his most obstinate positions are potentially undone by his equally obstinate statements about the openness of détournement.

Détournement is a form of critical repetition that until now has been governed by its creators’ gendered concepts. But if we take détournement as seriously (or as playfully) as its Lettrist and Situationist theorizers, then we cannot take seriously their misogynist poses or at least we cannot allow these intentions to govern our understanding of détournement.<sup>34</sup> Situationist texts on détournement cannot be exempted from a general détournability. They can be plagiarized by détourners who stay close to the original authors’ words, exploit their expressions, erase their false ideas, and replace them with correct ones.

### Protodétournement in Baudelaire

The question now is, how to détourn détournement? How to rearticulate it in such a way that it includes a critique of its gendered theorization in Debord? I would like to do this by reading a specific example of détournement, the final line of *Mémoires*, which is a metapoetic statement about the book and the Situationist project in general. This line—“Je voulais parler la belle langue de mon siècle” (“I wanted to speak the beautiful language of my century”)—is taken from Baudelaire’s prose poem “Solitude,” and this resonance is useful for understanding Debord and Jorn’s book and for détourning détournement.

“Solitude” stages a debate between a journalist who maintains that solitude is “bad for people” and a narrator who seems to represent the opposing view.<sup>35</sup> The poem opens with the narrator’s indirect quotations of the journalist and proceeds to relate how the two parties defend their positions with quotations: the journalist cites the church fathers, and the narrator cites Jean de La Bruyère and Blaise Pascal. The narrator’s quotational style reveals a few peculiarities. When quoting La Bruyère, he relies on a misquotation lifted from Edgar Allan Poe’s “Man of the Crowd.”<sup>36</sup> And his Pascal quotation is accompanied by a strange addendum: “‘Almost all our woes come from not being capable of remaining in our rooms,’ said

another wise man, Pascal, I believe.” This “I believe” calls attention to itself, because any educated French speaker of the nineteenth century would not have doubted for a second the attribution to Pascal.<sup>37</sup> In what appears to be a reciprocal, sincere lobbing of quotations, the “I believe” effects a slight disturbance.

In case Baudelaire’s readers do not notice the narrator’s misquotations and feigned doubt about these quotations’ attribution, the poem’s final lines make clear his distance from the commonplaces that he quotes—and from any form of respectful quotation. There, the narrator says that he “could” call the pleasures of the crowd “*fraternitary*” (Baudelaire’s italics), but only “if I wanted to speak the beautiful language of my century.” By italicizing the word *fraternitary*, he explicitly distances himself from it; he takes the word into his mouth and spits it out.

Baudelaire’s transformation of quotation into a kind of protodétournement is explicit only in the final sentence, and this is where Debord’s scissors enter the poem. He makes his cut in the middle of Baudelaire’s phrase and leaves out the “if.” The phrase in *Mémoires* no longer reads “if I wanted to speak the beautiful language of my century” but “I wanted to speak the beautiful language of my century.” He makes clear, by excising the *if*, that he has (or had) a desire to speak the beautiful language of his century.<sup>38</sup> The goal of the Situationists’ descent into the depths of reified language and images is, as Tom McDonough puts it, to “throw themselves into every kind of filth . . . in order, by way of its appropriation, to make it speak otherly.”<sup>39</sup> But here Debord expresses only a desire to do so; he does not claim that he has actually spoken this language. The line does not read “je parlais la belle langue de mon siècle” (“I spoke the beautiful language of my century”) but “je voulais . . .” (“I wanted to . . .”). *Mémoires* is, as Debord says in his afterword to the 1993 edition, “the test but not the use of our forces.”<sup>40</sup>

### Insinuation

Baudelaire’s narrator never explicitly makes the argument that “solitude is good.” He just wants to be left alone by this pesky journalist: “I especially want my damned journalist to let me enjoy myself as I like. ‘Then you never feel the need to share your delights?’ he says to me, with a very apostolic nasal tone. Look at that subtle envious one! The disgusting spoilsport, he knows I look down on his, and he comes insinuating himself into mine [s’insinuer dans les miennes]!”<sup>41</sup> To “insinuate oneself” (“s’insinuer”) is “to introduce oneself, make one’s way, or penetrate, by sinuous or subtle

ways,” we read in the *Oxford English Dictionary*; it is to “pénétrer peu à peu,” Littré tells us.<sup>42</sup> To quote is to take words from others; to be insinuated is to become a vessel for someone else’s words.<sup>43</sup>

