

IV.

La Librairie de Guy Debord: Stratégie. Ed. Laurence Le Bras. Paris: Éditions l'Échappée, 2018. 525 pp.

La Librairie de Guy Debord: Poésie. Ed. Laurence Le Bras. Paris: Éditions l'Échappée, 2019. 586 pp.

La Librairie de Guy Debord: Marx et Hegel. Ed. Laurence Le Bras. Paris: Éditions l'Échappée, 2021. 521 pp.

La Librairie de Guy Debord: Histoire. Ed. Laurence Le Bras. Paris : Éditions de l'Échappée, 2022. 528 pp. [As DR3 goes to press.]



Sa bibliothèque vaste et précise. Guy Debord, Une étrange guerre, 1999, Phillipe Sollers et Emmanuel Descombes.

In 2001, as I was leaving Northwestern University, I wrote and published an essay on “Néo-Stoïcisme et éthique de la gloire: Le Baroque chez Guy Debord.” Looking over one’s old publications can be a depressing business – especially if one’s writing got caught up in provincial arguments, which mercifully was not the case here¹⁴ – but I have continued to hold to this essay with only one regret: that a section on “Temps et musique” and a film still (or

rather a screen shot) of Guy Debord’s library in the French country side of Champot in the Haute-Loire had to be cut. (Sollers was absolutely right in his film on Debord, *Une étrange guerre*, to emphasize the essential importance of Baroque music in Debord’s sensibility. There remains a serious reflection to be undertaken on the importance of Baroque music in Debord’s thinking – Not only is the use of Art Blakey’s *Whisper not* in *In girum nocte et*

consumimur igni (1978) the unique instance of Jazz in Debord's filmography,¹⁵ it is also the unique instance of non-Baroque music, if we accept Michel Corrette, whose *Les Délices de la solitude*, op. 20, Sonata VI in D Major, we hear in *La Société du spectacle*, as a composer from the late stage of the Baroque in music, and of the Baroque composers used by Debord, Handel – for his *Thèmes cérémonieux des aventures*¹⁶ – is the only non-French composer: De Lalande, Couperin, Boismortier, and Corrette are the composers whose music we hear in the films of Debord.) Debord's reading, his culture, is evident at every turn, as is the directedness of that culture, and seeing the photography of Debord's study in Champot served to cohere in my mind the desire on Debord's part for a particularity of culture – not the cultivatedness of the average bourgeois.

It's not long after this moment that a certain chauvinist strain in the American historiography on Debord started to appear emphasizing what it openly characterized as the *Americanness* of its approach and against what it considered the *French approach* to Debord, an approach that addressed the melancholy, the revolutionary pessimism, the classicism of his style, the systematicity of this thought (also known as philosophical anthropology), and worst of all, which began to separate Debord "from his colleagues" – what a quaint bit of piousness – in the Internationale situationniste. As the camera pans slowly in its approach to Debord's country residence where the precious library is held, we hear Sollers in a voice-over

reflecting on the role of *retrait* (withdrawal) and solitude so important to Debord, as he asks: "Seule? Non. La pensée essentielle de la liberté n'est jamais seule? [Alone? No. The essential thought of liberty is never alone!]" – Alas, certain things are simply not egalitarian: beauty, intelligence, good conversation, and style. I still treasure the screen shot of Debord's library, it may even have been the first screen shot I ever took – I recall watching the film for the first time in 1999 – if I am not mistaken – with a colleague in New York as we worked on a translation of a Debord text, for it was so obvious that Debord's culture was larger, more *generous*, and analytically encompassing than the use to which the academic literature of the late 90's and 2000's was putting a limited body of his work. The *French Debord* – well, his library was declared a national treasure and acquired by the State, much to the irritation of certain American admirers – was never, of course, narrow and aetiolated, and since the State – l'État – acquired his library, enormous work, of the kind well-established in French academic culture (see work on the collection of André Breton, but also on the library of Paul Celan) has been accomplished in making public the range and materials and significance of Debord's culture of which the three volumes of Debord's (carefully organized) reading notes under consideration are but the latest tranches. Here in these three volumes is all that most of us will ever need to be able to reconstruct Debord's reading in poetry, Marx and Hegel, and strategy and therefrom draw our own conclusions. Lacenaire is there with Bossuet, La Bible de Sacy along with poetry from the Tang Dynasty,

Boulenger's *Les Romans de la Table Ronde* with Gracián, but also Gertrude Stein with Marcel Mouladjil. Indeed, with Goethe, and the strong presence of Pessoa and Machado, one suddenly realizes that we are confronted with a *reading* in World Literature - the terms of which are wholly based on economies of circulation in translation and power - of a high and distinctive sensibility. In a saying attributed to the iconologist Erwin Panofsky, it is often said that *who has the best photographs wins* (in art historical research since one cannot physically visit every object of one's interest), and here we might say, in view of how it is typical of the European avant-garde - Breton, Tzara, for example - that *who has the best archives shapes history*. The kind of (institutional and historiographic) work represented in these volumes is only possible because of the meticulous archives maintained by these artist-thinkers themselves. I recall reading of Asger Jorn's arrival in post-World War II

Paris and his thinking that Surrealists and former Dadaists and assorted avant-gardists would be into his wish to meet and talk for as long as he wanted to talk - all in the name of spontaneity. He was shocked to find that right across the social and political spectrum French writers and artists kept very strict hours for lunch and dinner since outside these times they were busy making their archives for posterity, something Duchamp helped Enrico Donati to realize when Donati asked him why Breton's handwriting was always so perfect: PM, Duchamp replied: post-mortum.¹⁷ Posterity - the *transmission* of values. As Breton wrote in his "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism, or Not" (1942): "my greatest ambition would be to allow the theoretical sense to be indefinitely transmissible after me." This concern with transmission may yet prove to be the lesson of lessons of the historical avant-garde.

