

government, plus parties and elections (the authors are not altogether clear on the point) then our political options are relatively narrow.

Hunter says that just as there is no single point of sovereign will or universal state, so there is no single point of resistance and "a general 'oppositional' politics is unintelligible". That is right, and it is necessary to establish multiple points of political intervention based on working out how things mesh together. But politics, including radical politics, is more fluid and informal than *Account-*

ing for the Humanities suggests. These linkages are conducted through the medium of political discourses which—while often rightly dismissed as essentialist—are nonetheless implicated in real activity and material effects.

Scepticism is very valuable, but more generally so in intellectual life than in politics. There comes a time in political life when it is necessary to put aside doubt and uncertainty to pursue a particular course of action. In the end you are faced with the question about positive action: 'well what would you do,

then? What would you put in its place?'

Perhaps this shows that some separation of ethics and technologies can be useful. But it also highlights the need to subject the 'technologies' of government, those means of classifying and controlling us, to the closest ethical scrutiny, so that the machinery of government does not dictate all of our political choices.

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The Last Decadent

Panegyric, by Guy Debord (*Verso*, 79pp). Reviewed by McKenzie Wark.

The situationists were an odd lot; in revolt against both art and politics, they refused to compromise with either. Guy Debord ruthlessly expelled anyone who showed signs of compromise, and in the end expelled himself as well. Yet for all that he will be remembered for some time to come for his incendiary tract *The Society of the Spectacle*, a crystal clear hegelian-marxist analysis of the spectacular form of capitalist society. Everyone from Baudrillard to the Sex Pistols have dipped into it, yet few have fathomed this strange and hermetic book. It is the last great classic of western marxism.

What always made Debord's writings so powerful was that, like classical marxist tracts, they came right out of left field. Debord was not an academic, not an artist, not a political functionary. None of the compromises each of these careers entails mar his writing. His errors, so to speak, are all his.

Debord imagines *Panegyric* as the first volume of his autobiography. It is a

strange book, owing more to De Quincey's *Confessions* than to anything else. It is at once learned and arrogant, revealing and obscure. Like De Quincey, Debord writes with absolute self-assurance. In a discussion of the various statements under oath he has made in various police stations, he concludes "So then I here declare that my answers to the police should not be included later in my collected works, because of scruples about the form and even though I signed the veracious content without embarrassment".

Without the solidity of an institution like a party or a university to lean on, Debord has only himself. "There is nothing more natural than to consider everything as starting from oneself, chosen as the centre of the world; one finds oneself thus capable of condemning the world without even wanting to hear its deceitful chatter." Which is exactly what Debord in life, as much as in his writing, does: "I am the only one who's (*sic*) life is true to his works."

Debord is the last of the great French decadents. The spirit of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautremont, Cravan is still alive in him. Baudelaire and De Quincey make the city the great theme, Rimbaud gives writing its desire to change life, while Lautremont gives it its extremism of style. Cravan is the spirit of pure provocation, and this

Debord gives a political twist. He picked up and played with the rhetoric of revolution like a child playing with fire. He and the situationists discovered what becomes of the language of revolution in a spectacular or, as we would say today postmodern, society. Debord knew, long before it was fashionable, what betrayals of revolutionary language were being carried out under its banner. His was always a revolt against the betrayal of the formerly powerful rhetoric of revolution as much as anything else.

Debord was ahead of his time in grasping the spectacular or, as one might say today simulated, nature of public discourse. Yet he is also a relic of the past, a great poet of the streets from a time when the streets were still the place of insurrection. "One cannot go into exile in a unified world," he mourns. The Paris of the 1960s has been 'Hausmannised' again, its spaces rearranged to preserve it from revolution, and this time by a socialist government. Yet as Debord mutters darkly to himself, "All revolutions go down in history, yet history does not fill up; the rivers of revolution return from whence they came, to flow again."

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