The narrator’s protodétournement and the journalist’s insinuation seem at first to be complementary ways of turning: the journalist insinuates, and the narrator counters with his protodétournement. But the relation is asymmetrical. Insinuation comes first, and it runs deeper than the narrator’s use of particular quotations. Baudelaire’s narrator highlights his insinuation by opening the poem with the journalist’s words and by participating in this debate about solitude as virtue or vice, which is itself clichéd.

The narrator takes up the cause of solitude in a strategic battle against the journalist, but he has no stake in solitude as such or at least not in the brand of solitude that he seems to defend here. It is hard to believe that he would want to heed the call that, he says, “summon[s] to their meditative cells all the panic-stricken who seek happiness in movement.” *Spleen de Paris*, the collection that includes “Solitude,” includes a poem titled “Crowds,” in which the narrator praises “that ineffable orgy, that holy prostitution of the soul which gives itself totally, poetry and charity, to the unexpected which appears, to the unknown which passes by” in the middle of a crowd.<sup>44</sup> In the crowd, the poet is able to enjoy “the incomparable privilege of being able, at will, to be himself and an other.”<sup>45</sup> In that poem, he also writes of his indifference to the term *solitude*: “Multitude, solitude: equal and interchangeable terms for the active and fertile poet.”<sup>46</sup> Although it cannot be claimed that these narrators are the same, “Crowds” at least casts doubt on the narrator’s position in “Solitude.”

The defense of solitude is just one of many masks that Baudelaire dons in *Spleen de Paris*, which one critic describes as a collection of “elaborate rehearsals of moral and philosophical stances [that] . . . may be no more than performances.”<sup>47</sup> The intimacy forced on him by the insinuating journalist is like the promiscuity of the crowd, in which he can both be himself and an other, both say what he means and wear the mask of someone who really cares about the journalist’s opinion of solitude. The narrator cannot be said to quote La Bruyère and Pascal in the sense of quotation that is criticized by the Situationists; he does not recognize these classical thinkers’ authority but subtly undermines it.

Graham Robb interprets Baudelaire’s use of commonplaces in terms that allow for a comparison of Baudelaire and the Situationists: “Baudelaire’s perverse or even comical use of [clichés and popular sayings] suggests a world in which ‘philosophical’ or ‘spiritual’ realities are, essentially,

lexical patterns which may reinforce the supposed truth, but which can just as easily contradict and undermine it.”<sup>48</sup> Baudelaire writes elsewhere of the “immense intellectual profundity in popular expressions, holes dug by generations of ants.”<sup>49</sup> Clichés are burrowed through with subterranean passages that poets can explore and exploit in their battle against the truths that these clichés are supposed to support. But to do this, poets must enter into enemy territory and repeat the locutions that they undermine. In this repetition, poets burrow into language, but they, too, are dug into, penetrated by the very language that they want to overcome or keep at a distance.

“Solitude” points to the possibility of thinking about *détournement* as more than simply the virile overcoming of spectacular passivity. It allows for this conclusion: *détournement* is always a repetition of a prior insinuation. Baudelaire’s narrator *détourns*, yes, but this *détournement* includes the staging of his insinuation and the emphasis on his exposure to the journalist’s language. This reading of his prose poem reveals the inadequacy of the concepts of activity and passivity for describing *détournement* or interpreting Situationist texts.

When reading Debord’s *détournement* of Baudelaire’s desire for a beautiful language, we should retain a memory of the workings of quotation and misquotation in the prose poem “Solitude.” Read in this way, Debord’s oeuvre becomes something other than what it has been taken to be. It is a complex and as yet unexplored terrain for thinking about gender and the avant-garde, even if Debord’s texts often resist this kind of reading. Just as Baudelaire laments the insinuating influence of the journalist, Debord’s texts are run through with opposition to passivity. His texts can nonetheless be reread, *détourned*, as texts about tensions within Situationist practices and not just as proposals to overcome spectacular passivity.

## Notes

- 1 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), §208; hereafter cited parenthetically by section number. See also the derisive remarks on quotation in Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, “A User’s Guide to *Détournement*,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 15.
- 2 Debord and Wolman, “User’s Guide to *Détournement*,” 18–19.
- 3 *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* dir. Kuang-chi Tu and René Viénet, 1973, available at [www.ubu.com/film/vienet\\_dialectics.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/vienet_dialectics.html) (accessed June 18, 2010).
- 4 “The bourgeoisie unveiled irreversible historical time and imposed it on society only to deprive society of its use” (§143).
- 5 See Giorgio Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine: Note sulla politica (Means without End: Notes on Politics)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), 69.

- 6 See Mustapha Khayati, "Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary," in *Situationist International Anthology*, 222–28. For Marx, the loss of community is where alienation "is first realized and expressed"; see Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 129. Giorgio Agamben identifies the spectacle and language, "humanity's linguistic being"; see Giorgio Agamben, "Violenza e speranza nell'ultimo spettacolo" ("Violence and Hope in the Last Spectacle"), in *I situationisti* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1991), 14; translation is mine.
- 7 See Khayati, "Captive Words," 222–28.
- 8 This goal corresponds to a definition of the spectacle offered early in *The Society of the Spectacle*: "The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue" (§18).
- 9 The opposition of passivity and activity plays an important role in many Situationist and pre-Situationist texts. In the 1957 "Report on the Construction of Situations," Debord writes that the situation, like Bertolt Brecht's epic theater, aims to "break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity by provoking their capacities to revolutionize their own lives." Even if there are spectators in the first stages of constructing situations, "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." Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action," in *Situationist International Anthology*, 40–41. In the screenplay "On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Unity of Time," Debord claims that the proper response to passivity is the organized activity of the Situationists, who scorn those who simply continue to create as in the past "because they are unaware of the decomposition and exhaustion of individual expression in our time, unaware that the arts of passivity are over and done." See Guy Debord, "On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Unity of Time," in *Guy Debord: Complete Cinematographic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*, trans. and ed. Ken Knabb (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 23. In the Situationists' text "Avant-Garde of Presence," we read, "people who are resigned in one way or another to political passivity, to metaphysical despair, or even to being subjected to an art of total noncreativity, are incapable of participating in [situations]." Situationist International, "Avant-Garde of Presence," in *Situationist International Anthology*, 143. This 1964 questionnaire appeared in the *Internationale situationniste*: "What does the word 'Situationist' mean? It denotes an activity aimed at *creating* situations, as opposed to passively recognizing them in academic or other separate terms. . . . We replace existential passivity with the construction of moments of life, and doubt with playful affirmation." Situationist International, "Questionnaire," in *Situationist International Anthology*, 178; emphasis in the original. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord identifies the spectacle and passivity: "The attitude that [the spectacle] demands is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances" (§12). The spectacle "is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity" (§13).
- 10 Ivan Chtcheglov, "Formulary for a New Urbanism," in *Situationist International Anthology*, 4.
- 11 Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations," 40. Anselm Jappe emphasizes

- the importance of the notion of “nonintervention” for the understanding of Debord’s thought. See Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 24–25.
- 12 On the spectacle’s creation of nonlife, see Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, §10 and §123; and Jappe, *Guy Debord*, 136–37.
- 13 For a discussion of the “persistent gendering of mass culture as feminine and inferior” since the nineteenth century, see Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44–62.
- 14 Debord and the Situationists draw on what Jacques Derrida summarizes as the “very old philosopheme of *production*,” which depends on the opposition of “active . . . productivity and virility on the one hand, and material, unproductive passivity and femininity on the other.” Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 77–79; emphasis in the original.
- 15 See the definition of *détournement* in Situationist International, “Definitions,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, 52.
- 16 Boris Donn e insists, without citing any source, that Debord was “inspired” to use the word *détournement* by the “legal characterization of the crime that the young people of Chez Moineau [the Lettrists’ hangout] committed with [underage] girls like Eliane”; see Boris Donn e, (*Pour M moires*): *Un essai d’ lucidation des M moires de Guy Debord* (Paris:  ditions Allia, 2004), 92. In the screenplay for “In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni,” Debord writes nostalgically, “Gangs of police, guided by numerous informers, were constantly launching raids under every sort of pretext—most often searching for drugs or for girls under eighteen. I couldn’t help remembering the charming hooligans and proud young women I hung out with in those shady dives when much later . . . I heard a song sung by prisoners in Italy: ‘It’s there you find those young girls who give you everything; first hello and then their hand.’” Guy Debord, “In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni,” in *Complete Cinematographic Works*, 162–63. See also the accounts of the role of young women in the Lettrist International in Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe: Conversations with G rard Berr by and Francesco Milo*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 65–68, 110.
- 17 Situationist International, “Detournement as Negation and Prelude,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, 67; translation modified.
- 18 The original edition of *M moires* indicates that the publication date is 1959, but the editors of the 2004 edition and of Debord’s works list the publication date as 1958; see Guy Debord, *M moires*, in *Œuvres*, ed. Jean-Louis Ran on (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 375. All references to *M moires* are to the unpaginated 2004 edition: Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *M moires* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2004). For summary interpretations of *M moires*, see Greil Marcus, “Guy Debord’s *M moires*: A Situationist Primer,” in *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957–1972*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 124–31; and Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 39–46, 101–8. For a detailed account of Debord’s use of his sources in *M moires*, see Donn e, (*Pour M moires*).
- 19 See Marcus, “Guy Debord’s *M moires*,” 128. On September 1953 as the birth of the *d rive*, see Donn e, (*Pour M moires*), 30, 58–59.

- 20 Situationist International, "Détournement as Negation and Prelude," 68.
- 21 In the first chapter of *Mémoires*, Debord writes, "elle avait dix-sept ans" ("she was seventeen years old"), and in the second chapter, "débauche de mineur je sais où ça mène" ("corruption of a minor, I know what that leads to"). Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *Mémoires* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2004), n.p.
- 22 See Kaufmann, *Guy Debord*, 42; and Donné, (*Pour Mémoires*), 91.
- 23 The inclusion of Jack the Ripper in *Mémoires* is not an isolated event in Debord's works. Debord praises him in his laconic "Exercice de la psychogéographie" from 1954 (Debord, *Œuvres*, 136). The line "Jack the Ripper was never caught" appears in the final version of *Howls for Sade* (see Debord, *Howls for Sade*, in *Complete Cinematographic Works*, 7) and in the first version of the screenplay (Debord, *Hurléments en faveur de Sade*, in *Œuvres*, 51).
- 24 Debord, *Hurléments en faveur de Sade*, in *Œuvres*, 62. This passage can also be found in Debord, *Complete Cinematographic Works*, 2. This translation is taken from Thomas Y. Levin, "Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 343. Levin notes that Debord's line echoes Breton's declaration in *Nadja* that "beauty will be convulsive or it will not be at all" and that these formulations recall "Thiers in his famous speech to the National Assembly on November 13, 1872: 'La République sera conservatrice, ou ne sera pas'" (ibid., 439n58). See André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 160.
- 25 "Je la sens trembler comme un enfant / c'est une vraie gamine / plus fort, jusqu'à devenir la fin du monde" ("I felt her trembling like a child / she's truly a girl / stronger, to the point of becoming the end of the world").
- 26 Asger Jorn, *Pour la forme* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2001), 148; my translation.
- 27 Ibid., 149. For another version of Jorn's gender theory, see Asger Jorn, *The Natural Order and Other Texts*, trans. Peter Shield (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 334. Jorn's theory of history belongs to what Jorn's translator and biographer Peter Shield calls his "deep misogyny" (ibid., ix). See also Peter Shield, *Comparative Vandalism: Asger Jorn and the Artistic Attitude to Life* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 182–96.
- 28 On Isou's film theory, see Allyson Field, "Hurléments en faveur de Sade: The Negation and Surpassing of Discrepant Cinema," *SubStance* 28.3 (1999): 55–80; and Levin, "Dismantling the Spectacle," 337–40.
- 29 Isidore Isou, *Esthétique du cinéma* (Paris: Ur, 1952), 103–7; all translations are mine.
- 30 Ibid., 88.
- 31 Ibid., 89.
- 32 Women still play a role in the process, though: they are enraptured spectators when Isou begins to work on the negative (ibid., 89n1). See also the remarks comparing women and the material of film in Isidore Isou, *Œuvres de spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 18.
- 33 According to the early Situationist Jacqueline de Jong's account, "the topic 'woman' was not present" for the Situationists, and the women's movement, she insists, "has nothing to do with the theories of the SI." This seems to have been the consensus among the Situationists. See Dieter Schrage, "Jacqueline de Jong: Eine Frau in der Situationistischen Internationale," in *Situationistische Internationale 1957–1972*, ed. Dieter Schrage (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 1998), 69–70. An exception to

- the Situationist silence on gender is the remark that “the extensive participation of women in all aspects of the struggle [in May 1968] was an unmistakable sign of its revolutionary depth.” Situationist International, “The Beginning of an Era,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, 289. The literature on gender and sexuality in Situationist texts is slim; see Kelly Baum, “The Sex of the Situationist International,” *October* 126 (Fall 2008): 23–43; and the project documented in J. U. P., ed., *Situationistinnen und andere . . .* (Berlin: b\_books, 2001), 69, 77.
- 34 For a similar position, see Rosalind Krauss’s remarks on Surrealism: “It is not possible to take such a project [the Surrealist project] seriously and at one and the same time to proclaim the subject-position of the work’s instigator as stable and female” (or, in the case of Debord, as stable and misogynist). Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 50.
- 35 All quotations of “Solitude” are from Charles Baudelaire, *The Parisian Prowler: Le spleen de Paris, Petits poèmes en prose*, trans. Edward K. Kaplan (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 52–53.
- 36 J. A. Hiddleston, “Fusée, Maxim, and Commonplace in Baudelaire,” *Modern Language Review* 80.3 (1985): 565. For a discussion of these misquotations, see David H. T. Scott, “Le spleen de Paris,” in *Baudelaire: “La fanfarlo” and “Le spleen de Paris,”* ed. David H. T. Scott and Barbara Wright (London: Grant and Cutler, 1984), 90–92.
- 37 See Hiddleston, “Fusée,” 565–66.
- 38 For Tom McDonough, Debord recognizes that the beautiful language of his century is “precisely the language of exchange, of the commodity” and that there was “no other language” than this one; see Tom McDonough, “*The Beautiful Language of My Century*”: *Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 6–8.
- 39 Tom McDonough, “Guy Debord, or the Revolutionary without a Halo,” *October* 115 (Winter 2006): 45.
- 40 This afterword is included in the 2006 edition of *Mémoires*.
- 41 I have slightly modified the translation of this passage; Kaplan translates “s’insinuer dans les miennes” as “worming his way into mine.”
- 42 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “insinuate”; Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, s.v. “insinuer.”
- 43 For a related discussion of the “solicitation” and “incitation” to cite, see Antoine Compagnon, *La seconde main, ou le travail de la citation* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 66–68.
- 44 Baudelaire, *Parisian Prowler*, 21.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Scott, “Le spleen de Paris,” 88.
- 48 Graham Robb, “The Poetics of the Commonplace in *Les Fleurs du mal*,” *Modern Language Review* 86.1 (1991): 64.
- 49 “Profondeur immense de pensée dans les locutions vulgaires, trous creusés par des générations de fourmis”; Baudelaire, *Œuvres*, ed. Yves-Gérard Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 1181–82; my translation. Quoted in Robb, “The Poetics of the Commonplace,” 57.